It's Not Too Late

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It's Not Too Late

by TheNinjaMouse

Summary

You haven’t had an easy life. The mistakes you've made have carved literal scars into your mind and body. A precious life was lost because of you. But now you've moved to a new city, trying to leave all that behind you. You've got a promising new internship at the radio station, new chances to start over. The foggy past is behind you.

And perhaps a bright new future is ahead. You don't know what to expect. Meeting a new family of monsters certainly wasn't even close to what you imagined. A certain pun loving skeleton who seems to have his own share of trauma catches your attention in particular. But can you trust him with your scars?

Notes

Ok, so I have finally given in and let myself fall completely into the Undertale trash bin. I had some trouble with the writing format and I'm still having some issues so if you see problems please let me know. This is a piece help with practice and to maybe connect with people who have depression and other such issues. There will be fluff, some angst and lots of puns. More to come!
Burn Baby Burn

Breathe.


Your heart races wildly in your chest.

Breathe.

You wipe at your forehead, sweat pouring down in streams. Almost over. It's almost over.

"Yes!" You gasp loudly as you approach the end of the sidewalk. A full circle complete! You come to a stop, leaning over slightly. Blood pounds in your ears. C'mon, stay strong! Pain is just weakness leaving the body! Ha! Whoever came up with that deserves to be punched in the face. Huffing, you check your watch. Hey, you managed to shave off a whole six seconds! You allow yourself a little victory air pump.

You never could have imagined the you from last year, the lazy couch potato, willingly running and exercising. Yet here you are, in an unfamiliar neighborhood, jogging in the brisk autumn air. You grab the water bottle hanging from your hip and finish off what's left. You head back towards your new apartment, walking briskly to keep your blood pumping. You look around as you walk, taking in the sights of your new home. You've been extremely lucky in finding a place like this. It's a fairly new complex, each building arranged in a squashed kind of circle. The innermost ring of buildings hold apartments on the top three levels while the bottom is filled with various shops and diners. A small park sits smack dab in the middle of the complex. You can hear the shrieking laughter of children as you pass by. The park is mostly filled with monsters of various sizes, with a few humans sprinkled here and there.

That's right, the management lady had mentioned that this was a monster heavy neighborhood, which probably explained the reasonable apartment rates. It had been about six months since the barrer at Mt. Ebbot had fallen and monsters swarmed out to join the human race. Of course at the time, you had been hundreds of miles away so the news, while startling, was a little detached and seemed more like a fairy tale. Monsters, real monsters had suddenly joined your world? It seemed like a wonderful, yet impossible fantasy.

But now you're right in the middle of it. It's only your second day in the city but so far all of the monsters you had come across had been open and friendly, if not a little strange. You're a little ashamed to admit you had stared upon first seeing them. Manners, as they were in most small towns, had been drilled into your head since you were little. But...monsters! Real monsters live in the city! How can you not stare?

You swerve past a group of strange jelly looking creatures on your way up the stairs, taking care not to step on any of them. You can already tell that this is going to take some getting used to. You haul your burning legs up to the second level. Your apartment just so happened to be in one of the few buildings in the inner circle where the shop below is empty, which makes being on the second level worth it. You don't want to deal with the noises that will undoubtedly come from a bar or other such thing. You reach your door and fumble with your keys.

Your head suddenly jerks up as you notice a strong burning smell drifting from the apartment on the other end of the hall. Right on cue, a shrill beeping roars to life. Your heart starts to pound again, for an entirely different reason.
"BROTHER HELP ME THE DEVICE IS SCREAMING AT ME!"

The voice is loud enough to carry through the walls, though you have a feeling that's not entirely's the voice's fault. It sounds like a little kid. You quickly move to the door the shrill noise is coming from and knock as loud as you can. A moment later, the door opens and your jaw drops in surprise.

It's a skeleton. He's close to your size and wearing a blue jacket dusted with what looks like flour. Small pinpricks of white stare at you from deep black eye sockets. He blinks at you for a second and tilts his head.

"heya-"

“BROTHER! THE STOVE IS ON FIRE!”

You look past the first skeleton to see a second one, much larger than the first waving his gloved hands at a small grease fire, clearly panicking. Okay...not a kid. Or maybe he is? Is he wearing...armor and shorts? Despite the odd scene in front of you, your eyes are immediately drawn to the flames on the stove. Your breath catches and...oh no, this was a mistake, you shouldn't be here, not so close to the fire-

The skeleton reaches for a cup of water and true fear shoots through you. No time to be scared! "Don't!" You push past the shorter skeleton, running to knock the cup away. "Do you have baking soda?"

When you're met with a shocked "NYEH?" you instead look around and grab a large pot full of noodles on the sink and dump its contents. You only hesitate for a moment before slamming it over the fire. It only takes a moment for the flames to die out. You let out a deep sigh of relief. That was close. Your hands are shaking slightly. You hope they don't notice. Oh. Wait. You jerk back from the stove, realizing that you had just burst into a complete stranger's home and dumped spaghetti noodles all over their floor.

The two skeletons are staring at you.

"Oh! Sorry, I um...."

The one in the blue jacket suddenly smiles widely. "heh. looks like things got rather heated there, huh?"

"BROTHER!" The taller skeleton's shriek nearly matches the still beeping alarm.

Caught off guard, you can't help but snicker at the pun. You point up at the alarm, which is our of your reach. "Hold that button down and it'll stop."

The taller skeleton reaches up and easily pushes the button. The harsh noise dies away and your shoulders relax slightly.

"THANK YOU HUMAN!" Before you can blink, you're wrapped up in a bony hug, your feet leaving the ground.

"Um, you're welcome," you choke out, patting the skeleton's arm. "I'm super sweaty...."

He puts you down and you take a moment to catch your breath. You gesture to the ruined pasta spread across the ground. "I'm really sorry about that. Water makes grease fires worse and I just grabbed what I could without thinking."
"don't worry about it." The short skeleton winks at you. "i don't wanna think about what pasta-bly could'a happened if you didn't."

You hold back a chuckle. "Well, water neighbors for?"

"OH MY GOD." The big guy groans loudly and slaps a gloved hand across his face as his brother lets out a loud cackle. "NOT ANOTHER ONE."

Fighting back your giggles, you stick your hand out. "Now that I've completely ruined your dinner; hi! I'm _____. I live down the hall."

The short one takes your hand. Startlingly white bones grasp your palm and you can't help but stare for a moment. It feels odd, almost like smooth stone. You bring your gaze back to his face. The seemingly permanent grin on his face grows slightly.

"sans the skeleton," he says.

Your other hand is suddenly gripped by much larger, gloved ones. He shakes your entire arm enthusiastically. "I AM THE GREAT PAPYRUS," the taller brother crows victoriously. "THANK YOU ONCE AGAIN FOR SAVING OUR HOME FROM ANOTHER FIRE."

"It's no problem-another fire?" you question, but Sans waves your concern away.

"happened a long time ago. no biggie."

"Um okay then." You shift a little guiltily. "I'm seriously sorry about the mess, can I help clean it up? Order you a pizza?"

"DO NOT WORRY ABOUT THE MESS HUMAN. I AM WELL TALENTED IN THE AREA OF CLEANING. MY BOTHER ON THE OTHER HAND...." He glares at Sans who just shrugs.

"seriously, don't worry about it," Sans says to you. "we've got leftovers."

You still feel bad despite their assurances. "Are you sure? I was gonna order a pizza anyway. All my cooking stuff is still in boxes."

"OH SO YOU ARE NEW TO THIS APARTMENT COMPLEX?" For some reason Papyrus looks pleased at this news. "I SHALL MAKE YOU MY WONDERFUL SPAGHETTI AS A WELCOMING PRESENT. THAT IS A HUMAN CUSTOM YES?"

"Oh you don't have to!" Your protest is cut off as Papyrus guides you to the door, talking over you.

"DO NOT FRET HUMAN IT IS NO TROUBLE. NOW GO PREPARE YOURSELF FOR DINNER! I SHALL WHIP UP A NEW DISH IN NO TIME!"

You send a glance to Sans, who once again just shrugs before the door closes behind you. Well, it certainly isn't how you were expecting the evening to go, but it looks like you've just made dinner plans with two skeletons living down the hall.

Man, city life is crazy.
Is Spaghetti Supposed To Taste Like This?

Chapter Summary

In which you discover that Papyrus loves running and cooking. He is considerably better at one of these things than the other. Sans continues to be a lazy bum.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this is short, I wanted to pump out another chapter while I was waiting for the 3 Doors Down concert. Enjoy!

*Edit*

Fixed formatting errors!

Writing Blog
Main Blog

It's not until you duck back into your apartment and lean heavily against the door that you fully realize what had just happened. You've moved in next to two living (!) breathing (?) skeletons! Not only that, you somehow managed to ruin their dinner and get yourself invited over in the same night. You press a hand against your face. It's still slick with sweat from your run. Oh you must look like an utter dream. Soaking wet and screaming about baking soda. Fantastic start to making a good impression.

No, stop that. Thoughts like that only lead to bad places. You can do this! You had promised yourself that things would be different here. Worrying about stuff like first impressions isn't going to help. Thus motivated, you quickly hop into the shower. Papyrus hadn't specified when the food would be ready, but if he's making more spaghetti, you figure you've got at least thirty minutes.

Exactly twenty-one minutes later the doorbell rings.

"Geez that was fast!"

"Just a second!" you call around your toothbrush. You finish with your teeth, fluff your still damp hair and grabbed the bag of sugar cookies you had tossed on the counter earlier that morning. You had been planning on saving those for unpacking time but you can't go over with nothing when they're offering you dinner. You reached the door and have a sudden thought. Were they bringing dinner over here? You glance at the table. It's barely visible under the mound of boxes on and around it. Too late to worry about that now.

It was still a bit of a shock to open the door to a grinning skeleton. It's the short one. He's alone, which put your worry about where dinner is happening at ease.

"heya," he says in way of greeting.
"Hi," you say a little breathlessly, shutting the door behind you. "Man your brother wasn't kidding when he said he could whip something up in no time."

"it's mostly leftovers," Sans admits with a small shrug. He eyes the bag in your hand and you hold it up.

"I'm not exactly prepared but I hope you guys like cookies." Do skeletons even eat cookies? For that matter, how do skeletons even eat spaghetti? The absurdity of the situation is enough to make you smile as you follow Sans back to his apartment. You have to assume there aren't like human skeletons. Following that train of thought, you really have to try not to make assumptions about anything else.

"HELLO AGAIN HUMAN!" Papyrus pokes his head out of the kitchen as the two of you entered the apartment.

"Hey Papyrus," you say with a grin. Despite his booming voice and overall size, you find yourself oddly at ease with the cheery skeleton. "That didn't take long at all."

"OF COURSE!" He shouts proudly. "A ROYAL GUARD MUST BE PREPARED TO LEAP INTO ACTION AT ANY MOMENT."

"wow paps. sounds like you were really on guard."

Your laugh comes out louder than you meant it to and you slap a hand over your mouth. Sans looks utterly smug with himself. Papyrus threatens to throw the bowl of spaghetti at Sans and you quickly take it from him. "Should I put this on the table?"

"YES! THANK YOU HUMAN!"

You head over to their table, which you notice has a few of those small ketchup packets you can get from any fast food place. You pick them up and set them on the counter. A moment later, Sans strides by and sweeps all of them into his coat pocket. You give him a questioning look and he just shrugs before joining you at the table.

The rest of the night quickly leads even more bad puns and cheerful talking while you eat as much of the spaghetti as you can stomach. You try not to think about how mushy it is and insist you're just a light eater when Papyrus offers you more. You talk mostly about the neighborhood, which places to visit for the best grub and what parts of the city to avoid. It seems, sadly but not surprisingly, that certain areas were less monster accepting than others. After dinner the conversation moves to the faded couch in the living room. You and Sans both take a side while Papyrus seems content to sit on the ground in front of you.

"WHAT BRINGS YOU TO THE CITY?" Papyrus asks while munching on a cookie.

It's fascinating to watch the food simply vanish in his mouth. Don't stare! You shake your head and think about what to say. You had already mentioned that you were from out of town but as to the WHY....well, you can't exactly tell your traumatizing story to a pair of monsters you've just met.

"You know," you say slowly, playing with a loose thread on the arm of the couch. "Just needed a change of pace. New scenery. I have a friend of a friend who said they could get me a job at a local radio station but it would mean moving here. So here I am."

"you work at the radio station?" Sans asks curiously. "which station?"

"99.5 EBBT. Technically I start tomorrow," you say with a light laugh. "Feel free to listen, you
might eventually hear me."

"WOWIE!" Papyrus' eyes are shimmering. "DOES THAT MAKE YOU A STAR LIKE METTATON?"

Like who? Oh that robot that could change his body from a square thing with wheels to a silver skinned 'hunk'. Or so the media called him. You've seen him on t.v before but he had never really held your interest. "No not like that," you say quickly, shaking your head. "I'm not going on the air any time soon anyway."

"then what do you do?" Sans stretches out his legs while talking. The edge of his pink slippers brush against your leg.

You give him a bit of a bemused look before answering. "Whatever they want me to do for now. Pinch voice over work if I'm lucky. Printing out reports and fetching donuts and coffee I would imagine. Basically I'm a glorified intern. I'd like to be on the show itself," you admit. "But I don't have much experience."

At that Papyrus stands up suddenly, striking a pose. "DO NOT FRET HUMAN! YOU SHALL BE THE BEST INTERN THEY HAVE EVER SEEN! THEN THEY WILL HAVE TO GIVE YOU A PLACE ON THE SHOW!"

His enthusiasm throws you a little and you give him a shaky smile. "I really hope so Papyrus." You glance over at Sans. If he noticed your odd reaction, he doesn't show it. You take the following silence as your cue and pull yourself up with a groan. "Speaking of the station, I'd better turn in. I start nice and early as it is and I'm pretty tired after my run."

"run?" You had no idea how he does it, but Sans moves his grinning expression into a grimace while continuing to maintain a pained smile. He's made of bone right? Bone shouldn't be able to change and shift like that. Papyrus on the other hand looks like he's going to cry.

"HUMAN Y-YOU LIKE EXERCISE?"

"Um, call it a recent interest," you say, patting his arm a little cautiously. Are skeletons against exercise? They don't have an visible muscles, so you can't imagine it's something that they would do. "That's why I looked so sweaty and awful earlier."

"i was a little too busy paying attention to the fire on the stove to notice that," Sans says dryly, snuggling deeper into the sofa.

Papyrus grabbed your hands tightly. "MAY I JOIN YOU IN YOUR RUNS PLEASE?"

That surprises you. You gape at his hopeful expression for a second. He's all puppy eyes and sweetness. How can you say no to that face? "Sure you can. Though," you glance at his absurdly long legs, "you may have to slow down for me. I'm not very fast."

