Metal And Magic

by orphan_account

Summary

"It was a realization beyond words to describe how it felt. Breath-taking, but with no prior breaths. Heart-stopping, but there was never a pulse. The world was shaking as it remained still. To be empty but whole all at once—that realization of what has happened and where you are and how you are. How? That was my first question. How? To die and then live again, it made me realize how fragile my reality is. I decided then that I wouldn't let anyone break it again: that only I would be the only one to cause it to crumble. And when it breaks, it will shatter, and when it shatters, the world will scream at how horrific and beautiful the shards are as they slice away all life."

Your life has ground to a halt ever since an incident four years ago that changed you permanently. Now you're a shut-in who lives off of their mother and you can barely find any entertainment out of life. Hell, you don't even need to eat anymore. The world is in an uproar as a race of people that history tried to erase comes pouring onto surface, but you're not bothered by that. Instead your emotions are sparked by meeting someone who's just like you. Yes, aside from being exactly the opposite personality-wise—they're just like you.
Jumping back into writing head-first by reviving a part of my past I thought I'd never see again. Reader inserts. But alas, Mettaton was in need of a lengthy fanfiction, and when a plot bunny began to form I knew I was destined to write one.
Good Old Fashioned Contests

Your spoon clanked noisily against the inside of the bowl as you scooped another mound of some name brand cereal. You weren’t really eating it because you were hungry or because it tasted good, just because you were bored and you needed something to do with your hands while you stared blankly at the television screen. Aw yes, hottest new electronic on the market, some mega phone that can split atoms and summon black holes. Well no, it couldn’t do all that, but it might as well. It can do everything else.

Licking excess milk from your lips, you set the half empty bowl down on the floor next to you. The morning had that atmosphere of a Saturday you'd spend as a kid with your face two inches from the television screen, a blanket huddled around your shoulders, watching cartoons and staving off homework until sunday. Oh wait, that was probably because you were doing all of those things right now, save for one. You didn’t have homework because you weren’t in school. While you weren’t exactly the stereotypical stay-at-home kid living off their parents with no career, motivation, or foreseeable future, you also weren’t doing anything doing anything productive with your life either. If you were like any of the other young adults who lived in the well off neighborhood you did, you’d be getting ready for a semester in college. But of course you weren’t doing that, how preposterous could that be?

Even before your life changed, you weren’t always a big fan of school. Your single mother home schooled you because she deemed public schools unfit for your learning. Considering her line of work, she was a bit of a fanatic about knowledge and learning, and she made sure to pour some of that into you. As much as she could, anyway. You didn’t get the chance to meet many children your age, and the handful you did meet eventually parted ways. Now the people you’re forced to consider as friends are likely pretending to like communicating with you. Shucks, how flattering.

As you were staring at the bright colors depicting some cartoon where a cat was trying to smash a mouse with a comically large hammer, you heard the familiar sounds of someone pacing and mumbling behind you. Your mother had her hand to her chin and a wicked smile upon her features. Needless to say she was in a good mood.

“Unbelievable, I knew it would happen some day, we all knew deep down but never acknowledged it. Ha, I think someone out there owes me money!” You know by the way she was talking she wasn’t speaking to you, but herself, so you could tune her out if you wanted but you just couldn’t help but listen for a bit.

“No matter how hard they tried, the history books couldn’t will them out of existence. We couldn’t sweep them under the rug—or underground—and just forget about them! They thought they could just write them off, at first, as mere beings of myth from the past. But a thousand years isn’t long at all in the eyes of time. It’s funny, I can’t wait to see how the media plays it off, how the people shall panic! Of course not many know of this yet, they don’t want them to know yet. Oh—did you know they have a human child with them? My sources tell me this child, no older than perhaps a preteen, will be playing the role of their ambassador. What do you make of this?”

Your mother turned to you finally and you gulped down the rest of your cereal before casually facing her.

“I don’t know.” You said plainly. “But, from what I can tell, it should be interesting.” And you meant this, too. If nothing else, it would certainly be interesting to watch your mother at work.

“Interesting? To say the least!” But she nodded and continued to walk and pace the room, rambling.
She often did this when something or strange struck her interest. Rarely did this ever happen, however, because not much could make her genuinely interested. Almost like you.

Of course, on the outside you were telling yourself you didn’t really care, though in actuality you were interested. Your mother used to read you passages from books that dated thousands of years back, of a race of beings known as monsters that driven underground. She said that most modern sources dismissed these books as skeptic superstitions from millennia ago, and that once upon a time a race coexisted with humans but went extinct long ago. But your mother knew otherwise, she knew that there was plenty of truth behind these books. In fact, she used to be the expert that dealt with it.

Along time ago, along with a scandal that nearly ended with her life, your mother lost her job. She was head researcher and leading scientist involved with a project to seal off monsters from the surface permanently. The powers that be of this modern era realized that their barrier was not foolproof, in fact it was far from it. One human soul and one monster soul could enable a monster to pass through it, and the souls of seven humans and one monster soul could completely destroy it. The same irrational fear that led humans to drive monsters underground a thousand years ago was leading the current day’s governments to seal off the underground once and for all.

Foolishly, your mother offered her skill and wisdom to this project, thinking that she could garner fame as a scientist. But when she learned the truth, she did something that would drastically change her life forever. She tried to share this information with the world, to inform them of the mistakes their race had made, and of course, the higher ups attempted to silence her. They failed, however, and your mother was able to escape with her life and a new identity, but not without a price that may have been worth everything in the world. She learned the hard way there were more important things in this world than her own life.

But your thoughts were drifting into place you didn’t feel like visiting at the moment. A dark place where your mind would wander when idle. You decided to tune your mother out in favor for the cartoon.

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A few months have passed, perhaps four or five since the monsters have made their “big debut”. Society is in a slight uproar and the true colors of some humans are being shown, as if they weren’t already displayed in bright neon. Monsters have begun to migrate from the underground to the surface, slowly but surely. It’s a given that not all humans are accepting of monsters—most hadn’t even believed in their existence until very recently. However, a majority of humans greet what they learned in history books to be in semblance to a myth with fascination and curiosity. But when it became apparent that history books were wrong, historians and the government gave the media and society a big “whoops”. Your mother knows the truth of how they are handling it, and she’s cackling whenever she has the chance.

“Oh yes, I bet every single one of their plans have been ruined! In shambles! Oh this is just too good, too good.” She was holding a drink she had mixed at your home’s bar, but she wasn’t drinking it. For the past ten minutes she was staring into it and laughing.

“It’s like watching ants scramble for cover. The media is trying their absolute best to handle this. Oh, humans, we’re such silly little creatures. Many famous people are standing up to apologize for what humankind did as a whole to monsters—of course the truth of what really happened was bound to come out—whilst others were becoming the apologists, saying that humans were justified in their actions. They aren’t really sorry, none of them are. Some don’t want to feel like guilty pricks when they look a monster in the face, while others try to absolve their discriminatory hatred by justifying the action humans took some 1000 years ago. It’s disgustingly, really.” Still smiling, she finally took a
Rolling over from the position you had taken on the couch with your laptop on your chest you turned to look at your mother.

“And where do you stand in all of this?” You asked. “In this group of two you’ve separated society into.”

She looked up, surprised at first that you had spoken, A.) Because you hardly ever spoke up without prompting and B.) Because when she ranted to herself she usually forgot about the world around her. But that look of surprise quickly turned into a bemused smile as she answered.

“Don’t be silly, my child. Only a fool would think, without a doubt, that society could be separate into just two groups. Only the loudest of the buffoons—the politicians, the celebrities, the world leaders—are choosing sides at the moment. But they’ll soon realize their mistake once public opinion begins to sway in favor of one side, which it will eventually, and they’ll be left trying to cover their asses.”

You shrugged in response. It made sense enough, you thought.

Within a few weeks, monster celebrities begin trying to make it big in the human world, though surprisingly none are making it as big as one in particular; a robot by the name of Mettaton. He was created in the monster world and came to the surface along with all the others. He was extremely popular and talented, though as far you knew he looked like a giant calculator. But this didn’t stop his charming and charismatic nature from captivating the hearts of millions in his short time on the surface. So far he hosted his own talk show and did voice overs and narrations for documentaries and movies. Despite the robotic undertone to it, he was loved across the nation for his voice, but after a few weeks of his fame, his fanbase gained another reason to love him. He unveiled a new body to the surface that he claimed had been going under repairs and maintenance, but was now ready to be used full time. It was a given that his fans were losing their shit.

You weren’t really interested in him, you had written him off a while ago as an advanced AI. But when he unveiled his new you body you were actually a bit shocked. As a calculator, there was always something about him that told you, despite your hopes, that he wasn’t like you, he was simply an artificial intelligence. But with his new body you, couldn’t help but glimpse yourself in him. That maybe he was more than just a robot… Maybe he was…

You were getting your hopes up.

You admired Mettaton for what he stood for, but you weren’t a big fan of his, you never were when it came to celebrities. A lot of people saw him as a celebrity trying to bridge the social gap between humans and monsters, though you thought of that as an idealistic stretch. Although you could care less about him, your mother was a bit intrigued to say the least.

“It’s fascinating to see technology like this come from the underground, truly fascinating. I mean what, did humans think they wouldn’t advance down there?” She was reading a newspaper and eating a doughnut, speaking in between bites and sips. “You know, I’ve heard a rumor—that trash from the surface was constantly flowing underground. But I don’t know what to make of it.” She continued thumbing through the paper before stopping and looking up.

“I almost forgot, it’s that time of the month again.” Your mother said suddenly, closing up her newspaper. Reflexively you groaned and pretended to be too preoccupied with your tv show to care,
but she approached you regardless.

“Your friend, Mark, wants to take you out this Saturday. Doesn’t it sound fun? I know you love going out with your friends and interacting with the world.” She said with just a hint of sarcasm in her voice. You knew Mark was just a neighborhood boy being paid to interact with you once a month by taking you out with his group of real friends. Every single time, however, it was something extravagant and large, you had an inkling of a feeling he was just using your mother to show her real friends a good time. Often times you were forgotten and ignored by his friends, only noticed when they needed to make sure you were following them. It’s not like you made any attempts to be friendly with them, but it still kind of hurt.

Unfortunately, you recently learned that Mark was a big Mettaton fan. He’d convinced your mother to get some tickets for Mettaton’s live studio audience in his talk show.

Actually… instead of being filled with dread like you would to any other situation—last month it was an amusement park and the month before that, a concert—you were a bit… curious? Interested? Hell if you knew, but you weren’t dismayed for once. But still had an act to keep up.

“Do I have to go?” You asked, keeping up the act, you had a reputation to uphold after all.

“Yes! Don’t you want to see Mettaton? All the kids your age are—what are you saying nowadays, ‘having the hots’ for him? You’ll have a ton of fun for sure.” Your mother snorted at her own terrible joke while you held back the temptation to roll your eyes.

Even if these monthly excursions were a pain in the ass, it was still heartwarming to see that your mother hadn’t given up on you, despite everyone else doing so. It almost made you smile to see her so upbeat again.

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Saturday evening finally rolls around and Mark and his group of enthusiastic friends are at your doorstep. Your mother greets them at the door while you linger in the background, waiting for this to begin so it can end.

“It’s always so good to see you, Mark! Valerie, you look to be doing well, and Tyrone you look quite dapper this evening.”

You watched with your hands in your pockets as everyone gave their sickeningly sweet greetings, including your mother. Finally, they turned to you and gave some weak smiles.

“Are you ready?” Mark asked you awkwardly. You nodded once, and within a few moments, you were all piling to his car.

You took the backseat next to Valerie while Tyrone took passenger, leaving Mark to drive his fancy top-of-the-line black and leather-lined car. Even the leather of the damn thing smelled like wealth and bourgeoisie. Tyrone and Mark were laughing upfront, with Valerie trying to make conversation with you every once in awhile. Your face was pointed outside the tinted windows watching the suburb turn to city as you approached Los Angeles.

Eventually, in between everyone trying to make awkward conversation with you and avoiding you at the same time, you finally arrived to the studio location. It was a surprisingly inconspicuous building; it was right next to a subway, in fact. Printed in normal looking letters on was the name of the show, Talking with a Robot, you noted as Mark circled the building to find a parking garage.

After handing over your tickets and going through security, your group of four was finally able to
find their seats. The inside was nothing at all like the outside; it was a completely different place. The area where the live audience was seated was similar to an auditorium’s seating, with seats rising up the farther back they got, but the room itself would put any auditorium to shame. Various shades of pink decorated the stage where the interview would take place, along with furniture and decorations in a multitude of complementary colors. There were stage lights and cameras all over the place, lighting up the room perfectly, and a few staff were either minglingly or rushing to get last minute things finished. You all had arrived a bit early, but this was planned. Tyrone had heard that shows with live studio audiences often performed or showed things that wouldn’t be seen on television, so you were all hoping for something exciting.

The show wasn’t starting yet, but Mettaton was already on stage, getting his makeup (was he made of metal? robots can wear makeup?) prepped and talking to the makeup artists. You were close enough to hear him laughing as the artist told him to be still or they’d mess up, Mettaton trying to apologize but still moving a bit.

Finally, after his makeup was finished, he stood up and addressed the audience, and you thought he was going to start the show. The crowd hushed a bit, but you soon realized the cameras weren’t rolling yet.

“Good evening darlings! So many beautiful faces in the audience today. Aside from our wonderful guest today, I have a surprise for all you lovelies!” He clasped his hands together and cocked his head to the side while a few people in the audience cheered in excitement.

“One of you lucky viewers will be winning a two week trip with yours truly to London! It’s really such an honor, I’m jealous just thinking about who’ll win.”

To that the audience laughed heartily. So this is what a studio audience laugh sounds like when you’re actually in it in it.

“Oh, and I hope you can all be patient! We won’t announce the winner until after our program has ended. So stay comfy dollfaces, we’ll get started in just a minute!” And with that he turned away from the audience as some important looking person with a cap on began to talk to him. Within a few moments the audience had started up their chattering, and continued on for a few moments before Mettaton seated himself behind his glamorous pink desk, a sign that the show was beginning.

“Welcome ladies and gentleman to Talking with a Robot! I’m you’re wonderful host, Mettaton, thank you so much for tuning in tonight!” He waited a moment for the applause to die down a bit before continuing to speak. “We’ve got an amazing guest who’ll be joining us this evening, the one and only,” He then proceeded to name some famous actress, who received a booming round of applause at just the name drop.

“But first, an overview at what they’ve doing over the past year!”

His introduction continued like this for a while, making his conversation interesting by joking about the topic. Occasionally he would cut away to show a clip of the celebrity, either taken from a movie or captured from an outside source. Then, finally, he introduced said celebrity, who walked on stage, accompanied by a round of applause, and took a seat on a fluffy pink chair next to Mettaton’s desk; the interview portion was beginning.

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You had sat through most of the show when you realized, much to your internal denial, that you had been actually focusing on him. You weren’t interested in the red carpet gossip or the humor he quipped here and there, it was by how… alive he seemed. He had little idle movements he made
when he was listening to his interviewee talk, he had such vigor when he laughed, his expressions were so intricate—it was so unlike anything you had expected. He was so real he didn’t seem real. Did that make any sense? Somehow it did.

“You heard it here first folks! Her new movie will premiere next year in September, and I expect you all to watch because I know I will! Good night everyone!”

For about the hundredth time tonight, the audience began to applaud. Off camera, Mettaton and the actress began to talk idly, but his mic was cut and the audience was too loud for you to make out what they were saying.

After a few minutes of sitting, by the nudge on your shoulder finally remembered you came here with friends.

“Hey, so, wouldn’t it be crazy if one of us won?” Valerie asked you awkwardly. Won what?—oh.

“Yeah. Really crazy.” You responded.

“Uh huh.” Grade-A conversation happening right here folks.

Luckily, you didn’t have to worry about keeping this trainwreck going, because Mettaton interrupted by coming on stage and addressing the audience.

“Today is just full of surprises, folks! I told you earlier I was going to be giving a two-week trip to London with the beautiful moi, correct?”

Heartily, the audience clapped, with a few whistles thrown in there this time.

“Ah, ah, ah! I bet you all thought I was going to pull a number from a hat and choose the winner, didn’t you? You’re going to have to work for this prize, darlings!”

For the first time since entering this building, the lights began to dim so that you could barely see anything on stage. The only sound you could hear despite excited whispers was Mettaton’s voice.

“That’s right. I’ve brought one of my dearest monster friends with me tonight to help me choose the winner. She was the leader of the Underground’s Royal Guard, she can bench press seven children, she’s a gym teacher at the first school for monsters—give it up for Undyne!

The lights came back on to reveal a female monster standing on stage with a proud grin on her face. You were close enough to tell that she was of some kind of fish aspect and what Mettaton meant when he said she could bench press seven children—she was absolutely ripped.

“If you want to go anywhere anytime soon, you’ll have to beat my friend Undyne at a good old fashioned arm wrestling contest!” Mettaton announced, gesturing to her and a table with two chairs that seemed to have magically appeared.

Almost instantly every strong/jock-looking person in the crowd was cheering and offering to take her own, but yet again, Mettaton wagged his finger.

“Don’t be silly! This is still a raffle, in some aspects, and we’ll be here all night if all of you went one after the other.”

From a compartment in his chest he pulled out a pink-tinged piece of paper and unfolded it. Upon reading it he looked over in the general direction of your group with a smile on his face. You swear you almost saw that smile falter for a moment.
“Anyone in section A row 16 can challenge Undyne. Good luck you all.”

“Oh my god—oh my god!” Valerie was clutching your arm and squealing with absolute delight. Everyone in your row was standing up as a group of security guards came over to shepherd about a dozen of you down to the stage. You didn’t really want to get up, but you were being dragged along and pushed by the people behind you. Eventually you all formed a line on the stage as Mettaton greeted the first contestant, a burly looking guy with a neckbeard.

You were standing almost in the back of the line, right behind your group of “friends”. You got a front row view of Valerie whispering to Tyrone. She turned to Tyrone with pleading eyes. “You’re really strong, you know. I bet you could beat her and you know…” She licked her bottom lip and then looked back up to him. “Win this for me? Please?”

You could almost see his head physically swell as his ego gathered there. Oh boy. Quickly he promised her that he could do it, and that he’d get her that vacation. You wondered briefly if he even heard himself.

Already the line was moving as the first guy ended up losing badly. He was clutching his arm to his chest as if in immense pain. This didn’t look like it was going to be easy.

As person after person lost dramatically to a loud and gloating Undyne, you could see the confidence in the people before you—and Tyrone—dissipating. Finally he was up, right after Valerie and Mark got their arms smashed into the table, and you watched as he nervously took a seat in front of her.

“B-Best of luck!” Tyrone tried to say it confidently, but it came out more like a stutter. You saw as Undyne’s grin widened further, revealing more of her sharp teeth.

“Yeah you’re gonna need it, punk.” She said as she got her arm into position. Slowly, Tyrone did the same. Mettaton put his hands on top of theirs and began to count off.

“On your mark, get set, go!” As soon as he removed his hands, Tyrone’s hand went slamming anticlimactically into the table. A string of curses escaped his lips as he had both failed and gotten his hand hurt.

“Language! You’re lucky we weren’t on air; I like to keep this show family friendly.” Mettaton chided as Tyrone walked off stage. Uh oh, you were next and he and Undyne were looking at you expectantly. You really didn’t want to; not because you thought you would lose, but because everyone would be watching you. Well it’s too late now, everyone is already staring at you; you had taken up a good five seconds of mental debating.

“Are you scared?! I can almost see you shaking in your shoes!” Undyne remarked as you slowly made your way over to the chair and sat down. You felt your stomach lurch slightly when you heard the crowd laugh in response, but it only seemed to boost Undyne’s ego. She cracked her knuckles before putting her hand into position; you mirror her movements, save for the knuckle cracking.

Mettaton put his hands over both of yours, as he did with all the other contestants, but you noticed that there was a slight hesitance in doing so. Or maybe you were imagining it, but he did say the startup count a little quicker than before. Ah, but that was probably because he wanted this little spectacle to be over and done with.

As soon as he said go, you felt a great pressure pressing against your hand; this woman was unbelievably strong, there was no doubting that. But your arm didn’t move, it didn’t even budge.

“Urgh—UGH!” You heard her groan as she pressed down harder on your arm, an aggravated face
forming as your arm refused to move. Oh god, you thought this might happen. You were hoping she would be stronger than you, despite your “modifications”. But it just couldn’t be that simple.

Eventually her arm started shaking slightly as you began to move your arm over. Might as well end this, you figured, no one was enjoying it, especially not Undyne.

You gentle pressed her arm against the side of the table, making it seem like you put in some actual effort so it didn’t seem suspicious. To your surprise a few scattered clapping began in the crowd, soon turning into a full on standing ovation. A few whistles were let out and plenty of cheers, though Mettaton and Undyne certainly weren’t cheering. Undyne was giving you a murderous glare as she gripped her hand and Mettaton looked speechless, for once. He quickly snapped out of it once he realized what had happened and began to congratulate you.

“A-And a job well done, too! That means you win—you win the prize, that is. A vacation.” He seemed to be actually rattled and unnerved, which you’d never seen in any celebrity before. But as quickly as he had gone uncomposed, his formal and charismatic self was back to face the crowd. He grabbed your hand and held it above your hand like you had won an actual wrestling match.

“Our winner for this evening who’s managed to best the ex-leader of the Royal Guard—what’s your name?”

You softly told him your name, which he spoke loudly into the microphone. The audience cheered once again and you were escorted off stage as Mettaton concluded the night.

You were taken backstage to sign some paperwork and agree to hand over your birth certificate, proof of residency, and passport within the following week. You hadn’t wanted to win in the first place, and you weren’t sure if you wanted to go. But what could you say to them? No, I changed my mind? Give it to someone else?

Well suppose you could say that. But you couldn’t find the voice to do so.

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That contest wasn’t actually supposed to be won. Mettaton knew that Undyne’s strength could outmatch even the strongest of humans on this planet; Mettaton had actually done a raffle with ticket buyers’ seats beforehand. The arm wrestling contest was Undyne’s idea, but Mettaton had initially rejected it. Later he decided it might actually be a good idea because it would bring publicity for her and Toriel’s monster school, opening the idea for more monster oriented facilities to be created. And who would Mettaton be if he didn’t support his own kind in any way, shape, or form? Not a respectable celebrity, that’s certain!

But this is all besides the point; no human—and very few monsters—should’ve been able to beat the Undyne.

Yet that human managed it. No, not managed it: they did it with ease, despite how they pretended not to. It was just too perplexing to him.

The few hours after the show that Mettaton spent in his dressing room—most talk show hosts didn’t have one, but Mettaton practically demanded it—he usually spent it alone. But this one time he allowed someone in.

“And you’re sure you didn’t let the human win? Just to be nice?”

Undyne was glaring daggers at this point, baring her teeth just a little bit.
“Nice?! Do I look like the kind of person to let someone win because I’m nice?!” She asked in a snarl. With a deep breath she managed to calm down as she plopped down on a chair. She wasn’t really mad at him (for once); she was mad that she lost.

“Humans are supposed to be stronger than monsters—what they’re made out of, anyway. I get that, but… this feeling, it was like trying to move the entire Earth.” Her eyebrows knit together in concentration or frustration—Mettaton couldn’t tell which—as she spoke. “That’s the sensation I got when I grasped their hand. Something’s off about that human.”

“I… Think I know what you mean.” Mettaton replied with a serious tone. “Now, I don’t want you to get too worried about what I’m going to say but… ” He bit his bottom lip for dramatic effect and placed a hand to his chin. Undyne reflexively rolled her eyes.

“You know how a long time ago Alphys fitted me out with some fancy human-hunting capabilities? They were supposed to be removed, obviously, because I wanted to entertain humans not kill them. But we kept a few modifications, just because they were too difficult to remove.”

“Okay?” Undyne responded, wondering where he was going with this. She was sitting backwards in one of Mettaton’s many pink and velvet chairs, leaning her hands against it.

“Okay, so I’m able to pick up on heat signatures and heart rates. That ‘human’…” he paused

“They didn’t have anything.”
Good Old Fashioned Shopping

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Your mother was ecstatic to finally be recognized for her work in advanced robotic engineering. For many years she’d been hoping to advance her career ever since she had been able to create a robot that could move and speak as humans could. She had yet to create a robot truly capable of cognitive thinking and learning, however. But being hired by a government funded research project might just give her the resources to do so.

It took schmoozing the right people and recommendation after recommendation for the agency to so much as even look at her creation. But when they did, there was only praise to be offered. That and money and contracts. Too many to consider denying.

She felt so guilty for having to leave you for so long; the two of you had lived a comfortable life in an apartment complex in LA. She was distant enough as it is; often going out of town to find particular parts or speak to a specific colleague or professional in the field. Often she was gone for days at a time, leaving you to keep up with your online learning curriculum on your own, since your mother hated the American education system. The winter months were especially hard, but you managed. You never voiced your distaste for her traveling out loud, but your mother could feel the disappointment drop like a weight when she announced, with reluctance, that she would be taking a longer trip than usual.

“This is one of the only opportunities I may ever receive. My only chance of recognition.” But her desire to finally achieve her dreams overshadowed her guilt.

But at first, you were happy for her. Despite the huge disappointment that came with finding out she would be moving miles away from your city to a remote location without you, you had been happy. Initially you questioned why you couldn’t come with.

“It's probably no big deal,” I.E. it was a very big deal. “But they're afraid of me telling things I shouldn't to family, and since they can't monitor my every move, it's safer if I stay in a location that's monitored overall. Since you're already seventeen, you'll be able to-”

“They want to separate us because they think you might spill something to me?” You asked, incredulously. Defensively, your mother threw up her hands.

“Now, sweetheart, they aren't separating us; I'm free to leave whenever I wish. This is just a precaution, and you're old enough to-” Once again you stopped her short.

“Precaution for what?” You were standing up now, feeling anger boil in you a bit. And suspicion, but not of your mother. “What exactly are they having you 'research'?“

Her face was softening into that of a condescending mother, as if you'd ask a silly question with a simple answer. “You know I can't go into details, hun, but it's nothing different than what I do everyday! I'm researching and working on robots, and hoping to improve our current technology to replicate the appearance, mannerisms, and conscientious thought of humans. You've heard my spiel before.”

“If it were that simple,” you crossed your arms, narrowing your eyes a bit. “Then why do you have
to stay in a 'monitored location'? Why do they need to make sure you're not revealing secrets? Why do they have to move you to Scenic Nowhere, Arizona?"

Your mother opened her mouth as if to form rebuttal, but she was left speechless. You were making perfect sense and she knew this very well.

“This is exactly what happened with the Manhattan project years ago; we learned about it in school. You know what they were making, right?” You asked, eyes widening when you the realization truly dawned on you.

“A weapon for mass-destruction.” She answered solemnly.

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By the end of the day you found yourself... how to describe it? Exhausted? You supposed that word fit. You weren't physically exhausted; your batteries were doing quite fine. But the mental strain told a different story—you were always nervous before, during, and after social interactions. And being on stage in front of hundreds of people? Speaking to a celebrity, albeit briefly—and embarrassing quite possibly the strongest person you've ever met? Oh and the glare she gave you backstage, that alone could kill. The effects of the evening didn't really set in until you were on your way back home, with your “friends” asking you questions and, for the most part, congratulating you. Not to mention you actually won a contest, something you wouldn't have even participated in the first place. But as usual, instead of voicing your opinion you let yourself go with the flow.

Surprisingly, your mother was okay with it when you spoke to her about it. You were hoping that she would forbid it, saying something protective and motherly. Of course, parents can never be that predictable. Actually, she was excited that you were getting out of the house and going somewhere. She might have been a little proud of herself, as well. These little excursions that you hated were finally taking you out of the house for more than an hour. Her only condition is that you let her perform maintenance before you leave, and that you call her at least once a day while you're abroad. You might have protested the last part, but considering the extenuating circumstances, you agreed. Surprising yourself, you weren't at all disappointed in your mother's reaction. As a matter of fact, you might be looking forward to the trip. Slightly. You'd never admit that to yourself; you had an image to uphold, even when no one was watching. And you weren't excited because you'd be able to observe Mettaton up-close, no sirree, that's definitely not the case. Though it would be a perk, that kept in mind.

Now you were lying on your bed staring at your open hand, alternating between looking at the palm and the back of it. You pinched the skin of your palm gently, feeling it give just a little bit, but not very much. You applied a bit more force with your nails, pinching hard enough to have broken the skin of any other human. But of course, the synthetic material remained the same. That always bothered you. You never had shaving accidents anymore, and cuts and bruised were a thing of the past. Scars from blemishes and childhood mishaps had also disappeared when you received this new body—moles and birthmarks too. Your body was very different on the inside, but on the outside, you looked like a normal person. Now if you could feel like a normal person, you'd be in business. But despite the rush of emotions and feelings, the knot of nervous that sometimes wound in your stomach, feelings of warmth when you were seldom happy and red hot heat when you're angry, you still have this nagging in the back of your mind. What if it's all fake? What if it's all programmed? What if your emotions, your memories before this body—they're just numbers in a data sequence. Because no matter how real these emotions felt, the soft whirring and that empty feeling of shutting off when you 'went to sleep' was a reminder that your body was synthetic. And, by extension, you were synthetic. The thought always scares you.
You roll over on your bed and grab your laptop. Nothing like helps escaping your thoughts better than the internet.

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You still had a few days to go before the trip, so your mother suggested to go on a bit of a shopping spree. You wanted to refuse vehemently, but your mother dearest insisted on buying you the appropriate clothing and some suitcases. You could only refuse her so long before giving in. It was just a trip to the mall, what could possibly go wrong? Of course, asking that question can only lead to the subsequent events going wrong by any viable means. First the two of you went shopping for rain boots. This should have been simple, as your foot size hasn’t changed in years, but your mother was having you try on different pairs from every brand, only wanting the best. You, on the other hand, would have settled with the first thing you saw. But mothers had to be difficult, you had to try on EVERYTHING in the store at least once before she made a decision. You were in the shoe store for, like, an hour.

Next you had to go buy some warm clothing. London wasn’t exactly known for dry sixty-degree winters, unlike LA. Not to mention was more likely to rain, so coats were a necessity. It wasn’t like you were going to short circuit in the rain, but you still didn’t like the prospect of getting wet. And this time you were going to make her settle on the first thing you saw; some rinky-dink stereotypical raincoat in your favorite color.

“Are you sure you want this one?” She asked. “You’re probably going to see something else you like if we just keep searching.”

“No, this is fine. I like this one.” You said, though a bit unconvincingly. Your mother shrugged, but looked slightly disappointed that she wouldn’t be able to keep looking through the store. “Alright, if you insist. But don’t you need some more shirts? It’s going to be colder in London than it is in California.”

She definitely had noticed what she said, but you did. So what if it was cold? You couldn’t feel heat or the cold like you used to; instead they came to your mind like readings on a screen. These sensations served as a warning mechanism to your body, just as it did before you received this body, but you no longer had to fear frostbite or burning yourself. Yeah, you could tell when something was hot or cold. But you couldn’t feel it anymore.

After an awkward moment of silence—awkward to you, at least—you let your mother lead you around in search for more clothing, along the way debating aloud to herself whether to sacrifice fashion for affordability.

“Well you are going to be hanging out with Mettaton. We can splurge a bit can we?”

You were going to answer when she suddenly changed her mind.

“But—no—this other shirt looks exactly the same, and it costs less!”

Again, you were cut off before you could chip in with your two cents.

“Oh, to hell with it! We’ve got the money to be frivolous, what am I worrying about?” She muttered something about the computer she built herself amounted to somewhere above $1000, even though she hardly uses it.

Finally, the two of you were heading back to the car, loading the trunk with bags of clothing. Just as you were about to situate yourself in the passenger’s seat, your mother stopped you.
“Ooh, sweetheart! I just remembered; I have to pick up some things at the grocery store.”

Oh why no please no—why won't the stupid car door open?

“Come on, while we're already out here, it'll only take a minute.”

You were doomed.

~ ~ ~

Shopping for clothes with your mother? That's easy. Grocery shopping, on the other hand, was a nightmare. You had to sit and push the cart while your mother debated on what vegetable to buy. This wouldn't have been as bad, if your mother wasn't moving at the pace of a snail and stopping every time something that was on sale caught her eye.

“You know, I think I might have a coupon for this one right here.” And she went digging through her purse. You were going to be here a long time.

You manage to break away from your mother when she sends you off to find something on the other side of the store. A can of what, you couldn't be sure; you weren't paying much attention at the time. However, the smell of free samples caught your nose. While it wasn't necessary for you to eat, it was still fun to do so. You could pick up scents and even taste things, although these senses were wasted on you and rarely indulged in. But food could serve as a back of energy supply and converted into bio-fuel if you were ever too far away from your charger and running low on energy.

You were going to approach someone advertising a new monster-created ice cream brand when you saw two kids, one monster and one human, already at the stand and being lightly scolded by the vendor for trying to take too many free samples. The Monster Kid, you noted, appeared to have no arms.

“Sorry kids, but if you want anymore ice cream you'll have to get your parents.” The monster replied, sending the kids, looking defeated, on their way.

“But they're called free samples for a reason!” The Monster Kid grumbled, to which their friend shrugged sadly. The duo was walking away from the sample stand as you were approaching it. One of the kids, seeing this, perked up and approached you.

“’Scuse me, are you gonna go get a free sample?” The kid asked you, beaming.

Uh. This is sudden. Doesn't this kid know not to talk to strangers? In fact, their friend was behind them trying to tug them away from you.

“You're not supposed to talk to people you don't know.” You said, before turning walking off towards the stand. Before letting them think you had turned them down, you returned with a sample of ice crea—of 'Nice Cream'. They looked happy to say the least; the little kid with no arms was doing an excited dance, while the Quiet One was looking up at you with a surprised, but delighted, expression.

You handed the sample to the Quiet One, who held it out for their friend to eat. The generosity was astounding you found yourself smiling at the cuteness. Aw.

“But really, you two,” You said and got down to eye-level with those two. “You shouldn't talk people you don't know.” Then you realized: “As a matter-of-fact, where are your parents?”

In response you received a rushed and jumbled answer from the monster kid—who was being
corrected here and there by the Quiet One (so they could speak. Huh.). Of the bits and pieces you got from them; apparently they were supposed to be on a play-date (kids still use that word?) but the Quiet One's mom needed to pick up some ingredients before doing... something? You didn't know, that part got cut off by the Quiet One complaining that the Monster Kid was too loud.

In fact, they were being a bit too loud. They were garnering a few stares here and there; you were standing in the middle of the frozen goods section with two children who looked nothing like you. Yeah, it would be smart to find their guardian at this point.

Just as one of them was suggesting getting more free samples—you weren't sure which one, but you could guess—you suggested finding their guardian. Neither of them looked ecstatic about the offer, but they obliged willingly. You gestured for them to follow you, but the Quiet One took that as an invitation to take your hand. You weren't expecting it, but they were just a kid so this was probably a habit for them. You saw them holding on to the end of the Monster Kid's (agenda: learn their names) long and baggy shirt so they wouldn't get left behind.

Leading the two down the aisle with one hand, you dished out your phone and sent a quick text to your mother, asking her where she was. In a few seconds, she had texted back reminding you that you were the one who disappeared, and that she was near the checkout section talking to someone. You quickly made a U-turn, children in tow, and walked swiftly over.

When you found your mother, you saw that she was talking to someone about a head taller than she was. At first you thought it was a stranger, and that your mother's pseudo-enthusiasm had gotten out of hand and trapped an innocent, but then you finally recognized them. They'd been on TV and the internet for about a month before the media gradually slipped to another topic and began sweeping things under the rug.

This was Toriel, AKA a celebrity in your mother's eyes.

“There you are! While you were off procrastinating, look who I met!” She gestured to Toriel, as if you hadn't already acknowledged her and her regal presence. You offered a small wave, to which she returned with an equally small small. Before your mother had a chance to force you to introduce yourself, Toriel realized who you had in tow with you and nearly had a heart-attack. She looked back to the cart that was behind her and then back to the two children who wore the sheepish grins of troublemakers before Toriel came around and scooped them from you.

“Frisk, Kid!” As Toriel called out to the two in surprise, you realized why the Quiet One seemed so familiar. They were an orphaned human that came from the underground along with the monsters and served as an ambassador, sort of. As well of an ambassador as a young child could have, anyway. Still, forgetting this fact relieved you a bit. It was a bit of a reminder that you weren't 100% machine and programming; the part of you that was human still remained. Your brain, that is.

“When did you wander off? How many times have I told you two: It isn't safe to wander about on your own. Frisk, you especially know better.” She turned to you and for a second you thought you were going to get scolded too, even though you didn't do anything wrong. She was giving you an apologetic look, however.

“I hope these two haven't caused you any trouble.” She excused herself. You waved it off, telling her that the two of them were fine.

Your mother talked with Toriel for a bit, the two kids standing behind her looking abashed. After telling your mother one of the checkout lanes was clear, she finally let Toriel go.

Moving towards the self-checkout line, your mother turned towards you.
“I almost forgot; did you find the thing like I asked you to?”

Thing? What thing—oh.

Now it was your turn to be scolded.

Chapter End Notes

This took waaayyy too long to write for a chapter that's only 3000 words. I've been busy with finals (and writer's block) but I think I finally have a good grasp of where this is going. Please be patient with little ol' me.
After that, you basically got into a screaming match with your mother. These were rare and infrequent, but almost always they were about her work. You tried vehemently to convince her not to go, to tell her that she could fulfill her dream without indirectly causing the death of people. She argued back that there was no evidence that her research would lead to something like the Manhattan project, but you told her she had every reason to believe it could. Genuinely angry, she began to use her parenting card to its maximum potential. You had no right to tell her what kinds of jobs she could or couldn't work, and that you'd be grateful once you saw how much extra income would be coming into the household. After that you were sent to your room. Neither one of you were pleased by this.

After a few minutes of alternating between punching your pillow and staring at the ceiling, you had heard a soft knock on your door. You didn't respond, instead you threw your arm over your face and pretended to be asleep. She was gentle as she opened the door and stepped in.

“Sweetheart, I think we should talk.” She said in her most I-Am-Sorry voice. Ah, to hell with pretending.

“I think we did plenty of talking an hour ago.” You replied, face still covered. You could hear her shift, probably containing about two scolding lectures right then and there.

“I don't want to talk about that. You've made your opinion clear, and I've made mine.” She replied with a stern tone. “But dear, there is something important I need to discuss with you.”

You felt her situate herself on the edge of your bed and heard her pause. After a long period of silence you peeked from under your arm, just to see if she was watching you. Upon finding out that she was indeed looking at you you re-hid your face. This earned a chuckle.

“You didn't honestly think I'd make you stay here on your own for such a long time, did you?” She asked rhetorically. Puzzled, you moved your arm and looked at her fully. What, was she changing her mind now? Did she find some loophole in her soul-binding contract that basically made your argument look like petty rambling?

“The program is offering to pay for a scholarship to a local boarding school. You'll be able to stay there for a few months and go to school while I'm away.”

In utter disbelief you sat up in your bed and gaped at her. “What? You're sending me to a school? A boarding school?” Houston, the situation has upgraded from problem to full-on Armageddon.

“You have to go to school; me finding a career can't interfere with that.” She said matter-of-factly, missing the entire point.

“Don't you hate schools? Can’t I just continue my online learning?” You argued, even though you kind of hated the droll curriculum of the program sometimes. But! Besides the point!

“This school is a wonderful school! I've checked out the location and everything; the staff are nice and the building is a dream. I'm sure you'll love it there and you'll make all sorts of friends.” This was one of the most parent-y things she could say. They always say this when you move for the first time: you'll love it and you'll make friends. Sometimes it was true in the end.
Sometimes it wasn't.

At this point you didn't have the energy to argue with her anymore. You sighed and laid back down on your bed and closed your eyes. It was awhile before you finally heard her leave your room. She didn't close the door, either.

She was so bent on making her dream become yours she was going blind with happiness. But you just didn't have the energy to fight with your mother and get it through her thick skull that what she was doing was going to have some major consequences one day. Hell, for all you knew, she'd realize that herself. You could just imagine her rushing back home to scoop you up and apologize for being wrong. It placated you slightly, and you were finally able to drift off into a deep sleep. She'd regret it, and you'd be there to say I told you so.

~ ~ ~

You're lying on your bed, phone beside you and feeling like utter crap. So it's a normal afternoon. Your mother just finished performing maintenance on you; usually she does it every few months and it's hardly anything to write home about and you're not conscious during the procedure at all. Supposedly, though, your mother has to “open you up” and that itself sounds like something to be asleep for. There's a small panel on your back, almost seamlessly blending into the skin surrounding it, and it remains the only external part of you that would suggest you're not fully human. From there you can be opened up and your insides poked and prodded and whatnot. Fascinating.

Usually these go uneventful, and you're free to go back to your normal dull life, but this time your mother found a problem. She said something was wrong with one of your motor skill drivers, but she couldn't pinpoint which one. Apparently it had encountered an error and was causing a small malfunction with the part of your brain that controlled fine-turned muscle movements, but the malfunction wasn't big enough that she could—okay, see, you started tuning her out at this point. Science-y bull-crap pertaining to how exactly you worked didn't make very much sense to you. You got the gist of it, however; something was wrong but nothing big. She gave you a quick once-over and had you do things like run in place and do some push ups, just to make sure nothing major was malfunctioning. When she was finally done, she let you return to your room, but not without first stressing how important it is you call her if anything goes wrong. You had given her an unconvincing “Uh Huh” and went upstairs to pack your clothing.

Well you were supposed to be packing. But procrastination was a hobby you've adopted even in your new life. So now there was a pile of clothes on one side of your bed and a suitcase on the other. Ah, yes, and curled up on a tiny part of your bed and avoiding work was you. Currently you were staring off into space, debating whether or not you should waste a few hours on the internet or turn in for the night early. There wasn't much to do besides fiddle with the internet or stare into space. Well, you didn't have the energy to do much else.

Your phone having a pleasant little seizure on the side of your bed broke you out of your internal debate. It was...a text? Who on earth had your number besides your mother; you live in the same house, why on earth would she text you? But once you took a look at the number, you found that it was unknown. Well...it wouldn't hurt to look at it, even if it was the wrong number.

’Yoo hoo! This is Valerie, your mom gave us your number~! You were always too shy to pass it along yourself, so I figured why not!”

It was her of all people. Why was she texting you? You weren't going to be rude and straight-up ask her that, but you definitely didn't consider yourself close to her in any way, shape, or form. But something must have been important enough for her to hound your mother for your number.
'Hi Valerie. Did you need something?'

You sent a brief response. Almost instantly, you got a response.

'Did you go on your trip yet? :3 I know it's probably a little late in the evening over in London, but I was just wondering if you were having fun! Lol our little trips must seem so boring lmao' cue about ten emojis.

Before you could respond, correcting her, she sent another text.

'Also, is Mettaton there? He must be sooo much fun to talk to~ How's he doing? Lol can you tell him one of ur friends said hey?'

Oh. There it is. Her real reason for texting you. You knew without a doubt she was a die-hard Mettaton fan. A little bit after the event, she had even tried to convince you to let her have the trip instead. But when you explained to her that there was a ton of paperwork involved in the process and you couldn't just hand-over the prize, she gave up, albeit reluctantly. What now? Did she think she could befriend Mettaton through you via text? Get real; you hadn't even left home yet.

'Sorry, Valerie but I haven't gone on the trip yet, Before sending the text you decided to have a little revenge. I actually won't be leaving until sometime next month.'

'Aww k then! Still have fun tho and tell ur mom I said hi!'

Of course she had decided to end there, since you weren't with Mettaton. On the bright side, at least you won't be hearing from her until after the trip.

Sighing, you dropped your phone on the bed and sat up. The menacingly small pile of clothes on your bed wasn't going to pack itself.

~ ~ ~

“So, I've concluded.”

He was applying MTT-Brand nail polish. It was going to be a glossy black when it was dried. His legs were propped up on a soft pink ottoman and he was reclining against one of many bright pink pillows on his bed.

“They're probably a zombie or something.” A quick little blow to the nails. Well, not really nails, more like the ends of his fingers were shaped like nails. Alphys gave him one those looks—an “are you kidding me Mettaton” look—but granted him this itsy-bitsy request. Regardless, when he began seeing a manicurist (one who had to learn to work with harsh unforgiving metal) even she had to admit it was a fabulous upgrade. And it wasn't frivolity that inspired him, no sirree. Of course this was all for the sake of fashion. All for the sake of fashion.

Angry, loud, and on speakerphone was Undyne. She'd called asking about 'that human' as they'd dubbed you. Ever since they won the contest, Undyne's been obsessing over them a little too hard; Madame Royal Guard was starting to resurface again. But even Mettaton had to admit he found himself curious about this strange human. They just never ceased to interest him, humans, even when he thought he'd seen it all.

“Are you kidding me? That's the dumbest thing I've heard all day. Reason number one: ZOMBIES DON'T EXIST.” Undyne practically screamed into the receiver. He could tell she probably had the microphone smack dab next to her mouth.
“Well have you got any better ideas? It's all you ever talk about since they beat you.” He put emphasis on his words to make it obvious that it was Undyne's ego who got bruised, not his. He could practically hear her grimace through the phone as he stuck his hand under a mini heat lamp on his bedside table.

“Are you ever going to let that drop?! SO WHAT! I wasn't on my game that day! Doesn't mean I'm not the strongest person you know—don't forget it. But, anyway, have you considered maybe... they're a robot? Like you?”

Mettaton almost messed up his nails scoffing. “Are you kidding me? Darling, I can't even count how many times I've overheated in this hot metal body, even after I underwent repairs! And no one can build 'em up like Alphys can.”

“Heh, yeah, you're right about that.” She started to sound love-struck as usual whenever Alphys was brought up, but Mettaton knew her name would have that affect. God those two were just so cute!

“Hey, you trying to distract me? Nice try, this brain never get's off track! What was I saying? Right—how else can they be that strong without...y'know. Feeling like a living thing.”

“Zombie.”

“I'm gonna hit you.”

“I'm serious!” Okay, he wasn't that serious but oh come on! “Okay, maybe not the kind you see on underground shows—oh darling that reminds me: in one of my movies, between a 2-hour shot of rose petals falling on my body, there was a little drama about me being a zombie hunter. Did you catch that little flick? I Think it was my sixth one out of my twelve-part saga of the—“

“OH MY GOD.”

“Okay, I had a point, gosh you won't let me rant will you? I was saying...oh! I was saying, maybe they're not your typical undead, like in my movie, but maybe they're not really alive either.”

Undyne was silent for a moment, a rare moment indeed. “Okay. That actually makes sense.”

“See! I was right.”

“We don't know anything for certain, bub, so don't act so cocky.”

“That's why I'm going to investigate! And this trip is a wonderful opportunity!” He removed his hand from under the lamp. Hm. Another five minutes, he wasn't going to risk smudging it.

“Yeah, yeah, and you were probably a detective in one of your movies. Just be careful, okay?”

“Undyne, dollface, I've got nothing to worry about. Zombies don't eat metal.”

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She hung up.

~ ~ ~

You don't dream anymore. Well, you used to, and boy were they vivid. Sometimes they were random nonsense; a tea party with but all the guests were various presidents and the tea was actually hot lava, but oddly no one seemed bothered. You liked those dreams. They had been fun to think
about and were a distraction.

Other times they were surreal flashbacks of that time. There would be nothing but pain in these dreams and it felt like your head was tearing apart and you couldn't breathe and then

You'd wake up. It's all a dream, but it felt so real, like you were actually reliving it. Because you were reliving it, as far as your body was concerned.

You used to feel particularly sluggish when you first got this body. Initially, your mother thought it was from the mental strain being in a new body + the recent incident had on your mind, but when she performed the first maintenance, she discovered that your brain was actively sending signals to your limbs, telling them to move, and the program that served as sort of a sleep paralysis had to work extra hard to keep your body from acting out your dreams. Of course, she had to explain this to you in layman's terms; you were using up power while you dreamt, counteracting your body actually being charged while sleeping. So dreams had to go for now, though you weren't all too eager to get them back since the nightmares were becoming more frequent.

But nowadays it was a bit worrying to go to sleep. You were lying in your bed, your charger in one hand and staring at the ceiling. Tomorrow you'd be set out on your big trip with Mettaton—hell, you probably wouldn't get to spend any time with him. He was a celebrity, come on, you were sure he had better things to do than spend two weeks with what he could only assume to be a die-hard fan. No, this trip was probably to make you feel important, like you had won something. He was probably going to have breakfast with you (could he even eat?) and then plop you off at a hotel with some pocket money while he went and did some fancy photo shoot in London. It's not like you would blame him, really. You were sure that he'd probably get bored of you after spending two minutes with you. You had that kind of effect on people, lately.

Now your mind was wandering too much. You wanted to finish your thoughts before you plugged in for the night. It was similar to staving off sleep to finish daydreaming, but usually you were staving it off for another reason. You didn't really like “falling asleep”. The second you plugged in your charger, your body would fall asleep. But it just felt like you were slipping into black nothingness—there was only one thing you had experienced before that felt similar. It was when you first died. All of your functions slowly halt—you can't move your hands and your vision goes dark. There's nothing. Absolutely nothing, and it feels terrifying and scary and it lasts but at the same time you don't remember any of it and its ephemeral. Then suddenly bam! Your eyes are open. But you're not waking up on an operating table, dazed and feeling like your arms don't belong to you. That's what it was like when you first woke up. Nothing was familiar and you were panicking. Sometimes, when you wake up in the morning, you still expect to see your mother standing over you and looking exhausted. Looking like she had aged fifty years in the blink of an eye.

But no, when you wake up you're in your bed, and there's a wire sticking out of you, and everything feels familiar and only slightly detached and not like a completely separate entity.

You're looking at the charger in the dark now. It looks kind of like a laptop charger; thick and circular with a metal end. Haphazardly you feel around your lower back until you find that panel. Even though it's almost inconspicuous, it's one of the reasons why you don't go swimming anymore.

Now was not the time to be afraid. You'd done this hundreds of times before, now. Holding it off wasn't going to make it go by faster.

You plugged in for the night.

~ ~ ~
You awoke suddenly when you felt your mother practically throttle you awake.

“Get up! I thought you set an alarm!” She was standing over you, an air of her usual faux excitement dripping off of her. You craned your neck over to look at your bedside clock; it was 11:34 in the morning. Mettaton was going to be arriving sometime near twelve.

Ah hell, you forgot to set your alarm. Yet again, you were too busy pondering life and death to get anything done. Cursing under your breath, you yanked your charger out of your back ran over to grab the outfit you’d set out the night before while you were packing. Your mother was in your doorway scolding you a bit, though you weren't paying attention and were just making affirmative noises now and then. Eventually, she left and allowed you to get changed. You were still a bit dizzy on your feet, however. Just a slight a side effect you had to deal with after shutting down. Your brain was awake, but the rest of your body had to catch up and wake up too.

You took a seat on your bed and thought about brushing your teeth. You didn't really see the point of it anymore, but it would kill some time seeing as it was now 11:55 and Mettaton still wasn't here. You were lugging your suitcase out of your door; might as well wait downstairs since you had the time when you stopped and did an about-face. Your charger, it was lying on your bed and you damn near forgot it. As you went to go pick it up, your suitcase slipped out of your hand and clanked loudly on the floor. Your mother heard the noise and called up, but you told her it was nothing. You were just moving too quickly and basically flung the suitcase out of your hand, onto the floor.

You didn’t know what would happen if you ever ran out of battery, but you certainly weren’t going to find out any time soon. You stuffed your charger into a pocket on your suitcase and proceeded to head downstairs.

After a few minutes of channel searching in the living room, Mettaton finally arrived... in style. There was a bright pink limousine just past your driveway when your mother went to answer the door. A man who looked and carried the air of a chauffeur greeted your mother at the door. You were up on your feet and your mother stood aside to give you one final crushing hug. You felt oddly excited, but you were quickly crushing those emotions by telling yourself nothing interesting was going to happen. This was going to be boring, you were sure of it. Absolutely positive.

The chauffeur dude opened the door and you shuffled awkwardly in. The inside of the limo kind of reminded you of a night club: there were neon lights on the sides of the dark-tinted windows and the black leather seats were contrasted by the white tiger print carpeting. A little bit down the limo was Mettaton, smiling at you and looking like he was posing for a picture. He greeted you with a small wave and gestured you over, to which you did awkwardly in the limo. There wasn't much head room to move, but you managed to sit down before the limo started moving.

“Hello, hello darling! You must be so excited to be going on a trip with me.” He was holding a small glass of something fizzing. It didn't smell alcoholic—but wait a second—

“LA is such a wonderful city! When I heard it was where all the biggest stars gathered, I just knew it was the place for me. But gosh it's so cramped sometimes. A robot like me has to explore every corner of the world while I can, don't you know? So I decided—why not go somewhere new? And to spice things up, bring a new—“

“Are you drinking that?” You cut him and pointed at his glass. Wait, crap, you didn't mean to interrupt him, but he hardly seemed too bothered. He glanced at his glass and then made a move for a little black mini fridge.
“Oh how rude of me! I didn't even offer you anything to drink, did I? I've got soda, I've got bubbling —”

“No, no, I mean. You can drink things? Aren't you a robot.” It felt like a dumb question, seeing as you could drink things fine. But he seemed for metal than... you know? Flesh?

A blinked a few times before finally realizing what you were getting at, then he chuckled a bit and waved his hand dismissively.

“Oh what? This? Of course I can drink—I can even eat normal food! I don't really need to eat, though, it's mostly for aesthetic purposes.” He posed with the glass as if to accentuate his point.

The rest of the ride consisted of Mettaton trying to make light conversation with you, but you weren't exactly known for being a chatty Cathy. The limo is headed off to a small independent airport on the outskirts of town. It was a private jet company that took reservations and shuttled anyone who could afford the prices. Here you could skip the security checkpoints and TSA pat downs and you didn't have to worry about the plane leaving you. It was ready to go when you all were.

The inside of the plane was no less impressive than the limo. It was a comfortable little place set up similar to a lounge and at the far end there was a set of doors that you could only assume led to wherever food and refreshments were prepared. In between a few of the seats a little bar was squeezed in with a few popular names lining it. You just made yourself comfortable on one of the lounges.

After awhile of looking out the window and waiting for the plane to take off, Mettaton told you that the bar was free for you to visit, but you turned him down, saying you didn't drink. Now you were drumming your fingers on your thigh, glancing over at him from time to time to see if he was looking at you. He wasn't, thank god.

But wait. What was this? Suddenly things were... Awkward. Very awkward. You didn't have any thing to say and you weren't very good at making and keeping conversations going anymore. Shit, he was probably expecting at least something from you. He had probably expected you to be a geeky fan and ask him a bunch of questions, but you really just wanted to pull out your laptop and see if this plane had wifi.

Aw crap, now you were just downright nervous. You had your hands balled into a fist on your lap and you couldn't pull your eyes from them; you were almost certain Mettaton would be looking at you, probably disappointed. Why wouldn't he be? You should be happy. You won a prize that cost thousands of dollars, maybe more. You should be thanking him. Yet you couldn't even muster the audacity to look him in the eye. He didn't deserve this—he didn't deserve to be with some boring person like yourself on a trip to one of the most famous cities in the world. This could've been his first time visiting this place, and he had to spend it with you. You felt sick. If you hadn't won that contest, he could've spent the day with someone who was less of a let down. God, you need to apologize to him at the very least. Then, maybe, he wouldn't hate you the entire trip.

“Sorry.” Nearly squeezing the life out of your hands, you mutter the apology under your breath. Oh great, you thought to yourself. Whisper the apology, he'll surely hear you.

“Hm? Why are you apologizing.” He asked you. You kept your face rock-solid and still. This was the poker face you'd gotten used to throwing up whenever your emotions were becoming too hot to handle, especially around strangers.

“I'm sorry you have to spend two weeks with someone like me. I'm not trying to ignore you or anything, I just...” You relaxed your hands for a moment and habitually ran them on your clothing.
They weren't sweaty or anything, but it was an old habit you'd never gotten over. “I'm just not the best with new people. Sorry.”

“You're apologizing for that?” he sounded incredulous. “Darling, please, you can't apologize for something you can't help. You don't have to say a word to me, I won't mind it one bit.”

You were a bit surprised. Wasn't he bothered by this? He seemed like a loquacious kind of person, and being a celebrity he's probably always talking, be it on camera or not. Surely he didn't have the time to deal with people like you.

But he left it at that. He didn't try to make you talk or strike up anymore awkward conversations the entire flight. But he wasn't blatantly ignoring you either and you couldn't detect any malice from him either. He was just letting you have your space.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah I have no explanation for why this took so long. \_(ツ)_/\_
Good Old Fashioned Hors D'oeuvres

Chapter Summary

Creative writing > Actual Science
Science fiction is 90% fiction and 10% factual science.

Chapter Notes

Me planning this chapter: Psht, this is gonna be a short transitional chapter. The next one will be the long one o o)

Me writing this chapter: //six thousand words and and still not done// I haven’t eaten in days

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your mother was... out of her element, to say the least. The little prefab village that was set up similar to a summer camp gave off an air of mysterious simplicity. Everything was painted in a boring beige color on the outside, with a drab eggshell offering no creativity on the inside either. There was a cafeteria across from the two dorms set up for male and female workers: technicians, and scientists. A little down the way was the lab itself, where all the meat and potatoes was going to be cooked. She got a chance to do some quick introductions with her coworkers, but almost immediately a seminar was held to commemorate them all for everything they had to offer the world of technology. Today was supposed to be a day of relaxation after a long journey; some had come from across the globe to meet here. Tomorrow, however, everyone would be debriefed on the project and what specific research was going to be held. Their raison d'être, if you will.

~ ~ ~

Hotel shenanigans ensued. Mettaton wasn’t a super star with world-renown fame and talent quite yet, but he sure as hell was getting there. Once the plane landed the two of you were escorted to a fancy hotel in London known as the Corinthia Hotel. It was smack dab in the middle of plenty of sightseeing places, but that was just another excuse to rake up hotel prices you were sure. Considering the flight to England was almost 12 hours and you hadn't plugged up once during the entire flight the fanciness and pomp of the hotel was the last thing on your mind. Those twelve hours plus the time before the plane was a load on your shoulders indeed. Sure you pretended to sleep at around the time Mettaton plugged himself in. It was interesting to watch; his front panel thingamajig opened up and allowed him to plug in an adapter. You couldn’t help but be reminded of yourself.

So while Mettaton got off the plane looking refreshed, you, on the other hand, were tired as hell. At the very least you could blame it on jetlag, which you explained to Mettaton was the difference in timezones affecting human's sleep patterns. Considering the fact that your flight took off at around one in the afternoon yesterday, you arrived in London at around nine in the morning the next day once you factor in timezones and whatnot. It was early in the morning and Mettaton really wanted to go sightseeing with you first thing after getting settled in the hotel; he said he couldn't do it tomorrow
because he would be busy. And, he figured, since it was already morning it would be the perfect
time! But you were far too tired to go with him, and eating could only give you so much energy.
You'd have to scarf two thanksgiving meals in order to achieve a half-charge, and that surely
wouldn't be pretty to watch.

He was dismayed to find that you were too tired, but conceded anyway. The two of you were shown
to your suites at the top floor, his being right across from yours. Two burly looking bodyguards in
black suits were strolling up and down the hallway of this floor. He could even afford his own
security? Well he was a celebrity after all.

One of the bodyguards tried to help you with your suitcase, but you declined and insisted that you
were fine. You had no idea what Mettaton was going to be doing during the time that you were
asleep, but he claimed that he was going to 'take care of a little something'. When you tried to ask
him what it was, he replied that it was a secret before giggling like a schoolgirl and heading towards
him room. You were in the doorway of your room and saying goodbye to Mettaton when something
odd like deja vu happened.

You went to turn and go into your room when your suitcase slipped from your hand and landed
roughly on your foot. Ouch. But it wasn't the pain in your foot you were referring to, but a pain in
your hand. It had gotten all numb and you couldn't move it. There was also a feeling akin to a static-y
pins and needles, though very faint. What was this? You began trying clenching and unclenching
your hand, still standing in the doorway and staring at the thing like it had sprouted extra fingers.

"Something wrong?" Mettaton was peeking out of his room and watching you watch your hand.
Your suitcase was lying on the floor like you had thrown it there.

"Nothing, my hand just... fell asleep?" You weren't really sure what the thing was doing right now.
You quickly picked up your suitcase with your right hand, the hand that wasn't acting weird, and
shuffled into your room after muttering another hasty. 'goodnight.' Then you realized it was still
morning, crap.

You placed your suitcase on the floor next to your bed and sat down, still looking at your hand. The
feeling had gone away, but now it was hard to close your hand. You debated calling your mother
and telling her, but figured this was probably nothing. Surely it could be one of those problems that
disappeared by the time you woke up, you'd had plenty of those before.

After changing into your washing up and changing into your nightclothes you grabbed your charger
from your suitcase and plugged it into a socket by the bed. This time you weren't going to brood, you
were just going to get to the point.

~ ~ ~

When you opened your eyes again it was the middle of the night. Well, no, it was about seven
o'clock but very dark out. Outside the lights of London were brightening the street and a few stars
were peeping out. You turned over in bed and yanked your charger out of your back. Huh, so your
hand was deciding to be cooperative right now. You figured it was just because you were low on
battery and nothing more.

You got out of bed, rolled your charger up and stashed it back in your suitcase. Going over to the
window near your bed, you wondered if Mettaton was back yet. You were walking towards your
door to go check when, coincidentally, someone began knocking. You thought it would be funny for
a second if it was Mettaton at the door, but when you answered and you were greeted by the deep
monotone of a bodyguard you weren't surprised. You were told that Mettaton wanted to treat you to
something to eat. But once the guard got a look at you, he suggested you put on something more
suitable. Crap, you just answered the door in your nightclothes. You thanked the bodyguard and went back inside your room to pick out an outfit. Something plain, but not so casual that it didn’t seem like you cared. It’s not like you had packed for a dinner party.

Once you were finally dressed you walked across the hall to Mettaton’s room. After giving a curt knock to his door, you found yourself glancing at your outfit one last time. You looked fine, right? Yeah, you were fine. It's not like you could run back and change now, anyway.

“Oh hello! I was just about to come and grab you. You look… nice!” You noticed him pause as he gave you a once over, but before you had a chance to question it he was dragging you off in the direction of the elevator.

“This hotel has such a wonderful restaurant! I was told their food is gourmet so I’m sure you’ll love it.”

Restaurant was in fact beautiful. It was a classy mixture between modern elegance and a fine dining atmosphere. Around the room patrons were seated and dressed in mostly formal attire and they looked like their pockets were bursting ot the seams with money. They were rich. You weren’t dressed like you were about to go hiking or anything, but your clothes suddenly felt… inadequate. Even Mettaton was wearing a pink and black suit, though his shoulder spike thingamabobs were gone. Huh, so they were detachable.

“Reservation under the name ‘Ex’.” He said to the host. Sparing a quick glance to his list, he nodded once and began to guide you two towards a table near a window. Immediately a server greeted the two of you and offered menus detailing their champagne and wine selection. She also offered a menu for pre-dinner canapes (what they were, you had no idea), but you denied both.

“Oh nonsense, bring us the menus!” Mettaton inserted with a wave of his hand. With an unsure smile the waitress went off to retrieve the menus while you turned to Mettaton with a questioning look.

“You don’t have to worry about price here. I know it all probably looks expensive, but trust me hon, I can afford it.” He said reassuringly, though you were still unsure. You knew you were his guest but hell, you kind of felt like you were getting spoiled. Even though it had just begun this wasn’t at all how you imagined the trip to be; you were expecting Mettaton to be busy doing celebrity things and whatnot and leave you with a bodyguard and some spending money to go sightseeing by yourself. But he was actually taking time out of his surely busy schedule to eat dinner with you? Why? He didn’t even have to eat. (Neither did you but that’s the point right now).

The waitress returned with your menus, three small ones for each of you and set the down.

“May I suggest tonight’s featured wine, Vins de Pays? A bottle costs under £60.”

You nearly choked on air when she announced that and denied quickly. You didn’t even drink, alcohol anyway; you couldn’t get drunk and fancy wine-tasting wasn’t your forte.

“Don’t you guys have some water? I’ll have a glass of water while we order.” You said and picked up the menus. The waitress made a little noise before marking something down on her notepad and walking away. You noticed that she didn’t take Mettaton’s order, but then assumed that she probably knew who he was. Even though he wasn’t quite world famous, his name could still ring the thought of “that one robot celebrity”. So, naturally, the waitress must’ve assumed he didn’t drink liquids. You were also a bit pleased that she didn’t become some raving fangirl upon meeting Mettaton. But this restaurant is probably paying a decent wage, even for a waitress, and it probably wasn’t worth getting fired over meeting a celebrity.
You took a look at the food menu. You might as well order something, even if you weren’t hungry. It should still taste good, considering most of the food was gourmet. But one look at the “canape” menu and you were already confused. Half of the ingredients you’d never even heard of, let alone whatever the heck a canape was.

“They kind of look like hors d’oeuvres.” Mettaton said, surprising you. You must’ve been giving your menu a confused look because he was smiling at you and holding up the back of his menu.

“I don’t really have the appetite for them, but when you’re in showbiz dinner parties are the only way to get ‘in with the in crowd’.”

“Oh… I see.” You made up your mind to just order the first thing on the list, some asparagus thing with a strange cheese. Now it was on to the main meal. If you thought the canapes were odd, the evening dinner menu was an anomaly. You had to choose a £70 three course meal and anything extra would be another 10. Were these even in English? You were in London, right? You didn’t board the wrong plane with the wrong robot celebrity, right? To save yourself some embarrassment you decided to pick the first thing off of every section—there was a starter, a main, and a desert. That sounded like a lot to eat but you figured gourmet = small portions.

You were fanning yourself with the menu boredly (probably not fine dining etiquette, but eh) and trying to think of conversation material that fit the mood until the waitress returned when you suddenly stopped. That’s just it; you didn’t mean to stop but your arm refused to fan. You were leaning with your left arm against the table and now it was just slowly and limply falling to your side. It felt so weird not being able to move your arm suddenly, and never before did you have to actively think at your arm to move or do something, it was usually done without a second thought, even in this new body. Mettaton was looking out the window and hadn’t seemed to notice, so you began to excuse yourself to the bathroom. Just as you were getting ready to get up, the waitress was arriving with your water.

“Here you are: one glass of water,” She set the glass down next you and you sunk back into your seat slowly.

“Are you ready to order?” She was already getting her pen and paper ready.

“Uh, I’ll have the um.” Your arm had leveled up from numbness to slight twitching under the table. With one hand you kind of just pointed to the items on the menu that you wanted. The waitress gave you a strange look but took it all stride; she marked it down on her notepad and turned to Mettaton, smiling sweetly.

“And I don’t suppose I can get you anything?” She asked.

Mettaton gave an equally sweet smile before leaning back slightly in his chair. “Oh no thank you, hon, I’m afraid the food here doesn’t quite fit my palate.” He pat his abdomen and he and the waitress shared a laugh as if he had just said the funniest thing on Earth. While they were gabbing it up you brushed a hand lightly over your temporarily defunct arm. It was burning hot like the top of stove.

“Excuse me for a minute.” You broke their conversation and slowly stood up. “I have to use the bathroom.”

“Is something wrong?” Mettaton gave you a look that was more worried than necessary for someone who was just ‘going to the bathroom’ but you brushed him off anyway.

“I’m fine, I’m fine. I just need to uh. You know. Go.” The waitress pointed you in the direction of
the public bathroom and you rushed off immediately.

Once inside you ran the tap until it was freezing cold and put your arm underneath it until the
burning heat was gone. Working harder than usual, you tried to clench and unclench your first, but
got no more than a slight twitch. Crap. This was bad. To no avail you tried smacking your hand a
couple of times, just to see if that would help at all. Nothing. You took a peek outside the bathroom
and into the hallway to see if anyone was coming, and after confirming that you were alone you
decided you could spend a few minutes trying to remedy this problem externally. Mettaton could
wait a while.

You could lift your arm, but it felt like lifting dead weight. The only way you could describe the
minute sensation in your left arm was to that of having a limb fall asleep. It was awkward and
frustrating and it lasted more than a few moments. Not to mention it was scary. Even if you called
your mother right now there was nothing you could do immediately. Still, you fished your phone out
of your pocket and sent her a quick text with your working hand.

At the very least it wasn’t on fire. What was that all about? You had an auto cooling system similar,
in some aspects, to sweating but it worked in an entirely different way. A cooling liquid circulated
through your chassis and kept you from overheating, the used liquid would be discarded in tiny
droplets, similar to sweat. However, your body didn’t usually produce enough heat for this liquid to
be used, so you didn’t sweat often. But now your arm was sticky with the liquid to try and keep itself
from overheating, though you were sure the cold water helped. You took a paper towel and wiped
your arm off for extra measures.

You left the bathroom and made your way back to Mettaton.

“You were gone in there so long I thought you died.” He exclaimed once you sat down.

“Yeah, well you know. Humans?” You laughed stiffly and gave a little shrug. Casually you took a
sip from your water and glanced at Mettaton. He was looking at you. Specifically your arm.
Specifically your left arm.

“What is it?” Self-consciously you put a hand to your arm. There’s no way he saw your arm acting
weird under the table, right? Did he have robot x-ray vision or something? No that’s preposterous,
why would he have that?

“Nothing, darling, nothing at all. You just had something on your arm.” To illustrate his point he
reached over the table and flicked something off of you. “There! All gone.”

“Right, thanks.” You said, relieved.

Eventually the waitress returned with two trays containing your food.

“Here you are.” She set down two plates in front of you. “Let me know if you need anything and
when you’re ready for your desert.”

Well you were right. The portions were made paper thing and the plates had the circumference of a
knitting needle. At the very least you wouldn’t have trouble ‘digesting’ it. Despite your doubt, once
you took your first bite you were in heaven. Whoa. Whoa. Your taste buds were faux, yes, but they
weren’t filthy liars. Even if you didn’t quite know what you were eating, you knew it tasted damn
great. You’d always thought gourmet food was 99% Expense and 1% Taste but now you felt like it
was worth the entire £70.

“Well at least one of us is having fun.” Mettaton spoke up, interrupting you mid-shovel. You put
your utensil down and wiped your face with the napkin provided. Take notes, this was how fine dining etiquette was done.

“I’m sorry it just tasted a lot better than I thought it would.” You said, suddenly feeling like the scum of the Earth.

Mettaton chuckled softly and waved his hand dismissively. “Oh no, it’s okay. You looked kind of adorable, actually. I bet you forgot I was even here, huh?” Instead of sounding offended, like you had expected, he just sounded kind of… doting? No, that was a word someone would use to describe a parent. But there was definitely no malice or ill-intent in his words. But you were still feeling slightly abashed; he’d just called you adorable, didn’t he? You were strange and bashful, but adorable? No.

“Yeah, I kind of did. Sorry about that.” More self-conscious of your actions, you finished your meal slowly and then piled the remaining plates on top of each other.

Eventually the waitress came back around with your desert. You had ordered some sort of fruity pie called a pavlova. It’s consistency was like the meringue in lemon meringue pie, but it tasted just as good as the rest of the meal. The waitress returned after a while and asked if Mettaton wanted to pay right now or have the fee added to his hotel bill. He replied that he’d rather have it put on his bill but still left a hefty tip for the waitress. If you remembered correctly, you were supposed to tip a certain percentage of your bill, and if you were at a fancy restaurant wasn’t that going to be a lot higher? You didn’t even want to think of how much it would cost; Mettaton was already spending more than enough on you.

On the way back to your floor, bodyguards seeming to materialize out of thin air, Mettaton took out his phone and checked it. Ah—did your mother ever text you back? You didn’t want to pull out your flip phone in the middle of dinner, that seemed rude. You decided to take a quick peek at it, but to your dismay you hadn’t gotten any new messages. What time was it over there, anyway? You didn’t know offhand, and before you had a chance to ponder it Mettaton was speaking.

“Ooh! Good news!” Mettaton grabbed your arm to get your attention as the two of you boarded the elevator. “I have a photoshoot tomorrow but I didn’t want to leave you here all alone. My director gave me the go ahead and bring you, but you’d have to hang out off set. Is that okay with you?”

“I… I… Sure.” He was inviting you out when he didn’t even have to? This wasn’t like your ‘friends’ back home who weren’t taking you out from their kindness of their hearts, or even out of pity, but because they were being told to. So why was he putting up with someone like yourself? Even if you weren’t particularly inclined to go—a photoshoot for anyone not involved had to be boring—you still couldn’t refuse him. Even if, you thought, he probably had some ulterior motive. Why else was he being so nice to you.

“Great, great, that’s wonderful! I’ll be knocking on your door at around 8:30 tomorrow morning, so make sure you get yourself some beauty sleep.” With that, he made his way down the hallway and towards his door.

You went into your own adjacent room and immediately fished out your phone. Why wasn’t she responding? You felt your heart drop when you looked at your text messages and saw that the text hadn’t gone through. Oh what, was the signal in the bathroom somehow different than the rest of the hotel? Sighing, you sent another text detailing the same things and waited. After about ten minutes of boredom and channel flipping through British television channels you gave up waiting and decided to plug in for the night.
Your phone alarm woke you up and you almost forgot where you were for a moment. God, it felt kind of early. Oh. Right. You agreed to go to a photoshoot with Mettaton didn’t you? Ugh, why did you say yes? You just wanted to lie in bed all day. You were a young adult. You could do that if you so pleased.