"THAT IS NOT A PROBLEM." He wrapped you in another (ha!) bone crushing hug. "I AM SO HAPPY! I CANNOT GET THAT LAZY BONES TO DO ANY SORT OF EXERCISE."

Said lazy bones waves tiredly at you, eye sockets half closed. You purse your lips. "You know," you whisper in a conspiring voice as you leaned forward, "I too used to be...a lazybones!"

Papyrus gasps like you had just admitted to a dark secret. You swallow your laugh, glancing at Sans. He's shaking slightly, bony hand pressed over his teeth to hide his widening smirk.
"I converted. Maybe we can change his mind together!"

Sans' loud laughter at that follows you all the way out of the door. After exchanging numbers and agreeing on a time to run the next evening, you head back to your apartment. Sudden exhaustion washes over you. You put on your loosest pair of p.j's and fall on top your your air mattress. It really needs to be blown up some more but honestly all you want to do now was sleep. You're about to close your eyes when your phone beeps at you. Groaning, you grabbed it to see a text from an unknown number. Papyrus already?

?: knock knock

Definitely not Papyrus. You smirk and decide to play along.

y: who's there?

s: water

y: water who?

s: water you doing after work?

y: unpacking I guess. Why?

s: i know paps isn't the best at cooking. i wanna say thanks for saving the kitchen. do you like burgers?

You feel your heart speed up slightly. OKAY slow down there sweetie.

y: yeah I like burgers :) I'm done at 4.

s: cool

You put the phone down after double checking your alarm. An odd feeling lingers in your chest. It takes you a moment to place it. Excitement. Pure, happy excitement. Man, you haven't felt like this in a long time. That dark corner of your mind, the part the overwhelming fogginess came from, rears it's ugly head and whispers that you can't, you shouldn't feel such happiness. You roll over and tried to push that thought down. You let your fingers run over the faint scars on your arm.

"I'm allowed to be happy," you whisper. It's just a phrase that some doctor had told you to say in moments like this. It doesn't always help, but the habit of saying it was born a long time ago. So now you say it every night because maybe if you say it enough times, you'll start to believe it.
You wake the next morning, slightly disoriented and sore from the flattened air mattress. It takes a few moments of looking around your new room to get your bearings. You rise excitedly, eager to get going. There had been no nightmares last night and that is as good a sign as any that the day is going to go right. You shower, put on your best 'first day of work' clothes and duck out the door, grabbing a bagel to go. You glance towards the parking lot where your dusty car sits before looking at the time on your phone. What the heck, it's a beautiful morning and according to google maps you're only a fifteen minute walk away from the station. After the two day drive to get here, you're in no hurry to get back in the car. Besides, you've got plenty of time.

You stroll along, taking nibbles of your bagel. It's still pretty quiet out. The sun hasn't quite chased away the chill of night and most of the windows you pass are foggy with dew. Soon enough you reach the station. A large sign proclaiming "Home of the Mountain's Best Music!" makes it hard to miss. The neighboring buildings on either side are a thrift sore you make note of for later and what looks like a grill/bar mix called Grillby's. It's too early for the place to be open but it might make a nice spot for lunch once in a while. You grin, a nervous excitement making your stomach turn. Taking a breath, you head inside. It's pretty much what you imagined it would be. The greeting room is simply furnished with a few chairs and a receptionist deck. The walls are covered in framed posters of various rock bands. All have signatures and little messages left by the members.

There's a dark skinned girl behind the desk who looks up at the tinkling door. She has the craziest hair you've ever seen. It's partially shaved in an undercut, and dyed crimson red. The curly top is a rainbow mix of purple, blue and dark green. You stare at her jealously. You could never pull off hair like that.

"Hey!" She stands and comes to meet you, revealing arms full of tattoos and a halter top jacket with ripped jeans. Oddly enough, she doesn't have a single piercing.

Suddenly you feel extremely overdressed.
"You must be _____." She says cheerfully, brushing a few strands of her colorful hair back.

Your voice gets stuck in your throat for a second. "Uh yep that's me! I guess I got the wrong dress code. I love your hair."

"Aw thanks." She proudly fluffs it. "Don't worry about dress codes. We don't have them. Just wear what makes you comfy. If that's slacks and heels, you do you."

Now that is a dress code you can dig. The rainbow girl introduces herself as Abby and leads you on a tour through the studio. It's a two story building, with the main recording booth and sound systems on the second floor. The first floor holds mostly offices and a break room, also covered in band photos. Abby leads you upstairs and the two of you stand outside the glass panel of the recording booth. An older guy on the soundboard in the same room as you barely spares a glance as you enter, fiddling with all kinds of buttons.

"That's Joe," Abby provides. "He's friendlier when he's not working."

You nod a greeting at Joe, who grunts, and turn your attention to the two people in the booth. A tall elegant lady with bottle blond hair pulled into a loose ponytail and a man a few years older than you with a sharp scar running down the side of his right cheek and black hair that falls to his chin. That has to be Tod, the guy who had given you the job. The sight of the scar on his face makes your own arm itch a little. You've spoken with Tod a few times on the phone before moving out here. After a few words it had become clear that both of you had experience with...well anxiety to put it lightly. He hadn't asked for more details, and simply offered you the job.

"That's the latest news for traffic. Not a bad day for driving huh Em?" Tod glanced up as he spoke and gives you a short wave, his voice carrying through speakers set up around the room.

Em follows his gaze while smiling lightly. "Get out and enjoy that air while you can. Seems like we've got some serious cold fronts heading our way over the next week."

Tod removes his headphones and nods at Em who seamlessly moves into the next segment on her own, talking about some local band performing a few days from now.

"_____" Tod walks over to you and warmly shakes your hand. "Welcome! What do you think of the studio?"

Oh good heavens he's a good looking man. Scar included. That combined with his wild locks made me look rather...wild. Sudden shyness made your voice a little quiet. "It's really nice. Thank you for welcoming me here."

He laughs good naturally. "No need to be stiff. We're an open book here." He clapped you heartily on the back. "No point in standing around then. Let's get you to work."

This work turns out to be mostly sitting around and listening to the various types of music that the station specialized in. You recognize several of the bands and songs, bobbing your head in time with the music. There are many pieces you didn't recognize but definitely make it on your 'to download' list. For a good two hours Tod has you sit by Joe as he worked. The time is spent in awkward silence, as you feel he wouldn't appreciate being interrupted by questions. Abby seems to realize this and takes pity on you and asks for some help with front desk work. It turns out there is a lot more to running a station than picking a song and hitting play. Artist permissions, royalties, guest appearances are just a few of the things that needs to be worked on. People always seem to be
coming and going and the names and faces started to blur together in a whirl of introductions. The only one you don't get a chance to talk to from is the blonde from this morning.

Before you know it, the clock hits 4 pm and then Abby is giving you a list of new music to familiarize yourself with "if you want to be hip with the latest hits!" on your way out the door. In a bit of a daze you leave the station. Talk about a whirlwind of a day! It's just a shame you hadn't had a chance to go into the studio itself where the various talk shows happened. Baby steps! You'll get there.

"huh, look's like i was right."

You nearly jump out of your skin at the sudden voice right behind you. You whirl, heart pounding. "Good g-! Sans!"

The skeleton stands there, hands shoved in his jacket pocket. Aside from switching out the pink slippers for a pair of untied sneakers, he's wearing the same blue coat/sweat shorts combo as last night. He closes an eye socket in an exaggerated wink. "sorry pal. didn't mean to rattle your bones."

You groan loudly. "First you scare me then you hit me with that awful pun. You're quite a guy."

He only grins in response.

"What are you doing here?" He couldn't have possibly...followed you, right? Oh great way to be a paranoid git.

Sans points up at the radio sign. "i didn't think of it til this morning. knew i recognized ebbt from somewhere. it's a funny coincidence. the place i wanna take ya for burgers is right next door. figured there was no point in making ya walk all the way back to your place."

Leave it to a lazy bones to be considerate about something like that. You glance past him to the bar. "Oh! Wow, that is funny. You could have texted me. Were you waiting long?"

"nah. just got here myself."

Well at least you hadn't made him wait. "I was wondering if the food was any good. Have you eaten here before?"

He laughs loudly and you wonder if you're missing a joke or something. "you could say that. c'mon let's eat."

Sans leads the way into the bar. The moment the two of you step in, warmth washes over you, taking off the chill from outside. You haven't been in many bars yourself, but you're pretty sure they're don't typically smell like a campfire. You get your answer for the odd smell a moment later. The man behind the bar is literally on fire! The sight of the flames makes you tense up, bring up memories you don't want to visit. Instinctively, you reach out and grab Sans' sleeve. "He's-!"

Sans stops and looks at you with mild concern. "you ok there?" He follows your horrified gaze to the man. "that's grillby. he's a fire monster. well, elemental actually. he's supposed to look like that."

Right of course. You flush. Stupid, letting yourself get worked up that. "H-heh sorry! I thought maybe I was gonna have to swoop in to save the day again!" Sans watches you for a second, gauging your face. You look away from him before he can see how shaken you are.

"i guess if you're not use to it, seeing him could make anyone a little hot under the collar."
You let out a relieved laugh and push at his shoulder slightly. "Nah, I just have a burning passion to be a hero."

Sans chuckles, his grin reaching new levels. "nice."

As he leads you to the bar and your initial shock over the burning man fades, you look around the rest of the bar. It's filled mostly with monsters, many of those of a dog like nature. They all seem to know Sans, calling out greetings as you pass by. You try not to feel self conscious with the sensation of curious gazes on your back. You quickly join Sans on the stools. You can't help but notice charred spots here and there on the surface of the table.

"hey grillbz." Sans waves lazily as the monster approaches. He turns to you. "you ok with the burger?"

"Huh? Oh yes!," you say quickly. Grillby has a pair of glasses suspended on his face but you can't see any sign of a nose. Or even eyes! Grillby notices you looking and nods in your direction, letting out a pop and crackle, like burning logs.

"drink?" Sans translates.

"I'll take a water. Please," you add and Grillby makes another soft crackling noise.

"too bad, he doesn't touch the stuff," Sans says with a wide smirk.

Oh god! Of course he wouldn't! "I'm sorry!" you stutter out. "I'm good with just the burger."


Oh good grief he's teasing you. You groan and put your face in your hands. "You're kind of a jerk you know that?"

"maybe. but you're smiling."

Crap you are. Grillby leaves to get your order as you fight to keep the grin off your face. Sans turns and makes light conversation with a white dog wearing a suit of armor also sitting at the bar. You watch curiously, fighting your urge to pet him. These aren't normal dogs, you can't just go around petting them! The dog leaves quickly (and you're only slightly disappointed) right as your food arrives. You didn't see Grillby bring it, but there's a glass of water next to your burger. You look pointedly at Sans and take a deep swig.

"so i've been dying to ask you since last night-"

You choke on your water and Sans thumps your back. "Gah! About what?" you cough.

Sans turns back to his plate of fries, dumping almost the entire bottle of ketchup on them. Ignoring your horrified expression at this misuse of condiments, he says "i'm not trying to sound ungrateful about the whole saving the apartment thing but i wanna know. why did you do it? you could'a just kept on going, doing your...running thing. but you came over and knocked on the door. i thought you were just gonna complain about the noise or something. first time we've had a neighbor actually run in and deal with it."

"Have you ever had to deal with a screaming fire alarm for any amount of time?" you ask, picking up your burger. "It's torture. Honestly I was gonna just make sure you knew how to turn it off before the whole apartment was triggered." You took a bite of the burger and nearly moaned. "This is
amazing!" You eagerly continued devouring the burger as Sans plays with his fries, not really eating them.

"and that's it?"

You swallow your bite and meet the white lights of his sockets. He's staring at you, like he knows that there's more to it than just that. You set your burger down and take a sip of water before answering him. "Well... I uh. I've had experiences with fires in the past." You're staring down at your plate, unable to meet his gaze. "I used to love campfires and candles but now even just the smell of burning makes me a little... anxious? It's hard to explain why. When I think that something might actually be on fire I just panic. So that's why I kind of freaked out when we came in here...."

And now you're babbling. Sans puts his hand over yours. Without realizing it, your fingers have curled into a fist. The feeling of his fingers on yours is soothing. The bones of his hand are thick, thicker than you would have figured skeleton fingers to be. Fingers? You didn't know the actual term for the individual bones. It's been a very long time since your last health class. He taps the back of your hand gently until you relax your grip.

"sorry kid," Sans says softly. "didn't mean to dig up old bones."

"Was that supposed to be a pun?" Regardless, it brings a smile back to your face. "Sorry. It makes sense that you'd want to know why some strange girl would just run into your apartment without warning."

"not gonna lie. it surprised me." Sans takes a large bite of his soaked fries and you can't help but feel a little disappointed when he takes his hand away. But even with that, you don't feel completely overwhelmed with regret at talking about it. It's odd. Normally you keep stuff like that bottled up. It's just easier not to say anything about it, especially since it's something that can't change. But Sans is so easy to talk to. You'll have to watch yourself and make sure you don't say too much. You don't want to scare him away with your history. You've literally known him for a day!

"you got kinda quiet. you ok?" Sans has nearly finished his plate and is using a plastic spoon to sweep up the left over ketchup.

You've got to keep it together. You give him a reassuring smile. "Yeah! It was just a very intense first day. And now I'm remembering all the unpacking I still have to do." You groan and put your head on the table. "I can't keep putting it off or I'm gonna be living out of boxes forever. Moving sucks."

"want some help unpacking?"

You lift your head and put your hand over your chest in mock surprise. "Is the lazy bones offering to actually get off his butt and help?"

"i was thinking more of a management position from the couch."

You giggle and smack him lightly. "That's my role you bone head."

His eye sockets seem to light up and you catch yourself. You groan.

"that pun alone deserves a reward. i don't have anything else planned for the night anyway," he says, finishing off his plate. "put it on my tab grillbz!" he calls to the fire elemental, who you swear somehow manages to roll his eyes.

You make a face at Sans. "That much ketchup can't be good for you."
Sans hops down from the stool. "don't worry. i won't let it ketchup to me."

Your shriek almost matches Papyrus' from last night. "Okay just for that you are on dish duty for the night!"

"well dish sucks."

"Oh my gosh!"
This is utterly surreal. You glance over at the skeleton seated among stacks of your books, making no effort to actually put them away. He's leaning against the massive beanbag that graced your living room, flipping through a thick book on various musical composers. Needless to say he had been thrilled to see the bag the moment the two of you got back from Grillby's and made himself right at home.

"i am officially declaring myself manager of the beanbag," he had drawled, almost disappearing in its depths.

"I thought we agreed you were on dish duty."

"you agreed to that."

It's probably better that you handled your dishes anyway. You had put the CD Abby had given you on in the background and the beat had helped you fall into a groove of tidying up. Eventually Sans slid from the beanbag and pulled the box labeled books towards him and for a moment you had been hopeful he was actually going to help. Hence the moment of clarity that has you shaking your head in disbelief. You have a skeleton, in your living room and you're annoyed he's being lazy and spreading your books everywhere. It's almost like you've fallen into one of the stories you love so much.

"was it a requirement for all these old composers to have such out of control hairstyles?" Sans asks suddenly. He holds up the book, pointing to a page with a portrait of Johann Bach, wild gray locks and all.

"Um, I think it was just the fashion styles of that time period," you say as you struggle to reach a higher shelf. Better to put the long term storage stuff up high and save the lower shelves for stuff you use often. "I'm not too familiar with older sections of classical music history. I'm more of a modern day music nut."

"i guess you could say-"
"SANS."

"it's not your **forte**!"

"Ha. Ha," you laugh dryly. "You gotta try harder than that. Or are you just running out of ideas?"

"i'll come up with something. i've been told i'm pretty clef-er."

That one gets a giggle out of you. "You know," you point out as he closes the book and sets it down, "there is a bookshelf literally in arms reach. Could you maybe put my babies on there instead of the floor? Alphabetically by series please!"

He groans loudly, pausing in his casual placement and moves them around. "yes ma'm."

You watch him do for this for a second, feeling that old sense of doubt poking its head up. "If it's that big a bother you didn't have to offer." You say this quietly, kind of hoping he didn't hear. If it truly was bothering him you didn't want to push but you really didn't want him to leave either. What was going on with you?

He seems to hear the hint of your serious question. "nah. i don't mind. i just like messing with you." He looks at another full box of books he hasn't even opened it. "you really like reading huh?"

"It's my drug," you say rather proudly. You finish with the dishes and stretch when it's all done. Sans has fallen silent and you turn to find him actually sitting up, nose deep in your encyclopedia of stars and space. His eye sockets are wide, the lights flickering quickly back and forth across the page with intense interest. You decide now is as good a time as any to take a break and join him on the bean bag. You plop down just above him on the bag itself so you sit a little higher than him.

"Do you like spacey science stuff?" you ask him, curling your feet up under you. He doesn't answer until you actually tap him on the shoulder and he jumps slightly. His gaze flickers to you, his smile more gentle than you'd ever seen it.

"heh, sorry. got lost there for a second. what did you say?"

You laugh. "I guess that answers my question." You lean closer to him, trying to get a look at the page. It's the chapter titled 'History and Constellations'. "Ah, excellent choice! I love constellations. I think my favorite is the story about Orion chasing the seven sisters." You point to the illustration in the book, tracing the patterns of the stars.

"that does sound like a good story."

You can't quite place the expression on Sans' skull. He almost looks a little...sad? He notices you looking and a little sigh hisses out from his teeth.

"we didn't really have stars. you know, down there."

Oh that would make sense. Being underground there wouldn't be a view of the sky. You couldn't imagine what that must be like. Living and never seeing the sky, never seeing the stars or the sun? That alone would have made you fight tooth and nail to escape had it been you stuck down there. Curiosity eats at you but you don't ask. It didn't feel right to bring up a sensitive topic like that just yet.

Sans continues, his own bony fingers tapping against the book gently. "we had something that was close though. some of the caverns had glowing crystals in the ceiling. monsters used to visit there and make wishes on fake stars. i used to take paps when he was a baby bones. he was more interested in
playing in the mud though. I actually found an old beat up telescope once," he adds, closing the book. "Seeing the 'stars' up close made me want to know everything about them."

You lean back against the bean bag, trying to picture it. "I bet it was beautiful in its own way."

He joins you in leaning back, his skull tapping gently against your arm. "It was, but it's not the same. Seeing them for real...there's nothing like it." He's staring wistfully up at the ceiling. "Kinda makes you think it's too good to be true. Like it could just one day...disappear."

"The stars aren't going anywhere silly." You point up to the ceiling, as if you two were outside and could actually see the stars. "That's why I love them so much. You can be anywhere in the world, at any point in time and the stars will be there. Even if you can't see them. They don't fade, and they don't vanish. They hold so much history and hope. I mean, people have been using the stars to pass on stories and navigate for hundreds of years! How cool is that?"

He doesn't answer and you look down to find he's staring at you, with something almost akin to wonder. You feel your face light up with embarrassment. When did you turn into such a rambler?

"I know it's a lot more sciencey than that," you say with a cough, hoping he doesn't notice how red your face is. "P-Plus my grandpa was a big space nerd and used to tell me all kinds of stories like that. He liked the romantic side of space. Oh that reminds me of a joke he used to use all the time. What did the planet say to the asteroid?"

Sans grins again. "What?"

"Comet me bro!"

That sends the both of you into wild peals of laughter and you spend the next little while swapping every space pun and joke you can think of. In fact, it's not until you hear a knock at the door and a loud voice calling "HUMAN! IT IS TIME FOR OUR RUN!" that you remember your plans with Papyrus. You groan, not at the idea of running but at the fact you had spent so much time goofing off you had barely gotten anything done.

"You are a distraction," you say grumpily to Sans as you stand to let Papyrus in. You open the door and immediately get swept up in a tight hug. "Oompf!"

"HELLO HUMAN!" Papyrus has swapped out his white armor like clothes for a large tee shirt with 'JOGBOY' written in uneven handwriting. A bright red sweatband is around his skull and his red scarf has been replaced with a slightly shorter cape. He narrows his eye sockets at you, noticing your attire at the same time. You hadn't bothered to change after work aside from losing your shoes.

"THAT IS A VERY...INTERESTING CHOICE OF CLOTHING FOR OUR EXERCISE." You laugh, patting his arm lightly. "No, I'm sorry buddy. I was distracted by unpacking and completely forgot. Just give me a minute to change and we can get going!"

"Hey bro." Sans waves from his slumped position on the bean bag. At this angle it's hard to see much besides the gleam of his skull.

"BROTHER?" Papyrus shouts in surprise. "I DID NOT KNOW YOU WERE HERE."

"I was helping with unpacking," he says, winking in your direction. Papyrus looks so proud at this news that you can't find it in yourself to mention that his 'help' actually left more of a mess. You duck inside your room to throw shorts and a tank top on. You grab your shoes and water bottle, noticing that both brothers are standing outside the door, chatting together. You make sure to lock up and join
the two outside.

"Hey Sans," you say casually as you lean against the wall and tie your shoes. "Am I correct in assuming it would be pointless to ask if you wanted to join us?"

"completely," he deadpans.

"I thought so," you sigh heavily, pushing up from the wall. As Sans turns to go back to his own place you call out, "Guess I'll galax-SEE you tomorrow then!"

The look he gives you is so completely filled with glee you can't help but laugh loudly as your stomach does little butterfly turns.
Secrets and Pizza

Chapter Summary

You learn that not everyone is happy about the monster's presence and order some pizza

Chapter Notes

Tried to write a big longer of a chapter! Enjoy!

Writing Blog
Main Blog

You follow Papyrus down the steps. You can't get the image of Sans' gleeful grin out of your head. You press your hands against your face, trying to stifle the butterflies in your stomach. You can't do this again. This is where you had messed up so many times in the past; people would get interested, you would share too much way too soon and they would freak out and leave. The thought of losing these two brothers was enough to calm you down. Take things slow, don't get overexcited.

"AND THEN TO COME BACK AND FIND YOU, THE HUMAN WITH PUNS JUST AS BAD-!"

You guiltily realize that Papyrus has been talking to you this whole time. It's not hard to guess what he was ranting about. "Sorry Papyrus. No more puns tonight," you promise.

"I SHALL FORGIVE YOU HUMAN." He seems appeased and then his face lights up. "STILL, I CANNOT BELIEVE YOU ACTUALLY GOT MY BROTHER TO WORK AT SOMETHING. YOU MUST HAVE USED GREAT CUNNING."

"Actually he said it was to reward me for a joke I told him."

"OH. WELL I APPRECIATE IT ANYWAY. NOW ON TO OUR TRAINING!" The two of you stop at the bottom of the building and you take a few moments to stretch. Papyrus watches you for a moment and begins mimicking your movements. It's surely not necessary for him but you appreciate his efforts. "WHAT IS YOUR USUAL TRAINING REGIMENT?"

You straighten up. It's chillier out here than you thought and goosebumps cover your arms. "Last night I just did a full circle around the park, twenty seconds running, ten seconds walking since I'm still kinda new at this. Once I get the know the area better I'll go further."

"THAT SOUNDS LIKE AN EXCELLENT PLAN!" Papyrus looks ready to start bolting at any moment. You laugh and the two of you start. As you expected, the tall skeleton soon passes you by and gains quite a bit of distance. The temptation to go faster is strong but you force yourself to keep your pace. Wearing yourself out at the beginning wouldn't help anything. He notices you falling behind and jogs in place while you catch up. The rest of the run follows the same pattern, with him zooming ahead and waiting while your shorter legs fought to keep up with his long strides. After making the complete circle you end up back in front of the apartment. Papyrus is barely winded.
while you have to stop and take great gulps of your water.

"ARE YOU READY FOR ANOTHER CIRCLE?"

Your legs and lungs scream in protest but he looks so excited you find yourself nodding. "S-sure...let's g-go!"

You run much slower the second time around and you wind up walking the last bit. You wipe the sweat from your face with your shirt as you approach Papyrus, who long beat you to the finish line. Your legs are quivering slightly. "Sorry, I don't have much stamina."

"IN THAT WAY YOU ARE VERY MUCH LIKE MY BROTHER. BUT YOU AT LEAST ARE TRYING TO TRAIN, UNLIKE THAT LAZY BONES WHO BARELY MAKES AN EFFORT." He pats your head like a kid and you grin. "YOU DID VERY WELL HUMAN."

"Thanks Pap." It seems trying out the nickname is right call because his eye sockets fill with joyful tears again.

"WOWIE! HAVE WE ALREADY REACHED THE NICKNAME ZONE IN OUR FRIENDSHIP?" He gives you another massive hug, not caring about the sweat. "I SHALL HAVE TO THINK OF THE BEST NICKNAME FOR YOU!"

A warm feeling blossoms in your chest. "I'd really like that," you laugh.

Friendship. You never expected your first friend in the city to be a monster skeleton. But just being able to say it, have someone call you a friend, is nearly enough to make you cry. You have missed this so much.

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The next morning you drag yourself to work, body aching from a combination of the running and your sad air mattress. Next on your list, get an actual bed. You take Abby's advice and put on your most comfortable pair of jeans and a slightly over sized sweater that proclaims it's 'Time to Dance' and that helps you feel better. The door hasn't even finished its tinkling ring before Abby is on you, eyes shining.

"Who was that yesterday?" she demands excitedly.

"Uh, who?" you ask intelligently.

"The skeleton," she whispers. "I saw you talking through the window and then you left with him! Was he waiting for you? Are you two...together?"

"Wha-no!" you sputter. "I've known him for like two days. He's my neighbor. There was a bit of an accident with his stove that I helped out with. He was treating me to dinner to say thanks at bar next door."

"That is fantastic!" She sounds far more ecstatic than the situation calls for. You find out why a moment later when she lifts her shirt slightly to show you a beautifully complicated tattoo on her hip. It's got birds, eyeballs and....oh. A large skull with emerald filled eyes glares at you, teeth pulled back in a wide sneer. "I've always loved skeletons and other spooky stuff from way back before I heard about the barrier falling. And you move in next to one? Totally awesome."

"There's two of them actually," you say in a bit of a daze, finding it hard to look away from the tattoo. "He's got a brother."
This news just excites her even more. "$That is INSANE.$"

"I guess it is." You run your hand through your hair. "$But it's almost like I forget at times. They're so crazy and fun and just...alive you know?"

"I'm so jealous," she moans. "$You need to tell me everything about them!"

So the rest of the morning passes with the two of you chatting about the brothers and other monsters you've seen around the city. Abby counters your 'no, he was actually made of FIRE' story with one about a pair of monsters, named Catty and Bratty who had oohed and ahhed over her hair at the mall the other day.

"Bratty is like this massive alligator with a total outdated blonde look that she actually pulls off," Abby says, reapplying a coat of nail polish. "$Catty is-"

"Let me guess, a giant cat?" you ask with a grin.

"No way, how'd you know?!"

The two of you are laughing when the door opens and the tall lady you had seen in the booth comes in, her pretty face twisted in a scowl. Her name was...Em if you remembered right but it might be a nickname.

"There's some kind of...gathering happening at that monster bar next door," she says to no one in particular. "$They're making such a racket."

The words and her tone send a feeling of apprehension through you, with just a bit of anger on the side. "$It's probably the lunch hour rush," you say, not noticing Abby's quick panicked look at you.

Em glances at you, almost like she's surprised you spoke up. "$It's no excuse for the place to act like a zoo. But I guess that's to be expected, given its patrons," she says coolly before sweeping upstairs to the booth. Your jaw drops and you gape after her. Abby whistles quietly.

"I totally expected her to go off on you," she says, putting her nail polish away. "$Emily doesn't exactly...like monsters."

That much is obvious. Your stomach is churning with anger. "$Humans are just as capable of making noise as monsters are. They're just people like us."

"Well, if you know that, and I know that...who's driving the train?" She's obviously trying to cheer you up so you try to let go of your annoyance.

Once again, the end of work arrives fairly quickly after that. Today ended up consisting of mostly sitting by Joe as he worked the controls and after almost thirty minutes of silence he asked if you wanted to help with the audio control. He spoke quietly and to the point, but it was progress! You step outside and stretch, bones in your back popping. The noise makes you think of a certain bony fellow and you pull your phone out.

y: hey, are you and Pap busy tonight?

It takes a few minutes and you start walking home before your phone dings.

s: nope. 'sup?

y: As I recall, a certain lazy bones had promised to help me unpack and my apartment is still full of
boxes.

It really isn't; there's maybe five boxes left and normally you would tackle those on your own but....

s: i dunno i thought i did a pretty good job last night. what's in it for me?

y: pizza, a movie and my charming jokes?

s: you drive a hard bargain

y: You can be manager of the beanbag again

s: deal. see you soon.

A wide grin lights your face. You quickly call the pizza place for delivery (you try not to think about how sad it is that you've already saved the pizza place's number in your phone) and hurry home. You've barely come in and managed to change into some sweatpants when the doorbell rings.

"HELLO PARTNER!" You're expecting the hug this time and manage to actually hug him back. Sans gives you a quick pat on the head as he passes by and makes a beeline straight for the beanbag. "I WAS OVERJOYED TO BE INVITED FOR A MOVIE PARTY!"

A movie party? Sure why not. "Uh yeah, I'm glad you could come Pap! Make yourself comfy. Pizza should be here soon."