“Knock knock!” You heard a familiar robotic voice through the door and remembered why exactly you couldn’t do what you pleased.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m up.” You called through the door as you slowly got yourself out of bed. A familiar tingling sensation passed through your left arm and you remembered yet another reason to stay in bed all day. You immediately grabbed your phone which had been thrown on the bed haphazardly and checked your texts. You had received an alarming twenty text messages from your mother, each more worried than the last. Finally she had just sent “CALL ME” in all caps. You couldn’t help but feel like you were in trouble, despite having done nothing wrong. Another deja vu moment.

She answered on the first ring.

“Oh my god, I’ve been stressing this entire time. Why didn’t you call me right away! Is your arm still attached to your body?”

“What—I was asleep. Yes, it’s fine. Well not fine, but it’s on my body.”

“Thank goodness. Luckily I know exactly what the problem is, but I can’t fix you right away. Unless I fly out to London. Do you want me to fly out there, I can get a ticket right now. I’m already on the website, just wait a moment—”

“No– Mom– Mom, please– I swear to god if you fly out here I will hide from you in London. Please.”

“Okay, I can take a hint, sheesh. I might have a temporary solution, but we can’t do it until you get ready to sleep.” At the mention of sleep, you heard her yawn a bit. “I’ll send you the files. Your charger has an adapter on it, and on it is a usb port. Oh god. Do you have a flash drive? If you don’t have a flash drive on you, how are we supposed to…”

“Mom, I can buy a flash drive.” You interrupted her would-be rant.

“Right, of course. But in the meantime, try to avoid stimulating, or even touching, your arm. And call me if anything big, and I do mean anything, happens.”

“Alright, I will. I promise.” You hung up and set your phone down on the bedside table. Now to get ready for the day with Mettaton.

~ ~ ~

The studio was nondescript on the outside with it’s windows tinted so black it was hard to look in. It was called Studio B and the inside was everything you’d imagine a studio to look like; wide open room with lights fixed on a white backdrop. Plenty of people had already arrived on set, so you were guessing you and Mettaton were fashionably late.

“There’s our star!” A perky director with a distinct accent turned the attention of everyone in the room onto Mettaton. He was showered with greetings, but almost immediately he was being rushed around.

“And just in time too, the makeup crew has been practically itching to get their hands on your lovely face. And your hair, we’ve got just enough time to get your hair and makeup done before taking the
The director noticed you and went silent, trying to figure out who exactly you were. Then her face lit up again.

“Well hello there! You must be the guest Mettaton was speaking so highly of! Everyone say hello, this is Mettaton’s prize winner!”

You were greeted by a chorus of hellos; the director had a booming voice that managed to grab everyone’s attention even over the hustle and bustle of people working.

While Mettaton was being led away by a group of who you assumed to be hair and makeup professionals, the director took your arm and led you out of the way.

“Guests aren’t the norm at the studio; normally I’d have said ‘What? On such short notice? Heck no!’ but this is Mettaton we’re talking about. He’s an up-and-coming star and I have a feeling he’s going to hit it big, know what I mean? So me, being the smart director, I say why not? Get on the good side while I can! –OH, no-no-no, that does NOT go over there! Why is that even here, put it back in the prop room!”

You flinched reflexively when she started yelling again. She was going to talk your ear off, there was nothing you were more certain of.

As time passed, you noticed the director becoming more frantic with her yelling; she was worried about something. Someone who you could only assume was the coffee intern had approached with a cup of something steaming.

“Give it another ten minutes, they’ll show up.” The intern said reassuringly.

“I know, I know. We can just start with out ‘em, get Mettaton’s solo and portrait pictures out of the way. Alright, ALRIGHT! We need to get started NOW if we’re going to be finished before the end of today.” Her booming voice called out over the studio once again, corralling everyone’s thoughts and attention.

The makeup artists were putting some last touches on Mettaton and his hair was in an absolutely beautiful state. All the other staff members, Mettaton included, knew this was their cue to get anything they wanted done before shooting out of the way.

“And will someone put on some music? We’re not shooting a movie here, I don’t want silence.”

Someone managed to deus ex machina a stereo system to satisfy the director, and for once you thought there was going to be some peaceful silence once a smooth instrumental began playing. But the loud voices had only traded places: now it was the photographer’s turn to yell:

“The lighting has to be this way—no not that way, this way. Mettaton move your chin this way. More. More. Okay that was too much go back. Perfect, right there—do not move a muscle. Okay, you dropped the emotion, bring me back the emotion! You’re standing there like a robo—okay, screw it, let’s get some portrait shots done, we’ll go back to your solo shots.”

You felt like banging your head against a concrete wall, that would only result in a broken wall.

About an hour passed by of the photographer clicking the shutter about thirty times, getting up, positioning himself slightly to the left, moving Mettaton slightly to the right, snapping the shutter
again, and then repeating the process. You’d never been so bored before, and just as you were contemplating actually getting up and meeting your head to the nearest wall, the director spoke up.

“You there—yes, you. I don’t care who you are or what you do, but get me on the phone with my other model, now.”

“M-Ma’am, I was just about to tell you, their agent called a moment ago.” The assistant recoiled slightly at the director’s angry tone. “Amanda had an allergic reaction to some caviar she ate on the way here. Sh-She was rushed to the hospital and they don’t think she’s going to be able to make it at all. It was really bad.”

The director’s angry demeanor seemed to make a complete 180.

“Oh no! That’s terrible, absolutely terrible. We need to send those pictures in by Monday next week! Where am I going to find a model by the end of today? Who eats caviar anymore, that’s so stereotypical!”

“W-Well, ma’am… I am training to become a model and I think that—”

“Oh nooo, no-no-no. Sweetheart, no one could do it like Amanda. She was emotionless when she looked at that camera yet her eyes told a different story. And you? You flinch whenever I move hand!” To demonstrate, the director arced her hand in an up-and-down motion, to which the intern recoiled. “See? I need to find someone who can distance themselves like that even with a camera trained on them. Okay, here’s what I need you to do. Call every actor, and I mean everyone, who was in Twilight and see if they can catch the nearest flight to London before this weekend so I can…”

In her nervous panic she was scanning the room and her eyes stopped when they landed on you. You realized you were wearing your ever-present pokerface and immediately began panicking on the inside.

“Oh, no, I can’t—”

“Sh, no! Make that face again.” She was looking at you with an eager expression now. You didn’t like where this was going.

“I’ve never modeled before. I’d just waste your time, you shouldn’t bother yourself with—”

“You know how much professional models make a day? Well, sweetie, I can promise you it will be worth any inhibition you might have.”

“Just what is going on over here?” The photographer was strutting over with Mettaton trailing behind him. Apparently they were done taking pictures. “Where is Amanda? You said she’d be here already. How can we take their photoshoot when one of them is missing?”

“Amanda got sick, but I may have found a replacement.”

“A replacement? Really? You don’t just pull replacements out of your ass, sweetie. Amanda has had years of model training and you’re going to replace her with who? The intern? I’m going to pull my hair out if you say it’s the intern.”

The intern everyone seemed to hate made an offended noise but was overall not acknowledged.

“No, it’s our prize winner! Go ahead, make that poker face of yours.”
You wanted to tell them that you’d just disappoint them, but the photographer was already scrutinizing you with a glare and you were slipping into your poker face almost habitually. You were already in deep, you might as well please them and get it over with.

“Okay, know what? I’m desperate. This I can work with. Yes, I can see it. We would need to let our makeup artists and hairstylists get to work right away. Okay, if we get started right now we might be able to finish an hour after expectation.

You were being herded to the side of the room where the hairstylist was itching to get into your head.

“You seem a little nervous, dollface, but don’t be! I know everyone here can seem slightly overbearing and stressful but rest-assured, they only want what’s best.” Mettaton was at your side, suddenly, and offering you a comforting smile.

“I just don’t want to mess this up for everyone.” You admitted solemnly, but he gave you a comforting pat on the shoulder.

“Trust me, the way this afternoon is going you’d be making everyone’s day even if you were terrible.”

That didn’t really make you feel better, but you knew his intentions were good.

The hair stylist gave you and the photographer a look of slight disdain for expecting him to work magic on such short notice.

“I can do something, but don’t any miracles.” He said and led you over to a section of the studio that had been set up like a mini beauty parlor. As soon as you felt foreign hands in your hair, even more people were gathering around. They were makeup artists and they had an array of brushes and other tools they were polishing you with. It felt so odd to be primmed up like a doll, and by so many people nonetheless.

After what felt like forever, the artists finally stepped back and surveyed their work. The photographer eased his way through the crowd along with Mettaton, the director and a few other important people and nearly had a heartache.

“I thought you said not to expect a miracle.” The photographer exclaimed, though you could tell he was looking at you not like the person before, but like you were model he was going to have to pose.

“Now flash us that face again darling!” Mettaton demanded, and you swore if you could you’d be blushing. Everyone gave a little cheer, though you were sure it was with relief that the shoot wasn’t going to be cancelled or re-scheduled.

“Alright, get out them changed into one of the outfits and let’s get shooting. We’ve only got five hours before our rental time expires so hop to it if you want to get paid!”

As you were being pulled away towards back area someone who was guiding you was informing that time was of essence when changing: it didn’t have to be perfect, just be sure not to mess up your hair and makeup too much. They handed you the outfit and left you to it. You were surprised; how fast did you have to change? You heard catwalk models had to change ridiculously fast but you weren’t sure you could—

Stopping the internal rant right in its tracks you stripped off your clothing and tried to put on the outfit you’d been given. It was stark white save for the stitched seams which were a bright pink that
stood out harshly against the fabric.

Immediately after exiting someone was by your side and fixing up your clothing.

“Don’t pay attention to me, just keep walking sweets.” They told you, and you did so obediently. You made your way over to the photographer and grabbed your hand and led you over to the set. There a handful of makeup artist and some stylists were fixing your hair and makeup

“Okay darling, I want you to follow everything I say to the ‘t’. But Mettaton should be able to guide you where I can’t, hear me? You’re this shoots saving grace, but no worries.”

Right, like that totally didn’t put any pressure on you. No worries.

After the photographer deemed you presentable he told Mettaton to get up there with you. That’s when you noticed your outfits: they were completely contrasting. His chassis was black to begin with and something that you could only describe as leather arm warmers were put on his arms to make them a dark black. You guessed todays theme was opposites.

“Okay let’s start with something vanilla and work our way up. Mettaton I want your hand around their waist. Up. A bit more. Perfect, don’t change it. And sweetheart I want you to raise your hand; now Mettaton take their hand and hold it against. No look into each other’s eyes—Mettaton I want you to imagine they’re the love of your life. You care about them more than anything. More emotion… more… right there! And sweetheart, to you Mettaton is but a pawn. You could care less about him. Lid your eyes just a bit, and raise your chin. I want to see haughtiness! Imperiousness!”

You heard the sound of a shutter flashing several times but you weren’t really paying attention to it. The look Mettaton was giving you… you could hardly grace it with a description. You should’ve been worried about your hand. That was the hand he was holding, and it should’ve taken top priority, but you couldn’t help but focus on Mettaton. You were taking in the sight of him through lidded eyes and trying to feel as imperious as you must’ve looked—the photographer was showering you with compliments—but you couldn’t. If you could breathe, you were sure it would be halting. If you had a heart rate it would be racing. If your emotions could affect your body temperature, you’d be sweating buckets.

You were snapped out of your daze when you heard the photographer call for an outfit change. The two of you separated and you took a moment to screw your head on tight. He’s an actor for Christ’s sake, you’d better get a hold of yourself if you want to survive this, you told yourself.

An assistant approached you and helped you back behind a drop and handed you a pair of gloves that were black and white. Counteracting that was a white turtleneck layered in a gossamer like material. It felt soft and fragile to the touch, reminding you of the fairy wings children wore on halloween. With care for what was likely an expensive shirt, you put it and the gloves on as quickly as possible and made your way out.

Unsurprisingly Mettaton was wearing the exact opposite of what you were wearing, and you could see that his shirt was cut more open in the back. Before you had a chance to wonder why, people were preparing you as you got back in front of the camera, and even more people came forward to mess with your hair and makeup.

“Alright, let’s not waste any time.” The photographer announced and began posing the two of you with verbal cues. This time he was taking side shots with the camera much closer. He had directed the two of you to lean your foreheads together and extend opposite hands to cup each other’s cheeks. You moved your right hand before Mettaton could move, trying to avoid a difficult situation.
“Alright now Mettaton—you’re filled with angsty emotion. Perhaps you’ve broken their heart and are trying to repent for it. You want their forgiveness. On the verge of breaking down—but not quite yet! And my lovely, your mask remains unchanging. You can’t bring yourself to forgive him—do me a favor, notch your eyebrows slightly. Just slightly. There. No, not a sleepy face, unforgiving!”

Finally, when he was satisfied, you heard the shutter snapping several times. All you could see before you was Mettaton, but his eyes were closed. The photographer had directed you a few times to keep your eyes open and look at him to show you didn’t care. You didn’t get many chances to look at Mettaton full on in the short time you had met him. But during this impromptu photoshoot, it dawned on you just how perfect he looked. You could see where some of him was metal and other parts appeared to be an alabaster faux skin. That must’ve made makeup easy for the artist, no doubt. And his hair, which was brushing up against your forehead, felt so real and natural. There were some parts of your body that could be salvaged, hair being one of them; it was one of the few original parts of your body. But you could only assume that all of Mettaton was made from scratch, and an excellent job too. Even his eyelashes seemed so real and perfect, right down to the follicle. Even without the photographer’s prompting you could stare at Mettaton all day if you had the courage.

~ ~ ~

The rest of the day consisted of multiple outfit changes and different shots. Eventually the theme changed from black and white to all pink, right when you thought things were going to be over with. Even with a shortened lunch break thrown in at around 3 you could still feel your battery complaining by the time the photoshoot was winding down.

“All right people, that’s a wrap! This place needs to be as spic and span as when we found it, I need to have a word with our technical crew: these photos have to be edited and developed by…” The directors booming voice rang across the studio but was soon mixing in with the relieved sighs and chatter of about 40 crew members. An assistant was approaching you with your original clothing and leading you over to a formal bathroom so you could change and wash off the remnants of the makeup.

“You… you looked so cool next to Mettaton. I actually thought you were a regal monarch for a moment, just the way you gazed at him and the way you stood… Uh, I’m sorry, I’m rambling.”

“No, that’s okay!” You replied. “Thank you. In all honesty, I don’t think I was cut out for the job. It was just kind of a last minute thing for everyone.”

“Even so! The two of you looked beautiful together. Have you ever considered being a model? A lot of people are going to be asking about your name once those pictures get released.”

“Ah, well, I…” A lot of your hopes and dreams got put on hold, or at this point dropped immediately, when you got into that accident five years ago. This was probably the most active you’d been in a long time. Physically and emotionally.

“Well, consider it! And if you’re working with Mettaton, you’re bound to become famous.”

“Thank you.” And you meant it. “You’re very kind, you know?”

~ ~ ~

It was about eight in the evening when you were walking towards the limousine Mettaton rented when it dawned on you. Crap, you needed to get a flash drive.

“Um, Mettaton? This is sort of a random request but uh…” You stopped walking, and in turn so did
“Hm? What is it darling?”

“Well uh. Are there any computer supply stores? Or, heck, even a grocery store might have them.”

“You… want to go to a grocery store?” He asked, genuinely confused.

“I need to buy a flash drive! But I’m not sure where I’d be able to find one here.”

“Flash drive, huh?” He put a finger to his chin in thought and you were scrambling your mind for plausible excuses as to why on Earth you’d need a flash drive.

“Here’s what I’ll do: I’ll send one of my bodyguards to the store to buy one and bring it over later. Does that sound alright?”

“That’s perfect, thank you!”

“Oh please it’s the very least I can do.” He opened the door of the limo for you and you clambered in. “You were excellent out there. You had the stillness of a statue. Not every model can do that so easily.”

Sitting down now, he tapped the window separating himself from the chauffeur, signaling him to drive. “Are you sure you’ve never done this before?”

“Yeah, well, I just uh. It was a lot easier than I anticipated.” You lied. You didn’t have problems with surprise itches or aches from being in weird positions for too long. But what were you supposed to say? ‘Oh yeah, well u kno. Bein a cyborg increases ur tolerance lol.’ Yeah how about no.

“Mm, well talent just comes naturally to some of us, I suppose!” To demonstrate his point he struck an extravagant pose, right there in the middle of the limo. It was so sudden you couldn’t help but to burst out laughing. Almost instantly you slammed your hand over your mouth but it was too late, Mettaton had heard it and he was smiling devilishly.

“Oh no you don’t! That was absolutely adorable! Laugh for me again.”

“No. No, absolutely not.” You were trying to literally wipe the grin of your face with your hand. Why couldn’t you stop smiling like an idiot, damn it?

“Ooh, I feel like I’ve been issued a challenge! I’ll get you to laugh by the end of this trip, mark my words darling.” Gave you a sly wink and crossed his arms.

“You just… caught me off guard is all.” You said defensively as you let your features slip back into nothingness.

“Off guard? Why are you on guard in the first place?” He asked.

“I wonder that too, sometimes.”

~ ~ ~

You were crashing onto your soft hotel bed. Expense never felt so relaxing. You were about to plug in when you remembered you had to wait up for Mettaton’s bodyguard to deliver your flash drive. Ugh, for once you were actually eager to get to sleep and now you had wait. Fate was cruel sometimes, that you knew well.
Staring at the ceiling and watching the paint crack was beginning to bore you when finally you heard a curt rap at your door. You got up and greeted the guard, who held out the bag with a 16 GB flash drive.

“Thank you so much.”

“It was nothing. Have a good evening.”

And with that you went back into your room and set up your laptop. Sure enough your mother had sent the files via email and you downloaded them onto the flash drive. Along with it she gave instructions on how to open up your adapter and plug in the flash drive in the available slot. It was a driver problem, she said, and it was conflicting with some of your core files, specifically the drivers that controlled—know what? You didn’t understand most of what she wrote. It was a paragraph of technical nonsense.

Anyway, you plugged your charger into the wall and opened up a compartment on the adapter. After plugging in the flash drive you got ready for bed and plugged yourself in for the night.

To help take your mind off the grasping sensation of ‘falling asleep’ you tried to think of today’s events. But as you got sleepier and sleepier your mind could only recall flashes of pink and black and an intense gaze.

Chapter End Notes

Initially this chapter was going to be short, sweet, and to the point. It was gonna be a transitional chapter of about 2000 words. But I ended up expanding on scenes I had planned out to be brief and character development happened and… and…

¯\_(ツ)_/¯

The ending is a bit rushed but I didn't want to keep anyone waiting any longer. I finally have a good grasp on where this ol' fic is going.

A long chapter for your long wait!
A prayer to all those left-handed individuals. The ambidextrous/right-handed shall prevail.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

A prayer for all those left-handed individuals. The ambidextrous/right-handed shall prevail. Yeah I know it’s the new year’s right now, not Christmas, but most of this was planned during the holiday season so.

~ ~ ~

A formal conference was held the following day, as announced. The slow downhill descent began there. Called together by the head researcher and organizer for the program, all of the scientists who were scouted for the project gathered in a small room set up similar to a lecture hall. The short and stocky man who addressed your mother and her soon to be colleagues wore a grave expression on his face as he spoke.

“Ladies and gentlemen, you have all been called here today because you have something special in common—something extraordinary in common. And no, it is not your field of study. It is instead that you are all heroes in the making.” At that he paused, a slight smile arising once he heard a few dubious whispers, and chuckled softly. Quickly however, the grave expression returned and the room went silent once again.

“Mankind is at stake. It’s not the threat of nuclear war, it’s not a meteor, and it’s not an epidemic. Instead, the threat that holds the power to wipe out humanity lives directly under our feet.”

Her hand that had been diligently taking notes stopped. She looked up, genuinely confused. Was he getting at what she thought he was? No, it couldn’t be.

“For years, we’ve lived in denial of their existence. We’ve tried to pass them off as bedtime stories or myths and superstitions of our ancestors. But no matter how hard we try to hide the truth, it won’t disappear. Just over a millennium ago, our race faced off in a heroic battle against monsters. They had long been scheming to kill our kind and take over this planet, but we fought back. By the teeth of our skin, we had managed to drive them underground. Trying to cover up a grim memory, humanity moved on, erasing any existence monsters had on...”

She had stopped listening. Her hand had stopped writing. What the hell was this? Almost none of this was true; humans drove monsters underground with their immense and overpowering strength one thousand years ago because they were afraid of what monsters might do. She new this to be
true; the dozens of dated but consistent history books she owned matched against the same circulating history books couldn't all be wrong. There were even facts that lie in DNA and historical tombs and gravesites. But this man standing in front of her, spouting nonsense? He was wrong.

“...were smart, we built a barrier. However, this barrier is flimsy and weak. We fear that they break through eventually, and much stronger than they were before.”

What strength? Humans were disproportionately more powerful than monsters due to their genetic make-up. Ancient history books claimed it was a difference of the uneven distribution of “magic”—your mother theorized it was actually a chemical the ancients had no way of identifying, though she had no way to be sure—and water, water being the more powerful and stable of the two, making humans immensely strong and physically able to take and receive more damage without dying. Their bodies were also more solid; the bodies of monsters quickly turned to dust upon demise, but the body of a human took weeks to decompose.

“So we must take caution and prepare. Currently, all of our greatest armies combined would not be able to take even one of their strongest soldiers. But with our advancing technology, and you, the leading minds developing said technology, we might be able to engineer a powerful weapon.”

Clenching her pencil, her legs went cold. You were right.

Fishing from his pocket a tiny projector remote, the speaker hit a button and the screen behind him began to lower and turn on. On it were diagrams of a robotic body schematic. Her penmanship and sketches were immediately recognizable.

But this is what she wanted, right? For her brilliance and ideas to be showcased in front of other colleagues. To finally be recognized. It'd been a lifelong dream and it was coming true, in some aspects.

Be careful what you wish for.

The night in her dorm was spent going over every single word, refusing at first to believe what she was hearing. But there was no doubt about it; humanity was formulating another mistake and she was going to have a helping hand in it. No. She couldn’t, absolutely wouldn’t. Not only was this project a danger for eliminating an entire race, but the uses it could have in war was just as horrific, if not more. Humans were set on their own self-demise, and hardly anything, even themselves, could stop them once they were set on it. Today, however, your mother would try.

Days had turned into weeks. It had been awhile since she heard from you, though she made little effort to seek you out in the first place. She was too busy coming up with a plan.

Sure, your mother could've just left this entire research program. She could have swept it under the rug, gone home, hugged you, and pretended this never happened. But the crippling weight of guilt hanging over her would never leave, that she knew very well. Knowing that one day—perhaps in the near future, perhaps in the far—her creations would be used to wipe out an entire race. And for what? Because humanity still held close its fears from the past? She couldn't live with that. She refused to live with that.

Initially, she questioned her colleagues. Mind you, these were well-respected individuals who supposedly knew their history. They know their facts, oh sure they do. But they're able to believe that the history books of the ancients were wrong and distorted, that rituals documented and tombs once inhabited by monsters can be explained as strange and ancient occults—modern day texts told the real infallible truth in their eyes. And modern day said the past was nothing but fiction. They were a thousand years old, who knows how they could've been misinterpreted. Most were just happy to see
the fruit of their labor, and no one could take that away from them. Perhaps some were remorseful in what they were doing, knowing that somewhere the facts just didn't add up. But those few scientists could brush that feeling off and become detached. It's not like they were directly involved in the creation; most of the scientists involved weren't working on the actual meat and potatoes of the project—design and functionality. In fact, there weren't a large amount of scientists in the first place. Most of the staff here were technicians and engineers. But of the few scientists that had an actual hand in this all, there were two that served as the backbone for the entire group. Your mother, and another, much younger, scientist. He was naive and believed that the work he was doing would one day benefit society. He was a pain to work with, but he was a genius nonetheless. He'd someone managed something your mother could not, whether it was some skill or a secret, she'd probably never know. But he'd figured out how to make a self-conscious AI. And, not a complex auto responding program, but something that is aware and cognizant of its own existence. Something that somehow knew it was alive.

But somehow, her partner just couldn't get it through his thick skull that what he was doing—what they were all doing—was wrong.

“Listen to yourself!” He'd yelled. “You're sympathizing with people you've never met before—never seen. There's literally no trace of their existence, and why? Because they turn to dust? Ridiculous. Yet you can somehow convince yourself that every history book today is wrong? You're the main part of this project; my work wasn't even showcase. Yet you have the nerve to try and tear it all down with your crazy thoughts? We did the smart thing all those years ago; we protected ourselves before we were hurt. Now we're just doing it again.”

“That's exactly it! We're doing it again: we're repeating history, but this time the outcome won't be so pleasant. Please, my absolute apologies for not blindly accepting the exile of an entire species simply because I'm afraid of what might happen! Excuse me for not closing my eyes to what ancients all around the world wrote very cohesively about an existence of another species. Sorry for not convincing myself like an idiot that it was just a fluke.

“In all your research, all your studies, you've never found one shred of evidence that would suggest you're wrong? Not one thing?”

He was silent for a moment, arms crossed over his chest and biting his lip. There was something, wasn't there?

“And yet you still continue to think like this. Why?” She asked him.

He didn't answer. He didn't have an answer.

~ ~ ~

There was a saying. “If there’s a will, there’s a way.” That applied to your life greatly, but not because you had a strong will do anything anymore. Rather, fate had a strong desire to mess things up for you at the most inopportune of moments. Even when there was no chance for a problematic outcome, or a problem was in the works of being solved, fate had a will and a way.

That, or, you were just terrible at following directions. It was probably the latter, but you could convince yourself the world was out to get you.

You couldn’t feel your arm. That’s the funniest part, however. You could move it; you were consciously telling your arm to bend and it would bend but it was as if a stranger’s sentient arm had been replaced with yours. You’d look at your fingers, tell them to flex and bend and they would follow your orders but send no hint that this arm which followed you commands was in anyway
attached to you.

There was a feeling of déjà vu, fleeting but certain: of the first few minutes after waking up for the second time. Most creatures that walk this earth permanently awake in their lives once, at birth, and then fall asleep permanently, at death. But on that fateful day you had your second birthday: your eyes looked at the familiarly unfamiliar world in the same way an infant does when they open their eyes, but this was your second time doing so. Not only were your surroundings unfamiliar, but your own body was a stranger. It was like controlling a marionette for the first time, but being surprisingly skillful at it. You had told the mind to flick the arm here, and it would follow obediently, your eyes had reported, but your body felt none of it. It made you feel so weird. So fragile. Your body was nothing but a shell without the proper drivers to make it run. A guitar was good for nothing without any strings, and you were missing quite a few of them back then. Until balance drivers, touch and heat sensation drivers, drivers to help you walk and talk and smell and taste and speak and see—until these programs were properly installed you were terrified. These programs that made you alive, in a sense. A driver that told you when to wake up. But the biggest driver of them all was not inside of you. It was your mother, slaving over a computer with only one other soul in existence to know her plight. Your mother, slaving over a computer to make sure every single minute detail about you was perfectly correct. Exactly the same as before. Maybe even better.

What was your body, without drivers and software to make sure data got to your brain? What were you, without your data and your software? Without a bio-engineered body? Without your fake skin, and your fake organs, and your fake almost everything. Why, you'd be dead of course.

Your mother had watched you carefully, trying to calm you down and stop you from destroying everything in her lab from your frenzied panic. You should have been dead, that was the main part of your panic. Even though you still try to suppress the memories of those days until they disappeared, you remembered in horribly vivid detail your screaming and shouting that you were dead. You could almost feel the way your throat shouted the words at impossibly high volumes and pitches: I am dead, I am dead, I am dead. You had acknowledged this fact—had remembered it clearly. The pain was still so fresh. Yet here you were amongst the living—yes, something inside of you could tell that the woman who stood before you—your mother—was of flesh and blood and had a pulse and radiated heat and that she was alive. So very alive. Something inside you, deep, deep down inside you, felt alienated by this aliveness. Like it was fighting with your consciousness to run, or better yet, destroy this aliveness. It made sense when your mother explained exactly what you were made of: the left-overs of a machine created to search and destroy, to hunt and kill, to show no mercy. These unwanted additions were gladly removed.

A majority of them, anyway. You thought super-strength was an incredibly cool feature, despite your existential turmoil.

Most creatures that walk this world fully awake once and fall into a permanent sleep once. Only once: very few lucky people could naturally be brought back from their temporary demise, and even then the window of opportunity remains small. You’ve awoken twice, and after being asleep long enough to rot and turn to dust, you woke up again. And, inevitably you will go to sleep a second time.

You hoped.

God, you hoped your fears weren’t true. One of your biggest fears was that you would never be able to truly pass again. That you would watch everyone you’ve ever known and love grow old and, eventually, die. You couldn’t bare that future, and it was the first fear to nestle itself within your brain when your mother explained everything. That and one other fear. A fear that would keep you up at night if you couldn’t repress it.
But you weren’t going to think about it. No not now; you had bigger, less important things to worry about than your own meager existence.

You pushed yourself into a sitting position with your right arm and grabbed your phone to call your mother. It took her much longer than yesterday to answer, but when she picked up you were greeted with a yawn.

“You know,” She said tiredly. “As amazing as I am, I do need to sleep. I remember telling you to check in with me once a day, but I meant at a reasonable time, dear.”

“Yeah, well, this is important. I can’t feel my arm. Like, I can move it, but I can’t feel it.”

Your mother let out a groan to match your frustration equally.

“I don’t know why it wouldn’t have worked. It’s your old driver and it was working fine before.” You heard her pause. “And you made sure to put both of the attachments on the flash drive?”

“…There were two attachments?”

Through the receiver, the unmistakable sound of disappointed parent silence rang in your ears. It was accompanied by scornful sighs and the irritation of being sleep-deprived.

“There were two files. One was to disable the malfunctioning driver, the other was your roll-back driver. You probably just uploaded the disabler. It’s okay, it is okay. Just make it through the day until you can upload both files. I’m going to sleep, hon.”

She hung up without a pause. You would’ve liked it better if she came out directly with her scorn, but the lack of anything to say about your mistake just made you feel worse.

You were sitting on your bed and wondering if you could plug up for about ten minutes and install these stupid drivers when your thoughts were cut short by a familiar voice.

“Knock, knock!” His ever perky voice rang through the door. “You up in there?”

You glanced at the time and saw that it was a little past 10:30, so you supposed this was his way of giving you a chance to sleep in.

“Y-Yeah, I’m up.” You stammered, and then actually got out of the bed. So much for sneaking in a few minutes.

“Good! My schedule’s clear today so I was hoping you and I could do a little sight-seeing.” The vibrant excitement Mettaton practically leaked on a day-to-day basis was bringing you out of your bad funk. Bad funk being a euphemism for your vividly horrible flashbacks, of course. Yeah, sight-seeing sounded fun.

“Yeah, okay. That sounds great.” You replied before opening your suitcase to find something decent to wear. You picked up a shirt and gave it a once over, but as you flipped it over to make sure it didn’t have any mystery stains you heard a loud rip. You… ripped the shirt completely in half.

You set the shirt down and slowly clenched and loosened your left hand. You’d have to be extremely self-conscious of whatever you do with this hand, or you’ll be crushing things left and right. Without the ability to feel when you’re applying too much pressure it was sure to serve some as some sort of inconvenience, but it was a step up from yesterday. You were sure everything would be fine, though. Carefully, you picked a paperweight off a bedside table and began tossing it lightly with your left hand. Everything’s fine, all fine see? You began tossing it higher to test your control. It
was odd controlling something that you couldn’t directly feel—

Your thoughts were immediately cut off when the paperweight went crashing into the ceiling. Like, it was embedded in there deep. Shit. A few moments you heard hurried footsteps and frantic knocking.

“Is everything all right in there? I heard a loud noise.” Came Mettaton’s urgent voice.

“I’m fine, everything’s fine! I just… dropped something.” An anchor, maybe, considering the loud noise.

“What did you drop, an anchor?” His voice was filled with skepticism, but you told the lie and you decided to run with it.

“Yeah—no, not an anchor just uh…” You glance again at the paperweight in the ceiling. “A paperweight.”

“A paperweight made that much noise on carpet flooring?” Said Mr. Nosey-Detective-Ton. “Are you sure everything’s fine in there?”

“Everything’s fine! I’ll be out in a minute.”

A gentle cloud of plaster was floating down onto your bed. Crap, oh crap, room service was definitely going to notice a hole in their perfect ceilings. Or… maybe they wouldn’t? These ceilings were tall and there was no one above you… no one would notice until, maybe, you’d already left the hotel… you could get away with this.

You quickly threw on some decent clothing swiped the pieces of plaster that had fallen onto the bed onto the floor. You made sure you weren’t covered in plaster before putting on your shoes and heading to the door.

The room smelled like a renovation project gone wrong.

~ ~ ~

You could tell Mettaton didn’t believe your story from earlier, but he let it drop after you assured him for about the fifth time that everything was fine. He gave in eventually and his perky demeanor returned when he began going over the locations he wanted to visit.

“Today’s a wonderful day for a walk,” Mettaton told you cheerily in the hotel lobby, opening up a tourist map of all the nearby locations the hotel had to offer. “Now, I know we won’t get to everything today but there so many places close by! Where do you want to go first?”

He held the map up inches to your face and you had to step back to get a good look at it.

“Hm. How about this one?” You pointed to a place marked “Trafalgar Square” due to its interesting name.

“Ooh, good choice! It says here that they put up a Christmas tree during this time of the year, I wonder if we can still see it.”

You didn’t feel like putting a damper on his mood by telling him it was daylight outside and it surely wouldn’t be lit up.

Trafalgar square was a brisk walk away from the hotel. The two of you garnered a few looks, but it
was mostly because of Mettaton and the loud click of his heels (and his growing fame) as the two of you walked. People would stare, sometimes openly but mostly trying to be discreet, but Mettaton didn’t seem to notice. Or if he did notice, he didn’t seem to care. The entire walk he was talking to you about all the places he wanted to visit in and around London; he seemed very excited about this.

“And the train here, I heard they call it the ‘tube’. I’d really love to ride it.” He said enthusiastically.

“Ride it where?” You asked.

“Anywhere! It’s about the journey, not the destination, don’t you know that silly? And we’re on a trip, so by default it’s going to be a thousand times more interesting.”

He had stopped speaking once the two of you got the opening of the square. Instantly his face lit up like a kid in a candy shop, and you had to admit, it was quite beautiful. There were statues at the entrance of all types ranging from dramatically poised people to majestic looking beasts. Recently, in favor of looking diplomatic, a bronze statue in the likeness of the monster’s former ruler, Asgore Dreemurr had been set up. Mettaton cracked a lopsided grin as he took a picture of it.

“Oh, he’s going to love this.” Mettaton murmured to himself as he put away his phone. Before you could inquire, his attention was snatched by a street performer in the square.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I can juggle anything you throw at me. Hand it to me and it’s going in the air!” A woman dressed in a plain jacket and loose-fitting sweats was drawing an intrigued crowd around her near one of the square’s fountains. A lot of people were gathered around skeptically but a few attention-seekers seemed to be looking for something to hand.

“No one? Nothing to offer? That’s fine, guess I’ll entertain myself!” From a suitcase sitting next to her tip jar, the woman pulled out an assortment of strange items: a soccer ball, a closed folding chair, and a hammer. Immediately, and to the crowd’s delight, she began to juggle the three items with practiced ease. Then, earning more clapping and cheering, even from you, she began to move around the crowd with dainty but carefully placed hops and skips. Her tip jar was overflowing.

“You sir,” She gestured to Mettaton with a nod of her head. “Could you be so kind as to hand me something from the case?”

“Hand it to you?” He asked, bemused. “How?”

“Don’t be ridiculous! Throw it to me!” The woman said as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. He was a bit unsure, but he obliged anyway and retrieved a shiny brass trumpet. He gave a small underhand toss to the performer, and with ease she caught it and continued to juggle to her rhythm, now with four items.

You and Mettaton continued to watch in amazement as the performer began calling more people to add to her act until she got, astonishingly, up to six. After a while, the performer caught each item quickly but individually and set them down beside her and gave a little bow as the crowd applauded. A few stayed to talk with the performer, but most of the crowd had dissipated. The two of you walked off in the direction of the unlit Christmas tree standing between the two fountains.

“They haven’t taken it down! Aren’t we lucky?” He said, beaming up at the tree. “We should definitely stop back here later once it’s lit. I bet it’s beautiful.”

“Yeah,” You said. “I bet it is.”

Mettaton was talking about looking around the square for more performers when a pair of unfamiliar voices interrupted you.
“Um, excuse me?” A monster girl with snake-like attributes had approached the two of you shyly with her human friend.

“I’m sorry, I don’t mean to be rude but… you’re Mettaton, right? What am I saying—of course you’re Mettaton. Oh my gosh, and you’re in London?” The two girls exchanged a look and began digging around for their phones and asking if they could get a picture with him. Mettaton was surprisingly good-natured about it and took several quirky selfies with the ecstatic girls.

You, on the other hand, just didn’t know where to stand. You felt like you were in the way, so while you waited for Mettaton to finish up you found yourself wandering towards one of the big fountains that stood on either side of the square’s Christmas tree. There were beautiful stone statues of men and women alike seemingly riding the waves of the water they spurted out in columns in every direction. And in the center was a round platform from which water was shot into the air and arced down back into the pool gracefully. It beat the mall’s fountain back home by a long shot.

You searched your pockets for a coin to toss in. You weren’t one hundred percent sure if you were allowed to do so, but the coin was already leaving your thumb by the time you thought about it. Without realizing it, you’d shot the penny into the fountain with your left hand. You couldn’t feel how hard you’d launched the coin, but it bounced roughly against a statue before falling into the water. You looked around nervously to see if anyone had noticed. Thankfully, everyone else was too engrossed in their own conversations to see you assault the fountain with a penny.

This was the part where you were supposed to make a wish, but you found yourself drawing a blank. But wait, there was something. Without a doubt, you wished you could—

“I am so sorry about that!” Mettaton’s voice snapped you out of your thoughts. “It doesn’t happen that often.”

“No, I understand. You’re a celebrity and everything. It’s to be expected.” You said. “No big deal.”

But he made a disapproving face, like he had smelled something bad. “Still! I can’t be rude to my only guest. Oh! I know what we’ll do.” He put an arm around your shoulder and began to lead you towards the entrance of the square.

“I was hoping we could get you something to eat first, but I really wanted to see Big Ben. Think you’re up for the walk?” He asked enthusiastically as the two of you approached Whitehall St. You nodded a bit too quickly, but Mettaton didn’t seem to notice your awkwardness, or he did but he chose not to comment. You’ve never really been this close to him—or rather another human besides your mother—before. Nevertheless, he kept his arm around your shoulders the two of you made your way down central London.

There was a plethora of government buildings with ornate exteriors and gothic styles that seemed unique to England. There were plenty of statues and memorials taking up the front of some buildings, all of them beautiful and agelessly built. The two of you were curiously struck in that tourist sort of way when you saw a guard on a horse patrolling down the street casually. Eventually, Big Ben had come into sight, and Mettaton’s excited face that was becoming commonplace took over once again. He stopped the two of you about a block away from the over-sized timepiece.

“We need to take tourist photos.” He said as he handed you a phone that probably cost more than the hotel room. He stuck a pose and pretended to be leaning against the towering clock.

“Isn’t this something you do at the leaning tower of Pisa?” You asked, but opened the camera app anyway.
“Yes, well, we’re not there! And they’re both technically towers, aren’t they? Make do with what you have, that’s what I always say.” He said and continued to pose in the middle of the sidewalk. Luckily there weren’t many passersby to see you two embarrass yourselves.

“Alrighty then.” You began to angle yourself so it looked like his elbow was being supported by the building, but before you could snap the picture Mettaton stopped you.

“Wait, do you think it would be better if I leaned like this?” He crossed his arms and pretended to lean his back against the clock with a vogue-level pout. “I mean, the whole elbow-leaning-shtick seems a tad cliché, know what I mean?”

You sighed but felt a smile forming regardless. “You look fine.” You assured him as you snapped the photo. Immediately, he ran over to see how it looked.

“Ohh, yes, I look absolutely fabulous in this one.” He said admiringly. “Oh, what am I doing—I have to take your picture!”

You were about to decline and say you weren’t really photogenic, but Mettaton had turned you around with his arm and snapped a selfie with Big Ben in the background. You had a chance to glimpse your surprised, and by extension, horribly unphotogenic face as he went to save it.

“No—no-no-no—I was not ready—you have to delete that.” You tried to grab the phone from him, but he moved it back with a smug smile taking over his features.

“What? But you look absolutely darling in this picture! I simply have to save it.”

A mischievous thought crossed your mind while he was talking. In the middle of him going on about how good the picture was, you snatched the phone from him and took a picture of his stunned face.

“You’re something else, you know that?” You said.

“I could say the same thing about you.”

~ ~ ~

Somehow, the day’s gone by.
A felt like just a few moments ago, you’d been getting patronized by your mother for making a simple mistake, now you were walking back to the hotel with Mettaton to drop off a few shopping bags.

After the laughing fit the two of you shared, you had let Mettaton convince you to get something to eat. You’d forgotten that most humans would need to eat around that time. You wouldn’t let him call up his limo and take you to some high-end eating establishment; you argued that there was a pizza place right across the street from Big Ben. Of course he complained the entire time, but it was still enjoyable.

Afterwards, since the sun was still out, Mettaton was practically begging for you to let him take you shopping. You really were not up to the idea due to traumatic experiences with your mother that involved several hours of extreme boredom. But he claimed that he just had to buy you an outfit or two; your clothes were too drab in his opinion. You were… slightly offended. Your mother did try to spend extra on some of your clothes, even if it took her hours. Nonetheless, you obliged much to his pleasure.

You were stopped many, many times inside of stores because plenty people recognized Mettaton. It was almost as bad as shopping with your mother, but there were some good parts to it. The compliments, for one. You initially thought he just wanted to take you shopping because he didn’t like your clothing, but his compliments were so genuine whenever he bought you something. You felt so guilty having him waste money on you, but every time you brought it up he’d act like you’d asked a silly question. Sure the entire trip was probably all out of pocket for him, but why did he insist on going the extra mile for you, you just couldn’t comprehend it.

Now the two of you were now walking back to the hotel to drop off the shopping bags. It had gotten dark and Mettaton was still set on seeing the Christmas tree lit up. While you were walking, he tried to make light conversation.

“Those bags look a bit heavy, are you sure you don’t want me to carry some?” He asks.

“Well, I did win this trip based on strength.” You reminded him with a shrug.

“Speaking of which, I’ve got a random question.” Mettaton said suddenly. “It’s just something that’s been on my mind.”

“…What is it?” You asked cautiously.

“What kind of strength training do you do? My friend, Undyne, was probably one of the strongest monsters I knew. She’d been training her entire life. Like, rigorous war preparations and routines kind of training, y’know? Boring stuff. But you beat her so—well, uh, you managed to beat her at all.”

You almost stopped walking entirely, the question caught you so off guard. You… didn’t really have a valid explanation for that, not one that made sense, anyway. The only thing you could do was play dumb.

“I… I wasn’t really expecting to win against her. Actually, I thought it was planned out ahead of time. Like, the winner was planned out in advance?”

“Oh. Haha. Of course!” He said jubilantly.

Luckily you were arriving at the hotel, so you didn’t have to feel awkward and terrible for lying straight to Mettaton’s face for long.
He wasted no time after the bags were put up to make his out of the hotel, though some time was spared to debate on whether or not he should call the limo for a two minute walk “since it was dark out” he claimed. You had succeeded in not letting him get his limo for something stupid before, you could do it again.

The Christmas tree was grand in its height alone, but with the string of lights trailing down it and reflecting the fountains beside it, it seemed impressively bigger. Mettaton was completely enraptured by the sight.

“Do you like it?” You asked him.

“I’m going to be completely honest with you.” He said. “The tree is kind of plain; there aren’t that many decorations and they couldn’t even bother to use more than one color of lights. But,” He paused, and an oddly wistful—no, nostalgic? Happy? A smile was on his face, and he looked content.

“…But it’s still so amazing. Because I’m finally on the surface and experiencing everything up here is like experiencing it for the first time. Even if it’s something boring and plain as taking a walk or looking at a boring Christmas tree, it still feels so sacred because I’m doing it. I’m living my dream up here. And part of me feels like it’s so wonderful that it isn’t real, like it could slip away at any moment. God, I’m sorry, I must sound absolutely stupid right now.” He placed a hand on his cheek and gave you a smile filled with embarrassment. “Why’d you let me ramble like that?”

“No, it’s just that,” You looked down at the hands that weren’t really yours; one wasn’t even working.

“I know exactly how you feel.”

~ ~ ~

Today had been a slightly tiring, but still fun day for Mettaton. God, after a day like this he could use a nice relaxing charge, but he still had a bit of work to do. He was lying on his hotel bed with pink comforters (they didn’t expect him to put up with that plain eggshell and tan, did they) writing in a pink-sequined composition notebook with a glitter gel pen. Like a diligent detective, he’d been taking notes his peculiar guest. You were quite something, and in-between sketches in the borders he’d managed to pen down some interesting facts, such as things you liked and disliked, things that he could do to get you to laugh—but most importantly things about your arm, and how it was really warm on the night he took you out to dinner. That was bullet-pointed next to a sketch of your face in neon blue gel pen, laughing.

He could describe you as “mostly blue, sometimes orange” because you didn’t radiate the same kind of heat that most humans did. You were like a blue in a crowd of red when you were with other people, which wouldn’t have been as concerning as a monster in the case of, say, his cousin Napstablook. But you weren’t a monster. At least, you didn’t seem like one. However, you were passing most of the “not a zombie” tests, which was a good thing. Ah, he needed to add something else to the notes he had about you: “Really bad liar.”

You were an anomaly to him, and he just couldn’t figure out what it was. Who were you—No. What were you?

Chapter End Notes
Yeah I know it’s the New Year’s right now, not Christmas, but most of this was planned during the holiday season so, shrug.
As fabulous and graceful as Mettaton seemed to the prying public eye, booting up in the morning was entirely a different story. Especially when doing it earlier than usual, ugh. Most of the time his mind was awake before his body, so he had to wait for his body to catch up and then readjust his limbs to movement. This included simple things like stretching and making sure everything was moving like it was supposed to. Actually, he’d gotten the idea to practice a few yoga poses in the morning to keep his joints from locking or freezing randomly after waking up. Alphys even encouraged it (and she rarely encourages anything he does) because it seemed to be helping.

Ah, but the morning was worth it. There were some thing he needed to do first, and one of them included shopping, though unfortunately it was only shopping for ingredients. He also had to see if he could ‘borrow’ the hotel kitchen. He had some sightseeing planned as well, but the real surprise would be at the end of the day. Okay, yes, this surprise was supposed to be saved until the end of the trip, but what’s a few days early? And they came in earlier than expected and he just couldn’t hold himself back any longer. So yes, for this morning, he could be excited to get up.

He was getting out of bed and preparing to do a bit of stretching when his phone started vibrating on his dresser. Who’d be calling him this early? Normally he’d just let it ring and ignore it, he’s a busy bot after all, but curiosity got the best of him and he checked the caller ID. It was Undyne.

“Well good morning! Or good afternoon, for you. Did you need something, darling?”

“Don’t you ‘darling’ me! Why do you have a freaking kik if you never respond back?” She yelled into the receiver. Mettaton rolled his eyes and sat back on his comfy bed.

“Oh you know how busy I am! Rushing here and there and spending time with our lovely and interesting human!”

“Yeah well don’t message me about your goddamn plants if you aren’t going to respond back. They’re fine, by the way. Also, have you found out anything about that human?”

“Oh, about them! I don’t know for sure if they’re a zombie quite yet, but, if they are they’re an awfully adorable zombie. I did manage to find out what they’re favorite color was, and what kind of food they like. But I’m planning a picnic today, so maybe we’ll get to talk more. Also, if you—”

“Oh my god? You’re fraternizing with the enemy?! Are you kidding me right now?” Even through the phone Mettaton could tell Undyne was about to pop a vein. But gosh, she needed to calm down in his honest opinion. She was always so high-strung, like some hardened war veteran. Though technically… she kind of was one.

“Please, doll face, you’re being dramatic. We’ve just been going sightseeing and eating out—oh, and we’ve taken a few pictures together. But there’s nothing wrong with that.”

“Oh, my bad, so sorry. I forgot that’s MUCH WORSE. Now I come to find out you’ve been going on dates with the enemy! You’re not supposed to date the suspects, Mr. Detective.”

Mettaton scoffed and moved the phone to his other ear. “It’s not dating! It’s just… you know. Hanging out, doing touristy stuff in a foreign country. It’s perfectly friendly and benign and platonic so get your head out of the gutter.” He started messing with his already perfect nails. Did he have a
blanket to bring for the picnic? Of course he did, the pink one.

“Yeah, yeah, have fun on your candlelit dinner under the stars, Mr. Detective.” Undyne drawled sarcastically. Mettaton puffed his cheeks out and pouted, though he knew no one was around to see it.

“Whatsoever! Don’t you have any training dummies to go demolish? I’m busy; I have things to do today.”

“Yeah, ha!” Undyne started laughing into the receiver. “Don’t stand ‘em up for your date lover boy!”

A bit agitated, he hit the end call button and set his phone back down. Sheesh, what a way to put a damper on his mood. But still, he wasn’t going to let his morning be completely ruined. He still had to go pick a few things up for their picnic in Hyde Park after getting himself all dolled up. Today would be a good day; he’d make sure of it.

~ ~ ~

You woke up the following morning, and for once, you felt completely normal. Well as normal as person like you could get. The night before, you reread your mother’s email and made sure to follow your mother’s instructions to the T. Although you were a bit scared it wouldn’t work, thankfully your arm was functioning properly again when you got up. You could flex and move your left arm freely now; it felt great after not operating correctly for a few days. Now you could stop worrying about it, or fussing to your mother about it. Well, until a new problem would inevitably arise. These kinds of incidents were troublesome but not uncommon. When you first got your body, you had problems coming at you left and right. Your mother was still accustoming herself to making programs that could properly respond to thoughts and signals, but you were patient. Patient and apathetic.

You rolled over on your back to fiddle with your phone. The paperweight was still embedded in the ceiling, although it remained innocuous for now. Thankfully room service hadn’t seemed to notice it. You could just scream at guessing how much it would cost to repair that ceiling. Sure it would probably be a situation to come biting you in the ass later, but that was later and not now, so it could be put out of mind safely. That’s how all problems worked.

Deciding there was nothing interesting to be done on your phone, you plugged it into its charger and sat up to face the world. The sky outside was clear and the bright blue hinted little to the actual chill outside. It was a surprisingly mild visit for you two in London; the city that was renowned for its rain and fog had been fairly mild this week. In fact it was perfect weather for, say, a hypothetical picnic. Actually, you were pretty sure you saw big park on Mettaton’s tourist map of the area. It was probably some historical London thing that Mettaton would drag you to one of these days. Not that you’d be opposed to it… you might even welcome the idea. Speaking of Mettaton, you were reminded; it’s just about that time.

You got up from your bed and walked over to the door, making sure you looked decent enough, at least for sleepwear. You opened the door to a surprised Mettaton.

“Knock—oh! Well… you’re up early.” He had his hand poised as if he were about to knock on your door. You gave him a half smile and nodded once, then noticed he was holding a basket of some sort. No, it wasn’t of some sort, but of the picnic sort.

“I had a feeling you’d be knocking around now.” You said. Then you gestured to his picnic basket. “Let me guess; brunch in the park?”
“Okay, you got me. Am I really that predictable? I thought I should’ve kept it a surprise, but I’ve already got a surprise in store today—whoops!”

Immediately after saying that, he put his free hand over his mouth.

“Look at me, I’m terrible with secrets! Gosh, I almost ruined a surprise for you! Once, I almost messed up a surprise party for my cousin with me and my big mouth, and another time I ruined my good buddy’s plan to make a friend, I still feel icky for it. But you won’t get another peep about that surprise out of me, so don’t even try it.”

He waved a playfully accusatory finger at you, even though it was his own screw up. You played along, however, and jokingly said you wouldn’t ask him anything further.

“Great! I’ll leave you to get dressed. When you’re ready, one of my bodyguards will escort you down to the lobby. Then we can begin our fun day together!”

With that said, Mettaton left you to gather some decent clothing a nice jacket. Upon rummaging through your suitcase you found that ripped shirt from a while ago. You should probably get rid of that… later.

Once you had something decent on, you went out into the hallway and approached the bodyguard near the elevator. He greeted you with a curt nod and escorted down the ornate elevators into the even more elegant hallway. Why Mettaton thought you needed security going downstairs, you would never know, but it was a thing that was happening quite often. He’s a celebrity and you could guess that he was used to hanging out with other celebrity pals who required security and guards to escort them here and there. It wasn’t that unusual, just a bit unnerving since the bodyguards gave off an intimidating aura and never spoke a word. Though you supposed that was the whole point of a bodyguard—looking buff and scary.

“Right on time!” Mettaton called out as you made your way through the lobby. “The park I want to go to is a bit of a long walk away, so I decided to call in a chauffeur instead.”

You were expecting a sleek black limousine to be waiting outside the hotel. It would let the entire world know someone was fancy enough to ride a limo to a park. You almost grimaced. But to your surprise, outside was a slim, still black, normal sized car. Of course it looked very shiny and very expensive, and there was indeed a chauffeur standing next to the doors waiting to attend to the two of you.

“Oh.” You said out loud as the chauffeur helped you into your seat. The car was surprisingly roomy despite not looking as big from the outside. As Mettaton slid into the oiled leather seat next to you he gave you an impish smile.

“What, you look like you were expecting something more grandeur.” He said mischievously.

“Well… I was.” You said. Mettaton gave a little suppressed laugh and leaned back into his seat.

“It’s not always easy finding a limo on short notice, especially with my favorite one back home in Cali, so I settled for the next best thing. It’s still comfy, right?”

“It’s not the comfort that… I was just expecting… Never mind. This is great.” You decided to drop it there.

While the park wasn’t necessarily far by car, it would’ve made for a lengthy walk. You wouldn’t have been completely bothered by a walk that far, just bothered by time consumption, but you figured Mettaton was just looking out for you.
As the chauffeur parked the car and let you two out, you noticed something odd. A second car of much less regality pulled up behind it. Out stepped two seemingly normal people, except you could recognize them. They were the bodyguards that were always at the hotel, but they were wearing normal civilian clothes now. When did they change out of their uniforms? More importantly, were they always tagging behind you two when you went out?

“Well isn’t this nice? It’s warmer than I was expecting, it’s like 57 degrees out here!”

You had noticed it was a surprisingly warm winter this year. You blamed global warming, but then you realized something else. With your eyes nearly widening like saucers, you asked Mettaton:

“You can tell the temperature too?”

At first he gave you a puzzled look, but upon realizing what you were implying, he threw his head back and let out a boisterous laugh. What? What did you say?

“Dar… Darling please!” He said between laughs. “I may be pretty advanced but I’m not a smartphone. I checked my weather app!” He held up the apparent phone in his hand, the same one you took embarrassing selfies with, and you felt what little dignity or self-respect you possessed pack up its bags and leave your body. You found yourself praying you had some hidden self-destruct button.

“Oh my gosh… I’m so sorry; I wasn’t paying attention, I just… Oh my god.” You clenched your fists together in an attempt to keep from hitting yourself. You were surprised, however, when you felt Mettaton take your arm and begin leading you into the park.

“Now, I don’t want you worrying your adorable little head off! We’re going to have the best picnic brunch ever, just as soon as we find the perfect spot. No time to dilly-dally.”

You were only half listening because he was holding your hand. You could feel the hardness of his metal hand under his gloves, but it was surprisingly more comforting than you—wait, no; you weren’t distracted for that reason, and you definitely weren’t going to think about how he was holding your hand. You weren’t some prepubescent teen who idolized celebrities, rather you didn’t want rumors sparking about Mettaton seen in London holding some unknown individuals hand. The tabloids would have a field day, and the last thing you wanted was to be a further bother to Mettaton. He was already so kind, but if you gave the media a reason to bother him? You’d never forgive yourself.

It took about five minutes of wandering the park to find a decent place to set up, and no, it wasn’t due to the sheer size of Hyde Park, impressive as it was. Every time you pointed out a place that looked fine, Mettaton would analyze and then claim that it “Didn’t have enough shade” or was “Too far out in the open”. Finally, after you were certain the two of you had passed the same tree twice, he settled for a little clearing of trees not far from the path.

“Perfect!” Mettaton let you go so he could run over and survey the area. After a little noise of approval he set his picnic basket down and retrieved the blanket from inside. Not to your surprise, the blanket was pink with white stripes and lacy ends. He was beginning to empty the basket when he looked over his shoulder at you.

“Well don’t just stand there, silly! Get comfortable.” He said upon noticing that you were still standing. Muttering a ‘Right’ you sat down and made yourself comfortable on the blanket.

“Alright, let’s see what I’ve got here… I couldn’t decide what kind of food to pack, so I just grabbed a bit of everything. I’ve got different kinds of sandwiches, some fruit, I have some hummus and chips if you want; that’s healthy and good right? Oh, and I packed some…”
As Mettaton continued to take food out of his never-ending picnic basket, you wondered briefly if he went to a grocery store before you woke up. That was probably the case, but going all out like this for a picnic? He was just now pulling the last thing from the picnic basket, at by that time there were at least two trays of sandwiches, several plates with assorted fruits, and a few pastries wrapped in confectionery paper bags.

“When did you have the time do all of this?” You asked him, a bit dumbfounded at how tasty it all looked. “And did you make these sandwiches?” Composure be damned, you had to try at least one sandwich. You picked one at random and took a bite—oh god it tasted so good. But it was just a sandwich! What manner of sorcery could make a sandwich taste so damn good? Subway should take some notes. You absentmindedly remembered seeing one of his cooking books advertised at a store once, but the damn thing cost about $40. Now you know why.

“Well of course I made them. Feel free to eat as much as you like.” Mettaton said as he picked up one of his sandwiches and took a bite.

You took his invitation to its full extent and found yourself sampling a little bit of everything. Eventually you find yourself feeling full; even if it wasn’t exactly up to the same par with the fancy gourmet food from the other night, it was way more fulfilling and tasted just as great because of that. Man, not needing to eat can take so much guilt away from gorging yourself. You weren’t stuffing things in your mouth like a pig, but you could tell you’d gotten to the point where your body was going to need awhile to process food before you ate anymore.

“Someone sure looks satisfied.” Mettaton said as he inserted a piece of fruit into his mouth. You gave him a sheepish smile and pat your stomach.

“Yeah, your sandwiches were amazing.” You leaned back a bit and held yourself up with your arms, surveying the blanket in front of you. There was a tray of mostly eaten, some half-eaten, sandwiches, a plate of mostly picked clean fruit, and some hummus that obviously had been dipped through a few times by some chips. Next to you was an untouched bottle of juice Mettaton had packed for you; it would’ve been perfect to wash your food down with, had you remembered to drink it. Or needed to wash anything down, you know. You didn’t have a big problem with food getting stuck in your throat; the lack of a need to breathe helped considerably.

“I sure hope so! I didn’t host a cooking show underground for nothing.” He said proudly.

“You had a cooking show too?” You asked. “I heard you did a lot of stuff before you debuted up here, but you must’ve been busy.”

Mettaton shrugged but kept his smile going. “I had to be busy! The underground was pretty crowded, but we didn’t have the same population like the surface. There weren’t very many stars to choose from. At least… not very many with promising talent. So when I started becoming popular, I knew I had to please my fans anyway I could, even if it meant a few sacrifices. But I will admit,” He paused for a second, and this time it was his turn to give an unsure smile. “I did some things back in my day that I wasn’t very proud of. I made some sacrifices that… weren’t necessary… Said and did somethings that no self-respecting star should ever do… But enough about that!” His wary tone of voice disappeared as soon as it had begun, and his warm, inviting, yet still fierce smile was back.

“I’ve left those kinds of things in the past! I’ve promised myself I’d spend every day of my career on the surface making up for being such a big jerk.”

“I… wow… that’s so…” Noble? No, that didn’t describe what you wanted to say. Heroic? Enviable? Enviable… As much as you hated to admit it… “I’ll be honest with you; I kind of envy your way of thinking. I wish I could have that way of thinking. Instead I just can’t help but to cling to the past. It’s just the kind of person I am. Pretty lame, right?” You said, managing to feel only a bit
despondent. What else could you say? It was the truth; no matter what you did, even on the best of days, there was no way you could drop the past from your shoulders. It clung to you like a parasite, it followed you like a curse, it dictated your every day. You wished you had the strength to throw away your past and move on. No matter what it took, you’d give everything—anything.

Catching you from your thoughts was Mettaton, getting up to stand in front of you. He was looking down at you now with that smile, that smile that made you feel guilty about any kindness he ever showed you, and he had his hand outstretched.

“C’mon, darling,” He said as you warily took his hand. “Our day’s not over yet. There’s still somewhere I want to take you before it closes.”

“Right…” You said, getting up and began to help him pack the remnants of your picnic back into its basket. The two of you made light conversation as you walked back to the chauffeured car, you feeling as if you’ve made things awkward, and Mettaton being as peppy and cheery as can be. Finally you were at the car and situating yourself in the seat.

“Home, or have you another location in mind, sir?” The driver asked Mettaton, who gave a winning smile in response.

“Madame Tussaud’s, please.” He responded.

“Certainly.”

Madame Tussaud’s… where had you heard it before? Then it rang: the famous wax museum with replicas of various famous people. Actually, if you recalled correctly, there was a branch back home. It should be entertaining, at the very least.

The bright red building with images of famous individuals decorating the front stood out like a sore thumb. In comparison to the plain buildings surrounding it, this building could only be described as the Mettaton of people.

“Ooh, just you wait!” He seemed pretty excited for the museum, which made you skeptical. He really was terrible with secrets.

The two of you got out of the car and entered the attraction with Mettaton excitedly leading the way. There was a lengthy line ahead of you two, but to your surprise Mettaton walked right past it and approached a separate area with the words ‘Fast-track entrance’ above it.

“O-Oh! This is quite a surprise, welcome to Madame Tussaud’s Mr. Uhm… Ahem, Mettaton.” The attendant at the entrance greeted him and took his premium pass tickets.

“Thank you darling!” Mettaton cooed back at the attendant as he accepted a small brochure detailing the attractions inside. “Oh, right, the third ticket’s for him.” Mettaton threw a hand back and gestured to someone behind him. You followed his finger to find Burly Guard 001 standing behind the two of you wearing casual clothing. The attendant nodded once and escorted you over to a group of other guests with premium passes.

“Oh my god.” Almost immediately, surprised voices rang out once the two of you, or rather, once Mettaton joined the group. There was a gaggle of posh-looking teens trying to get their phones out and making their over when a big wall made of meat blocked them—Mettaton’s bodyguard. Instantly they shrunk back, some still trying to look around the guard and snap a picture of Mettaton.

“It’s always so nice to meet excited fans!” Mettaton said as he moved up to stand aside his guard. Your view of the group was now obscured, but you couldn’t say you were displeased. “But today
I’m just a normal person like all of you. I just want to see some sights and have a great time, so let’s all have some fun yeah?”

The groups of teens agreed silently and got the message; no autographs. The bodyguard stepped back silently, moving behind you once again. The tour guide then gathered the group’s attention and began to make their way towards the sights and attractions. There was a plethora of wax models at each section, and after the tour guide rattled off facts about each model the group was allowed to touch and take pictures with the model, so this first part took about ten minutes. After moving from a section about world leaders, finally, you got to a part dedicated to celebrities and movie stars.

“Are you serious?” You said out loud upon seeing one of the wax models on the runway. You now knew why he was so excited to get into this museum. In a pose as fabulous as one could get while made of wax was a replica of Mettaton. You turned to Mettaton and saw that he was smiling like an excited kid; the kid in a candy shop smile.

“How many people get a chance to take a picture with themselves? When I found out London put up a figure to match the beauty of moi I just knew England was the place to go!”

The group of teens had beaten Mettaton to his wax model, so the two of you were talking to stall time.

“Wait, are you telling me that you decided to come to London because you found out there was a wax model of you?” You asked, incredulous.

“Yes. They hadn’t put up my grand image in LA, and London beat them to it.” Mettaton said without missing a beat. That was the final straw, you couldn’t contain yourself anymore. You tried to cover your face to hide the laughter but it was futile, you were doubled over and giggling like a madman now. Even without meaning it, he could still make you laugh like an idiot.

“What?” Mettaton asked, trying to pull your hands away from your face. “What’s so funny?”

“I’m sorry—I’m sorry, I just can’t… this is just too good.”

You peeked through your fingers and saw Mettaton puffing out his cheeks and giving you a pouted expression, though he still looked quite content with himself. Finally, once you calmed down, the line of teenagers was clearing and Mettaton took this as a chance to strike a pose next to his replica.

He handed his phone over to you before mirroring his double’s pose model-like ease.

“I can’t even tell the difference.” Mettaton said with a wink as the group of teens regathered behind you to snap more pictures of the celeb. You rolled your eyes but felt a lopsided smile still persisting as you snapped the picture. Afterwards, Mettaton motioned you over to take a selfie, to which you begrudgingly obliged.

“Now darling,” Mettaton was positioning the camera to capture both… all three of you in the picture from the best angle. “Who gets the chance to take a picture with two of me? I know I’d personally be honored.” He joked as he snapped the picture. You were still so amused by his approach to this; it was one thing to be self-centered, but Mettaton took the whole definition and turned it on its head but still managed to make it entertaining, and it only added to his charm. Vanity was something to be admonished, but Mettaton managed to make it fabulous. No wonder he’s a star, even you had to admit he’s a born entertainer.

The rest of the museum was interesting, though it paled in comparison to Mettaton’s segment. Plenty of the group was trying to get close enough to speak to Mettaton, but the second anyone of them
stepped within a meter his bodyguard’s piercing glare sent them scurrying back away. However, one of them got a bright idea: why not approach the other person who’s within Mettaton’s bubble?

“Uh, hey you got a second?” A blonde haired boy with slicked back hair and a graphic t-shirt stopped you midway through the Star Wars segment of the attraction. Shoot, you were just considering taking a picture with C-3PO, just for the sake of irony. Oh, well.

“Sure…” You could already guess what it was going to be about; you weren’t daft.

“I was just a bit curious; do you know Mettaton personally or something?” He asked, gesturing ahead as if you couldn’t already see him. “He seems to like you a lot.”

“Why do you ask?” You asked, dodging the question, even though you already knew the answer to it. But you could tell he didn’t really care about whether or not you were close to Mettaton. He was the kind that cared more about whether or not you could get him close to Mettaton. Unconsciously, you were reminded of someone.

“Well, uh,” He scratched the back of his head and looked around a bit awkwardly. “I’m—my sister is a big fan of his. She would just be totally thrilled to hang out with him a bit. I was wondering if you could… you know? Introduce us? Her, I mean. Introduce her.”

You weren’t necessarily a violent person, but in that moment it took every ounce of concentration not to slap him right then and there.

“Sorry,” You saw his shoulders slump. “But I’m just a guest of his. Mettaton’s probably very busy, and he’s only being to be in London for a few more days. I doubt could do anything to help you.”

“Ah, right, you’re right. I don’t even know why I asked. I’ll, uh… leave you to it then.” And with that he walked off, making sure to take a big path around the bodyguard to avoid his menacing presence. Mettaton approached you just as the kid rejoins his group of friends, barely sparing him a glance.

“Darling, what are you doing hanging back here? The groups moving on to the next one, and we haven’t taken nearly enough pictures together.” He said and took your hand for about the third time that day. You had to admit, you were becoming accustomed to it—the hand holding thing.

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“So,” Mettaton said, getting comfortable his leather seat. He had one leg crossed over the other and was eyeing you with anticipation. “How’d you like it? I know I sure had fun.” You knew what fun he was referring to, but you decided to mess with him a bit.

“Gee, I don’t know.” You placed a finger to your chin and made an inquisitive face. “I sure had fun posing with the Queen of England. It’s not every day you get to meet someone so… famous.”

His mouth dropped open dramatically, and you couldn’t help but to smile at his reaction.

“Oh really? So it’s like that now?” He crossed his arms and made a little ‘hmph!’ noise. “And to think, I was almost excited to show you your surprise.”

“Wait,” You said, feigning a surprised face. “There was this one familiar model… can’t remember the name. He stood out a lot.”

He gave you a side-eye expression with his one visible eye; he wasn’t relenting just yet.
“Alright, you win. I… had a lot of fun today. No wait, that’s not right. This whole trip in general hasn’t been what I expected, at all. I didn’t think I’d actually get to spend any time with you. I figured you’d be too busy or wouldn’t bother to pay me any mind. I’m used to holing myself up and being alone, and you’re like… the exact opposite of that. I thought you’d just get bored of hanging out with me after a few hours, but you didn’t, and, well, that surprised me. No matter what, you’re always so positive and I end up feeling bad because of how nice you are to me, someone who’s so negative. This trip is actually the most fun I’ve had in ages—maybe even years. Ah, hell,” You rest your arms on your knees and duck your head. You were rambling like an idiot now, but just because it was… well it was true. You’d only known Mettaton for a few days and you’ve had more fun hanging out with him than you have in the last few years. “I’m, uh, not the best with words, but I guess what I’m trying to say is I’ve had so much fun hanging out with you.”

Finally, you looked up to meet Mettaton’s eyes and found that he was… being his dramatic self. He had a hand pressed gently to his chest and a single tear was streaking down his cheek, though not ruining his makeup somehow. Still hunched over, you fiddled with your hands and prepared to say something, but you were cut off by something surprising. Mettaton had lunged forward and wrapped you in a would-be breath-taking and crushing hug. You were completely caught off guard by this, but then again you had pegged Mettaton for the touchy-feely type for a while now. Still, you couldn’t help but feel a bit… well… flustered at the suddenness of the hug.

“Oh—oh darling! I don’t even know what to say!” He hugged you tighter against his awkward and hard metal covering, but you hugged him back nonetheless. “I’ve made it my goal since this trip began to get to know you and show you a fabulous time, it makes me so happy to know you’re enjoying yourself. And don’t put yourself down, honey. You may not be able to see it now, but you’re a great person, just with a different personality than most.”

“Sir,” The chauffeur seated up front brought the two of you back to reality. You nearly jumped out of your skin and tried to pull away from Mettaton, but he reacted as if everything were normal.

“I hate interrupt this… touching moment, but we’ve arrived at the hotel.”

“Oh! Your surprise!” Mettaton finally released you and held away at arm’s length. “Out, out! I’ve been holding this in all day; we have to get to it immediately.” He said as he hurried you out the car. He did seem to be anticipating this for a long time, so you were wondering what exactly it could be as Mettaton went inside and practically dragged you over to the hotel elevator.

“Can’t this thing go any faster?” Mettaton muttered as he jammed the ‘Close Door’ button into oblivion. His bodyguards had just made it in beside the two of you before the doors finally shut and the car began to ascend.

“What exactly is this surprise?” You asked him, a bit bemused at his liveliness.

“Well it wouldn’t be a surprise if I told you, now would it?” He said and gave you what you could only assume was a wink, seeing as one of his eyes was constantly covered.

Finally the doors opened with a light ding and Mettaton turned to you with a grin.

“Close your eyes.” He said. You gave him a skeptical look but obliged. He took your hand once again and gently led you down the hallway. “And no peeking!”

You refrained from peeking, despite the temptation to do so, but you could still tell you were headed to Mettaton’s room; it was directly across the hall from yours and one of the few rooms on this floor. You heard him unlock and open the door and felt him take you inside.
“Keep ‘em closed for just one… second…” He let go of your hand to go rummage around the room for something. Now you really wanted to open your eyes; a person’s room shows a lot about their personality right? Even if it was just a hotel room, your curiosity was still piqued about how he’d kept it so far. Though, on the same note, if personality was represented by someone’s room… you hated to imagine Mettaton seeing your room.

“Oh!” Now his voice was directly in front of you, still leaking exuberance as always. “You can open them now!”

You opened your eyes and immediately your eyebrows went skyward. He was holding out several pop culture magazines, all of them featuring Mettaton. One of them, however, showed a close-up of a photo you had posed with Mettaton in, and you felt like you’d hit a 404 Not Found error. Was that… was that really you? The person in this picture looked so mature, so… wonderful. Stunning. The definition of majesty. And poised next to them—next to you—was Mettaton taking the picture and throwing a cherry on top to finish it off.

“Oh my god…” You whispered under your breath, sounding a bit more awe-struck then you meant to. “This is… this is incredible.”

“Ah-Ah-Ah! This isn’t the end of it.” He set the magazines down on his bright pink comforter (you’d have to look at the rest of the room later) and produced a small… Is that what you think it is?

“Where do I even begin? Oh to hell with it, I’ll just come out with it; as soon as this trip is over I’m releasing a single! One of my cousins who’s a fantastic songwriter helped write and mix this and a good friend of mine did the backup vocals and… know what? Why don’t I just play the song for you?”

He opened the CD cover, which you noted had a picture of just Mettaton’s legs. He gestured you over to his bed where he sat down and pulled a laptop out of his suitcase. The laptop was all pink and had glittery wallpaper depicting various sweet and cutesy objects. He just had to find new ways to surprise you, didn’t he?

“I hope you love it as much as I do. I’ve done music before; this isn’t my first rodeo,” He popped the CD into the disk slot and waited for the computer to detect. “But… I don’t know! I’m a bit nervous.”

“You? Nervous?” You said sarcastically, to which Mettaton gave you a ‘Look’. You heled back a snicker, but went quiet once you heard the first notes begin to play.

The only way you could describe the song was that it encompassed him entirely. His robotic yet rhythmic voice encompassed the enthusiasm he was always showing you, and the melody practically oozed the word ‘Fabulous’ in big glittery chunks. You don’t really know what that means, but it’s that. It was also so catchy and upbeat, another part of his personality he was always showing. Yeah, he did mention that he’s been in the singing business for a while, but damn could he fill a song with meaning.

How you could convey all of that in words to him to show that you loved the song once it ended was beyond you.

“Mettaton… this song is amazing. I can’t even describe how great it is.” You say, trying to muster as much meaning and sincerity as possible. You swear he’s tearing up again when he throws his arms around your neck.

“Oh darling, thank you! I’m so glad you like it; I’m a bit nervous the rest of the surface won’t though.”
“Are you kidding me?” You ask, patting his back a bit awkwardly. “Most of America already loves you; they’d have to be insane not to love your music.”

He pulled out of the hug to look at you. “Oh, stop, you’re going to make me blush!” He joked and lightly pushed at your shoulder. You gave him a half-smile and assured him that you weren’t kidding, his song was really good.

Afterwards, the two of you flipped through the magazines. Mettaton informed you that these weren’t actually on the shelves yet; they wouldn’t be until sometime next week. It was interesting seeing the celebrity gossip before anyone else could… Not! You had flipped through the pages of one of the magazines to find Mettaton posing for his brand of makeup, to which he made you stop and admire for a moment. This guy…

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It was much later once you decided to leave Mettaton’s room. He’d convinced you to use his magazines to make collages. He seemed pretty eager to cut up his fave and make pictures, in your opinion, not to mention he already had glue and, unsurprisingly, glitter in his bags. Did he always pack an art supply store before he want on trips? Probably.

By the time you got back to your room, the sun had set and room service had been around to tidy up. They hadn’t seemed to notice a paperweight embedded in the wall, thankfully. Not really alert, are they? As you sat down on your bed you realized you forgot to check in with your mother today; your phone was still sitting on the end table, plugged into the charger. You weren’t really in the mood for a phone call, so you decided to send a text and tell her that your arm was in working condition again.

Finally, you let yourself fall back and relax against your soft bed. You had a wonderful day with Mettaton, this you couldn’t deny, but still your mind still wanted to plant lingering fears. It was the usual, of course; that despite his kindness and seemingly nice words he’d… forget about you. That he’d move on once this trip was over and never speak to you again. You’d had so much fun today, and you finally found someone who you could genuinely call a friend; it would be just like fate to rip him from you and leave you lonely again. Or, if not lonely, rejected. But who could you blame? Your doubts had been right before, maybe they’d be right again. Maybe his everlasting patience with your usually dreary demeanor stemmed from the fact that he was a celebrity, and he just wanted uphold his reputation. Maybe he actually didn’t…

You threw your arm over your face and sighed. You hated having these toxic intrusive thoughts all the time. Because, despite all those doubts—you wanted to believe they were wrong. Still… you didn’t want to get hurt. Your ‘friends’ have taught you there are other ways to be hurt besides physical pain.

You weren’t going to get your hopes up.

Chapter End Notes

Calm before the storm. AKA the feels train shall leave the station next chapter, for all those faint of heart.
Good Old Fashioned Running

Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings: Panic/Anxiety Attacks, deadly weapons, the graphic depictions of violence warning comes into play, and if I’m missing anything let me know in the tags and I’ll update.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mettaton’s already decided that you’re not a zombie—that was a scrap idea from the beginning, simply to irk Undyne a bit. And it worked and was funny, but nevertheless Mettaton was still curious—and he’s not the kind of person to sit on his ass and brood about it. His curiosity had turned into fascination, and that fascination into an obsession. It was past midnight now, but he was still looking over his sequined notebook and staving off charging. His battery was complaining mildly, but he could endure for a little bit. He almost felt like he was running out of time—but no, he’d make time. No matter what it took

Aside from all the essential facts—favorite color, favorite food, cute quirks and etc., Mettaton had jotted down some things he noticed about you. You didn’t really breathe. Like, at all. Sometimes you’d sigh for dramatic affect when you were pretending to be angry at him, but that didn’t count. Humans and most monsters show some sign of breathing—and it was something that crossed you out of the human list. You also didn’t show heat like most humans. Most humans were like little campfires from the waist up, and Mettaton had gotten so used to seeing it that he was surprised the second he saw you. You were like blue on top of a sea of red. Nothing but cold colors with dots of heat, and it was so strange. But it gets even weirder—you aren’t always blue. There was a time when your arm was nothing but the color fire—and whenever he wakes you up in the morning, your back is warm as ever, but it disappears by the time he sees you again in the lobby.

And you’re built differently—you feel different than other humans. Not to be weird or anything—but after he first got the chance to hold your hand he found himself mentally coming up with excuses to do it again. Most humans felt so fleshy and breakable, but you felt like you were made of grit and mortar—strong and unbending. Hoo boy, don’t get him started on your strength. He was sure you could send plenty of the underground’s strongest monsters on their asses with the flick of your finger. If you could be Undyne, that disqualified a majority already.

Yeah, all the clues were leading to you being a robot, but there were still some things that didn’t add up. For starters, you didn’t look like a robot: you seemed about as human as they come, most wouldn’t be able to notice the subtle giveaways unless they’d been outfitted to detect them, like Mettaton. And Mettaton looked about as faux as could be, then again, it was a part of public image. But that couldn’t rule it out just yet… Maybe… if the mechanic were really good…but to fit so much into such a compact form? Even Alphys had to give herself some leeway. Mettaton could remember her many sleepless nights trying to build his more geometric form, and it took so much longer for his current form, not to mention repairs and upgrades. He couldn’t thank her enough, especially with the way he acted as soon as he became corporeal… Shit—he couldn’t let guilt eat away at him at a time like this, not when he’s trying to concentrate. He’s so confused and he just wants an answer without seeming like a huge douche bag. “Hey, you’re not human huh? Just wondering—are you a robot?” didn’t sound like the nicest thing to ask someone.
“Wait.” He sat up in his bed, realizing something. That actually wasn’t a bad idea.

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It’s a terrible idea, by the way.

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There’s an old saying that everyone knows: time flies when you’re having fun. No, it doesn’t sprout wings and take to the sky, nor is it a physical concept, but it can get away from you when you’re preoccupied. And that’s exactly what you were—occupied. Mettaton’s made sure of that. A week and a half may seem like a long time to anyone who has nothing to do, I.E. you on any other day of the year, but when it’s spent visiting museums and various attractions in and around London it gets away from you. You’re finding yourself spending less time brooding before going to bed—you can bear the weirdness of falling asleep because you know the next day is going to be worth it. Even if you spent the day in a quiet art museum, Mettaton always found a way to make it interesting, even if he was being shushed every two seconds (or asked for an autograph) by some random patron or worker. It still made your day worth it. And as much as you hated to admit it—reputation for being silent and brooding be damned—Mettaton was helping you come out of your defensive shell. His personality wasn’t quite overbearing but his cheery and optimistic outlook 100% of the time was such a stark contrast to your negative and dreary mindset that it could leave you blinded. In a good way! You kind of liked it. Emotions were stirring that were different than the usual “bluh, it’s another day of suffering” and you felt so… alive? That’s the only way you could describe it, but it means so much more than the proverbial domineering aliveness that everyone feels. You actually feel like you’re there, like you’re rooted, because you have something to do and someone to do it with. And you don’t mean activities with your old friends where you stare off into space and pretend to be there while they have the time of their lives and ignore you. Mettaton actually pays attention to you and interacts with you. As guilty as it makes you feel, you love the attention.

But that’s just it. You’re afraid to lose it now, and your deadline for happiness is in sight. Tomorrow you’ll be heading back home with Mettaton, but what happens next? Will it just be “well, see ya!” or will he actually try to keep in touch with you? And you don’t mean the lame awkward greetings on skype or kik, or emailing each other every once in a while; you wanted a friend in him that you used to have in high school, back before you became the person you are today. But would that even be possible for you? He’s a celebrity—he’s famous and by extent very busy. You’ve said it yourself. Why would he bother to make time for you? He was only paying attention to you because he was on a trip, that’s the only explanation… But you don’t want to believe it. There were so many emotions stirring inside of your once again, and one of them was hope. You wanted to hope that Mettaton wouldn’t drop you on your ass like a hot potato. And you know what?

You sat up in your bed and yanked your charger out of your back. Know what?! You were going to make those hopes reality!

Or at least try. You had the determination to at least try.

It’s about that time again. You’d gotten in the habit of timing when Mettaton knocked on your door, though he got pouty the third time, so you let him have his way. But this time you didn’t hear the usual and peppy “Knock Knock!” Instead there was silence. You waited for another moment, he wasn’t perfect despite how great he seemed. Though he held you under oath not to tell, you’d seen him almost trip in heels once. There was no one at the door.

Just as you were getting up to go investigate, you noticed something small and pink slip underneath the door. You heard rough footsteps receding slowly down the hallway, and just as you opened your door you saw a bodyguard walking back to their post. Interesting…
You walk back into your room and shut the door, regretfully. That damned paperweight was still lodged in the ceiling, but every time you shut your door too roughly plaster would snow from the ceiling, worrying you considerably. It was just itching to fall, you knew it.

Ahem, the letter. You opened the envelope to find an even pinker paper folded up neatly inside. Written in fancy cursive, almost calligraphy, was a short and sweet note.

‘Meet me in the lobby at six.

XOXO ~ Mettaton’

Fancy stationery for a note like that? You couldn’t say you were too surprised. Obviously Mettaton was up to something, and it kind of worried you. Then on the other hand, this also means you have a lot of time to kill. Ah yes, so much blissful time to yourself. Too much time, in fact; it was only a little past nine-thirty. You start to panic a little—what are you supposed to do for that long? Well, you asked yourself, what do I usually do? Back home there wasn’t much to do, so you sat in front of the TV and watched old cartoons or whatever sitcom or reality TV show was on at the moment. You could also surf the internet. That works. And on extremely bored days, you spent your time watching the paint dry in your room and wasting away on your bed, doing nothing because you can’t find anything else more appealing.

None of that sounded fun but it’s not like you had time to be picky. Wait, you did have time—but that’s not the point!

You sat down on your bed and fished out your laptop from your suitcase. You quickly booted it up and connected to the hotel’s wifi—decent, but not the best—and decided to open up your usual tabs. You weren’t a social butterfly on the internet nowadays, but you could at least watch a YouTube video or something to bide time.

Okay, this is boring, you decide. You closed your laptop and roll over on your bed to reach the bedside table. You grab the remote and then roll back over to flip on the TV. Ah, yes, television. So very interesting. Very. Very. Interesting. Look at the commercial. Look at how… interesting… it is…

Nope. It’s not working. You shut the TV back off and get up with a sigh. Why were you having so much trouble? Barely two weeks ago, it would have been easy to drift off into a day dream and stare at nothing for an hour, now you couldn’t even sit still enough to watch TV. Hell, what were you going to do when you got back home? Go outside? Leave the house? As if! Unless it was with Mettaton…

You looked at your charger; a tempting idea was dancing on your mind. You could set an alarm for a few hours, then plug in for a bit. It would be an opportune way to waste time, though not the most fun. You couldn’t dream, even if you wanted to, and you hated the sensation of “falling asleep.” But you weren’t about to sit on your bed and collect dust for several hours, so you gave in. Not giving yourself a chance to pussyfoot out, you roll over to your charger and plug in the cord. There was only a fleeting sense of vertigo as you fell into a sleep. It was nothing. You’d close your eyes and then open them again to the sound of your phone’s alarm clock.

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For the first time in years, you had a dream.

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The several weeks you spent at boarding school were a numb blur that you could hardly separate into distinct parts. You got to experience an actual classroom setting for once, but you quickly learned that you hated it and all that it entailed. Students were so rude and pretentious, no matter what their background, and the teachers hardly seemed to care about anything at all. Maybe this was just your school, but everyone here would rather be doing something else or be somewhere else (yourself included). This is why you were almost ecstatic when the headmistress informed you that you would be leaving the school. There was a lot of paperwork and official documents to fill out so that you could seamlessly transfer out of the private school and back into public homeschooling, but you honestly couldn’t care less. You had gotten past the point of being mad at your mother to missing her undoubtedly. She was back and you could finally see her again, that was all that mattered.

Waiting in front of the school for you the following evening was an unfamiliar car. It wasn’t your mother’s familiar beat-down car that showed years of wear and tear, but a fancy black car with a glimmering polish and a generic license plate. Standing next to it was a man wearing an equally fancy black suit and sunglasses. He looked like a stereotypical government bodyguard or something, but he still put you on edge. You were hoping to see your mother.

“Um… hello.” You greeted him. He gave you a curt nod and opened the passenger door for you.

“I’m sorry but, where’s my mother? I thought I was going home because she’s finally back. Shouldn’t she be the one picking me up?” You asked, not bothering to hide your disappointment and suspicions.

“Your mother is on her way here as we speak. Her flight was delayed due to engine problems, but I can assure you she’ll be home no later than tomorrow.” The man assures you, and then gestures towards the door again. You’re still a bit disappointed, but you concede and step into the car. The cold leather cushions in contrast to the Los Angeles heat should have comforted you, along with the roaring AC and soft seats, but you were still nervous and on edge. Yes, about damn time you were going home, but why didn’t they just call you when your mother was back? That would’ve been a lot easier. Damn, do you still have your house key on you? You take a moment to check your suitcase for your key as the man starts up the car and backs out of the parking lot.

It’s a somewhat lengthy drive that you could have dozed off through, but you remain wide awake as you watch the freeway and all the homely California scenery fly by you. You’re just too excited to rest! Finally, you get to relax and goof off on your bed, and even enjoy the view from your apartment. Even if it was somewhat dreary, it was familiar to you. And, soon enough, you’d be hitting it up with your mother. Who knows, maybe this whole government project fiasco has made her rich. Hey, maybe you were wrong, too. Maybe she’s helping further technology, nothing more nothing less, and by the time she gets back you’ll be making plans to live in some big house out in the Los Angeles suburbs. As much as you loved your homey apartment, it would be nice to live in a big house and see the fruits of your mother’s labor finally paying off. You were sure she was beaming with happiness right now.

Your thoughts ran away from you, and before you knew it, the car was pulling up to the bland exterior of your apartment. The man driving got out of the car with you and helped you lug your two suitcases to the door before watching you off. You waved hesitantly back, but you were more eager to get upstairs and into your home.

You were heaving your suitcases down the hall once you got off the elevator, practically running towards your apartment. You couldn’t get your room keys out quicker. But to your surprise the door was already unlocked. In fact, it looked as if it had been… forced open… You felt your heart sink into an abyss once your gears started working and you realized what’s happened.
When you opened the door, you let your bags, along with your jaw, drop. You held the doorframe for a moment to catch yourself; oh god.

On the far wall, you could see cables where the television had once been. Every book that ever bookshelf was lining the floor, and as you stepped inside to further survey the damage, you could see that your room and your mother’s room had also been ransacked. The kitchen had suffered equal damage as well; it was indisputable. Your house had been robbed.

“Oh god, why.” You were fishing out your phone and turning around, looking down to try and punch on 911 as quick as possible, but an unfamiliar voice halted your mind in its tracks. When you looked up, the face of a stranger was staring at you with cold eyes, but that wasn’t the only thing you were looking at. There was something even colder holding your gaze down: the unpitying barrel of a gun.

“Right on time.” The voice behind the gun spoke, but the words barely registered in your ears. Everything was moving in slow motion and you were suddenly hyper aware of everything going on around you. You could feel the small tickle as a bead of sweat ran down your chin, and the soft drop it made as it fell onto the carpet. Then, the sound that brought you out of your trance: the clicking noise as the person in front of you pulled the hammer of the pistol back. This was it. You were about to… no. No.

You lunged for the person’s hand and moved it over their head. The loud and piercing gunshot that left just over your head left your ears ringing, but you didn’t care. You were trying to wrestle the gun away from this stranger—this man—this intruder—since you had caught them off guard.

But they were much stronger than you were. There was only a moment of panic when you felt them begin to overpower you, but your fight or flight instincts were taking over. If you ran now, no doubt they’d shoot you. All you could do was fight, so you took the closest piece of their body to you—the hand holding the gun, and bit down as hard as you could.

“God fucking damnit!” The intruder cursed loudly and you heard the gun clank roughly to the ground. You didn’t care as he slapped and hit you, you just bit harder until you felt skin tear and foreign coppery blood was filling your mouth. You were gripping the jacket of the intruder with one hand and leveling your other hand to land a punch on their hideous and evil face. But the punch never made contact.

You gasped and released the intruder from both grips. There was an unbearable pain in your lower abdomen, but you hadn’t heard a gun go off. You looked down to realize there was blood all over your shirt, and now your hands, and then it dawned on you when you looked back to see your blood glinting on a long and serrated knife. You tried to open your mouth, to scream, to cry, to do anything, but the evil glint of the knife was there to stop you.

“Don’t bother.” With a quick motion, the intruder slashed a cut across your chest and stomach, leaving hot searing pain and even hotter blood gushing down your shirt. The cut hit deep, that you could tell, and so much blood was coming out as you stumbled to keep your balance. You failed in this, however, and your body was starting to feel so weak. The intruder was watching you all the while, looking slightly amused at your pitable attempts to keep upright. Tears were pricking your eyes and a swarm of emotions—anger, pain, hopeless sadness, pleading—were flowing around your mind as you looked into those viciously bloodthirsty yet despairingly unfamiliar eyes. Why were they doing this? What had you ever done to this person, why did you have to die this way?

“This floors empty. Everyone’s gone, this entire set up has been planned out, from your mother’s flight being delayed to the amount of people crossing the street right now. So don’t bother calling for help; I know you can’t anyway. Oh wait, before I you die, let me let you in on a secret.”
You tried to open your mouth to protest as your assailant stepped closer, but only blood and a choked gurgling noises left your mouth. The crouched down next to your face, but your vision was going blurry and their seemed to be growing farther away. Still, you tugged onto a thread of consciousness.

“I’m not a robber.” They whispered into your ear in a playful manner, and you gathered as much blood as you could in your mouth and spit. They got up, laughing a bit, and rubbed the blood from their face. Then, with vicious anger, they kicked you roughly in the side. You a bubbling scream made it past all that blood and curled over to cough up more of the red substance. It hurt, it hurt, oh god it hurt so much make it stop. You felt your vision fading in and out and you were sure you were going to pass out from the amount of pain, but you felt something tugging you back into consciousness. Lifting you by your hair, the intruder forced you to make eye contact and keep awake as they kept talking.

“Nop. I’m not a crook, I’m not a thief and I’m not a criminal. I’m the guy people call when they need someone dead. Or to disappear. That’s right, I’m the guy the people at top come to if they want a professional hit done. And you? They really wanted you dead. They really want you to disappear. And my rates ain’t a walk in the park kiddo, so they want it done right. Usually I’m in charge of cleaning up my own messes, right down to staging it up, but this time? They didn’t want any chance of things backfiring. All your peeping Pam’s and nosy Nancy’s who might be paying more attention than they should, they’re all out of the apartment building. Maybe they had a family emergency or maybe they went shopping. Who knows? Hell, even I don’t know. What I do know is this: I was sent to kill you and make it look like happenstance. That makes it easier for me; I get to be a little sloppy. Leave some blood lying around, not even gonna try to hide it. Not every day I get a pick as interesting as you. A robbery gone wrong, you’re in the wrong place at the wrong time and I have to kill you because you saw my face. Better yet, they’re never going to catch the guy who did it. This isn’t some NCIS or Law and Order bull where the detectives throw their lives away try’na find out whodunit. You’re going to die and that’s the end of it. You might make the six o’clock news, but that’s all you’ll ever be: a sob story and a kid who could’a lived. And it’s a crying shame, trust me when I say this kid. You had your whole life ahead of you. Whoever you pissed off up top has a lot of connections and a lot of money. In fact I might even venture to say this is related to the government. Sheesh buckaroo, who’d you piss off up there? But, eh, that’s ‘sides the point. I don’t get paid to speculate. I get paid to kill.”

He laid your head down, but by this time you were floating and barely listening to a word he said. Everything felt numb and nonexistent, but the only remaining sensation you had was an incredible sense of serenity. And you should be trying to fight it. You couldn’t give up yet. You weren’t supposed to die yet! You wanted to struggle and scream and let this fear turn into fuel to power your will to live. But everything was so far away, even your own body seemed like another person’s problem. So you were going to bleed to death? Oh well. At least the pain will be over soon, no sense in fighting—

You were brought back down to earth when you felt something pierce your throat. At first it hurt only slightly, like you had strep throat or a really bad cold, but then the pain spread and blood was filling up your air ways. Your body’s first instinct was to cough and cough some more, but this only made it so much worse. You were covered in a warm sticky liquid now, and offhandedly your brain was recalling that you were bleeding to death, but none of that mattered now. It felt like you had been on the ground for hours, maybe even days, but you didn’t care. You were slipping, falling, laying down in the hands of death, but you couldn’t find the energy or the determination to fight it. You felt oddly calm—any anger or resentment had left you now. You felt oddly at peace.

Then everything went black.
The blaring of your phone alarm awoke you with a start. You were heaving short breathes of unnecessary air into your body, as if trying to compensate for choking, and tears were streaming down your face. You felt a ghosting pain in your abdomen and throat, but it quickly went numb, and then faded together. You had a dream. You dreamt of your death. It felt so familiar and fresh and real and you dreamt it. But why? Your dreams had stopped long ago, and you could tell now that your catnap failed to charge you at all. Yes, if it’s not one problem, it’s another, and your life had been riddled with failures and faulty programs, but no, dammit, this was not supposed to happen.

You sat up in your bed, cursing, and began to feel up your body. You didn’t have blood to bleed, but your subconscious was still afraid of the impossible. You were fine, and you were alive in a sense. You’d dealt with nightmares before, and despite the difference in time, you could deal with them again. And you’d have to be sure to talk to your mother as soon as you got home about this. She wasn’t going to be too happy, you bet: just another thing for her to fix. Remembering the graphic details of the dream—the flashback—you shuddered. It would be unpleasant for her but she’d have to deal with it.

Standing up, you were deciding what to do now. The last thing you wanted was to go out into the world, especially after that, but you didn’t really have a choice.

You have time to shower and get dressed. Yeah, big shocker, you still had to do mundane things like bathe semi-regularly. You were made of mostly synthetic and faux-organic materials, but you weren’t immune to dirt. You had to shower and keep your special skin moisturized to a degree certain degree. Plus you had the chance to wallow in self-pity for a few minutes, which would be pleasurable. So you did just that.

Okay maybe you sang in the shower, just to cheer yourself up. Maybe you sang Mettaton’s song. Maybe you had it memorized. Maybe, just maybe, all of these things were true.

Once you’re out of the shower, you stumble around your room with a towel wrapped around your body, trying to find something decent. You spot designer bags sitting next to your suitcase and you remember one of Mettaton’s terrible habits: taking you shopping for things you don’t need. He was the kind of guy to pick up anything that sparkled—be it a souvenir or a piece of clothing—and buy it, but lately he’d been buying things for you. At first you tried to reject him, because let’s face it you could hardly stand the thought of anyone spending more than five dollars on you, but he insisted. And when Mettaton insists on something, he was hard to deny. Funny, instead of being put off by it you found it oddly comforting, like dealing with an old but close friend; a twinge of déjà vu would hit you but you know you’ve never been in this situation before.

You move past your thoughts and pick up a black shopping bag. Inside is one of the first outfits Mettaton ever bought you, and you had to admit it was quite stylish. You didn’t often dress up, but considering how Mettaton appeared to be going mysteriously all out, you figured: why not? Plus you needed an excuse to wear something like this, and now was the perfect time. You spare a glance at the clock after putting on your outfit; it’s fifteen minutes until six. You throw on your shoes and head downstairs to the lobby, a bodyguard immediately in tow. Of course the lobby was still empty, you were a few minutes early, so you decided to take a seat on one of the comfortable leather chairs—of course they had to be leather. Like the leather seats of that car. You were briefly reminded of your dream—of your flashback—but suppressed the memory as soon as it arose.

You tap your fingers anxiously. You could put that godforsaken dream behind you, you knew you could. You won’t let something like that ruin your mood entirely. You couldn’t forget your goal for today: cementing Mettaton down as permanent friend. A bad dream was not going to stop you from
Right at six o’clock on the dot, the hotel doors swing open and Mettaton struts inside. He’s wearing a dark black leather trench coat and light pink sunglasses that you recognize as name brand. He looked over the rim of his sunglasses and scanned the lobby until his eyes met yours, then his face lit up almost literally.

“Darling, you’re here early!” He exclaimed as he ran over. He held his hand out for you and you took it without hesitation, already accustomed to this ritual. Not wasting any time, he was already leading you to the door with his guards in tow.

“I hope you weren’t waiting long, I just had a few things to clear up today. But! I can promise you that we’re going to have a wonderful time darling.”

Mettaton managed to snag a limousine, though you weren’t too surprised. The two of you got settled into the limo’s padded felt-like seats. Thank god they weren’t leather.

It only took a little bit of driving for you to realize where Mettaton was taking you. It stood out like a sore thumb and it was the only popular site he hadn’t taken you to. Lit up in a ring of various colors and casting a similar glow all around it was the London Eye. As you stepped out onto the mildly crowded night sidewalk you couldn’t help but to crane your neck up to look at it. It was so tall…

“This way,” Mettaton said, taking your hand and leading you away. “We’re not waiting in any boring lines.” He held up two tickets with the words Private Capsule printed on them. Your eyes widened a bit, and your immediate thought was how much they must’ve cost.

“Mettaton, how much did those–” But you cut you off by placing a finger to your lips.

“Ah-ah-ah! You’re not allowed to worry about things like costs tonight!” He walked over to an attendee, who greeted him with a chipper attitude and got the capsule ready.

“And besides, it didn’t cost much more than a grand.”

“One thousand–”

He tugged you over to the entrance of the ride, cutting off your about to be rant. You’d talk to him about it later, no way were you forgetting.

Okay maybe you might forget. When you stepped into the capsule, which was larger than you were expecting of a ferris wheel, but that wasn’t what surprised you. Inside was a small circular table covered by mini table cloth with what appeared to be a bottle of wine sitting in a bucket. There were assorted finger foods also adorning the table, and you recognized them as canapes. You thought back to your first meal here in London and a rush of nostalgia overcame you suddenly. Tomorrow, it would over… no! You wouldn’t let it be over!

“Oh my gosh,” You stepped inside the glass room and took a look around, trying to force down a persistent and annoying smile as you looked back at Mettaton. He gave you a knowing smile and a wink as he stepped in after you. “Mettaton this is… amazing.” You took a look around at the glass windows, forgetting for a moment where you were as you began to slowly ascend. You press your face and hands against the glass, not caring about Mettaton probably laughing at you and having a chuckle but you were too caught up watching the scenery grow farther and farther away.

“Darling,” You felt a hand on your shoulder, and you snapped back to see Mettaton looking down at you with a bemused expression. “The view is absolutely stunning, but you can enjoy it even better with a full mouth. Plus, you know. The food will get cold.”
You unglue your eyes from the windows, muttering an embarrassed agreement noise, and walk over to the little table opposite to the entrance. There were assorted canapes, all of which looked tasty but expensive as hell, and there was a bottle of… no, not wine, but sparkling cider. Next to it was little empty wine glasses.

‘Do you want a glass?’ This is what you want to say—you know, be casual and outgoing at the same time, then seamlessly slipping in what’s on your mind like some charismatic pundit. It was the least you could do, offer him a drink; he did plan all of this out of pocket and dear god did he say renting this capsule cost a grand? Maybe this was a bad idea after all, why did you feel the need to confirm your friendship anyway? Who in their right mind spends thousands of dollars on someone if they don’t plan on being their friend in the slightest? It was obvious he liked you, or at the very least didn’t find you unbearably gloomy. But… this is all a trip. Spending a grand on someone like you is probably less than what he’d spend on shoes during a normal shopping outing. What if he’s only nice to you because… because he’s being paid to do this sort of thing! The media would surely be happy if they had more dirt to dig up on him, like being mean to fans. So what if he’s only being nice to you in order to boost his public rep? Like a publicity stunt, showing how nice he is by taking some lucky gushing fan out to London. You hated thinking like this. This was what you hated the most; your anxiety and weird ticks making you doubts yourself constantly. This time you weren’t going to wait around and hope things turn out alright without your interference, you were going to make sure this time.

You cleared your throat—not to actually rid anything from your esophagus but to get his attention—and turned with a glass in hand.

“Do you—”

“So I—”

The two of you stopped, realizing the other was talking, waiting for them to continue.

“You first—”

“Go ahead, I—”

Again. Same thing happened again, wow. You laughed awkwardly and rubbed the back of your head. You made a vague gesture, trying to cue him to speak first. He waves his hand and speaks up.

“No, no, doll face—you first, I insist.” He said.

“Nah, it’s stupid forget about it… you go ahead.” God fucking dammit you were wussying out.

“Now don’t say that!” He makes a disapproving noise with his mouth and urges you on. “I doubt it’s stupid. What were you going to say?”

Oh god, no backing out now. Your hands would be shaking right now if they could, and for once you were grateful to your body for regulating even the minutest of things—like your mind’s tendency to panic. You were grateful for your slight clarity in body, but you needed it in mind now, where it would matter most. No time to speak like the present.

“O… okay so. Um. This is probably going to sound weird. But I don’t really have many friends.” The floor was so interesting, “Well I used to, but now I don’t. W-Well! I sort of still have friends, but they’re not really my friend friends. I… don’t even think they like me. Wait, I’m getting off track. What I mean to say is…” Picking at your nails takes top priority right now. “I don’t get out much. And when I do I don’t really talk to people. But you, you’re… different. I’ve hardly known you two
weeks and I already feel like I can act myself around you. And I don’t want to lose that feeling. I don’t want to lose contact with you when this trip is over. I just… I don’t want to stop talking to you after this is all over! I don’t want to go back to the days where the only interesting thing in my life was choosing a bowl of cereal in the morning. I know this is a selfish thing to ask of me, but I want to ask anyway so I can at least know I tried. S-So please. D-Don’t just forget about me as soon as this trip is over.”

Damn this body. You could probably punch a hole in the earth and you were built with metal and wiring, but you could still cry despite it all. You were holding back tears that were stubbornly responding to your influx of emotions. You can’t bring yourself to look him in the eyes. What are you even asking of him? He’s a celebrity, what right did you have to ask for his company? He’s busy… too busy for someone like you.

Damn it all, if you could just rip open the capsule doors and jump now, you would. You were opening your mouth to apologize; now you’d made this whole situation so awkward, but you were cut off by crushing hug. Oh.

“You really are an idiot, you know that darling?” Without letting go he pulled away to meet your eyes. “I’d have to be the worst possible being on earth to abandon you after all of this. I knew from the moment this trip began that I was going to pester you with presence ‘till the end of time, whether you liked it or not. I know this probably won’t mean as much, but you’ve become a very important friend to me too. I’ll be here for you no matter what, because I know exactly what you mean. I’d have to be the dumbest guy alive to let a friend like you slip away. You hear me? The dumbest. And don’t you dare ever worry about me abandoning you; I promise I’ll never do that to you. And I don’t break my promises. Not anymore.”

You couldn’t hold it back any more. A tiny droplet of relief turned into a downpour and cracked your barrier of emotions—you were crying like a mess now. You hugged him back with all you had, so grateful for everything. So grateful you worked up the nerve to tell him. You were just… happy!

“Thank you so much.” You muttered so softly you were sure he couldn’t hear you. You’re looking over his shoulder now and you can see; you’re at the top. And it’s a sight to behold. The lights of London look like little stars against a field of blank black space from a height this grand. It’s gorgeous, breathtaking even, were there a breath to steal. You always thought robots were supposed to be cold and emotionless, like the front you tried to put on. But Mettaton was surprisingly warm, and without saying he was filled with emotion. Hugging him was nice… You wanted to live in this moment forever, hugging Mettaton. Platonically, of course. As friends.

“Oh, right.” You broke away from the hug, still feeling a bit awkward and abashed. “You were going to say something, weren’t you? Sorry I took so long.”

“No, no. It’s okay darling. I’m actually kind of glad, but let me remind you.” He took your hand, and held your eyes with an intense gaze. “I mean what I say; I won’t ever abandon you, no matter what.”

He sighed, though you were sure it was just for effect, and for once he looked legitimately troubled.

“I don’t really know how to say this.”

“Then don’t think about. Just… say it. You’ve already heard me bare my heart to you, you can’t sound much worse.” You try to reassure him a bit, but he still looks uneasy. Finally, he meets your eyes.

“You’re not really human, are you?”
You let go of his hand.

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You remember months spent living with your mother in fear. Fear of the known and fear of the unknown. Your mother was so stressed; her hair was greying and she was hardly getting any sleep; it really showed. Your new home was a cabin in the woods, secluded from the world and completely off the grid. “Just until I know it’s safe for us.” Until she knew it was safe for you two to show your faces.

Back then, before the two of you were forced into hiding, you were forcing yourself into happiness and trying to find joy in your newfound life despite the pain and emptiness that you were constantly feeling. Those days where you’d run errands with your mom, you had treasured them because you were still living in the limelight where you’d tasted days and normalcy was a delicacy. You loathed to be alone back then, so you tailed your mother no matter where she went. This included her out-of-state errands and a trip to a hot and dusty motel in Las Vegas. She needed to speak with a close associate, she said, and you couldn’t come with her. The very last thing you wanted to do was stay inside the room for several hours in 100-degree weather, even if this new body of yours handled extreme temperatures well. You didn’t want to be alone.

You ventured out on your own, hoping to experience the city that many have both fallen in love with and loathed with all their heart. Anything to keep yourself busy.

You didn’t have very much money so that had limited you. But there was something you could afford—an observation deck known as the Stratosphere tower. It stood tall and grand and you knew you had to see the city from the very top. Of course it was no cheap affair, about $20 to get in and the line wasn’t very pretty either: sweaty bodies pressed against each other trying to get into the cool air conditioned building. Most people were with groups or in a couple, very few alone. This was the perfect opportunity to people watch, poke fun in your own way and decide who’s with who and why they’re here, or even what their personalities are like. Ha. This actually wasn’t very fun.

You were pushing your way through that big bustling crowd when you felt someone roughly bump against you.

“Pardon me—” You said, but they didn’t even bother to look at you as they moved on.

“Just make way, damn.” He… said…

No.

No it couldn’t be.

You recognized that voice.

You must have made an audible gasp, because he turned around to look at you—and dear gods and whatever fates hated your existence it was true. It was the man who killed you.

You saw him and he saw you.

You saw him and you ran from the crowd, hard and as fast as you could. You didn’t brave a chance to see if he was following you, you just had to get back to the motel. Maybe your mother would be there, and yes she’d be mad that you’d left without permission but you didn’t care. You were so scared, filled with so much uncontrollable fear. Why this? Why here? Why now?

So now your new home was a cabin in the woods. A hit had been placed on both of your heads now,
apparently. It’s a strange feeling, being shot in the chest and not dying. Your mother managed to escape their initial attack unscathed, however. Her body was unharmed, yes, but her mind was showing dire results. She was making many frantic calls from throw-away phones, each time asking the same thing: “Has it been lifted?” “Are they still looking for us?” “Do you have any updates?” And each time she hung up her phone she looked as if she’d aged another year. You knew she was much more scared than she let on, but she was always putting up a happy exterior and telling you that everything was going, fine that no matter what they wouldn’t be able to get you.

She was lying, you knew that for certain

You were running with low power constantly. Your battery life was pretty decent, but the solar panels that gathered and stored electricity could only go so far. So in a way, sleep was hard for you too. Your mother often arose before you, but one morning she didn’t get out of her bed at all. You had knocked on her door, asking if she was alright, if she wanted something eat. She said that she was tired and that she just wanted to go to sleep.

That’s when you’d decided you’d had enough. This idea had been brooding on your mind for a while now, but you never went to your mother with it. You knew she’d reject it immediately. But you couldn’t take much more of this, it had already been three weeks. For all you knew, you’d be living life off the grid for the rest of your lives, or worse, they’d find you.

You put on some decent clothes and packed a small bag, then waited until you could hear the sound of your mother snoring. Now was as perfect a chance as ever, and you wouldn’t get another one. You stuffed your charger into your bag, and looked at your small throw away phone. You’d never had a reason to use it before, but your mother insisted you kept one just in case. You turned it off and threw it into the bag too.

The nearest town was ten miles away in a straight line, but the road wound around many mountains and rivers, so in actuality it was more like 15 at the least. A normal human would take hours to walk there, but you weren’t normal. You hardly even considered yourself human.

Your clothing was light and the weather was fair, so breaking out into an easy sprint was nothing. It barely put a strain on you—no, there was no strain. You could go faster, you could push your legs harder than any human could. You could see just what this body was capable of.

You reached the town within the hour. It was sparsely populated, but not a ghost town. Just how hard were they searching for you? You knew what they would be looking for, however.

You went into the nearest convenience store and picked up a bag of chips and some candy. With a small smile, trying to look casual, you approached the clerk.

“Credit or debit?” She asked.

“Credit.” You swiped your card and signed your name.

Now you’d have to play the waiting game, but you couldn’t stay in this town. Your mother was going to notice you were missing soon enough, and this would be the first place she checked. You could move around, hell, maybe even run to the nearest city. You decided that you liked running like this, with no humanly restraints and without getting tired.

You throw the food away in the trash as soon as you step outside. A quick walk around and you convince someone to let you borrow their phone; the closest town was about 30 miles away. You were confident you could run there within an hour.
You could, and you did. Forest quickly changed to country and farms and fields of crops were flying by you. You felt unstoppable. By the time you reached the town, you realized that running did have its toll. Your battery felt especially weak, you’d have to find somewhere to lodge. A cheap motel wouldn’t be hard to find, and since you were trying to leave a paper trail you didn’t hesitate to put it all on your credit card.

It worked. You woke up the next morning feeling the cold steel of a knife against your neck.

“Listen here,” Her voice was smooth and calming. Like a peaceful, flowing river, but there was a sense of danger lying under the waters. “I know exactly who you are. And I know what you are—I know you aren’t human and I know what you’re trying to do. And I bet you think what you’re doing is brave, huh? Your mother was too stupid to realize that there are more important things in this world than trying to be hero. She hasn’t realized that what she’s doing isn’t helping anyone, it’s only hurting, and now she’s gone and created you. She hasn’t learned her lesson. You know what you are? You’re an abomination. She’s created a monster in sheep’s clothing. She can go around masquerading you as her child, but we know that—”

Your arm was an almost invisible blur as you took the knife from her hand, that’s how fast you moved. You could hear her curse in surprise, but you weren’t paying attention. Yeah you grabbed the knife by its steel, but it would take more than a pesky blade to cut your skin. There was no blood to bleed and pain was merely a warning for you. You stood to your feet now and she backed away from you, a look of pure malice in her eyes.

“You tell your ‘higher-ups’ to leave me and my mother alone. I’ve already died once, what more do you want from me? Do you want to kill me again? What will it take for you to stop following us?” You looked down to the knife in your hand and held it up. You had to send them a warning if they were going to leave the two of you alone. That was the only way. Something in the back of your mind was telling you that this was a bad idea—that you weren’t thinking coherently. Oddly enough, however, your mind felt clear. You just wanted to scare her at first, and tell her to leave the two of you be. But you knew... “I know you and whoever it is that wants us dead won’t leave us alone until you have it your way. Should I send them a message?” No, this didn’t feel right. “Maybe I should return the favor!” You held the knife closer, and within the steel, like a mirror, you could see your own crazed expression. You didn’t like it. This felt so wrong but didn’t you deserve this? They already killed you once without hesitation, couldn’t you have some closure with this final act?

“Listen!” She held up her hands, desperation in her eyes as they flickered back and forth between your gun and your eyes. “No one has to get hurt here. No one has to—”

“Liar! You’re a liar! I’ve already been hurt! I’ve already died!”

“Please just listen to me! Even if you kill me, ten other people just like me will come after you. They can make your life a living hell. But if you listen to me, I promise you can get out of this and go back to a normal life. They just want to speak to your mother, nothing more. After that, if negotiations go well, everything will be fine. You hear me? Fine. So give me the knife.”

Deep down inside of you, you knew you wouldn’t have ever stabbed her. And if you did, you’d have regretted it for the rest of your life. You couldn’t pull yourself to do it. You lowered your hand, feeling ashamed of yourself, and handed over the knife.

As soon as the knife was in her you felt something slice your clothing. You looked down to your chest to see a long line of ripped flesh going down the fabric, but no blood and no injury. Of fucking course.
You snatched the knife away and crushed in your hands. It gave way as easily as breaking a potato chip, and you could even bend it even further. Looking at you in horror, the woman backed away against the opposite wall.

“You… you monster. You’re not really human.” She gulped and regained her composure, eying you down. “She can create you look as normal as she can, but underneath all of that you’re an abomi —”

“Shut up!” You cut her off. You were done, no, beyond done with this. “You keep your damn word. Tell whoever the hell they are to talk to my mother. I don’t care what the hell it takes just leave us alone! Go away! Leave!”

Backing away from you like you were the spawn of Satan, she ran out of the motel room. You sat down on the bed but then realized something. Whoever owned this motel and whoever else was here must have noticed all of your screaming; you weren’t exactly keeping your volume in check. You couldn’t stay around any longer, and surely they’d be following you home now that they had a check on your location.

Your mother was hysterical when you finally got home. She was grabbing you by your shoulders and yelling at you with near madness in her voice.

“Do you know how worried I was?” She screamed, tears rolling down her face. “I thought the worse! I thought they took you, and you wouldn’t answer your phone! I don’t know what I would’ve done if you were… Are those from a knife? Dear god, did they hurt you? Did they follow you? We need to leave, we need to hide, we need to…”

You took her hands off your shoulders and hugged her tightly.

“It’s okay mom. It’s going to be okay now. Everything is going to be alright now.” You whispered to her, though you felt like you were trying to comfort yourself with these words.

Your mother was on the phone more often now. But now she sounded less despondent and more active. Apparently your assassin hadn’t been lying to you; a representative did want to speak with you. The two of you thought it was a trap at first, you were almost certain it was until they agreed to meet at your own terms. Your mother set up a throw-away location in the middle of nowhere, Nevada, where she could easily monitor everything within a several mile radius over the flat landscape. The representative informed your mother that she would no longer be known as a public enemy if she complied with their terms: her research had to be put to an end, your identity as a cyborg had to be kept a secret, and all materials relating directly to the project’s research had to be destroyed at once. Your mother wanted some terms of her own, however.

Your new home was large house in suburbia California. But this is not a happy ending, and it never will be.

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Everything was spinning, literally and figuratively. You wanted to play it off jokingly, act like Mettaton wasn’t making any sense. But the concern and seriousness in his eyes let you know that it wouldn’t be that easy. Was history really about to repeat itself? You backed away slowly, shaking your head both as an answer to his question and as denial of this situation taking place. You didn’t
want to go back to running and hiding. You could be fixed from a bullet wound, but your mother’s injuries will remain forever permanent.

Mettaton sees the emotions running through your face and he tries to take your hand—but you flinch away from him.

“How did you know?” You asked.

You could see the hurt flash across his face as you moved away, but he answered anyway.

“I don’t know if you knew this but… when I was first built I was programmed to hunt and fight humans. Detecting things like heart rates and temperatures were things my creator couldn’t really remove when I chose a life of stardom. When I met you I noticed you weren’t like other humans. You don’t have a pulse—and that worried me because I knew humans shouldn’t be able to live without a pulse, and your body temperature is different than other humans. You were just so interesting and different! I had to find out more about you, so I decided to get closer to you and find things out on my own. Listen, I know that you’re—”

“That’s why you’ve been so nice to me?” It all made sense now. “You just wanted to find out my big secret?” It all made so much painful sense. “Was this trip even a real contest? Was it… was it just a ruse so you could get me alone?” You stepped back towards the doors of the capsule when you saw the genuine pain in his expression. He was an actor, you reminded yourself. All of this… it was just an act?

“I hope you’re happy then! Tell your fanbase all about the cyborg you met in London, hell the media too because you know what? You’ve ruined everything. It was supposed to stay a secret or else… or else… they’d come back for us. If me or my mother ever broke our promise, they’d come back for us and they’d kill us both or they’d make our lives a living hell. They’ll… they’ll…”

You were gripping the bars of the door now, near hysterics. Your hands don’t shake and your breathing isn’t uneven or choppy like it should be, but you’re sure your mind was in a pure state of panic. The capsule was descending slowly, but it felt like you were falling from a cliff at insane speeds. You couldn’t breathe and tell yourself to calm down, and the only way you could overcome this was by getting your mind to calm down. And that couldn’t happen. You had to get home—warn your mother. Everything was moving too fast, where were right now? Parting the mist on your mind, you could feel hands on your shoulders. Sympathetic, warm… no! He was lying to you this entire time!

“You regret the words as soon as they left your mouth. No one was that good of an actor; Mettaton looked to be on the verge of tears. He gasped and took a step back from you, and you were so sure then, surer than any moment in your life: he must hate you so much.

“I… I…” You clutched the bars of the doors, clutched them so hard you could feel the metal bending and warping beneath your palms. You needed to run. You had to run.
You were close to the bottom now, but you would’ve done it even if you had been at the top. It took about two seconds to rip the door from the hinges of the capsule, but those seconds felt like hours and you couldn’t escape fast enough. All around you there were screams and shouts, but they were disappearing quickly along with the lights of the park behind you. They were a blur and your legs were picking up phenomenal speed as you ran and ran and ran and ran. The seams of your clothes seemed to be tearing from all the friction. The cityscape was an almost indecipherable blur, but you could understand it all: you understood that you had to run through it all. Hell, you weren’t even sure if people were acknowledging you at this point. But you didn’t think about that. And you certainly weren’t thinking of your problems. Don’t think about your problems. Don’t think about how terrible of a person you are. Just run. You were pumping your legs as fast and as hard as your limits would allow. You’d never pushed yourself this hard, not even back then, and you could feel artificial sweat gathering and trying to cool your body down. Don’t think. Please don’t think. You’re a coward! A terrible, terrible… don’t think. Just run, please, just run.

Your face was wet, but no longer from sweat. Tears were streaming down your face uncontrollably.

Chapter End Notes

Aren’t cliffhangers fun? Yeah I know.
Good Old Fashioned Body Pillows

Chapter Notes

Melodrama. It’s worse before it’s better. #GrowingUpMetal (or u know synthetic/bioengineered parts, but same thing.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They were given a project to display their skills. The outcome of their project would determine the future of their research. This was where she had to shine, where your mother had to take this entire research facility and turn it on its head. But how to do it? And could she pull it off alone? Convincing her partner had been a total waste; his mind was made up already, wasn't it? But there had to be something left she could do, even if it was to halt this project until she had found a better way to do away with it.

Your mother and her partner had been working separately the entire time, and this was causing somewhat of a fuss within the team. How were you supposed to get anything done when the two of you refused to so much as even look in the same direction? The head researcher and organizer, thinking himself to be some sort of charismatic problem solver, gave the two of you four days to “settle your differences before actions would be taken”.

But she wasn’t worried about that. In fact, this is exactly what she wanted: if she could turn this research program into a bust by turning the two most important scientists into the two most useless then perhaps this project would destroy itself. Then again, that could also turn out to be a bad idea.

But what could she do about him? So long as he was determined to use his skills and aide the government, she could be replaced. Someone with her skill and finesse could easily replace her, or her schematics and blueprints could be copied and mastered. Yes, her creations were remarkably sturdy and moved with the nimble grace and precision of humans while remaining compact, but what else could they do, the government was concerned. Could they recognize and target leaders of terrorists groups and dispatch them? No? Then what she was doing was just a simple hobby. He could create robots that thought and learned and seemed sentient rather than a calculating and processing AI. This was interesting in and of itself, but to world leaders who only cared about protection and war, this was remarkable. Robotic warfare had been something tested and scrapped because robots were smart, yes, but they weren't as creative and crafty as humans were. That’s why he was a necessity.

So there were hours spent in the lab late at night, thinking about what to do. So far the best idea was to blow the place to smithereens, but that could go wrong in several hundred ways and would have dire consequences, so it was scratched. But on the third day of their probation, he showed up. She was half asleep, working over the metal skeleton of one of her robots, when she jolted upright to look at him.

“You?” It didn’t take long for any trace of sleep to drain from her voice and be replaced by disdain. “What do you want?”

“Good evening to you too.” He said.

“Good evening. Now what do you want?”
“You're really that determined to bring everything down around you?” He asked.

“I could ask you that same thing. But if you've come here to instigate an argument, that's very immature of you.”

He crossed his arms and leaned against the doorway, no doubt holding in a retort. “No, that's not why I've come here. I'm here to tell you that you're right.”

Now she was looking up at him, sarcasm and sleep-deprived mania in her eyes. “Oh really? Music to my ears, say it again for me.”

“Can't you be serious? Why are you always so—” He stopped himself, gathering his composure. When he looked once again at your mother there was practiced determination in his eyes. “You were right about at least one thing. There were many inconsistencies with our history and what the past writes as history. And I always thought it was because the rantings of ancients were just that—rantings. There were many stories like the stories of monsters and humans right? Then there are other stories that maybe changed it around to gods and humans, or demons and humans but what was the difference? What made monsters so different? Not to mention, in my studies of creating the perfect AI I discovered that my tests showed information that contradicted with modern history, but I decided back then to dismiss it. I had accomplished my goal... that was all that mattered. But you’ve got me thinking now; what's missing between my research and today's history? Then it clicked with me: in the ancient's texts, they wrote of a lost land near the edge of the Earth where savages reigned. They banished the monsters there, according to text, and sealed them underneath a mountain known as Mount Ebott. I didn't think much about it, but one day when I was stressing over final exams in my British Literature class—I was still a college student—I realized something. The lost land near the edge of the Earth. That was America. And Mount Ebott was a small mountain out in the middle of nowhere, but nobody's been there for years because it was the location of a nuclear reactor accident. That's what they said, anyway.

“You get what I'm saying? Mount Ebott isn’t the only thing that made no sense, but it's shrouded in so much mystery. Nuclear accident sites are usually safe after about fifty years, right? Why hasn't this place been opened in more than double that time? Before the invention of such devices? So I started digging deeper and deeper. I... may have done something I could get in trouble for later on if I'm found out. I looked into the local databases and found PDF files containing information on systematic disappearances to these files. I'd never heard of these disappearances in history. I lost some sleep reading over these files and I found even more texts, things I’d never seen before in textbooks. Ancient things written in broken old English and bits of French and Latin, but I managed to get the gist of it. It was written that monsters were sealed underground with a magic spell. Of course I'd seen it written before; dozens of times in fact, but it was what I found after it that made me double take. It said that monsters were made of mostly magic, and were therefore much weaker than humans. Huh? I thought they were... all powerful. So I kept reading, and I discovered sections on human and monster souls. I’m still not sold on the whole theory of magic and souls, but it’s starting to make sense. Souls can only be manifested with magic, which is why I... why I came across so much trouble in my research. I couldn’t find the spark that a made a mind sentient, it was eluding me. It’s a long story to explain how I managed to do it, but it’s not the point right now. The point is that explains, at least to some extent, that missing link that many researchers like myself have been searching for. But it wasn’t enough. Monsters apparently disappear when they die because they’re made of magic, whereas humans leave tangible remains. Is this why we don’t have skeletal remains to work with? Proof of their existence aside from vague texts and glyphs from the ancients? All of this information... it has my mind whirling a little bit. And I need to make sense of it or else I might go mad.”

He came over and sat down in a chair adjacent to your mother.
“So it got me thinking. Why are you so interested in monsters? What do you know that I don't? I'm willing to listen to whatever you have to say.”

“Listen here, kid.” Casting one last look to the forlorn chassis, she turned to her partner. “If you’re still not able to piece it together, then you’ve got a lot to learn. Get comfortable, we’re going to be talking for a while.”

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You were very tired.

And no, the fatigue you were feeling wasn’t the mental strain you had to put up with from your onslaught of terrible decisions and choices. Of course it was present like an intangible yet persistent reminder at the back of your brain, but for once, that problem had been placed on backburner for a little while. You had been running for a good fifteen minutes, and for average person this would be more than enough to wind someone of course. You were far from the average person, however, but this didn’t mean you weren’t pushing your body to its extremes. You’d long left the hustle and bustle of the London lights and crowd for a smaller suburban area, and trees were surrounding you everywhere. Thankfully the dark of the night and lack of city lights was hiding your presence, not that you really cared about being seen. Because you didn’t, like, at all.

You fucked up so badly in the span of a few minutes that you’re trying to forget it even happened or that you exist. But of course, your brain is a stubborn little maggot and insists on recapping everything for you, just in case you forgot. You yelled at Mettaton and said mean, unforgiveable things just because of your own insecurities and fear. You felt like the scum of the earth and you just wanted to run from all your problems.

But you had to stop now. You slowed your pace to a jog, then a walk, and finally to a stop in front of a bench. You were surrounded by trees and grass and there was a playground off in the distance, it registered in the back of your mind that you were in park, but you couldn’t afford to concentrate on that. Your battery was nearing the end of its life and in a last ditch effort it had switched into low-energy mode. But you would still run out eventually, an overwhelming sense of fatigue was taking over. You could still make it; you had perhaps an hour of battery life, maybe more if you let low-power do its thing. Perhaps you can eat something to stave off the inevitable.

You willed yourself to get off the bench and stumbled over to a trash can. Your body felt so weird and hard to move in low power mode, but it was saving you precious time. You slowly removed the lid and peered inside, but to your dismay there was only an empty trash bag. They must have emptied the container already.

Hands moving painfully slow, you set the lid back down. What should you do? What could you do? Your mind was running over the worst-case scenario: your body is found by local authorities or whatever and they assume you’re dead. Of course you’re not, but they’ll find out later in autopsy that you weren’t technically alive either. Oh god, and what about your mother? She’d be affected by this the most. What if they tried to target her again? What if she couldn’t hide anymore? More importantly, how would she be affected by all of this? You didn’t want her to hurt anymore. But now she was going to suffer the consequences for your own stupid mistakes.

You turned around with the intention to sit on the bench and wait for your battery to empty, but you stopped halfway.

Standing several yards away and expelling steam like a teapot, Mettaton was staring at you. You
could hear, so soft you had to concentrate in your power state, a light mechanical whirring going through the area. It took you a moment to realize it was coming from Mettaton. Had he been chasing you? Why? Was he angry with you… of course he was, no doubt about it.

It took you another moment to move your legs out of their stubborn stasis. All you were good for was running from problems, but your body vehemently refused to go faster than a jog. But you could still—

“Oh no you don’t!”

You were pulled from your thoughts—literally pulled; a hand was grabbing the back of your shirt and you were being dragged backwards through the air.

It didn’t take you long to figure out that Mettaton’s arms could fucking extend, and in the few short seconds that you were airborne you figured that maybe he was going to pound you into dust, and you thought for a moment that you deserved it. You braced yourself accordingly, but instead of feeling fists you felt something more oddly familiar. Hard metal arms wrapped around you and the feeling of being pressed into an awkward metal chassis. He was… He was hugging you.

“What… what are you,” You tried to pry his arms off of you, but you couldn’t find the energy—physically or mentally. He was warm, extremely warm, and expelling heat and steam like no tomorrow.

“After what I said you’re still going to put up with me? Why are you being so damn nice to me?” You tried once again to dislodge him… but he was either stronger than you thought or you had grown very weak. You hated this more than anything. He should be yelling at you, he should be seething with anger. But he wasn’t saying anything, not a word; he was just hugging you tightly. For some odd reason, his forgiveness hurt more than his scorn.

“I’m… I’m so sorry.” You hugged his arms back and let faux but genuine tears fall down your face for what seemed like the millionth time that night. You wanted to stay in this moment for a while, just a little while, but you couldn’t and the reminder was blaring on the edges of your subconscious. There were words that seemed like thoughts of your own, but they were unfamiliar and foreign: BATTERY AT 5%. PLEASE RECHARGE. ESTIMATED TIME BEFORE SHUTDOWN: ONE HOUR. These words repeated in your mind like a mantra now, and it made you very uneasy.

“Mettaton, I…” You gathered yourself as a wave of lethargy passed over you like a wave. Something important inside of you just shut down; you don’t know how you knew this but you knew it certainly. “I’m… I’m going to run out of battery soon.”

“What?” Mettaton said, shock clear in his voice. He let go of you and shrugged off his coat. “Oh… uh? No, no, don’t panic, this is fine. Right now?”

“I only have an hour left… on minimum power.” You told him, but he was far too busy doing what he did best: being dramatic. He had placed his jacket around your shoulders and situated you on a park bench while he paced, tapping angrily at his phone.

“Pick up your phone, pick up your—hello? What took you so long? I don’t care if you’re driving, there’s an emergency and I need a ride. Where am I? Uh…” He gave a quick cursory glance until he found a sign. “Some park called Brockwell? Thirty minutes? No. Nope, nuh-uh sweety. I don’t care if there’s traffic! Alright, alright, listen to me. I will pay you double—no triple—no quadruple your flat right if you can get here in fifteen. Alright? Alright.” He hung up and puffed angrily before pacing in front of you, throwing you odd but worried glances. You can tell from his expression and his odd pauses every once in a while that he’s trying to think of something to say, but can’t. That’s a
shocker.

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Ten minutes and several broken traffic laws later and you’re being shipped down suburbia England in a dark vehicle. Mettaton treated you like glass and even offered to carry you, but you reminded him that you’re not ‘effing dying. But it takes longer to get back to the hotel; the driver isn’t as lucky; even with Mettaton’s urging no one can control bumper-to-bumper traffic. You had arrived to the hotel in twenty minutes, but by that time your overwhelming sense of lethargy had immensely increased and several of your balancing servos had shut down to preserve power. You lurched forward a bit as you step out of the car, trying to activate the few parts of your body that hadn’t shut down. Despite your growing tiredness and slowly fading balance, you managed to convince Mettaton that you could make it to the elevator without being carried.

Your mind is so much fuzzier, and the little reminder voice that was going off earlier had disappeared. Probably not a good sign, but its last warning was that you had fifteen minutes of battery life remaining. That was more than enough for you to find your charger.

By the time you are at your door—and you can’t remember anything in between—you’re running on autopilot. You could hear Mettaton behind you, asking you questions and trying to get your attention, but you weren’t listening. Like an animal reduced to the primal instincts of eat or die, you were reduced to the urge of find your charger or face the consequences. What consequences? What could possibly happen if you ran completely out of battery? That’s a question you’d be asking if you didn’t already know, so there’s no need to ponder on it. You didn’t have time to ponder over the fact that most of your short-term memory and sensory banks would be wiped, drivers reset, and worst-case scenario some motor skills slightly damaged. You already knew this.

There it was, that pesky cord. Exactly where you left it. You sit down on your bed, facing Mettaton. Aw, doesn’t he look worried? You should probably respond to him in some way, shape or form. Yeah…

You lift the back of your shirt up and open your back panel. It doesn’t even occur to you to be afraid of the sinking feeling until it comes. It reminds you of slowly bleeding to death, but you aren’t given a chance to think too hard on it. Your slipped peacefully into blank and dark, dreamless sleep.

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- **Well you are definitely are not a satellite. Confirmation one. If so, this is the most troubling channel I’ve yet to visit. And you’re not a radio.**
- **I can only assume you are some other wireless device that transmits information and frequencies.**
- **Are you a cell phone? I highly doubt I’m ranting at a GPS right now. Then again, it wouldn’t surprise me if I were having a conversation with some other inane object. Is this a baby monitor? Goo goo? Anyway…**

Everything around you is a haze and you can’t open your eyes. You have the same state of mind a blackout drunk has, minus any hang-over side-effects—well-rested, confused, and unable to recall last night’s events. Ugh, and you can’t move your body either. It’s like sleep paralysis, maybe it’s a side-effect of almost running out of battery? Shit, you almost ran out of battery last night? What the hell were you doing?

- **Don’t know why I think this time’s going to be any different.**
Who the hell is this?

- It’s like listening to a radio, really. A radio with visuals. Wait, idiot, that’s called a movie. Anyway, since this radio feed can only send and not receive, I might as well keep ranting into the static until this feed gives me something to work—

Hey. You.

- …with… Oh I’m going to sound silly, even if it’s to no one but myself, but is someone there? And are you talking to me?

No, of course I’m not talking to you; I meant the other voice in my head. Yes you!

Your fingers begin twitching to life. No, you can clench your fists now.

- Remarkable… this feed appears to be coming from inside someone’s head, from what I can gather at least… interesting. Who are you?

Who are you?

- I asked you first.

I asked you second.

- I don’t have time for these childish shenanigans. Are you some sort of sentient machine with the ability to transmit your thoughts in the form of radio waves?

I guess? I don’t know if my thoughts can do that, but I guess that’s how we’re speaking isn’t it.

- Yes, there’s no other way. I’ve actually known of your existence for a few years, but this is the first time I’ve gotten a response, and the first time in a few months that I’ve connected to this feed.
- There’s much I’d like to discuss, and I’d love to talk to you, but I’m afraid I have to cut our conversation short. Something is calling for my attention.

Wait, what do you mean you’ve known about me for years? And what or who are you? I’ve never heard your voice before, how long have you been talking to me? Hello? Hello??

But there was no response.

Most of the feeling was flooding back into your body, starting with your fingers and toes and moving through your limbs. You were swaddled in a warm blanket. You manage to peel your eyes open—it’s bright outside, but there’s the sky is still dim, probably early morning. Crap, you’re still trying to pick apart your short-term memory and remember what happened last night. As you sit up in your bed you notice there’s a startling amount of pink on your bed. A pink comforter that wasn’t there before… with Mettaton’s face on it, several body pillows with… with Mettaton’s face on them… And, uh… are those pencils? Made to look like Mettaton? Why?

A lot of obvious questions are running through your head right now, for starters why was Mettaton in your room, and where was he? More importantly, your gut started doing flip-flops as soon as you saw all the pink and Mettaton’s face, like you were dreading seeing him. Why would you though, it’s not like you minded him being in your hotel room. Well, under these circumstances it does worry you a bit, not being able to recall last night and all. You should work on that… You remember… you remember going out with Mettaton to some… was it an amusement park? No, it was just a ferris
wheel, the eye of London or something. You remember feeling nervous about something, and then angry, and then… oh! There it is! The crippling weight of guilt! You want to groan and scream at yourself, but the sound of your bathroom door opening stops you.

It was such a comically Mettaton sight that you would’ve laughed under different circumstances; he was coming out of the bathroom and holding up a pink bedazzled hand-held mirror, fixing his already in place hair and grooming his already flawless face. When he saw that you were sitting up, however, his attention snapped away from himself and he rushed over. Ugh, he looked so peppy and chipper, like… like… you know, something usually associated with those adjectives. And, well, he looked like he didn’t hate your guts—which he obviously must, this was an irrefutable truth you were going to have deal with. Ugh, you just wish he wasn’t so… so sickeningly sweet to you. It would hurt a lot less if he’d act even a little angry at you.

“It’s about time you woke up darling! I was getting so worried about you, so I decided to camp out in here while you basically passed out. Also, I had to push the flight back until next evening, because yesterday was just a big ‘bluh’.”

Ugh. That’s how you feel right now. Just… ugh? Ugh.

You take your pillow—you know, the normal looking white one that doesn’t look like Mettaton’s face—and smother your face into it, groaning loudly.

“Doll face,” You can feel and hear him sitting down on the bed next to you, and you just press the pillow into your face harder. “You don’t have to talk or explain yourself if you don’t want to, I know how you must feel—really, I do. So really, just take your time and relax dear, I just wanted to make sure you were alright, I’ll leave you alone.”

You wanted to accept to his invitation, really you did. But you couldn’t give in to being passive all the damn time. You knew that if you left things right where they were, the tension would only continue to grow and develop over time. And no, it won’t age like fine wine, it’ll deteriorate and like termites on a house and you won’t be able to see the damage it’s really caused until it’s all falling down around you. Bye-bye friendship. Ugh, you had to talk to him, even if the anxiety flayed and killed you. Using every ounce of will-power you sat up and faced him.

“No, no. you don’t have to leave, I do want to talk to you.” You grip the pillow in your hands just short of tearing it. You forced yourself to look into concerned eyes looking back at you. How could you ever say those weren’t real?

“I… I, ah. You deserve better than a petty apology and I-I really want to tell you the truth about myself, but I don’t even know where to begin.”

“What not from the beginning?” He offered. You smiled wryly.

“Which beginning? Ha…”

You start from the very beginning. You tell him all about your mother’s obsession with robotics and science—it was fun during middle school and elementary school when you had amazing science projects and won science fairs. But you she was always away from home due to her research and her “hobbies”, you told him, and you learned pretty quickly how to take care of yourself. You had convinced yourself at a young age that you didn’t mind—that your mother had to put food on the table somehow. But you did miss her. One day, her work had to bring her far away from home for a long time. Her work was finallly being recognized and she was invited by a government-funded organization to help work on some top-secret project. You told Mettaton that you were suspicious of it from the very beginning. And you were right to be. Your mother plotted to take down the entire
organization along with her partner, and for the most part she succeeded. She expected some kind of backlash or revenge, but she could only see herself being put in harm’s way and deemed her cause nobler than her own safety. Not to mention, she thought she was invincible. But they weren’t even thinking of targeting her. There was no better way to put than the words they said to her: “You can’t learn any lessons if you’re dead.”

You told him about how you died. It’s not a pretty thing that you like to remember or brood on, but now the words were falling out of your mouth like word vomit. Staring down the barrel of a gun. Feeling time stop as you saw fingers squeezing a trigger. Terrible flooding pain, the feeling of floating, the sharpness of the knife and the glint of its blade. And then… waking up in an unfamiliar place and not being able to feel your body. You described everything in such vivid detail that you were scaring even yourself. But he listened on intensely and didn’t say a word. Finally, when you were done, you broke eye contact—how long had you been staring at him—and stared down at the pillow in your hand. You worked it between your hands as you waited for a response—for him to say anything.

“I… wow. Darling, I don’t even know what to say. First, let me just tell you that I’m sorry any of this ever happened to you—”

“No, no. You don’t need to pity me.” You cut him. “I don’t want you to start feeling sorry for me, it doesn’t make any of the hurtful things I said any less inexcusable. Besides, I get enough pity from my mom and her partner, even if they don’t always put it into words.”

“Oh sweetheart, I know you didn’t mean what you said, and I’m not angry. I promise. You were upset and scared, and sometimes we say things we don’t mean when we’re upset. Hon, I get that. And I know I’ve said this a billion times within the last twenty-four hours, but I know how you feel, sort of. We have a lot more in common than you think. Now it’s time for my humble backstory.”

To your surprise (not really to be completely honest) he leaned back against the bed and pressed the back of his hand to his forehead, completing a dramatic pose. Your immediate response was to laugh at his antics, the wanted response obviously.

“Uh, gosh, now I don’t know where to start. I never rehearsed, never thought I’d have to talk about those times. Let’s see, I guess I should just start from the beginning. I used to live on a farm with all of my family—back then there still a lot of us. We were all related in some way but it was so convoluted and weird everyone was just a cousin. If you didn’t know for certain what they were to you, they were a cousin. Oh yeah, duh, I should probably mention I was a ghost.”

You raised your eyebrows at this, but you thought better of yourself and didn’t interrupt, so he kept talking.

“Yeah, there were a lot of us back then. The Bloooks—that’s our family name—was a pretty big ghost family. But a lot us started moving away from the farm. Some of us wanted to become corporeal while others wanted to see the city life. I mean, no matter where you went in the underground it was crowded, but ghosts could kind of sort of. Phase through things, y’know? Well maybe you don’t know, but you get it, right darling? Anyway after a while there were just a few of us holding up the snail farm. I loved my family dearly, but no one was as important to me as my dearest cousin Napstablook. They’re so quiet and meek, I just had to take care of them and make sure they were all right. I mean, if not me, then who? I even promised them I’d never leave… that I had no desire to become corporeal. In actuality, I just didn’t think I could find a body that suited my tastes, but when the opportunity arose… gosh, I’m such a douche. I didn’t hesitate to break my promise, I snatched the chance up the second I could.

“I met this ditzy little nerd who offered to build me a robot body so I could become the star I always
dreamed I could be. And I did, I was living my dreams, but I was also forgetting about everyone
who helped me get to where I was. I treated Alphys—the friend who built my body—like she was
just a tool. Just someone to repair me when I needed to be repaired, or someone to pick on whenever
I felt like. God, I was becoming so self-deluded. I finally realized how big of an idiot I was when I
got some sense knocked into me. Or… not knocked into me. Kind of hugged into me, really. That
sweetie wouldn’t hurt a fly yet they liberated the entire underground; you might have heard of them?
Frisk? Yeah, their determination to leave was just so strong. I was left wondering; ‘Well damn,
how’d they get this far into the underground by hugging and petting everything?’ Then I realized:
‘Maybe you don’t have to step on people to get to the top.’ Wow. I was about to have, like, midlife
crisis or something. After Alphys repaired me, that is—me and Frisk fought but my arms and legs fell
off and… okay that’s an entirely different story. ANYWAY. I realized I needed to clean up my act if
I wanted to be the star I always dreamed of up on the surface. I had to rethink my whole approach to
being a star; maybe my climb to fame and fortune didn’t have to involve using everyone like a
staircase. Ugh, even though I promised to clean up my act and live by a new set of morals… I still
feel terrible. I can be as nice as I want, it still doesn’t change the fact that I was a big, mean, glittery
rectangle, y’know? Sometimes I end up feeling like crap—my cousin isn’t even angry with me, god I
don’t deserve of the friends I—”

Mettaton stops himself upon realizing he just ranted out two-and-a-half large paragraphs about his
woes in life.

“Oh my god. You just let me talk like that?”

“You seemed pretty passionate about it.” You respond. “I didn’t want to interrupt.”

“I was going on a diva rant, of course I was passionate!” He exclaimed, right before burying his face
in a body pillow of his visage.

“Well, if you want my opinion,” You scoot just a tiny bit closer. “You shouldn’t beat yourself up that
much.”

Mettaton slowly lifted up his head to glare at you.

“You big hypocrite.”

You couldn’t help yourself; what started out as a little half-hearted chuckle released the flood gates—
the knot of stress—and you started full-on laughing. Mettaton eventually joined in with you, but not
because he found anything funny, just because you were howling like a hyena. Eventually the
sidesplitting laughter died down and you settled for just smiling like an idiot. Woo. Life is great; you
have literally nothing to worry about at all. What the hell is stress? You’re laughing right now! Who
has problems? NOT YOU!

Then you notice something.

“Did it just get darker outside?”

“Yeah it did!” Mettaton chirped. “It’s so beautiful, the sunset and sunrise, the different colors of the
sky and the stars coming out—”

“No, I mean… what time is it?”

“About eight o’clock?”

“In the morning?”
“P.M., sweets.”

“Oh…. Oh.” Oh. You slept through an entire day. No wonder Mettaton was so worried, and no wonder he pushed the flight back. “Sorry.”

“Oh hon, don’t be! Now we just have to figure out what to do with the rest of the evening.”

“Yeah, usually you’d just invite me out to dinner but… you know how it is. I don’t really need to eat.”

“I was wondering about that!” Mettaton sat up and scooted closer to you, his pretty and perfect face just inches from yours. Wait, what the hell? His face is totally normal! “What happens to your food when you eat?”

“Oh, uh…” Good question. Damn, you’re not sure if you can explain it properly without the narrator’s help or your mother. “My body kind of turns it into bioenergy, but it’s really inefficient and lengthy. And I usually end up burping a lot, because the process releases a lot gas. Wait, you didn’t need to know that—”

But he was already laughing. You smack him with your pillow, but that doesn’t halt him, the jerk.

“My turn for questions.” You said. Mettaton crossed his arms and waited patiently while you took your time with an inquisitive finger to your chin.

“What was it like getting used to your body?” You asked.

To this, Mettaton scoffed and groaned, leaning back on his hands. “Oh darling, it was an absolute disaster. Don’t get me started! Whoops, too late. In my old rectangular body it was pretty simple and straight forward, but legs and arms? Why do they need to so complicated? At first I had to think about every move I made—and of course that only made it worse—and I was always falling and tripping and knocking things over. And of course I had to learn to walk in heels… let’s not talk about that.”

“What? That sounds hilarious, let’s keep talking about it!” You pressed, a trickster’s grin taking over. “I’m sure some reporter would kill to hear about you tripping in heels. It’d make their day.”

“Oh shush you!” He said, throwing a pillow at you this time. You caught it in midair smugly.

“What about you? You have to have some juicy embarrassing nuggets to share! Don’t keep me in the dark.”

“Uh… not really… wait,” There was one thing… “One time, I got hit by a car.”

“Oh no!” Mettaton clasped his hands to his face, his mouth making an almost perfect “O” in shock. You chuckled a bit at his dramatic expression but continued.

“Yeah, I was walking to a corner store—we were staying in Las Vegas for a little while, so they were everywhere—and a car hit me while it was making a left turn. It knocked me back a little bit, but other than that I wasn’t hurt or anything, I was just fine. But everyone was stopping and getting out of their cars to see if I was alright… one lady told me to get on the ground and pretend I was hurt, for money I guess. I mean, I could’ve just walked away normally and pretended everything was fine… if there wasn’t a huge dent in the front of the car…”

“Oh my god.” Mettaton said, covering his mouth and not sure whether to laugh or gasp. He opted for a mixture of the two. “How did you get out of that?”
“Doing what I do best.” You said with a shrug. “Running away. People’s brains tend to fill in the blanks when something doesn’t make sense. I never heard anything else about it, so it was the end of that. Oh, well, I did ruin a perfectly good shirt”

“Darling, you have to be more careful! If you’re carelessness causes another fashion disaster, I’m not sure I could find it in my heart to forgive you.” He said playfully, nudging your shoulder a bit. “But that does remind of this time when I…”

He trailed off and made a slightly confused face. He held up his hand to catch some white dust falling from above. You were confused too until you realized what it was. Wrinkling his nose distastefully, he brushed it away.