The sight of Papyrus attempting to fit his lanky limbs on the bag makes you giggle. He finally gives up and slides down to the floor, leaning back against the bag. Hmm, you might have to add a couch to that IKEA trip. You grab your folder of movies and go through the options with the boys. Sans doesn't really care and barely makes a comment. Pap on the other hand is so overwhelmed by your collection he has no idea what to pick.

"WHICH ONE IS YOUR FAVORITE?" he finally asks.

"Well...." Honestly, you're a huge fan of action flicks but all your favorites might be a little too intense for Pap. You have no idea how old he actually is but you can't help but see him almost like a little brother. You instead pick out Lilo and Stitch, figuring that would be plenty safe. You'll have to ask Sans later what kind of movies Paps was used to. The pizza arrives right as you put the disc in and you let yourself eat before tackling the remainder of the boxes. Halfway through the movie Sans finally pulls himself up from his nest and joins you in pulling stuff out. Papyrus is glued to the t.v, eye sockets wide.

"should i open this one?" Sans asks, pointing to a box labelled 'Decorations'.

"Nah, Halloween is coming up. You can just put it in the corner."

"what's halloween?"

You freeze and turn slowly to look at Sans. You can't help but grin a little evilly. "Oh my friend are you in for a treat. Halloween is the best holiday we've got! Pumpkins, costumes, apple cider, candy and lots of spooooky scary skeletons!" You wiggle your fingers at him. An eyebrow bone ridge raises slightly in amusement.

"is that so?"

"Yep! A haunting night when the spirits of the dead walk this earth once again!" you continue in a
witchy tone, diving back into your current box. "Children wear costumes to frighten the dead away and are rewarded with candy. At least that's how it started. The wearing costumes to scare away the supposed spirits of the dead on a night called All Hallows Eve. Now people do it just for fun and for free candy."

"guess me and paps will blend right in."

"I imagine you will." You grab the pile of sheets from the box and go down the hall to put them in the closet. You return, fully intent on telling him about haunted houses and pumpkin flavored everything, but then you stop short, feeling your heart drop to your feet.

Sans is holding a small black wooden box that you've duct-taped shut, observing it curiously. He starts to peel the tape off. "ya know, i don't think this is gonna be much use to you taped shut like this-"

You're across the room in a flash, snatching the box out of Sans' hand. His eye sockets widen with surprise and just a flash of hurt. For a moment you two just stare at each other and your heart falls again for a whole different reason.

"I-I'm sorry," you say quietly, pressing the box to your chest. "I didn't want you to see this. I thought it was in the box over there. I'm sorry."

His hand lowers and the wide smile returns to his face, but now it feels a little off. "don't worry about it. i shouldn't have tried to open it."

"No! No it's not your fault," you mumble, looking at the floor. "I'm gonna go put this away. I'll be right back." You escape to your room and shut the door. That was the worst thing that could have happened. Sans probably thought you were some kind of possessive freak. You stare at the box miserably. You should throw this away. You know that but...damn it! Why did you forget which box it was in? Why did this thing have to pop up? You throw it across the room, watching it clatter to the ground.

That small chest held the remainders of the worst mistake you've ever made. The reminder that the anxiety, the depression was never going to go away.

You feel yourself sinking to the floor, that fog, that stupid overwhelming fog rearing its ugly head. Stop it! None of that! You put your hands over your ears. "I deserve to be happy," you mumble. "I'm allowed to make mistakes." You repeat it several times, focusing just on the words.

This time, thank heavens, it works. Your heart slows down and the fog retreats. You breathe deeply for a few more moments, trying to recompose yourself. The longer you stay back here, the more you were gonna worry the skeletons. If they hadn't already just up and left. You leave the box in a corner of the closet, out of sight and head back to the living room.

They're both still there. The movie is almost over. Sans, who has returned to his spot on the beanbag, watches you closely. He motions to you with a bony digit and you hesitantly walk over. He pats the spot next to him and you sit down with a sigh. You rub your thumbs together, a habit you developed a long time ago to calm yourself down.

"I'm sorry," you say again. "I had a freak out moment."

Sans makes a motion, almost like he's about to take your hand but refrains. He's smiling, which should be good sign but then again, he's always smiling. "hey don't worry about it. it happens. are you ok?"
You take a deep breath. The fog has left for now, so yes, surprisingly, you still are. You finally look up. Sans is watching you with concern. "I'm fine. Really."

Sans hesitates for a moment, clearly mulling over something. "d-

"WHAT AN EXCELLENT FILM!" Papyrus claps loudly as the movie credits roll, interrupting Sans. "HUMAN YOU HAVE TRULY EXCELLENT TASTES IN MOVIES."

Glad for the distraction from the awkwardness, you smile at Papyrus. "I'm glad you like it! It's one of my favorites."

"I ONLY WISH THAT I COULD WATCH ALL OF THEM," he says wistfully, glancing at your large folder. You can't help but laugh.

"We can't watch them all at once, but I see no reason why we can't spread it out. In fact, tomorrow is my last day before my weekend. Do you want to have a movie night?"

It's like you've announced Christmas has come early. Papyrus' excitement calms you down even more and your smile is genuine as you make plans. Papyrus insists on bringing some more of his spaghetti and you in turn decide to pick up some more movie like snacks. Soon after, you all decide to turn in for the night. Sans pauses at your door, waiting until his brother has vanished to turn back to you. His easy smile thins into an expression a little more serious than before.

"hey _____."

The sound of him saying your name sends strange tingles down your back. "What is it?"

He rubs the back of his skull with his hand for a moment before dropping it to his side. "if you uh...well need anything at all, i'm here. ok? just wanted to let you know."

He turns to leave and you can't stop yourself. You reach out and grab his hand, making him pause. It's oddly warm, for being made of bone.

"Sans I-" You can't think of what to say. "Thank you. Really. D-do you want to grab burgers during my lunch tomorrow?"

Perhaps it's just the lighting, you could almost swear a blue tinge colored his cheekbones. He nods wordlessly and you let him go. You wait until he's at his door to call "Good night!"

He pauses and turns to give you that gentle smile. "g'night _____."
You can't stop your leg from bouncing as you glance over at the clock for the umpteenth time. It's almost time for your lunch and your stomach is in knots. You had asked Sans to meet you at Grillby's but you have no idea what you were going to say. It was a spur of the moment thing last night but now you just want to smack yourself in the face. For that matter, why are you so nervous? Sans obviously hadn't been too bothered by your weird behavior last night. This was just lunch with a friend. A friend that you can't get out of your head.

These thoughts are gonna lead to dangerous places. You shake your head. You barely even know a thing about Sans, or his brother for that matter! You're just slipping into that old habit of being clingy to anyone who paid attention to you. Okay, tonight you're gonna start asking about them! Papyrus you figure will be happy to talk; you had learned at least a little bit about the eccentric skeleton over the past few days. He loves spaghetti, he's an insanely passionate worker and wanted to be a member of the Royal Guard. Sans however is almost a complete mystery and you have a sinking feeling he likes to keep that way. You put your head in your hand, thinking. Maybe if you got him back on the topic of spacey science he'd be more willing to open up.

A gentle tapping draws you out of your thoughts. Sans is peeking through the open window, knuckles against the glass. He waves at you and you give him a 'just a moment!' gesture.

"Abby, I'm heading to lunch!" you call. You've been covering her spot on the front desk and she strolls back in from one of the offices.

"Gotta. Before you leave, just to let you know-ooh!" She spies Sans through the window. She's making no effort to hide her delighted stare and you see Sans shift slightly until he's out of sight. You slide just in front of Abby's view.

"So uh, I'll be back soon. What were you saying?"

She tears her gaze away. "Tod wants to see you when you're done, nothing urgent. I think he's gonna ask you to help out with the fall festival in the park." She wiggles her eyebrows at you, glancing pointedly towards the door and dammit now you're starting to blush.

"Shush you," you mumble, smacking her shoulder lightly. "He's a friend. Barely." You're already
thinking of him as a friend, oh boy.

She says nothing to that and practically shoves you out the door. Sans is leaning against the building, scuffing his old sneakers against the ground. "heya." He's all smiles and suddenly the knots in your stomach are gone.

"Hi! Sorry about Abby," you say, nodding towards the studio. "She's a bit of a skeleton fanatic. She's got a tattoo and everything."

This seems to take him a little off guard. "huh. that's...uh...." He's a little flabbergasted so you tug on his sleeve and pull him to the bar.

"Let's eat! I'm starving."

Grillby's is a little more packed than the last time you were here, most likely caused by a lunch hour rush. All the seats at the bar are taken so the two of you slide into a booth. A smaller flame monster, this one a bright green takes your order and hurries away. Sans reaches for the ketchup bottle and starts chugging it by itself. You wrinkle your nose.

"Okay, after you dumped the whole bottle on your fries last time, I figured you just really like ketchup. But good grief Sans!"

He waves the bottle in your general direction. "c'mon, if your favorite food was available in a bottle, you'd have no trouble drinking it. right?"

"I guess," you mutter. "To each his own."

"paps won't stop talking about how excited he is for tonight," Sans continues, finally putting the bottle down.

"I'm glad to finally have a movie buddy again," you laugh.

Sans shakes his head. "'s not just that," he says, his gaze going to the table. "thing's have been kinda tough for paps. even back underground, he didn't have many friends. he's kinda intense for some people."

Intense Papyrus certainly is. But he's so sweet and considerate, you can't imagine someone like him not having friends. "Being passionate about how you live your life isn't a bad thing," you say. "I admire him for it. Sure he's a little loud about it but everyone gets like that sometimes. It just means he's got a ton of energy to spare."

Sans looks up at you. Again, you can sense he's mulling something over, like he's trying to find the right words. "it hasn't been easy, being up here you know? most people aren't as open and inviting as you. you're his first human friend, aside from frisk i mean. or rather, our first human friend."

"Frisk? That kid that freed you guys right? Man, I'd like to meet them someday-oh." The rest of his sentence hits you and you stop talking. You know you must be staring at him because he looks down again. He called you his friend. Your lip quivers and you bring your hand up to hide it. You're saved from saying anything by the arrival of your food and the two of you eat in silence for a few minutes. You finally clear your throat.

"I'm really happy I moved in next to you guys," you say softly. Sans looks up at you, a fry dripping with ketchup halfway to his mouth. You see his shoulders ease up and realize that he's completely misinterpreted your silence. You hesitantly put your hand on top of his. You feel his bones twitch slightly, but he allows your hand to stay. "You took me by surprise!" you say lightly. "Seriously, you
two are awesome. Meeting you guys has been the best thing that's happened to me in a long time."

There it is again! His cheeks dimly light up with a blue blush. It's so adorable you can almost feel your heart burst. He hurriedly shoves the fry through a thin line between his top and bottom teeth.

"you're not too bad yourself," he says, the casual grin back on his face. "so you wanna meet the kid huh?"

He's changing the subject but you don't mind. "Absolutely! Just whenever they have some...time..." Time! You quickly glance at your phone. You've only got a few minutes before your break is over. "Sorry Sans, I gotta bounce."

"no problem bud. my break's almost over too."

You look at him in surprise. "You're on break? Where do you work?"

"here and there. i got the bill," he adds, noticing you trying to signal the frantic waitress.

You feel bad but you don't really have any time to wait. "It's my treat next time!" You call as you hurry to the door. You don't see the gentle look that crosses over Sans' face as he watches you leave.

"What kind of experience do you have with graphic design?" Tod is messing with something in the drawers with one hand, the other balancing a stack of files. You take the files from him before they topple over.

"I took a few art classes back in high school," you say cautiously.

"Perfect." He finds what he's looking for; it's a sloppy drawn sketch on a notepad with a list of information written at the bottom. "I want you to design the flyers for the upcoming festival. All the info you'll need is right here."

You exchange the files for the notepad and look at the scribbled notes. An odd twist of excitement and worry tug at your gut. "No problem boss," you say, smiling widely, squashing the feeling as best as you can. "When do you need it by?"

"Monday at the latest."

Okay, it's Friday now. That gives you the entire weekend to work on it. "Got it."

"Also," Tod gives up trying to juggle the folders and sets them down, pulling out a thin envelop with the radio's logo on the front. "We need various businesses and sponsors to set up booths and such. Abby is handling most of that but I want you to try and find just one business, since it's your first go. You just need to ask a manager or leader of whatever business if they would like to participate and give them this letter, which has all details. It's best to go over this yourself in case they have questions. Can you handle that?"

Just one business? You're pretty sure you can at least do that. "No problem! Should I shoot for like a cafe or something?"

"I'll leave that up to you." Tod gives you a wide smile and claps your shoulder as he heads back up to the recording booth.

The excitement of your assignments follows you the rest of the day and on your way back home you
stare intensely at each store you pass by, trying to decide if it would be a good fit. You're so in to your task you almost forget to grab movie snacks. You duck into a gas station, grabbing some popcorn and licorice. Then, as a last minute thought, you grab a big bottle of ketchup. Gross as it is, you want Sans to have what he likes.

When you get home, you shoot the brothers a text to let them know and get to setting the living room up. You feel bad about Papyrus sitting on the floor all last night so you drag your air mattress out from your room. You pull out your collection of various blankets and pillows. If there's one thing you know how to do right, it's movie nights! You're just putting on the kettle for hot chocolate when you hear a tap at the door.

"Come in!" you call.

Papyrus bursts into your place holding a massive pot of spaghetti, Sans casually strolling behind him. Both brothers are wearing p.j's; Paps has a shirt that screams he is the 'Spaghetti Master' and Sans is wearing one of those 'got milk?' tees. He joins you in the kitchen while Papyrus starts going through the cabinets looking for plates.

"Next one over!" you call to him before turning to Sans. "Hey you."

"heya." He's quiet and his smile is thin.

"Everything okay?" you ask, turning off the stove. He doesn't answer you right away and with a bit of alarm you notice that the white lights of his eyes are small and a little dim. "Sans?"

His smile grows wider but now you can tell it's fake. "'s nothing, just people at work with too much time to waste." It's clear that he doesn't want to talk about it so you reluctantly decide to drop it.

"Okay. But if you wanna talk you don't have to hold back," you tell him as you reach for the bag of goodies. "Anyway, I don't got milk, but I got this!" You offer the bottle of ketchup and his expression eases just a bit.

"i guess i can settle for this," he says with a wink. He pops the lid open and you smack his hand gently and waggle a finger at him.

"Dinner first! That's for the movie."

"SANS, HUMAN! DINNER IS READY," Papyrus calls the two of you over. This batch of spaghetti is actually decent compared to the first dish you had and Sans whispers to you that Papyrus had been cooking all day to make sure it was perfect. Your heart swells at this and you make sure to eat plenty.

"HUMAN," Papyrus says suddenly as the three of you move to the beanbag. "I HAVE A QUESTION. WILL YOU BE RUNNING AGAIN SOON?"

"Uh yeah I think so. I'll probably do it tomorrow night," you say as you put in the movie: it had taken a while but Paps had finally decided on Lion King. You debated on warning him about the Mufasa scene but hold your tongue. Might as well give him the full experience right? "Do you want to go again?"

"YES! I ALSO TOLD MY FRIEND UNDYNE ABOUT MY NEW RUNNING FRIEND. SHE WISHES TO JOIN US."

You had no idea who (or what) Undyne is but if she's a friend of Papyrus' you see no reason to say no. "Sure thing. That sounds like fun." Sans lets out a little grunt at this and you look worriedly at
him. He's smirking. "Is that a bad thing?"

Sans shakes his head. "undyne is...was the head of the royal guard. she's a very intense person. you'll be in for quite a workout."

Oh geez. Well, tomorrow's problems can be dealt with tomorrow. Papyrus has made himself at home on your air mattress, stretched on on his stomach with his skull in his hands so you grab your sketch book and join Sans on the bean bag. Might as well work on the flyer design for a bit. You balance a bowl of popcorn between the two of you. "Don't get ketchup on my beanbag," you warn him as the movie starts.

He pops the lid open and gives you another wink. "how dairy you suggest i would do such a thing," he says, pulling his shirt out a bit. You resist throwing popcorn at him since that seems a bit contradictory to what you just said. You give him a gentle kick instead.

"Shush you. The movie's starting."

Sans turns his attention to the screen and you start scribbling. You're not exactly a professional, but you did like to sketch so your various pumpkins and scarecrow designs don't look too bad. You get into it, barely paying attention to the movie until you hear a gentle sobbing. You look up in alarm. Shoot! The movie's already reached the end of stampede scene and Papyrus has his head buried in his hands. You scramble out of the bag and drop down next him. "I'm so sorry!" you say, rubbing his shoulder. You can feel the shape of his shoulder blade. It's so odd to feel that and no flesh but now isn't the time to focus on that. "I should have said something Paps. I'm sorry."

'W-WHY WOULD HIS BROTHER DO THAT?' Papyrus sobs. 'HIS OWN BROTHER A-AND POOR S-SIMBA-!'

"Shh Pap it's okay," you whisper, reaching over and pausing the movie. Scar is on screen, telling Simba to run away, mouth open in a snarl. "It's just a story."

"BUT IS WAS SO BRIGHT AND COLORFUL AND EVERYONE WAS HAPPY."

Oh man you messed up big time. "That's the story Pap," you say gently. "It's a story about how life can change so dramatically and through no fault of your own. Simba has to learn how to deal with this and what true family is." He's starting to calm down a little so you pat his hand. "Do you want to watch something else?"

Papyrus sniffles. "NO. I AM FINE NOW. I WISH TO SEE THE REST."

"Okay buddy. I promise the songs and the smiles come back. This is the saddest part and it's almost over." You turn the movie back on and look to the bean bag.

Sans isn't there. For a split second you don't see him and a wave of panic hits you. Did he leave? But then you notice he's standing in the corner over the by the door. He's leaning against the wall, head turn down. You quickly go over to him.

"Sans, I'm so sorry I didn't think it would bother you guys that much..." your voice trails off as you notice a quiet rattling. He's shaking. "Sans I-" What should you do? Papyrus you can understand getting upset but something must have hit Sans deeply to affect him this much. Or...maybe this has something to do with whatever upset him earlier? He lifts a hand to his face.

"sorry. just give me a sec."

Something about the movie, or maybe just seeing his brother upset has very clearly triggered
something in him. You can't just stand there, seeing him shake like he's going to fall apart. You slowly step closer and when he doesn't move away, you wrap your arms around him, pulling him gently away from the wall. He's so solid, more so than you would expect a skeleton to feel. He tenses under your hug. "I'm sorry," you whisper softly. You don't know what else to say.

His shaking stops after a minute and he slumps like he's lost all his energy. You let him go and he takes a deep breath.

"Is it the movie? I'm really sorry, I didn't think it would upset you guys like this."

He shrugs. "nah, 'm not upset cause of that. heh, not upset at all. i just...got reminded of a bad time."

The two of you stand there in silence for a minute. The joyful tune of Hakuna Matata fills the room and you look back at Papyrus. He's calmed down and is completely engrossed in the movie again. "Do you want to go sit down again? I promise the worst is over," you say, gesturing back to the t.v. You would completely understand if he doesn't want to though. "I'll make sure the next movie isn't so sad."

He nods wordlessly and follows you back to the beanbag. You tuck a thick blanket around the two of you and you feel him shift a little until he's pressed up against you. His bones are still now, and warm. How can he be warm without blood or skin?

"sorry," he mutters after a few minutes.

You turn slightly to look at him. "Sans you have nothing to be sorry for."

He sighs, eyes dim. "didn't think a freaking cartoon about lions would get to me."

"You can't control what gets to you." You had plenty of experience dealing with that. "If we could, then things wouldn't get to us. Right?"

"heh. guess not." He lets his head flop back and closes his eye sockets.

Guilt eats at your for the rest of the movie. When it's over, you slip out from the blanket and quickly put on How To Train Your Dragon. There was nothing too sad in that one. Papyrus is back to his cheerful self and offers you some popcorn. You take a handful and quietly slide back under the blanket. Sans still has his eyes closed and after a second, you realize he's asleep. His face is much more relaxed now and that gives you a little peace of mind. Halfway through the second movie you see Papyrus's head bobbing and soon he's fast asleep as well. You're feeling so comfortable and warm you can't bring yourself to move or wake the brothers up just yet. Just a few more minutes won't hurt. You'll get up in just a few minutes.

And just like that, you fall asleep as well.
Chapter Summary

Puns puns puns puns
Time to bring out some familiar faces!
Find me here: theninjamouse.tumblr.com

There's flash of blue, a deep tearing sensation, like your heart is being forcefully pulled from your chest and then you're falling...

Falling...

You jerk awake. The images from your nightmare are already fading and you can't remember anything about it besides the sensation of falling. You groan and shove your face into your pillow. Wait...this is too hard to be your pillow. Your eyes shoot open and you focus on the sight in front of you. You're nestled up against Sans, who is still sleeping. His arm is thrown over you and your face is lying against his shoulder. His skull is only inches away, his mouth set in a relaxed smile.

OH MY- You bite back the noise in your throat. You fell asleep on the beanbag with Sans! You can feel your face turning red with mortified embarrassment at yourself. How did... when....? First things first, you gotta get out of this awkward situation before he wakes up! Moving very slowly, you attempt to pull yourself out from under his arm. He's made of bone, how is he this heavy?! At that point you realize your legs are tangled up together and freeing them is not gonna be easy. You cup your hands with your face and stifle your moan. This is so embarrassing!

He shifts slightly and sighs before his eye sockets slowly start to open. Oh god what should you do? Look away? Pretend to be asleep? Too late!

Sans blinks sleepily a few times, his gaze meeting yours. "wha...." He focuses on your face and his eyes dart around, quickly taking in the situation, including the arm still thrown over you. Within a few seconds his entire face blushes bright blue and he gapes at you, pulling his arm away.

"M-morning bone head!" you say, your voice shriller than was at all acceptable. "Sleep good? Yep! Guess we're a pair of lazy bones, twin skeletons you could say!"

Seriously? Puns?! You're babbling complete nonsense! You decide it's better to just shut up and bury your face in your hands again. Maybe if you press hard enough you can sink right into the beanbag and disappear from the Earth altogether.

Sans does the worst possible thing he could do.

He starts laughing.

"heheheh. geez you're really tickling my funny bone here."

Oh good grief! "I hate you so much," you mumble into the beanbag.

He pokes you with a bony finger. "c'mon pal. don't let it get under your skin. i'm just ribbing ya."
You bury your head under the blanket but now Sans is on a roll. "sorry friend, am i crossing your bonedries?"

You moan loudly at him.

"geez, i know it wasn't that original but it was funny right? c'mon can't ya...."

"NO."

"throw me a bone here?" He snorts, he actually snorts and that throws you over the edge. You start giggling uncontrollably. You peek out at him from under the blanket, eyes watering.

"Y-you are a BONEAFIDE disaster!" you gasp out. Sans is shaking with laughter and you don't think it is physically possible for his delighted, shit-eating smirk to get any bigger.

"what, you don't think my puns are sansational?"

"OH MY GOD!"

Whelp, Papyrus is awake. He sits up, blanket up around his skull like a cloak. He scowls and points a wagging finger at the two of you, still trying to stifle your laughter.

"IT IS BAD ENOUGH TO HEAR YOUR JOKES THROUGHOUT THE DAY BUT FIRST THING IN THE MORNING? UNBELIEVABLE. BESIDES," His eye sockets glint suddenly. "THESE JOKES REALLY Aren'T EVEN THAT HUMEROUS."

And with that, all three of you completely lose it. Papyrus' NYEH HEH HEH's almost send you rolling off the bag. The larger skeleton is cackling, pounding his fist against the air mattress when there is a sudden loud bang and you can't help a scream of surprise. You all fall silent as a loud hissing fills the room and Papyrus slowly sinks to the ground. There is a large hole in the corner of the mattress, which his fist is currently filling. He had actually managed to punch a hole in it. He looks up at you with a distraught expression and you can't stop another snort of laughter.

"Well I guess that makes today bed hunting day," you say a little breathlessly. You wipe away the tears in your eyes as Papyrus begins to apologize profusely. "Seriously Pap don't worry about it. I needed to buy an actual bed anyway. That thing wasn't very comfortable."

He still looks a little miserable so you take a breath and decide to sacrifice one for the team. You reach over and pat his face. "How about this then? You make me the best plate of spaghetti you can for dinner tonight and we'll call it even. Deal?"

There's a muffled snort from behind you which you try to ignore.

Papyrus brightens almost immediately at that and nods vigorously. "VERY WELL THEN HUMAN. DO YOU WISH FOR ASSISTANCE WITH YOUR BED SHOPPING?"

"Oh no! That's okay, I can manage...." You trail off, struck with a sudden thought. You look at Sans, who still has a wide smile stretched ear to ear. Or where his ears would be if he had them. "You know what? I really think that you guys would enjoy a trip to Ikea."

Well...Sans would anyway.

Sans is in heaven. And Papyrus is pretty sure he's in hell. After your giggle fit this morning, you had
all split to clean up and change and met up about an hour later at your car. Sans had tried to pry answers out of you as to why Ikea was so great and you’d had a hard time keeping your mouth shut. Even when the three of you had entered the store, he had looked around in confusion. That is until you had spotted your first victim. You snatched it, hiding it behind your back.

"So, what do you think?" you had asked, fighting to keep the smirk off your face.

Sans shrugged. "it's cool i guess. but i don't really get why you were so excited."

Cackling, you had triumphantly flourished the cooking dish. It's labeled SMARTA cooking. "You don't see it? I guess that means I'm SMARTA than you."

He had blinked. And then he had gasped with utter delight. And there had been no stopping him since.

Sans strides up to you now, barely able to hold in his giggles. "say, i haven't had wine before but i've heard it makes you-" he waves the wine opener in your face. It's labeled 'Groggy'.

"SANS." Papyrus looks like he's about to either explode or cry.

"sorry bro. didn't mean to be a 'jerk-er' anything." He stabs a thumb over to a desk display with a large sign proclaiming 'JERKER'.

You let out a dramatic sigh, tilting your head slightly to draw Sans attention to a lawn chair set up on the other side of the room. "Don't you think you should give it a rest?"

He takes your cue and shakes his head, plopping into said chair. "sorry pal but i can knustorp now. i'm on a roll."

If Papyrus had hair, he would have completely pulled it all out by now. Or maybe he already had. You giggle, trying to picture the skeleton with hair and continue on to the mattress section. They've got a ton set up and you fall onto the closest one, sinking into its feather soft surface. Hmm, perhaps a bit too squishy for your taste. You feel the side of the mattress sink down and Sans lets out a happy sigh as he lies down next to you. He's holding a clock.

"ya know, i'm glad you 'rusch'd us out here. i'm having a great time."

You giggle and nudge his shoulder. "I think Pap is gonna hate me after this."

"nah. i don't think it's physically possible for him to hate anyone." Sans sits up, setting the Rusch clock to the side. You move to the next mattress, sprawling out across its surface. Ooh now this one is nice.

"Oh 'myrbacka' enjoys this!" you sigh, reading aloud the label.

"comfy?" Sans sits on the edge this time, eye lights glinting with suppressed laughter.

"Very." You stretch and a few bones in your back pop. Sans winces slightly at the noise. "Sorry! Does that bother you?"

He shakes his head. "it's just weird hearing it. i almost forget you humans have bones sometimes. you look too soft and squishy." He pinches your upper arm and you flail away.

"No tickles!" you squeal. He throws up his hands in surrender.

"ok, ok. i'm gonna find paps." He slides off the bed and strolls away, hands in the pocket of his
jacket. You sigh happily. The difference between the Sans of right now and last night is astounding. Bringing the brothers here was the right call, even if Pap was a tad cross at you for tricking him.

"Excuse me."

You're pulled from your thoughts by an older man. He accompanied by three younger children, probably grand kids. You sit up. "Uh yes?"

"Are you... with that skeleton creature?" The old man nods after Sans, who just barely in sight. Your gut twists unpleasantly at the grim expression on his face.

"Yes, he's a friend of mine," you say a little coolly as you stand up. He frowns disapprovingly at you.

"I know you younger people think that associating with those beings is hip and cool but you have gone far beyond that line."

What on earth is he talking about? The gazes of the kids has you biting back your angry tone. "What, is shopping with a friend a crime?"

The old man shakes his head, his eyes narrowing. "Your lost soul is your choice, but do not flaunt your..." he leans forward and spits "consummation relationships with that creature in public! It is not fit for children's eyes!"

Consu-what?! "You think I'm having sex with him?" You sputter out and the man flinches, rage crossing his face.

"Do not use such language! You were very clearly selecting a bed with that thing weren't you?"

The commotion is beginning to draw attention but you're angry enough you don't really care. You take a step towards him. He's taller than you by several inches but you're filled with a rage that makes you feel rather invincible. "Excuse me? First of all, it's a furniture store! People buy FURNITURE here. Which is what I'm doing. Secondly, you don't know me and I don't give a crap about your opinion. So why don't you take your long nose out of my business and leave us alone?"

He pulls his grand kids away from you, shooting you a dirty sneer as they leave. "Your soul belongs in hell!"

"Then I guess I'll see you there!" you snarl after him. What a racist pig! You turn, fuming, only to find Sans and Papyrus standing right behind you. Your remaining anger ebbs away. Shoot, how much of that did they hear? Judging by the thinness of Sans' smile and downcast gaze, they heard enough.