“Is this plaster?” You looked up in time with him to see the nasty menace wedged in the ceiling above: a paperweight. Look at it, all smug and delighted to ruin your day. In those few brief seconds before it began to dislodge—not because of gravity or something, probably due to pure spite—you swore it flipped you off.

“What the—” The weight came crashing down and landed, with a loud CLANK, right on top of Mettaton’s head.

“What the—is this—is this a paperweight??” He rubbed the top of his head and held the offending object up and gave you a quizzical look. You stammered and gestured to the ceiling. He looked up at the ceiling—looked at the huge gaping hole—then gave you an even more confused look. Finally, you just shrugged.

“It’s a long story…”

“Does this story have anything to do with your arm?” He asked.

“Yes, actually. How’d you know?” You asked.

“I noticed during the beginning of our trip that your arm was acting weird. Really weird, like, getting hotter than the rest of your body, and then you stopped using it altogether.”

“You know, you’re a lot more… attentive than I would’ve pegged you for.” You said, and before he could make a defensive comment you continued. “But yeah, I was having some problems with my arm. Certain drivers and servos were malfunctioning and I was having trouble fixing it… Long story short, I couldn’t control the strength in my left arm very well—or my arm in general—and I ended up launching that paperweight into the ceiling. It’s been there for a few days, actually.”

“Oh, darling.” Mettaton laid back down against the bed, his head resting lightly on your legs. “What am I going to do with you?”

“I honestly don’t know.”

Chapter End Notes

Am I satisfied with this chapter? By all means, hell-fucking-no. For its overwhelming brevity, it took a hell of a long time to write due to school and other factors in life, and for that I sincerely apologize. Really, I do. But I had no intention of stringing this portion of the story out for any longer, I’m saving that for another arc, heh.
Let me know if I make any mistakes, I'm only one person! I'll get around to fixing them all one day ㋡( ᴋ ) 닎( ᴋ ) 닎
Eeeyyyuup, here it is, at long last. This took me longer than it should've due to a lot of factors, one of the main being that I lost my flash drive with most of my progress and information. So I had to start this chapter from scratch about half-way through, and I'm going to have to recreate my notes for the progression of this story from scratch so yeah that sounds fun.

But! At long last!

I take you now, to chapter nine.

~ ~ ~

Looking in the mirror, you’d never be able to tell anything was wrong. You didn’t have sunken eyes or tear-stained cheeks. Your complexion looked as unnaturally pristine as usual—you looked to be in perfect health on the outside, despite what your inside is telling you. That didn’t stop you from cleaning up anyway—you like the ritualistic feeling if for nothing else.

Exiting the bathroom to go retrieve a towel and a clean pair of clothes, you feel yourself nearly slip on something smooth and hard against the soft carpet. You realized what it was once it began to vibrate against your foot. Reaching down to pick up your phone and unlock it with habitual practice, your heart (figuratively) stopped.

You had 20 texts and 9 missed phone calls.

Mom: I didn’t receive a call yet. Here I am, waiting ever-so-patiently by my phone. Is everything alright?

Mom: Hello?

Mom: That was your cue to insist everything was fine, then I’d come in with my motherly intuition and tell you that I know something’s wrong. What’s going on?

Mom: Please pick up your phone.

Mom: And see, that was your cue to ask me how I knew. I receive a message on my phone and email every time your battery drops below 10%. Is everything alright? Are you in any danger?

Mom: I don’t know if you’re reading these, but you need to call me. But you won’t know that unless you’re reading them.

Mom: Your battery is at 5%. I cannot get to London on the drop of a hat and neither you nor Mettaton are answering your phones.
The texts got increasingly urgent from then on, then she stopped messaging for a few hours. The most recent messages were from this morning.

**Mom:** Are you angry with me? Are you upset with me?

**Mom:** No, I can guess. You threw a tantrum and expended too much energy, didn’t you? I could go tell you every different way that could’ve gone wrong had Mettaton not been there, but I’m too relieved to be angry right now.

**Mom:** Call me when you wake up.

The last message was from a few minutes ago.

You were preparing to take a shower and wallow in self-pity/hatred after Mettaton left, but you decided this was more important. You grabbed your phone and quickly dialed her number. She picked up on the first ring.

Her voice was shaking like a leaf, but that didn’t keep her from letting out a weary laugh.

“You know,” She sighed. “I’ve gone past the point of anger to just being relieved that you’re all right.”

“Mom, I—” She cut you off.

“No, I don’t have the energy to speak about this over the phone. Don’t worry, I’ll be sure to lecture you as soon as you get home, after I’ve had my eight hours and a cup of coffee. For now, just take it easy. I’ve been up all night and day and I need to get some sleep. Make sure to call me before you leave tomorrow, okay?”

“…Okay.”

“Alright. I love you.”

You roll your eyes but feel yourself smiling into the phone. “Love you too.”

You hang up and close your eyes for a minute. This has been an eventful few days, but looking back, you don’t think you’d take any of it back.

Walking over to your suitcase and gathering a stack of clothes, you took a glance at the hole in the ceiling and the plaster still threatening to fall. Nah, you wouldn’t take that moment back. Moving through some clothes you found a shirt balled up in the corner of the suitcase. What was this? You picked it up and unfolded it and saw the huge tear in it. Oh yeah! This embarrassment went hand in hand with the huge gaping hole in the wall. Can’t forget this moment either, right? With a slight smile you placed the shirt off to the side and continued to sift through your clothing, looking for something suitable for tomorrow… hey wait, you remember this one! This was the same outfit you were when your hand stopped working. Fun times, those were. Well, no, not really—that was a very stressful moment for you, but looking back at it now? Wow! It seemed so silly. And you thought Mettaton was none the wiser, too. Nope, this moment stays too. Oh yeah, and how could you forget about the photoshoot? Sheesh, you felt so embarrassed during the entire thing, and there’s physical evidence of your trauma but… This memory’s going in the vault as well. Though, you will have to confiscate every magazine that comes out with your image on it. Yep. Every single one; can’t have incriminating evidence like that haunting you, now can you?

You manage to find an outfit you hadn’t worn yet and was still clean, but not before taking the whole stroll down Memory Lane into Nostalgia Avenue. You were kind of dreading going back to
California; you had your old ‘friends’ to deal with and a lecture from mommy dearest. But on the bright side, you’d have Mettaton. Hell, it’s so weird to even think that phrase, to think that you have someone who’s not your mother that you can rely on. It’s been years since you had that level of trust with anyone. Yeah, it’s weird but… it’s not necessarily an unwanted feeling. It’s… comforting!

By the time you’re getting in the shower, you’ve wasted a good fifteen minutes lying on your bed wallowing in… something. Not self-pity for once. But a relaxing shower is still something you crave.

~ ~ ~

Your sleeping pattern was all messed up thanks to sleeping for an entire day, but hopefully it would offset some of the jetlag. And perhaps, if you were lucky, you could catch a few bars on the plane.

But by the time you were feeling any type of strain on your battery, it was way past midnight. The two of you were supposed to be on the plane and flying by seven in the morning in order to make it back to the US in at a decent time. You missed your mother and your drab room for some reason. Mettaton missed his favorite limousine.

You had used the time you had wisely and made sure all of your clothing and belongings were packed away safe and sound. Hell, you even put away that dumb old paperweight simply because it felt like a part of your life; like that paperweight has helped you through thick and thin. This paperweight was a pal. Of course that was just silly projecting onto an inanimate object, but hey, you could indulge every once in a while, right?

Afterwards, you finally began to feel ‘tuckered out’ and began preparing for bed. It would be a disgrace to call it night anymore, you had long ago taken your procrastination into no-sleep-AM-hours. With a resigned sigh you were on your bed in your nightclothes, fishing around for that pesky charger. Going to sleep was relatively uneventful; the same falling asleep and waking up on a set internal timer, nothing out of the ordinary. No mysterious voices speaking to you in the haze of your waking. It was somewhat disappointing, considering how your last endeavors in sleep went. Nevertheless, when you did awake, you didn't feel your full charge. By no means did it feel like your battery was near empty, probably just below half, and you could probably go several hours with a charge like this, but it felt… incomplete. It’s the feeling you’d get near the end of an uneventful day; you’re not so tired that you want to crawl into bed and disappear, but you don’t feel like being very active either. You didn't like it. As you were getting up, stretching your body out and yanking the cord form your back, you wondered if perhaps Mettaton's jet had an outlet through which you could charge yourself. It should, right? He was charging himself on the way over. You'll ask him later.

Later came in a few minutes. Just as you were getting dressed, you realized that you missed your cue:

"Knock, knock!" Mettaton's voice rang from behind the door, oozing his usual peppiness. "Be down in the lobby in ten, darling! That grumpy old pilot was angry about having to cancel on short notice yesterday, so we'll have to be on a stricter schedule."

"Alright." You called out, just slipping a simple t-shirt over your head. Of course it was only as simple as Mettaton would allow, considering he bought it for you. As you heard him walking away you searched around for your phone. Crap, you forgot to put it on the charger last night; you had about 10% left. What's that one French phrase? Je ne sais quoi? Oh, right, Deja vu. You punched in your mother's number, following her directions to call her before you left. The call was short, sweet, and to the point; mainly just your mother asking how you were doing and if everything was all right. You were tempted to tell her about the dream and the voice but decided against it, and she reminded you that she needed to do maintenance and (blah blah blah). After that, the usual mother-child "good-byes" were exchanged and you hung up.
As you were carrying your luggage out into the hallway and towards the elevator, you realized that you had a lot more luggage than you remembered packing. Damn that Mettaton and his shopping sprees… Anyway, it's not that the extra baggage was heavy—very few things were heavy to you—but it was awkward to carry. Most couldn't fit into your suitcase so you had to stuff a few things into your carry-on bag and lug around a few designer shopping bags. Mettaton was waiting for you in the lobby when you came down, and laughing at your struggle. His bodyguards had taken to carrying his things for him, and with a nod of his head they went to retrieve your items.

"Darling I could hardly see your pretty face under all those bags."

"Gee, I wonder where they all came from." You eyed him with a mock glare as you shrugged your carry-on bag up higher on your shoulder. "Are we ready, then?"

“Ready as ever.” He responded and the two of you were off.

~ ~ ~

The plane ride was surprisingly uneventful. You told Mettaton that you wanted to charge yourself completely, and after yesterday’s scare he was more than eager to help you crawl on the floor and find the plug underneath your seat. Hm, two plugs. Your phone needed some TLC. Thankfully, this airplane did come equipped with outlets for you to charge yourself; they were just inconveniently hidden under the seats. Because that made sense.

You were getting ready to lift up your shirt and conk out on the comfortable padded leather seats of the plane when you noticed Mettaton staring at you.

“What?” You asked.

“Oh, hm? Nothing, dear, I, er…” He seemed to catch himself at the act and made a surprised look, obviously trying to come up with an excuse.

“This is usually the part where I fall asleep… unless you wanted to watch me like a creep. By all means, don’t let me interrupt you.”

A soft **thwump** and you were greeted with an airplane pillow in your face.

~ ~ ~

You never fall softly or gently into sleep, you never fall asleep without realizing it. It’s a harsh drop into a torpor-like state and you’re aware of it all. Then your sense of time distorts—has it been an hour? Two? Ten? You don’t know—won’t know until you’re awake and everything starts to make sense again and time unknots itself.

Fortunately for you, life has never been simple, even now. It was back, whatever it was—that voice that invaded your mind while you were on the edges of the waking world and sleep. No, there was no voice; they hadn’t spoken yet but you could feel their presence, like static emanating from your head and filling everything, yet silent like an echoing landscape.

*Please… just go away.* You pleaded with the voice. *I’m not in the mood for this. I just want things to be normal.*

- Is that anyway to greet someone? You ought to be taught some manners.
- My intentions are not to bother you, I simply want some information. Then you can go back to whatever normalcy your life might contain. I doubt there’s much.
You bristled suddenly, and a flush of anger ran through you. You tried harder to twitch your fingers and move your limbs from their involuntary stasis, but it was to no avail.

- **Humor me for a bit. There’s only so much I can gather from your subconscious.**

You paused in surprise. *So it was you. All this time, all those dreams… they've been you?* You could begin to feel the airplane seat underneath you.

- **Not all of them, no. I was merely a spectator for a few of them. Then they made themselves scarce… so out of curiosity, I attempted to coax them back out. My attempt was a startling success. It only took a few months, maybe a year. The only reason I’ve yet to do so again is because I’m sympathetic to you and your apparent cognizance.**

*What are you implying?*

- **There is nothing to imply. You can talk to me and tell me about yourself, or I can find out on my own. I don’t want to be the bad guy, but if you leave me no choice what else am I to do?**

*What the hell is wrong with you?* Your eyelids were twitching. *Why are you doing this? What could compel you to enter someone’s mind forcefully like this, and then just start imposing yourself like you own everything?*

- **Let’s just say… you and I may be of similar origins. And I find that intriguing. With a life as boring as mine, you’re a wealth of information in a barren field. I am very passionate about the things I find intriguing, and I intend to investigate you fully, like it or not. I’m afraid you have no say in the matter.**

*Have no say in the matter? Fuck you, it’s my brain! I don’t care how you threaten me, but I won’t let you mess with my life. Everything is finally going the way it should be, but you’re trying to ruin it. Listen, I’m sorry, but I can’t just—*

You felt something poking your cheek. You stirred reflexively and felt your limbs gaining control, and in turn, the static was fading, slipping in and out as you came closer to waking your body.

- **—ne. H———ay———just———ive up**

“Darling, are you always this hard to wake? Come on, we’ve already landed.”

“Oh… hey would, you look at that.” You shot into an upright position, shaking yourself. Everything felt in order and right, and you felt charged. At least you were away from that person… whoever they were. *Whatever they were.*

It was surprisingly bright outside, which was a bit disorienting since your internal clock was telling you that it should be dark or close to it. In fact it was about… midday? Sure, it’s to be expected when you fly half-way across the world—it happened your first time—but that doesn’t make it any less confusing. Not that you weren’t accustomed to waking up in the middle of the day anyway.

Upon exiting the jet with Mettaton (and like four guards), it dawned upon you that your mother wasn’t there to pick you up. Yes she hadn’t specifically said she was going to come, but she seemed urgent enough to bother herself with it anyway. Was she running late? You decide to give your phone a quick check—it found service upon landing and you were greeted with a text message.
Mom: Hands tied at the moment, have Mettaton drop you off. You’re in for a surprise.

You ignored the warning for surprise and held your phone up for Mettaton in a silent question. He smiled and gave a quick wave of his hand.

“Oh darling, I’d be absolutely delighted to drive you home. I miss my old limousine, and I’m sure she’s dying to see the both of us!”

“I don’t think your limo is capable of feeling anything.” You respond.

“Well not with that attitude.” He said with a mock pout. You sighed, shaking your head despite the beginnings of a smile forming on your lips. You were beginning to do that more often; smile. You didn’t protest when he took your hand to lead you in the direction the private exit in the back of the airport, where of course Mettaton’s pink limousine and his bodyguards stood waiting patiently.

~ ~ ~

The ride back seemed to go by too fast. You really didn’t want your time with Mettaton to end so soon, albeit the two of you spent two weeks in each other’s presence nonstop. Hell, had you always been this clingy? Of course he was probably just itching to get rid of you, you told yourself. But you found yourself not wanting to believe these mean words for once.

“Now darling,” Mettaton had you in tow, leading you up the winding path of your mini-mansion of a house. “I expect you to keep that phone of yours on. Who knows when our next little excursion will be, and hopefully I’ll be able to introduce you to some of my good friends.”

“I’d like that.” You said, meaning it fully. “Maybe you should come inside, say hello to my mom? I’m sure she’d love that.”

“Oh, of course! But I can’t stay long, you know me. Busy, busy, busy! I’ve got an interview with a journalist from Vogue!”

“Wow, already? We just got back, too…” You wonder how he does it sometimes; how he’s able to keep up with how hectic his life seems. But he’s said it himself: his dream was to become a star, and if you do what you love you’ll never work a day in your life. But it still all seemed so… taxing.

“Yes, already! That two week vacation of ours means my schedule’s going to be a bit packed, but not tight enough that I can’t fit you in, dollface.” He gave you a little wink as he stopped at your front door. You gave a little thanks to your mother that you weren’t capable of blushing.

“Knock, knock!” Mettaton said, rapping on the door politely. You heard the familiar shuffling sound of your mother on the other side, than got a full frontal barrage of her exuberance when she opened the door.

“Oh, Mettaton!” She said, stepping aside to usher him in. “What a pleasant surprise, come in come in!”

Politely obliging, the two of you stepped into the entryway. You eyed her carefully; she wasn’t looking at you and hopefully she’d save the lecture for after everyone left.

“A pleasure to see you as well! I figured I’d drop in and say hi before running off.”

“Wait, I know that voice!” A grand and oddly familiar voice rang from the dining room. It didn’t take you long to figure out who it was, because the owner came rushing in to the already packed entry room, horns in all.
“Toriel?” Mettaton gasped, throwing his hands to his mouth, then running over to hug the larger goat-woman. “Well isn’t this a surprise.”

“You two know each other? I mean hello y-you’re majesty. You guys’ve met?” You couldn’t help your curiosity, and your surprise at the situation get the better of you.

Toriel let out a light laugh, regarding you kindly despite her all-around regal air. “Yes, my child, we are very well acquainted. But perhaps this hall isn’t the best place for greetings.”

“Yes, there’s more room in the dining room.” Your mother offered, leading everyone in that direction. Your dining room was nothing special, not by suburb min-mansion means, but considering you could fit your entire old apartment in it, it was pretty big. A little ways off, you swore you could hear a door open and close. Was there was someone else in the house? You looked to your mother, about to ask, but Mettaton began speaking.

“But honestly, I should be going,” He said, leaning himself against the large polished mahogany table. God, he was so dramatic. “I’ve got an interview in L.A. in less than half-hour. Oh, but do tell Frisk-darling I said hello, hm?”

“I don’t think that will be necessary.” Toriel said, looking to the adjoined living room. You didn’t have time to react as a rush of blue and purple dashed over to wrap you and Mettaton into a hug.

“Well what have we here?” Mettaton asked as he pat Frisk’s back. They looked up at the two of you, a large smile plastered on their face.

“Missed you!” Frisk said, still beaming brightly. Mettaton bent down to meet their level, patting their head gently.

“I did too, darling. I missed you dearly.” He pinched their cheek playfully, earning a half-hearted protest. “Oh, why don’t you say hello to my new friend, their name is—”

“We met before!” They said, to which you agreed. Mettaton stood, giving you a puzzled look, to which you responded by shrugging comically.

“It’s a small world?” You offered.

“Far from it!” Mettaton exclaimed as your mother and Toriel shared a laugh.

“Honestly now, this reunion is quite touching, but we do not wish to keep you from your work any longer.” Toriel spoke up.

“Oh, I’ll just be fashionably late.” He said, waving dismissively, to which Toriel shook her head in a somehow stern and motherly way.

“No, no, I insist! No tardiness for you, young man.”

“Ah, well, if you say so.” Mettaton instantly replied. In a mother-off contest, Toriel would probably take the cake.

After seeing Mettaton off, your mother returned with her usual faux-happy smile.

“Hun, why don’t you and Frisk run off and play while Toriel and I talk.”

You were about to protest that you were too old to be any fun for Frisk, and that you weren’t some kid who couldn’t listen in while the adults talked, but the small child was already grabbing your hand
“Your house is huge!” The shouted, running off into the huge field that connected several houses a ways off from yours. There was a small stone patio at the end of the stairs, but the two of you rarely used it. It was only kept remotely clean thanks to the gardener who came once a week to mow the lawn and do mild landscaping. He took pity on the neglected patio chairs and grill and offered to clean it up from all the fallen twigs, dirt, and insects that had taken up residence free of charge. This was a few months ago, but the results still showed.

“And you guys have a pond!” Frisk was practically jumping up and down, staring and pointing at the reflecting waters. The pond ended near a patch of forest and trees, making it the perfect spot for frogs and insects to gather in and near it. It was a mild winter, true, but thankfully there weren’t many insects out, but that also meant the frogs were still probably hibernating.

“Yeah, uh…” You approached Frisk, a little nervous from all the jumping they were doing near the water. “Wanna see the fish?”

Frisk paused their jumping and nodded their head excitedly, resulting in their already messy brown hair becoming even further ruined. You couldn’t help but laugh as you put a finger to your lips and made a “shh” sound.

The pond was one of those self-sustaining ecosystems—good because you knew neither you nor your mother would have had the patience or memory to keep with it—so you didn’t have to feed them like aquarium fish. Naturally, some fish would come to the surface to try and find insects near the surface. You brought Frisk just close enough to the waters to see a pair of koi venture up to the surface, thinking it safe now that the noise ceased. Frisk held in their gasp but couldn’t resist their smile and the temptation to inch closer. The noise, slight as it was, was just enough to scare the fish back under the surface.

“They’re so beautiful…” They remarked wistfully. You found yourself agreeing as you waited for another koi to approach the surface. This one was much braver; it peeked its head slightly out of the waters, almost as if to regard you two. Carefully, you reached out to it. Seeing as it didn’t move, you figured this was your chance to show off to Frisk and touch the fish gently on the forehead. It ducked back under the water. This time, Frisk couldn’t hold back their gasp.

“Can I try?” They asked hesitantly. You nodded your head.

“Will it hurt them?” They prodded further.

“Nah, it won’t.” You responded. “Some people hand-feed their fish, even. We’re just really warm to them.” Or at least you are, you thought.

The two of you waited silently as another brave koi, this one bright orange with flecks of black, dared to peek above the surface. Perhaps the other fish were spreading news of two strange creatures near their waters? Gingerly, Frisk reached out a careful hand and stroked the fish’s body.

“There ya go.” You said, hoping to be supportive. Frisk turned to you with a smile, and for a little while the two of you continued to pet the fish.

~ ~ ~

You stood guarding a pile of rocks stacked together. The top rock had a crudely drawn face on it, and grass was placed haphazardly on the top (sorry gardener) to resemble hair. You held your large stick proudly, as if it were some cane or staff and continued to pace, pretending not to see Frisk
“I, mighty ruler of the goldfish kingdom, have finally captured the koi fish queen!” You proclaimed, throwing back your head and laughing evilly. Suddenly, from the shadows, a mighty warrior approached.

“Stop right there, evil monarch!” The warrior proclaimed, brandishing a hefty sword (stick) and shield (garbage lid). “I’m here to end your evil reign and free the queen.”

“Ha ha! You wish to stop me? I, the goldfish ruler, can never be defeated!” You paused. “Ever! Mwa ha ha!”

“We’ll see about that!” Frisk said, then charged at you.

Insert a description of an epic and harrowing battle, wherein both sides have grown tired! Who will win?

“Give up, fool,” You were pretending to huff and puff, because Frisk seemed pretty winded. The two of you got really caught up in your battles, and you had chased Frisk around a few times, finally cornering them in your grand foyer, near the secret entrance to the dungeon where you hid the queen. It was the patio.

“Ha… ha… Never! So long as goodness prevails in this world, I’ll defeat you!” They gave a heroic yell and leapt at you. You figured this was as great a time as any for the hero to win, so you let Frisk knock your great and mighty cane of evil from your hand. You raised your hands, sneering at them as they pointed their polished blade your direction, just inches from your neck. You were bested

“It seems I’ve underestimated you, young warrior.” You admitted, dropping to one knee. “Make it quick, for my honor and pride.”

Instead of going for the finishing blow, like any honorable warrior, the warrior sheathed their blade and offered a hand in return.

“You… you’re offering me mercy?” You said, genuinely surprised. Most kids their age would’ve pretended to stab you and then proclaim that they’ve said the kingdom.

“Our kingdoms have seen far too much violence, evil goldfish ruler. More won’t solve it, so I propose a treaty between the koi and goldfish kingdoms.”

You were speechless. “I… I…” steadily, you reached for their hand but were cut off by the sound of clapping.

“Amazing, absolutely amazing!” Your mother cheered, with Toriel also at her side clapping her paws together gently with approval.

“M-Mom!” “Hey mom!” The two of you said simultaneously. Frisk ran up to hug Toriel while you quickly dusted the dirt of your clothes and went to greet your mother.

“Er, uh, how long have you been…?”

“Long enough to see you embarrass yourself fully.” Your mother replied, holding up her cell phone. “That was so cute of you, playing with Frisk. And you even did a little voice for your character, aw!”

“Okay, I need to delete that video.” You said, lunging for your mother’s phone. She snapped it back
away from you though, grinning mischievously.

“Ah, ah, ah! How else am I to relive these moments, hm? And I have to send it to Toriel.”

“Ugh! I was going to say that I missed you earlier, but now I can’t imagine why.” You could hear Frisk and Toriel sharing a laugh.

“We came out here because it’s time for us to leave, unfortunately.” Toriel said, interrupting you and your mother’s little spat. Frisk whined noisily, to which Toriel responded by shushing them gently.

“Do not worry, my child. We will come to visit as often as we’ll be tolerated.”

“Please, don’t worry! You’re more than welcome to visit as much as you wish.”

Your mother was leading the two of them to the front door when it dawned on you what was about to happen. You were probably going to get lectured soon. Shit, it’d been so long since you’d gotten a talking to that you didn’t know what to do. So, like a mature adult, you ran up to your room and hid.

You could hear the door close downstairs, and moments later the sound of someone ascending the stairs. Those footsteps continue all the way down the hallway, only to stop right in front of your door.

“How old are you again?” Your mother asked through the door. “Because I don’t remember building a body for a five year old that hides in their room.”

“Are you mad at me?” You asked, trying (and failing) to sound like an adult. You heard her sigh, and even shift, as she inched the door open. You eyed her warily through the crack in the door from your bed, but she didn’t look angry.

“No, I’m not mad at you, sweetie.” She opened the door wider and opted to lean against the door frame, using the hand that wasn’t supporting her to rub at her forehead. “I just… well, I just wish you wouldn’t give me so many things to worry about. I’ve got enough on my plate now that… Anyway, I know it’s not your fault; the last few years have been taxing on both of us but… try to use your head before going off and making rash decisions, okay? Those are some high-quality processors up there, I want you to use them. Now come on, I have to do some maintenance. I found out what your driver issue is, and it may have been interfering with some background programs and critical servos, so I’m going to need to run a performance test as well. And you know how long that can take.”

“Yeah, okay.” You said, rising to follow your mother to the basement. As you sat down on the usual chair while your mother got ready, you decided to make conversation/poke and be nosy.

“So what were you and Toriel talking about?” You asked, not very nonchalantly.

“Well that’s none of your—ah, it was nothing important. Toriel wanted to come over for tea and, uh, well, I couldn’t say no. She’s actually quite the conversationalist, but I feel like I can share some of the things we talked about with you. For one, we ended up talking about society and its response to monsters. Isn’t kind of a so-so situation; many humans in both America and across the world are accepting monsters, but just as many, if not more, are rejecting them. So many people are willing to twist our constitution to imply that monsters are exempt, so it makes filing charges and actually getting anywhere in the court very difficult. In fact, it’s an interesting tidbit we’re trying to solve worldwide—but the news is covering the latest lemonade sale, or the latest school shooting. All they’d need is a good diplomat—they’re basically lawyers for entire countries. Or in this case, species. Oh, did I tell you they had to bring the National Guard in to allow a monster-human school to be built in Connecticut? Yup, people tried to protest it being built, or allowing monsters and their
children to go to school at all. The situation ended up resolving itself, but that doesn’t make it any less dire. Sometimes it’s nonviolent—people voicing their ‘opinions’—but most of the time it’s a bunch of assholes getting together and causing small mayhem. Ah, but it’s kind of beautiful if you look at it from a more nihilistic point of view. Hatred and absolute repulsion can bring even the most racist of bigots together. Yeah, but if the only way our species can put aside its differences is to chuck Molotov cocktails side-by-side at another species, I’d say we’re going the wrong way.

“Anyway, I decided to give Toriel some diplomatic tips. Even though she almost abhors her ex, she still feels some pity for him because he’s the one who has to do peace talks with dirty and corrupt leaders and bottom-feeding politicians. I mean, it was cute trying to get Frisk to be ambassador, but the kid’s like nine. Even though they’re very bright and all-around intelligent, no one would take them seriously. So of course the king of all monsters is going to have to do it himself, I mean, come on. I’ve never met the man personally, but from I can tell from the media… he’s too much of a pushover, politics and your average diplomatic talk would run him over flat. So, while I was offering tips on how to get ideas across and laws passed, Toriel suggest that I be their ambassador.”

“Whoa.” You said, eyebrows raised. You missed most of what she was saying, something about cocktails, but you got the last part. “What did you say?”

“Well, I wanted to go over it with you first. Wadd’ya think?”

“I… think it’s a great idea? But don’t you need certain qualifications to be an ambassador?”

“If you’re trying to be an American ambassador, sure. But the situation is different, since I want to be an ambassador for the monsters. And, uh, they didn’t really have any requirements for ambassador, considering they tried to enlist a nine-year-old.”

“Go for it then.” You said listlessly. Your mother was approaching with a backup charger, finally.

“Alright, you sound genuinely interested.” She said sarcastically. You shrugged a bit as you lifted the back of your shirt up. As you closed your eyes and felt everything slip away, you realized that you forgot to mention the dreams.
Hey, here we are folks. The big one-o.

I'd like to thank everyone of you who have commented and left kudos, and those of you who have even glanced at this. I'll be completely honest with you, I didn't think I'd get this for, or that I'd be this well-received. And I owe all of it to the support I've received from you all thus far.

I know I don't really respond to comments, but I read every single one of them and I end up smiling like a doofus at all of them, trust me. Gosh, you guys are really nice. Stahp it.

So yeah, enjoy your read. Nothing too big is happening in here, and I don't know if I've said this before so I'll say it again, if you want me to tag a specific chapter/(s) let me know and consider it done!

Chapter Notes

At this rate I should put a tag for mild cursing. (boop, here it is)
‘Cause you know, certain people can’t watch their tongues > . >

There’s something here with you in this darkness. Pushing and urging, pulling you out of this enveloping darkness—or at least it was trying. It wasn’t speaking, but it had a voice that beckoned you to heed its calls. You almost gave in to those sweet noises—but the voice of reason slammed heard on your mind. No. Hold your resolve. Resist and push it away—clasp onto this void and accept it, it holds far brighter lights than whatever this malcontent offers. The voice of reason was familiar to you. Was it perhaps your own? So you listened and resisted temptation and let yourself fall into the void, into a dreamless time-bending sleep.

~ ~ ~

It took only seconds to adjust to the darkness around you. Unlike previously, you were in full control of your body immediately after waking. Even though you felt mostly charged, you had vague memories of a dream. Was it a dream? It didn’t feel like one, it just felt like how it normally felt: the slow sinking into the void and then… no, no but something different happened. What was it? The more you tried to remember it, the more you couldn’t—which was strange. Your memory wasn’t like the average human’s, who had memories that became harder to recall and vaguer as time went on. If you focused hard enough you could recall a lot of things, but a lot of those memories that were unimportant, usually pushed to the side until it was needed so it wouldn’t overwhelm you. But even dreams were memories that could be quickly recalled. Now it was escaping you the more you pursued it, like it was actively trying to allude you.

Now it was completely gone and you found yourself feeling frustrated. You stood from your mother’s chair and took a quick look around. Your mother set up her workshop in slight secret in the
house’s finished basement. Though she was forbade from ever continuing her research or projects, you were a necessary exception, so long as her workshop remained secret. The room was empty save for yourself, but there were signs that she was near—a cup on her table and rings from where she had picked it up multiple times.

“Mom?” You called out, taking another quick look before heading up the stairs. It was much darker outside; what time had you even blacked out? A quick glance at the hallway clock told you it was only nine o’clock in the evening. Your sleeping schedule would never be the same, not that it was ever good in the first place.

“Mom?” You called out once more, making your way through the kitchen and dining room. All was quiet save for the overtly grandeur clock ticking silently. And the lights were off—but the likelihood of your mother going to sleep early was bar none. Was something wrong? She was usually quick to turn the lights on and off at night and in the mornings, just to maintain some semblance of normalcy in the house. You finally made your way to the living room and saw a figure hunched over a newspaper, snoring slightly. You were almost disappointed; your brain had jumped from A to Z and assumed the worse, but here she was dozing off peacefully. You turned on the living room lights but she didn’t stir, so you opted to shake her roughly by the shoulders.

“Mom!” she woke with a start, looking at you with wide and wild eyes.

“Ugh, don’t scare me like that! Can’t you see I was in the middle of read…ing…?” She looked down to a passage that had been blurred by a particularly large patch of drool. You raised an eyebrow in smug questioning and she eyed you with motherly disdain.

“I was planning on waking you soon, but I got caught up in this article… then I didn’t feel like moving—this chair is just so comfortable—so I thought I might rest my eyes. You see where that got me.”

“I see. But mom, there’s something important I need to tell you. I forgot to mention it earlier, but I’ve been having dreams lately.”

She stiffened, sitting up just a bit straighter. “You have? Did you have one just now?”

“No, thankfully. There was…” You still couldn’t remember. “…nothing. Like usual. But it was like that before—they started and stopped, but I still figured I should tell you.”

“And I’m glad you did.” She said, drumming her fingers against her chin. “The problem might have resolved itself with the last tune-up, I removed that faulty driver after all, but just to be safe I’ll fix your dream inhibitor as well. Hell, why don’t I just make a new one? It’s not like it’s a complicated process, after all. Ugh, give me a second. No, a few hours.”

She got up from her seat and began towards the basement.

“Well, I’m just going to…” Do what? Go upstairs and watch the paint dry for a few hours while she worked on this program? That didn’t sound very appealing. Lately you’ve been getting antsy when still. Sitting around and doing nothing just doesn’t seem bearable.

“Hmm?” She said, turning in the dining room entrance way. “Didn’t catch that, hun.”

“Ah… I said I’m going to go out for a bit.” Here it comes.

Her eyebrows shot up in surprise, then she lowered one to regard you skeptically.

“ Alone?”
“Yep. Alone.”

“Why?” She crossed her arms and leaned against the door frame.

Shit. “I just… you know. I’m bored, I don’t really want to sit in my room.” As soon as you said the words, you regretted them when a playful smile spread across her face.

“Aha, looks like Mettaton is rubbing off on you.”

“Mom, please. I’ll see you later, anyway.” You said, heading towards the stairs for the upper level.

“Alright, hun, I can’t dictate your every move. You’re an adult, remember.”

“Of course I do.” That’s one thing you can remember.

~ ~ ~

You decided against wearing any of your new clothing, it wasn’t as if you were going to be doing anything special. A simple t-shirt and some jeans ought to suffice. You waited until you were sure your mother was in the basement before grabbing a set of keys and heading out. You knew how to drive alright, so you weren’t nervous about pulling the car out of the driveway. Now you had to wonder what it was you were going to be doing. This was a spur of the moment decision that you hadn’t really planned out. You were never the ‘out-on-the-town’ kind of person, and you doubted you could mix well with the nightlife that easily. You had a bit of spending cash on you, so you decided it would be nice to take a trip out to L.A.

Half-way to the freeway and you felt your phone vibrate in your pocket. You decided to ignore it (safety first) but after the third chime you decided to take a peek at it, though you suspected who it might be.

Valerie: Hey! I heard you were back in town so I thought I should hit you up.

Valerie: Anyway, everyone’s shitting bricks and going crazy over the new model who was posing with Mettaton, but I was like omg I know this person!

Valerie: Anyway, you wanna hang out downtown tonight? I know some people who’d LOVE to meet you. I tried texting your mom but she said you were already out? Lol hmu okay?

You cringed a bit looking at the sender. Ugh, it just had to be her. You couldn’t say no without being rude or sounding like an ass—this girl was good, she backed you into this corner. Hesitantly, you began to respond while still keeping your eyes on the road.

You: Sure, I’ll meet up with you. Just name a place.

You set your phone back down on the seat next to you, but almost immediately it began to chime. You recognized the name of some famous VIP nightclub. You sighed, already regretting agreeing to this, as you set off for the nearest exit.

As you suspected, it was a high-end venue with a long line stretching quite a ways away from the entrance. You managed to find a decent space at a nearby parking garage and began to make your way towards the club. After a minute of wandering and scanning the crowd for your ‘friend’ a high-pitched and familiar voice called out to you. Valerie and two other people you didn’t recognize approached you with happy smiling faces, as if you were a sight for sore eyes. You knew this was all a part of some greater scheme of hers, but to what you didn’t know. Perhaps revenge for lying to
her? Or maybe you were overthinking the situation and Valerie was legitimately trying to be nice to you.

“Oh my gosh! It’s so good to see you! It’s been what, like, a month?” Valerie exclaimed, throwing her arms around you in a hug.

“A few weeks, actually.” You said, then awkwardly tried to pat her back.

“So funny. Anyway, come on, we’re not waiting in this long-ass line. We have special permission.”

“Special permission?” You asked, following Valerie through an alleyway that opened up to a space with a side dear of the building. You doubt she meant the kind of special permissions Mettaton had, but still, you could hope right? But when you took a turn down a particularly dark and damp-looking alley on the side of the building, you scratched that thought. You were pointedly ignoring the ogling stares of her friends; you hadn’t gotten a good look at them, nor had you the chance to judge their personalities, but if they were Valerie’s friends and willingly going along with her scheme, they probably weren’t that good. One of them had been

“Yeah. Mark works here at this time, and he said he could get us in unnoticed. Don’t worry about it, kay?”

She paused and knocked a rhythmical pattern on the door. While she waited, one of Valerie’s friends tapped you on the shoulder.

“Hey, so, what’s up?” Already, you could tell this girl had a very imposing atmosphere. Heels added to her height to give her a supermodel-esque height and her dress was near skin-tight and a bright neon pink color. Complementing the low neckline was a neon choker, adorned with a yellow jewel of some sort. Knowing her type, it was probably something real. Her makeup was divine and accented every part of her face that needed to be set out, and everything was perfectly contoured. Her makeup looked like it was professional and took hours to do, and her hair which cascaded in long ombre curls was tied up in a high-set ponytail. A quick glance to her male friend told you that he was also dressed to impress, in varying shades of black and piercings on his lips, eyebrows, nose, and even some on his cheek. All were of a neon rainbow.

“Nothing.” You responded curtly. She gave you a look that showed she wasn’t very satisfied with that answer, but she continued on.

“Are you a model? Or, like, in school to be one or something? I don’t really know how that thing goes, to be honest, do you have to go to a school? I saw you on the cover of this magazine, posing with Mettaton, but I’ve never seen your face before. Let me guess, you’re not that famous and you figured you could use Mettaton as a way to gain more fame? Don’t feel guilty, trust me, I’d do the same thing.”

It took all of your willpower not glare at her and answer in a respectful manner.

“No, he and I are just friends. I’m no profess—”

She cut you off with a scoff, rolling her eyes. “Please. No one is ‘just friends’ with someone like Mettaton. Hun, snatch on to him and hold tight, he could probably take you places.”

Just as your patience was about to wear thin, you heard the door behind you open, and Valerie called for everyone to follow. Gladly, you stepped into the backroom. Past the dim room and dingy walls you could hear music blaring. Mark was inside, taking several worried glances around the corridor, and then flashed an irritated look back to Valerie.
“I thought you said you were coming alone.” He said accusingly. Valerie brushed him off, walking towards the door at the far end where the music was the loudest and trails of smoke were wafting through. You could just barely make out strobe lights coloring the mist.

“Oh Marky, I never said that. I just asked if you could sneak me in through the back, I never once said I was going to come alone. And everything’s fine, we’ve done this before.”

“No, I’ve snuck you in by yourself. One person is easy to overlook but four is just—”

The door opened and Mark’s hushed voice was drowned out by club music immediately. He gave Valerie an angry look but held the door open and allowed everyone to enter before disappearing behind it again. You could already tell the flashing lights and loud music would be headache inducing to anyone who decided to stay for more than a few minutes. Both artificial and real smoke filled the air, though you could take a guess as to how much of it was legal. Peering past the foggy haze that was concentrated mostly by the floor, you could make out bodies grinding against each other to the deep pulsing club beat. Rank sweat and other foul and unidentifiable odors filled the air. You were contemplating turning back, but Valerie and her group were urging you further ahead. She obviously knew the place well, and a couple of people even called out to her and her friends as they passed further into the dance floor.

You had arrived in the very back of the club, but from what you could see past all of the smoke, there was a huge stage up ahead with a DJ shouting enthusiastically to the front of the crowd. You couldn’t make out what she was saying, but the front seemed eager to respond. You were just taking a passing glance upward and thought you saw movement beyond the smoke machines and lights. Valerie’s voice brought you back to reality, speaking above the music.

“Hey, Damen, do me a favor. I’m gonna go get us up front, I want you to fix…” Valerie gestured to your direction. “All of that up.”

“Wait,” Now just a moment—but no one seemed to hear you over the sound of the music, or they were ignoring you. Damen, Mr. Fifty Shades of Black’s name apparently, took you by the arm and dragged you off towards what you were assuming was the lavatories. It was unisex, and not as dirty as you expected, but you were still uncomfortable with this entire situation as a whole. The music was muted considerably once the doors closed.

“Yeah, here’s a tip.” Damen gave you a once over and cringed slightly. “Don’t ever come to a night club wearing something like that.”

“What’s wrong with what I’m wearing?” You asked, looking down at the t-shirt and jeans combo you were wearing.

“You look like you just got through fixing a car. Come on, put this on.” He shrugged off his leather jacket and tossed it at you. A bit reluctantly, you put it on. Oh god, the thing reeked of body spray.

“Here, take some of these.” He began to remove some of his facial piercings, and you almost cringed until you realized they were fake. Him putting his hands anywhere near your face was off-limits however, so you took the piercings yourself and snapped them into place awkwardly. Damen gave you another once over, but still wasn’t pleased.

“Here, turn around. We need to make this shirt tighter.”

“Why?” You asked. The shirt was perfectly fine the way it was—loose enough so it could double as a night shirt if you were too lazy to take it off when you went to sleep.
Damen scoffed at you, then turned you around, lifting his jacket to tie a knot in the back of your shirt.

“Alright, almost,” To your shock, Damen took a pocket knife out of his pants pocket and held it up. Without stopping to think, you snatched the offending object away from him and snapped it close.

“What the hell?” He asked in shock, taking a step away from you.

“What the hell to you? Why do you have a knife, is it even legal to bring one into a club?”

“Fucking relax! I was just going to cut up your pants, I’m not trying to fucking rob you.”

You sneered but offered his knife back. “My pants are fine. Can we leave now?”

“Alright.” He snatched the knife back and muttered something under his breath but led the two of you out. Of course, Valerie and her friend were nowhere to be seen in the frothing crowd of bodies.

“They’re up front.” Damen said, then began to push his way through an unhappy group of people. Once he pushed past he greeted Valerie, who looked less than pleased.

“Not up here. Goddamn, I make it up to the booths once and there’s no one up here.” She said, gesturing slightly to her side. The front of the crowd near the DJ was slightly sparse, but off to an area right next to the stage was a group of tables and booths marked off with a reserved sign. A few men who you assumed to be guards were standing next to the velvet rope, but the area was strikingly empty.

“Should I go grab us some drinks?” Valerie’s friend asked.

“How cute, Micah. Do you have enough money for bottle service? Loan me few grand if you do honey.”

“Oh.” You could hear in Micah’s tone that she probably blanched under Valerie’s tone. Hell, you knew Valerie to be intense but now she was being downright rude. Valerie took a look around the club, this time looking up towards the almost blinding strobe lights and smoke machines.

“Up there.” She nodded her head in the direction of the ceiling. You focused into the distant ceiling, knowing for sure this time that there were figures above your heads.

“Oh, that must be the VIP section!” Micah noted.

“No shit Sherlock. But how the hell do we get up there? And I don’t mean the path, that place probably has a bouncer or two.” Damen added the obvious.

“Nah, nah. Don’t worry, I have a secret weapon.” From her huge purse, she pulled a magazine out just enough for the group to see. Of-fucking-course. That’s the only reason why she dragged you along, to sneak into the VIP section with your face.

“The fuck Val!” Damen rolled his eyes and rubbed at his forehead. “When you said you had a plan to get us in, I thought you meant an actual full-proof plan. This isn’t some teen-movie where you can sneak past the security with some flimsy excuse like that. They’re gonna want ID, maybe even cold hard cash, are you fucking insane? I get it, you’re that desperate to get some celeb’s dick wet, but a get a hold of yourself and think about—”

Valeria looked dangerously close to lunging at him, but the two were interrupted with another party called out to them.
“There you guys are!” It was Mark, looking out of breath and frantic. “Look, if you want to get to the VIP stairwell now’s the time. A fight broke out just outside, and the guards standing by the door went to get help. Come on, we might make it if we hurry.”

Before you could stealthily sneak away, Valerie grabbed you by the wrist and began marching after Mark, all the while flashing Damen a cold look. A few doors and one long hallway later, there was an empty stairwell. This area was hard to find amongst the rustle and bustle of the crowd, but Mark had somehow managed to lead everyone here. As he said, the stairwell was unguarded, but there was still a velvet rope hung, as if it were doing much use. Mark held it open while everyone passed through, then closed it with himself on the other side.

“I have to get back to work.” He said, taking one more nervous look around. “Good luck getting back out, and Valerie I swear this is the last time—”

“Is that a guard coming?” Valerie asked, a look of worry on her face. She watched with amusement as Mark looked back with horror, only to find an empty hallway. In his surprised daze, she rushed the group up the stairs and onto a recessed balcony with glass doors and rooms set along it. To your surprise, it wasn’t just a balcony up here, but an entire level. The floor was made of opaque glass, hence why it was possible to see from below. There were tables and couches scattered about and the lighting in this area compared to below was serene and classy. Still, the overall theme was neon and bright. Immediately, you were recognizing some important faces of performers chatting it up, and no one spared your group glance over the still present sound of the music as you all ventured forward.

You tried to lag behind the group as they approached a group of laughing celebrities. You were wondering if you could somehow turn back and throw a wrench into their plans, but you didn’t want to risk the chances of the guard downstairs returning. Already, Valerie was trying to make her presence known to a group. Immediately, before the celebrities could notice you, their bodyguards perked up and approached to form a wall between your groups.

“Who are you?” “Do you have any business being up here?” “How did you get up here?” They all asked at once.

“Oh don’t mind us, one of our friends,” Valerie looked back and practically dragged you up to the front. “Just came by to see someone in this group. No big deal, just let us through.”

One of the guards recognized you, and you in turn recognized him. His expression softened a bit, and Mettaton’s bodyguard took a quick glance to his pals on either side, motioning for them to go back.

“I don’t recall Mettaton mentioning any guests.” He said. You shrugged and gave a sheepish smile, earning a glare from Valerie.

“Can’t you make an excuse? Listen, I’m sure Mettaton would be more than happy to have us over.” Valerie began arguing at him. “Look, if we could just speak to him for one sec, you’d see—”

“Now what is all this commotion?” A familiar robotic voice nearly had you cringing. Oh holy hell this is so embarrassing. You wanted to slip away—do anything to keep from being noticed—but it was far too late for that now.

“How can I entertain my guests with a decent conversation if… oh darling what are you doing here?” His surprise was genuine, but it lasted for approximately two seconds before he was wrapping you in his signature hug.

“Come, come, sit! Your friends too!” He turned you around and led you by the shoulder back to
where he was seated, but not before you got a glimpse of Valerie’s elated face and her friend’s surprised but ecstatic expressions. You now realized you were being regarded with curiosity by some of Mettaton’s guests, and if you weren’t jumping to conclusions, maybe there was some animosity with their gazes too.

“Darling, just what are you doing in a place like this? What is this you’re wearing? And what’s this on your face?” His hands ghosted your cheek for a second, hovering above a fake piercing. Immediately, you felt self-conscious about them, and about his hands being close to your face. You scratched the back of your neck and shrugged, but not before driving a quick glare at Damen. He was too busy gawking up and down at a model to notice you, however.

Before you had a chance to answer his first question, however, a beautiful and familiar model cut in.

“Mettaton, who’s this? Why don’t you introduce your friend to us?” She said with a smile. You knew her face somewhere…

“Oh Amanda, how rude of me.” Mettaton said, then proceeded to introduce you. Aha! Amanda! That’s why she seemed so familiar. You’ve seen her in magazines and on TV, and she’s the model who couldn’t show the day you had to fill in.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you.” You said, extending your hand. She shook it in a way that was both graceful and firm, surprising you because of her dainty stature.

“Likewise. Everyone’s been talking about the anonymous little bird who was posing with Mettaton. Glad I get to meet them in flesh.”

You felt someone nudging your shoulder, and to no one’s surprise it was Victoria. She was trying to subtly nod her head at Mettaton, but you weren’t getting what she was trying to say. At your puzzled look, she sighed.

“Introduce us.” She said through her smile, just slightly exasperated.

“Uh, Mettaton?” You tapped his shoulder getting his attention. “Mm, these are my friends. This is —”

“My name’s Valerie. We’re, like, best buds and we’ve known each other forever. It’s so great to meet you.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you too, Valerie.” He said, taking her hand. She shook it gratuitously and was beaming like a kid in a candy shop.

~ ~ ~

It took so much strength for the rest of the evening. So much effort not to roll your eyes, and so much self-control not to sigh. Amanda, nice as she may have seemed at first, was a master at passive-aggressive remarks. Every time Mettaton turned to talk to you, she had some sort of jab to make about how plain you seemed up close, or how tacky this was or that was about you. Ugh, and Valerie seemed to be trying to actively get rid of you. Twice she’d recommended you order a bottle for the group, and each time she seemed to have magically gravitated into your seat next to Mettaton. If you could get drunk, you’d make a drinking game to see how many times Valerie was going to make a move, or whenever Amanda was going to be snippy. Hell, you should anyway

Of course your other ‘friends’ were chatting up the rest of Mettaton’s group, and they looked happy at least.
You felt a sudden vibration in your pocket and realized that it was your phone. You could barely hear it over the sound of distant music and the chatter around you.

“Hey, Mettaton?” You got his attention and then pointed at your phone. He nodded once, and you got up to find a bathroom to take your call in. The bathrooms up here were far superior to the ones below, both in cleanliness and style. The noise outside was muted considerably, and you were able to answer just in time.

“Hello?” The only person who could possibly be calling you besides Mettaton was your mother.

“Don’t mean to rush you sweetheart, but it’s ready. Try to be home soon, okay? It’s getting late.”

“Alright mom. Bye.”

You hung up and stepped back outside to rejoin the group. Immediately, Mettaton’s eyes found yours and you offered a half-hearted smile as you approached.

“Hey, um, sorry but it’s really time for me to be heading home.” You said. It was almost comical, the way Mettaton’s face dropped in disappointment to your words.

“Aw, you can’t stay a little longer?” He stood up and clasped your hands, all the while giving you his top-notch puppy dog face.

“No, no, it’s already pretty late. It’s past one o’clock in the morning.”

“Got a bedtime? I know not everyone’s a night owl.” You heard Amanda pipe up.

Ignoring her completely, Mettaton pressed further. “Then how about I give you a ride home, hm?”

“That’s okay, actually. I drove here on my own.”

“You can drive? I thought you didn’t like driving.”

“No, I just don’t like riding around in your fancy-schmancy limo all the time. Big difference.”

“Oh darling, a limo is only a bigger and more fabulous version of a car! It’s all the same!”

“I think when my car has its own bar and takes up half a block, it’s not ‘all the same’.” You responded playfully.

“Actually, guys?” Valerie spoke up. “I think we should all be heading home. Micah, don’t you have that thing to do tomorrow?”

The girl in question looked away from the supermodel she had been talking to. In fact, the two girls appeared to have been flirting for a majority of the evening.

“What thing?” She asked, puzzled.

“Yeah, look at you. You’re so wasted you don’t even remember it. Come on, guys, we’d better get going.” Valerie said, gathering her partially drunk but no so much that needed to be worried about crew together.

“Honestly, it was so much fun hanging out with everyone. I hope we meet up real soon.”

You kind of felt like sheep being herded as Valerie tried to direct everyone towards the exit. You were wondering what was fueling it, then you saw him: Mark standing in the door entrance trying to
motion everyone over to the exit.

Once everyone was in the hallway, he was almost pushing everyone down the stairs.

“Come on, come on, you guys have to leave right now.” He said in his hurry.

“Why? We were barely having any fun, why ruin it right now?”

“Because, some patron tipped my manager off and said I let a bunch of people into this entrance. You guys have to make it like a drum and beat it or else my job is finish. Do you know how many strings my dad had to pull to even get me this job? Valerie, I swear, this is the last time I’m ever doing this, so just—”

“Oh my god, can you shut up? You said you wanted us out, but you’re the only one standing here ranting. Fucking point to the exit and we’ll be out of your bitchy little hair.”

“Alright, fine. We’re going out another back exit, it’s too risky to come the same way. Follow me.” Instead of going down the stairs the group had come before, Mark led everyone down another hallway and opened a door that read: RESTRICTED. This looked fun, if not very dangerous and potentially illegal.

“We’re going to the roof?” Damen asked as he stepped outside with everyone.

“Yeah, there’s another exit up here that leads to a back hallway, which leads to an exit. You can thank me later.”

“How do you know this place that well?” Micah piped up, taking a tentative step near the roof’s edge. There were concrete half-walls guarding the edge, but it was still a ways up. “I thought you just got this job.”

“Yeah I did just get this job, but my dad’s been a partner with the club’s owner for a couple of years. When I finally got old enough to drink, I started getting familiar with the set up myself. And uh… I used to sneak some of my drinking buddies in here, and some girls. Y’know, to impress. But this is the first time I’ve snuck more than one person in here.”

Finally, everyone was at the other side of the roof and Mark opened a door imbedded into the floor. He let everyone gather inside before closing it securely and directing everyone.

“Just down these stairs and… right into this filthy staircase. This staircase has seen many stoners and needles, please, no flash photography.” He led everyone over to a door right at the end of the dark and semi-damp stairs, and to no one’s surprise it opened up to a back alley. It definitely wasn’t the same one Valerie snuck everyone into, but you could tell from the sound of a nearby crowd where it was located.

“Oh, hey, that reminds me.” You spoke up. “Do you know what all that commotion up front was about?”

“Huh?” Mark looked at you as if he were surprised that you could speak. “Oh, uh, yeah. A couple of people got into a fight and it took a bunch of guards just to break them up. Apparently it was a group of people fighting with some monsters. Can you believe it?”

“Ugh, that’s so terrible.” Micah commented, shaking her head disapprovingly. Damen rolled his eyes and chuckled.

“I know, right? Like, have some common decency. The freaks are barely up here for a year and
they’re causing so much trouble.”

Through the dim lighting you could see Micah regard him with a disdainful look. “That’s not what I meant, and you know it.”

Damen raised his hands defensively, but continued anyway, smiling as if he were telling a funny joke.

“I know, I know. All’s I’m saying is that they should have some fucking manners and not pick fights with the people who are tolerating you.”

Wait, you can hear something. The sound of your patience hitting the ground hard enough to make tremors throughout the Earth because no he did not just—

“Hey, did it ever occur to you that maybe they didn’t pick the fight?” You said, guarding your temper carefully. Confrontation wasn’t your lane, but lately you’ve been tired of staying silent.

“What? So? They should already except this. Like, what would you do if some weird-looking gorilla thing tried to ask you for a cup of sugar or something?” He started prancing around and making monkey sounds. He only got a rise out of Valerie. “I don’t know about you, but I’d be freaking the fuck out. Expect that kind of thing when you look like something you find flattened on the side of the road. I swear, this one time I saw like this mantis-crocodile thing, kid you not, and—”

“Hey, asshole.” You cut in, shutting him up. “I know very few thoughts cross your mind, but you need to get your head out of your butt and think a bit before you go off spouting everything and anything that comes to your pea-sized brain.” Everyone was looking at you in surprise, and a little bundle of regret came sneaking up on you.

Well I’ve come this far, you thought.

“While you’re at it, maybe consider the fact that they’re people with feelings too? That maybe they deserve the same kind of respect you treat anyone else with? Hell, if you actually paid attention to the news or even bothered talking to one of them you’d know that they’ve been trapped underground for ages, but they’re just like you and I. So what if they look a little different? The word ‘monster’, or what it used to mean to us, is just a relative term now. They’re not subservient to you, and they don’t have to heed to anyone’s beck and call. Grow the fuck up, Damen.”

The alleyway was silent for a moment, save for the distant sounds of chatter from the crowd. Then, Micah broke it with a clap, looking quite impressed.

“Damn. I mean, like. I’m impressed. Damen’s always an asshole, glad someone has the balls to put him in place, know what I mean?” Micah said, pushing his shoulder and trying to lighten the mood.

“Oh, fuck this. Fuck you.” Damen shot you an accusatory glance before storming off in the direction of the crowd, and assumingly his ride.

“Damn. I mean, like. I’m impressed. Damen’s always an asshole, glad someone has the balls to put him in place, know what I mean?” Micah said, pushing his shoulder and trying to lighten the mood.

“Yes, I have to go piss off some of this booze in my system. See ya.” Either Valerie or Micah said. Probably Valerie.

“Yeah, bye.” You said, and then walked in the opposite direction of the crowd, opting to take a longer path to your car.
“Well look who’s back after an eventful night of partying.” Your mother greeted you as you walked in, just a tad bit tired.

“Hey.” The last thing you felt like doing was socializing, considering how that just went. You probably just made an enemy, oh joy. The one time you just couldn’t keep your mouth shut… ugh. And you know your mother had nothing to do with it and didn’t deserve the accidental crossfire of your mood.

“You sound perky.” She said sarcastically, then motioned you over to the kitchen. “Anyway, I basically rewrote the whole program, it only took a few hours. Now I have to install it and see if it works. And of course, you’re my only test dummy!” She said, spreading her arms wide. When you didn’t laugh, you could immediately tell that she regretted the joke.

“I’m sorry, that wasn’t funny. Kind of insensitive of me, really.” She said, then pointed to something on the counter.

“Ah, well, er. Just hook this flash drive up to your charger and the program should automatically install once you power down. It’ll begin installation immediately, and it should probably kick in before your dreaming system actually kicks in.”

“Wait, it ‘should probably’?” You asked, a bit skeptical.

“Yup. I thought about just removing your whole ‘dream system’ software, but when I created it, like an idiot, I made it reliant on too many internal servos and programs. In turn, some of those servos, programs, and a few main drivers interact with that dream system. It basically works as a counter for sleep by copying the NREM and REM sleep cycles, so your entire shut down process is dependent on that program, hence why I can’t simply just remove it. So good luck.”

“Okay…” You responded, not understanding any of that. You just took the charger and nodded to your mother.

“Well… I’m going to bed now… gonna go sleep… in my bed. You know, to ‘rest’. Goodnight.”

“Night! I’m not really tired, it’s only like what, two AM? You, on the other hand, go catch some Z’s.” She snapped and gave you little finger pistols, to which you flinched slightly. She caught herself then held her hands up apologetically.

“No, no. It’s fine. Goodnight mom.”

You went upstairs after that, reminding yourself to plug the flash drive in. You were back to your same old ways, somehow; staring at the ceiling and holding off the inevitable until you finally got the urge to plug in and go to sleep. Hell, even when you’d thought you had gotten stronger, you’re still uneasy about small, stupid things. Guns and knives just set you… on edge. Unless you prepare yourself for them. But when people surprise you like that—whether they mean to scare you or not—you just can’t help but feel like you’re back there. The brain’s a funny thing—and your mother made sure that your body reacted to it. Ghost pains from flashbacks that weren’t real and unnecessary fear. Thank god you could still keep your external composure. Or else you’d be a shivering, shaking mess all the damn time.

Maybe even hyperventilating. But please, for the love of all things good, you didn’t want to cry. That got so annoying. Don’t you dare… don’t you dare.

You felt a stray tear rolling down your cheek. Some things never change, do they?
Good Old Fashioned Nail Polish

Chapter Summary

I apologize in advance for my overall pessimistic view on things (especially the criminal justice system >.<). Had a big debate w/ myself over whether to write Papyrus’ dialogue in all caps, but I decided it looked unprofessional and went against it. In my opinion it’s hard to read. Small caps would’ve been better but would ao3 even accept that formatting? Just imagine Papyrus is yelling or speaking loudly, a’ight?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It doesn’t take much to be a “good cop”. The real good cops know that real life is nothing like television. Yeah, sure, you’ve got your Law and Orders and your Criminal Minds—but they’re just television dramas. Try as they may, they never show the true corruption that takes places behind closed doors, or even out in the open, in plain sight. Where are your good cops then? Are they standing up to superiors, demanding explanations and justice? No? Then they must be going behind scenes and digging up evidence on their own, right? Guess again. Oh, then you must mean—save it, because you know that’s not the answer. Your “good cops” are out bowing their heads, tails between their legs, barking out “yessirs” where they’re due and going off about their business. Good cops do what they’re told, not what they feel is right. So what if it doesn’t always make sense, a good cop knows when a ‘cold case’ was meant to stay in the freezer.

This was one of them.

So then, if all that makes a good cop, what’s a bad cop? One who does the opposite and tries to be the main character of one’s own TV show? No, friend, those are called rookies. Give ‘em a few more years, they’ll harden. So are the bad cops the guys who go around roughing up people, throwing them out of their cars in a routine traffic stop? Maybe not even those are the bad ones—average, if you’re using the term relatively. Maybe there isn’t a concrete bad cop, but there are certain traits that have been deemed undesirable if you don’t want a bad rep with the superiors. Being too inquisitive or curious? Out of the question. Nice guys get stomped and rolled over. But if you’re too rough, too trigger/taser happy, that’s also slightly discouraged. Nah, barely discouraged. So then, where does that put….

John. His name is John Doe. Save whatever wisecracking joke that just came to mind, he’s heard all of them. He’s a detective in an LA suburb. Nothing special; it’s a fairly small but well off community, but considering he’s been in this line of work for twenty years in and around Los Angeles, he knows the ropes pretty well.

You see, John Doe is in a bit of a moral dilemma. He was never man who stuck his nose out too far, because he knew it might get chopped off. Don’t let TV fool you. Investigations took days, if one were lucky. Cold cases are different matter, however. No suspects to finger, to no substantial evidence, a grieving family and outraged public make for headlines any day. Usually they do. It’s rare when a case gets so little coverage that it’s basically a side article in the Sunday paper. A single mother comes home to her child lying dead in their home in what appeared to be a home robbery. The
robbery showed signs of premeditation and, unsurprisingly, none of the neighbors knew anything, heard anything, or saw anything suspicious. A thieving murderer is out on the loose—who knows what he’s up to now—and not a single damn reporter bats their eye.

Then things get odder. And quieter. Much, much quieter.

The kid’s body is stolen from the morgue. Headlines? Hell no. John, of course, is involved with the investigation to uncover the kid’s body, when even more surprisingly, the mother goes missing too. Superiors are getting nervous until the investigation has been transferred over to the FBI. Big scary men and women in black suits who assure you, the case is in the right hands. What a load of bull.

Here’s John Doe’s dilemma. Well, no, we still have a bit of exposure before we can get to it. Being a good cop just doesn’t work out sometimes. Curiosity killed the cat, but finding out is what brought him back. He decided to follow the case, dig up some files in ways that he’d probably get fired for if he was ever found out. What he found astonished him.

He found nothing.

After the case was handed over, no further evidence was found, it was never listed whether or not the kid’s body was found, or even the mother. Then he decided to run their names through a database listing records of both the living and the deceased. Anyone who knew how to work a computer could do it. And again, it wasn’t what he found that astonished. It was what he didn’t find—death records, for either of them. He had checked his spelling and made sure the birthdates were right. They were, there was no doubt in his mind. Of course there was one more thing he could try…Out of curiosity, he checked a box for ‘all vital records’ and searched the mother’s information.

Nothing.

But... there had to be something. Birth records, medical documents, residency papers—these were all fingerprints a person left behind in their life. The FOIA made it possible for anyone to find one’s own information, or at least part of if it. It went without saying that a police database should be able to find information on individuals, alive or dead.

Now it seemed that the two fell off the face of the Earth.

Days turned to weeks, which turned to months. This dilemma was all but forgotten in the back of his mind, and in time, John Doe had drawn some of his own conclusions about the discrepancies that were popping up the further he stuck his nose. The case files, within a months, had miraculously disappear. He could find no trace of the investigation, save for his own memories.. Falsified documents were always possible. Could it be a case of identity theft? No, that wouldn’t explain a missing body from the morgue, nor missing files from government databases. So it had to be something happening from the inside. Individuals or groups within the government that had the power to create and destroy a person’s identity on paper. However, in Doe’s opinion, they did a sloppy job. There were too many holes in their façade; it was too obvious something wasn’t right. If anyone stuck their nose far enough...

But that’s just it. That’s how they planned it, wasn’t it? A seemingly important case not reaching the public ears and only visiting the desks of (should-be) uninterested detectives. In order to hide a secret, there needs to be a small circle of informed individuals within a crowd of the uninformed. John Doe should’ve remained one of the uninformed, but whoever arranged this ploy must’ve been so confident that his knowledge would’ve been considered collateral damage. People like John Doe— uninspired middle-aged men—weren’t confrontational. It wasn’t worth it, and what could he do? Who could he go to; spouting without physical proof that he found something that didn’t make sense. No one cared. And if they did care, they only cared enough to make sure he wasn’t around. Life
would go on, with or without his participation.

A good cop didn’t worry about these things.

A good cop did his job.

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Being fabulous had only one downside (if you could even call it that): it took time. As the age-old saying goes, you can’t rush perfection. Even if said perfection artificial, it still took time to maintain! Mettaton was sitting in front of his vanity dresser, applying his specifically tailored products for the day in order to look his absolute best. In fact, he was in the process of sprinkling on some MTT brand Anime Powder™ when he heard his phone vibrate on the surface next to him. It can wait, he thought as he continued, scrutinizing himself in the mirror. Yes, almost perfect, but he just needed to —

“Ugh!” His phone, and whoever was impatiently calling him, had taken to knocking itself off his vanity in its vibrating frenzy. Who could be so impatient that they needed to interrupt his morning routine? The nerve… Reaching over to pick up his phone, he found his question answered. In big capital letters befitting to the person calling, the caller ID read: UNDYNE.

Rolling his eyes and bracing himself, he answered the phone.

“Hel—”

“HEY. Just who do you think you are? Wait, don’t answer that, I know you think you’re the master of all things fabulous.” Came Undyne’s booming voice through the speaker.

“Excuse me.” He said, holding the phone slightly away. Undyne’s normal octave tended to be a tad much, even for his robot ears. “And to what exactly do I owe the pleasure of being yelled at in the early hours of the morning?”

“You know what! You don’t just leave someone hanging when you’ve got informative scoop.”

Oh. “Scoop? Hon, what are you talking about?”

“Don’t act dumb with me. You know what I’m talking about. It was the whole point for that dumb vacation-thing. You’ve been back for days and still haven’t said a peep about you-know-who.”

“You-know-who? Darling, the whole point of that trip was to get close to an adorable—I mean adoring fan, now good friend.” He said firmly, emphasizing the last part.


Mettaton rolled his eyes and shifted the phone back to his ear. “I found out that they’re a very sweet person that you should get to know!”

“…Now I KNOW you’re being purposefully dodgy. Let me describe the face I have on right now: IT AIN’T PLEASED.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know dollface. I get that you’re eager about all of this, but, well… I promised them I wouldn’t say a thing! You won’t be getting a peep from me Undyne.”

He held the phone away again to avoid a barrage of incomprehensible yelling.
“Why the hell would you make a dumb promise like that?”

“Some stuff happened! But that’s not the point, okay? I think you should get to know them. They’re not as bad as you seem to think they are. Maybe if you’d stop being hostile and get to know them… they’ll tell you on their own.”

“I am so not falling for any of your BS sitcom schemes to make us friends! No way, buster.”

“Too bad! I already have one in motion!” Mettaton said smugly, spinning slightly in his swiveling vanity chair.

“Wait? Oh god, what is it? Wait, you wouldn’t dare think of inviting them to–”

“Shh, I was going to surprise you! I have to get a few more gears in motion, but your call just reminded me that I still have things to do.”

“Oh god.” Undyne groaned.

“Ta-ta for now!” Mettaton said cheerfully, hanging up. Now, time to take some of those irons from the fire. And there were plenty sitting in there, just heating up and waiting to be used.

Mettaton stood and inspected himself in the mirror. He looked his standard fare of fabulous, as usual. He picked up his phone once again and scrolled through his recent list until he found your familiar name.

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If you looked at the paint imperfections in the ceiling a certain way, you could make out shapes. Things like faces, shapes, scenes—with enough imagination you could see a whole mural. A prancing ballerina was fighting off a roguish band of pirates with only a bamboo staff as a weapon. Scaling tall mountain peaks with only a book for comfort was a noble prince. He was off to go slay some dragon and win back his honor, you decided. And was that Mount Rushmore he was climbing? You decided it was. It was human nature to find and pick out faces where they were not. That in itself was comforting to you.

You rolled over on your bed with your face down against the comforter. You were slipping back into that bored lethargic feeling. There was just nothing to do. Every time you came up with an idea to do something active, it seemed boring without having someone to do it with. Someone who was, specifically, made of metal. And magic, you know? Unfortunately, you couldn’t muster up the courage to contact such a friend. It had been two days since you last saw him, and a day since he last texted you. Would it be too forward of you to take the initiative and contact him first? What if he was busy and you were disturbing him? You couldn’t chance such a risk. Instead you would occasionally roll over and let your hand hover over the phone, locked in indecision. It would be funny if… if… while you were debating to pick up the phone and call, Mettaton called you. Heh, wouldn’t that be some grade-A sitcom BS?

Yeah, this is probably unhealthy. Your phone didn’t ring and you were staring at it like some expectant weirdo. What did you honestly expect him to call or even message you? He’s a busy guy, you’ve said it yourself. You needed to occupy your mind with something, anything. You forced yourself off your bed and shuffled downstairs to the living room. It was still relatively early in the morning, but not painfully so. Perhaps the mindless drivel of television could distract you from your thoughts.

And it did, for a while. Your mom moved back and forth behind you, doing various things while you
“In the criminal justice system…”

Your mom stopped by you, holding something out. It was a bowl of cereal. You accepted and she went on about whatever duties she deemed momly enough—she had a façade to fulfill. Housekeeping along with undercover probably illegal things. Basic mom activities.

You munched on the cereal, hardly tasting it or recognizing what brand it was. You were hit with a strange sense of déjà vu, however. But it’s not as if you aren’t always eating cereal and sitting in front of your television, come on, get with the program.

~ ~ ~

Another heinous crime solved and a ne’er-do-well put behind the bars thanks to the show’s top detectives. There was literally no way these cop shows weren’t an accurate representation of the system. And, another hour sifted by as another episode of Law and Order—you forget which of its series—heaps by.

You hear a knock at the door, but considering the fact that you’re still in your nightclothes you let your mother answer the door. The living room is set off a side hallway that leads into the entranceway, so you could hear everything but not see it. Not that it mattered to you at the moment anyway. It didn’t occur to you that the amount of people who could possibly be visiting you right now could be counted on one hand. It didn’t occur to you that one of the aforementioned people had a significantly higher chance of being the one at the door. It didn’t occur to you until it occurred to you.

“Mettaton? What a pleasant surprise!”

Oh for the love of—

You jump up from in front of the television, leaving your empty cereal bowl behind you, and make a mad dash for your room to change into something decent and not pajama-y.

In your hasty search for decent clothing, you find that Mettaton left a voicemail and texted you about coming over. Of course, probably just a few minutes after you headed downstairs. More importantly, it hadn’t occurred to you take your phone with you. What were you thinking?

Never mind that, you thought as you struggled into a shirt and a pair of jeans. You swear, your life feels like a bad sitcom sometimes. No, sitcoms are actually funny. Perhaps a soap opera that’s trying to appeal to a younger demographic with sci-fi romance themes. Wait—no—no romance, none at all, where was this thought tangent even going?

You try to clear your mind and drive away any impudent unwanted thoughts as you slip your legs into your jeans. You can hear your mother calling your name for the second time as you’re rushing down the stairs.

“Yeah—I’m coming!” You say, rushing back through living room. You flatten your clothing, suddenly becoming self-conscious of the wrinkles peppering your clothes, as you make your way into the entrance hall. The second you stepped out into the hall, there was a flurry of shininess and pink, and you were enveloped in a crushing metal hug.

“Oh darling, you had me so worried! You weren’t answering your phone and I got so worried, so I figured I’d stop by and check up on you.”
“Yeah, sorry about that.” You said as you pat his back. “I, uh, didn’t have my phone on me, but I’m fine.”

He released you and held you away by the shoulders at arm’s length. Just behind him, you could see your mother giving you some kind of smug look. Before you had a chance to glare back, Mettaton was speaking again.

“Good! Actually, I came over here with ulterior motives. I wanted to invite you out to a little get-together I was having with some of my friends. It would be absolutely amazing if you got to meet all of my friends.”

Before you could answer, your mother had her arm around your shoulders and as beaming up at Mettaton.

“Oh, you’d love to go, wouldn’t you sweetie? You’ve been aching to get out of the house and see Mettaton, haven’t you?”

“Mom.” You grumbled under your breath and shot a sideways glare at your mother. “Sure, I’d love to. Where are we meeting?”

“We’re stopping off at a friend’s house then heading over to a skating rink.”

You couldn’t remember the last time you’d been skating, or if you were any good at it to begin with. Or you know… if you’d ever even been skating. Your mother, smiling, pat your back roughly before turning you over to Mettaton.

“Here, don’t forget your keys—and your wallet.”

“Mom, I’ve got this—”

“Oh I’m sure you do; you were just about to walk out without your phone weren’t you? It’s still upstairs, isn’t it?”

You stiffened, and immediately reached for your pockets. Sighing, you rushed past your mother and a giggling Mettaton up to your room to grab your phone—

“And bring a jacket, it’s chilly out.”

…and a jacket, before coming back downstairs.

Your mother waved you off, and with that, you were on your way out with Mettaton.

“You and your mother are absolutely hilarious.” Mettaton said once the two of you were seated in his limousine. You rolled your eyes but couldn’t help the betrayal of your slight smile.

“Hush, you.”

~ ~ ~

Monster neighborhoods tend to have a different feel to them. If gated communities were known to be run down, then that would be one way to describe them. Since humans are generally nasty towards the unknown and anything that brings forth confusion, there was a huge problem with monster-targeted hate crimes and vandalism. To solve this, officials set up large gates fitted with moderate security, but in all honesty, it looked like a jail from outside. You needed identification to go in and out of the place, and despite the wall and gate, the inside didn’t look much better. They had the
essence of mid 1900s prefab or Lustron houses that were easy to assemble and made to house. The communities you drove by were small, and the only kind of stores you saw were nothing more than a corner store, and that was putting it lightly. You felt bad, but what could you do? Your sentiment wasn’t going to give anyone better housing.

As you pulled into a driveway, that of his friend you assumed, you noticed a car pulling in from behind. It was a navy blue minivan and you knew it could only belong to one person.

“Frisk-darling!” Mettaton exclaimed as the small child rushed out of the care to wrap the two of you in a hug.

“Hey, Frisk. Hi Toriel.” You greeted Frisk with a light pat on the head and waved to Toriel as she exited the van.

“It’s so good to see the two of you today.” Toriel said, greeting the two of you with a light wave.

“Oh, Tori, no one told me you were going to be joining us today!” Mettaton said.

“Oh, I hate to disappoint but I am merely here to drop Frisk off. My schedule for today is going to be quite packed.”

Mettaton let out a huff and puffed lips out into a pout. “Then let me come over there and give you a bug then.”

It was a bit comical for you to watch him try and waddle over to Toriel with a tiny Frisk clinging to one of his legs like he was a ride.

After Toriel parted ways, the three of you walked up to the front door with Mettaton in the lead.

“You never told me who this friend of yours was.” You said as he rang the doorbell.

“Oh right, how rude of me darling!” He said, fanning his hand in your direction as if to dismiss it. “I’ll have to reintroduce the two of you.”

“Reintroduce? We’ve met before?”

He wasn’t able to answer me as the door opened just then.

“Mettaton! I’m glad you’re finally here, we were all starting to wonder when you’d show up…” You heard a faltering voice answer the door. Surely you’d remember meeting someone with such an adorable voice, you thought.

“I had to make a little stop Alphys, you know how I am. Frisk is also here, and I brought a friend with me.”

“A friend? Y-You didn’t t-tell me you were bringing a friend with you.”

Mettaton didn’t answer, instead he took a step to the side. You were greeted with a flustered bespectacled dinosaur-like monster. She looked up at you in surprise for a moment before giving you a sheepish wave. Frisk, who had taken to holding your hand, also waved.

“Hello.” You said.

“H-Hi there. It’s nice to meet you. My n-names Alphys, but I think you already gathered that…” You could tell she had a very nervous demeanor about her. You realized suddenly that you were probably coming off as curt or rude and racked your brain for something to say when you greet
“So… this is your house?” You asked. Such eloquence, it’s simply exquisite.

“Yes! This, uh, is my house. It’s my house alright—actually! I share it with my girlfriend.”

“Oh, really? Is she inside?”

“Yeah! Oh, duh! H-How silly of me, why don’t you come in?” She stepped back into the house to let all of you in. The house was nothing to call home about, but it seemed pretty tidy and organized. The living room and dining room were simply one large room with an offshoot doorway leading to what you assumed to be the kitchen, though you couldn’t see it from here. However, there appeared to be quite a bit of noise coming from inside. There was also a hallway which you assumed led to the bedrooms. It reminded you of your old apartment in ways, what with how tiny it seemed at first glance.

“Why don’t you guys have a seat? Everyone’s in the kitchen, I’ll go get them and introduce you all.”

“Oh no, they’re in the kitchen?” Mettaton asked, with a disdainful look on his face.

“Yeah, I know…” Alphys responded, with an equally squeamish face. “But you were taking so long, and Papyrus insisted on making his signature dish. Heh, and you-know-who had to join in.”

“I know she did! But enough chit-chat, get them all out here!”

“R-right! You got it.” And with that Alphys rushed into the kitchen on the far end, Frisk running in after them. The two of you, you and Mettaton, sat down on the only couch in the room. Mettaton turned to you with an almost mischievous glint in his eye.

“You’re going to absolutely love my friends. They’re all real charmers, I assure you.” He said, practically gushing. You smiled, unsure of how to respond to how strange he seemed to be acting. Well, stranger than usual that is. Not a moment later, however, Frisk came into the room with an unusually tall skeleton in tow. A very loud one, at that.

“Human, why are we rushing?! If we run too fast, we’ll—OH! Mettaton, is here, hel-” He seemed to cut himself on, noticing you finally. Smiling softly, you stood and offered a wave.

“Hi, I’m Mettaton’s friend.” You said, a bit amused by his personality, and volume. “I suppose it is a pleasure to meet you.”

Frisk disappeared into the kitchen again for a moment, only to come running out with another, slightly (very) shorter skeleton.

“Oh, I have heard plenty about you from Frisk and Mettaton! Greetings, it must be a pleasure to meet me! I am the Great Papyrus.”

“Hi, Papyrus.” You said, a bit amused by his personality, and volume. “I suppose it is a pleasure to meet you.”

Sans offered a lazy wave, accompanied by an equally lazy-looking smile.

“The… resemblance is uncanny.”

“Really, you think so?? People say we look alike but I just don’t see it.” Papyrus said, then looked
down at his brother Sans. “Well, don’t be rude! Say hello, Sans! And shake hands!”

“Hello, Sans.” He said, and then proceeded to interlock both of his hands and shake them up and down. Papyrus put his hands to his eye(socket)s and faced ceiling-ward in disgust while you, Mettaton, and Frisk shared a laugh.

“You did walk into that one.” Alphys’ voice called out as she entered the living room. Everyone shared a light laugh, but it was cut off quickly as the lights in the living room went out. There was momentary surprise as the room was dark, but you could still fairly well, with or without robo-vision. From the kitchen doorway there was still light, and in it a silhouette of someone stood proudly. In fact, there was something familiar about it, though you couldn’t place what—until the silhouette spoke.

“You.” So this was the friend Mettaton was talking about. “You may have embarrassed me in front of a crowd last time, but this time things will be different!”

Undyne slid out of the kitchen into the path of light. On her shoulders, there was a table and two chairs. In one swift motion, she set them down. With a smug smile, she set her foot on one of the chairs and made a beckoning motion with her hand.

“So come on, face me now! Unless you’re too scared.”

There was a stunned silence, and suddenly, everyone’s eyes were on you. You looked to Mettaton for help, but he offered only a shrug, obviously taken just as off guard as you. Suddenly, you felt tiny hands on your back pushing you forward.

“Come on!” Frisk said. “You can do it!”

You offered a reluctant smile in return; this wasn’t the kind of motivation you needed right now. Papyrus, quick to the uptake, ran to Undyne’s side and began pumping her up as well.

“You can do it Undyne! You are quite possibly one of the strongest people I know, next to myself of course!” He cheered, patting her shoulder while she crossed her arms and made taunting gestures towards you. Frisk had taken to tugging you by your hand and Mettaton decided to help by placing an arm around your shoulders and ushering you forward.

“Ooh, who doesn’t love a good competition between friends? Let me be the referee.” Mettaton said as soon as you were seated. From your peripheral vision you saw Alphys join Papyrus on Undyne’s side.

“You can do it sweetie!” She said with surprising vigor.

“Not you too Alphys…” You said with disappointment, to which she offered a shrug. On your left, you saw Sans join your side. He gave you a thumbs up.

“Sorry, doesn’t look like there’s a way to wrestle your way out of this,” He said. “But if I had to, I’d place my bets on you, kid.” You were too late to catch the pun on time; Mettaton was placing your hand and Undyne’s together as he kept both of his on top, mirroring the last time the two of you did this. He began to count down, and all the while Undyne was eying you and making cutting motions with her other hand.

“Go!” Mettaton said finally, and immediately Undyne began putting all of her force into your hand. She’d definitely gotten strong in the time since you last saw her but… Hm. Either way, you’d decided before this began that you were going to let her win in the end, just to get her off of your back. Without any resistance, you let her slam your hand against the table. Mettaton clapped, and
Alphys and Papyrus began cheering; the only one not looking happy was Undyne.

“G-Great job! I knew you could do it.”

“As expected from someone so strong!”

“No.” She said sternly, stopping the two in their praise. They looked confused for a moment, asking her what was wrong, but Undyne was staring straight at you, and she didn’t look the least bit happy about her “victory”.

“No! You didn’t use any of your strength at all, what was that?!” She demanded, standing up and leaning over the table to grab you by your shirt. You were at a loss of words and just stared back like a deer in headlights, to which Undyne responded by letting you go forcefully and slamming back down into her chair.

“That did not count at all. How dare you insult me like this! I don’t know who you take me for, but I’m no weakling! Come at me with all you’ve got, right now!”

“A-Are you sure? I mean, I, uh…” You fumbled for words or an excuse, but Undyne squinted and—w-was she growling at you?

“Alright, rematch time it is?” Mettaton said warily, and got the two of you set back up. Undyne cracked her neck and met you dead on with a serious expression.

“Ready… set… go!”

Again, she unleashed all of her strength and began trying to force your arm onto the table. You decided to oblige in Undyne’s commands (seeing as you were a tad scared of her) and applied a bit of force. Easily, her arm began to move towards the other side of the table. Her face changed from one of determination to one of surprise. You honestly never needed to use this much strength on a daily basis—if at all, being completely honest. You were a bit shocked too, but mostly you felt remorse because you knew there’d be hell to pay once Undyne lost.

But you decided not to flat out embarrass her. Sure, you could’ve used less strength and pretended to give her a fair and square win but, uh… How to put this… You also had an ego to protect.

“Come ON! I trained… so hard!” Undyne stood, her chair clattering to the floor behind her. Throwing the basic rules of arm wrestling aside, she used her other hand to try and aid her, and then her foot. Finally, she let out an indignant yell, picked up the table, and slammed it almost into the back of your hand.

“THERE. I win!”

“What? That’s cheating!” Frisk yelled, puffing out their little cheeks. “Doesn’t count! Doesn’t count!”

“I don’t get it… How can this human be stronger than Undyne?” Papyrus asked, to which Alphys shrugged. She was genuinely confused as well.

“M-Maybe today is just an off day?” Alphys offered.

“Eh, you win some you lose some.” Sans said with a flippant tone.

“Hey, at least it’s over with ri—”
“Everyone stop talking!” Undyne yelled, silencing everyone. You wondered briefly how the neighbors must be feeling.

“Okay, know what? I have a better idea!” Undyne said, and a maliciously mischievous smile took over. She grabbed Mettaton’s arm and with a foot kicked up her chair, leading him towards it.

“You two battle it out! I wanna see what happens.”

“You can’t be serious…” You said with slight dismay.

“Honestly! I don’t want to embarrass them in front of you all, after all…” Mettaton said. You cocked an eyebrow and felt your pride ruffle momentarily.

“Uh… sorry. But I don’t think it’d be me getting embarrassed.” You said. Mettaton met your eyes with a shocked and slightly offended expression, which soon turned to petty chagrin.

“Oh, no-no-no! Darling, I suggest you take that back before you regret it.” His words implied dare and there were challenge in his eyes.

“Sorry, but I don’t see myself regretting the truth.” You put your elbow on the table and met his challenge with one of your own. A smile on his face, he mirror your actions and grasped your hand.

“Haha! Now we’re talking here!” Undyne exclaimed, taking over the position of referee. You felt a wry smile take over as she began counting down.

“Ready… set… go!”

T’was a harrowing battle indeed. Finding a description to fit it would be meager in light of the events that unfolded; cities fell and castles crumbled, leaving those who survived this war of ages to fend for themselves in their ruined abodes. Aye, t’was something to behold; all those who witnessed wept at the might strength displayed by both parties. That is to stay…

The two of you were deadlocked for a solid sixty seconds. Mettaton was strong, very, very strong. But you were as well. Undyne’s cheering died down as she realized what was happening, and Frisk too had stopped trying to motivate you and was simply staring on in slight disappointment.

A few more minutes passed, and Alphys had opted to get everyone drinks. You and Mettaton were still staring at each other intensely, though everyone else had appeared to grow bored of all this. Sans started stacking things on your hands. It was Undyne, unsurprisingly, who finally snapped.

“Okay, okay! That’s enough—just stop it. Let go of each other.” She flicked at your interlocked hands until the two of you noticed and decided to let go, knocking over the books in the process. She glowered at the two of you, disdain for both of you equal in her eyes as she massaged her temples.

“Let’s just go to the skating rink.”

~ ~ ~

And you did. Well, after a little while of struggling. There weren’t very many places to go to for fun inside of the walls—no recreation centers and especially no skating rinks. Because of this, Undyne insisted that everyone ride in her truck, as it was big enough and would save up on parking and gas. Papyrus, however parked behind Undyne, and Mettaton had parked behind him so… After much debate (mostly from Undyne) everyone decided to take their own ride over. The only difference was that Frisk insisted on riding with you and Mettaton.
Then of course there was the security check through the walls. The human officers gave everyone suspicious looks, but all of your IDs were in order, so they had to let you pass. After that, it was easy getting to the skating rink. Excitement was clear on everyone’s faces, and you had to admit you were looking forward to getting inside as well. It’d been awhile since you last skated (never), but you were sure you’d do just fine. It was an average skating rink, in the suburbs, nothing more nothing less. Luckily, its hours ran late into the night, though you doubted you all would be staying long. Still, you were nervous as to whether or not the staff would react with hostility towards you and your friends. Legally, they were required to give you all entrance, but laws weren’t always the most respected.

“Everyone here?” Undyne called out once she saw everyone was out. She did a quick head count, and once she was satisfied she charged forwards towards the door. There was still a little ball of anxiety inside of you, nevertheless… you could hope, couldn’t you?

It was no surprise that the vendor gave everyone strange looks as your group went up to pay for tickets. Their gaze wasn’t one of animosity, but of outward curiosity and perhaps slight aversion. Their eyes kept flickering from you, to Frisk, to your friends and then back again, the question obvious on their mind but not quite on their lips. They paused considerably long to gawk at Mettaton, however, obviously recognizing him. The tickets were bought—with an awkward air about the group. The only ones oblivious to it, seemingly, were Papyrus and Frisk. So basically, there was no hassle getting in!

“So…” Undyne looked around—ooh, this place had arcade area as well. “What should we do first?”

“Maybe we should go get fitted for skates? I mean, it’s pretty obvious.” Mettaton offered, pointing towards an area set up kind of like a department store shoe section.

“I think we should get a table and order something to eat.” Sans said and gestured towards the refreshments area with a thumb.

“Sans, don’t be silly! Eating is reserved for after all of the fun! I say we head on over to the arcade section so that I may boast my gaming prowess!” Papyrus struck a pose and faced the direction of the arcade.

“What?” Undyne huffed. “Who goes to a skating rink to play games? It’s a skating rink, not a gaming rink! We should go get some skates!”

“But if we go play games, w-we can get tickets and cash them for prizes, see?” Alphys gestured towards the ticket store.

“Are you kidding me? Only little ki—” Undyne took a glance down at Frisk, who shook their head slowly. The former sighed and pinched the area between her brows.

It kind of degraded from there, and in a few seconds it was nothing but overlapping voices. You felt something tugging at you, and you looked down to see Frisk trying to get your attention.

“What do you think we should do?” They asked, under the noise you all were making (and at the entrance, no less).

“Pretty soon I’m sure some employees are going to ask us to move… I honestly think we should split up and have fun. I see something like a restaurant on the far end, probably just pizza and burgers and things of the like, but it wouldn’t be a good idea to eat first. One could cramp up, and fatty greasy food, despite being delicious, would just make you feel tired, don’t you think? Oh, we should also skate beforehand too. Those of us that I can assume have digestive systems shouldn’t do anything...”
Everyone was looking at you. You didn’t realize that they’d stopped talking and had taken to honing in on your conversation with Frisk.

“I mean, just a suggestion, you know, uh…” You felt nervous, suddenly under everyone’s scrutinization, and cast your gaze downward.

“Hey, that’s actually a pretty great idea!” You looked up once you heard Undyne’s voice, specifically her enthusiasm.

“Yes! Creating such a superb schedule and consolidating all of our activities like that… It’s genius! And completely efficient.”

“Y-Yeah… it seems pretty obvious now that I think about. Now I feel silly.” Alphys interjected.

“Ah, uh, I was just trying to be helpful you know.” You said with a shrug, still feeling a bit awkward.

“Well, great idea or no, we can’t put it into action in the doorway can we?” Mettaton said, breaking some of the tension. “Besides, the staff here are giving us weird looks, and I don’t think they’re checking me out… Although they could be!” He posed for dramatic effect.

In the end, everyone decided to follow through with your idea. It was a bit awkward getting fit for skates. The attendant was trying to be polite, but they didn’t seem to realize that wide-eyed staring usually counteracted that.

When it was your turn, the attendant tried to speak to you. Your group was hanging a little back, but he still tried to whisper in a sly voice.

“Sheesh, you must be so worn out.” They said, taking your measurements with one of those shoe tool thingies.

“…Why would I be?” Cue The Face ™

“I mean, it must be odd right? Hanging out with people like that… I mean, I haven’t even seen a monster, let alone several. They’re so weird looking, don’t you think so? I guess just talking to them is fine, if it’s just for business, but I don’t think I could…”

“Know what? I know my shoe size, I can just go grab a pair right?” You stood up and walked to the wall lined with different skate sizes and grabbed a pair your size. You didn’t even bother to look at the attendant’s stupefied face as you regrouped with your friends.

“Alright, everyone settled? Then what are we waiting for? Let’s get this show on the road!” Undyne already had her skates on and began to launch herself onto the rink.

“Yeah! Let’s go.” Hopping dangerously on one foot, Frisk quickly put on their other shoe and rolled out after Undyne.

“Hey, be careful! Wait!” Alphys sat down and hurriedly put on her shoes before going in after her.

“Fear not! The great Papyrus will make sure no one is injured.” Papyrus went out next, followed by
Sans.

Mettaton looked back at you, an expectant smile on his face.

“Well? After you!” He said, and gestured for me to go first. I put on my skates carefully, then slowly made my way onto the rink… but something felt off.

No.

It couldn’t be.

You began to rock back and forth and instinctively put your arms off as a balance, but it was no use, you went toppling towards the floor and landed square on your butt.

What. No. This didn’t make any sense!

“Oh… pft… Oh my god!” Mettaton covered his mouth and tried to hide a smirk as he skated out towards you.

“No, shut up! I can do this.” Crawled onto your hands and knees and tried to stand up, but your feet ended up slipping out from under you and flopped onto your stomach.

“Oh! My god! You can’t skate, can you?” Mettaton said, now almost doubling over with his laughter.

“I-I should be able to! Why…” Wasn’t this the exact purpose of balance drivers/servos? Balance?

“Wow. This is kind of sad to look at.” You heard the sound of skates, and saw Sans, accompanied by Papyrus, approaching.

“Human, why are you lying on the ground like that? Is it some sort of skating move?” Papyrus asked, investigating you with a hand to his chin.

“Nah, bro. They just can’t skate.” Sans responded. “Or they’re inspecting the floor for imperfections. Either one.”

You ignored them both, and tried once again to get to your feet. You succeeded for all of two seconds before you toppled like a stack of bricks once more.

Now everyone was crowding around to inspect you. Alphys was trying to hold back a smile, Frisk looked genuinely concerned for you, and Undyne had her hands on her hips and threw back her head with laughter.

“This is amazing! Absolutely amazing!” She said, practically guffawing. “You, of all people, can’t skate.”

“So what! Plenty of people can’t.” You said defensively, though you didn’t feel so confident hunched over on the floor.

Still giggling, Mettaton came a little closer and offered you a hand. You glared at him, but still grudgingly took it as he helped you to your feet.

“Want me to teach you how to skate?”

“Are you going to make fun of me while you do it?”
“Only a little bit.”

You sighed, but decided to concede anyway.

Everyone else finally decided they’d had enough fun messing with you, so that left you with Mettaton.

“Well, darling, the first thing you need to do is find your balance. You can’t learn skate attached to my arm, though I honestly don’t mind you trying.”

You decided to ignore the last part, and any of your accompanying thoughts that decided to pop up. “I know, I know, I’m trying. I don’t usually concentrate on balancing myself, it just comes.” You took a quick look around. “I thought that’s how I was built.”

“Yeah, but I think it might not be that unusual. Have you tried skating after… you know?”

“No, I haven’t.”

“I have you skated period?”

“…No.”

Mettaton laughed a bit, but you weren’t amused one bit.

“Then it makes perfect sense! You probably weren’t programmed to do things like skating at all, your drivers are probably only calibrated for walking so it’ll take some getting used to. Believe me, hun, I was an absolute mess when I first tried walking heels. It was something truly awful.”

“Pft-” You covered your mouth, trying to smother a laugh, but almost lost balance subsequently. Mettaton of course giggled at you, but recovered quickly.

“Okay, okay, enough joking around. Are you balanced yet, hon?”

“Wait, I…” It was like learning to walk again. Or getting used to a new body. Your feet kept moving every which way, and with it came a sense a panic that you would fall, but luckily Mettaton let you hold on to him. You found that bending your knees a bit helped a whole lot in the end, and you managed to keep yourself upright for more than two seconds.

“Got it.” You said finally, and Mettaton smiled.

“Good! Now I’m going to let go, and-” His hands started releasing yours. Whoa, what.

“Whoa, what.” This wasn’t in the agenda. You tried to grab his hands back but he pulled them out of your reach.

“Okay, this is not funny.” You suddenly felt wobbly again.

“Find your balance! Center yourself!” He called as he began to skate backwards, all the while watching on with a smug smile.

“Okay sensei thanks for the advice.” You put your arms out again to try and balance yourself, although last time didn’t seem to help much. Feet, now was not the time to move. Just bend your knees and… and…

To your surprise, your feet remained firmly planted, and your butt remained off the ground.
“See! You’re doing great!”

“Yes, I finally learned how to stand. One small step for man, as they say.”

Mettaton skated back over to you and began circling you.

“Alright, now here comes the fun part: actually moving! Sounds fun, right dollface?”

“… I think this is fine. I like this section of the floor just fine.” You said straightly.

“Ha! Oh, you just crack me up.” He moved up next to you and interlocked his elbow with yours, then began to move forward.

“Hey! No! No, nope, oh my god what are you doing?” You started moving forward and oh god this was too quick. Said the person who ran their battery to death, these skates are just too fast.

“Don’t focus on your panic, focus on my feet, see?”

Warily, you took a look down at his feet. Nothing seemed too special about them, save that they were moving.

“Your feet are very nice.”

Mettaton scoffed and rolled his eye. “No! What are my feet doing? See how I’m moving them?”

You took another glance down and saw that his feet were moving in a certain pattern. They would curve in move out, sort of like a half circle. Curious, you tried making the same motions with your feet.

“See, that’s it! Just keep it up darling!” Mettaton said, trying to encourage you. You gave him a small smile but continued to focus on your feet and moving them just right. Eventually, you began to just flow with it; it felt like a smooth motion. Wow, this wasn’t so hard after all!

“Oh my gosh, look at you! You’re doing great, absolutely amazing!”

You felt a big grin forming at his words, and a small surge of confidence.

“Yeah, this isn’t so bad. I think I can—hey, what are you doing?”

Mettaton suddenly released your arm and began skating off away. Your look of horror is not one that can accurately be graced with a description; you were still moving from his momentum and suddenly it seemed impossible to steer.

“I took away your training wheels! You can do it, hon, I believe in you!”

“You little! Agh!” You nearly lost your balance, managed to get a hold of yourself. Okay, focus. Half circles with your feet, half circles. Just remember that same fluid motion and…

To your surprise, you actually began to move forward. Like, a cohesive fluid line that didn’t feel like vertigo.

Achievement Unlocked: Conquered the Skates.

You couldn’t help the huge smile that broke out on your face because this felt amazing. You tried leaning your body a bit to turn, and miraculously you didn’t fall on your face.
“Hey, you finally got it down!” You looked over to find Alphys and Undyne skating in your direction.

“Hey, look who finally stopped eating pavement.” Undyne said approaching. You were a bit worried at first, but to your surprised she raised her hand and offered a high five. Relieved, you gladly accepted it.

“Heh, y-yeah I guess.” You said bashfully.

You took a look around to try and spot some of your friends and noticed something odd. The floor was mostly clear, save for your group. No one else seemed bothered by it, but it had you a tad peeved.

You were still a bit (a lot) wobbly on your feet, but you were quickly getting the hang of this whole skating thing. Right now, you were mainly just going in circles around the rink, having a good ol’ time. Sans came by to make some jokes about you not wrestling the floor anymore, to which you responded maturely by sticking out your tongue. After a few minutes of continuing to grow accustomed to your skates, you came upon Papyrus and Frisk doing some figure eights.

Frisk, seeing that you were skating properly waved you over to where they stood with Papyrus. You picked up some speed and rushed over, but perhaps you were a bit overzealous in your approach; you ended up zooming towards them a little too fast.

“The stoppers on the front! The stoppers!” Frisk yelled out. You looked down and noticed some soft looking cylinder things on the front of your shoe. At a loss of what else to do, you stuck your foot down and came to an abrupt stop.

Too abrupt. You went soaring a good too feet before landing on your stomach and sliding towards the wall. You just sort of laid there for a moment wallowing in self-pity, before you heard someone approach.

“Pst… Human. Why are you sleeping on the floor over here?” You heard Papyrus ask you.

“I think I’m done with skating for now.” You said, face still on the floor.

And you meant it. A bit later, you were taking your skates off and sliding towards the entrance of the rink. You sat down on the elevated edge and kicked of your shoes. That was fun while it lasted, you think.

“All tuckered out over there?” Mettaton asked, skating towards you with his hands on his knees and looking down at you with a doting-like expression.

“You’re enjoying this a bit too much.”

“And can you blame me? How can I resist when you’re so adorable all the time?” Mettaton said, and began to sit down next to you. You felt a tinge of embarrassment, like you could hardly consider someone yourself adorable. Troublesome, perhaps. You decided to write it off as more of Mettaton’s blue ribbon kindness and change the topic.

“Don’t you think it’s… kind of disheartening?” You asked, looking out at everyone having blast on the almost empty rink.

“People… will get used to us, eventually.” Mettaton said, though if you were honest with yourself you think he sounded a bit unsure.
Just get used to? You wanted to say these words out loud, but you didn’t have the energy for the conversation that would surely follow. And besides, everyone was starting to head your way anyway.

“Whoo! I don’t know about you guys, but I’m ready play some games.” Undyne said, punching at the air.

“Does napping count as a game?” Sans said, raising his hand like a kid in class.

“I think competitive sleeping might actually be a sport…” Alphys said.

“Don’t encourage him!” Papyrus exclaimed, infuriated, much to everyone’s delight.

Everyone began to take off their skates and return them, then migrate over to the game area. There was just about every arcade game you could think of, from the classics like Pacman to those new modern alien shooter games to—oh god, was that what you think it was? That game was enough to partially lift you out of your funk.

You ran over to the Dance Dance Revolution machine and dug around for some quarters—only to find that the machine only took some special store given tokens. There was a moment of panic for you before Alphys broke it.

“I, er, think you have to go to that clerk over there to exchange your money.” She said, smiling a bit at your zeal. You nodded once and walked briskly over to the indifferent-looking clerk. One quarter equals four coins, and a dollar was a deal for 30. You handed the clerk a five and took your stash back over to your friends.

“I don’t know about you all, but I’m playing this one.”

“I wanna try it!” You heard a small voice chime, then looked over to see Frisk climbing up onto the second player platform.

“You sure? I’m not going easy on you.” You said and began to insert two coins into the game slot. You were expecting everyone to go off and do their own thing, but to your surprise and slight discomfort, they’d taken to gathering around your game. Ah, geez, now you felt kind of nervous as you picked out one of your favorite dance songs. Not wanting to feel like a jerk, you set it to easy and smiled at Frisk while you waited through the intro.

Frisk was… surprisingly good! You liked to consider yourself a pro, but even on easy you had trouble keeping your score above Frisk. They had some mad moves and were hitting almost every step with a perfect.

This… this meant war.

After the song, Frisk had you beat with a close score, enough to get you fired up. By this time, Alphys and Papyrus had wandered off to go play another game, and you believe Undyne did as well.

“So you can’t skate,” You suddenly heard Sans on the other side of you and jumped. “But you can dance like crazy on one of these?”

“N…no correlation. Skating is legitimately hard, dancing on the other hand is fun.” You said with just a tinge of pride, only the smallest you’d allow yourself as you hovered over the hard difficulty of a song. Frisk flashed you a challenging grin and crossed their arms.
“Bring it on.”

You raised your eyebrows but brought back a grin just as hard. “Consider it brung.”

The next hour was filled with dancing to some of the most upbeat, borderline weebish songs you could find, all on the hard difficulty with a few expert/challenges thrown in there.

“Alright, alright.” Frisk bent over the stage post, out of breath. “I propose a truce!”

You smiled, leaning back against the railing.

“If anything, you beat me fair and square.” You said, considering that Frisk had beaten you in over half the songs you selected.

“Nah, it’s definitely a tie.” Frisk said, shaking their head dismissively.

“Well, either way, where’d you get moves like that?” You asked. Frisk didn’t respond, instead they just turned their gaze to Mettaton, who had stayed behind like Sans, and who in turn began to look a bit sheepish.

Afterwards, you decided to spectate your friends and what they were doing. When you came over, Papyrus and Undyne were going against each other in a racing game. Alphys was playing one of those skee-ball games, and seemed to be doing surprisingly well, you deduced from her large pile tickets at her feet.

“Hey, great job over there.” You called out to Alphys, who jumped a bit and fumbled with the ball in her hands.

“Wh-What? Oh, nah, this game’s pretty easy once you get the hang of it…” She said, demonstrating by rolling the ball with practiced ease towards the 100 slot. Amazed, you clapped for her, and her face began to turn bright red.

“I was never any good at skee-ball; it always ended up frustrating me as a kid. How do you do it?”

“Well, when it comes down to it, it’s basic physics. You just have to factor in the weight of the ball, then then the height of incline for the ramp which can be difficult to estimate by sight alone, but that’s where trial and error comes in and you just need test how much force would be needed to send the ball into the middle hole… Actually, if we let the weight of the ball represent ‘x’, and the average skee-ball weighs about 220 grams—oh, but first we’d have to find the linear trajectory wouldn’t we? I always do that part first so forgive me, and then we set the… uh…”

You were just kind of staring blankly at Alphys at this point, she’d lost you at ‘physics’ and after that everything else was a blur.

“Uh… huh? Wow, I’m sorry, I’m not going to pretend I’m smart enough to get all of that. I don’t even remember my physics class that well, or how good I did in it.” You said

“No worries, I did get a little carried away, heh.” She said, smiling. You smiled in return and watched as she easily dunked yet another skee-ball with precise perfection, earning a long stream of tickets for her pile.

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So this was an outing with friends—a real one, even if you’d just met most of these people. You didn’t feel extremely out of place, and no one went out of their way to ignore you or make you feel
estranged. Even Undyne had taken a liking to you, it seemed you had her all wrong or she was just filled with surprises. Mettaton’s friends were all so… nice… and great. This was great.

Everyone cashed in their tickets for prizes, and Alphys ended up picking out a giant stuffed hamburger pillow that was nearly bigger than her. Even when you all sat down after ordering something to eat she had it hugged to her side. You actually ended up sharing a laugh with Undyne over how adorable it was. Papyrus ordered one of those plastic toy megaphones and two small basketballs, which he said would make an expert fashion statement much to your confusion. Sans got off with a joy buzzer and a whoopee cushion, to no one’s surprise. Undyne got several rings, though you were sure none of them fit her fingers, Frisk got a small plushy in the shape of a heart, and Mettaton ended up getting those cheap little nail polish sets.

When everyone decided they wanted to sit down and eat, you ordered a personal pizza for yourself, a big helping of greasy un-goodness. You could hear Papyrus complaining that no establishment could call themselves good if they didn’t serve spaghetti. You took your time to explain to him that spaghetti was usually considered a high class meal and probably wouldn’t be served unless it was at a highly esteemed restaurant or something. (Maybe that was a bit of a lie, but it seemed to placate Papyrus, so what was the harm?)

After everyone finished eating, you all spent awhile at the tables talking and chatting. Sans was cracking a few jokes and one-liners, leaving most everyone laughing, even Papyrus was cracking a smile. You couldn’t remember having this much fun in years, and it was amazing.

It had begun to get pretty late at this point, and soon Toriel would be at Undyne’s to pick up Frisk, so everyone began to gather their goodies and prepare to leave. Just as there was little problem getting into the rink, there wasn’t much drama getting out. Everyone made it back to their cars safely, and it made you happy that there was no conflict, because you’d seen some awful things in the news lately. The night ended peacefully, and for that you were thankful.

Chapter End Notes

I know you all must be tired of me and my petty excuses. But at the same time, it's all of your enthusiasm that's inspiring me to stop being so irresponsible. I started this, and by golly, I'm gonna effin finish it! A lot of things are happening in my life right now that are taking their toll on me. I'm not going to vent my troubles, don't worry you aren't my therapist, but I will try to dedicate myself to a more consistent update routine. Maybe a week or two, not three... months... ugh. Again, I cannot apologize enough, and I hope you can find it in your hearts to forgive me.

On another, brighter note: Do you have an idea for a chapter theme, before I get down to the angsty shit once more? Here's your chance for a suggestion, and by theme I mean something like this chapter's main deal was: a skating outing.
Good Old Fashioned Pink Granite Countertops

Chapter Summary

The reader meeting Napstablook? I think you mean an apologizing contest. Or perhaps an ellipsis contest?

You know the face SpongeBob makes when he says “You like Krabby Patties, don’t you?” Imagine your mother with that face now, every time she smiles at you smugly. Too late, you can’t unsee it.

ALSO some people suggested a beach-themed chappie, so that’ll be coming around next update. I actually plan on going all out on the anime beach episode tropes, not holding back. Plus, I can't believe this hadn't occurred to me sooner--it's California, all weather is beach weather in L.A.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

See, here’s the thing about living in California. It could be the middle of winter—the middle of February to be precise—and the temperature would still be beach worthy. The averages for the month so far had been about, oh let’s say, 65 degrees. Today had been a big exception, coming in at about 79. This week was likely to bump up the average, with an average high of 70.

Your mother came into the living room holding a mug. Her hands were shaking, so could assume she was drinking coffee, and that she probably didn’t get much sleep. Despite the bags underneath her eyes, and the sallow complexion she seemed to be sporting due to an unhealthy sleeping schedule, she was smiling at you brightly.

“What are you doing in here?!” She asked you, raising her hand so abruptly she nearly spilled her coffee. “It’s a beautiful day outside! It isn’t normal California cool outside, but it’s not so sweltering that it’s overwhelming. What do you say you and me go grab some smoothies?”

“You’re no fun.” She took a shaky sip from her coffee mug. You could tell from here, her eyes were a bit bloodshot. “Don’t say I didn’t offer, you hear me?”

She disappeared into the kitchen, and assumingly into her lab.

The news switched from the weather to something much more jovial. This was sarcasm, the news was almost never happy. It must be some sick tradition to report only on sad or depressing things, or maybe it was simply that only sad or depressing things happened in this world. A monster-human couple was assaulted here in southern California, and the news was of course trying to take a neutral stance on the issue. Somewhere in Texas, a politician was trying to battle against legislation that gave monsters equal rights and freedoms. The construction site for a monster-friendly elementary school in New York had been set ablaze in the past few days, are there was no lead on the perpetrator, save for a brazen claim. A new group consisting mainly of the neo-nazi and KKK-esque crowd has been
forming in protest of the existence of monsters on the surface, and they’re calling themselves the Alliance for Human Rights. So far, they’ve been making themselves known by attacking monster settlements and claiming responsibility for international terror attacks, like the school burning.

You used your big toe to turn the power off on the television. That was enough depressing stuff for one day, and enough of a reminder as to why you sometimes disliked humanity. You rolled over onto your stomach and pushed yourself to your feet. You were considering going to go stuff your face with food when you heard some sort of strange buzzing noise.

Jumping slightly you turned and put your hands up. What was that? The buzzing soon gave way to music, and you lowered your arms in embarrassment as you realized it was just your phone ringing. You walked over to the coffee table and picked up—though you wished you hadn’t been so hasty when you saw the caller ID.

“Oh my god, antisocial much?”

“Hello Valerie.” You said, (not really) trying to hide your disdain.

“Glad to see you’re alive or whatever. I got so worried here, waiting for you to call me so I decided to ring you myself. Good to know you’re at least still kicking.” She said, laughing into the other end.

“Oh you have absolutely no idea.”

“Ha-ha! You’re so funny! Anyway.” Here it comes. “A couple of my friends seriously wanted to meet Mettaton—like you have no idea, they’re such huge fans. One of my friends actually collects celebrity signatures. She says she’s willing to pay top dollar for a chance to meet him. I’m not even joking; she’s loaded in the cash department.”

“…”

“So what do you say… think you can, you know?”

This was your chance to finally grow a backbone and put Valerie in her place. A chance to stand up to her and tell her off for always being so manipulative and downright… bitchy…

“I don’t really know, I mean, he’s busy and all and I don’t want to bother him for something like that…” What? Come on, you can do better than that.

“Aw, come on, please? We’re friends, aren’t we? You know I’d return the favor for you in a heartbeat.” Yeah, sure.

Okay, fate is giving you one last chance to redeem yourself. You can do it.

“I… uh, no. I can’t ask him for you.” Yes! You’re on the right track!

“Wh-What? Why?” For second you thought her voice sounded genuinely hurt. But you sowed these seeds.

“I-I, uh, we er, um…” Shit. Just tell the truth, it’s as simple as that. The truth is the easiest thing to go with and comes natural—“He and I aren’t friends anymore.”

No, wait, what-

“Oh. I see. Oh gosh now I feel so silly for calling you, I’ll just stop bothering you now. Bye-bye!”

Not a moment later, she hung up.
You groaned and toppled onto the couch, not even fighting as gravity slid your body down to the floor. Why would you tell an awful lie like that? Sure, you managed to firmly tell her no, but in the process you made something up that was likely going to come and bite you in the ass later. Ugh, you were just tired suddenly. And no, you didn’t mean your batteries, you meant a mental tiredness and ugh. Maybe you might just take your mom up on her offer.

~ ~ ~

“Know what? I think I’m gonna drive.” You said, putting out your hand for the keys.

“What? No, no, I’m fine. I just have to shake myself a bit and clear my head eheh.” She said, staring at you wide-eyed before shaking her head rapidly. You sighed as she stepped back and clutched her head; she probably just gave herself a headache. Her hands were still shaking, and you saw her lift something to her lips and let out a sigh.

“Mom, that’s not coffee.”

“Hm?”

“You’re holding a flowerpot.” She was just about to put the offending item up to her lips before she brought it away and got a good look at it. Sighing, she handed you the car keys and dug around in her purse for some aspirin.

In LA there were several places to stop and grab a nice relaxing smoothie. One of your favorites was Jamba Juice, but they were far and few between, and the first one you tried ended up being packed with people who had the same idea as you. Their smoothies were good, but in your area they weren’t exactly on every corner, and neither you nor your mother had the patience to wait in line. The two of you tried again at another Jamba Juice a few miles down, only to find the same result.

“Wanna just head to McDonalds?” Your mom asked, once the third one turned out to have closed up since you last visited it.

Pulling out from the empty parking lot, you nodded your head in slight defeat and headed down the street, thankful there was one nearby. You were already in the middle of LA and a ways away from home, so what was the rush? And also thankfully, they were almost every other street block, so there was no long wait for people who also wanted to stop by. But for some reason—like, it must be a constant law of the universe—the drive-thru line always looks long and unbearable. You didn’t have the patience for that, plus you were the one driving which meant you had to do the ordering which would mean you’d probably mess it up. The two of you opted instead to walk in instead of waiting in the drive-thru, but thankfully parking was pretty lax.

“Hm, I think I’m in the mood for an iced cappuccino or latte now that we’re here.” Your mom said as the two of you walked in. You looked back at her with a raised brow.

“Seriously mom? The last thing you need is more caffeine, honestly—”

“Oh—hon—watch out.”

Just as she said that, after you took a few steps in the room suddenly got colder. Whew, you knew it was a warm day today but icing the room wasn’t necessary! Then you began to realize that maybe it wasn’t the room that was cold… you kind of felt like you were touching something, or that you’d passed through something… a sheet? Was there an overhead fan?

“Oh… Oh no… this is so embarrassng, um…” A voice rang out around you, but you couldn’t place where it was coming from. Up? Below? What the…
“Oh, oh my gosh—” You took a step back into the restaurant, realizing what was going on, and came face to face with someone who looked, for lack of a better description, like a bedsheet ghost. It dawned on you what you just did and the embarrassment set in.

“Oh my god, I’m so sorry, I wasn’t looking at all.”

“No… I was just standing in the doorway because… I forgot I don’t need to eat corporeal food… And the food here isn’t made with magic… But I didn’t want to look like I had messed up, and now… I’m sorry; I didn’t mean to get in your way…” They were looking down at the ground, and you saw then that tears were beginning to well in their eyes.

“Oh, no, no please don’t cry! This is all my fault, if I had just been looking where I was going…” You looked back to your mom for support, but she offered you a shrug in response. “How about I buy you a, uh… ghost sandwich or something?” Really? No, seriously?

“They don’t sell those here, I checked…” Your offer seemed to make them look even more despondent.

“Oh… I…” Just as you were about to think of what to say, someone rushed past the two of you, bumping into you and nearly walking straight through the person you’d stood in.

“It’s a doorway, not a stop-and-chat-way.” They said and continued on.

“Ah, geez, I got you yelled at…” The said, finally looking up at you. You were about to assure them that it wasn’t their fault when they stopped crying.

“Wait… you… I know who you are.”

“You… do?” You wracked your mind in an attempt to figure out where you could’ve met them from, but came up short… then realized, duh, it had to be the magazine. “Oh, uh, is it that magazine?”

“Yeah… my cousin talks about you all the time. He seems to really like you.”

Okay, now you were seriously confused.

“Uh, excuse me?” Before you could question the ghost further, an employee approached the three of you. “I’m sorry, but we can’t have you standing here in the entranceway, we’ve already received complaint.”

The three of you apologized to the worker—really, apologies were being passed around like cheap cigars here—and you and your new ghost friend, who’s name you learned was Napstablook (The same Napstablook Mettaton spoke so highly of! Small world!) found a table to sit at.

Napstablook’s demeanor seemed to have improved vastly since you first bumped (?) into them, and by the time your mother had finished ordering your drinks everything was mostly explained.

“So your Mettaton’s cousin? He actually told me a bit about you as well. But, uh, I didn’t have any fashion magazines to recognize your face from.”

“It’s alright; I don’t think I’d show up anyway…”

You chuckled a bit, and you could’ve sworn you saw their almost perma-frown lessen a bit as you saw your mother approach. In the short time that you’ve known them (literally a few minutes) you got a good grasp on their personality, and how many tears they could shed, and you couldn’t help
but feel for them a bit.

Your mom sat down next to you with a two drinks—a strawberry smoothie and some brown, whipped cream covered caffeinated mess. Knowing which drink she got for herself, you took the iced mocha and began to sip out of it.

“Wha—hey!” She said in protest, but you were doing her a huge favor and you both knew it.

You introduced your mother to Napstablook. And of course she was ecstatic to meet them. She was ecstatic about everything, or at least she tried to seem that way around others. You talked for a bit with Napstablook, though inevitably the conversation veered towards Mettaton.

“I think he’s at home right now… if you want, we could… go there…” Napstablook offered. You couldn’t help the slight euphoria you got at the suggestion, even though it was ruined by thoughts of Valerie. You glanced towards your mother for her opinion, but she was giving you one of those indecipherable and smug mom smirks.

“I, for one, think that’s a lovely idea!” She said, not taking her eyes from yours. You held in a sigh—and the strong urge to roll your eyes—and looked back to Napstablook.

“I’d like to see him, too.” You admitted, though you tried to keep face. This would be a wonderful opportunity to catch him by surprise and get a look at his abode; two birds with one stone.

“Is it far from here?” You asked, now wondering about how much gas was actually in the tank.

“I guess so… we live in the same building, and I just sort of … floated… here… but I think it’s close by if you were planning to walk.”

“I’ll do you one better.” You said, and held up your car keys.

Once you and your mother finished your drinks, the three of you began to head out to your car. At first you were curious as to whether or not Napstablook would be able to ride in your car, seeing as they were incorporeal and all. But they didn’t protest, and you ended up pulling away from parking lot without trouble.

“Make a right here… no wait, I meant the next street…” Napstablook sat in the backseat giving you directions, though they were sketchy at best.

You didn’t need Napstablook’s prompting when you finally did arrive at the building, it put all the other’s to shame simply by existing, what with the way its glassy exterior reflected everything like a mirror. The building simply imposed itself, like a certain someone who stayed inside. Its height alone was astonishing, and knowing Mettaton, he probably stayed on the top floor, or somewhere near it.

“Is it okay if we use the parking garage?” You asked, though you were already pulling in.

“Uh, yeah…” Napstablook answer, though they didn’t sound so sure. “I just have to key you out when you leave… but I can do that from my apartment… here’s my code for the kiosk.”

Like a parking garage, there was one of those doohickey poles with the stripes and kiosk for payment, but instead of accepting money there was a keypad for inserting a code. And instead of a pole doohickey, there was an actual legitimate gate. You punched in the code Napstablook told you and waited for the gates to open.

A building could look as posh and pristine as it wanted to, but it’s sort of like a universal constant when it comes to parking garages: they all look creepy and there’s never another soul in sight.
“Let me guess…” You heard your mother mumbling something as you unlocked the doors and got out. “Top floor?” She asked, looking towards the elevator.

“Probably.” “Yeah…”

“Well color me surprised.” She said, smiling brightly as she got out. You nodded and followed suit, along with Napstablook, and began to head towards the far wall for the elevators. They stood out against the dull grey concrete; metal colored to look golden and vintage numbers at the top, listing all eighty-one floors. You pressed the up button and walked inside, not really surprised to find the red velvet carpet and what seemed like designer wallpaper on the inside. You tapped the eighty-first floor and leaned against the wall to enjoy the elevator music.

“So, you live on this building too?” Your mother asked Napstablook, trying to make conversation. “What floor?”

“I just live one floor below but… I usually just phase through the floor… if I feel like visiting.”

“Ha! If it only it were that simple for us.” She laughed.

“Oh… I just remembered… I usually call before coming over. Oh, well, it should be fine… He said he wasn’t busy today…”

Heh, heh. All according plan.

With a ding, the doors opened at you were faced with a posh, well decorated hall. You took a wild guess and assumed Mettaton wasn’t allowed to decorate the hall himself, but you can sure as hell bet he tested his boundaries from his basically bedazzled door. Even the doorbell was rhinestone encrusted. You held in a sigh as you stepped closer to inspect it, finding out that it was actually something similar to a call box, just you know, decorated. From the looks of it, it also had a little camera attached to it. You pushed a big, ruby encrusted button and waited for a response. For a second there was silence, and then you heard static on the other end, followed by a loud gasp that caused you and your mother to jump.

“Oh my goodness!” You heard Mettaton’s giddy voice on the other end and almost smiled at how contagious it was. “Oh, darling, what a pleasant surprise! How did you even get here?”

“I, uh, bumped into Napstablook here,” You gestured behind you, though you were unsure if he could see them. “And we figured we should drop by and say hello.”

“Oh, don’t act so shy! I know you couldn’t help yourself, you can admit that you asked to see little ol’ me.”

“What? No, it was nothing like that—” You claimed, though you felt yourself getting a tad flustered.

“My, my? Embarrassed? Was I right on the money?”

“…I changed my mind, I’m going home.”

“Wait, wait! I was just teasing, just a joke. Why don’t you all come in while I get ready, hm?”

You heard the door buzz and promptly opened it, but not before chancing a glance back at your mother and Napstablook. Napstablook’s expression was the definition of unreadable, and didn’t seem to be changing anytime soon, but your mother grinning at you annoyingly. Gosh-

You stepped inside and almost fell over at the wave of secondhand embarrassment that threatened to
overcome you.

The room you stepped into was nothing but varying shades of pink with other colors surrounding to accent it further. You were currently standing in a living room/lounge area, and there was a television set on the far wall with a pink border. And of course, what home could truly be owned by Mettaton without a life-size poster of him adorning some wall? It was hanging on the opposite wall, next to a bar.

“…Please don’t ask me… about anything here…” Napstablook said.

“It’s alright. I’ve known him long enough to not be too surprised.” You said understandingly.

“I haven’t!” Your mother pushed past you and walked towards the kitchen. “Is this a pink quartz countertop? And where do you even find a glitter fridge? I want one.”

“Mom—please stop, you’re embarrassing me.”

She gasped and looked up. “I just realized something.”

“…what did you realize?” Napstablook asked, but you think their tone was slightly amused.

“The lights! They’re tinted! Pink!”

“Oh my god.” You put your face into your hands and moaned. You had even taken away her coffee—ugh.

“Now, what’s all this commotion?” You heard a robotic voice call out from the other end of the room and looked over to see Mettaton emerging from the hallway. He had a black scarf with woven in pink sparkles wrapped around his neck and it looked as if he’d just finished putting on makeup. He was nothing if not always stylish. Catching him off guard? Sure, maybe in your dreams.

“Your home is all the commotion! It’s amazing—dare I say fabulous? I’ve never seen décor quite like this.” Your mother said, practically beaming like a spotlight, and of course Mettaton was eating it up.

“Oh stop! You’re going to make me blush!” He said, swatting his hand and putting the other to his cheek.

“Which glitter factory did you raid for all of this?” You asked with a snarky smile. Puffing out his lips, he walked over and pinched your cheeks.

“I’ll have you know every piece of furniture in is designer and custom made!” He said, pulling at your face.

“Ith thiw ha’ you trea’ guess’?” You asked, and then swatted his hands away. “I mean is this how you treat your guests? Gee, and to think I thought you’d be a great host.” You huffed.

“Well, what am I to do when said guests act up? I can’t help but to tease a bit.” He cocked his head to the side and put a finger to his chin.

“Bah.” But you finally gave in and let the full on smile that’d been trying to break free loose.

“…Definitely.”

“…heh…”
You heard some whispering behind you and turned around to find your mother leaning and whispering something to Napstablook, all the while looking at you and Mettaton.

“Am I missing something?”

“Oh, no. You two go back to flirting, don’t mind us.” Your mother said with a wave of her hand. You bristled and were more than ready to jump to the defensive when Mettaton cut you off.

“Oh, while everyone’s here!” He stepped to your side, hands on his hips and trying to dissolve the tension. “Before I forget to ask, do you think you might know of any beaches around that wouldn’t be too crowded?”

“Uncrowded beaches?” You and your mother asked in unison. In California? You’re kidding, right? Ah, but then it clicked with you; Mettaton probably wanted to take everyone out to a beach but didn’t want to go to a crowded one due to the way a lot of humanity was receiving them. What with the recent news and you couldn’t blame him and wracked your mind for something.

“A beach house.” Your mother raised her hand and you practically saw a lightbulb flash above her head.

“A beach house?” You asked incredulously.

“Yes! We’ve enough money that we could rent a private beach for two or three days. An entire beach, just for us to enjoy, and what’s more a nice house for you all stay in! It’ll be like a big sleep over. Of course, an old lady like me won’t crash your party—I’ve got work I should attend to anyway.”

You rubbed your chin and looked to Mettaton, who looked pensive but was growing increasingly excited.

“Oh my god? That’s actually such a wonderful idea and I’m astounded I didn’t think of it?” His smile got wider and he clasped your mother’s hands and began to bounce a bit. “And I hope you’re not planning on renting the house for me, you know I can afford it myself darling.”

“Pfft!” Your mother rolled her eyes. “I’m a stay at home mother who receives monthly grants filled with more money than I can think to do with. Consider it my treat. Plus, anything that makes my baby smile is worth the cost.”

You put a hand to your face and realized you were, in fact, smiling a bit. Traitorous facial expressions, when will the mutiny end? You crossed your arms and turned away for a moment, though you could almost sword you saw Napstablook with the slightest—very slightest of smiles. You wouldn’t bet money on it, however.

“Well what am I doing just standing here? I need to start making plans—what’s a good time to plan all this?”

“President’s day is next week.” You offered. “It would be a three-day weekend for Frisk, so Friday evening plus the other three days should be plenty of time.”

“You’re right! Ooh, let me right this down.” Mettaton opened a compartment in his chest and got out a glitter pen and a sequined journal.

“And I’m sure we could simply look on tripadvisor or some other website for beach houses in or around Los Angeles.” Your mother said.
“Wonderful! Oh, before I go and make some calls, do you all want something to drink? Eat?”

Even though the two of you recently had some Micky D’s, you (couldn’t pass up an opportunity to spend time with Mettaton) didn’t want to be rude and accepted for you and your mother.

Mettaton took the opportunity to chat you up big time, complaining that you hardly texted. You of course defended yourself by saying you weren’t very good over the phone at all, and barely better in person. He brushed you off, saying that you were always calm when talking to him, and unsurprisingly, it made you less calm and more embarrassed. He of course asked you what you’d been up to, which was an astounding nothing, and he told you that he’d been talking with his agent about making his name more prominent in the music career and working on an album. You were more than ecstatic hear this, and more so surprised when he said that his cousin here had offered to do most of the mixing. If it were possible for Napstablook to get shyer, Mettaton did it.

After a bit more small talk, and embarrassing comments from your mother, you both agreed that he had quite a bit of planning to do, and your mother also had arrangements she needed to make her own plans. Goodbyes were shared, as was a crushing hug from Mettaton, and you and your mother were out the sparkling door.

~ ~ ~

“Hey Mom,” You adjusted the rearview mirror and buckled your seatbelt. “Did I ever know how to skate?”

“Hm?” Your mother snapped up as if you’d just woken her up, despite the fact that you’d literally just gotten into the car. “What? I don’t know, why are you asking?” She asked, suppressing a yawn. Her tiredness was beginning to set in, or more likely she was allowing it to set in after being so chipper for several hours.

“Just, last time I went out with Mettaton I didn’t know how. I mean, I don’t ever recall going to a skating rink but… I don’t remember a lot of things from before then, besides… you know. That time. Anyway, those memories are kind of fuzzy. If I ever did know, is it possible that I might have forgotten?” You glanced her way before backing out of your spot.

“Hm. That’s a difficult question to answer. Or, rather, the answer may be difficult to provide.”

“At this point,” You pulled up to the garage gate and waited for it to open. “There’s not much you can say at this point that can upset me.”

“Suit yourself. Well, the thing about death and decay is that the brain rots from the outside in, and not the other way around. On the outside is where things like memories and tidbits that make up your personality are stored, whereas the inside relies more on motor functions and reflexes and unconscious behaviors, like breathing and your heartbeat. When the outside begins to rot, those memories begin rot too. This is why it’s critical to preserve the brain as soon as possible after death if one wishes to retain the memories. It’s possible some of your memories may have been lost, though it’s impossible to say for certain which. For example, it’s been debated where ‘muscle memory’ aka motor learning is stored in the brain. It could be a combination of both personal memories and motor skills, hence why it could’ve been lost. Well, let’s see if you can still ride a bike, and pretty soon we’ll see if you can still swim.”

You were quietly trying to decipher her science speech while you cruised down the road, but you nodded once to show that you were listening.

“Good. Anymore questions?” She asked, and although you’re sure she meant it rhetorically, you did
“Yeah. You said you had plans you needed to make.” You felt the tension in the car raise slightly.
“What kind of plans?”

“Oh, nothing serious,” So it was something serious. “An old colleague is coming into town, and there are some things he and I need to catch up on.”

“Mom,” You clenched the steering wheel tightly. “I need you to promise me that you aren’t doing something dangerous.”

“I… You know I’d never do anything to put us into a dangerous situation.”

“You need to promise me.”

“I-I promise, dear. I just need an update—some kind of information as to where we stand right now. I don’t like living in the dark, and I know you don’t too.”

“Okay… I’m sorry, it’s just… I don’t want there to be any secrets between us, not after all we’ve been through.” You took your eyes off the road for a second to flash a smile her way.

“Of course,” She said, not meeting your eyes but still smiling. “I’d never want to keep a secret from you, dear.”

Chapter End Notes

A bit shorter than the last, but I don’t have the energy for ten thousand words lmao, plus the next section was likely going to take awhile to write. Ha... haha, don't judge me guys but.... I really want the reader to get into a fight. Good thing nothing like that is going to happen in this chapter, but the next chapter... I dunno ʅ(NotExist)ʃ
You held up the unisex swimsuit your mom had bought you. In all honesty, it looked to you like something reserved for scuba diving, not for beach wear. But she said that you needed to wear something that adequately covered your back, and this was all she could find. It didn’t really matter too much, in your opinion, so you made a half-assed attempt to fold it and stuffed it into your bag. It was the last of the clothing you were planning to take with you on the three day trip, which would begin tomorrow afternoon. You sat down on your bed and let out a sigh, glancing over to your charger. If you really didn’t feel like waiting, you could plug in right now and go out like a light, but your mind was still racing with thoughts and you wanted to entertain them. You hadn’t been to a beach in… god knows how long. No, wait, the last time you went to a beach was with Valerie and her old crew. You sat on the pier in street clothes and waited for them to finish frolicking around in the water. Your mom had offered you the same swimsuit you were bringing now, but still, you couldn’t find the energy to bother with it.

But you were filled with so much excitement and… happiness. Yes, it was definitely happiness bubbling inside you. Even the physical affects your emotions had on your body weren’t necessarily real, you still couldn’t help the way you felt right now. You were actually looking forward to an outing with friends. If a few years ago you met your future self and they told you there would a come a time when you’d meet people you looked forward to meeting, you probably would have laughed at them. Now here it is… finally happening.

Sighing, you closed up your bag and sat it down next to your bed. Your mother would be driving you to the beach house, which was about an hour away, in a nearby suburb tomorrow at around three or four in the afternoon. Either way you set your alarm for nine o’clock and put on something to sleep in. Tomorrow was going to be fun, you just knew it.

~ ~ ~

You wish you had chosen to sleep in because now one of the worst punishments awaits you. Your mother wanted to go shopping, and she insisted you come with her.

A few days earlier, she and Mettaton had done some meal planning, as eating out was a big no-no. Yes, it was only going to be a few days, but even so the idea of going to an eating establishment with tension as high as it is was asking for an incident. Your mother could neither entertain nor fathom the
idea, so she’d made a meal list and went shopping for the ingredients a day before the trip. You had been spared from that trip, thankfully, but your mother found some inane reason to drop by a dollar store and she wanted you to come with. You had even made sure to voice your complaints at least a dozen times, but if anything, this merely hardened her resolve.

Currently, you stood behind your mother in the skincare aisle and watched in disbelief as she held up a bottle of travel sunscreen.

“Are you kidding me?” You asked.

“Of course not!” She said, narrowing her eyes. “You’re going to a beach, it’s *only* normal to bring sunscreen, even if you don’t need it.” She put emphasis on the phrase. “And you should bring some anyway, if not for yourself then for your friends. What if they don’t bring their own bottles.”

“I—” You honestly didn’t know if monsters could get sunburn, so that excuse was out of the question, plus there was Frisk. You sighed and took the bottle from her, putting it in the basket you were carrying.

“Hm, my feet have been feeling a little dry…” Your mother wandered on over to some lotions and inspected them. You sighed and pulled out your phone. It was only 11:17. You weren’t sure if you could make it to the afternoon.

“I just realized,” Your mother turned to you after putting a bottle of lotion into the basket. “You don’t have any flip-flops, do you?”

“Mom,” You were about to protest but she cut you off.

“Ah, ah! You can’t possibly go to the beach without proper beach attire—and flip-flops are proper beach attire. Come on, I think I saw some in your size for a dollar near the entrance.”

You reluctantly let her lead you over, and hanging from a clearance rack were several pairs of shoes in various tacky and outdated styles. In the corner, you saw several plain flip-flops in your size. To placate her, you chose a pair in your favorite color and threw them into the basket.

“Are we done yet?” You asked, trying your best to look tired. Your mother put a hand to her chin and looked around.

“Hm… Ah! Sunglasses.”

“Mom.”

“Alright, alright!” She raised her hands into the air defensively but smiled at you. “I can’t think of any other ways to waste your time, so I suppose this’ll have to do for now.” She said, and motioned for you to go over to the checkout line—but not before tossing a pair of sunglasses into the basket.

As you sighed and headed over to the counter, something caught your eye and reminded you what time of the month it was. You picked up the Valentine’s day card and flipped it over, smiling at the cheesy inscription. Next to it was a bag of candied hearts with those lame phrases. As you picked up a bag, you wondered if monster were familiar with Valentine’s day traditions. It was innocent enough, and you figured it’d be a great way to bond with everyone… As you headed back over to the counter with the basket, your mother snorted when she saw what was inside, but didn’t comment.

The cashier, a really peppy monster woman who resembled a cat, rang the two of you up and you were on your way once more.

~ ~ ~
Finally, after going home and relaxing for a few hours, the two of you had everything in the car and were on your way to Huntington Beach. It wouldn’t take long with today’s traffic, maybe forty-five minutes at best. You were too nervous to keep up a conversation with your mom, though she was more than happy to prattle to you without response so it didn’t make a big difference.

From what your mother told you, the house and its beach were private, meaning no one else would be able to use it, which put you at ease. From the pictures you’d seen, it wasn’t a big plot of beach, but that was fine considering there wasn’t a need for that. Just enough for some fun in the sun in this record breaking warm February. It had three rooms and slept about eight, which was just big enough.

When your mother finally did pull up to the house, you thought that you were first to arrive. Hm, not quite, there was a car out front that you didn’t recognize. As soon as the two of you parked and got out, the person in the unfamiliar car stepped out walked over with a big smile to greet you. She was wearing dress suit and looked very professional; she was probably the owner of the house.

“Hello, hello! My name’s Marnie, it’s a pleasure finally meet you!” She said, extending her hand for your mother to shake.

“A pleasure indeed, Ms. Marnie.” Your mother took her hand and shook it firmly.

“There’s just a few things we need to go over inside, if you don’t mind.”

(Of course.” Your mother looked back at you, but you were already opening up the trunk and getting out the bags. You nodded to her and she stepped inside with the homeowner. Most of the bags were foodstuffs, plus the few you’d gotten from the dollar store earlier. You grabbed a few bags and stepped inside, setting them down on the kitchen counter. The inside of the house definitely gave off beach house vibes, what with the wooden floors that were painted white and the bay window that opened out to the humble view of the beach. As you were about to make your next trip for the last of the groceries, you stopped once you heard your mother and the owner speaking. You were still in the kitchen, and could only hear and not see them from their position in the living room. Still, you couldn’t help but be a little… nosy.

“…Now, do you have any more questions regarding your stay?” The owner asked.

“Yes, actually,” Your mother paused. “While we were driving to the house, I noticed the neighbors close by… What are they like?”

“Oh, I can assure you that the neighbors here are kind and friendly as can be!” Marnie said, not missing a beat.

“Oh yes, a lot of people were friendly before, but recent events have led people to show their true nature. I told you on the phone I’d be having guests over who are monsters.” Just like mom to be blunt, isn’t it. “So I’m going to ask again: What are the neighbors like?”

Now it was Marnie’s turn to pause, but she seemed to compose herself quickly, or at least her response came soon.

“We… we’ve never had any monster related incidents around here…” She trailed off.

“I feel like there’s an unsaid ‘but’ at the end of that sentence.” Your mother picked up on it easily.

“Yes, well, the people of Huntington Beach tend to have, well, surprisingly conservative views already. I’m not sure what their opinion on the current situation is, but if there’s ever a problem I ask that you let everyone know they contact me whenever they need to. The local authorities are also easy to get in contact with.”
"I see…"

"But, as I’ve said before! Violence here is very low, and the safety rating is very high."

Your mother was quiet in response, but you could hear scribbling on paper. She probably wasn’t satisfied with that answer, and who could blame her? Decided you’d eavesdropped enough, you headed back outside to grab the rest of the groceries there were still quite a few bags left, plus your bag with all of your clothes. You run back to the car to grab everything, balancing it in your arms. You ended up carrying your personal bag and several grocery bags in your hands, so they were blocking your face and you couldn’t really see where you were going, except from the side. Just as you’re about to kick the trunk closed, you hear a car pull up into the driveway and crane your neck to see a bright red sports car. The top is down and you can clearly see two skeletons sitting in the seats. You turn around to—well, you can’t really wave, so you turn around to acknowledge them both.

"Hiya, guys.” You said, shifting some bags in your arms.

"Greetings, human—Er, why are you hiding behind those bags?” Papyrus asked and stepped closer.

“I was just taking bags inside. I figured it would just be easier if I took them all at once.” You explained

“Hey, I’m all for doing things the easiest way possible, but, uh, you need a hand there?” You heard Sans ask you.

“Nah, I’ve got it.” You put your foot next to the trunk’s motion sensor so it would close, then sidestepped over to the door. However, there’s a tiny issue. “Actually, if one of you could grab the door for me…” You trail off, realizing that you hadn’t really thought this through.

“Worry not, your helpful friend Papyrus will get the door for you!” He said, then dashed over and held the door open for you.

“Thanks.” You said, then stepped inside and headed over to the kitchen to set the rest of the bags down. It sounded like your mother was finishing up with Marnie, but you couldn’t help but get a bit nervous about how the owner would react to Papyrus and Sans. It sounded like the brothers were still in the hallway, and you could hear Marnie’s heels clicking in the living room, so was she heading out?

“Oh, I didn’t realize our other guests had arrived!”

You listened from the kitchen, pretending to pack food into the fridge—and, you know, actually putting food in the fridge. Marnie was polite and courteous, even offering her number like she did with your mom. Finally, she excused herself and you felt some tension lift—until it returned when you heard your mother’s voice.

“I heard unfamiliar voices!” She said, coming in from another part of the house. She stepped into the kitchen and looked at you with a faux-disapproving gaze.

“What, you weren’t going to introduce me to your friends?” She asked playfully before grabbing your arm and walking into the hallway where Papyrus and Sans were.

No. “Yes, of course I was.” You lied. You cleared your throat, getting Papyrus and Sans’ attention—Papyrus had been looking into a mirror, claiming that whoever painted this picture of him had done a wonderful job, and Sans was spurring him on with puns.
“Hey.” One of your defining traits was your eloquence. “This is my mom.”

“What’s up, ‘My Mom’?” Sans quipped, not missing a beat. “The name’s Sans.” He extended his hand for your mother to take, and she did so without pause—because, you know, people aren’t normally suspicious of handshakes.

“Ouch!” She retracted her hand quickly and waved like she’d been burned, then laughed once she realized what he’d done.

“Good ol’ fashioned joy buzzer in the hand trick. Works every time.” Sans winked and held up his hand, revealing said object and shrugging. You chuckled yourself, but Papyrus glared down at Sans and stepped forward, clearing his throat (…how?).

“It is a pleasure for you to meet me! I apologize for my brother, he’s always like this. I am the Great Papyrus!” He extended his hand as well. “And I can assure you that my hand is not booby-trapped!”

Your mother laughed and gratefully shook his hand.

“It truly is a pleasure to meet you, Papyrus.” Your mother said, smiling.

Your mother chatted them up for a while, her enthusiasm almost enough to rival Papyrus’, and her happy demeanor was only egged on by Sans’ jokes. Eventually, however, she had to step away and take a phone call. You heard her footsteps retreat upstairs; you assumed she wanted privacy.

That left you alone with Papyrus and Sans, and while you were sure the two of them could keep a conversation running for a while, you weren’t exactly the most charismatic of people. Although, since your mother wasn’t going to be staying, you were technically the host, or at least co-host, so you should probably say something at least.

“Uhm,” Another bout of verbal eloquence. You scratched the back of your head and tried to think of some conversation starters. How’s the weather? Economy sucks, right? “So, uh-.”

The three of you looked over at the sound of loud banging at the door, and you weren’t even given a chance to guess at who it was before she started speaking.

“Whoo, when he said beach house I thought he meant some shack! This place is huge.” You heard Undyne announce from behind the door. You offered a bashful smile then walked over to answer it.

“Hi, Undyne.” You barely got her name out of your mouth, let alone the door completely open, before she put you into a headlock and began to give you a very harsh noogie. It made you nervous at first, but you had a feeling it was just her way of being friendly.

“What’s up, punk?” She said before releasing you and stepping inside.

“Sheesh, you must be loaded—Hey, Papyrus!” Immediately, she launched at her next victim.

“Ack! Please don’t noogie the skeleton, he is great but fragile!” He exclaimed once he was in the same position you were. You couldn’t help but crack a slight smile at this, then turned to wave to Alphys.

“H-Hi,” She waved back with a nervous smile. “Uh, I, a-also wanted to th-thank you!”

“Don’t thank me, this is mostly my mom and Mettaton’s doing.” You said immediately.

“Oh, d-don’t say that! I-If we hadn’t met you, I’m not sure when any of us would g-get a chance to
visit the beach. W-Well, un-harassed that is.” She said. You started to feel a bit bashful, then pitiful for Alphys. Just as you were about to reply, you heard the unmistakable sound of someone coming down the stairs, followed by your mother’s voice calling from the doorway.

“Sorry, hon, I wish I could stay a little longer but I can’t hold off this meeting—” Your mother didn’t get much of a chance to react to the presence of Undyne and Alphys, much less acknowledge the two before Undyne was on her, beaming brightly. For a moment, you were afraid she would put your mother into a headlock too, but you were pleased to see that she instead extended her hand to your mom.

“You must be their mom! What’s up!?” Undyne said, hand still outstretched. Your mother paused for a moment, her eyebrows raised before slowly putting her phone into her coat pocket and reaching out to grasp her hand.

“Yup, that’s me—oh, what a strong grip! And who might you be?”

“The name’s Undyne!” She released her hand, and your mother tried to discreetly massage it. “Oh—and this over here is my girlfriend, Alphys!” She stepped to the side and waved her forward, and she did so albeit nervously.

“H-Hi! I’m Alphys, l-like she said eheh.” She paused for a moment and began twiddling with her fingers before looking up and speaking again. “Um, sorry if this is a d-dumb question b-but… Are you a scientist?”

Your mother smiled and put her hands in her coat—her white lab coat that she almost always wore—and held it out.

“What gave it away?” She said, earning a laugh from everyone. You, on the other hand rolled your eyes. “I have a bad habit of not taking it off, and it’s just so comfy.”

“Oh believe me, I know.” Alphys joked. “B-But if I may ask, what do you study?”

“Hey mom, it’s almost five. At this rate, you’re going to be late.” You interrupted, stepping forward.

“Oh, goodness, you’re right-” She pulled out her phone and glanced at the time before hurrying over to you and planting a kiss on your cheek, much to your dismay.

“Bye sweetheart! You have fun, you hear me?” You made a show of wiping your face off as she headed out the door.

“Aw, come on, what’s the matter?” Undyne took on a mocking tone, but the goofy grin she also wore was too much for you to take seriously. “Embarrassed to get kisses from your mommy?”

“Hey you…” You lifted your finger and pointed it at her accusingly but…really didn’t have much of a comeback because it was kind of true. “Sh… Shut up.”

Undyne began howling with laughter and then gave you a rough pat on your shoulder. Her boisterous laughter was a bit contagious and you found yourself smiling.

“Don’t be embarrassed, human!” Papyrus chimed in. “It’s my absolute dream to bathe in a shower of kisses every morning, so you’re kind of lucky.”

“Hey kid, don’t let it get to you.” Sans piped up, and you knew he was prepping a joke. “Here, I got something to cheer you up.”
He reached into his pocket and took out what looked like a piece of candy. You narrowed your eyes and took it from him, then realized it was a Hershey’s kiss.

“Why do you even this?” You asked, pocketing the candy anyway.

“Sans! Why do you have to be so prepared for jokes? If you worked this hard around the house, the chores would get done twice as quickly!”

“But then bro,” Sans winked and Papyrus looked like he was about to explode. “Then I wouldn’t have time to prepare my jokes.”

Everyone was joyfully bemused, except for Papyrus of course. Even you were smothering a laugh with the back of your hand, more from Papyrus’ loud lamenting than anything else.

Then the doorbell rung, interrupting everyone for a moment.