Papyrus shifts uneasily. "HUMAN ARE YOU OKAY? YOU LOOKED VERY ANGRY AT THAT MAN."

You pat his arm reassuringly. "Yeah Pap I'm fine. Some people are real jerks huh?" The murmuring from the crowd hasn't ceased so you tug on the brother's arms, pulling them away from the harsh stares. "C'mon. Let's head to the pick up area. There's a mattress down there with my name on it!"

Sans is completely silent the rest of the time you spend in the store. You try to stay cheerful as you locate the mattress you want. Fortunately it's one of those rolled up and plastic wrapped ones so it'll fit in the trunk of your car. You decide to worry about the bed frame another day. Papyrus helps you carry the mattress out, easily lifting up the heavy thing like it's nothing. When you all pile in the car, Pap up front with you and Sans slumped in the back, you can't take the silence any longer.
"Hey, just so you guys know, I'm not bothered by what that jerk said." You stare at Sans via your rear-view mirror until his gaze lifts to meet yours. The thin smile on his face is completely fake. "Okay? Please don't let it bug you."

Papyrus stares down at his gloved hands, twisting them uneasily. "WE ARE USED TO IT," he says, his voice softer than you've ever heard it. "I AM MERELY CONCERNED FOR YOU."

For you? You gently pat Papyrus' knee before starting the car up. "I'm fine. I just got a little heated that's all. It's one thing to figure that some people are ignorant dummies about you guys, but actually seeing it was a surprise."It had shocked you. News about the monsters hadn't exactly been warmly accepted when the barrier first fell but that was months ago. Monsters had moved in, opened businesses, played in the park! It was clear that while different, they weren't a threat to the human race. But to see an old man be so openly rude about a misunderstanding was a little jarring.

"you shouldn't have to deal with it," Sans mutters from the back.

"And you guys should?" You can't stand the defeated tone of his voice. "It's not fair. And it's not gonna get any better for you, or monster kind unless we work together to prove people like him wrong. That's the only way things'll change. Besides, if you think a little old man with a greasy nose is gonna chase me away, you've got it all wrong. I like you guys too much to just drop you at the first bump in the road."

Papyrus can't contain himself any longer and practically launches himself across the armrest to hug you. The movement makes you swerve wildly.

"Pap! Driving! Not now!"

He sniffs and you are startled to see little tears gathering in his eye sockets. They, and the space directly beneath his eyes are glowing a dim orange color. "YOU ARE SO KIND ______. I WISH THAT MORE PEOPLE WERE LIKE YOU."

It's the first time he's said your name and not 'human' or some variation thereof. "I promise there are more people like me," you say with a smile. "You guys are just having a hard time finding them. It's a big city after all."

"it is a big city." Sans is sitting up, leaning forward between the front seats. He hesitantly puts a hand on your head, rubbing gently. "we're pretty lucky we ended up with a neighbor like you."

The feeling of his phalanges (you know what they're called now!) on your head is surprisingly pleasant. You can feel yourself turning red from the attention. "No way. I'm the lucky one," you murmur. They have no idea how much you mean that. You're shocked at how close you had become to these two in just the few days that you had known them. Has it really only been a few days? It feels so much longer than that.

The tension in the car eases and you all chat cheerfully the rest of the drive home, carefully avoiding topics that could even possibly sour the mood. It's just starting to rain when you pull into the apartment parking lot. Papyrus is happily chattering about the spaghetti plans he has for tonight. You're so busy laughing along with his excitement, that you don't notice the lady heading to the stairs at that exact same moment. You yelp as you collide with her, more out of surprise than anything. You stumble back, trying not to slip on the wet sidewalk.

"Sorry about that!" you say "I wasn't-"

Your breath catches as the lady turns to give you a sharp glare with one eye (the other covered by a
patch). She's blue! And not only that...she's covered in scales! A pair of fins stick out from her cherry red hair that's pulled up in a pony tail, dampened by the rain. She turns slightly towards you, her sharp nailed hands leaving the pockets of her faded jeans. She's gorgeous, and utterly terrifying. You can't tell if her mouth is sneering or smiling at you. You're too distracted by the sharp fangs.

"Bumping into people can be dangerous punk," she says, before her gaze flickers to the brothers beside you. Immediately her harsh expression eases up. "Yo Papyrus! Check your phone, I've been trying to call you all morning!"

"I'M SORRY UNDYNE," Papyrus says cheerfully, shifting the mattress slightly so he can look at the fish lady. "I WAS HELPING MY FRIEND PICK OUT A NEW BED SINCE I ACCIDENTALLY BROKE HER OLD ONE."

THIS was Undyne?! She turns her gaze back to you. This time, you can tell she's smiling but that doesn't make it any less scary.

"Oh, so this is the new human you've told me about." Her eye glints gleefully and you can feel yourself sweating a little. "Ha! This is gonna be fun."
Nothing Like Being Yelled At By A Fish Lady

Chapter Notes

*Edit* I reached over a thousand hits in the few minutes since I posted the chapter. You guys are seriously awesome. Please feel free to comment with thoughts, ideas, suggestions, whatever. I don't bite :D

So funny story, I was talking to my mom about how much writing I've been getting done that last few days and she says 'well you definitely have a writing bone' in complete innocence.

She couldn't understand why I started laughing cause no way in heck am I telling her I'm writing a story about falling in love with a pun loving skeleton

On that note, my laptop is going to be going to the shop Monday afternoon cause it's having issues. I have no idea how long it'll take and I'll still try to update but all writing will be done on mobile so the wait between chapters may be longer. Just forewarning you guys. But the chapters will still be coming!

Find me here! theninjamouse.tumblr.com

"Well let's take a look at you!" Undyne paces around you, studying you up and down. She pokes at your sides, makes you flex and generally ignores all rules of personal space.

"undyne teaches classes at the martial art school a few blocks down," Sans explains as Undyne leans in close, staring straight into your eyes. "this is how she assess people."

"Ah...uh um." You can't do more than mumble as you try not to look away from her intense stare. You have a feeling you would fail whatever test she was doing if you did. Her bright yellow eye is clearly searching for something. You can only pray she likes what she sees. You shiver, partly from nerves but more from the rain still falling down. Your hair is more than a little damp now and water drips down your face. Goosebumps rise on your arms.

Sans must see this because he steps up and taps Undyne's arm; he's a good foot shorter than her. "hey, there's no point in standing out in the rain. let's go upstairs."

Undyne's eye narrows and she backs off with a loud laugh. "Ha! Good point. Humans are so fragile they can't even handle being out in the rain!" She throws an arm around you and starts pulling you to the stairs. "It's a good thing you've got me now punk! When I'm done you'll be a warrior good enough for the Royal Guard!!"

What is even happening? You're in a bit of a daze as Undyne and the two skelebros follow you into your apartment. You show Papyrus where your room is so he can dump the mattress. When you come back to the living room, Sans (to no surprise) is in his usual spot on the bean bag. He's flipping through your space book again. Undyne is in your kitchen, examining your various pots and pans.

"You've got some pretty good gear here," she admits. "You cook?"

"Um, a bit," you say.

Undyne brandishes a spatula at you. "Alright then punk, let's see what you've got! Create your best dish!"
"Right now?" You sneeze and Sans looks up from his book.

"hey paps, why don't you and undyne go back over to our place and start dinner instead? you did promise that you'd be in charge tonight."

Dinner? You glance at the stove clock. It's barely three o'clock. "It's a bit early isn't it?"

"NONSENSE!" Papyrus proclaims. "THE BEST SPAGHETTI TAKES TIME AND LOTS OF WORK. WITH UNDYNE ASSISTING, THERE IS NO WAY I SHALL FAIL TO MAKE THE BEST SPAGHETTI YOU HAVE EVER TASTED AND MAKE UP FOR MY MISTAKE THIS MORNING!"

Undyne, despite not knowing exactly what is happening, raises immediately to the challenge. "Ha! As if any other outcome is possible!" She throws her arm around Papyrus' neck and the two of them head out, laughing wildly. The door slams shut and you immediately fall into a kitchen chair.

"Wow. She's uh...intense."

"that's one word for it." Sans pulls himself up and sets the book down. "now go dry off. i'd better keep an eye on them and make sure nothing catches fire again. i'll let you know when it's ready." He starts to shuffle out and stops when he reaches you. He hesitates for a second. "listen. what happened back at the store-"

"Sans," you say gently, standing up. "I told you. It doesn't bother me."

"but it should." His shoulders are tense, but he's staring at you with an unusual seriousness. "you need to be careful. people aren't always scared off with a few sharp words. there are worse things that can happen."

His words bring back a memory from last night, when he had in visibly upset about something. "Did someone do something to you at work?" you ask quietly. When he looks away, you add. "Please, you can tell me."

You don't think he's going to answer, but finally he starts speaking in a harsh whisper. "i uh, work at a hot dog place. y'know, the one by the library?"

You nod. You'd seen it a few times.

"well there are some regulars who weren't very happy to see a monster like me working the place. so i usually work in the back. s'not so bad and i don't really mind. long as i've got the job right? but yesterday we were short staffed so i was up front and uh...."

His words are starting to sound strained, so you reach out and take his hand, squeezing it reassuringly. He smiles at you and takes breath before continuing.

"after i met you for lunch i was back at the shop and a group of them came in. they saw me, did the usual grumble and walked out without buying anything. thought that was the end of it. but then later i saw a bunch of people outside the window. they were wearing all black, masks. the whole thing. they threw rocks at the windows. broke 'em all. no way to prove who it was but...ya'know."

You gasp softly, your grip tightening. What kind of complete jerks would do something like that? "I-I'm so sorry Sans," you say. It feels so pathetic that that's all you can say.

Sans shrugs. "tibia honest, thought i was gonna get fired." His mouth quirks upward at his own pun and you feel like your heart is going to rip apart. "but the boss, he's cool. said it wasn't my fault. he's
not even gonna make me pay for it. even though it is cause of me it happened."

"No!" You shake your head furiously. "Sans that was not your fault. Those people are assholes and they're gonna get what's coming to them. But hey, your boss sounds like a good guy. See? There are more people like me out there. Not everyone hates monsters."

He doesn't really respond to your attempt to lighten the matter. You sigh. "Look I-" you're cut off by a massive sneeze and that brings a small smile back to Sans' face. He pulls his hand out of your grip and pushes you to your room.

"seriously pal. go change before you catch a cold."

"I'm not gonna get sick that easily!" You protest. You pause at the edge of the hallway. "I'm sorry that happened to you. But please just remember that you did nothing to deserve that. Okay?"

He doesn't answer and you hear the door click softly. You sigh and does what he says, changing into a hoodie and take off your wet socks. You're a little embarrassed about going into 'mom-lecture' mode. But it's horrible to see him so sad and accepting of the actions of a bunch of jerks, the words had just spilled from you. You had no idea he had been holding on to it since yesterday. If he hadn't say anything about that, what else could he be holding onto? You want to know. You want to know everything about him. Slowly, you realize your heart is pounding wildly. Oh no. Are you actually starting to....

No! No thoughts like that! You clap your hands to your face and decide to work on the flyer for the festival until dinner was ready. You dive right in and work furiously, trying not to think about the confusing feelings rising in your heart.

You don't get the text from Sans until close to five-thirty, just when your stomach is beginning to rumble. Good timing though. You've completely finished the flyer and send the email off to Tod before heading over. You grab the space book on your way out. Sans was clearly using it more than you were anyway right? Stepping out of your place, you're pleased to see that it's stopped raining. Maybe your evening run could happen after all! You'd hate to have to cancel it since Undyne had come all the way over. Though you had a sneaking suspicion that rain wouldn't stop her.

The door is cracked so you knock softly as you open the door. "Hey guys-"

The kitchen looks like a warzone. The walls are splattered with spaghetti sauce and noodles. An actual tomato is stuck on the ceiling, juice dripping to the kitchen tiles. Flour covers the ground and the resulting footprints track all over the living room. You gape at the scene as Papyrus waves to you cheerfully.

"WELCOME HUMAN! UNDYNE SUGGESTED WE INCLUDE GARLIC BREAD IN OUR DINNER TONIGHT! I HAVE NOT HAD THIS GARLIC BREAD BEFORE BUT SHE TELLS ME IT IS A TASTY COMPANION TO SPAGHETTI."

"That's right it is!" Unydne crows. She's wearing an apron and under the various stains you can see 'KISS THE COOK'. "You'd better prepare to have your taste buds explode!"

The tomato finally slips from the ceiling and falls heavily in front of you, hitting the ground with a thick plop. It takes every ounce of determination you have to not burst out laughing. Especially when you spy Sans on the couch, giving you a pleading look. There's a spot of sauce on his skull.

"I can-pffft-can't wait for it," you choke out, closing the door behind you. Oh man was cleaning up going to be rough. But for now you set the book down safely out of the range of the mess and sit at
the table, which is already set. Sans slouches over and plops into the chair next to yours. You grab your napkin.

"Hold still, there's sauce on your head," you say, unable to stop a few giggles. You put your hand on his skull, making him lean forward a bit. The bone is smooth for the most part but you can feel a few nicks and rough patches. Huh, now that's interesting. You wipe at the mess, trying to be as gentle as you can. Is his skull sensitive? "You weren't kidding when you said you needed to keep an eye on them. At least nothing caught on fire."

"this time," he mumbles, straightening when you're finished. "usually they do the cooking lessons at undyne's. so if she wrecks her place it's her fault."

"PREPARE TO BE AMAZED! ASTOUNDED! AND COMPLETELY IN AWE OF MY TALENTS," Papyrus brings the steaming pot over, Undyne toting the garlic bread. It smells amazing and your stomach rumbles again. You prepare yourself as you take a bite...

It's actually...really good?

"Dang Papyrus! This tastes awesome!" you praise him as you shovel more spaghetti in your mouth.

"NYEH HEH HEH! DO NOT LET THIS MAGNIFICENT FEAST OVERWHELM YOU HUMAN. UNDYNE IS TO THANK AS WELL."

You have a feeling it's because of Undyne, despite the mess, that it tastes as good as it does. You swallow your bite. "Thank you Undyne. It's really good."

She gives you a sharp fanged smile. "Glad to see you can recognize talent."

"where's alphys tonight?" Sans asks, twirling as many noodles as he possibly can on his fork. "working at the lab again?"

"Yeah." Undyne sighs but you notice an almost gentle look come over her face. "The geeks at the university are totally thrilled with her knowledge about all that sciencey crap. They've got her working on some alternative energy something or other. So she's got a lotta late nights."

"ALPHYS WAS THE ROYAL SCIENTIST UNDERGROUND," Papyrus explains to you. "SHE'S VERY SMART SO THE HUMANS LIKE HER. SHE'S ALSO THE ONE WHO MADE METTATON!"

Wow, that is really cool! The underground must have been a pretty tight knit community. You don't know how many monsters there are exactly, but it kinda seems like everyone knows everyone. "I'd like to meet her sometime," you say, gnawing on a piece of garlic bread. It's a little chewy but hey it's garlic bread.

Undyne laughs. "Sure. But she won't be running with us. She's more like this sack of bones."

Sans grins and shrugs. He's managed to produce another bottle of ketchup from somewhere. You frown at him disapprovingly and give him a pointed glance at his mostly untouched dinner.

"So tell me." Undyne leans forward towards you, all business. "What is your goal?"

"Huh?" Goal in what? "Like, in my life?"

"Do you want to get stronger? Is that why you go running?" She sweeps her hand dramatically and knocks over the pitcher of water on the table. Sans' hand shoots up and manages to snag it before it
hits the ground.

"Nice reflexes," you say to him before looking back at Undyne. The running had started because of a recommendation from a doctor. She had told you to give yourself something to do, something to distract from the dark thoughts when they came creeping back. Also, you had been pleased to find that running wore you out enough that if you went straight to bed afterwards, the nightmares weren't as bad. It was better than what you had done before anyway. Staying up until ungodly hours of the night until pure exhaustion gave you a dreamless sleep. But explaining that could lead to more questions you aren't quite ready to answer.

"Yeah, I want to be a stronger person. I'm...I'm not as weak as I was before but it's not enough. I gotta do more. Be more than the person I am right now. That's why I moved here."

Undyne leans back in her chair, once again giving you that studying look again. You can feel Sans watching you too but you're too embarrassed to look at him. Geez, when you say it out loud like that you sound like some immature kid. You should've just said 'oh you know, to get in shape!' or something like that.

Undyne slams her hands on the table suddenly, making you jump. She starts laughing and stands up, putting her hands on her hips. You stare at her blankly, not sure what you said that was so funny.

"You know what, I think I like you kid! You wanna get stronger? I'll make you the strongest human in this city!"

"Oh, well I mean I don't need to be that strong-" you try to protest but she suddenly darts to you and pulls you to your feet and starts shoving you to the door.

"Change!" she orders. "The rain is gone and that means our training is on! Go go go!"

You're pretty sure you're supposed to wait a while before running since you just ate but telling Undyne no would be like smacking a brick wall. Considering you hadn't been able to eat much, you're sure it'll be fine. Still, you don't hurry to dress and Undyne is hopping from foot to foot outside your door with Papyrus when you go back outside.

"I'm not very good yet," you try to tell her as the three of you head down the stairs. She merely claps you on the back.

"That's the point of training you dummy! Now then!" You've reached the sidewalk. "Paps told me you did two circles last time so tonight we're gonna do three!"

Three?! "I don't know-"

"GO!"

Ah what the heck?! You're pulled along into running. Again, Papyrus makes long strides ahead of you and jogs in place until you catch up. Undyne however, matches your pace and constantly shouts encouragement at you. Oddly enough, having a tall, blue fish lady yelling at you does make you more determined and you can feel yourself speeding up slightly, walking less. It's at the start of the third lap, your lungs on fire, that a great boom sounds from above and the sky dumps a waterfall on you. It's pouring and within a few seconds you're completely soaked, for the second time that day.

Undyne looks up at the sky but before she can say anything you yell, "Let's finish! A-almost done!"

She lets out a whoop and the two of you carry on, struggling through the rain. Finally, you reach the apartment and duck under the awning for some cover. You can't breathe, you're soaked to the bone
(heh) and you feel like your legs might give out at any moment. But the exhilaration! You're smiling and once you catch your breath you can't help but laugh. Having an actual coach is amazing!

"Not bad kid!" Undyne claps you on the back again and nearly sends you careening into the wall.

"T-thanks," you pant.

"YES YOU DID VERY WELL HUMAN!" Papyrus looks so proud of you. Neither he or Undyne appear to be bothered by the fact that they're dripping water.

"Thanks Pap," you say as you straighten. "Whoo! That was intense." But you had handled it!

You all squish and squeak your way back upstairs. Papyrus insists on giving you some leftovers so you stop by his place. Sans is reading your book and looks up as the three of you trudge in.

"hey, i saw you brought this over and..." He trails off, taking in your soaked appearance as Undyne and Papyrus head to the still wrecked kitchen.

"Oh yeah, I figured it'd be nice for you to actually be able to read it when you'd like." You wrap your arms around yourself and sniff. It's cold in the apartment. "You can just give it back whenever."

Sans stands and quickly disappears down the hall. You can hear a cabinet squeak and he's back with a big fluffy towel. He comes to you and puts it over your head, covering your face. You can feel his hands on your head, gently rubbing the towel against your hair. "i know you said you don't get sick that easy, but getting soaked twice in one day probably isn't good for you."

You laugh. The towel smells nice. Like fresh detergent. Guess that means skeletons take showers. "Thanks Sans." You lift the towel so you can see only to find that his face is right in front of yours. Your eyes meet and you feel yourself blushing. Oh great, you probably look like a ragged kitten all soaked like this! And not one of the cute kinds of kittens either.

"so uh can you promise me something?" he says suddenly, taking you off guard.

"What?"

Very slowly, he reaches up to your face, gently booping you on on the nose. "go take a hot shower and take it easy the rest of the night. ok?"

Well if you weren't blushing before...! You pull the towel back down over your face. "Yeah, sure," you mumble. "I promise, mom!"

He chuckles at you and lowers the towel to your shoulders, keeping his hands there for perhaps a few seconds longer than necessary. Your stomach is doing that stupid butterfly thing again.

"Well, I'd better hop to it then!" You say a little too cheerfully, stepping away from Sans. You take the plastic container of spaghetti from Papyrus, who has an odd grin on his face. "Thank you Pap, Undyne. I had fun tonight. Let's do it again soon!"

Undyne is leaning against the counter and she too is grinning widely. "You got it nerd," she says and you hear her whistle after you as you duck outside. It's not until you're back in your place that you realize you've still got the towel wrapped around your shoulders. Oh well, it's not like it's a long trip to return it. You toss it aside for now and do what Sans says. Peeling off your dripping clothes, you hop in shower. You let the hot water pound against you, the steam easing up your shivers. What an insane day! Especially the last part. That had definitely been...something. The touch of his hand on
your head, the gentle lights of his eyes, the genuine smile on his face. All of these sends your heart into a crazy spiral.

You are in big trouble.

You enter your room and groan. Ah crap, you had forgotten to unwrap your new mattress. And then you'd have to put sheets on and your head is starting to pound and your legs are aching. Well, Sans had told you to take it easy. You decide to sleep on your beanbag for one more night. Grabbing your laptop and your fuzziest blanket, you snuggle into the bag and start researching local cafes. The festival isn't for another two weeks and you have until Thursday to find a place for sponsors but it's probably a good idea to get a head start on it. You scroll around on the internet until your eyes start to droop. You fall asleep with thoughts of blue in your head.
Please Don't Say I Told You So

Chapter Summary

Man, getting sick sucks, doesn't it?
Find me here! theninjamouse.tumblr.com

You've made a terrible mistake. You moan and try to shift a little and instantly sharp pain flashes through you head. You try to breathe through it, but thanks to your clogged nose, you only end up coughing.

Yep. You're sick. Damn it! You were supposed to get stuff done today! Your head swims with any sort of movement, making your empty stomach churn. But you're desperate for some water and moving inch by inch, make your way over to the kitchen. The trip wears you out like a workout but the water is heaven on your burning throat. Blearily, you look through the rest of the cabinets. No medicine or soup or anything of the usual things you use to make yourself better. You were used to taking care of yourself when you got sick but this time you were vastly unprepared. You slump into the kitchen chair, wiping your nose with your sleeve. Every movement feels like torture against your sensitive skin. What to do? The little shop down in the circle should have what you needed right? It would be a ten minute trip. You slowly pull yourself up, stumbling a little. Your legs are on fire after the workout last night. Maybe fifteen minutes. You put on shoes, not bothering to change out of your p.j's and shuffle to the door.

Man, how pathetic to get sick like this after your big talk last night. Just from a little run in the rain! Sans would certainly have a thing or two to say if he saw you now.

"_____?"

Crap. Why are you not surprised? Speak of the devil and all that. You slowly turn away from your door. Sans is halfway down the stairs, clearly heading out somewhere. He's looking up at you with concern.

"you ok there? you look awful."

Gee thanks, why don't you tell me how you really feel? That's what you try to say but you only manage to croak out the "Gee, thanks," before you're seized by another harsh coughing fit. This one doubles you over and you brace yourself on the wall.

"oh my god." Sans presses a hand over his face. "i don't believe this. you actually got sick."

You cough a few more times and fight to get your breath back. You don't have the energy to retort. You stagger over to the stairs. "Believe....me. 'M not...happy about...it."

He's suddenly right by your side. You blink groggily at him. How did he move so fast?

"careful there," he warns you, pulling you back from the steps. "don't think you should be pushing yourself right now. where're you heading?"

"Store," you murmur, weakly trying to push past him. If you lost your resolve now, there was no way you'd make it down and back. "Need medicine and soup."
Gently, but firmly, Sans pulls you back to your apartment. He opens the door and leads you back inside. "I'll go get the stuff for you. What exactly do you need?"

You feel so bad, but now your head is spinning and you want nothing more than to lie back down. "Cough syrup. Chicken noodle soup. Crackers." You fish inside your wallet for cash but Sans takes it out of your semi-numb fingers and sets it aside.

"Anything else?" he asks gently, helping you ease back onto the bean bag. You shake your head, wincing at the stabs of pain.

"Sorry," you croak, letting your eyes close. After a minute, you feel his phalanges run through your hair. The movement is so soft and soothing that you sigh deeply, a small degree of relief filling your aching head. "Hmm, that feels nice." He continues the motion and you dimly feel his other hand press against your forehead.

"You've got a pretty bad fever," he says grimly.

You crack open an eye. "How can you tell without skin?"

"I'm not only made outta bone pal," he says with a smile. "I can feel things just like you. Now go back to sleep. I'll be back soon."

You make a little hum and let yourself sink back into darkness.

~~

Everything feels so light. Everything is hazy but you still feel completely safe. Blurred images float in front of your eyes. The concrete of the floor outside, the squeaking of a door opening and closing. A deep murmur and gentle touch. The color blue? It doesn't make sense. It just feels good to float and not worry about it.

~~

You're not sure how long you've been asleep when you next open your eyes. You blink slowly, your vision blurry. That's not your t.v. The pictures of monsters on the walls aren't yours. And the couch beneath your aching body most certainly isn't yours.

"You finally woke up."

You turn your head slowly to the voice, propped up by a thick pillow. Sans swims into view. He's sitting in front of you on the ground, book on his lap. He closes it and sets it aside. He offers you a glass of water and you gladly take it. You sip at it for a minute before you find your voice.

"Am I at your apartment?"

"Uh yeah, sorry." Sans rubs the back of his skull, grinning a little sheepishly. "I came back and you were asleep. You didn't look very comfortable on the bean bag and you don't have a couch so I'd figure I'd let you use ours. Easier to keep an eye on you that way."

So he had carried you over here. That's what the sensation of floating must have been from. Though you can't image what the heck that blue glow was about. Probably your fevered mind just playing tricks.

Sans pulls a plastic bag towards him. With a simple glance, you can tell there's more than just the three things you asked for. He starts pulling stuff out; advil, various soups, a six pack of 7-UP,
several packages of different types of crackers, honey, herbal teas, Nyquil, Dayquil, counter cough syrup and a hot water bottle.

"I've never had to deal with a sick human before, y'know? So I asked the store lady what I should do and she started listing stuff so I'd figured it wouldn't hurt to just get everything right? I'm sorry if it's the wrong stuff, I can go back if you need something else." He starts pulling off the wrapping of the cough syrup. "Probably best to start with this. Says it's supposed to help your throat. Heh, makes sense. It's called cough syrup after all. I'm a skeleton, I don't even have a throat. Paps hasn't ever needed something like this either so I hope it works."

He's babbling. You reach out and put your hand on his cheek, stopping his rant. He was worried about you. You fight to keep tears from your eyes. "Thank you," you say softly. "It's perfect."

He visibly relaxes, then pours you a cup of the syrup. He's watching you in a fascinated sort way as you swallow the medicine and make a face. "Ugh. Gross."

"Huh. Guess human and monster medicine is the same in that sense."

"Monsters get sick?" You hand the cup back and he starts opening up a 7-UP.

"Not quite in the same way that humans do. Monsters are made up mostly of magic. There's a little bit of biology involved. Obviously not for me and Paps but every one is so widely varied, in terms of what makes them up that it just depends on the individual. But most illnesses have to do with a monster's soul." He hands you the soda.

"Soul?" This was unexpected. "I didn't take you for a religious type."

Sans waves a hand dismissively. "I'm not talking about the idea of a heaven or hell kind of soul. It's an indisputable fact. Every one has a soul. Paps, Undyne. I have one. So do you." His gaze flickers downward to your chest for a brief second, like he's looking at something. You draw the blanket closer around yourself without thinking and Sans blushes lightly.

"Can you see mine?" you ask curiously.

"If I focus," he mumbles, playing with a can of soup.

You glance at your chest. Now you were insanely curious. You squint, as if that would make your soul appear. Sans chuckles gently.

"Humans don't have the ability to make souls visible."

You cease your efforts, leaning back tiredly against the pillow. "That's a shame. I'd like to see it."

Sans goes quiet for a minute. "If...If you want, I can show it to you. But-!" he cuts off your brightened gasp. "Only when you're better. Sound good?"

You pout a little, but nod. "Yeah. Thanks Sans."

Sans smiles, and places his hand back against your forehead. His eye sockets tighten slightly. "You're still pretty hot."

"Why thank you."

He blinks at you. "Heh. Good one," he admits with a laugh and another, slightly deeper blush. He stands, still holding a can of soup. "Feel up to eating?"
Your head is still pounding, despite sleeping. "I think I'll just munch on some crackers. What time is it anyway?"

"A little after three," he answers as he heads into the kitchen. Wow, you did sleep for a long time. You grab a pack of oyster crackers and start nibbling on them. Sans soon returns and sits back down on the ground and turns the TV on. It flickers to the science channel and some show about dinosaurs is on. After checking with you, he leaves it there and starts sipping from a bottle of ketchup. The two of you watch the show for a bit. You tap Sans on the skull gently.