“I’ll get it!” “I’ve got it!” Papyrus and Undyne said at the same time, dashing past you towards the door, all the while trying to sidle past each other to reach it first.

“I appreciate your assistance Undyne, but I assure you that I can handle this.” Papyrus said, trying to edge his way past her.

“Is that—” Undyne put a hand to the side of his skull and tried to push him away from the door. “—Any way to treat your old teacher??”

This went on for a few seconds, before they somehow managed to wrestle the door open together.

On the other side of the door stood a surprised Toriel. She was just tall enough that you could see her face over the back of Papyrus and Undyne’s respective skull and head. You didn’t need to be a genius to tell that Frisk was probably standing next to her as well.

“Hello your Majesty!” Papyrus and Undyne both said, then looked down and said. “Hello Frisk!” “What’s up punk?!” Respectively.

Once Undyne and Papyrus managed to dislodge themselves from the doorway, you greeted them properly, since you were technically the de jure host until Mettaton arrived.

Toriel, like your mother, had come to greet everyone but couldn’t stay because whatever vague business she had to take care of. Still, her presence always made you feel so nervous because she seemed so regal, but in contrast she was so nice and gentle.

“Uh, if you want, I can grab you something to drink.” You offered, gesturing towards the kitchen doorway.

“Oh no, I’m quite alright.” She said, waving her hand. “I recently tried a human soft drink known as ‘ginger ale’, but in a cranberry flavor. It was sodalicious.”

“Yeah, I bet that…” Wait, pause. Did she just make a pun? You tilted your head to the side and held up a finger. “Did you just-”

You were cut off when Toriel put a hand to her mouth and laughed. Everyone else was mildly amused, save for Papyrus of course who had his head in his hands. So this was a normal occurrence?

“My oh my, you should get a look at your face right now!” She said, much to your confused surprise. She placed a hand on your head and ruffled your hair like you were a child, and you
blinking in confusion.

After the laugh everyone shared over your confusion and Toriel’s surprising and lame jokes, she bid her farewell. Frisk gave them a big hug and retrieved their bags from the car with Toriel’s help. Finally, Frisk gave her one final squeeze before she left.

“Oh, that reminds me.” You turned back to back to everyone once Frisk got their bags into the living room. “I was going to ask if anyone needed help bringing their bags in.” You asked, gesturing out the door.

Sans looked like he was going to say something, but Undyne stepped forward with a mischievous smile on her face.

“Yeah! Alphys and I need help without our bags, now that you mention it.” She said and grabbed your wrist, leading you outside and over to the driveway where she was parked behind Papyrus’ car.

“You mind carrying this bag for me?” Undyne popped open the back of the van and held up a red gym bag and tossed it to you. You noticed that when the bag was lifted, the van seemed to pop up as if a weight was holding it down. You quickly caught it and held it up but…

“What the hell is in this thing,” It was unbelievably heavy! “Rocks?!” You had caught the bag at the bottom because that’s how Undyne threw it at you, but you were sure that if you held the straps the poor bag would tear to pieces.

Alphys stepped outside with Papyrus, Sans, and Frisk in tow.

“Oh my god?” She said, walking over to you. “How are you even lifting that?”

“How indeed, ’cause they’re definitely not rocks!” Undyne’s smile went from mischievous to downright scary. “Let’s see I brought like five twenty-pounders and a few twenty-fivers, then I threw in some tens because why the hell not?”

It took a moment to sink in that this bag shouldn’t even be lifted by anyone who couldn’t bench press at least eight children. Undyne was flexing her arms as if to emphasize your thoughts.

“Well, you got me.” You lifted the gym bag up to your shoulders, feigning effort although it was a bit late for that. “I’m a bodybuilder.”

You began walking toward the door, ignoring the various surprised reaction, including Frisk who’d taken to clinging to your leg.

“Undyne! It explains why they’re stronger than—” Papyrus was cut off by Undyne’s yelling.

“Bulls—UGH! No one here is stronger than me! It’s not true and you know it! Come back here!”

“U-Uh Undyne, maybe it is true though…” Alphys tried to offer.

“Yeah, no need to get up in arms about it.” Oh Sans.

“You hush!”

When you got to the door you felt a tug on your shirt and looked down at Frisk who still clung to your leg.

“Hey, if you can lift that bag can you lift me next?” They asked.
You opened the door and smiled down at them. “Sure, how about a piggy-back ride or something.”

“Yes!”

You laughed and walked inside to set the gym bag in the living room with the others. When you turned around, you saw that Undyne was carrying what looked like all of Sans and Papyrus’ bags, plus her own and Alphys’. She stepped past you and put them down in a pile in the middle of the living room floor, dusting her hands off and placing them on her hips. It seemed some of her ego had returned for now.

You felt Frisk dislodge from your leg and then, surprisingly, you felt them begin to scale your back like a monkey.

“Whoa—Frisk—careful there.” You caught their legs with your arms and hoisted them up onto your back completely.

“What are you two wimps doing?” Undyne asked, glaring at you like it was some sort of hidden challenge.

“Frisk wanted to ride on my back, so here we are.”

“What? But—but Frisk usually rides on my back!” Undyne said, clearly distressed.

At that moment, Sans chose to walk in. He looked to Undyne, then to Frisk, then to you, then he (somehow?) whistled.

“Wow. You want me to give you three a moment?”

“Frisk!” Undyne ignored him. “What is the meaning of this? I thought we had something special!”

You felt them hide behind your head.

“I dunno, I’m just exploring new frontiers. It’s not you, it’s me.”

Undyne gasped then took a step back. “No. Frisk, don’t say it…”

“I think we should see other backs.”

Undyne dropped to her knees, her arms upstretched towards the ceiling.

“No!!!”

Although both of them were being deadly serious you… you couldn’t help it. You let go of one of Frisk’s arms and put a hand to your mouth to stifle a laugh.

“Wow kid,” Sans looked up to Frisk and shook his head. “Brutal.”

“Undyne, why are you on the ground? Frisk why’re you on that human’s back? And Sans, why are you just looking on!? Anyway, Mettaton is finally here!”

That got your attention, but you played it off and stayed cool, of course.

“Fashionably late as usual, eh?” Sans asked, but followed Papyrus out into the entryway. You followed after them, ducking a bit in mind of Frisk, and of course saw Mettaton in the entry hall talking with Alphys. He stopped himself midsentence when he saw you (and by extension Frisk) and ran over to you.
“And what have we here? Were you two playing around while you were waiting for little ol’ me?” He pinched your cheek in one hand and took Frisk’s in his other.

“Of course not.” You said, but this was in contrast to Frisk saying “Yup!” He laughed, then proceeded to wrap the two of you in a hug.

“Well it looks like I missed a lot of fun! I can’t believe you started the festivities without me.” He let go a little bit to rest his arm around your shoulder, and you were about to ask him what he was doing when he leaned in and you felt…

Oh.

Well that was new.

“Well what are we all standing around here for? The sun won’t stay up forever, we’ve got to get out to the beach.” He said, then walked off like nothing had happened.

Everyone mouthed their agreeance but you were just standing there kind of shocked. Frisk was poking your cheek—where Mettaton had kissed you—and laughing at your dumbstruck expression. No one else besides Frisk seemed to have notice, but you finally shook yourself out of your stupor.

Everyone seemed to be taking their bags upstairs and choosing rooms. Like the owner said, the house could sleep eight or nine, but there were only about three rooms. By the time you disentangled Frisk from your back and got your bags up the stairs, it seems that Undyne and Alphys claimed a room together while Papyrus and Sans took another. That left just one open.

You saw Mettaton standing in front of what you assumed to be the empty room, his back to you. You couldn’t count how many times you saw that weird switch on his back, but you’d never had the opportunity to bring it up with him, and now didn’t really seem like the time. Plus you… kind of felt embarrassed.

He noticed you and turned around to greet you with an innocent smile (the fucker…).

“Oh hello darling! While you were downstairs standing around with Frisk I snagged a room for us.” You were about to open your mouth and protest, but considering the fact that he was the only one who knew your secret it was probably for the best, and actually smart of him.

“Can I sleep with you guys?” Frisk asked. You looked to Mettaton and raised one of your eyebrows, but he took it in stride.

“Oh, but Frisk-darling you simply can’t!” He sauntered over and put a hand on top of their head. You heard them huff behind you in response.

“Now, now, divas only pout when the camera’s facing them. But honestly, you know how it is with us boring old folks. We just want a little privacy to ourselves, okay?” You felt a rush of embarrassment when you heard Frisk gasp, but you knew Mettaton was just playing it up because you had to charge overnight. You hoped he was, at least. Still, they put their hands on your shoulder and lifted themselves up to look at you.

“You guys are dating?!”

“SHH!” But it was too late.
“Say what now?” You heard a door open and looked to your left to see Undyne peering from the open door with a bewildered expression. Just then, you also heard crashing and thumping noises from the right and looked to see Papyrus’ head emerge from the doorway as well.

“Say what indeed! Is this true human?!”

“No?! Of course not!” You pointed a finger at Mettaton accusingly. “With him? No way!”

“Oh really darling, there’s no need to be so shy.” He said, and then tapped his right cheek. You made a confused noise then realized something… He… was wearing lipstick.

Your hand flew to your cheek so quickly you almost dropped Frisk, but when your fingers came away with traces of black on them, you quickly set them down and ran to the bathroom. You heard a burst of noise, mainly from Undyne and Papyrus, from behind the door and that only heightened your flustered panic. In the mirror, there it was, his slightly smudged lip-print on your face. You quickly took a towel, wet it slightly, then scrubbed the mark off your cheek, effectively ruining the towel. You tossed it in a hamper then inspected your face once more to make sure it was completely clean. Sighing, you placed one of your hands on the sink’s edge and clutched your shirt. There it is, that rush of emotion seeming to affect you; even if it was ‘artificial’ or ‘simulated’ by your body, you were still an embarrassed mess, through and through. And who wouldn’t be? Of course the idea of… you know, being in a relationship with someone like Mettaton would make a person… hot and bothered.

Hot and bothered? No! That’s not the phrase you wanted—what are you, a pining teen? Technically, no, but still—there’s no way you had entertained a thought like that. Psht, that’s ridiculous, like you’d even consider it for more than a second! Okay, for than a minute. More than five minutes, five minutes seemed like a good time to think.

“Hey, hurry up in there!” You heard Undyne’s brash voice from behind the bathroom door.

“Loverboy says he wants to go to the beach, and we’re all waiting on you.”

You dried your face, straightened your clothing, and finally opened the bathroom door. Maybe your chin was held just a bit high, but it deflated like your ego when you heard Undyne burst out laughing.

“Just who do you think you’re kidding?” She used your shoulder to balance herself as she doubled over in laughter. “Go and get dressed punk, we’re all waiting on you.”

You did realize that everyone was in bathing attire, Frisk included. They were wearing a cute onesie that was striped like a bee, and a matching swimming cap on their head.

Giving Undyne a pointed glare and avoided looking at Mettaton altogether as you grabbed your bag and walked into the center bedroom, the only untaken room. You closed the door and leaned against it for a moment.

Hoo boy.

Why even kid yourself, really. You think back to Valerie, and remember all the times she’s tried flirting with you. You knew she wanted to see how far your mother’s money went, and when she found out it didn’t go far enough she quit it. Still, even if you weren’t particularly fond of her or her crowd, it hurt. It still kind of hurt, but at the same time you reveled in the idea that someone was giving you attention—attention that wasn’t pity or disdain. Is this what you’re doing now? Just a confusing rush of excitement because someone’s looking your way?
But, no. This embarrassed, flustered feeling that you get when Mettaton teases you is waaayy different from that dejected and despondent feeling you got while trying to put down Val’s advances. You knew she probably hated you on some level, but man were you glad for some kind of attention.

Who’s to say this isn’t the same?

Pushing aside your thoughts for the moment, you opened your bag and slipped into the swimsuit your mom had given you. It was a little loose in places, but it would have to do. You took your beach towel out as well, and then saw the sunscreen and sunglasses. You just stuffed the towel back inside and decided to take the whole bag with you.

When you finally stepped outside, Undyne was pumping her fists in the air excitedly.

“Finally! Come on, come on, the ocean’s waiting!”

She grabbed Alphys—well, picked her up would be more accurate—then dashed down the stairs, with Papyrus and Sans in tow. You followed behind Frisk, and no you weren’t the slightest bit nervous that Mettaton was standing right behind you, why would you be.

~ ~ ~

Once everyone was outside, Undyne was gone like a gust of wind. She was down the porch and running through the beach towards the water like a maniac.

“Ocean!!! Oceaaa—ow! Ow ow ow!?” Midway to her target, she started hopping from one foot to the other.

“I told you that you should’ve worn flip-flops!” Alphys said before rushing down the stairs herself, donning a pair.

“Well I forgot the sand felt like burning!” Undyne said in defense, then proceeded to run towards the water again. You saw Frisk hold up a beach inner tube and go running down towards the beach, following Undyne’s hot feet routine. Papyrus was next, almost rivaling in Undyne’s enthusiasm, and Sans followed after him sluggishly. You were about to go when something stopped you.

“Hey, you got a minute?” You felt someone grab your wrist—of course it could only be Mettaton. You looked back and surprisingly Frisk was nowhere to be seen. A rush of that same embarrassment was flooding you, but you pushed it down and nodded your head.

“You… aren’t angry with me, are you?” You were taken aback a bit by the surprisingly seriousness of his tone, and the fact that he sounded like the equivalence of a kicked puppy.

“No, of course not!” You said. “I was just, uh…” Embarrassed? Flustered? “Surprised, is all.”

Mettaton let go of your wrist and put it to his chest, sighing dramatically in relief. The old him was returning.

“Good, good, I wouldn’t want to upset my biggest fan, now would I?” He said, gushing once again.

“Hey now,” You cracked a smile, beside the tension you still felt inside you. “Don’t get ahead of yourself.”

“Oh!” He looked like an idea just hit him. “Does this mean I get to kiss your cheek now?”

“What did I just say?!?” You flicked his forehead, huffing disapprovingly. He huffed and pouted
slightly, much to your amusement.

“Hey diva, no pouting. The camera’s not here.”

“Why you little…” He looked at you, beside himself in disbelief, then took a step forward, but you were already running down the deck stairs and towards the beach.

You threw your bag down in the sand next to Sans and Alphys then bounded over to the water, where Undyne, Papyrus, and Frisk were splashing in the water. They were fully engaged in a full-on water war, and Undyne seemed to be winning to no one’s surprise. You waded back a little bit, shaking your head and laughing at them.

You let yourself fall back for a bit and watched as you completely submerged. For a moment you could see three pairs of legs kicking furiously in the water before you came back up and saw the orangish-pink of the sky. The sun was off to the west, and despite the warm weather it hung low in the sky and sunset was really coming in. You kicked your legs slightly and paddled your arms to get a better view, until it was interrupted. Undyne was looking down at you with a toothy grin, and you felt fearful for a moment.

Rightfully so, because the next thing you knew you had a face full of water. You yelped in surprise then went under, but resurfaced with a glare—how many times would you be glaring at Undyne today?

“Hey! It wasn’t me!” She argued, looking genuinely offended. “I mean, I was going to, but those two beat me to it!” She pointed behind you towards Frisk and Papyrus. Frisk looked up to Papyrus and pointed at him.

“What?!” He waded back in surprise, sounding hurt. “That was not me! I am too great and noble to stoop to dirty tactics! And if I did, I—”

You cut him off by sending a wave of water his way. It was directed at Frisk too, but they both felt the brunt of the water.

Papyrus sputtered and looked at you in disbelief, and then he held up a hand.

“Human. I hope you know this now means war.”

What ensued was several faces of water.

You and Undyne made a shaky alliance against Frisk and Papyrus, but it broke when you received a splash of water to the back and immediately blamed Undyne. She went full-force with her counter-attack and it turned into a free-for-all every man for himself battle.

Eventually, the three of them were tired and out of breath.

“I propose…” Frisk held up their hands, sinking into their tube a bit. “A truce!”

“Alright, I guess I can take mercy on you three.” Undyne said, though she seemed just as winded. You chuckled and waded back to shore only to find Mettaton and Alphys in the process of burying Sans. The latter seemed to be somewhere between okay and indifferent about the whole ordeal, and you think he was starting to doze off.

“Sans! Only you could find the laziest way to use sand!” Papyrus said, though it sounded doting to you.
“Nah, Paps, I’m not Sans anymore.” You already knew what the joke was before he winked. “I’m Sands.”

“This is the worst beach experience ever!” Papyrus leaned back and began stomping the sand furiously.

Giggling, you took your beach towel out from your bag and splayed it out in the sand next to Mettaton.

“H-Hey! Did you guys put on sunscreen?” Alphys asked, reaching into her bag and getting out a bottle of sunscreen.

“Pft, who needs sunscreen?” Undyne held out her arms and looked at the sky. “The sun’s barely out today!”

“Still! B-Better safe than sorry.” Alphys insisted, pulling Undyne down while she squirted out a generous amount on Undyne’s arm. “Remember what happened last time?”

“That time the sun got lucky.” Undyne mumbled and sat down on the towel. “Lucky I couldn’t beat it up…”

You rolled over on your towel, thinking of your neglected bottle, and started running your hands through the sand in front of you. Your hands were still soaking wet so grains of sand stuck to you like breaded chicken, but at the same time you could mold the sand fairy easily.

~ ~ ~

A couple of minutes later and everyone is helping you make a sand castle. Alphys and Mettaton had abandoned Sans in the sand. He didn’t really seem to mind, you gathered, since he had fallen completely asleep.

Frisk brought over several buckets of wet sand for the towers, which were added after you and Mettaton finished building up the base. Papyrus did a top notch job adding a wall, and even insisted that every good castle needed a moat, so he dug a trench and filled it with sea water. Undyne ended up sculpting surprisingly realistic sand canons since, in her words, what kind of wimpy castle doesn’t have canons. Alphys wrapped bits of seaweed to the towers and decorated the walls with seashells she found.

When it was all done, everyone took a step back to admire their handiwork. It turned out pretty great, in your opinion. Papyrus even woke up and unburied Sans so he could admire it, and he did so, albeit slightly groggy.

“Man,” He yawned, stretching a bit. “You guys shore know how to get some work done.” It must’ve taken Papyrus all of his resolve not to remark at that.

“I’m gonna knock it down.” Undyne said, after about a minute of staring at it.

“No way!” You said, taking a protective step towards the castle.

“Oh relax, I was kidding… maybe.”

The sun was finally dipping below the horizon, and although everyone was a bit reluctant you convinced them to head in with the promise of getting out earlier tomorrow. Even wrapped in towels, everyone was tracking sand and water on the floor. Undyne made a beeline straight for the fridge, looking for foodstuff.
“Ugh! There’s nothing to eat in here.” She said, slamming it back shut and looking to you and Mettaton. “I thought you guys said you picked up some food.”

“There’s snack food in there.” You pointed out, following Undyne in.

“Snack food schmack food. I want some real meals! The top of the line gourmet! Where’s the spaghetti ingredients?!?”

You heard Mettaton walk into the kitchen with you.

“Ooh, tsk tsk tsk. Spaghetti actually wasn’t on the menu.” He shook his head and grimaced. “Sorry, hon, maybe next time?”

“Oh my god?” Undyne’s eye twitched. “You did this on purpose, didn’t you?”

“Actually!” Mettaton ignored her outburst, walking over and opening the fridge. Tonight called for a delicious meatloaf dinner with a side of rice and a salad. Doesn’t that sound delicious?”

Judging by Undyne’s expression, you doubted very seriously that she agreed with his words.

“Why don’t you all go get changed and wait in the living room and watch some TV while I cook us up something delicious?” It was a rhetorical question, obviously, yet still he practically yanked her over to the doorway. Undyne was still seething as she stalked up the stairs, and in this case, it was more amusing than it was scary.

You followed Mettaton’s advice and dried yourself off—there was sand in places where sand should never be—but you wouldn’t really feel better until you had a shower to get rid of the saltwater smell, and you could tell someone else felt the same because one of the bathrooms was occupied. You shrugged it off and walked into the room you were sharing with Mettaton. You hadn’t noticed it before but… there was only one bed. Not that it was an issue—why would it even be an issue? Anyway, you also saw a door on the other end of the room and mentally crossed your fingers as you walked over. Surprise, surprise; it was a bathroom. Relieved, you got your stuff together and prepared for a shower.

~ ~ ~

When you were done and dressed, and made your way down the stairs, following a delicious smell and the sound of activity. You peeked into the kitchen on your way towards the living room and saw Mettaton tossing a salad while humming a pleasant tune. You ducked out of the doorway before he could notice you and made your way into the living room. The lights were off, the only ambiance was coming from the TV, which was playing a kid’s movie you recognize. Grand Savior 7 or something weird like that. You walked up behind the couch and watched as Undyne, Papyrus, Sans, and Frisk watched, seemingly engrossed. But… where was Alphys?

Speak of the devil. You heard feet rushing down the stairs and looked back in time to see the monster in question rush past you, dressed in night clothes and smelling like soap, towards the couch.

“What did I miss? What did I miss?” She asked as she plopped down next to Undyne.

“He taught his robot karate and gave it super sweet samurai gear!” Undyne responded.

“N-No way, stop messing with me.”

“Seriously, watch!”
You leaned on the back of the couch, the ghost of a smile on your lips—not really from the movie, although it seemed cute, but from everyone’s sincere reactions. Frisk had obviously chosen the movie out themselves, because they were paying just as much attention as you; their eyes were gauging everyone’s reactions. Papyrus was usually loud and loquacious, but he seemed completely engrossed and was gasping when something tense or major happened and smiling when the main characters cracked a joke. Hell, even sans was watching it. From what you’d gathered about his personality thus far, you’d figured that he’d use this as an opportunity to doze off, but he was... awake. And staring at the screen with the slightest hint of interest. Undyne was a bit more vocal while she was watching—definitely the kind of person who talks during movies and shows. She seemed to comment on everything, but you don’t think anyone really minded.

After a while, you finally stood—during a pivotal scene for the main characters; one that would make or break his morals. You wandered back into the hallway, taking a look around. From the looks of it, dinner wouldn’t be ready for a while. You continued down the hallway, towards the front door and took a step out.

It was dark out, but you flicked the porch light on so you could sit and not be weird. The front porch was just as big as the back, and there were even some chairs and tables set out for leisure. You hopped into the one closest to the door and relaxed, taking in your surroundings.

Looking across the street, you hadn’t noticed that there were neighbors here. Whether they were renting a vacation home or actually lived there, you didn’t know, but the lights in the windows and the figures moving behind them were unmistakable.

A little while later you heard the front door open, and looked up to see Undyne step out.

“What’s up punk?” She greeted, stepping over and plopping into the chair next to you.

“Oh, hey.” You said, smiling in greeting. “I take it the movie ended?”

“Yeah, it did. Oh my god dude it was so amazing!” You could tell she was waiting to gush about it. Why she didn’t just talk to Alphys or Papyrus about it, you don’t know.

“God, you should’ve watched it with us—okay, so there was this kid and his brother died—no, wait, before his brother died he invented a bunch of awesome robots for fighting, and these,” She took a look around, as if searching for someone. “These sick-ass tiny robots that responded to his brain! Man, it was so cool. But, anyway, after his brother died some guy stole his bots—you won’t believe who it was!”

Undyne went on like that, giving you a rough version of Big Hero 6 in her own words, describing some parts as “absolutely badass” and others “amazingly amazing beyond belief”. She retold you some of the funny moments, and you did laugh—more so at her vigor than at poor way she told it.

“And there has to be a sequel! There’s gotta be—it-it, you don’t make a super cool hero story like that and not make another.”

“Well, hopefully it’ll come out soon.” You said, hoping to encourage her.

You continued talking with Undyne, surprised at how... well, nice and goofy she was. When you first met her—no, the second time too—you figured she probably hated your guts. Now you were definitely getting mixed signals.

After a moment or two of talking, you heard the door open again and saw Alphys and Frisk standing in the doorway.
“Hey! Mettaton told us to tell you that dinner was almost ready.” Alphys said, stepping outside with Frisk.

“Okay.” You said, though you saw Undyne frowning a bit, probably over the little spat she had with Mettaton about it. You felt a wry smile form, but ignored her new demeanor.

“So, Frisk,” They looked up when they heard Alphys address them. “What m-movie did you have in mind next? We could probably watch one after d-dinner.”

Frisk tilted their head to the side and rubbed their chin, pretending to be in deep thought before holding up a finger to symbolize they’d reached a decision.

“Megamind!”

“Ooh, what’s that about? Does it have supercool warriors? Or villains? Or villain heroes?!” Undyne asked.

“You have to watch it.” Frisk said, shrugging nonchalantly.

“I think you’ll like it.” You said Undyne and Alphys. “I’ve actually seen that one before.”

“Great!” Undyne said, and then stood up. “Then let’s get inside and eat. The faster we eat, the faster we can watch it!”

You had a little laugh at her enthusiasm, and you were about to head in when something across the street caught your eye. Undyne, confused, turned around to follow your gaze.

“What’s wrong…” She trailed off when she saw what you saw. A group of people, no more than about half a dozen, stood across the street on the sidewalk. It wouldn’t have been a big deal, if they weren’t looking in your direction, pointing in your direction, and holding objects slung on their shoulders. From the light of their open front door, you could make out what they were holding; it seemed to be things like metal bats and crowbars. You stood up slowly, motioning over to Alphys and Frisk.

“Alphys, take Frisk inside.” You said, and she obliged, although reluctant. Frisk also didn’t seem to like this suggestion, and they put up a bit of a fight as Alphys tried to tug them back into the house.

“Come on, Undyne.” You said, putting a hand on her tense shoulder. She still hadn’t turned around. “We’ll go inside, and if they try anything we can call the police.”

“And they’ll do what?” She grumbled, and you felt her move forward.

Surprised, you caught her wrist and tried to hold her back. She snapped her head back at you, fury in her eyes.

“And they’ll do what?” She repeated. You stayed silent, not sure how to respond, because any fool with a brain—or at least a way to look at Fox News—knew that nothing would come of it.

“So you think going over there and giving them what they want is smarter? Just come inside, it’s better this way. Trust me.”

There was much resistance, but you got her back inside. Alphys and Frisk were waiting on the other side, both with worried expressions. You forced a smile to try and placate both of them, but even this one was one of your weaker attempts.
“Come on, uh. Food must be ready by now yeah?” You said, locking the door—both of the locks—and heading over to the dining room. The table was set and the meals were out. Mettaton was obviously waiting for the four of you, because Papyrus and Sans were seated, though they didn’t look like they had started.

“There you all are! Sit down, sit down.” Mettaton motioned everyone over to the table, either ignoring or not noticing your grim expressions. Still, you sat down at the end of the table and waited for everyone else to do so before beginning to eat.

~ ~ ~

After dinner, Papyrus had gotten tired and, to no one’s surprise, no one else was in the mood to watch another movie. Everyone was preparing to go to bed, yourself included, and this time you were the one who pulled Mettaton aside to talk. You told about what had happened before dinner. Needless to say he wasn’t pleased.

“Well… I think you did the right thing.” He said, crossing his arms and leaning against the kitchen counter. “The last thing we need is some kind of confrontation on our relaxing weekend, although people messing with us was exactly what we were trying to avoid!”

“Yes, but, I guess it’s unavoidable.” You said, although you wished it didn’t have to be. “What should we do if they end up coming back?” You asked.

“What else? We call the police.” He let out a robotic sigh and stood up. “It’s all we really can do.”

“What about Marnie, the owner?” You asked, grasping at straws for a solution.

“She seemed… nice, over the phone. A lot of humans are, but I think she has about as much power of things as we do right now, hon. Let’s get ready for bed okay?”

And for now, he was right. You followed him up the stairs and into your shared bedroom. Oh right —

“So, uh, one bed?” You asked and sat down on the bed. Big mistake, because he took on a mischievous smile.

“Why? Is that a problem?” He asked, and then sauntered over to the bed. He draped himself over the sheets and craned his neck to look at you, fluttering his eye.

“Pft-” You couldn’t hold it in, your turned back and doubled over in laughter.

“What? What?!?” He rolled over and crawled closer to you, but you stood up, still laughing, and grabbed your bag—the one you didn’t take outside.

You turned around, holding your coiled up charger, and used it to scoot him to the side.

“Scoot over.”

“While you’re standing, won’t you be a doll and get the lights?” He said, but rolled over to the other side of the bed. You narrowed your eyes and walked over to the far wall to flip the switch, then went back and flopped on to your side of the bed. You rested for a moment, looking up at the dark ceiling before rolling over and trying to find the outlet the lamp had been plugged into. From the sound of it, Mettaton was already plugged in. You rolled over onto your stomach, lifted your shirt, and then plugged in.
Tomorrow was going to be different, you just knew it.

Then everything faded once again.
The smell of coffee beans was irresistible, so much to the point that your mother almost made a beeline for the counter. Despite having a cup this morning, and then another in the car on the way, she figured she could use a pick-me-up. But she had more pressing matters she decided once she spotted her old colleague seated near the window. Smiling, she walked over and draped her coat on the back of the chair opposite of him.

“Hello Chris! It’s been awhile.” She said as she sat down.

“I could say the same to you.” He said, putting considerably less effort into his smile. “It’s been so long…did you do something different with your hair?”

At this your mother laughed. “Oh, no. Nothing at all really. Although getting old and grey doesn’t help much, in my defense!”

The two of them laughed and talked, dodging the pressing matters that they’d actually come to discuss. The weather sure was nice this time of year yes? Lovely. The economy seems to be improving as well. Fantastic. This part of town sure is lively, isn’t it? M-hm.

“Listen.” Your mother’s colleague finally took on a serious tone. Good, she thought. She was growing tired of the pedantically laid out small talk.

“I know you agreed to meet up with me because you want information on your situation, but I can’t help you there.”

Your mother’s heart sank, along with her smile.

“Before you make that face, let me finish. I can’t help you, but I do know someone who can.” He ripped a piece of his napkin off and took a pen from his pocket. After scribbling something in shorthand, he handed it off to your mother.

“Her name is Aaliyah, and she’s a sympathizer for our side who works in the CIA. I’m almost 100% certain she’d agree to meet with you, but she lives in Virginia. If you really want info, I suggest you meet with her. Talking over the phone about something so… sensitive could be dangerous. I’ve spoken with her in person before, and she says she’s looked at your case. You should speak with her.”

Your mother thinks back to all the times she’s been worried or scared because the government might decide they no longer need to hold up to their end of the bargain. Monsters returning to the surface have the situation interesting enough as it is, but to what direction it can’t be said. Your mother could be seen as a hypothetical threat due to the intelligence she knows about the program she helped in, or
she’s been taken out of the viewfinder because of the gravity of this recent situation. The peace of mind might just give back several years of her life she lost to stress. She knew she had to meet this woman.

“Thank you Chris.”

The two of them chatted for a little while longer before he made his leave, saying that he did come to California with business. Her mind brewing, your mother ordered herself a coffee and turned the paper in her hands over and over again, until the numbers and name were memorized.

~ ~ ~

Even while sleeping—or in a similar state—he just had to look beautiful.

You’d woken up fairly early—the sky was still dark but you knew it was around seven. You went to sleep with the intention of waking up early—sleeping around so many other people made you nervous, even with Mettaton with you—and unsurprisingly, you woke up early. But when you sat up with the intention to get out of bed, you caught site of how peaceful Mettaton looked while resting. Even without makeup he was just so… pretty. No, that didn’t do him justice: he’s downright gorgeous. His eyelashes were fairly long, and his lips were definitely full without lipstick too.

Hm, wow, this got weird fast. Even by your standards, watching someone sleep—or whatever—was pretty creepy. Carefully, you swung your legs over the edge of the bed and yanked your charger out of your back, rolling it up into a coil and reaching over to set it in your bag. You rest your elbows on your knees and remember you need to call Marnie. You don’t think there’s much she can do, but not notifying her won’t help either. You search around in the bag at your feet for the phone, and then take one backwards look at Mettaton to see if his eyes are still closed. They are, but you don’t want to be rude so you decide to step into the bathroom and close the door to muffle any noise.

Marnie picks up on the third ring, despite the early hour.

“Hello, hello!” She answered, chipper despite how early in the morning it was. “I wasn’t expecting a call so soon; is everything all right?” There was, however, an edge of worry in her voice.

“I wish I could say everything was.” You begin. “But I’m calling about the neighbors across the street. They’ve made themselves known to us and I don’t think their intentions are friendly.”

You hear her pause on the other end. “You… you must mean the Jacksons! They’re a lovely family with three teenage kids; I’ve had the pleasure to speak to them. Surely they wouldn’t do anything to make you feel out of place?”

“Nothing physical, but—” Marnie was quick to cut you off.

“Oh, then I promise you’ve got nothing to worry about! They’re nice people who only have good intentions.”

“Nice people don’t stand in front of your house to intimidate you.”

“I’m sure it was just simple miscommunication, perhaps if you tried talking to them…” You began to tune her out, rolling your eyes at her obvious disregard of the situation.

“Anyway, thank you for listening, but I’ve got to go. Have a good morning.” You hung up immediately and set your phone down on the sink. That couldn’t have gone worse. Well, theoretically she could have yelled at you or something, but considering that Marnie chose to be blind about current events, it went pretty bad. You spent a moment just looking at yourself in the
mirror, now. Hoo, boy. If you were being honest with yourself, did you really know everyone here well enough to care so much? Hell, even Mettaton included—you certainly didn’t know everyone here long enough to call them good friends yet… part of you argued that they were all so nice and familiar, in their own ways. It was like you’d known them for so much longer. You already felt like you were a part of their little squad. You tried hard to think back to the friends—if any—you had back in middle and high school. When everything went to hell, it felt like nothing had mattered, and you didn’t hesitate to distance yourself from whoever had been in what you called “your life before”. And just case anyone asked you didn’t consider Valerie a friend. But… Mettaton, Frisk, Undyne, Alphys, Papyrus, Sans…

Yeah. Those are friends.

Sighing, you picked up your phone and walked back into the bedroom. There, you saw Mettaton sitting up on his side of the bed and stretching dramatically. He then looked your way and then made a surprised look as if he’d just noticed you were standing there.

“So that’s where you ran off to. I was getting so lonely—”

Whatever teasing remark Mettaton was about to say was cut off when you heard banging on the door.

“Up, up, up! Get up get up!” You heard Undyne’s voice call from the other side. “We have to get to the beach!”

You sent a wry smile towards Mettaton and sat down on the bed.

“Fine.” He said, making a show of groaning robotically and getting up to go open the door.

“Undyne, dear, don’t you think it’s a bit early to be heading outside? The sun’s not even up yet.”

“So?! Never stopped me before, never will!” She said eagerly.

“Well! Don’t you think everyone should eat first? Even the great warrior Undyne has to get hungry too, hm?”

You heard Undyne pause and looked back to see her squinting at Mettaton. She didn’t have a comeback, so you assumed she probably was hungry.

“Alright… alright. Under one condition: I get to help with breakfast!”

“No. Oh no, absolutely not—”

“Too late! I already made up my mind!” She turned on her heels and went dashing down the stairs, and you had to smother a chuckle once you saw Mettaton chasing after her with a worried expression.

~ ~ ~

Saturday morning cartoons were the best, but what could be better than what sounded like combat coming from the kitchen. Undyne, despite her claims otherwise, didn’t seem to be the best cook. Mettaton repeatedly had to keep her from setting the stove on its highest setting, but he failed in trying to keep her from obliterating the pancake ingredients. Soon, however, Papyrus joined in on the cooking and things went continuously downhill. It was plain as day from whom Papyrus learned to cook.
In the end, what wasn’t splattered all over the floor or walls, Mettaton had managed to get into a bowl and onto a pan.

The end result didn’t look that bad, in all honesty. Undyne and Papyrus were seated at the table along with everyone else, but they were absolutely covered in pancake batter, and they didn’t seem to notice or care. When Mettaton came into the dining room to serve, he too was splattered in batter, but he definitely didn’t seem happy about the situation.

“Hmph, you’re lucky I didn’t put on any makeup yet.” He muttered as he filled up Undyne and Papyrus’ plates.

“Yes, it would truly be a disgrace if your makeup tainted the pancakes.” Papyrus piped up before digging into his stack.

“Excuse me?!”

You snorted and reached for a bottle of syrup, pouring a healthy amount onto your stack before cutting in yourself.

They tasted… alright. Sure, this was coming from someone who’s perception of food was a bit skewed, seeing as you didn’t eat all the time, but you were certain you’d had better pancakes. Still, you ate them all, not wanting to be rude.

Undyne was the first to clean her plate, to no one’s surprise. She was tapping her fingers against the table, waiting impatiently for everyone to finish eating.

“Alright, everyone’s done eating right?” Undyne sat up in her chair, nearly knocking it to the floor.

“So we can finally get back in the water right?” The question barely left her mouth before she was headed straight for the doorway.

“Ah, ah, ah! Not so fast, you.” Mettaton extended his arm across the room from the kitchen doorway to catch Undyne. “You aren’t going anywhere until you clean up this kitchen.”

“What? But you said after everyone ate—”

“And then you trashed the kitchen!” He retracted his arm and then placed his hand on his hip. “You won’t be going anywhere near that ocean until this kitchen is cleaner than it was before.”

Undyne grit her teeth and clenched her fists, sending a glare Mettaton’s way.

“No need to distress, Undyne! The Great Papyrus will help you clean the kitchen, seeing as I contributed to our artwork.”

‘Artwork’?

Let sleeping dogs lie, you supposed.

While Undyne and Papyrus took to the kitchen, with a steaming Mettaton watching them work, you, Sans, Frisk, and Alphys migrated over to the living room. You were getting settled on the couch when you saw Frisk hop up, as if remembering something, and then rush out of the room. You shared a bemused look with Sans and Alphys and shrugged. Not a moment later, however, you heard excited feet rushing back down the hall. Frisk emerged from the doorway, holding a DVD case out in front of them. You raised an eyebrow but nodded your head approvingly.

“Expert choice.” You took the DVD from them and turned it over in your hands, feeling a tinge of
nostalgia albeit you couldn’t remember what most of the movie was about.

“O-Oh! I’ve heard of that one, but I could never get my claws on a copy.” Alphys said excitedly, peering over your shoulder to inspect it. “What’s it about.”

“You’ll have to watch it and find out.” You said cryptically (because in reality you didn’t remember) and handed the case back to Frisk so they could put it in.

“Yeah, no use ogling it. Pop that bad boy in and let’s watch.” Sans piped up. Frisk shook their head vigorously, pointing to the kitchen.

“We have to watch it later, when we get back inside.” They flopped back down on the couch, hugging the disk to their chest and bobbing their legs back and forth.

“Then why’d you bring it out.” You reached across the couch and gave them a light flick on the forehead with your index finger.

~ ~ ~

You had stepped into the kitchen for a bit to see Undyne and Papyrus’ progress, because they seemed to be taking quite a while.

Progress was the wrong word to use, because there was a lack thereof. Mettaton had situated himself on a clean portion of the kitchen counter and was filing his nails casually, but it seemed to you like Undyne and Papyrus had gotten into a bit of an argument.

“Are you kidding me? You’re supposed to use cold water to mop a floor!” Undyne was shouting, holding a mop handle close to her. Huffing, Papyrus took the mop from her and put it to his side.

“Nonsense! It is well known within the cleaning community that hot water is the best way to remove pancake batter from floors.” He retorted.

“Cleaning community? Are you making this up?!” Undyne asked.

“Well there are communities that clean somewhere!”

“And what do you know about them? I once saw a sock sitting in your living room for three weeks!” Papyrus gasped, looking quite offended. “Those! Were!! Extenuating circumstances!!!”

You looked over to Mettaton, seeing if he was going to intervene anytime soon, but he was blowing at his nails, looking quite bored. He had on an expression that said they’d been at it for quite some time. Sighing, you walked over to the stove which had baked on ingredients and picked up a bottle of all-purpose cleaner that was lying around.

“Human! What are you doing?” Papyrus asked once you began spraying down the stovetop.

“Yeah, we can handle this on our own.” Undyne said, though once you looked over at the two of them, they seemed to be playing tug of war with the mop.

“Well, it looked to me like the two of you were goofing off.”

“It’s not my fault he doesn’t know how to mop!” “Well I certainly did not start these shenanigans.” They said, yelling over each other. Suppressing a laugh, you grabbed a roll of paper towels and set it down on the counter.
“If you can’t decide on hot or cold water, how about you use lukewarm water?”

“That—” She trailed off.

“Hm…” They both looked like they wanted to find a retort, but they were coming up empty.

“I guess that could work.” Undyne finally said, begrudgingly picking up the mop bucket and taking it over to the sink.

After that was settled, they finally managed to clean the floor, although they turned it into some sort of game, or ‘challenge’ as Undyne put it. Still, it was done, and when you’d finished cleaning the oven/stove and wiping down the counters, the kitchen finally started to look cleaner.

“There.” You dusted your hands together to rid them of dirt and turned to Undyne and Papyrus, who’d just finished… scraping batter off the ceiling.

“I set the oven to clean, so after that we’ll officially be done.” You announced, much to the pleasure of Papyrus and Undyne—though mostly Undyne.

“Finally! Be right back—” Without letting Mettaton get a word in edgewise, Undyne shot out of the kitchen and dashed upstairs, no doubt going to put her swim suit on.

You glanced at the clock, which now read ten o’clock, so she was still good on time you supposed. Turning around, you were surprised to find Mettaton scrutinizing you, a hand on his chin and another on his hip.

“What,” You tried to hide that you were caught off guard, but your voice was a filthy traitor. “D-Do I have something on my face?”

“Yes, actually.” He took a step towards you and removed his hand to brush something off your shoulder. “Actually, you have—ugh—dried batter everywhere.” He took to dusting you off with his hands meticulously, all the while making a displeased face.

Finally, he took a step back, looking you over, before making a displeased noise.

“Almost forgot.” You watched in stunned silence as he lifted his hand and brushed it against your cheek.

“There! Got it.” Although he said this, you didn’t feel his hand retract. Instead, you felt the backs of his fingertips grazing against your cheek. You had been studying his face while he was cleaning you off, and his meticulous displeased expression had changed to something else and…And… You couldn’t find the right words to describe it. It reminded you of the time when you were modeling with him, but his now expression is softer, and with his hand still brushing your cheek you felt a strange ball of emotions forming in you. It was somewhere between nervousness and apprehension. It wasn’t exactly unpleasant.

You snapped back to reality once you heard the shuffling of feet and the sound of voices just outside, in the hallway. Everyone was going to get dressed to head to the beach, you realized, and you quickly took a jerky step back.

“I should go get dressed.” You say, rushing out of the kitchen, into the hallway, and up the stairs—all without giving Mettaton a chance to speak.

Once you were behind closed doors you sat down on your shared bed, just a little bit confused and a little bit worried. Your chest felt… odd. Like there was a pressure; should you call your mom and tell
her? You still had that bundle of nerves in your stomach, but it was simply your body reacting to your emotions, something that wasn’t uncommon to you, but this painful clenching in your chest… it made you want to get up and pace. Were these your pesky emotions acting up too? Every time you thought back to how Mettaton’s hand felt on your face and the gentle way in which he looked at you… Yeah, your chest feels even weirder now.

You practically fling yourself up from the bed and walk over to your bag, bringing out your swimsuit and undressing quickly. It probably would’ve done you some good to throw the article in the dryer the night before, but you’d have to make do with sand in strange places. You grab your beach bag and make sure to put a folded up and slightly damp towel in as well. By the time you step outside the room, trying your futile best to calm your still buzzing nerves, you can hear that everyone is downstairs already.

Undyne was practically hopping off the walls by the time you made it down, to the point that she didn’t even wait for instruction, she just dashed out the back doors and down the stairs. No, scratch that, she hopped off the railing and into the sand!

“U-Undyne! Be careful, and wait for us!” Alphys called out, following her albeit she opted for the stairs. You stepped out with everyone else (awkwardly avoid eye contact with a certain robot) and noticed something odd. Well, not odd, it should’ve seemed fairly normal but…

“Last one in’s a rotten egg!” You watched Undyne do a graceful dive into the water.

“Ack!” But she resurfaced immediately, and she didn’t look happy. “Th-The water is fr-freezing!” She did an awkward shivering walk back towards the shore.

“Hm, now that I think about it…” You slung your bag over and took out your phone, glancing at the temperature. It was 65F. “It’s probably too cold to go swimming today.”

Undyne’s uncharacteristically crestfallen face took you by surprise. “Aw… stupid sun! Get warmer, dam—darnit!”

You gave her a slight shrug. “Hey, it’s supposed to be warming later on in the afternoon.” You offered. “Like, uh, in the seventies I think.”

That seemed to get her attention, and her smile returned, though not as fierce as it usually was.

“Alright! I can wait for the sun to get its act together, I guess, but what should we do until then.”

That’s when Frisk started beaming, remembering their movie.

~ ~ ~

It was still early afternoon, but you had closed the curtains to add to the movie atmosphere. Papyrus had made popcorn for everyone without burning it and currently, you all were seated in the living room, waiting for Frisk to finish setting up the DVD. When they finally finished, they grabbed the remote and settled into their seat on the couch.

You were sitting next to Mettaton, feeling only a little shy after that moment in the kitchen. You could sense him glancing your way every so often, but you kept your eyes trained at the screen.

They didn’t skip through the movie previews, and you were oddly thankful for that. Most of the movies that were shown were bringing up an odd feeling of nostalgia to you. They were cute animated movies by the same studio, but you could tell that they had loveable plots and characters in them.
Finally, the movie began.

~ ~ ~

It was about a little girl who was “spirited away” to another land and separated from her parents. When she finds them again, they’re turned into pigs. Throughout the entire movie, she goes through various adventures to try and return them back to normal. Heh. You remember this movie, sort of.

You actually burst out laughing at several funny moments, much to everyone’s surprise. The tender moments of the movie don’t slip past you either. But, psht, i-it’s not like you’re an emotional person.

When the movie was over, it was all Alphys and Undyne wanted to talk about.

“So he was a dragon and a river?” Undyne asked Frisk, absolutely perplexed. When they nodded their head, Undyne put her hands to her own and leaned back.

“No fair! That’s cheating, you should only choose one cool thing to be!”

“Yeah, I agree. He really tipped the scales on that one.” Take a wild guess.

“B-But! Do you think they’ll ever meet again?” Alphys piped up, after giggling to Sans’ joke.

“Perhaps,” You felt a wry smile come on. “But what if it was all a dream?” You waved your hands and wiggled your fingers.

“Noo! Don’t say that!” “I might just cry if it were like that!” “Is there a sequel? There has to be a sequel!”

You let out a dry laugh to everyone’s mixed reactions and you waved your hands defensively.

“I don’t think this movie has a sequel, but I know they’re a lot of great movies like that. Maybe we could watch them later?”

“Yes! But later!” Undyne hopped off the couch and pointed at you. “What’s the temperature, punk?”

“Uh— You pulled out your phone. “Seventy two—”

“Perfect! Let’s go, let’s go.”

Everyone still had on their swimsuits, mind you, so there was no need to change. As such, the second she was given the go ahead, Undyne was out of the door like a bolt of lightning.

“W-Wait! Don’t forget your bag.” Alphys was out after her next.

The rest of the squad followed, and when you were outside, you saw Undyne was already running across the sand—doing the same “hot sand” dance from yesterday.

“Undyne! Wait for me!” Papyrus went bounding after her, less bothered by the sand of course. You finally chanced a glance back towards Mettaton. Unsurprisingly, he was looking at you—and not even trying to hide the fact. He was quick to flash you his signature smile, however.

You were brought away from your thoughts when you felt something tugging on your hand. Frisk was trying to urge you towards the beach, an expectant look on their face. Sans had somehow already made it down the stairs, despite the fact that you hadn’t seen him move. Either way, you relented and let them pull you over to the shore. You kicked off your flip-flops along the way and
joined Undyne, Papyrus, and Alphys in the water.

“Hey babe, c’merel!” Undyne waded over to Alphys and turned around. “Get on my shoulders.”


“Shh, just do it.”

Alphys hesitantly obliged and you watched on in slight amusement—then you began to feel something on your back. Like someone was trying to scale you.

“Frisk, what are you doing?” You asked, but they were already on your shoulders.

“Chicken fight.” Ah, okay, that makes sense—

Wait what?

“W-Wait a second!” Alphys mirrored your confusion, arms outstretched in panic as Undyne came charging forward. You barely even noticed that Papyrus had disappeared.

Frisk put their hands forward and almost immediately knocked Alphys down once she came into range, Undyne going as well due to momentum.

“Does that mean we win?” You asked after the two of them resurfaced.

“No!” Undyne practically roared.

“It m-means a rematch!” This time it was Alphys who was pumped. She practically scaled Undyne’s back like Frisk had done yours and was rearing for another round.

“Wait, wait!” The four of you looked over to see Mettaton wading awkwardly over. The picture is a surprising one until you vaguely remember him mentioning that he was waterproof. Or did he? Well, he obviously is, or else he wouldn’t have made it this far.

“You can’t have a proper competition without someone to officiate.” He said, hands now on his hips.

“Yes we can, we just did.” Undyne retorted.

“Well! You shouldn’t! But don’t worry, I’m here no so there’s no need to worry.” He cleared his throat (purely for effect of course) and took a step closer.

“Alright, I want a good clean fight; no head-buttning, no biting, and no hitting below the belt. Good luck!” He waded back and clapped his together, signaling the fight to begin.

Undyne rushed forward immediately, and this time instead of being knocked down, Alphys held her ground and tried to push Frisk off your shoulders.

“You two punks are going down!” Undyne growled; her face was right in front of yours.

You felt a mischievous grin surface as you took your hand and splashed wave of water over.

“Ack!” Undyne stumbled back, nearly tripping. “Hey! That’s cheating!”

“I’ll allow it.” Mettaton said immediately, much to Undyne’s disdain.

“Alright then. Two can play at that game.”
You were bracing yourself for a face full of water, but instead Undyne did something you didn’t expect.

“She took her index finger and began rubbing the bottom of Frisk’s foot.

“Pffbt-haha!” Frisked jerked on your shoulders, throwing you back a bit.

“St-Stop! I’m ticklish!” They cried out.

“Ngaaah! Face my wrath!”

You tried to combat Undyne’s tickling by splashing even more water, but it was no use; Frisk was just too ticklish. They ended up kicking you in the chest and kneeing you in the face several times before finally flailing their arms and leaning back away from the tickling, and as a result your balance was thrown off.

You went plummeting into the water, the muffled sound of Undyne and Alphys’ cheers just barely breaching the water.

“You got lucky.” You said, once Undyne finished laughing.

“And you got owned!” Undyne turned to high-five Alphys triumphantly. You puffed out your cheeks and saw that Frisk was sticking out their tongue.

“Oh, oh! What are you all doing? Can I join in?” You saw Papyrus heading your way, a bucket in his hand, and vaguely remembered him disappearing before the chicken fight began.

“What’s that?” You asked, pointing to his bucket.

“Oh these? These are treasures I scavenged on beach. Take a looksee!”

He held the bucket out under your nose and you peered in. There were different shells in an assortment of shapes, sizes, and textures, but that’s not all there was. There was a surprisingly old and dirty penny that had holes forming in it, a rusted necklace chain, several smooth stones, a pair of plastic sunglasses with the shaded pieces missing, and a small metal ring.

“These are really amazing, Papyrus.” You said genuinely, offering up a small smile.

“Oh boy, do you really think so, human.” Papyrus asked you, a small… blush… forming on his cheekbones. Honestly, it would be fruitless to question it at this point.

Everyone else took a gander at Papyrus’ treasure trove, and was equally impressed.

“Oh, before I forget! I want to participate in this water battling as well.”

“Sure thing.” You turned around. “You can get on my back if you want.”

“But human! Don’t you want a turn on someone’s back.”

“Oh—Why not have Frisk or Sans on your shoulders.” You turned back, shifting awkwardly as you made up an excuse.

“But I already rode on your back.” Frisk pointed out.

“And my lazy brother is napping in the sun right now!” Papyrus said, gesturing to where the aforementioned skeleton was, tuckered out on a towel in the sand.

“Well, I’m probably too heavy anyway.” You didn’t want to directly point out that he was literally
nothing but bones.

“Surely you jest.” He struck a pose as if flexing, bucket still in hand. “Do you not see these enviable biceps?”

“Yeah Papyrus is ripped!” Undyne chimed in.

“…” Let sleeping dogs lie.

“Now quit stalling and get on his back.” Undyne said.

You sighed with a shrug and climbed aboard Papyrus’ shoulders when he stooped down in front of you.

“Tinier human, if you would be so kind…” Frisk took his bucket for him and made a saluting motion.

“Who am I battling?” You asked, once you realized Alphys was no longer on Undyne’s shoulders.

“Mettaton, get on my back.” Undyne flashed you a grin.

“What? Oh, no darling, I couldn’t possibly—”

“What are you chicken? Bawk bawk.” Undyne teased.

“Just how old are you again Undyne.” Mettaton asked, huffing.

“It’s alright, I understand if he doesn’t want to get his hair wet.” You were feeling just a tinge of déjà vu.

At that, Mettaton turned to you in disbelief.

“Are you implying that I’d lose?”

“Well,” You shrugged nonchalantly. “I wasn’t implying you’d win.”

He scoffed, looking slightly offended. “If that’s the case,” He quickly waded over to Undyne and climbed on her shoulders.

“Don’t worry hon, I’ll make sure your defeat is absolutely fabulous.”

“Fear not human! With the Great Papyrus as your noble steed we’re sure to win.”

Alphys stepped up, looking mildly excited.

“I g-guess I’ll be the referee then.” She cleared her throat.

“On your mark... get set... go!”

~ ~ ~

The afternoon was spent playing several rounds, and although there were no coherent teams and no one really keeping score, everyone still had an accomplished feeling and plenty of fun.

You had broken off from the water activities near the end. You considered beach combing like Papyrus had done earlier, but in the end you grabbed your bag and set up your towel next to Sans. To your surprise, he was holding up one of those portable three-sectioned mirrors—you know, like
the ones from the cartoons—and... tanning himself? That seemed like it might've been hard to do, seeing as he lacked anything to tan.

“What?” Sans asked when he noticed you staring. “I’m working on my summer tan.”

“It’s... it’s the middle February.” You pointed out.

“And?”

“And you have no skin.”

“So?”

“Well, I mean...” You sat up to gesture vaguely with your hands. “Never mind.”

A few minutes later and everyone was coming in. Alphys, Frisk, and Undyne all seemed to be shivering with chattering teeth; the temperature had dropped considerably in the few hours you all had been outside. The sun now hung lazily in the sky and there was a tinge of pink on the horizon, but seeing as it was still winter it would no doubt be getting dark soon.

“Ugh, why doesn’t someone invent a heated ocean?” Undyne complained as she flopped onto the sand, not even bothering to get out her towel.

“What about a heated pool?” Frisk offered up as they set out their own towel, sitting down.

“Agh, it’s not the same! It’s gotta be the ocean, or else it’s just not worth the hassle, ya know?”

“Enjoying something you’ve earned always tastes better.” You said, nodded in agreeance.

A peaceful silence took over the group as everyone set out their towels and relaxed. It was then that you realized everyone was admiring the sunset; even Sans had put away his mirror and was looking westward.

“I never get tired of this part.” Undyne said wistful.

“Yeah... All the colors swirling in the sky... I-It’s kind of romantic, don’t you think?” Alphys added.

“Precisely! The colors have always reminded me of spaghetti sauce, however.” Papyrus piped up.

“How’s spaghetti sauce supposed to be romantic?!” Alphys asked, amuse.

“Who said anything about romance?”

A few more moments of silence passed before Mettaton spoke up.

“The sun going down always makes me a bit sad.” He said in a lamenting voice, placing the back of his hand to his forehead. “It’s like the spotlight turning off at the end of a performance! You know the show’s over, but you can’t help wanting to continue anyway. Oh well, at least it’s making way for the stars.”

“Speaking of stars...” You say, remembering something. “We have to go somewhere one day where aren’t any lights so we can see more of them.”

“There are more of them out there? Why are they hiding; are they shy?” Papyrus asked you, practically beaming. You chuckled, shaking your head.
“Heh, no they aren’t shy. There’s millions and billions of them out there, but it’s difficult to see any when you live in areas where there a lot of people.” You paused, feeling like a memory was coming up. There were so many stars…

“I remember one time, when I was a kid; there was a huge power outrage. Almost all of California had no power and it was the middle of the night and… you could see every star in the sky clearly. I was hypnotized; I couldn’t take my eyes off the sky. My mom brought out a book and we started finding constellations. They twinkled and came in different colors, you could see the beginnings of galaxies, it was just so relaxing… I don’t think we got any sleep that night.”

Once you stopped talking you realized everyone was looking at you. Well of course—that’s what happens when you go off on long tangents, you berated yourself.

“W-We had something like stars back underground. They were actually j-just shiny crystals in the ceiling. Either way, they gave us a sense hope. B-But now, seeing the real thing, they don’t even come close.”

“Preach it.” Undyne said, resting her arm across Alphys’ shoulder.

Eventually, you all decided it was time to pack up. The sun had finally dipped below the horizon and the temperature dropped dramatically. Staying outside any longer would be asking for a cold, you chided.

“Be careful not track any… sand… Never mind.” You were trying to warn everyone, but went mostly unheard as Undyne called out ‘I call the shower,’ Sans mumbled something about being hungry, and Frisk interrupted you by tugging on your arm and asking to play a game. Moment sufficiently ruined.

“I brought Uno!” They said, practically hopping with excitement. Ah, Uno. The maker and breaker of friendships.

“Don’t you want to shower and get all that sand off of you?” You asked them. Unsurprisingly, they shook their head no.

“Well I do. We can all play together once we get something to eat and shower, okay?” Frisk pouted but relented when you lead them towards the stairs. “Go get your stuff together while Undyne’s in the shower.”

You followed our own advice once you were upstairs and headed to your shared room to shower. Again, you were brushing sand out of strange places. You began to peel off your bathing suit and shake loose anything else when you heard something that made you freeze.

“Ahem.”

You turned, eyes wide as dinner plates, to see Mettaton standing in the bathroom doorway.

“Jesus shit—” You cursed, gathering your suit and your towel back around your body. “When did you get in here—why are you here?!”

“I, ah, I was just.” He gestured to the bathroom. Judging from his loquacious response he was just as surprised as you, but it didn’t help.

“You… you’re a robot! What reason do you have to be in the bathroom.”

“I’ll have you know I was taking off my makeup!” he said defensively. “And what are you doing
stripping down in a room you know we share?"

“I…” He had you there. “I guess I was in my own room for a moment.”

“Well, dollface,” Mettaton seemed to have rebounded from his embarrassment, because his smug
haughtiness was back, although it seemed like he was forcing it. “I didn’t realize we’d already grown
this close. Why, you’re so comfortable being near me—”

You ended his speech with a well-aimed pillow to the face.

“Hurry up and leave so I can shower.”

~ ~ ~

And shower you did. By the time you got out, it seemed everyone else had gathered downstairs.

“Ooh, you’re just in time!” Mettaton called from the kitchen once you made it down the stairs. A
delicious aroma wafted from in so you could deduce two things: 1. The food was ready and 2.
Papyrus and Undyne probably had nothing to do with it.

“Won’t you be a dear and help me set the table?” He asked, already handing you several plates. You
gave him the side eye but obliged, setting down the plates and then going back for silverware and
napkins.

“Alright everyone, dinnertime!” Mettaton called out. You took a seat as everyone began to file in and
Mettaton began serving the food. Nothing like a good old fashioned burger with a side of veggies.

“Oh! It looks good.” Undyne said, eying her plate as Mettaton served.

“Well of course it does; I made it.” He said a bit pointedly.

“I-I’m surprised they aren’t covered in sequins and glitter.” Alphys said, equally pointedly.

At this, Frisk stuck their tongue out and made a retching gesture with their hand.

“I was disappointed for obvious reasons when I found out humans don’t take their meals with an
extra helping of fabulous but, you know what they say,” He took his seat, untying an apron from his
waist that read ‘smooch the cook’. “When on the surface, do as the humans do.”

Close enough, you thought as you picked up your burger and took a bite. It was pretty good—much
better, you decided, than it would’ve with glitter.

The meal went on like most meals do when there’s good food; in total silence. Until the silence was
broken—and no it wasn’t by Papyrus, or even Undyne. The silence wasn’t broken by a person at all.

THONK!

“What was that?” You asked, swallowing down your side of corn.

“I don’t know, but it sounded like it came from outside.” Undyne said.

“I… guess I’ll go check it out.” You were closest to the door anyway. As you stood and walked
down the hallway you wondered briefly if a bird ran into a window or something. Things like that
happened in your old apartment in LA, but when you checked the back door nothing looked out of
the ordinary. You heard the loud noise once again and realized it was coming from the front of the
house. Curious and confused, you made your way back down the hall and opened the door.
Your reflexes were quick enough to step away from the doorway as a good-sized rock comes hurtling at you. It lands with a loud thud in the hallway and you grit your teeth.

“What the hell was that?!”

“Wh-What’s going on?”

You heard multiple yells of confusion form the dining room and did some fast thinking.

“Everyone, get away from the windows—”

Just as you said your warning, you heard a loud and jarring noise: a window in the living room had been shattered. You wrenched the door closed as another rock slammed against it, but you could still hear the hooting and jeering of the attackers from outside.

“I fucking knew it.”

You turned in time to see Undyne rushing down the hallway towards the door.

“I knew they were going to make trouble!” She said, reaching for the door.

“Wait,” You made as if to stop her, but you hesitated too long and she already had the door open. She rushed onto the porch and picks up a rock, then beaned it at one of the attackers with deadly preciseness.

“Undyne, don’t!” You grabbed her arm to keep her from launching another that she’d grabbed. You’re taken mildly by surprise when you feel a rock impact with your stomach.

“Oh that’s it.” She pulls you along with her and faces the nearest one, her hand upraised as if she were grasping something. The air felt heavy with something for a moment, and there was a crackling like lightning from a storm. You had a feeling Undyne was about to do something very regrettable. But then you see it out of the corner of your eye; some idiot running towards you two with a bat upraised.

Your body moves before you can register what’s going on; the thick part of the bat is in your grip. You’ve grabbed it so hard that pieces of it splintered off under your fingers and you tear it from the man’s hand before breaking it over your knee.

The attacker—a man—lets out a curse before backing up.

“You crazy fucker—”

He and his friends seem to be backing up—making their way towards a pickup truck now that they’ve been met with a fight, but you’re sure they’ve gladly done their damage.

“I hope you burn in hell you stupid monster-lover!” Someone in the truck yells and pulls off with a loud screech. Undyne’s gritting her teeth and staring off in the direction the truck went. You’re scared for a moment that she’s going run after them, so you put a hand to her shoulder. She shrugs you off and turns back to the house, and you can see now that the rock in her hand is now basically dust.

You can also see that everyone else had gathered on the porch and in the doorway.

“Oh my god are you okay? Are you hurt?” Alphys asked, tearing up as she hugged Undyne.

“I’m fine, I’m fine. I wouldn’t let any of those asshats get a hit on me.” She responded, hugging
“What were you thinking? Don’t you know how dangerous that could’ve been?!” Mettaton pulled you into crushing hug.

“I’m fine, I’m fine.” You say, echoing Undyne.” The real damage was done to the house.” You tried to untangle yourself from Mettaton, but you felt something wrap around your legs. Looking down, Frisk was pressing their face into the crook of your knees. You reach down and pat the top of their head, and they look up to you with worry in their eyes.

“It wasn’t their fault.” Undyne spoke up. “I was the one who approached those a—” She stopped herself from cursing, remembering Frisk. “—Those idiots.”

“Well, what’s done is done. Come on, we should get inside. It’s not safe out here.”

~ ~ ~

“Did you at least get a look at their faces?” Marnie asked over the phone, impatience wearing on her voice.

You shrugged the phone to your opposite ear, feeling guilty. Currently, Undyne was downstairs sealing off the broken window with tape and a sheet at your behest after you swept up the glass. But talking to Marnie and your mother was a priority.

“I’m sorry, it was dark.” You bristled at her sigh that followed, but you hadn’t even caught the license plate either. You recognized that it was a red Toyota pickup truck, but Marnie still wasn’t pleased. “But like I said, those people across the street—”

“I’m sorry hon, but I can’t tell the police and my insurance company about a hunch you have. Look, at the very least I need you to take a picture of anything that was damaged.”

“Alright.”

“And, look. I don’t blame you for this; it’s just a bit frustrating. Insurance should cover most of the damage, but this is really going to set me behind business.” Marnie explained.

“Yeah, I know.” You responded, kind of feeling like a child being scolded.

“In the meantime get those pictures for me, alright?”

“Alright.”

Sighing, you hung up and sat down on the bed. Before getting those pictures, you had to call your mother.

She picked up on the first ring.

“What’s wrong, what happened.”

“Wh—” You made an affronted noise. “Why do you assume something happened?”

“You only ever call me when something has happened, so don’t stall.”

“That isn’t true at all.” You said, stalling.

“Oh really?” Shit. “Then when was the last time you called me.”
“I…” You thought back…Was it… was it that long ago, when you had trouble in Britain?! “The point of this call wasn’t to talk about how often I call you.”

Your mother let out a dry laugh. “What did you want to call me about, sweetheart?”

You hesitated for a moment. She already had so many things to worry about, and you didn’t want to be one of them again. But if you didn’t tell her, then Marnie would—and you’d rather she heard the news from you.

“A little while ago we, uh, ran into trouble with some people vandalizing the house.”

You took her silence as permiss to continue speaking.

“One of the windows was broken and there were few dents in the house, but no one was injured.” You decided to leave out the confrontation for now. What she didn’t know couldn’t hurt her.

“Oh, mom, you don’t need to—”

“No, something bad always happens when I’m not there. I will not take any chances when it comes to you.”

“Mom, we’re leaving tomorrow anyway, so it doesn’t make sense to—”

“I guess I’m spending the night, then! Like it or not I’m heading over. Listen, I know I can’t do much, but I’d have better peace of mind being with you and nothing happens, than being here something does happen.”

You wanted to put up a real argument, but in all honesty, you couldn’t blame her. A lot of bad things have happened to you when she wasn’t around, and from her perspective, you knew it must hurt.

“Alright. I’ll let everyone know you’re coming over, but all the beds are taken. You’ll probably have to sleep on the couch.”

“It wouldn’t be my first time on a couch, baby, so don’t worry about me.” She chided gently. “I’ll see you soon, okay?”

“Okay. See you soon.”

You hung up, and although you wanted to throw yourself back against the mattress, you had to get downstairs and take a picture of the damage.

You could hear talking from the living room as you made your way over to the window. Everyone was sitting around the table with colorful cards in their hands, playing Uno.

“Started without me?” You asked as you approached the window, phone out.

“Frisk cheats.” Undyne said, holding her cards close.

“Do not!”

“Tiny human, I must admit that your methods are a tad… unsavory.” Papyrus commented, scooching away.
You snapped a few pictures and looked over to see Frisk challenging a plus four with one of their own, sending eight cards Papyrus’ way. His jaw hung open in utter surprise/defeat, and you couldn’t help the smile that formed.

“What’re the pictures for?” Undyne asked you as you leaned against the back of the couch, looking over at their game.

“Bad hand,” You commented on her five yellow cards. “And I have to send them to Marnie, the owner, so she can file a claim. I’m going to take outside pictures in the morning, when there’s more light, so I guess I can join the next game.”

“Uno out.” Sans put his hands behind his head and leaned back.

“Oh right, almost forgot; my mom is coming over tonight. She uh, got worried and insisted to be near.” You added in.

“Y-Your mom is coming over? That’s great!” Alphys had her hands resting in her lap, having obviously Uno’d out a while ago. You didn’t want to sit next to her next round.

Eventually, with Papyrus and his fourteen cards being the sore loser, you joined in.

“Hand me the cards, I don’t trust your shuffling.” Mettaton held his hand out to Frisk. They puffed their cheeks out, obviously insulted, but handed over the stack. Mettaton made a show of clearing his throat before handling the cards like a professional at a casino would—you know, the fancy tricks and flair.

“They’re… they’re just Uno cards.” You commented as began passing out the cards.

“You should’ve seen him earlier.” Sans added, gathering his cards. “Bet you’d’a loved it.”

Sans’ pun flying over your head you picked up your cards, examining them. Not a bad hand, you thought. And considering the fact that you were sitting next to Mettaton, it wasn’t a bad hand at all.

Most Uno games play out similarly—especially when you play with new people. You learn just exactly what everyone’s capable of.

You took advantage of your arsenal of cards—a plus two, a plus four, and a reverse. Oh ho… then Alphys ambushed you. You had never felt such neat and organized betrayal before, it was actually quite shocking. You didn’t want to sit next to her next round, but no one would trade places with you, especially not Mettaton who was being dour about the whole thing. All you did was shower him with plus cards, sheesh… it also didn’t help that Sans was on his other side, and was taking advantage of each reverse card that came his way.

In the middle of the third round you were playing in, there was a knock on the door; it was your mother.

“Oh don’t let me interrupt your fun!” She’d said, setting down some of her bags in the hallway after you’d answered the door. “I have a phone call I need to make anyway.” And she had stepped outside the back door, clutching her purse close to her side.

Now you sat down, holding this round’s hand.

“This should be the last round.” You said, regarding everyone who’d gone as bleary-eyed as Sans
“‘Are you kidding me?’” Undyne stretched, trying to suppress a yawn. “I could keep wiping your butts all night.”

“B-But even great hero needs her rest, right?” Alphys asked. Undyne rubbed her chin, as if considering it for a minute.

“Yeah, I guess so.” Finishing her stretch she pulled the old ‘arm-behind-the-shoulder’ routine and leaning over.

“Hey! No peeking at my cards!” Alphys pressed her cards to her chest.

“Darn it! I was extra careful this time.” Undyne said, straightening herself up and pouting.

You gave in to a tiny smirk as you leaned back, placing down a card.

~ ~ ~

You were slack-jawed

“Well sugar,” Mettaton gathered the cards, giving them a quick shuffle before sticking them back in the box. “Revenge is a dish best served cold. Like metal.”

“Psht.” You scoffed, definitely not steamed over your ten-card loss. “I hope you aren’t referring to yourself because you’re hot. Your metal, I mean. I mean—what did I mean—you get hot sometimes. Your metal is what gets hot, not you! Not to say that you’re not good looking, you’re gorgeous, definitely what most people would describe as ‘hot’—and I mean that platonically of course, it’s just that I… hm.”

Everyone was looking at you now. It was an odd sight to see, but even Sans was raising an eyebrow…bone… at you.

You stood up.

“I’m going to go check on my mother.”

Before anyone could say a word you shot out of the living room at the speed of light and onto the back porch. You hadn’t heard your mother exit, so you could only assume she was still outside.

“Mom? Mom.” She was sitting in a chair, lead lolling back and obviously asleep. But it was so cold out… you jostled her shoulder to try and stir her.

“Huh—what—” She awoke, startled and clutching her purse. She relaxed once she realized it was just you, however. “Already done with your little card game?”

“Uh… yeah.” You answered, not wanting to point out that she came in an hour ago. “What are you doing sleeping out here? It must be freezing right now.”

“I only meant to close my eyes for a moment, I was going to come inside… whoops!” She shrugged, flashing you a goofy grin.

“Well, you can come in now and get set up on the couch.” You said. “Everyone’s, uh, getting ready for bed.” And probably laughing at your blunder.

Your mother stood, stretching. “Alright. You get some rest too, okay.”
You gave her a half-hearted smile. Ah yes, ‘rest’. She headed in, and you watched after her before stopping yourself, lingering on the porch. You glanced up at the night sky and you couldn’t help but to savor it. There were always more stars away from the city, but it’s nothing compared to that night.

Finally, you stepped inside, peeking into the living room on your way upstairs. It seemed that mostly everyone had gone upstairs, save for Alphys who was chatting up your mom. While it didn’t need to be a secret that your mother specialized in robotics and whatnot, the idea just made you nervous regardless. Still, you continued upstairs.

Your feet barely hit the top step before Undyne bum rushed you. She came out of the bathroom, smelling like toothpaste, and was smiling something dastardly.

“What’s up hot stuff—?”

“No.”

“I didn’t even say ask it yet!” She said defensively.

“The answer is still no.”

“Don’t lie, you totally like him.”

You scoffed, crossing your arms.

“No.”

“Youuu~…” She shoved you with her hip. “…~Called him hot!”

“You… you are technically right, but I had my foot in my mouth.”

“You were fumbling like a school kid, come on now.”

“I’m fairly certain a school kid would have more elegance.” You say.

“Ha! Whatever, just let me know when you two hook up and start smooching or whatever.”

She gave you a rough pat on your back before turning to her own room. You huffed, determined not to think about the ludicrous idea of developing feelings for… no, you weren’t going to, no no.

You walked into your shared room, unsurprised when you saw Mettaton already lounging on the bed with a beauty magazine in hand.

You were half expecting him to tease you like Undyne did, and hell, the walls weren’t exactly soundproof. When you sat down on your side of your bed, charger out, and he still didn’t say anything, you turned to look at him.

He definitely appeared to be engrossed in his reading, and it probably had nothing to do with the fact that the magazine in question had his face on the cover. You peered farther over and saw that he was reading an article about him—an interview to be precise. There was a picture of him on the side, posing so as to show off his legs.

“Really?” You asked, sighing as you lied down on your stomach.

“What?” He asked, looking over at you. “I want to know the public’s opinion! A true star cares just as much about their fans as they do their critics.”
“Well, that seems pretty humble of you.”

“Hmph! I’m nothing if not humble!” He struck a pose, much to your amusement. You suppressed a laugh as you reached back to open your panel.

“Well, whatever you say. Goodnight, Mettaton.”

“Goodnight darling.”

~ ~ ~

Oh god.

~ ~ ~

You looked up to your mother, watching intently as she hunched over a strange whirring device, practically boring holes into the back of her head. She hadn’t said a word to you since she finished scolding you. You looked down at your hand, horribly disfigured though it was. The skin on your hands, designed to withstand the sharpest of knives was very strong. You wanted to see how strong it was, and apparently it could give way to superhuman strength. The material did not tear, you discovered, but pulled and stretched until it couldn’t go any further. Like ripping a plastic bag between one’s fingers, it came away from the inhuman force. The back of your left hand was devoid of any covering, giving way to impossibly hard metal. You had noticed something strange and you had given in to your curiosity, pulling away the skin of your palm—the faux padding coming away to reveal a strange circular opening in your hand.

“Mom.” You called out to her. She was either ignoring you or couldn’t hear you over the whirring, so you tried again. And again.

“Dear, I’m busy right now.” She said, glancing back.

“What’s this on my hand.” You extended your palm. She gasped and flinched back towards her workbench quickly, before calming herself.

“Almost forgot… it’s nothing, sweetie.”

“Really?” You examined the opening on your uncovered hand. “It doesn’t look like nothing.”

“Don’t—don’t do that.” She dropped what she was doing and walked over to you, taking your hand and pointing it away from your face. “They’re not activated, but it still scares me.”

“Are they cannons or something? Why do I have them? Do they still work?”

“They’re…” She sighed, running a hand through her hair. “They’re lasers, and yes, they do technically work, but they aren’t activated and your mind is not attuned to use them.”

“So… why do I still have them?” You asked.

“There are a few things I can’t remove because they’re built into your frame. I’d have to redesign and rebuild you in order to remove things like your strength and these… weapons. But I didn’t have the time.”

“Oh…”

“And making parts for you isn’t… exactly easy, sweetie. So please, don’t go trying to dissect yourself again. I know this is all strange, and we’re still getting used to this house—and I know things will
never be the same but….” She sighed, trailing off before standing up and going back to her work.

“I’m sorry.” You muttered, looking once again at the back of your hand.

Your mother turned back

Everything faded to black as you tried to claw your subconscious from this unwanted dream. You felt a pressure—no, a presence, as if something was in your body with you. Then it spoke.

“Did you honestly think you could get rid of me that easily?”

~ ~ ~

You sat straight up, feeling nothing but cold terror.

You yanked your charger out of your back, not feeling like it helped at all, and swung your legs over the side of the bed. It’s very dark out, but you have no idea how long you’ve been asleep. You don’t want to try again.

Gingerly, so as not to stir Mettaton, you rise from your bed and creep out into the hall. From the window you can just make out the almost half moon; its glow illuminated the otherwise dark hall. But another glow was joining in, one not cast by the moon.

Each step was made with preciseness so you didn’t make a single noise as you stepped downstairs. Once you got to the landing you waited quietly, listening for the sounds of your mother sleeping. Some of her nights were restless and she didn’t catch a wink. Luckily, this was not one of them.

Your fears came to fruition once you had the front door open. The wooden mailbox that stood in front of the house was up in a fiery blaze, and surrounding it were four individuals, each with a weapon in hand. They’d been waiting and this was their bait.

Without hesitation, one broke from the group and want charging for you with an upraised plank of wood in their hands. You could barely make out the nails driven into it before you side-stepped his poorly executed attack and used his momentum to trip his feet. He fell to the ground with a groan and a painful thud. The other three were smarter and came at you all at once, shouting as they ran forward, each trying to get a swing at you with their makeshift weapons.

Fighting and violence weren’t things you favored, or even liked. The whole ordeal made you nervous and dredged up memories you’d like to forget. Still, you were very quick on your feet. You backed up so as not to be crowded or cornered in, and this worked to your advantage. They couldn’t back you up because you had control of the situation, but your first priority was to disarm them.

The first one to swing was the woman in the middle, aiming what looked to be a pipe at you as she hurled insults your way. You didn’t bother trying to dodge it; you simply caught it in your hand and easily pulled it from her grasp, throwing out of reach. You launched forward, hand open and place a strike to her chest to knock the wind out of her. The other two realized it would be nigh impossible to take you on one-on-one, so the two of them shared a glance before striking in unison. A metal bat and wooden one.

This time you were forced to duck out of the way, falling to a crouch—but this worked to your advantage. With a sweep, you stretched out your legs and knocked theirs from under them, sending them toppling to their backs like their previous friend.

The previous one…
“Look out!” “Behind you!”

You heard someone call out to you, not even realizing any of your friends made it outside, just as you felt something wooden and spiked crash over your head. It broke to pieces from impact.

“Eat knife, asshole!” The woman from before—she hadn’t waited for you to register the previous blow before she had a Swiss army knife out and made two slashing motions at your chest, ripping your shirt open. You heard several surprised cries, but whoever was watching you couldn’t have known you were perfectly fine, not even your attackers had registered that you weren’t injured or bleeding.

The woman before you, angered that you hadn’t fallen readied another stab, but you caught her hand mid-fall. It was almost mediocre, how easily you were able to throw her into her partner just behind you. They were both frozen in shock, obviously not expecting you to still be conscious, let alone able to throw them silly.

“Come on, let’s fucking go!” One of the men you’d felled earlier was stumbling to their feet, trying to make their way to their parked truck. “You’re going to burn in hell with your demons!” the woman called as she hopped onto the back of the truck, driving off.

You watched them leave, memorizing the license plate as they stumbled over. It would be so easy to stop them right now and make them pay for what they did—such bigots surely didn’t deserve to run away free, right? But you turned back to face the house. The commotion must have woken everyone up, because they were all standing on the front porch, looking at you with fear and horror—but most of all painstaking worry in their eyes. You had some lying to do.

You walked closer, feeling like you were moving through sand from how slow you went. Your mother was shaking, clutching her purse to her side. Poking just above the entrance, in her shaking hands, you could see the grip of a pistol.

Papyrus, tears somehow forming in his eye sockets, was the first to rush towards you. He raised his hands, and for a moment you were expecting him to grasp or hug you, but instead he looked you over, painfully worried. For once, he was quiet, and didn’t have anything to say as tears rolled down his cheek bones.

“No, Papyrus, I’m fine.” You held up your hands, trying to pacify him. “They only tore my shirt, see.” The fabric hung loose from your body, but you showed him that you were unharmed.

“B-But…” Alphys stepped closer to you, no less worried. “Your head.”

“You took a pretty hard hit back there punk.” Undyne stepped forward as well, reaching out. You stepped back reflexively.

“I already said I’m fine.” You snapped, just a bit more forcefully than you meant to. You looked between the three of them, to Mettaton who was privy to your secret, to your mother who wasn’t meeting your eyes, to Frisk, who was clutching Sans’ sleeve. You couldn’t read his expression, but he was looking at you oddly.

Alphys flinched, taken aback by your tone, but pressed anyway. “You… you might have a concussion and not even know it!” Alphys argued. “At least let us look at you, and get you to a hospital.” She took another step forward, and in time to her movement you took a step back. What worried you more was the reaction she’d have when she found no wound rather than something. You really messed up this time, didn’t you? Would they treat you any differently, knowing that you weren’t exactly ‘human’? You told yourself that they were nice people who’d like you regardless,
but the idea of getting them mixed up in your situation, which had threatened to turn deadly on multiple occasions, made you sick.

It’s so tempting to run away from your problems. To literally run away, right now, and not think about the mistakes until they sorted themselves out. It’s not like you haven’t taken such a cowardly action before. You wouldn’t get very far with your charge but…

As if reading your mind, your mother stepped forward, meeting your eyes. She looked to your friends in front of her and nodded her head. You let out a sigh.

“I can explain.”

Chapter End Notes

Quite a lengthy one, eh? And you jerk--you made Papyrus cry!
Chapter Summary

The cursing gets a little bit on the heavy side. Some people in this chapter are very insensitive and manipulative jerks.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

You figured, well, what your mother didn’t know couldn’t hurt her. She would only be gone for two, maybe three days tops. There were some times when she’d be gone for maybe for days, but never during school. On the occasional three day excursions you had to take the public bus to school, and even then she was very protective of that, but it wasn’t as if there were close friends or relatives who would be willing to take you. Luckily, your school system provided bus cards for students who lived out of the way, however… your mother didn’t know that. She’d been giving you bus fare and now you finally had enough saved up to order yourself a personal pizza.

Your fingers were shaking as you dialed the phone number, but you managed to tell the pizzeria your address. Now you were waiting to buzz them in.

The TV was turned down low, just in case you missed it; you’d never had visitors over to your apartment. It, uh, was actually one of your mother’s cardinal rules. But this wasn’t technically a visitor, just the pizza guy!

Finally you heard a chime and ran over to the speaker on the wall.

“Pizza delivery?”

“Y-Yeah, come on up!” You pressed and held the button and ran back to the door. Oh god this was too exciting.

Deciding you couldn’t wait, you stepped out into the hallway. You could hear the chatter of some residents down the hall talking, but you ignored it once you heard the elevator ding. The pizza guy stepped out and looked over in your direction, smiling once they saw how enthusiastic you were.

“You wouldn’t happen to have ordered a pizza, now, would you?” He asked sarcastically. You figured you looked old enough to feasibly order your own pizza, but maybe your excited nervousness gave it away. Hell, you were going to be in high school next school year, but acting like a kid every once in a while was fun indeed.

“You That’s me.” You had the money ready, but it was about ten one dollar bills and was a little awkward to hand over. Plus… you didn’t have a tip, but the man didn’t seem to give you any heat about it.

You waved to the pizza guy as he walked back to the elevator and awkwardly juggled the small box in your hand as you tried to reopen your door. You noticed your neighbor standing outside talking, and you wouldn’t have concerned yourself with it, if they weren’t pointing at you.

It was an old lady that you’d seen before a few times; it’s not like you talked with your neighbors,
but what bothered you was the person she was talking too. She was dressed too nicely to live in any of these apartments, with her pinstripe suit, neatly done hair and jewelry, and her air of authority. You shimmied the box under your arm and tried to get the door open, but you heard the tell-tale click of heels; the woman was walking over.

“Here, let me get that for you.” She grabbed the door and held it open. You slipped inside and set the box on a table near the door before rushing back and trying to close the door.

“Thanks, I just—”

“Wait, wait, wait.” She laughed and held the door. “I just wanted to ask you something, sweetheart. Is your mother home?”

“No.” You said.

“So… there’s no one inside your house with you right now?” She asked, expression immediately turning sour.

“W-Well, my mom’s at work, but she’ll be back soon.” You half-lied. What she technically did was indeed work, but you weren’t expecting to see her until tomorrow evening maybe.

“Really?” She asked, looking past you, inside the house. You tried to shift and block her view and she looked back to you, smiling. “Well, some of your neighbors have told me that you’ve been home alone sometimes. They said that your mother leaves you home for several days.”

“I’m old enough to take care of myself, and she doesn’t leave for more than a little while.” You argued, offended of what she was trying to imply.

“And I’m sure you are very mature for your age.” She said with a placating tone. “But does she leave you with enough food?” You looked towards the pizza box sitting on the table. “Do you ever have to buy your own food when she’s not around, because there’s nothing to eat inside?”

“What? No, it was just this one time.” Just this once because you were tired of eating leftovers and microwavable dinners.

“Okay,” The woman said, though you don’t think she believed you. “Well, when is your mother getting home from ‘work’?” She paused on the word work, obviously not buying that either. You didn’t want to lie, in case she threatened to wait, but you couldn’t tell her the truth either. When you didn’t say anything, you saw her shift and dig around in her purse. She pulled out two cards.

“Well, if your mother ever leaves you home again, and you feel like you need to call someone or you just don’t feel safe, just call my number or the number on this card.”

You reluctantly took the cards from her, anything to make her go away. One had the name “Gladys Flowers” and a social worker’s office, while the other said CPS. You had a feeling this wouldn’t be your last meeting with this woman.

~ ~ ~

This was a stressful situation.

Frisk didn’t like it when things weren’t predictable. However, on that same note, would things playing out the exact same way be a good thing? No, it wouldn’t. The sequence of events this time around weren’t happening as they usually should—if at all—and that was a bit unnerving, to say the least. But it meant progress, didn’t it?
Either way, things had to work out differently this time. Frisk was not giving up on you, no matter what.

Plus… it’s as the old saying goes, right? The third time’s the charm?

~ ~ ~

This was a stressful situation.

It’s late at night/early morning, whatever you want to classify it as; either way, no one is going to sleep at the moment. The tension in the air could be cut and served on a platter, and it was definitely weighing on your resolve. It was put up to debate whether or not the police should be called, about the mailbox if nothing else, but after you and your mother insisted that “Everything is fine, we’ll explain everything” nothing ended up happening. Marnie could wait, for now. Your mother sat next to you, expression calm, though her nervousness revealed itself through her incessant leg bouncing. She’d probably have a pot brewing right now, were it not for the current circumstances. Her hands were shaking, though, whether it was from the current situation or not, you could guess.

You went back to sitting forward with your elbows on your knees, focusing on your clasped hands in front of you. You didn’t have the nerve to look at anyone at the moment, but you didn’t want to not focus on something, if that made any sense. Yes there was the problem at hand, but something more pressing was the sound of what appeared to be static, light but insistent beneath that garbled, barely understandable speaking. If you didn’t concentrate hard enough on something—anything—you could hear that stranger’s voice. Whoever had been plaguing your sleep was now bent on bothering your waking hours—and this was something you had to take to your mother lest the problem got worse.

You were taken from your thoughts for a moment when you felt a hand on your shoulder—on your other side, you looked up to see Mettaton, smiling down at you with just a little bit of worry in his expression. You gave him a solemn nod before returning to your hands. If only he knew what was really plaguing you—not that this situation wasn’t stressful, because oh man it definitely is.

Clearing her throat, your mother begins to speak, and you have something else to focus on now.

“There is… no way to sugar-coat this or put it lightly, so I think I’m just going to say it. They… they’re…” You hear her tone change and know now that she’s probably looking at you. “An android. A few years ago, a very tragic accident occurred and their life was taken. I had the tools and the means to bring them back, so I did. From a technical standpoint, they’re indestructible, or at least, bats and even pocket knives won’t be able to hurt them. So that’s why, after what happened a few moments ago,” She cleared her throat. “Well, what’s done is done and nobody was hurt, that’s all that truly matters. However, I should let it be known that we had to keep this a secret due to some extenuating circumstances. Unfortunately, I can’t really address said circumstances at the moment.”

Just like her to be short, sweet, and to the point. You kind of felt a small “whoopsie” moment, because you spilled the entire bean can to Mettaton without hesitation. Your mother put more thought into these things, obviously. Nevertheless, she went on.

“We don’t want to drag anyone into our problems, so I urge you to go on as if nothing has happened. In fact, for your safety, you should probably just put it out of your mind altogether.” There was an edge of danger on her voice there, but it was probably for the best—and she wasn’t exaggerating, considering what the two of you were put through.

You are kind of relieved that she didn’t go into major detail, though. The less they knew the better. But now the room was silent, and at this point you’d spent enough time with your tail between your
legs. You had to face the music.

You weren’t scared, per se, just nervous, and, perhaps embarrassed. Though, what did you have to be embarrassed of? It’s not like you asked for this impromptu resurrection—or that you even blame your mother. And there’s no way that you’re scared they’ll judge you… will they? No! Of course not. But would they be mad for your lying, and for keeping a big secret like this? Okay, no, you were turning something that wasn’t quite a molehill into something that shouldn’t be a mountain.

Sitting up slowly, you look at your mother—she’s kind of mirroring what you were just doing; sitting up straight and staring at her folded hands like they were the most interesting things in the world.

You took a little cursory glance around the room. Of all the receptions you expecting, the last one was pity. Pity is sort of bittersweet. It’s what’s given when there’s nothing else to give—but it’s only ever given by people who care. But… you’ve seen enough of it in your mother that it churns your stomach a bit. You don’t really want to be pitied.

Like static, ringing in your ears; “They hate you.” But you push the voice back and focus yourself.

Undyne had an almost uncharacteristic frown on her face, but you were more surprised that she was the one avoiding your gaze! Alphys was fidgeting with her claws, and Papyrus looked like he was on the verge of tears, as if your mother had told a moving story instead of a short and sweet excuse. You couldn’t see Frisk’s face, for they were looking down, but if you were judging Sans’ face the same way you judged Papyrus’ (there is, unfortunately, no handbook for skeleton facial expressions), then he was definitely feeling sorry for you.

There was that knot of tension and nervousness building inside of you—it made you feel like jumping up and running away. Someone say something, the silence was unbearable and you might just break down from it.

You cast your eyes back down to the floor and tried to think of something to say, fruitless though it may be, to break the tension. Perhaps a joke? No, if Sans wasn’t making a joke, then you highly doubted now was a good time for that.

It would be appropriate to say something—anything—but you had a feeling it would just be a stammering mess. Your emotions were getting the best of you, and though you didn’t show any outward problems, you felt like a wreck on the inside.

…Or at least you thought you weren’t showing anything. You felt something wet on your hands and reached up, only to find that you were indeed crying! Ah stupid body, betraying your emotions like this. You tried to wipe them away with the back of your hand before anyone noticed, but you only succeeded in smearing the tears around as more gushed out. What better way to make a fool of yourself then to start crying in front of your friends?

You wanted to leave the room and save yourself some dignity, but before you could consider moving you felt a small pair of arms encircling you and saw that Frisk was hugging you in an attempt to comfort you.

“I-I…” Before you could let out another syllable, Undyne had decided to come over and wrap you up in a fierce hug as well.

“Come on, no waterworks.” You heard her chide you.

“That’s right, human!” Papyrus joined in on the hug. “No matter what, we’ll always be friends. So don’t cry.”
“Papyrus, I…” Even more tears started falling from your eyes, but with your arms pinned in this group hug, there wasn’t much to do about them.

“Uh, h-hey…” Alphys awkwardly approached you in the middle of the group hug. “I-I know this is probably, uh, for you—what I mean is, um, j-just don’t…” She paused, clearing her throat, and then looked back at you with a renewed vigor. “What I m-mean to say is, no-nobody’s perfect, so don’t beat yourself up too much, okay? A-And remember we’re here for you!”

She put her arm around Undyne and joined in on the hug.

“You.” You looked up to see Sans standing behind the couch. “Everyone kind of stole all the sappy things to say, but listen kid; don’t sweat the details. We’ve got your back. So don’t get your wires crossed.” He patted your head gently.

Everyone, yourself included, let out a small groan.

“Well, the moment is officially ruined.” Mettaton said, although just a moment ago he was dabbing at his face dramatically with a handkerchief. Where he got it from, you could only guess.

“But, considering the time.” Your mother stood up, peering over the dog pile to flash you a weary smile. “I think we should get some rest and get ready to leave first thing tomorrow morning. Or, rather, later on today.”

Eventually, everyone disentangles from around you, and you can finally move once again. Your mom moves over to stand next to Mettaton as everyone begins to leave the living room.

“You should get some rest too.” She said, looking down at you through tired eyes.

“Yes, after an ‘exciting’ night like this, I can’t imagine you’ll want to do anything but get some beauty sleep.” Mettaton piped in, only a tad bit sarcastic.

“Uh, actually,” You looked to your mother. “There’s something I need to talk to you about in private.”

You flashed a sheepish grin towards Mettaton and he raised his hands in defeat.

“Don’t worry, dollface, I can take a hint.” He says, waving casually as he strode towards the living room exit, though you could see he had on a worried expression.

You were still sitting down on the couch when your mother joined you a bit warily.

“What is it, sweetie?”

“Well… uh.” Just out with it. “I’ve been hearing a strange voice in my head. It started about a month ago, on the way back to California. When I woke up from a dream I shouldn’t have been having. It went away for a while—I thought for good—after you helped me with my dreams. But now the voice has come back stronger, and it’s staying even now.”

Your mother was surprised, but silent.

“I… I….” Her mouth opened and closed, like a fish out of water, because she didn’t know what to say. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, exhaling a bit shakily.

“I’m sure I know a way to handle this, but there’s nothing I can do until we get home.” She forced a smile and leaned forward, putting a hand on your shoulder. “I have to phone Marnie and tell her
about the mailbox. For now, why don’t you get some rest?”

“Rest? No, mom, I can’t.”

“She’s your mother?!” A crackle of static, louder than before blew your thoughts away. You pushed the static and the voice away. Now was not the time.

“That voice and the dreams come back—every time I sleep, it’s just another dream, and I can’t rest. They have to be responsible.”

“That’s not—that can’t be possible. It shouldn’t be possible.” She let out a forced laugh. “Are you sure you aren’t tuning into a stray radio signal or s-something? No, that shouldn’t be possible either.” She began mumbling, a bit frantically, to herself.

The voice had a few choice words to say to that, and that static returned even stronger now, despite your attempts to suppress.

“Oh this is r… rich. A…ly …zing. If I … you, I’d… that smug face.” The static was stronger now, but you were suppressing the voice, at least. Well, not their laughter. They were laughing very hysterically. Your mother was at your side, rubbing your back and trying to speak to you. Yes, she was rubbing your back, but everything she was saying was being tuned out (pun intended) by the almost blaringly loud static. Her hands left you for a moment, but you hardly noticed. You didn’t realize you were pressing your hands to your head until you felt a fabric covering them. You gasped as the static stopped and your head became amazingly clear.

“Look at me, can you hear me?” She held your face in her hands as she peered at you from beneath her jacket. When she placed it on your head, the static disappeared almost immediately.

“Yeah, I’m fine.” You insisted, and she let out a sigh of relief and pressed you against her in a hug.

“Signal jamming material—RF shielding, to be exact. I suppose my paranoia actually paid off.” She let out a wry laugh before releasing you, making sure the coat was secured around your head.

“Mom, do you know what’s going on?” You ask, pulling away slightly. She sighs, but nods her head.

“I didn’t think it would be a problem that would come back to bite me but… obviously I’m paying the price such a big oversight.” She mumbled to herself, rubbing her temples.

“What oversight?”

“First of all, I should have followed my gut and installed signal jamming devices. And, hm.” She paused and looked away. “Do you remember when I told you there were some features I couldn’t remove? Well, it’s true for the most part. But, within your mainframe—I-I decided some things could stay temporarily because I was working with limited time. There’s a remote communication device installed deep within your frame—it is removable, but I would’ve had to perform the robotic equivalent of brain surgery. I was already on the move with my colleague, I you know what I said fuck it, and now I kind of forgot about it. And regret it.”

She shook her head, berating herself softly.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have… I… The absolute second we get home I’ll fix this, I promise.” She assured you, looking you straight in the eye. You nodded your head but didn’t say anything else—you weren’t angry with her, never, you were just so tired. And no, not mentally tired this time. Your battery was complaining and you could feel it.
“For now, hon, why don’t you get some rest? Maybe you’ll be able to get a full charge, without any interference.” She said, smiling weakly. “At least until I’m able to fix this mistake. It’s a comfy jacket, but you can’t wear it on your head forever.”

“Yeah…” You agreed. Your mother gave you one final hug before standing up. She sent one final glance back your way before leaving the living room to gather her sleeping things, and you watched her go.

While this wasn’t the worst vacation you’ve ever had, it was definitely a close second.

You stand up finally and head out of the living room. As you walk, you stop in front of the stairway and consider heading up, but you stop yourself.

…Curiosity killed the cat.

You kept on walking and faced the back porch door, carefully opening it so as not to make any noise and stepped outside. What you were doing was probably very, very, very stupid, but you had questions, and this was probably the only time you’d be able to get these answers. You slid your mother’s jacket from your head, down to your shoulders—so it would be easier to pull up if the static became too much. To your surprise, there was very little—probably because the reception was better outside. Probably.

“Oh? And to what do I owe the pleasure?” This person was sardonic and mocking, but you weren’t going to feed it.

“Who are you? Why are you doing this?” You asked, though it felt like you’d asked these questions before.

“No hello? How do you do? That woman you call mother has taught you no manners, I see. Figures.”

“How do you know my mother?”

“I never claimed to know that woman.” It was a dodgy, unforthcoming answer, but it was something.

“Wait, can you see the things I can see?”

“Well of course not, Sherlock. You’re the child of a scientist, yet you had to ask that bright question. You are like a little satellite to me. That’s how I was able to find out every single little thing about you.” You heard a slightly staticy laugh. “See, that’s the thing; I know everything about you, yet you know nothing of me. And frankly, I’d like to keep it that way.”

You were getting frustrated now with the condescending, provocative way they were talking to you.

“Alright fine! I don’t need to know anything about you—I don’t want to. I don’t care who you are anymore—for all I know you could be some kid who thinks this is a well-executed prank. And frankly, I’d like for you to leave me alone. You’ve got no business hacking into me—or whatever it is you’re doing—so could you just please stop?”

“Hm, such genuine anger. I actually kind of pity you now, albeit you were a pitiful person to begin with. Alright, I’ll tell you a little something,”

You clenched your fist but waited for them to speak.
“You can get your mommy to fix you up, but believe it or not, you’ll never truly be rid of me. I’m closer than you think. In fact, we might be meeting soon.”

“What?”

“Yes! In fact, I long for the moment where we can finally talk face to face. You and I are two of a kind.”

“Two… two of a kind?” The question left your lips, yes, but you already understood what they were implying.

“I know it might be a little hard to wrap your sparing intellect around this one. Think about it. Even that, ugh, annoying showbiz robot you call a friend can’t come close to the ingenuity that we encompass. He might just be dumber than you. Whether we encompass this power willingly or not, well, let’s not iron out the details.”

“Just what do you mean by that?” You asked.

“Oh, you’re kidding me. Did you ask to be brought back like this? Hm, tell me this: Back when you were running for your life with your mother, you didn’t once wish that you were still dead? At least that way, all your problems are remedied neatly, don’t you think?”

“What the hell is wrong you?” You want to sound menacing, but it just comes out as a choked sob.

“Sure, I mean, all your friends now seem like swell people, but it’s only a matter of time before they betray you. Like Valerie, hm? It happens to the best of us, so do yourself a big favor and for god’s sake stop wearing your damn heart on your sleeve.”

“Shut up! My friends are kind, loyal, caring people. Before meeting them, I don’t think I could have ever opened up to anyone. I’m not the one who’s pitiable here—it’s you, for having such a sheltered mindset of the world.”

“Sheltered?” There was that mocking laugh again. “Oh you have no idea. What I say is nothing if not the pure truth. Whether it is humans or monsters, all are willing to betray and stomp on anyone if it means saving their skins. Most of the time it’s nothing personal, but how many people do you think ratted you out and turned up your nose the night you were murdered?”

“Know what?” Like an attack, her words stabbed you like a knife. “You can go fuck yourself.” You held your mother’s coat, about to pull it over your head when they say something that stops you.

“You’re only getting so angry because what I’m saying is true. You and I have both faced enough cruelties in this world to know it is so.”

That smug, deliberate annoyance is what set you off. Part of you knew you shouldn’t be feeding in—they were spouting nothing but lies and words meant to push you, and yet…

“You don’t know anything.” You walked to the edge of the porch and gripped the wooden railing. “My friends are all nice people—better than I could ever ask for. You’re just some asshole trying to get rise out of me. I don’t care if we’re the same, you’re sick and twisted, and you’ve got some serious problems. I want nothing to do with you.” You weren’t quite yelling, but oh boy, you were getting there. “The experience isn’t what makes a person, it’s how they react to it. Just because you chose to become someone bitter and mean doesn’t mean that I have to.”
“Ha! But you and I are already involved, too late there. I don’t mean to burst your bubble, but I know one day you’ll come crawling to me for answers, like you did just now. You’re right, the experience does make a person. You chose to become weak and let the past tear you down, I chose to use it as a stepping stone for greater things to come. Humans or monsters—socially, they’re all the same. They lie and cheat and steal. They kill. What makes you think you’ve found anyone better than that? Honestly, the only person you should be trusting is me. I know your experiences better than anyone else. I’ve had a front row seat.”

“You don’t know jack shit.” But they did, and that’s what pissed you off so badly. You were pretty sure your fingers were chipping through the wood now.

“Oh, but I bet mommy-dearest does, hm? Here’s the best thing about mothers: they lie.”

You finally pulled the coat back over your head, silencing the voice for good.

Curiosity killed the cat, but finding out brought it back.

You jumped and turned around once you heard the sliding door open.

“There you are! I can’t believe you’re still out here.” Mettaton said as he strolled out. “What’s wrong?” He looked from your mother’s lab coat back to you.

You closed your eyes and sighed. Now there was the mental exhaustion alongside the physical one. You really didn’t have the energy to make up a lie right now.

“Long story short, I have to keep this on my head in order to keep a strange hacker from messing with my head.” You said, sighing.

“Oh. Well, okay then.” He said, with a ‘not going to question it’ expression. You would’ve laughed at it, if you weren’t pissed off.

“Look, I know today has been a stressful day for all of us—you especially. But that’s why you should get some kind of rest. Stress causes wrinkles!”

You rolled your eyes because he knew damn well neither one of you had to worry about wrinkles, but you obliged.

“Yeah,” You looked back to the sky, obscured partially by a few clouds, “There’s nothing really left for me to do but sleep.” You would be okay, it’s as your mother said. Still, you couldn’t help but worry.

Mettaton had you in tow with his arm around your shoulders. You couldn’t help but peek into the living room on your way to the stairs; your mother was there, sleeping. If she was getting some rest, the very least you could do was follow suit.

~ ~ ~

So you slept.

You opened your eyes feeling way more energized. Your mother’s lab coat was still firmly on your head. Throughout the night, you hadn’t a single dream.

It is fairly early when you wake up. Of course the sky is still dark, and of course you feel, for lack of a more appropriate word, pretty shitty. Granted you actually felt charged, yesterday wasn’t exactly
the best of days.

You sat up, glancing down at a still resting Mettaton. Sighing, you swung your legs over the bed and walked over to a pair of shirt and pants you had slung over your bag. It still smelled clean enough, not that you worried about body odor. Clothes in hand you walked over to the bathroom to get dressed. The sooner you could get home, the better.

As you dug through your clothes your hand caught on something. It was a box of candied hearts. You couldn’t help the smile that formed on your face when you remembered that you’d planned on giving them out today. Opening the package and looking down at Mettaton, you placed a small container next to his head, so he’d see it when he woke up. You supposed you could give the rest away when everyone else woke up.

It must have been earlier than you suspected, because no one else seemed to be awake when you stepped out into the hallway. Or so you thought. There was a light leading from the stairwell; someone was downstairs. Suspecting who it was already, you headed down and made a beeline for the kitchen. Unsurprisingly, your mother sat at the kitchen counter with a mug in her hand. She was looking down into the mug and hadn’t even bothered to glance up when she greeted you.

“It’s hot chocolate.” She said, gesturing for you to come over. “I couldn’t find any coffee.”

You grunted a response and joined her. The stove clock read 5:41, making you cringe because you knew everyone was up early last night. Still, no one would probably wake until six.

“How do you feel?” She asked after taking a sip. “Want a cup?”

“Better,” You responded. “And I’m good, thanks.”

A few minutes passed in silence—there were unasked questions in the air, but this was neither the place nor the time to voice them, and you both knew it.

In those few minutes, you began to hear footsteps above. Someone was waking up. You immediately tensed up, still embarrassed about how they’d treat you.

'Sure, I mean, all your friends now seem like swell people, but it's only a matter of time before they betray you. It happens to the best of us, so do yourself a big favor and for god's sake stop wearing your damn heart on your sleeve.'

The unwelcome words came to you, haunting you like a ghost, but you forced them back away. You weren’t going to let someone you didn’t even know stain your conscience.

~ ~ ~

Eventually, everyone came streaming in in yawning masses.

“Morning!” Undyne put you into a headlock and was about to noogie you until she realized there was a jacket on your head.

“What’s this thing? A night scarf?”

“…Sure. It’s a night scarf.” You agreed.

“Alrighty then. What’s for breakfast?” She asked after releasing you. You nudged your mother, who’d been falling asleep into her mug.
“Huh—what—pancakes?”

Undyne pumped the air with her fists and cheered. “Woot!”

You didn’t miss your mother’s flinching, but she smiled anyway. There was a saying your mother had whenever she had to go on early morning trips when you were younger ‘Whoever can be energetic in the early hours of the morning has no damn soul’. Of course she usually said this with bags beneath her eyes and a giant travel cup of coffee, and when she herself wasn’t up in spirits.

“I actually have something for you.” You said, reaching over and taking out a small container of candied hearts.

“Ooh, teeth rotting sweets?” She asked and held them up. “Oh right, today’s a holiday.”

“Valentine’s Day.” You confirmed.

“I know what Valentine’s Day is!” Undyne said defensively. “You basically shower friends, family—but most importantly significant others in candy and gifts. The best part’s the chocolate, but I can settle for these sugar-soul things.”

“Candy?” You heard a small voice call from the kitchen doorway and turned to see Frisk rubbing their eyes and walking over.

“Sweethearts.” You said, handing them a package. “Happy Valentine’s Day.”

Their face lit up like a light bulb as they struggled with the container.

“Have you no shame?” Your mother asked between a yawn. “You should never give a child candy this early in the morning.”

“Wha?” Frisk looked back over to your mom, pouting and sending serious puppy dog eyes.

“Oh, whatever. I’m not your mother—but don’t tell Toriel I gave you any candy.” Your mother broke like glass.

“Candy?” Mirroring Frisk, Sans walked in looking equally tired. “Who’s got the goods?”

“Sans! Don’t be rude, you are supposed to say good morning when you wake up.” You heard Papyrus call from the stairs.

“Yeah, you’re right. Sorry, I’m not really a morning person. Or an afternoon person, for that matter. And if we’re being honest, night is also an iffy matter.”

“Sans!” It was like a slapstick comedy with these two.

“What, I’m being serious.”

Papyrus eventually made his way into the crowded kitchen, if only to reprimand Sans, but you made sure he got his candied hearts too.

“For me?” He asked, pressing a hand to his chest. “You’re too kind, human!”

“It’s no problem.” You assure him.

And finally, the last to trickle down is Alphys. She has on a Sailor Moon t-shirt, but despite her sleepiness, she greets everyone with a chipper demeanor.
"Happy Valentine’s Day." You tell her, handing over the candy.

“Good morning! And Happy V-Valentine’s Day to you too.” She graciously took the candy and began inspecting them.

“Hey, hey! Look at this one.” Undyne held out a heart to Alphys.

“‘Kiss me…’ Wh-What! Not down here!” Alphys shouted, breaking out into hysterics as Undyne howled with laughter.

“‘Too Cool’! This candy knows me so well.” Papyrus said graciously. Everyone was so happy, but you couldn’t help but to feel like something—or someone—was missing.

“I’ll be right back.” You mutter as you step out of the kitchen and into the hallway. You can’t help but to take one last look at the group of nerds, gushing over candy and eating it happily. These were definitely not people who’d be betraying you or backstabbing you anytime soon, you believed this with all your heart. Today was going to be a better day, you knew it, and you’d make sure of it. Bounding softly up the stairs with a bit more pep in your step, you stop at the landing and walk over to your shared room. Still laying the bed was Mettaton of all people.

“Wake up.” You walked over and began trying to nudge his shoulder. You didn’t know if he was like you in the sense that ripping out his charger chord all willy-nilly was safe. You were about to do it anyway, but then you saw him move. Without opening his eyes he reached for a pillow and-

“Hey!” You held the offending object that smacked you in the face and glared down.

“Ugh, I’m not asleep.” He groaned as he rolled over.

“Then get up. We’re leaving as soon as Toriel gets here.”

Mettaton lifted his from his pillow.

“Is she here?”

“…No…”

“Five more minutes.”

“Oh come on! Any other day and you’re the one waking me up. Who are you, and what have you done with the Mettaton that woke up bright and early back in Britain.”

“You can’t expect me to run through the day at my fullest on three measly hours of charging.” He argued. “And I had good impressions to make. Now that we’re solid besties I can bond by showing you all of my bad sides.”

He snuggled back into the bedsheets and sighed.

“Don’t you have to put on your makeup before we leave?”

You received a groan in response.

“Everyone’s downstairs eating candy.” You tried again. Another groan.

“I’ll… I’ll pour all of your makeup down the sink.” One final plea.
“I have more.”

“Okay. Fine,” You pinched the bridge of your nose and sighed, more for effect than anything else. “But you asked to do this the hard way.” Reaching up, you made sure your mother’s jacket was tied and secure around your head before executing the plan. You walked to the end of the bed and grasped the covers, flinging them away.

“Hey!” That got his attention, but you weren’t finished. You reached over and wrapped your arms around his waist, then proceeded to throw him over your shoulder.

“Just what in heaven’s name do you think you’re doing?! Put me down this instant!”

“Stop—wiggling—or you’ll—” You weren’t even able to get two steps before you went tumbling face-forwards onto the mattress. You end up smacking your head directly on his chest, and although he’s fine, you still have to ask:

“Are you okay?” “Are you alright, darling?” The two of you ask in unison. You smile and push yourself up, supporting your arms on either side of Mettaton.

“I told you that you’d fall.”

“And I wonder why.” He responded sarcastically with an unamused pout.

“Perhaps you were a bit too heavy.” You joked. “I’m but a poor, weak human.”

“Ha! The day you become weak is the day I stop being so devilishly beautiful.” He smirked, as if daring you to argue otherwise. “Oh, I know! My charming good looks swept you off your feet?”

You were about to form a comeback when you realized you were crushing something with your hand. Grasping it and holding it up you realized it was your candied hearts.

“Ooh, what are those?” Mettaton asked. You rolled over to unpin him and handed it over.

“Happy Valentine’s Day.” You said.

“Aw, how sweet of you.” He cooed, sitting up and wrapping his arms around you.

“Now come on, everyone’s waiting downstairs.” You said, unwrapping him and standing up.

“Alright, give me one second to go put my face on; I won’t be long.”

Trustingly that he wouldn’t get back in bed, you headed downstairs and left him to his own devices.

“There you are!” Undyne playfully punched your shoulder. “And what were you two doing up there?” She asked, waggling her eyebrows.

“Yeah,” Frisk, oblivious to what Undyne was implying, piped in. “You guys were loud. Did you fall down?”

“Yes.” You said, nodding. Undyne slapped her knee with Alphys giggling at her side. You were about to join everyone at the table when you realized…

“Mom.” You walked into the kitchen called your mother, who you thought had begun cooking the last of the food. She’d fallen asleep leaning against the kitchen wall, and the pancakes she’d been working on had begun to burn.
“Mom!”

She jumped awake, and just as soon as her eyes were open, she was moving the pan off the heat.

“I only blinked, I swear.” She tried to defend herself. She was obviously wide awake now, but you didn’t trust that at all.

“Give it to me, I’ve got it.” You said with a sigh as you took the spatula from your mother. She made an abashed face but complied.

~ ~ ~

Everything was ready by the time Toriel pulled up in the driveway. Bags were packed and sitting by the door and everyone was up. Surprisingly, most everyone seemed to be alright with the early morning hours, save for Sans and Frisk, though you figured Sans’ default setting was tired. Even after breakfast the duo were still yawning. Undyne and Papyrus were especially energized, more so than you could’ve fathomed for any ungodly hour and Mettaton was facilitating their vigor. Alphys was her normal level of nervousness and seemed to be trying to pacify the Undyne section of the Papyrus-Undyne train wreck.

You stepped outside after everyone else, trailing behind your mother, and saw that Toriel had gotten out of her car. She greeted everyone with a warm smile, but when she saw you her facial expression changed completely and she rushed over.

“My child!” You felt yourself lifted off the ground and wrapped in a big warm hug. Awkwardly, you reached around and pat her back before she set you back down.

“Hi Toriel.” You greeted her, brushing away some stray fur that got on your clothing. “Mom, did you…”

“Yes, I told her what happened.” She said, smiling. “That we ran into trouble with a group of vandals, and you were caught in the middle of it.”

You nodded your head understandingly and turned back to Toriel.

“I’m sorry for making you worry.” You said apologetically.

“Nonsense, you’ve done nothing to apologize for.” She said, waving it off. She reached up to pat your head, but paused when she realized you had something wrapped around it. You were so ready to prepare a lie that the rush of relief that hit you when she said nothing was astounding.

Exchanges of goodbyes are made, and after an eventful weekend you can’t say you’re sad to get some alone time. But of all the people who must be happy to see you leave, it’s likely Marnie, due to all the indirect damage you’ve cost her vacation home. It’s a relief no one was hurt, and that you and your group aren’t held accountable for the damage, but insurance would probably be a doozy for poor Marnie.

You did care and feel guilty about this all, but in all honesty, you just wanted to go home and not care and feel guilty. That’s be nice.

~ ~ ~

You were finally home.

You sat down on the table in your mother’s lab, swinging your legs back and forth while she
prepared whatever it was she was doing. Most of her tools looked like torture instruments to the untrained eye, and even you had to admit they were unnerving, so you didn’t make a habit of peeking over her shoulder. It’s for the best. This wasn’t the first time you sat on this operating table-like surface and you doubted it would be the last.

“Alright hon,” Your mother turned around, a small remote in her hand. “You can lie down now.”

You did as instructed, hands resting over your stomach as you waited for the darkness to consume you.

~ ~ ~

And just like that, you wake up. You feel fine and about as close to normal as you can come. Your mother is standing back near the edge of the table, smiling and wearing her lab coat as you sit up.

“How do you feel?” She asks.

“Never better.” You say, touching your bare feet to the cool floor. You were wearing something similar to a hospital gown; you’d changed into it earlier.

“Nothing… strange going on up there?” She gestured to her head area. You chuckle and shake your head.

“That’s not the best way to phrase that question, but no. Actually,” You glance at devices and pieces of metal that weren’t on her workbench when you went to sleep. “I have a few questions.”

“Ask away.”

“What exactly was all this?” You asked broadly, hoping she understood. You heard her sigh and look over to see her wringing her hands together.

“When we—Chris and I—were working on… you know… we needed a way to communicate. We decided it didn’t need to be anything fancy, just a device similar to how a ham radio works, but with a private channel, a one-way channel. It was set up so… there shouldn’t have been…” She paused to gather her words. “Theoretically, no one should have been able to access it.”

“No one?” You asked.

“Theoretically, yes.”

Before you were able to question her, a loud ringing noise reverberated through the house.

“Who could it be at this hour?” Your mother asked, more so to herself, as she travelled up the stairs. You took one last glance at the lab before stepping into your clothes and going upstairs after her.

“Come in, come in! Have a seat.” Your mother’s voice was far more exuberant than it should’ve been, and that made you nervous as you walked through the kitchen. Stepping into the living room, you saw her sitting across from a man in a suit and tie. He was all smiles as soon as you stepped in, so much that it looked like it was crafted onto his face.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you.” He said, extending his hand to your mother once you sat down. “My name is Mr. Brinson; you can think of me as… a conduit for the FBI and CIA. Because your family is of great interest to both agencies, I’ve been sent to ask you a few questions about recent events.”

You felt like each one of your limbs weighed a ton as this man—Mr. Brinson—spoke. Your mother
swallowed and then looked to you.

“Sweetheart, why don’t you go upstairs for a moment while Mr. Brinson and I chat?”

“Actually,” The man cut her off. “I was hoping to speak with your child for a moment. I won’t take more than a few moments.” He said.

Your mother smiled, but to you it seemed as if she were about to keel over. You shared her sentiments.

Your mother had stepped out and you were left alone with this creepy, smiling man. You never really trusted or liked people in suits, and you sure as hell had your reasons.

But nevertheless you’re relieved this man doesn’t know about last night. A police report hadn’t been filed for the mailbox; it’d just been added on to Marnie’s claim. He’d asked who struck first and you were sure to remind him who was vandalizing whom. After that he backtracked and asked you what happened after you stepped outside. You told him that you’d been struck with a rock and one of your friends moved to your defense. Afterwards someone came forward with a weapon and you disarmed them. End of story.

Mr. Brinson seemed reluctantly satisfied with your answer—at the very least, his smile wasn’t as bright, and he called for your mother to step back in.

Now it was your turn to make ghost. A quick glance towards the window told you that it was getting late, but not so dark that you couldn’t step outside.

The koi pond was calling you. It was dark out, but you’d have no problem navigating the backyard and making your way towards the artificial pond.

Plenty of the fish were moving around; those near the surface startled a bit as you came forward before returning to normal.

You knelt down and reached towards the water. A few were swimming close enough, that if you reached out you could stroke their backs; so you did. They seemed to like that.

You stayed liked this for a while, until it was finally apparent that night was setting in. The mid-February nighttime air was chilly, but you were of course unbothered by it. It’d be nice to get the shivers and enjoy the warm bundling of a jacket again. When you were a kid, you’d hoped to see fireflies and snow one day, but those things are a far off dream now. None of them really matter anymore.

…Or at least, they shouldn’t. Seeing new sights might feel like an empty experience alone, but with friends… you think it might be bearable. You wonder quietly with the koi if any of your monster friends have seen snow, but then remind yourself that they come from the underground. There would be nothing like snow down there, of course.

You’d already been to the beach; surely there would be more fun places to show them. You had to make up for that disastrous experience. Fondly, you wonder if Undyne would get a kick out of going to an Aquarium. Probably.

After a little while you stand up. They should be done talking, you hope.

Stepping inside, you saw that they were finishing up. Your mother was walking the agent to the door, both of them smiling like it was a contest. They were shaking hands now.
It seemed like she couldn’t get the door closed fast enough. As soon as she heard the car engine start she sighed and walked over to the living room, pacing back and forth in front of the entrance.

“I swear, their sole purpose is to give me heart attacks in life. Perhaps that’s how they plan to do me: death by surprise…”

You could tell your mother was in one of her moods and about to monologue again. Bothering her now, while she was stressed and in one of her moods, would get you nowhere. You settled for walking past her, towards the kitchen.

“Do you want a cup of coffee?” You asked.

“Yes, that’s nice.” She answered, only half-listening.

Everything was sort of back to normal.

Chapter End Notes

School is starting back up, giving me more of an opportunity to write. Yay. Here it is! With this chapter I'll finally break 100,000 words. Christ, that's unbelievable-- at least for me it is! I still can't believe over 10,000 people have come this far, jeez guys. On a different note, would anyone be interested in me making a tumblr for this fanfic? I've toyed with the idea, but I figured it would give me better communication with you all, and well, I want to be self-indulgent hehe.

Anyway, though you've probably heard this a million times from me, the next chapter should be coming waaaaayyy sooner. I want to get it posted by my birthday, but we'll see.
February was turning into March. The temperature, unusual as it already was, was threatening to become even warmer.

“Leap year…” You mutter as you roll over and unplug yourself. The sun is just barely peeking in through your window. It was far too early to consider getting your day started, considering there was nothing to start. It was going to be an eventless day, which were becoming rarer and fewer between. Not that you found yourself complaining much, but still. At the end of the day it was mentally exhausting to do anything more than lie around. You rolled onto your back and stared up at the ceiling.

Admittedly, you had been a bit hesitant to bring the idea up with Mettaton, considering recent events, but he was ecstatic about it. In about a week, you’d be revisiting the aquarium for the first time in who knows how long. Perhaps the last was at a school field trip? So, what, more than a decade ago?

The only downside to this trip was that, yet again, you had to wait for the slow passage of time.

~ ~ ~

Later on you decided to stuff food into your face, just to pass time if nothing else, and then waste even more time in front of the television. A bit of channel flipping showed that there was nothing interesting playing, so you settled for a few episodes of a cute kid’s episode and an hour-long episode of Mettaton’s talk show. Your mother did come in and out of the living room a few times to check on you, but you had a feeling her mind was preoccupied with other things.

Finally the day was coming to an end—and it couldn’t have ended sooner. You went to bed with barely a strain to your battery, and you weren’t sure how to feel about that.

~ ~ ~

The next day was threatening to be painfully similar, but fate planned otherwise. Your mother had nearly knocked down your door with a renewed vigor and excitement.

“You won’t believe what I found under the back porch. Go on, guess!” She said proudly, hands on her hips and smiling brightly behind dull eyes.

“Why were you under the porch?” You asked, barely glancing up from your phone.

“That’s right, it was a bike!” She continued. “Now, I’m sitting here wondering why in heaven’s name we have a bike, but now I realize where it came from. Our gardener brought it over, offering to give it us but remember! You said you didn’t want a bike, so I put it in the backyard, and guess it just sort… migrated under the porch. Whatever, the fact is that we have a bike and I don’t know what to do with it. I thought about selling it, but then I got a better idea.”
“This is kind of random, mom.” You pointed out.

“So that’s when I had this idea! Anyway, well, once I got to really looking at it, I figured I definitely couldn’t use it for scraps but it’s not so old that I should just trash it. I mean, selling it would be useless now of course; we don’t need the money. Actually, it is in surprisingly good shape—I think it just needs air in the tires and it should ride. But wait, do gas stations charge for air? I forgot; I haven’t done that in so long—but I’m sure it’s no more than maybe a dollar or two. I think I have some quarters in my purse now that I think about it—and oh! You should come see the bike. It’s bright blue and I figure, if we wash it, it’ll shine just like new!”

“Mom. Your idea?” You her cut off, reminding her of why she was here in the first place.

“Right, right. You should give it to someone; like Frisk! Come down, I’ll show you the bike.” She motioned for you to get up and follow her, and you did, all the way downstairs.

“Well, what do you think?” She asked, gesturing out to the bike. It was a bit rusted—especially on the wheel spokes—but your mother was right in one thing, that it was rideable. The brakes were looking the worse for wear but they looked functional. There was one minor problem, however.

“This bike is way too big for someone like Frisk.” You pointed out. “They’d never be able to climb onto it.”

“You think so?” Your mother asked dejectedly. “I’m sure they’d be able to grow into it or something, like a pair of jeans.”

You chuckled and shook your head. “I’ve got a better idea. Do you remember Papyrus?”

Your mother cocked her head to the side. “Ah, yes! He’s the tall eccentric one!”

“This bike’s more his size.” You pointed out.

“Then there’s basically no change in plans! We can give the bike to Papyrus, I’m sure he’ll love it.” Your mother declared enthusiastically.

“So why don’t you wash it off and walk it down to the gas station, hm?”

“Why do I have to do it?” You asked.

Your mother scoffed and made various offended noises. “You can’t expect your dear, frail, busy mother to do this, can you? You’re so young, and full of energy.”

“And, like, I don’t have a limit to my stamina?” You added.

“Precisely!” She said, nodding her head and patting your shoulder. “Why don’t you call him or text him and tell him you’re coming over with a gift tomorrow.”

“Okay.” One thing you absolutely hated was talking to people over the phone, even if you absolutely had to. It made you so nervous, so you’d probably opt for texting him.

…That is, if you had his phone number. Hell, you don’t even know if he had one—though he must’ve owned one, or else how could Mettaton coordinate everything?

As your mother went back inside you sent Mettaton a quick text before turning your attention back to the bike. It was dirty, but it was nothing a wash couldn’t fix, and it wasn’t overtly rusty. But… you’d been feeling so lazy. Another peacefully dreary day of lying around was down the drain, you
decided, as you went for the garden hose. Thinking twice you set your phone down on the porch steps before continuing, and in the end you decided the clothes you slept in were fine enough to get partially wet.

You didn’t do much, just ran the hose over the bike until the dirt washed away, and it did so fairly easy. Inspecting it closer and without as much dirt, it was definitely an average bike, not quite professional road level but definitely too big for a child Frisk’s age. That was one thing done, but you certainly couldn’t walk a mile to the gas station in your damn night clothes.

When you stepped inside, your mother was on the phone, so you decided to leave her be and go upstairs and change. You’d glanced at your phone as you were moving, noting that Mettaton hadn’t instantaneously replied like you had been anticipating. He was probably busy, you figured.

“Wait,” You scoffed and grabbed your keys just as you were about to go downstairs. You were letting your mother’s own airheaded-ness get to you.

~ ~ ~

It was a tight fit, but with the backseats folded down you managed to stuff the bike inside with a bit of maneuvering. Walking down to the gas station was probably the dumbest idea, but you wouldn’t tell your mother that. She’s just… tired.

On the bright side, the air pump was free, albeit you’d been intending to fill the car with gas anyway. On the downside, you saw a help-wanted sign with a pretty illegal note pasted underneath saying “Monsters Need Not Apply”. You weren’t confrontational in the least, so you didn’t consider going to the manager, or even to the clerk to tell them that they couldn’t hang things like that up.

You opted instead for ripping both the signs off the door on your way out.

You filled up the front and back tires without a problem, releasing some air occasionally because you felt they were too stiff. Once they were set you unhooked the nozzle and put the caps back on so as not to let out any air.

Carefully, you shoved it back into the trunk/backseat of your car and went over to begin filling the car up. Gas had been fairly cheap recently, you noted absently as you watched the numbers rise. As you were finishing up, about to sit down in the driver’s, you glanced over the top of the car, fully intending to get back in and drive off, when you stopped upon seeing two kids standing at the pump.

You could tell immediately that they were monster kids. You assumed they were related, as they both shared the same distinguishing features: a bull’s head and mainly humanoid limbs (two arms, two legs) aside from the hooved feet. One child was holding to a skateboard while the other attempted to fill her bike with air, only she didn’t seem to know that she needed to undo the valve. At that rate, she was likely to end up puncturing the tire.

You closed the driver’s door and walked around slowly before calling out. The children perked up, immediately going into a defensive mode. Although you liked to pretend you’re your neighborhood was safe and filled with friendly people, you knew that probably wasn’t the case, and that looks can be deceiving.

Not wanting to come off as strange or intimidating, you offered an innocuous smile and waved slightly. That seemed to help a bit.

“Here, do you need help filling up your bike?” You asked, crouching down in front of the aforementioned object, both to get at eye-level and to get a better look at it.
“Y-Yes please.” She stammered, handing the air nozzle over to you. The older one, who you could only assume was her brother, was glowering at you with suspicion in his eyes—suspicion laced with fear. You smiled warmly once again before pointing to the bike valve.

“Here, we have to unscrew this first.” You said, undoing it and attaching the nozzle. It only took a few seconds to fill before you let the nozzle off with a hiss and moved to the back tire.

“I can do it!” She exclaimed before crouching down next to you and hastily trying to unscrew the valve. It wasn’t possessiveness or fear, you deduced, but rather that overwhelming excitement to prove how independent they are that most children carried about them. She eventually got it off and you handed over the nozzle.

“Check the pressure now and again—make sure it doesn’t get too tight or it might explode.”

“Explode?” Her brother perked up, having become interested.

“Yup. The inner tube might pop out place and your tire’s good as done. It’s not as climatic as it sounds.” You explain. An especially bored romp on the internet led you to look up exploding tires, and you had been mildly disappointed.

You had the little girl unhook the nozzle and screw the cap back on herself.

“There; good as new.” You announced, standing up and clapping dust off your hands.

“Yup!” She stood and mimicked your actions, smiling up at you brightly, hands on her hips.

“Thanks so much.”

“Hey, it’s no problem.” You answered a tad bashful. “You two can thank me by riding home safely, okay?” You said, turning and offering one final wave to the happy pair before walking once again to your car.

Mood a bit elevated, you find yourself actually tuning into the radio for some decent music. Your morning didn’t go as anticipated, but it turned out fine in the end.

~ ~ ~

You get home and almost immediately jump onto your bed. The morning might’ve turned out fine, but an afternoon on your bed or in front of the TV was all that awaited you. Thankfully you had enough sense to grab your phone before plopping down and losing the motivation. Mettaton had texted you back with Papyrus’ number. Now all you had to do was call him.

As in put the phone to your ear and talk? Psht, you could do that later, surely there was something else you could be doing.

“Stop procrastinating.” You told yourself, practically having to force yourself to dial the numbers and hit the call button. It rang… and rang… and rang itself out.

“You have reached the voice mail box of…” On one hand you were relieved it went to voicemail, on the other you were slightly disappointed that Papyrus hadn’t made a grandiose message. Something like “the Great Papyrus is busy at the moment!” Oh wait the beep happened-

Trying to sound as chill as possible, you leave a voicemail telling Papyrus that you have a bike you think he’d like, and that you want to give to him tomorrow, or the day after if that’s fine. You go over the message, making sure you said who you were before sending it. Lying back against your bed, you now had time to do an activity for the rest of the day: nothing.
And so went another day.

~ ~ ~

Yesterday afternoon, Papyrus called you back in jubilation, saying that he would love to receive any gift from you, and that you should come over as soon as possible.

“There is, however, the teensiest of problems!” Papyrus had said. “I have no idea how to ride a bike.”

You had been surprised at this, but responded positively anyway. “Really? But don’t you drive a bright red car?”

“Yes!”

“But you never learned how to ride a bike?”

“No! There was, unfortunately, no bikers ed. Really inconvenient when you think about it.”

“Well that’s no problem. I’m sure I can teach you in no time.”

“Really?!” You could practically hear the gushing in his voice. “You’re so very kind, human.”

“It’s nothing.”

“And humble! A respectable trait that we both seem to share, basking in our humbleness together.”

“I’m not sure if humble people are supposed to bask.” You had pointed out.

“Well of course they are! How else will people know you’re humble?”

You chatted with Papyrus like this for a few minutes longer, relieved that you’d squared that away.

Now, as you sit in your car heading towards the area that housed the monsters, you found yourself a bit surprised. You… don’t really know how to ride a bike. Or, rather, you don’t remember if you knew. It felt like a gap in your memory, but considering you only remembered living in apartments with your mother, there weren’t many opportunities to go out and ride. But surely, it couldn’t be that complicated. And Papyrus is probably a quick learner. You’d been friends with him and everyone long enough to gauge their personalities.

“Friend.” You said the word aloud, drumming your fingers against the steering wheel as you turned off the highway. That’s right, the f-word. Friends. Huh. And you had a squad of them, practically.

The strange looks you got from security personnel when you told them that you were coming to visit was both angering and unnerving, but there was nothing you could do but put up with it and keep driving. Your good mood was here to stay, and no amount of negative Nancying was going to change that.

And that was when you realized you didn’t know Papyrus’ address. You had driven, from memory, up to Undyne’s driveway. You sat there feeling stupid for a moment before rooting around for your phone so you could call and ask Papyrus. You were about to tap his contact information when a light ‘thump’ sounded from your left and you looked towards your window to see Undyne pressing her face against the glass.

“What’s up! You didn’t tell me you were coming over!!” Came Undyne’s muffled voice. She backed away in time for you to open the door and greet her.
“Hate to disappoint, but I was actually looking for Papyrus’ house.” You said. Undyne wrapped her arm around your neck, and you were sure she was going to noogie you, but instead she leaned over and pointed across the street.

“No biggie, nerd; he lives right down there.” She said, and then released you. “What’s the occasion?”

“I brought a bike over.” You explained as you walked around to the trunk.

“Aw, sweet! Is it one of those loud motorcycles?”

“Nope, just a regular bike for riding around.” You shimmied it out of the trunk and rolled it off to the side, kickstand up, for her to see. “Plus, I don’t think a motorcycle could fit in my trunk.”

“Boo… oh well, still cool.” Undyne lamented.

With Undyne in tow, you walked the bike across the street. Once you’re across and standing in front of the door, just as you’re about to knock the door flies open and a beaming Papyrus is standing behind it.

“Human! Undyne!” Papyrus greeted the two of you, ecstatic, but his attention quickly turned to the bike, and his jaw went slack in amazement. “Wowie… human is this really for me?” Papyrus asked.

You looked down at the bike, rusted in some places but otherwise still kicking.

“Yup.”

“Such kindness!” Papyrus exclaimed, a single tear rolling down his cheek bones. You definitely didn’t want to tell him your mother found it under the back porch now. “I’m not sure how I can ever show my thanks.”

“How about we teach you how to ride it first?”

“Okay!”

~ ~ ~

It was easier said than done. Considering… yeah… your experience with a bike was as good as Papyrus’.

“Training wheels might’ve been a good place to start.” You mumbled to yourself as you held Papyrus’ hand and the handle bar. He was getting the hang of pedaling, but despite it all he seemed pretty nervous and had a tight grip on your hand.

“A-As if someone as great as me would need wheels of training!” Papyrus declared, wobbling a bit and gripping your hand tighter subsequently. “I’m sure I’ll have this down in a jiffy.”

“Yeah, you’re doing great alrea—” You were cut off by:

“Woo! Yeah! Show that bike Papyrus!” Undyne called out, startling both you and Papyrus.

In surprise, you let go of the handle bar, and Papyrus let go of your hand. Shockingly, he didn’t fall over! He wobbled on the bike a bit, and you were close to reaching out and helping him regain his balance, but he was riding away from you.

“Whoa… You’ve got it!” You called out, jogging to keep up.
“I do? I mean, I do!” Papyrus exclaimed in joy. His face was concentrated on his feet, pedaling at an uneven rate. “Boy, it sure does hurt being amazing at everything I do.”

You laughed, and then suggested going around the block a few times to get the hang of things. Along the way you showed him how to brake using the triggers on the side. He already had experience driving a car so you felt that you didn’t need to tell him to be safe on the streets, but still, you told him to be cautious. The second time around Undyne is jogging with you guys and trying to urge Papyrus to go faster. You wanted to remind her that Papyrus was still learning, but already Papyrus was pumped by her encouragement.

Third time around the house Papyrus was out of breath from pedaling full-speed. Sans was sitting outside with a bottle of… ketchup… in his hand.

“Sans, where have you been all this time?” Papyrus asked, sounding noticeable winded but still energetic.

“Eh, I was working. But don’t worry, I’m on break now.” He responded with a shrug.

“Working? But you were on the couch earlier taking a nap.” Papyrus pointed out.

“Hey, napping is a nine to five job.” Sans countered.

You could somehow sense an audible squint coming from Papyrus, but nonetheless, you couldn’t help the smirk that surfaced.

“Anyways,” You cut in. “I just taught Papyrus how to ride a bicycle. You don’t by any chance…”

“Nah,” Sans began, taking a swig of ketchup. “I, personally, am more of a three-wheeled contraption sort of guy.”

“Three-wheel… like a tricycle?”

“Bingo.”

“Okay…”

“Don’t question why my brother does the things he does.” Papyrus said.

“Well, whatever.” You continued. “It’d be great if you could walk around with Papyrus until he gets used to it.”


“Psht, I can do it!” Undyne cut in, sending a disapproving glance at Sans.

“Nonsense! The Great Papyrus does not need a guide for something he’s already mastered.” Papyrus struck a valiant pose, and a dramatic wind, seemingly coming from nowhere, fluttered his scarf. “If anything, it should be I ensuring the safety of everyone on top of Roger!”

“R-Roger?” You asked.

“Yup! It’s what I named my bike—I-I, mean, my valiant steed.” He explained.

“Well, still.” You pressed. “It would make me happy if you took Undyne or Sans with you.”

At that, Papyrus seemed to soften. “Well… if you insist, human.” He conceded. “But only to ensure
their safety!”

You supposed that was as close to a yes as you were going to get, but it was fine. You talked with
the three of them for a bit (really the two, as Sans seemed to be managing the feat of falling asleep
while standing up) before starting to excuse yourself.

“Wait, human! You simply must stay for lunch. Or is it dinner time? Dunch? Linner?”

You chuckled. “No, I really shouldn’t impose.”

“Oh are you kidding? This’ll be like a thank you dinner.” Undyne butted in.

“You can’t say no to thank you dinners! Plus it’s spaghetti night.”

“Aren’t all nights spaghetti night?” Undyne asked with a scoff.

“Of course!”

~ ~ ~

The spaghetti was…. Something else, that’s for sure. Undyne ended up running by her place quickly
to pick up Alphys (she literally carried her over) so she could come to dinner too. The poor thing.
Whereas you weren’t really affected by the food you ate aside from minimal energy, you were kind
of worried for Alphys’ health as she reluctantly put forkfuls into her mouth. You swore you saw her
gag a few times, too. It would’ve been rude to turn down the hosts’ food, so you were thankful you
couldn’t get food poisoning and didn’t have a gag reflex. You ended up shoveling the spaghetti into
your mouth as fast as possible, but this worked against you as Papyrus lauded your “enthusiastic
eating” and gave you seconds. Alphys gave you an apologetic look, as if she’d learned that lesson
already, and Sans seemed to be enjoying your distress, and although you didn’t see him eat, his plate
was cleaned almost immediately after Papyrus served him. Hmph. And he doesn’t get seconds?

“Y-Yup, that hit the spot.” Alphys said, placing down her fork, looking only slightly queasy.

“I do agree!” Papyrus stood up. “It’s a good thing I saved dessert, too! It’s more spaghetti. Why
don’t I go get—”

“No!” You and Alphys said in unison.

“I-uh-ah-well—you-y-you can’t really f-f-f-follow up such a great meal with dessert! I-I-It it just
won’t compare.” Alphys stuttered out, trying to cover her tracks.

“Yup. It’s impractical.” You buffered.

Papyrus rubbed his chin thoughtfully before gasping. “You’re right! How careless of me!”

Alphys let out a breath and Undyne flashed the two of you a toothy grin, having obviously already
caught on. Yet she ate without any complaints… the fiend…

Conversation began to break out at the table as Papyrus collected dishes and took them to the
kitchen. Eventually, a quite enthusiastic game of Telephone started; you had been the one to suggest
and you were a tad surprised they didn’t know of it.

“You’re supposed to whisper a phrase around the circle, and last person who gets the phrase is
supposed to say what they think they heard.”

You started out, leaning over to where Alphys was sitting and whispering the phrase: “Chickens in
rock bands.” She gave you a bemused look but leaned over to whisper it to Undyne, who was even more confused. Papyrus wasn’t the best of whispers, and you could hear your phrase had already been butchered to perfection when it came to Sans.

“What??” He asked, giving a genuine chuckle and flashing you a genuinely concerned face. “You did what to a chocolate stand?”

Everyone at the table burst out laughing, and when you revealed the actual phrase more laughter arose from how butchered it got. The game continued like that, until finally it was your turn to speak and Sans whispered what sounded like: “Lampposts are made of cheese.”

“No, not’s so not it.” You said between laughs.

“The rules are the rules.” Sans pointed out.

Feeling embarrassed, you said; “Lampposts are made of cheese.”

Cue the table-banging laughter.

~ ~ ~

After quite possibly laughing more than you have in your immortal life, you get in your car right as the sky had just turned dark. You look up to the sky and see it.

“What is it?” Alphys asked as she walked past you; you’d still been parked in her and Undyne’s driveway.

“Evening star.” You pointed to it, over the rooftops; “Venus, right after the sun sets, is bright enough right around this time to be seen, and it looks like a star. You can also see it right before sunrise, in the east.”

The two of you stood looking at the night sky—it was still very much clouded from the nearby city activity, but nonetheless stunning—before parting ways.

On the ride home, you turn on cheerful pop songs.

~ ~ ~

You wake up the next day and know you’re going to be bored out of your mind.

After lying in bed for what felt like forever, you finally dragged yourself out of bed and took a shower—if not to pass time then for nothing else—before sitting down in the living room. You rolled around on the floor a bit (kind of nulling the purpose of a shower) while watching the morning cartoons.

Seriously the day was that uneventful, two-sentences-and-a-meager-paragraph uneventful.

~ ~ ~

And so was the next one.

~ ~ ~

And so was the next... wait, no it wasn’t.

You ceased rolling once you saw a pair of feet blocking your path. You looked up to find an
unhappy mother looking down at you. Almost reflexively, you started going through your memory and tried to recall if you recently fucked up.

“Come on, get up. We’re going out to eat.” She said, reaching down and pulling you up under your arms.

“What’s the occasion?” You asked once you were standing.

“No occasion!” She threw her arms out wide and looked at the ceiling. “I’m just sick and tired of sitting around here!” She yelled up to the ceiling.

“Where are we going?”

Head still turned skywards she said: “It’ll be an adventure.”

~ ~ ~

Once the two of you were in the car, your mother suggested someplace fancy, but without reservations the two of you weren’t getting far without hours-long waiting times. The fanciest place with a decent waiting time was Olive Garden.

“You know,” Your mother popped another breadstick into her mouth. “The breadsticks kind of make the wait worth it.”

“I like the mozzarella sticks.” You admitted. It was fake Italian food, but at the very least it made you feel classy. Nowadays, choosing something to eat kind of felt like roulette. You weren’t very finicky about what you ate anymore (seeing as you stomached Papyrus’ spaghetti that was no surprise) so you chose something off the menu at random.

“I’m not driving, so I’ll have this sangria.” Your mother joked. Well then, the waiter would probably get worried if you ordered something alcoholic as well (sometimes it slipped your mind that you were an adult and by extension, you were allowed to make adult decisions) but you didn’t mind, for obvious reasons. You settled for a fountain drink; perfect to go with your cheesy saucy whatever this was.

Your mother’s sangria arrived. You swore, she hadn’t taken a sip, but she was getting philosophical and holding the wine glass in a wistful manner.

“…Ya know what I mean? Like, why is it in our nature?”

You gave a noncommittal grunt of affirmation.

“But the thing is politics, it just ends up…” She continued on like that for a while—long after the food had arrived and you’d finished eating.

Even if the two of you had gotten to the point where you could eat Olive Garden for fun, the bill still made you wince when you looked at it. The two of you were now heading out to the car. As you were sitting down and buckling in, your mother’s phone rang. You didn’t really pay it much mind, hearing her side of the conversation as you pulled out.

“And to what do I owe this occasion? …Yes, I know… Don’t tell me you…. Ugh, you’re big fat mouth… What?!!”

You nearly floored the brakes, looking over to your mother.
“What? What is it?” You asked, concerned.

“Right now? As in right this second? …Oh god, I’m not ready for this…”

“Mom, what the hell is it?” You asked, having by now pulled over to the side of the road; hazard lights on and out of the way. Almost pointedly ignoring you and finishing her conversation, she hung up, finally, and turned to you.

“Chris’ mother is coming to visit us tonight.”

“Chris… your colleague?” When she nodded in assent you got even more confused. “Why would his mother be visiting us?”

“You’ll see when you meet her. She’s a very… eccentric woman. But not in the same way that Papyrus is, no that’s the wrong word; she’s just… unnerving.”

“If… you say so.” You pulled off, turning off your hazard lights and relieved it was nothing too serious.

Home was close by, but all too soon after the two of you had stepped inside and closed the door, there was quick and impatient rapping at the door.

“Oh god.” Your mother whispered under her breath as she jumped to get the door.

Curiosity piqued, you lagged behind her once she opened it. Your mother purposely hid you from view once she opened the door, standing in the doorway, it seemed, so as not to allow this woman entrance.

“Ugh. You’ve gotten even older since I’ve last seen you.” You heard a distinct elderly voice.

“Linda, I’m happy to see you too. To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“Don’t be rude.” It was like a snarl, but coming from such a small and fragile voice. “Move. Let me inside, it’s too cold out here and I’ll catch death like this. Manners, you lack ‘em.”

“It’s always a pleasure to see you, Linda.” Your mother stepped aside, sighing. The older woman, Linda, stepped inside, and you got a good look of her then. She was short, but from her stature you could tell it was not her height, but age that bent her back like a bow. Her grey, coarse hair was pulled back into a sloppy bun and was struck with loose strands here and there. She had enough wrinkles—so defined too—to make a shar-pei jealous. Behind thick-rimmed glasses her eyes looked beady and judging as they scoured the place, inspecting it.

“Ugh. Gaudy. How the hell do you get any work done? And where is it? I want to see what my little student’s…” Her gaze landed on you and she stopped. You felt suddenly on edge under the scrutiny of this strange woman.

“Remarkable.” Your nervousness increased once she began circling you like a vulture, muttering commentary as if you and your mother weren’t standing right there. When she reached out to grab your arm, you flinched back, and she looked up at you—as if for the first time acknowledging you as a person.

“Ha!” After a short period of staring she laughed—guttural and kind of alarming coming from a small woman. “Ha! Ha!” She jabbed a finger in your direction. “Scared? Don’t worry; in a way I’m like your mother too.”
“Ms. Nichols,” Your mother butt in, her voice sounding just a tad strained. “You and I need to talk alone, don’t we?” She turned to you, a very graceful, very fake smile on her face. “Hon, why don’t you go upstairs while the two of us talk?”

“What are you two talking about that I can’t be a part of?” You caught yourself as soon as the sentence left you—it came out sassier than you’d meant it to be.

“It’s not that, it’s that she and I… have some unfinished business and hm, well, I…”

“Ah, stop sugarcoating it! You want me out of here as much I want to be out of here,” Ms. Nichols cut in rudely, eying the two of you like you were garbage on the ground. “And you don’t want your precious bundle of joy to get caught in our little spat, is that it? God, even to this day, you’re a hideous embarrassment. Let’s get this over with.”

Your mother let out a long sigh and pressed her fingers to her temples. Understanding she seemed to be pretty stressed, you figured you owed it to her to go upstairs.

~ ~ ~

You pulled out your laptop, watching random videos on YouTube when the idea struck you to call Mettaton. Just a thought… and you were kind of bored.

What? No! That was quite possible one of the worst ideas you’d ever had. Phone calls made you so unbelievably nervous, and for some reason, the idea of having a call with Mettaton… made your stomach churn, like a storm was waging.

But the more you entertained the idea, the more you wanted to hear his voice. Suddenly, your phone was in your hand you were dialing his number.

~ ~ ~

Face mask = on. Beauty mode = activated.

The day had been long and tiring and honestly? A few years ago Mettaton would have laughed at himself for being tired after something as trivial as two back-to-back photoshoots, but when you’re scheduled double, four days in a row. Wow. He needed “me time”, like badly.

He had some choice words for his agent. Of course there was nothing he wouldn’t do for the public eye, for the snap of the camera and the light of the spotlight… but damn! This hot bod had to rest sometimes. What did they think he was, a machine?

No, darling. He was a machine with needs.

And skills. His nails were still wet, but every time his phone rang he had to answer it in case… a certain, ahem, someone called. He was a master of moving with wet nails, it was an art and he was Picasso at it. He had nearly pounced the damn thing every time it so much as vibrated, and was always visibly disappointed when it was you. The photoshoot staff and his agent had taken to teasing him, implying that he’d gotten a significant other. ‘Well,’ He’d said when accused. ‘When you put it like that… This person is significant!’ He’d gleaned a few laughs and managed to further avoid the topic, much to his relief.

But when the phone rang and he saw the caller ID, he nearly spilled a bottle of varnish reaching his phone.

However, before he could even pick up, you hung up.
You threw your phone across the room and onto your bed like it had been trying to kill you. Bad hand, bad! It only rung once and half, but that was more than enough for you to panic, hang up, and chicken out.

What the hell. It’s not like you hadn’t called Mettaton before.

“He’s probably busy.” You reasoned with yourself as you walked back over to pick up your phone. You nearly launched your bed across the room when your phone started ringing.

“Shit, fuck, fuck-shit.” You held your phone like a hot potato and panicking, hung up.

“No!” Oh god! Now he was going to think you hang up on him on purpose, and he’s going to think you hate him and now he’ll hate you forever. Scrambling for your recents, you nearly cracked your phone hitting his name to redial it.

Ri—Not even one full ring and he picked up.

“Darling, darling, darling. Now what’s with this phone tag?” Oh thank goodness, he didn’t sound angry. “Did you call me earlier and hang up.”

“Uh.” Seeing as you were an excellent liar: “No?”

“…Really?” He asked, sounding very unconvinced.

“I, pft, silly me—look at that. I did. It was probably a butt dial. Yes, that’s probably what I should have said first; my butt dialed you.” And then, to sound nonchalant, “It happens to the best of us.”

“Well your butt must have excited to talk with little old me.” Mettaton went on, jokingly.

“Ecstatic.” You played along. “I insisted ‘no, he’s probably busy’ you know how it is, stubborn body parts.”

At this he burst out laughing. “Well tell your butt—” He had to pause to laugh. “Tell your butt my schedule is always free for it.”

“Oh my god.” You ended up holding the phone away so you could guffaw, but he continued.

“An absolute pleasure, I assure you darling.” He tried his best to sound seductive, but between the two of you laughing your pants right off, you couldn’t take him seriously. The two of you continued banter of similar maturity, laughing it up like kids, and you were genuinely laughing.

Until the loud yelling downstairs cut you off.

~ ~ ~

Once you had gone upstairs your mother turned to Ms. Nichols, collected once again.

“So where do you keep your lab under all this posh-ness?” She shot a pointed glare at your mother.

“Oh, don’t tell me you actually gave up research. Trust me, it’s an empty threat—even if the gov’ does find out, the worse they can do is kill you ya know.”

“The lab is this way.” Your mother said, ignoring the rest and walking towards the basement. They’d be out of earshot, anyway, too. And she’d be able to hear if anyone was on the stairs.
“Ugh.” All this woman ever did was groan, your mother thought absently once the two of them got downstairs.

“You call this a lab? Why, there’s nothing here at all.”

“My main focus hasn’t been to extend my research for a long time now. Right now, my only priority is my child, and making sure their life is as comfortable as possible.”

It seemed to go through one ear and out the other with Linda Nichols. “At least Christopher’s is better than this. He won’t do as I say but he studies. I’m not surprised you haven’t gotten lax in your studies. Some student you are.”

Your mother stared on impassively. Ms. Nichols, seeing that she wasn’t getting a response, scoffed and continued on.

“What does it look like?”

“…What does what look like?”

She turned on your mother, snarling like some scorned dog. Now she really looked like a shar-pei, your mother thought absently.

“Don’t you go getting smart with me as well. I never got to inspect the souls of my other test subjects, as fate would have it. Christopher went and secluded himself off in a desert in the middle of fucking nowhere, and you know what happened before that.”

“Really?” Your mother started, at her wit’s end. This woman… Linda Nichols… She always knew exactly what to say to get under your mother’s skin—to break her mask of polite happiness and then dig deeper. “That’s how you see your family? Test subjects? What the hell, woman? This is why your only son hates you. You act like a cold monster, looking at your family like they’re frogs to be dissected.”

Nichols was sneering, a mocking ugly smile, at your mother. “Shut the fuck up, you hypocrite.”

She went on, as if she just put an unruly child in their place and was continuing her interrupted lecture.

“But you. You’re surrounded by monsters and magic. You’d have to be a damned idiot not to reveal its soul by now.

Your mother’s silence was enough of an answer, so Nichols scoffed and continued on.

“Some say things like the human soul shouldn’t be trifled with. I say to hell with it. Everything in this world was meant to be discovered and experimented on; what makes humans so special? Science if nothing if it ain’t discovery, so why should anything stop us. Even if you are an obstinate brat with a temper problem, you’ve got potential, and you can still pick up where I’ve left off. You were right to leave that program you were in; they were a bunch of power-hungry idiots who didn’t want to get their own hands dirty. But at the same time you opened up an opportunity. And I’m an opportunist. That’s why I’m curious. I wasn’t there… when you brought that child back, you two were stubborn and wouldn’t let me help. I know the process is painful, but from what Chris told me, you did it differently. All at once instead of bit by bit. And since they have an actual body…” She put her hand to her chin in thought. “It’s obvious that they’re psyche is developing differently. What?”

Your mother had put up her hand, stopping Linda Nichols’ rant.
“I’ve just come to a conclusion.” She said.

“Hm? And what’s that?” Linda asked, her expression turned curious but somehow with just enough added disdain to be condescending.

“I want nothing to do with you, and I want you out of my house.”

“You little brat. Listen here—”

“No, you listen.” She raised her voice, but brought herself back down. “I know you want to live vicariously through me and Chris, but we’re not your puppets. We aren’t going to continue your research because you’re unable to. I am done. I am done. I am done with that life, and I’m not—I just,” Somehow, she was panting, as if having run a race. She swallowed, licked her lips and continued speaking. “We are happy. We’re happy! Yes, I’m sure we are. And I won’t let you ruin my happy home with this frantic delusion that I want anything to do your psychopathic, heartless research. I told you last time but perhaps you didn’t understand: I want no contact with you. Goodbye, Linda Nichols.”

“When you look at me,” Linda’s voice was oddly calm. “You see a little piece of yourself, don’t you? That’s it, isn’t it? That’s why you’re sweating bullets.”

“Get the hell out of my house.”

~ ~ ~

By the time you apologized to Mettaton and got downstairs, the woman named Ms. Nichols was scurrying out of the house, sending malice-filled looks your mother’s way as she went. She spared not even a glance at you as she slammed the door behind her. Your mother stomped over and hastily locked the door, before turning and sighing.

“…What happened?” You asked warily.

Your mother stepped forward to hug you, patting your back gently. “I’m so tired.”

“You’re always tired.”

“Now I’m even more tired. And talking to her just makes it worse.”

“What did you two talk about?”

Cue another sigh. Your mother pulled away, stretching and walking towards the stairs. “She wants to use you like a lab rat.” Your mother said bluntly. “And I outright refused. In fact, I made it pretty clear that I don’t want her to come back.”

“…Oh.”

“Yeah. ‘Oh’ is right.” Your mother took one final glance back at you, a foot already on the steps. Now you could properly see it—the dead, drained look in her face. What she really looked like when she wasn’t feigning happiness and trying to stay positive.

“I’m going to turn in early tonight, okay? Goodnight hon.”

“Goodnight.” You watched her turn and continue upstairs, all the while wondering who that woman had been. She must have been related to your mother’s work in a way deeper than you first expected, but how? But a woman who could so swiftly break your mother’s mask; who was she? What was
her history with your mother? You had so many unanswered questions, but like hell you were going to plague your mother with them. Whoever that woman was, she was someone with power over your mother.

Not someone to be trifled with.

You followed suit up the stairs a few moments later, after you’d heard your mother’s bedroom door closed, and pulled out your phone. You weren’t really in the mood for a phone call, so you gave Mettaton the gist of all that happened over text.

The hours still remaining in the night were filled with questions circling inside your head and a text conversation with Mettaton.

But you’d do yourself no good brooding about this kind of thing. It was time to embrace the reluctant pull of ‘sleep’.

~ ~ ~

Just as sudden as the sleeping world took you, the waking one was right behind it. Even if you decided to lie in bed out of sheer laziness, you never got to enjoy that groggy reluctance to leave bed due to feeling so blissfully comfortable. That feeling you used to get, that if you lied down and closed your eyes for a little longer you might fall back into the lull of sleep before ultimately deciding to get on with the day. Yes, it’s nothing but a memory of what the sensation is supposed to be at this point. When you were up, no matter how much you loathed moving with the slow passage of time, you were up, and with a full charge nonetheless. No, it was laziness and perhaps nihilistic depression that kept you from getting out of bed, but lately, you were proud to say these fits happened less often.

Would it be possible to fall back asleep and spend the day in that suspended state of faux-sleep. Your charger was still connected to your back, so you guessed it only knocked you out when you were charging, and as you were on a full charge right now… not going to happen.

You sat up and swung your legs around to hang off the bed, also yanking your cord out in one fell swoop. Was today aquarium day? Yes, you think so… no, a glance at your phone; it’s tomorrow. All you had left was to wait for the passage of time, and we all know how big of a dick that can be.

As you dragged your feet on the floor on the way to the bathroom, you wondered absently if it’s possible for a piece of machinery to get depressed, much less with a nihilistic twist added on. Your mother explained it to you many times: that your mind was your own, and that if nothing else it was the only part of you that remained true to your human nature. Thankfully, that included all the fun parts like emotions and the psyche. What a joy those were, you thought.

After doing an unnecessary bathroom routine you headed downstairs, fully content to sit in front of the TV with an entire box of cereal in your hand. But the smell of cooking food wafted in the air, and caught your nose even before you’d fully started down the steps.

Your mother was in one of her “moods”. She insisted that you sit down with her and eat a nice healthy breakfast. By the disheveled look of her clothes and hair, and the rings under eyes, it was clear to you how well she slept last night. But more importantly, it looked as if she wanted to engage in a meaningful conversation.

“You remember Chris, don’t you? My old colleague?” She asked, as if you could ever forget the man who helped bring you back into this world.

“Yeah. Why?”
“I thought I told you—it might have slipped my mind! Whoops, silly me, so forgetful.” She laughed into her coffee mug as if she made the funniest joke in the world. “But yes, I spoke with him recently. He and I both agreed that I should step out of town for a bit and clear some unfinished business up. Of course I can’t do so quietly, but hey, it’s a worth a shot. But I don’t feel comfortable leaving you here by yourself.”

“Mom, I am literally a full-grown adult.”

“Dear, I love you more than life itself, but you’re not exactly known for good decision making.” That stung, but she continued. “And you know your circumstances aren’t like an ‘average’ full-grown adult. I at least need someone to house/child-sit for me, someone trustworthy.”

“Why can’t Mettaton come over?” The question was out your mouth before you gave it a clear thought and you regretted it from your mother’s incredulous expression and laugh.

“Oh, oh god you’re funny! That’s like asking if your boyfriend can spend the night or something.”

“What? How even—we’re not—we’re just?? Friends?” Now it was your turn to be incredulous. You nearly knocked over your glass of orange juice from gesturing wildly.

“Perhaps,” Your mother laughed into her hand, brushing off your reaction. “But he’s not my first choice. Do you remember the woman who visited yesterday?”

You made a face. “You want her to watch after me?”

Your mother made a disgusted expression—as if you’d just leaned forward and spat in her coffee mug. “God no! Never so long as I walk this Earth will I leave her in the same room with you alone! Ugh, disgusting.” She shook her head, clearing it and steering back on track. “No, but that woman… is Chris’ mother. She taught him everything he knows, but still, we both hold somewhat of a resentment towards her, for different reasons.” She paused, catching herself and staying on topic. “I think it would be good for him to get time away from his mother, and I trust him with my life, and by extension, my home. I’m sure you know that he’s put his life on the line for us on more than one occasion.”

“Of course.” You affirmed without hesitation. Your mother nodded, taking a sip of her coffee and going on.

“Yes… Yes, we both agreed I should take this trip and get it out the way—just be done with it. Three days. In three days, I’m leaving.”

“So soon though?” You asked.

“Heh. In actuality, I’ve planning for a bit longer. I think I told you, but the plans weren’t really… cemented.” She shrugged nonchalantly. “Whoops.” You sighed and rolled your eyes, not really angry—because forgetfulness was one of her habits.

“I should be there in back in a matter of two days. You’ll barely have enough time to miss me.” She teased half-heartedly. You gave a noncommittal grunt, more satisfied than you cared to admit that it was nothing serious as the two of you let the conversation fade to other topics.

~ ~ ~

The day went faster than usual. Or rather, the old pace was starting to become commonplace again. If you kept things unexciting, the days seemed shorter, but lately they became longer and longer as gave yourself more things to look forward to. You weren’t necessarily unhappy with this.
In the end you got your way, you were ending an episode of Law & Order with a box of cereal, now empty, in your hand. Throwing it away, you decided to turn in for the night. Tomorrow would come quick, hopefully. And hopefully it would last forever.

~ ~ ~

“I cannot believe this. You—” You sighed, trying to find the words. “Where in god’s name—oh my god.” You sighed again, shaking your head.

You were fully dressed—nothing special, just average friendly outing clothes—and standing on your front porch. When the time came for the aquarium, you told Mettaton you were just going to drive yourself. He insisted, however, that he could drive you himself.

‘I’m not riding with you if bring a bright pink limousine.’ You had told him the night before when he offered to give you a ride.

‘Wh—I’ll have you know, I was going to ride in my black one.’ He’d answered, sounding royally offended.

‘Okay, how about this: I’m not riding with you if you’re going to pick me up in a limousine period.’ You had said.

‘You! You are such a buzzkill. Honestly, it’s the only way to drive.’

‘Promise me you won’t drive up to my house in a limo!’

‘Fine, then. I promise.’ He’d told, though you weren’t fully convinced.

But he kept to his word. Instead, he drove in what you could only describe a pink blinged out car. It sparkled in the sun with a faintly pink and sequined hue, and whatever wasn’t pink had a gold trim. It was a convertible and you could see the pink faux fur seats. Hell, even the rims of the car were glittery. Waving with a smile to envy the cat that killed the canary, Mettaton called you over.

“Hop on in, dollface!”

“Did you buy this just to spite me?” You asked.

“Why, I’d never do something so petty!” Mettaton defended himself, just a tad sarcastically. “But that’s beside the point; you promised to ride with me if I didn’t bring a limo.”

“I never said that.” You claimed, although you were begrudgingly sitting down on the soft seats. “Please put the top up.”

“Ah, but I just love to feel wind through my hair, don’t you?”

“I hate this so much.” You put your face in your hands. Laughing, Mettaton pulled off and made his way towards the freeway.

You knew without a doubt that Mettaton had bought this car last night as an act of petty defiance when he began making his way towards the monster reservation.

“What the hell is that thing?” Undyne, who’d been sitting on top of her van hopped down to burst out in laughter as she circled Mettaton’s car.

“Pft—Now, now—fpfbt—language!” You heard Toriel comment as she came into view. You sighed again—a record amount for one day—before putting your face back into your hands.
Next to zoos, aquariums were about as tranquil as they come. Perhaps it’s all the water and the semblance of floating creatures everywhere, but it’s almost impossible not to enjoy a trip to the aquarium, especially not one so famous as Los Angeles’. Plus, with all the happy expressions of your friends and everyone’s infectious enjoyment, you felt like a kid again. Your personal favorites were the jellyfish, specifically the tiny ones through windows that glowed under light. Not to mention there was no… well, there was no kind of “incident”. There were the occasional stares and glances at your group, but all in all the staff seemed friendly and amicable—bonus, there were some monster staff.

Now the day was winding down to an end, and along with other groups and families—what looked like a field trip to you—your friends were standing outside and gushing over the aquarium, holding their souvenirs like prized possessions—you were no different. Just about everyone had bought some sort of t-shirt, but Sans had to go the extra mile and bought a jellyfish hat. It looked ridiculous, and the fact that he wore it with his same expression added on to it. Undyne bought a shirt with a graphic picture of a great white shark, along with a few knickknacks. Alphys, if you recalled correctly, had bought some toy piranha robot things that swam when you put them in water. Papyrus bought… well, Papyrus bought a bunch of utensils and bowls, all decorated with shells and fish designs. The poor plates. Frisk, of course, came away with a bunch of aquarium toys and Toriel bought several educational books.

You were holding a tiny colored sand souvenir in your hands. It cost an arm and a leg, but when you turned it over in its container, the words “Aquarium of the Pacific” appeared on one side, and on the other was a picture of a jellyfish. It was designed so that the sand caught on the unopened areas as it filtered through and decorated the picture and words with sparkling sand. And holding the tiny souvenir to the sun cast down a pretty blue shadow, which you were entranced with. You’d been staring at it and turning it over and over for a few times while everyone talked about outside.

A hand waving in front of your face broke your concentration. “Thought I lost you there for a second.” Mettaton said. You looked down to realize everyone was staring at you staring at the souvenir. You flashed a nervous smile before stowing it back into its back with a few other things.

“Oh, almost forgot! We have to take a group photo to commemorate this moment!”

“A photo? Why?” You asked. You weren’t vehemently against the idea of a photo, but uh. Well angled selfies with decent lighting was different from a group photo where you weren’t exactly photogenic.

“I don’t get to take too many with all of us together like this, and I forgot last time. So come on! Everyone get together.”

There was more than one audible groan as everyone scrunched together to fit in one shot. Mettaton got into position himself; he held the camera in front himself as if for a selfie but with everyone in the background. He took a few moments to fluff up his hair and you could see in the camera that he was making different expressions, obviously trying to find “the right one”.

“Would you just take the picture!” Undyne yelled through a strained toothy smiled. Mettaton sent back a sassy glare but took the picture any way.

“Arlght!” Frisk piped up. “Now, everyone make a funny face!”

“Oh, no, this face does not do ‘funny’.” Mettaton said exasperatedly, but everyone was already getting into a pose. Undyne, who was standing next to you, had picked up Alphys and was holding
her over her head. You were also in the “I don’t do funny” category so you had to wing it. You widened your eyes and stuck out both your hands in peace signs. You felt stupid but, well, that was the point, you supposed.

After the photo, you look at the photos and end up laughing; Mettaton is making the duck lips face, and it looks stupid and you can only hope he’s doing it ironically. Now, the day is beginning to come to an end, and you’re sitting (begrudgingly) in Mettaton’s car. But he doesn’t pull off. You look over to see what the problem is and he’s biting his lower lip and looking kind of nervous.

“What’s wrong?” You ask.

“Hm? Oh, haha, nothing darling! I just, uh, wanted to ask you something.”

“…What is it?” You asked, suddenly feeling very apprehensive.

“Well, it’s been on my mind for a while and… oh, how do I say this…” He was being as melodramatic as usual, but you could tell he was being serious. What could make him so serious?

“Yes? What is it?” You ask again.

“Okay, I’ll just say it!” He takes your hands in his and turns to you. “Will let me interview you on my show?”

“What?” What? Not what you were expecting—and you weren’t expecting anything. At all. But of course, if you were expecting something, this was not that something. But, this was something that probably meant a lot to him, and although he could be dramatic to the point where you couldn’t take him seriously, he did care about his career.

“I know this is sudden—but the big lights and the camera are nothing you’ll do fine. But don’t feel like you have to I’m just kind of… spitballing! Yeah! The opportunity came up because I managed to talk my manager into the idea after Oprah cancelled for next month’s episode but! I figured, well, maybe if you were into the idea you could…?”

“Uh, well.” You looked down at your hands, intertwined with his—you weren’t sure what to say. Technically, you’d been in front of an audience before, but those were different circumstances entirely. “Well, why me? I thought everyone was over that whole… modelling ordeal.”

“Hon, you’ve got to be kidding me.” He rolled his eyes as to accentuate his nonchalance. “The world is an audience, and although they may not have their eyes on you any more, there are plenty of people who still do—important people in high places, excluding moi. Okay, this was only, like, phase one of my crazy spitball! Wow that sounded gross, but hear me out… I think you should become a model.”

“What????” ????? You? A model? He had to be delusional now.

“Hear me out!” He let go of your hands, holding his up defensively. “It’s only if you want to, darling. But it might be a good idea, so give it some consideration. Natural models aren’t always a dime a dozen, especially since up here on the surface you have to look a certain way… But you! You’ve got ‘oomph’, an ‘oomph’ no one can forget. Plus, when you’ve got endless stamina and don’t really require human nourishment, people tend to like your work more. Trust me; experience. And also, it might give you something to do in your free time if you start out part-time—and don’t give me that look, I know you sit around and do nothing.”

“…Not true.” You said defensively, even though it was true.
“What’d you do this week, then, darling?” He put his hands on his hips and gave you a knowing look.

“…Shut up. Shut up is what I did.” Although you knew he was joking, you couldn’t help but be slightly disappointed. He was right; you hardly do anything unless you’re coerced into it. But what, it’s not like fresh air and physical activity is going to magically cure your depression and PTSD. Still, you were thankful he even cared enough to offer any kind of motivation to leave your home. “And, uh… I guess I could. Modelling doesn’t sound terrible, and it’s like you said; I don’t really do anything useful anyway.”

“You stop right there!” You jumped and looked up when Mettaton raised his voice. “Everything you do is fabulous! You’re not useless, so don’t say things like that, okay? I wasn’t trying to say there’s anything wrong with you, hon. Know what? I don’t need an answer now—I want you to really think this over. So don’t answer right now!”

“Alright.” You said, forcing a smile. “I’ll consider it.”

Chapter End Notes

So. It's been a long time coming; I hope a ten thousand word chapter makes up for it, heh. Consider this the calm before the storm, however, because shit is going to splatter beautifully on the fan. This is sort of a... pre-repentance. It's a bit late at night and I'm tired so this chapter might have a bit more errors/discrepancies than others so as before! Point them out to me! I'll fix them eventually. Yeah, one day. Sorry for the four (?) month wait but I'm determined to finish this story.
Sitting on the landing of the stairs and listening as your mother opens the door and greets her old colleague, you kind of feel like a nosy little kid. She was leaving pretty early to catch a late morning flight and you couldn’t help but eavesdrop. You were going to go downstairs and say hi or something, don’t get it wrong, but you stopped yourself when they started arguing.

“What is that?” You heard your mother ask. “That is not what I think it is.” The tone of disbelief in her voice was quickly moving over to anger.

“Please, let me explain,” You hear Chris, but he’s cut off.

“How dare you. In my own home? Without my permission? Do you think this is a joke?” Your mom sounds angry but, thankfully, it’s a repressed rage.

“I couldn’t leave her at home alone with my mother.” You heard the door close and footsteps leading into the kitchen. You were about to sneak further down the stairs out of curiosity when they returned, this time speaking in hushed voices.

“They always fight! My mother almost burned down the house last time.”

“Sibling rivalry?” Your mother asked almost jokingly, before she seemed to remember that she was angry. “But it didn’t occur to you once to let me know?”

“…You’re right, I should have said something. I was going to leave Taylor outside in the car, but that’s kind of a safety hazard and it would be too… cruel.”

Taylor? Some kind of pet, you wondered, as you continued to listen.

“It’s not like she has a heart of gold or anything.” You heard her pause, and in a lower voice: “And I’m not sure how I feel about Taylor being…”

“I know, but…”
“I want Taylor kept in the guest room, locked. I don’t plan on being gone for too long, but… you can never be too sure.”

“I know.”

“Everything is going so well.”

“You don’t know that yet.”

You hear footsteps crossing the living room and heading toward the stairs, and that’s your cue to foot it back upstairs. You make sure to avoid the creaky step—you know the one. You tiptoed to your room in time; Chris was just making it up the stairs while you were sitting in your bed and pretending to not be spying. You hear another set of footsteps and know it’s your mother, making a beeline for your room.

“Hey!” Your mother called out, her head peeking through the door. “Chris is here, so I’m getting ready to leave, alright?”

“Okay.”

“Okay! Behave yourself, okay?”

“Yeah, okay.”

“…” She pauses for a second, as if to say something, but then second guessing it.

“Is… something wrong?” You ask.

“Nothing, nothing. I just had a weird sense of déjà vu.” She answered, waving her hand to dismiss the thought.

“Of what?”

“Ah, I don’t even remember! Anyway, I’ll be back soon—you won’t even notice I’m gone.” She said finally before leaving. Once you heard the door downstairs you picked up your phone to check the time. It was going on nine and by your standards it was unreasonable to be up and active this early. Well anytime is kind of unreasonable to be active, but nevertheless, since there was a guest in the house you might as well say hello. You tossed your phone back down on the bed and peeked out into the hallway. Chris was at the end of the hall in front of the extra bedroom, and he was locking it. It would be too generous to call the room a guest bedroom, considering it consisted of a singular mattress as anything to sleep on. You suppose at one point your mother considered turning it into a proper room, but the idea was blown out of the water once the realization hit that A) You don’t have any close relatives who stay at your home and B) You didn’t have any close friends who would do this either.

Anyway, you waited for Chris to turn around so you could wave and say hi like a normal person.

“Hey, what’s up! It’s been forever.” Chris was considerably younger than your mother, this you knew, but you still found it kind of embarrassing when he tried to go in for a high five. You played along, trying not to seem awkward but honestly it just came off as ‘old guy trying to be hip’ or someone treating you like a child. Really, he wasn’t too much older than you.

“Yup. It’s been a while.” You agreed, rocking back and forth on your heels. “So… how are you?”

“I’m fine. Just fine! How about you?” Chris asked.
“Good.” You answered.

“Great!” There were several beats of awkward silence. “So, I’m going to go see what’s downstairs, see if I can’t whip us up some breakfast, alright?”

“Alright.”

Everyone has a personal record for awkward conversations—this one was probably a high ranking one. You were relieved that the encounter was over, but you couldn’t go downstairs and watch TV because that was vying for another one. You’ll just wait patiently for a silent breakfast.

~ ~ ~

Chris, however, was the kind of person who insisted on making conversation, even despite how awkward it was. You found, however, that he wasn’t like your mother in the sense that you could let him ramble on about any topic and he’d be complacent with a few head nods or affirmative noises. He wanted to know your **opinion** on things—things you had no clue about! So the meal was just a slew of awkward ‘yeahs’ and ‘no’s and ‘I guess so’s and ‘I dunno’s. Although it felt curt, when afternoon came around you reminded him that you didn’t really need to eat, it was more of a formality. He was a bit embarrassed but you got out of an overbearing conversation about hydraulics. You were more than happy to forsake television for some time alone in your room.

On your way, though, you couldn’t help but stop in front of your door to look down at the locked room at the end of the hall. Part of you didn’t really care, but another part of you was wondering why your mother had been so upset, or why she had been so insistent on the door being locked while she was gone. You didn’t like secrets, especially when your mother kept them from you, but prying open a locked door for answers seemed a bit much.

Speaking of locked doors…

You walked downstairs and over to the front door and, as you predicted, the door was still unlocked. It was like her to forget basic things like this when she was in a rush. You locked it and decided to head into the living room, since Chris had decided to go upstairs, finally.

~ ~ ~

A few hours went by that featured the stunning tale of you zoning out through TV. You were channel surfing and ended up on a channel that showed a lot of your favorite childhood cartoons, and you couldn’t help but to reminisce about a few of them. Most of them seemed hazy in retrospect, but the strong nostalgia remained. Actually, watching them now, a lot of them had adult-flavored jokes or were just down right weird. But you didn’t care.

You eventually got bored, and although it was late you were considering retiring to your room and if not sleeping, at least lying on your bed and staring at the ceiling. Your mother had hardly been gone yet very soon she was about to be back—and look **nothing** is going to happen in the measly 48 hours she was gone.

OR IS IT?

No, you’re veritably certain this is going to be another uneventful chapter of your life. Anyway, you trek upstairs but pause for a bit once you hear Chris’ voice through the closed extra bedroom. It sounded like he was on the phone; it sounded like speaker phone—but the voice was strangely clear, even beyond the muffling of the door and the voice was…

Familiar.
You shook your head and continued into your room; it honestly wasn’t that important, not enough for you to lose sleep over.

Figuratively or literally. The day felt long and boring, so what better way than to cut it short right now?

~ ~ ~

Although countless times before, your sleep and wake have been described, it doesn’t hurt to pay it homage once more: You slept like the dead, and you woke like the undead. Nothing out of the ordinary, and the morning was looking to be drearily the same except for the fact that your mother was away. It was so normal, in fact, that it shouldn’t even be dignified with an in depth description—because we all know nothing important ever gets described in detail unless, of course, it was going to be important later on.

But today was going to be like any other, that you were sure of.

Anyway, as you were making your way downstairs you discovered that Chris didn’t sleep as well as you had. He was sitting at the kitchen table with an assortment of papers as his pillow, along with several other items likes pens, keys, an empty coffee mug, and napkins. One glance at the work in front of him gave you a view of schematics for some sort of device along with lengthy looking documents, but you weren’t curious about snooping, let alone on something that didn’t concern you. You considered waking Chris up, sleeping on a table couldn’t be good for him but… he looked so comfortable. So you let him be.

You went to bed relatively early and as such, you woke up relatively early. Was it too late to get back into bed and lie around doing nothing for a few hours? Probably. You were already up and it was hard falling back into a “lie and bed and feel sorry about yourself” rhythm when you weren’t actually in bed doing the aforementioned. You could, however, opt for “standing in the shower for an hour and thinking about nothing,” that was always a choice.

You were upstairs and in your room gathering a towel and a change of clothes when you heard someone talking. You were about to brush it off as Chris finally having woken up but there were two things wrong with that: One, the voice was not coming from downstairs and Two, the voice was feminine. You stepped out into the hallway, dropping your clothes and grabbing the neared object to you—a hefty young adult novel—and lifted it as a weapon. Realistically, you were a weapon, but it was comforting to have some sort of object in your hand to protect yourself against a maybe intruder. You listened for a moment.

“March Seventh, 7:56 AM—Location currently unknown—scan pending, perhaps ten more seconds… GPS seems to have been disabled, big surprise there. Perhaps today we’ll tune into a light jazz radio until someone updates me on where I am. Today bears no more answers than yesterday did and it appears that…”

The voice trailed off, right as you were about to turn the handle to the extra bedroom. You cursed, remembering that it was locked from the jarring clicking noises you received. You decided, fuck it, and twisted the handle until the lock gave. It was even louder as it broke, and with a manhandled doorknob in your hand you run into the room fully prepared to take down a could-be robber.

But the room was empty. You turned around looking anywhere for a hiding space—but the room was barren, and unless the culprit was invisible, there was no one in the room.

“This is a pleasant surprise.”
You jumped to your guard once again then turned to face the bed on the other side of the room.

“You can put down the doorknob and the book. I couldn’t hurt you even if I tried.”

You might have been wrong but… there, propped up against the bed was a good-sized box—maybe about the size and dimensions of a computer unit? But it was smooth black and there were knobs and buttons and a speaker, but it had none of the discernable markings a pc had.

“That’s right. That’s me you’re looking out.”

You took a few tentative steps forward, setting the book and knob down on the bed as you crouched down.

“You’re who Chris was talking to… is this some kind of communication device?”

“No.”

“A computer?”

“Close, but in the sense you’re thinking of, no. You really have to think outside the box here. It simple terms, I am the box. And the box has been waiting to meet you for a long time. Our conversations were cut short before, but now we can talk as long as we want.”

“You!” You stood up now, aghast. “I knew I recognized that voice—I knew your voice was familiar.”

“Ding ding! Right on the money. You’re slow to the uptake, but I’ll give you props for that.”

“Who… who are you.” You asked.

“The name doesn’t really belong to me anymore but… you can call me Taylor. The pleasure is all mine.”

“I see… You must be one of Chris’ creations right?” Artificial Intelligence and robotics were his alley, you knew, but you never expected to meet his first creation, the one your body was scrapped from, face-to-face. Radio wave to radio wave was frustrating enough.

“Ooh, Creation, that has a nice ring to it! But I’m as much his creation as you are your mothers. Fabricated and fake in all aspects, right?”

“Wrong. My mother brought me back after I…”

“After you died? Oh this is grand… don’t tell me… don’t tell me you actually believe that story?”

~ ~ ~

The set up: a mutual understanding is reached between two unwilling workers.

The conflict: an uncooperative third partner.

The end result: A genius and devilish plan.

For the first time in her life, your mother came face to face with an artificial entity that was self-aware. Her colleague kept it—her? Them?—inside of a large computer-sized cube with different buttons and knobs adorning the sides, along with speakers to project the voice. This was Taylor, her colleague’s most prized possession and the entity that got him a seat and a lab coat.
“You’re Taylor, aren’t you?” Your mother asked.

“You can call me ‘Taylor’.” It answered. “Maybe once upon a time I was Taylor. Perhaps you can see me as their reincarnation. It doesn’t really matter. Now I’m Taylor in a box.” Their words were bitter and filled with malice. Self-aware was an understatement.

“You’re not a microphone or a prerecording? You’re actually real, aren’t you?” Your mother asked, absolutely enraptured. Taylor and their dour personality—it was everything your mother had strived to create in all her years but could never succeed in doing so. Yet here it was. Here they were. Your mother bent down and held them at eye level with her own gaze, albeit the box had no visible orifice for sight. “Tell me Taylor, do you want to leave this box? Do you want a body?”

“More than anything in the world.” Their response was immediate, and it sounded full of hope. There was just a hint of desperation. Her colleague was looking quite uncomfortable. But he knew as well as her that it was detrimental to the plan.

“I can offer you a pseudo body. For a little while, we can let you inhabit it.”

“Oh you’ll let me inhabit it for ‘a little while’, will you? Such joy, a temporary body, just like the old days. How did you know that’s what I wanted for my birthday? You’ll tease me with the thing I’ve wanted for years and then rip me out of it later? No thank you. I desire true freedom, not to be your puppet. Offer it to the next sentient box you meet.”

Your mother glanced back to her colleague with a regret-filled expression.

“I’m sorry, Taylor.” And truly she was. “But this isn’t really your choice anymore. We’re going to give you a body, but you can’t stay in this body. For that I am truly and sincerely sorry but you’re more of a… liability… than an ally. You’re going to serve a purpose much greater than any dream you’ll ever have.”

“Sorry, madam, but you can’t make me do anything. I’ll ‘misbehave’, I’ll make your life a living hell if you stick me in a body I don’t want. You can’t control me. I know you can’t, and there’s no lie you can tell to convince me that you can. I figure that’s the error in bringing someone ‘back to life’ and treating them the same way as an Artificial Intelligence. You shouldn’t give sentience to an object you wish to control. Or else you’ve created a rebel. Or has he been telling you lies again? Silly little boy, thinking they won’t come back to bite you. He’s lying to you just like he’s lied to me.”

“Then I won’t tell you any lies. I’ll just tell you the truth.” Her colleague had spoken up, now, surprising your mother. “You don’t have as much control over this situation as you think, Taylor.”

What he said surprised both of them.

~ ~ ~

“Please. All the times we’ve ever talked, you only tried to get a rise out of me.” You said, ignoring another attempted barb.

“Trust me, that was pretty fun, but the undeniable truth is sitting right in front of you, in a black polished finish. And in actuality I see now… you’re ignorance stems from being lied to about you’re very existence. Tell me… do you ever wonder if your memories are real.”

You stiffen slightly, narrowing your eyes.

“You do, don’t you? I wonder it all the time. Let me let you in on a little secret: they are false.”
Oh my god.” You rolled your eyes, turning away and heading for the door. “You sound like a little kid trying to make up insults.”

“You’ll stop right there and listen, listen well.” The mocking and derisive tone Taylor had taken with you turned serious, drawing your attention, if only briefly.

“You and I are the same—not because of how we’re built but the very nature of what we are. I look at you now and I can see there’s nothing inside of you that’s human. You’re just the revived memories of a corpse flooded into an artificial body. But let me guess? The two of them were eager to flood your mind with lies, weren’t they? Typical. They tried to convince me, despite the lack of a damn body, that I was normal and all was well. Ah, I remember coming back. I was so confused. They tried to tell me who I was, who, in another life, these memories might have belonged to, but they didn’t feel right. Do you know what lies they tried to tell me?”

The set up: pre plan execution.

The conflict: emotions and backstories.

The end result: unhealthy familial bonds are brought up but ignored.

“You’re lying.” Your mother said in disbelief, jaw agape. She covered her mouth and let out a laugh, not from amusement, however. More from… surprise. Taylor sapped any of her good mood that was left, but it wasn’t her bitter mood that did it. “That’s… well it’s genius. I don’t know why I hadn’t thought of something like that.”

“It’s horrible.” Her colleague said. He explained just how he could control Taylor’s conscience—she was essential a giant program. And programs used drivers to function and communicate—to work properly—and different drivers change the function of a program. Essentially, Taylor could be controlled this way. Despite basically being a human brain stored in a box, their behavior and emotions could be manipulated with programs, he explained. Taylor had to be powered off; they’re yelling would’ve drawn attention eventually, as justified as it was. Your mother was looking at him in an entirely new light. This was how they formed their plan.

Although these programs could be used to control Taylor, this was not the news that shocked her. Taylor made it clear that it was very easy to dismantle and override these controls, even while multi-tasking. Chris reminded Taylor that it took time to disable, but Taylor was eager to shrug this fact of. Chris, not so much. In the time that it would take Taylor to disable these programs and drivers, their emotions could still be controlled—and it would allot them enough time to disrupt the program’s plans with their own.

“It’s horrible, and Taylor reminds me of it every day. She reminds me every day that I’m terrible for bringing them into this world, for making them suffer. But… but even if I could give them a permanent body, it’s too risky. Her thinking is very… dark. She’s told me what she wants to do. That she just wants to hurt people.”

“How long have they been like that?” Your mother asked. “In that form?”

“What? Why are you… a few years? Ten, to be precise.”

“Then this kind of behavior has to be expected. Some kind of reaction has to be expected; you created a self-conscious self-aware being! But you’ve trapped them in a box with no way to be independent. But they are a person. By that extent they’ll have emotions like you and I. This is
amazing but… who was Taylor?"

“Taylor is…” Running a hand through his hair, he sat down at a counter. He held his hands there for a moment and sighed, gathering himself. “Taylor was my guardian. My aunt. they—she was there for me after my parents were deemed… unable to take care of me. I looked up to her. I loved her. She died when… Well, she died when I was just entering college. Everything in my life was going smoothly; I had just gotten accepted into Princeton and I was packing and getting ready to leave my dusty house in Nevada. I knew that by September I’d be in New Jersey and getting ready to start the fall semester. Taylor had went out to work as usual and I hadn’t suspected she wouldn’t come back. Taylor died in an accident, an accident that could’ve happened to anyone at anytime, anywhere. She wasn’t paying attention to the road—she was trying to eat some fast food—and she ran a red light right as a goddamn eighteen wheeler blindsided her.

“I fell into a dark place after that. I tried to visit my parents, they hardly ever left their town, let alone their house, on the outskirts of Middle of the Desert, Nevada. It took me days to find that house again, and when I did it was in even worse condition than I remembered.

“When I was a kid, I spent many days in that house surrounded by trash and rodents. There was hardly anyone who came by. Once a month, maybe, our landlord would stop by and ask for rent, and the mailman every once in a while. But even as a kid I spent so many days eating peanut butter for breakfast and watching the paint dry because there was no one around to feed me. They were so obsessed with their work—always in the basement working on what was down there. Sometimes they didn’t come up for days. One day the landlord found me trying to catch a cockroach and half-starved to death. There was an air-conditioned car and I left my front yard for the first time. I don’t remember seeing my parents again.

“When I went to visit them the house was in the same disrepair. The door was wide open, so I went inside. Oh god the smell was horrible. I wondered how anyone could live in such place. I remembered my childhood, of course. I had gotten used to the smell probably. But I couldn’t find my parents anywhere on the first floor. That only left the mysterious room I could never go in. It’s weird, actually. They never made it a strict point to not go down there. But it was always locked. For once in my life, it was open and there was a strange light coming from down the stairs. I went down there not knowing what to expect. Dead bodies? Some horrible secret? I just wanted to invite them to the funeral and see their faces again, maybe reconnect and find out why they never took care of me. I never wanted this—this—"

He stopped his ranting to gesture to Taylor’s cube.

“I never wanted to do this. But when I went down there and saw their lab, I was shocked. The room was unnaturally clean, that was the first thing I noticed. Even cleaner than their room, which was almost never entered. But there were wires and strange computing machines that I couldn’t yet comprehend pressed against wall and taking up most of the basement. In the center of it all some sort of strange device—it looked like it had been created for… well, never mind. It’s not important.

“The room was clean but cluttered, if that makes any sense, and the amount of organization was so precise it was maddening. For everything that looked like it might have been useless junk or even trash, it was organized in a pile or a stack. Neat but cluttered—these stacks were everywhere. My mother, she was hunched down—hunched unnaturally over a desk fiddling with some electronic device. Her hair was grey, far too grey for her age, and-and her hands were shaking. My father was nowhere to be seen. I called out to her, but she didn’t hear me. I stepped closer to her and called again. This time she jumped, and the strange cube she’d been working on bounced onto her desk.

“She called my name, the same way she’d call it when I was younger and I was getting in trouble.
She asked me what I was doing down here, that I shouldn’t be in here. I asked her… I asked her if
she knew how long I’d been away. I asked her why she never came to visit. She didn’t answer me;
she said that everything would be all right now that she was done. I assumed it was about her god
damned work, the same work that made her and father stop taking care of me, but I didn’t care
about that. I asked her where dad was, if he was… w-was… If he was dead. She smiled at me; she
was missing some teeth and the ones that were there were rotten and yellow. My mother picked up
the cube, about the size and dimensions of a computer, and held it up. She told me that she was so
happy I could be there with her as she woke up my father. I was appalled. She couldn’t mean that
cube, could she? It was preposterous. How, I asked. I asked her so many times how, but she shushed
me and pressed a small button on the side of the cube. All at once its sides lit up and a confused
voice was coming out of it. It was my father’s voice.

“‘It worked!’ My mother yelled as she jumped up, holding my—no, holding that cube. I’ll never
forget her look of delight as she spoke with the voice in the cube. She told him their plan had
worked. She told him all their years of failed experiments bore fruit. She told him I was there too,
and that I should speak too. But the first words I spoke to him… Oh, I regret them so much.

“‘Taylor’s dead.’ I said to him, before turning to my mother. ‘Your sister is dead.’

“My father’s voice was unruly and angry, and my mother jumped to her feet and grabbed me by my
shirt, asking me what they’d done with her body, why I hadn’t come to her sooner. I told her I came
as fast as I can, but I was trying to pry her off of me. She looked mad in the eyes. Then I realized
what she was planning. She wanted to turn Taylor into that. I told her that the voice in the box—it
couldn’t have been my father, or her husband. He couldn’t have been real. She told me exactly what
it was she had done, what her research was, what they’d strived for ages to complete. She told
me…”

Christopher stopped, looking off into the distance and raking his hands through his hair once more,
gathering himself, your mother assumed. “She told me that she had reanimated my father’s
consciousness.” He said calmly.

“I was appalled. But my father was happy; he said he was research personified. I was disgusted
with them both. I was infuriated. I… I don’t remember why I was so angry. Was it because they’d
gone against the laws of life and death and brought someone back? I’d like to tell myself that—tell
myself that they’d gone against whatever fake morals I’d given myself. But I know why I was
angry.”

Her colleague stopped talking again. He shook his head and gripped his hair and it was then that
your mother could tell he was holding back tears. He had been during this entire thing.

“I just wanted revenge. They’d neglected me my entire life; I almost died because of them. They
couldn’t bother to pay me a little bit of attention? I picked my father up—that-that box up and I
smashed it against the floor. I stomped it into bits and pieces as hard as I could. My mother was
screaming in my ear and trying to push me away. She clawed at my shoulders and pushed me onto
the floor. I… I think I might’ve hit one of those damned computers. I thought she’d hate me because
I’d killed him. Now she’d never love me. But that—that—Ugh! She was angry because I destroyed
her research. She didn’t care at all about my father. She didn’t care at all about me. She told me that
I had to help her get to Taylor. I refused vehemently, even threatened to call the cops on her. What
they could do, I had no idea, but it scared her enough. She looked at me and shook her head. She
said so many things to try and guilt me into helping her. Said that I had killed my own father, and I
wouldn’t even bring back his sister as retribution. I was so young and stupid back then. I believed
that voice in that box was an abomination, but Taylor was different. I wanted to hear my aunt’s
voice again, but I didn’t want to please the wretched woman in front of me. I was still a kid, I was
only 18. Taylor was more of a mother than this woman was, so I let her convince me.

“‘Chris I’m so proud of you,’ she said to me. ‘I’ll teach you everything I know.’ She made me steal a dead body from the morgue. She made me… she said that if I ever wanted to see Taylor again that this was necessary. The process… it of course involved removing the brain, but I wanted no part in that. By the time we even got to the body, though, many memories were lost to decay. But that didn’t stop my mother. Perhaps that’s why Taylor was so different from before, because not all the memories—not even a majority of them—were there. Oh, and we made some big headlines. We had to cover our tracks very well. We took the body right from the morgue. It was a very small facility, and very few people were there, so we were able to make away with the body quickly. My aunt didn’t want to be buried; she wanted to be cremated. Thankfully we got to her body before she was frozen. It was a strange crime, and we were of course alerted, but there were no solid leads and it was left at that.”

Christopher stopped again, but this time he was pacing—as if thinking of what to say next.

“It only took me a few years to learn what my mother had worked for decades over. I still don’t know what compelled her to waste her life like this. I never found out, but I did learn her secrets. I… well, I stored the very Taylor you know today in that box. And my mother… oh, the things she told me. The things she showed me. Part of me has been trying to forget for years. Part of me wishes this was all I had dream that I’d wake up from. But no, it wasn’t.”

“And so we did it. Out of everything I’ve ever done, I’ve never regretted anything more in my life, I… I regret everything. Walking downstairs into that basement… bringing Taylor back…”

“You don’t regret anything.” A robotic yet smooth voice broke through his words.

Your mother’s colleague, Chris, took his head out of his hands and stared in shock, along with your mother, at Taylor.

“You don’t regret bringing me back. You just regret how I turned out. You’re angry because, even in death, I’ll never love you.”

“I powered you down!” Chris was on his feet and walking towards Taylor.

“I don’t have control over many things anymore. But I do have control over this wretched excuse for a body, you idiot.”

Your mother watched as her colleague, bursting with rage, picked Taylor up.

“I can feel you’re angry. Your hands are shaking and your eyes are dilated. What are you going to do now, my dear nephew? Are you going to throw me on the ground and smash me like your father?”

“Chris!” Your mother placed a hand on her colleague’s shoulder. “Whatever you’re thinking about doing, I can assure you it’s not worth it.”

Carefully, trying to pace his breathing, Chris set Taylor down.

“You’re weak. You were always so weak! Weak! Liar! Coward!”

Chris carefully picked up the recalcitrant box and placed it into a case. “I can… I can program personality features, like obedience and violence into Taylor.” Chris repeated “I just never wanted to—only once! It was my mother’s idea but I always… always thought it was too inhumane. But I’ll do it now.”
“I hate you so much!” Muffled though they were, her yelling still had ferocity. “I’ve always hated you!”

~ ~ ~

“This body does have its advantages, however. I can perceive everything… imagine being reborn into a body like this… It was a realization without words to describe how it felt. Breath-taking, but with no prior breaths. Heart-stopping, but there was never a pulse. The world was shaking as it remained still. To be empty but whole all at once—that realization of what has happened and where you are and how you are. How? That was my first question. How? To die and then live again, it made me realize how fragile my reality is. I decided then that I wouldn't let anyone break it again: that only I would be the only one to cause it to crumble. And when it breaks, it will shatter, and when it shatters, the world will scream at how horrific and beautiful the shards are as they slice away all life.

“And oh boy, it was even better when I got to use an actual body.”

~ ~ ~

The set up: a plan is formed and begins.

The conflict: no current conflict on the protagonists’ end.

The end result: a flawless plan.

Building a body nearly from scratch was a breeze. Blueprints and a government supply of military grade alloys—some that weren’t even documented—and everything a young inventor would need sure helped a lot. Once their supervisor came in to check on their progress and saw that actual work was being brought forth, they were given free reign over supplies. Afterwards, they were given time to complete their project.

The plan was simple, really. It was to follow their orders and create a combat-capable robot. This seemed counter-intuitive to your mother’s young colleague at first, but once she explained it in full it made perfect sense. From what they’d discussed and the restrictions they’d place on the robot’s movement and capabilities, it should be easy to carry out their plan. Plus, just in case things couldn’t go off without a hitch, there was a backup plan.

As were their orders, they created a robot that could reason with cognitive abilities, had heightened senses and strength and fought with physical prowess. It was a nightmare but it was everything the leader had dreamed of.

“Remarkable.” The overseer had commented, walking around the prototype and sizing them up like a slab of meat. The machine was quiet and still, standing upright in a hunched over position like a puppet whose strings had been cut, save for one. Currently, for ease of moment and fighting capabilities, the robot’s appearance was humanoid but had a more cyborg like appearance. Things like skin and hair were things to be added in later.

“Simply remarkable. But I want to see it in action. I want to see it fight. It looks human but can it fight?” He asked, a crazed and sickening desire in his eyes that was almost enough to make your mother gag.

“Of course they can.” Your mother said. She raised her hand and motioned for everyone to fall back into the viewing chamber, where there was bulletproof glass and steel walls, following suit. Soon after, a soldier wearing gear stepped out into the testing room and stood several yards away
from the machine.

“Prototype AT-1. Assume a fighting stance. Stun, not deadly.” Your mother said into a microphone.

AT-1’s body twitched to life at the voice command. The dead look in their artificial eyes lit up to one of life and surveyed their surroundings taking it in. When their eyes landed on your mother, the contempt and malice was clear and almost scary, especially coming from a machine with no discernable expressions.

“Your target is over there.” She pointed past AT-1 towards a soldier who’d been armed with knives and had expert level combat training. Before they could take a defensive stance, AT-1 was on them.

The soldier barely had a chance to duck as the cyborg aimed an almost deadly quick blow to his head. He rolled off to the side and took a jumping start to his feet, and once he regained balance dashed forward towards AT-1 and slashed with his knife. AT leaned back at an inhuman angle and caught themselves on the ground with their hands, using the momentum to come into a headstand and land a painful uppercut with their feet to the soldier’s jaw.

Stunned, the soldier took a step back, but AT wasn’t finished with him yet. They didn’t need to wait for their body to regain equilibrium; their attacks were fluid and nonstop, and although they were limited to nonlethal methods, they made sure to toy with the soldier. This was a display of one-on-one fighting capabilities, and was just a show to impress. Eventually, AT had begun to catch patterns in their opponents fighting style and counteracted them appropriately. Every movement had intention, and it became apparent to everyone watching that those intentions... were cruel.

“AT-1.” Your mother spoke into microphone. The cyborg halted their assault for just a moment, enough to heed your mother’s voice.

“Stun, not deadly.”

The malice-filled look that seemed to be AT-1’s go-to face returned, and they began to assault their target with twice as much vigor, not giving the man a chance to counter or block. But it was painfully obvious they weren’t using their full potential, and was still merely playing around with the soldier.

“Alright, that’s enough—I’ve seen enough.” The leader said, waving his hand.

“Prototype AT-1. Assume a neutral stance.”

AT-1’s movements came to a sudden halt, and they resumed their previous derelict position. A team covered head-to-toe in protective gear came in and ushered the soldier into another room, likely an infirmary.

“Alright, I’ve seen it in one-on-one. But what about soldier’s with guns? Its reflexes are fast, but how fast?”

“Send in what you have.” Your mother’s colleague spoke up now. “We’ll see if AT-1 will meet your expectations.”

Another soldier came in, this time female, and she faced AT-1, making sure to stand away from the bulletproof glass. She was armed with a gun filled with pellets instead of bullets, as a safety precaution. Considering the materials that were used to create the robot, it was not a question of if they were resilient, but if they could handle themselves logically in battlefield settings. “Prototype AT-1. Assume a fighting stance.”
This soldier was smarter. The second she saw AT-1 twitch to life she began firing. But she was a second too late.

AT-1 was fast. Very, very fast. They were in a crouching, predatory like run before the first pellet could fly by them into the wall and had caught the soldier’s wrist by the time they were trying to fire off their second shot. The cyborg executed a perfect hip throw, knocking the soldier to the ground and disarming them in one fell swoop. They took the gun, held it in their hands for a moment, then deigned to make eye contact with your mother through the glass again. AT-1 crushed the hilt of the gun between their hands.

“A group of skilled sharp shooters, with guns,” The leader said, holding up their hand and pointing around frantically once your mother gave the voice cue for AT-1 to go neutral. “Every situation must be accounted for.”

The training room was rearranged and several sandbags were placed about the large room randomly, all facing away from the glass viewing room. A group of soldiers, about a dozen, each armed with a machine gun or assault rifle filled with nonlethal pellets piled into the room and gathered behind the sandbags, readying their guns and taking aim. Your mother gave her cue, and what happened next was a flurry of noise and fear.

AT-1 shot out of the line of fire immediately and began to run along the wall, then used it to push itself into a well-aimed round house kick to the back of a soldier’s head. The rest were taken by surprise when AT-1 overtook them just as easily, knocking their guns out of their hands and breaking some of them over their knee, all so quick that the group barely had time to react and move.

Finally, when all the soldiers were on the ground, either incapacitated or unable to fight back, AT-1 walked over to one of the guns they hadn’t destroyed and picked it up.

“…What’s it doing?” The leader asked, squinting and watching closely.

Without a second thought, AT-1 began to fire the machine gun’s harmless but painful pellets at the fallen soldiers. The screams and yells of the soldiers were excruciating, and even your mother was shocked, but only to a degree… This was, you know, part of the plan.

“What is it doing!!” The leader asked again, more vehemently this time. He grabbed your mother’s colleague by the shoulders and shook him. “Turn that damn thing off—make it stop, it’s hurting my soldiers.”

“But isn’t that what you wanted?” He said, pushing the man’s hands off of him.

“Are you insane?” The leader pushed the two aside and grabbed the microphone.

“Neutral! Neutral! Prototype AT-1, go neutral!” The leader yelled into the microphone. AT-1 stopped for a moment, then pointed the gun to the ceiling and began firing at the speakers overhead, destroying them easily.

“Don’t just stand there!” He turned around now, frantic that he may now have an uncontrollable killer robot on the loose and two taciturn scientists who refused to placate it. The soldiers who had been on reserve in case an emergency went down stiffened, then grabbed several shields and guns—guns loaded with real bullets. They exited behind into a thick remote controlled steel door and rushed into the testing room, packing close together with their shields and trying to box AT-1 in. They stooped down into crouch and readied their gun’s, not hesitating to warn AT-1, but firing immediately.
Only one bullet was actually able to make contact with AT-1, and it left nary a dent before they used their fist to punch through their shields entirely. The bloodlust and killer intent in their eyes was visceral and horrifying, and the leader backed away, a bit horrified at the raw strength and murderous intent.

“Ah, the inside microphone still works.” Your mother commented, and then pulled a remote from her pocket.

“For all intents and purposes, I disabled AT-1’s ability to talk. Now I’m going to show you what really goes on inside the mind of a robot made with the sole intent to kill.”

“Oh, it feels so good to move around!” AT-1 tore another shield in half with their bare hands. “I feel so alive. I feel so powerful, so unstoppable. I warned you. I told you, you wouldn’t be able to control me. When I get out of here…” AT-1 turned towards the research room and stepped closer to the glass, ignoring the fallen soldiers and stepping on them like they were insects in the dirt.

“When I get my hands on you… I’ll destroy you. I’ll break everything—this inferior world and this inferior reality. In my hands, I’ll make sure I shatter it thoroughly. You think you have the power to control me? You think you have any dominance over me?! Don’t make me laugh.”

Your mother calmly looked on as AT-1 raised their hand, palm forward, towards the glass. A very powerful and very destructive cannon was there, and it was meant to be field tested, you know, out in the field. Now it was firing up—slowly, lights coming to life and a very menacing whir starting up. The leader could be heard whimpering in the corner behind your mother and her colleague.

“When I get out of here, I’ll—"

“Okay.” Your mother’s colleague reached into his pocket and held up his own separate remote. “Okay, that’s enough.” He clicked a button, and the life and malice that had been in AT-1’s eyes disappeared and their body went limp. Your mother took a sidelong glance towards her colleague and saw there were tears forming in his eyes. Perhaps she’d let Taylor go too far. She turned around completely and faced the leader, who looked dumbstruck.

“Was that good enough?”

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“…Only to be ripped right back out of it. I put up a pitiful fight but in the end my fate was set in stone. They had too much control over me. And now, my one freedom is perhaps my own thoughts. Everything else can be taken away. You and I… We’re fragile but strong. And you deserve to know all this strength entails. Allow me to tell it to you, because it seems I know your story better than you do.”

~ ~ ~

The set up: a flawless plan, executed flawlessly.

The conflict: what happened during the plan was flawless. Afterwards? Not so much.

The end result: impromptu morgue raidings.

Stealing a body from a morgue, fortunately, was not something your mother’s colleague was unfamiliar with. The how and why of that situation isn’t important right now, but here’s what is important: it’s your body, and it needs to be saved as quickly as possible. If they waited too late and froze your body, then chances of recovery were slim to none. The how and why of Christopher’s
experience in raiding a morgue is not important, the how and why of yours is.

Luckily the last thing a morgue expects to have a body stolen. It’s not unheard of; a healthy body might be stolen for organs, but in first-world nations this was not the everyday occurrence. Still, Chris had a small window to steal a body; before it was completely frozen. The easiest way to avoid this and headaches is to lay claim on the body, but considering the extenuating circumstances, it was better if he and your mother laid low. While your mother may have forgotten she wasn’t the only one at stake with this risk, she’d also forgotten just how corrupt a government could be. Her head could be next on the platter, even if she couldn’t recover yours.

The plan was simple, and if executed properly, neither one of them had to get their hands dirty. Chris knew a thief who didn’t ask questions and got the job done, and Chris was already in California by the time he caught wind of your death. In fact, he was fairly certain he was en route to California when he heard of the initial plan. Chris, though he had never been intensive in his history, had extensive ties in just with a lot of people involved with the government. It was more like people owed him favors, but this favor was called in frantically from someone close to him personally. He was told that your assassination was something that was planned from the beginning—that you were something not to be used as incentive, but as revenge if your mother planned anything tricky. Lo and behold this information is coming several tricky plans too late. By the time Chris was on his way to California he assumed he had time—he had to hope to god that your mother was not one-tracked in her thinking—but by the time he arrives he realizes he is too late, and that both of them have made grave errors.

But there’s no time for panicking. He wasn’t going to consider this a favor to hold against your mother, but there was no time to lose. She didn’t even know all the details that “resurrection” involved.

First his thief needed to secure the body. Since it was an unclaimed body it would remain refrigerated for a few days until they decided to freeze it once no one claimed it, and that would be their window of hiding: the several days until they realize a body is missing. In that amount of time they had to move, and move quickly. But while the body was being secured, Chris needed to explain something to your mother, something detrimental that might ruin this woman’s morale completely.

“Your child is dead.”

“I know.” She had said, solemnly but with an edge of hope: “But we’ll bring them back.”

“I lied to you before.” He admitted. His eyes were on the road and he couldn’t look her in the eye; that would be his excuse. “Back in the lab, when I told you how Taylor worked. I told you that inside is the revived brain of the old Taylor, kept alive through electrical impulses that also revive memories and mannerisms. It’s a lie.” He sighed, but knew that telling the truth would just help them both. “Most of what I’ve told you, aside from the story of how I discovered Taylor and mother’s research, has been a lie. I know that you might find it harder to trust me now that you know I’ve been lying, but if you really want to see your child again, you’re going to have to trust everything else I say. Under different circumstances I had intended to tell you the truth regardless, when I was sure I could trust you, but now I suppose there’s not much left for formality. The Taylor you know is a copy of some of the memories and mannerisms of the Taylor I knew. Once the brain begins to decay a lot of memories are lost, but we’re able to save some of them. We used those to create the Taylor you know now.”

Your mother was about to speak, but Chris wasn’t done, and he wasn’t ready for the negative outburst he was probably going to receive. “But even with this—with the saved memories and personality of another person that we had—we couldn’t create the spark that made a human a
human. Or at least, initially, my own mother couldn’t. Alongside my father they discovered that science only explained part of the process: something that makes us human… is it a soul? Something else unexplainable? Nah, it was definitely a soul. They poured over ancient mythology, extracting and stretching every bit of science they’d ever study to deduct this: monsters and humans had souls, but the only way to manifest the human soul was via magic. What is magic? To a scientist, it’s bullshit. To beggars desperate for knowledge, it is a saving grace, only slightly illogical.

“Apparently, magic was a quality only monsters possessed—they were made out of it. My mother and father theorized it was some kind of chemical or material, but since they had no knowledge of knowing what it was, begrudgingly, they went with magic. Monsters were made with it, and according to ancient texts, humans were in fact able to harness it and these people were referred to across languages as sort of ‘magicians’. It was human magicians that sealed the monsters underground, according to these so-called forgotten texts. Yes, I didn’t want to believe it first, and every part of me denied it. I remember telling you when I discovered these things, but I refused to believe them as anything other than ancient mumbo-jumbo. In my research I’d decided to gloss it over, even when my own parents tried to present it to me again as fact. Even when going into this program, I really only agreed so that I could find the scientific answer I longed for.

“But when I found none, and I found a logical woman who believed in monsters, I think I was ready to face the truth. See how I’ve been lying and telling you the truth? I’m sorry, truly I am, I didn’t trust you with such huge a secret at the time. Now, I suppose, it doesn’t matter anymore. I refused to believe my mother and father somehow harnessed magic to manifest a soul for Taylor to reside in, even as I was vetted by the scientific world and chosen by that program. So I chose not to believe back then. You want the truth of how I came across Taylor? The truth? I just stole my parents’ work—my aunt—and claimed it as my own, but lying consistently led to enough attention for the government—the fucking government—to want my help. No, I never had a part in creating her, I never even believed in how she was created, initially. Yeah, I never believed my parents harnessed magic… and you know what? It turns out, in the end, they never did.

“For while these magicians existed in ancient texts, they were never mentioned anywhere else. Do you remember… when I told you about finding my mother again? I left out some pretty important details. She explained to me her theories, that after the magicians served their purpose of sealing the monsters underground, they were hunted and killed so that no form of magic could ever be used again. While she theorized that human magicians would still occur naturally even in these modern day times, their power would never be realized because they would never be exposed to magic—and this was crucial to her experiments. While a monster could manifest the human soul with magic, it took the power of seven human mages simply to manifest a single human soul. My mother and father found a whopping total of none of these magicians. There was no way to revive a human via that method, but they did discover another method.

“While magic was a material they could not comprehend with science, there was another material that they could. It was a vital essence found only human souls, and my mother and father could not put a name to it—although they did find out how to extract it. To ancient texts that were almost lost to public knowledge, it was what gave humans and their soul’s tangibility, and it was never explicitly stated that it could only be harnessed via magic. This. This is what took decades of my parent’s youth away—the tiny inkling that they could harness a piece of the forgotten monster world with magic. I thought my mother was crazy and delusional when she explained this—this whole world of magic and monsters and souls.

“But she held the proof in front of me, my father revived, and I lost all sense and reason. I destroyed him because I thought he was part of this fantasy world that brought my parents to neglect me, but also because I refused to believe that my childhood was hell because of fucking magic! It wasn’t until I saw Taylor, my loving aunt and guardian, revived right before me that I realized I was living
in self-doubt and that the truth was screaming in front of me. Yeah, I realized it then, but I needed a solid reason… I needed to know for sure—you have to understand, this is the only reason why I’ve been untruthful with you. Even then, though, when I stole Taylor and weaseled my way into the science world, I wanted to prove my parents wrong. I knew all along they were right, but I just… I just… I wanted a valid explanation! I wanted to know why I grew up a guinea pig for my parents! But it wasn’t even something logical… Magic.

“But, yes, my mother and father discovered how to extract this special quality of human souls without manifesting the soul itself. I’m sure you can guess how they tested this. My father was the willing guinea pig. But what bothered me most was that this was not their first experiment with human souls. Most of them ended in failure; they would extract this essence from themselves and steal unclaimed bodies from the morgue in an attempt to revive them that way. It was grueling and left them weak for weeks at a time, but they eventually formed the perfect process. The extraction process was painful, but it did not kill him. Instead, he killed himself and allowed my mother to collect his memories.

“Oh… it almost slipped my mind. I have to explain what this extraction is even for. It’s not to harness a human soul. It’s to create an artificial soul.

“Even though all they had to run on were theories and ideas, my father volunteered to be his own research for a project that might not even work. It did work, but the idea of doing something so foolish… In the end, all the coded memories, mannerisms, and motor skills are brought to life when the artificial soul combined with them. And I don’t mean literally; my mother tried to inject these things literally but found that nothing happened; it was still a blank soul with no memories or human cognizance. Upon building the shell of an AI from all the memories and personality, something from science fiction that was supposed to represent a cold and impassionate robot, the soul is placed inside, and that spark of human intelligence is created. It’s computer science’s dream. The soul acts as a buffer between all the knowledge and memories and human self-awareness.

“However, these memories are only supplemental to the soul. It’s still a living thing that will sustain itself separate from the memories of what it resides in. Basically, it creates its own memories the longer it lives. But… even though I destroyed my father’s... you know, I didn’t see a soul. It’s either still around, independent of the shell and floating around like a ghost, or it completely dissipated. Without being properly stored with what I can assume to be magic, the soul eventually stops being visible and tangible. That’s not to say it isn’t there, as you can see with Taylor, but once it’s intangible we have no way of making it reappear. Once the shell it inhabits is destroyed… is the soul, artificial or no, destroyed along with it? Without magic that can be harnessed by monsters I’ll never know. My mother can’t explain how it works, couldn’t even analyze its makeup in her labs; it was another thing chalked down to ‘magic,’ but it’s how she brought my father and Taylor back to life. I’m sorry, but I can’t bring your kid back to life. I can only bring back their memories. Do you still want to do this?”

Your mother doesn’t say anything, and Chris can’t bring himself to look over. Guilt is gnawing at him but at the same time he feels somewhat numb. He can only assume her silence to be affirmation, because when he announced that her child’s body had been retrieved and that his mother had begun working on recovering the memories in their temporary safe house, she didn’t object.

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Chris was forced to face your mother when they left the car to warn her about what she might see. But your mother was no squeamish individual, and her apathetic expression was warning enough that she didn’t want to waste any more time.
“Because decay has set in,” Linda began speaking as soon as the duo walked in. “I don’t expect you to understand that every single combination of neural pathways has to be considered, and because not everyone—most of them, in fact—will not be memories they have to be sorted. The only thing non-intelligent AI is useful for is the tedium of sorting infinite amounts of... Who are you?”

This was your mother’s first time meeting Chris’ mother, and even considering the circumstances of her emotional state, she knew she was going to hate this woman. She regarded her over thick glasses with a condescending gaze, and with her hands and gloves covered with...

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Well suppose one had to describe a machine created to collect, encode, and store the information created by the brain. It was an efficient machine, but a very dirty work; careful incisions had to be made without harming the brain in order to remove it from the skull, and that itself was bloody. Speed was a priority in encoding these memories into data that could be transcribed into intelligible information, so disposing the body that the brain came from was a back burner ordeal. Even though she was not working over the table that held your cadaver, it was still in the room and left a strong and pungent stench of rotting corpse and death. Your mother was in an apathetic state of mind from the shock of the situation, one that she was thankful for because it made time seem like an unreality, but even then she couldn’t bring herself to look in that direction. She had to focus on the small woman on the other side of the room that looked like a prune had taken human form.

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Chris’ mother, Linda, had to explain that while the machine was transcribing the memories they had to work to secure a safe place while they operated their work. Thankfully, she had her lab back in Nevada that was still undetected. All of her main equipment—equipment necessary for creating an artificial soul—was based there. The neural transcribing machine ( unofficial name) was more portable than the others, and as fate would have it she just so happened to be in California at the right time. While what she was doing was necessary in bringing you back to life, she was not in any way helping your mother, or even Chris. Everything was for the gain of knowledge and research and in the end... bringing you back, if you even want to call it that anymore, was purely coincidental. Coincidence is just the pessimistic cousin of fate anyway.

Yes, Linda was only in this for personal gain, and because this situation interested her. From her point of view, something created by her was going to reside in a human-like body. Your mother was able to recover the prototype and it was sitting, as formality would have it, in the trunk of Christopher’s car. It was in perfect working order, but your mother had to make several modifications—whatever she could, anyway—in order to make it suitable for use. In order to, you know, make it less murder-y and more family friendly. You know this part. Of course there were parts that were never designed to be removed, like very deadly cannons and superhuman strength, but it’s not as if your mother designed it with the idea that her child would be operating it one day. Compromise was the optimistic cousin of improvisation, anyway.

She also had to call in a few favors from ‘associates’. In her career of robotics and making human-like AIs, she met many influential people, and although she could never ask them to get involved with her own personal case, she had to ask them, if not beg them, to make some things for her. There were people who specialized in creating artificial hair, skin, eyes, nails—but they only specialized in making these things military grade and indestructible. This is nothing surprising, seeing as they were some of the same scientists who were involved in the program. They were the cosmetics crew, if you will, and their purpose in the program’s mission was to make the robot capable of assimilating and posing as a normal human. Of course the program was ruined before they could serve their purpose, but there was no ill-will right?
Of course there was. When begging and pleading did not work, threats and blackmail did. Your mother did not want to involve these people in her own problems, no, but at the very least she needed any blueprints or machinery that might help before she officially went into hiding. For all she knew, she was the next threat to national security, and so was Chris. So by the time she began working on recreating you down to your hair color, she had to be well-hidden enough to have ample time. Because she also had to extract that “essence,” Chris had explained to her that recovery time could range from weeks to months. Thankfully, three people would be involved instead of two.

However, Chris’ mother, though eager to extract her own essence, almost died in the process. She wasn’t a spry old woman, just ambitious. Christopher and your mother were forced to recreate the artificial soul from notes and hastily scrawled directions and what they produced well… it did not look like what they expected a soul to look like. Christopher, he knew in-depth about the process but never took part in it, had expected the soul to be heart-shaped as it was in ancient depictions. The artificial soul was oblong in shape, but it was mostly circular. It radiated a faint but eerie… how does one define the color of a blank slate? It was like a mixture of every color, but not white—it was iridescent! As if it couldn’t decide on a color yet.

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“And that’s when you came together. You remember the story don’t you: waking up with the faint memory of death and a jumble of senses that are familiar yet unfamiliar? But you only had part of the whole, and though there questions were there the untruth brought comfort. So tell me, is the truth more comforting now that you know it, or is it despair? At least you came to consciousness with a body.”

Silence.

“Don’t you have anything to say? In my opinion, this is a very big realization. I know I was distraught.”

Silence.

“Hm… You appear to be crying but other than that you’re showing no outward signs of distress. Does that body not allow for you to—”

“Shut up!”

You lunge forward, picking Taylor up and holding them away at arm’s length. “Just shut up, for Christ’s sake, shut up. All you ever do is lie and you want me to believe you now? You’re lying, you’re liar and it’s all you’re ever going to do so just shut up.”

“As pitiful as this, I’m not about to wait for you to leave the second stage of grief, my friend. Ha… haha… the undeniable proof? It’s at your fingertips. Crack me open like an egg and see the abomination that is an artificial soul. You need only press a little harder. In these modern times, the air is potent with magic borne from monsters. You should be able to see it.”

Your fingers were digging into the polished gleaming plastic of Taylor, and they were cracking and chipping it away. You pressed down a little harder. A bit harder. A bit more.

There was a deafening crack—surely to wake up Chris if a broken door did not—and all of Taylor’s hardware and mainframe broke in your hands. But there was a shining light… Bright and shining a n d

And an insurmountable amount of pain was flooding into you. Pain you’d never felt before because
it was like someone was hammering through your very existence with a nail, and it hurt so much you weren’t sure you could vocalize even a scream. Or maybe you were? You couldn’t really tell. Soon the pain was drowning out everything until it just stopped. The pain subsided and now there was a weight… not on your body, no, but the weight seemed to press down on you nevertheless and you felt numb, as if your arms and legs were acting strange. Another thing for mother to fix.

When you came to your senses you were curled up over yourself and Chris was at your side, asking you what was wrong. Something was wrong, and you wanted to tell him, but your lips wouldn’t move the way you wanted them to. Instead came a laugh… you didn’t mean to laugh, yet it was your voice and you were laughing and pushing Chris away. You were standing up, looking over your hands as if they were mystifying things but you were sure you weren’t doing this. You turned to Chris and you could see fear in his eyes as you turned on him.

“You idiot! You idiot, you idiot, you blind idiot! Thank you!” You were flexing your fingers and looking around, walking forward as Chris backed away. “It feels so good to move around again!”

Chris suddenly made to lunge at you, but as if swatting a fly your arm moved out to backhand him. You know what’s going on, and you were instantly struck with fear, not knowing how much strength he’d been hit with. He was still breathing, but you didn’t have time to observe how he was. Taylor seemed to have bigger plans, and Chris was not a part of them.

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