"You don't have to sit on the floor." You sit up slowly and scoot down the couch a little, moving your pillow. You pat the spot your head had been and after a moment's hesitation, Sans stands up and takes the spot. He grabs the pillow from you and places it on his lap. Oh. That's not quite what you had meant but...well. The couch really isn't that big and your aching legs really don't want to squish up. You lay down, hoping that he'll take the redness of your face as a result of the fever and not your blush. You get comfy and glance at him. His cheekbones are a deeper blue than you've ever seen them and you can't stop a giggle that turns into a cough.

"For a bony guy, you're pretty comfy to lay on," you say when you get your breath back.

"I told ya before; I'm made of more than just bone." His phalanges start brushing against your head again. "This ok?"

"Uh huh," you say with a happy sigh. You resume watching the show, but you're not really processing what's happening. Every brush of your hair brings a gentle wave of relief from your headache. After a while, you notice Sans' strokes are getting slower until he stops altogether, letting his hand rest against your cheek.

"I can feel the heat. It feels like you're burning," he whispers softly. "I was reading about human sickness while you were sleeping. It said that fevers are human's way of burning out the illness." he rubs his thumb against your skin. "You humans set your insides on fire to get better."

You're pretty sure it's not that intense, but you can't bring yourself to interrupt him. He had actually researched human sickness? Just because you got a little cold?

"Humans haven't had magic since the war," he continues. Now you can tell he's talking more to himself. "But your natural resources...your determination. It's astounding. You're astounding."

"I'm really not." The words slip out, barely loud enough to hear. Your emotions are beginning to bubble up. When was the last time you had been fussed over like this? When someone had actually cared? Not because you were a responsibility, or a patient...but a friend? He was treating you with such genuine kindness. You didn't know what to do. "Just look at me. I got so sick for such a pathetic reason."

He starts rubbing your head again. "Humans get sick. There's not always a reason for it. No point in blaming yourself for it."

"I can't even take care of a little cold like this on my own. You were heading somewhere, right? I pulled you away from what you were doing, right?"

"'s not a big deal."

You can feel yourself starting to shake a little. Damn it no! You always get so emotional when you were sick! Tears are starting to leak from your eyes. "I'm sorry." You snuffle and rub at your eyes. Why? Why did you have to start crying? "I'm sorry."
He silently offers a tissue, and you wipe at your face. A quiet sob escapes from you. You're not even
sure why you're crying.

"why are you sorry?" he finally asks. He hasn't stopped rubbing your head and you want to trust
him. You want to trust him so bad it feels like your heart...like your SOUL is screaming for it. You
open your mouth but the words are stuck in your throat. You're so scared. Scared of blurtting out the
terrible truth, of showing him the scars on your arms. The scars that YOU dug into yourself. You're
scared that he'll leave. But mostly you're scared because you know that he would be right to do so.

"You're being so kind to me," you finally whisper. "I don't deserve it. Sans, I'm a broken, messed up
person. I'm trying so hard and I'm so happy being friends with you and Papyrus. But...things have
happened in the past. Things I can't change. I don't want to be burden to you. If I get sick like this so
easily, how can I possibly handle the rest of it?"

He doesn't answer, and you feel his hand leave your head. This is it. He's gonna tell you to leave.
You grit your teeth, but another sob slips out. But then, his phalanges very gently cup your chin,
turning your head slightly until you're looking at him. His eye sockets are glowing more softly than
you've ever seen them and he's gazing at you compassionately.

"listen to me _____." He rubs away some of the tears still falling down your face. "believe me when
i say i know what it feels like to have nonredeemable sins crawling on your back. to feel like there's
no point in life. no point in trying. there was a time in my life when i gave up. you wanna know what
i see when i look at your soul?" He puts a single digit against your chest, just below your collar bone
and your heartbeat speeds up just a little. "you've got a soul that's been hurt real bad pal. it's still
hurting. even i can see that. it's been cracked and glued back together with pure determination. it's
fragile, and solid as steel. it's known complete darkness, but is holding on to light. it's a soul that is
still fighting. a soul like that? a soul like yours, is not a burden."

His words, his kind, wonderful words unleash a flood in you. You turn over and wrap your arms
around his stomach, crying heavily into his shirt. He's so solid; you can feel a very soft hum of
energy pulsing through him, giving him shape. He holds you as you cry, rubbing your back
reassuringly. You go through several tissues; your nose is dripping an unsightly amount of snot and
your breakdown leads to several coughing fits. When you finally calm down, you continue holding
Sans tightly. His physical presence is so calming you can't bring yourself to let go just yet.

"Sorry," you murmur again.

"are you feeling any better?" Sans had been mostly quiet while you cried, though you could tell that
he was still concerned about your fever.

You cough loudly. "My head isn't thanking me for that, but I personally feel better. I should probably
take some of that advil." You start to sit up but Sans gently pushes your head back down to the
pillow.

"i got it."

You hear the rattle of the pill bottle and you're surprised to see it in his grip. You were certain the
medicine was still in the bag on the floor. Your head hurts too much to question it. You take a few
pills and lay back down. You groan, rubbing at your face. "Where's Pap at?"

"he had work."

"Oh? Where at?"
"he helps a friend with tending gardens. he's got quite a gift for making sculptures. i told him you were sick and he plans on bringing you a get well present. so i'll warn you when he gets here so you can pretend to be asleep."

You tap your knuckles against his ribs. "You're mean."

"the meanest." He starts rubbing your head again. Dang, he was pressing his full advantage with that move, wasn't he? As your eyelids start to get heavy again, you hear him clear his throat. "hey. so when you're all better, there's a place downtown i wanna check out. it's a space museum and theater. do you wanna go?"

"Hmm," you hum, almost asleep. "Yeah. Sounds fun. Like a date."

His phalanges twitch and a wide smile crosses his face. "heh. yeah. a date."

You fall asleep before his words really sink in.
The room is dark when you next open your eyes. Man, that cough syrup had really done it's job of knocking you out. You squint over at the stove top clock; it's too far away for you to really see what time it is. Two thirty? Three in the morning? Your gaze falls to the coffee table. There's a stuffed teddy bear holding a heart that says 'Get Well Soon!' on it's surface. You can only assume it's from Papyrus. You smile to yourself. What a sweet guy. It must have killed him to stay quiet enough not to wake you. Or you'd been so dead to the world it hadn't mattered anyway. You stretch and groan quietly. You still feel awful, but at least that crippling headache is finally gone. At that moment you become aware that you're alone on the couch. An unexpected stab of disappointment hits you. Well, you can't expect Sans to stay with you all night. What was it he had been saying before? You were practically asleep, but you're pretty sure he had said something about going to a space museum. That would be a fun place for a date. Not that you would ever actually say that out loud.

Wait.

Did you say that thought out loud before?!

You slap your hands up over your face. You honestly can't remember if you had spoken your medicine/sick hazy thought out loud, but the simple fact that you are even questioning it is a bad sign. You might as well wear a sign that says 'Attention! Desperate for companionship!' at this rate. A breath hisses out from your teeth. You seriously need to figure out what the heck is going on in your head when it comes to Sans. Is he a friend? Yes, absolutely. He and Papyrus are the best things that could have happened to you. But is that it? If that was the case, then why does your stomach flutter whenever you see him? Why is he always the first thing you think of whenever something monster related came up?

You trust him, and care about him. But honestly, you barely know a thing about him. It was days, just DAYS ago that you met him! And even if you are starting to....oh geez, it's embarrassing to even think it! It's all too soon, too fast. Too many things were still left unsaid both on your end and his. Furthermore, when all was said and done, you are a human. He's a monster skeleton. Can he even see you in that way? You sigh deeply. Even if he could, it wouldn't matter in the end. Sooner or later, you would have to tell him everything about your scars, your fear of fire and the fog in your head. You would be extremely lucky if he stuck around at all after that. Maybe it's better to let these frightening and wonderful feelings lie quietly in your heart.

You decide to try and sleep some more. You don't have to be in to work until the afternoon and hopefully your fever will at least be gone. You roll over and are about to fade away when you hear an odd sound. It's a soft groan and sniffle and it's in the same room as you. You freeze for a second and slowly push yourself up. What you see makes your heart melt all over again.

The coffee table had been blocking your view, but now you can see Sans wrapped in a blanket lying on a small, worn mattress on the floor. You watch him sleep for a moment, a tender feeling rising in
your chest. You felt bad for worrying him enough to drag his bed out here, but the fact that he cares so much almost makes you tear up again.

He shifts in his sleep, eye sockets squeezed tightly shut. He's frowning and gripping the blanket tightly. Another groan escapes him and for a split second, you see a flash of blue seep from his left eye. What on earth? You slip from the couch as quietly as you can. He starts muttering words you can't understand, the words garbled and utterly foreign. It's like no human language you've heard before and it sends a chill down your spine.

"...gaster...."

Gaster? What is a gaster?

Sans moans loudly and his feet start kicking slowly against the bed. He's having a nightmare. You reach out and gently touch his hand. He flinches away, curling into a ball. "g-gaster! paps!" There's no mistaking the blue light building in his closed eye now. Whatever he's seeing, it's clear that it's scaring him. You grab his bony shoulders, tightening your grip when he attempts to pull away again.

"no!"

"Sans, wake up!" you plead, trying to keep your voice low. The last thing you want to do is wake Papyrus. "Sans, it's just a dream. C'mon, wake up!"

His eyelids shoot open and you let go of him in alarm, falling back on the ground. His right eye socket is completely black, while the left is glowing with a large round pupil that flashes between blue and yellow. He's breathing heavily, staring at you with wide sockets and you find yourself frozen to the spot. You can't tear your eyes away from the utterly inhuman look on his face. In the dim light leaking in from the window, he looks like a monster from a horror movie.

He blinks and the blue light is gone just like that, replaced by his usual white lights in both eyes. The frightening image is gone and the Sans you know is back. "-____?"

"H-hey." Your voice is hoarse and for the first time you're glad that you're sick and can blame your shaky tone on your throat. "You okay? It sounded like you were having a bad dream."

Sans sits up, rubbing at his sweaty skull. How is he sweating? "um. yeah." He drags his hand down over his sockets and sighs. "sorry i woke you."

You wave your hands quickly. "No, no I was already awake! I did sleep most of yesterday." You lower your hands. "Do you want to talk about it?"

He shakes his head a little too quickly. "nah. i barely even remember it."

"Okay then. Um." You're not sure how to bring it up but that strange light in his eye had scared you a little. If that isn't normal, you have to let him know. "Your...your eye was doing a...." You gesture at your left eye, a little lost for words.

"oh." Sans presses his hand against the socket, a grim smile on his face. "it does that. don't worry about it."

"What was that?"

Sans looks away from you. "like i said, i'm made up of more than just bone. all monsters have a little bit of magic in them. some more than others."
You inch a little closer. "And that's what that flash was?"

He looks at you and sighs again. "do you really wanna talk 'bout this now? at-" he squints at the clock "three in the morning?"

"Well, I mean, you're awake. I'm awake," you mumble. But if he wants to go back to sleep it wouldn't be right to keep him up. He still looks shaken from his nightmare. You reach out and take his hands in yours. For a few minutes, you rub the back of his oddly thick and solid carpels with your thumbs. He watches you silently, eyelids heavy. "I just want to know more about you," you admit quietly. "But you're right, we should both go back to sleep."

He gives you a genuine smile and pulls one hand out of your grip, placing it against your forehead. "i think your fever's gone," he murmurs, brushing your hair back. "it's better to be safe than sorry though. i promise i'll tell you about my magic if you go to sleep for now. ok?"

You squeeze his hand. "It's a deal."

~~~~

*BANG!*

You yelp and flail, rolling off the couch. You hit the ground with a heavy thud (thank heaven for carpets). "Gah!"

"HUMAN! I AM SO SORRY!" Papyrus scrambles to pick up the many metal pots he had just knocked to the floor. "ARE YOU OKAY?"

"Just peachy Pap," you groan, flat against the ground. "I'm just gonna stay here for a bit, 'kay?"

A moment later you feel yourself rising into the air, Papyrus lifting you with ease. With more gentleness than you thought possible from him, he sets you back down on the couch, pulling the blanket back up around you. He then tucks the teddy bear he got you next to your face. He pats your head, smiling at you.

"YOU ARE VERY FUNNY ______. BUT A SICK PERSON SHOULD NOT LIE ON THE GROUND."

You laugh, your voice still scratchy. "Thanks Pap." You look over at the ground. Sans and his mattress are gone. "Where's your brother?"

"SANS HAD WORK THIS MORNING," Papyrus announces, going back to the kitchen. "I VOLUNTEERED TO REMAIN AND COOK YOU BREAKFAST TO HELP AID YOUR RECOVERY."

Your heart sinks a little. But work couldn't be helped right? You didn't have long before you'd have to get ready yourself. "Sounds good to me."

You watch him bustling in the kitchen for a few minutes. "Hey, I have a question for you," you say a little hesitantly.

"YES? WHAT IS IT?"

"Does-" you clear your throat. "Does Sans have nightmares often?"

The clanking from the kitchen stops for several long seconds. "MY BROTHER...SANS HAS
"ALWAYS HAD TROUBLE SLEEPING," Papyrus finally says. "I HAVE TRIED TO SPEAK WITH HIM ABOUT THEM BUT SANS IS NOT VERY WILLING TO DISCUSS IT."

"I see," you say softly. You play with the ears of the teddy bear. It made sense that Sans wouldn't talk about it. He wasn't the type to worry others, especially his brother. He had brushed you off last night, but he the way he acted made you think the dreams were a regular occurrence. It had happened enough to you so the signs were easily recognizable.

"DO NOT TROUBLE YOURSELF HUMAN," Papyrus calls to you cheerfully. "I AM ALMOST DONE WITH YOUR BREAKFAST!"

You just pray he isn't making spaghetti.

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It's not spaghetti. Papyrus does his best to heat up a can of chicken noodle soup and with some directions from you, manages not to set anything on fire. You eat together, Papyrus telling you all about his gardening job. He's very proud of the fact that he's working with Asgore, the king of monsters (this news makes you choke on your soup) and how he uses his royal guard training with Undyne in shaping various bushes and shrubs. You're not quite sure how the two connect, but you give your full support and interest. When you finish you head back to your place, waving off his concerns. Your fever is gone and as you've experienced in the past, it takes a few days for a cough to heal. But it's not enough to stop you from getting back to work. Furthermore there was no way you were calling in sick less than two weeks since your first day. You allow yourself to take a very long hot shower, washing away the sick. You let yourself move slowly but finally make your way to the station.

"Hey you! Woah." Abby takes in your bundled up appearance and the thick scarf wrapped around your mouth. "You okay?"

You wave, coughing a little pathetically. "I'm good. Sound worse than I am."

She gives you a skeptical look. "All right then. Your flyer was approved, so there's that good news." She starts shuffling through some papers as you start shedding layers. "Bad news, there was a mix up with the food permissions for the vendors. They've gotta all be done over."

Fantastic. You sigh and plop down next to her, popping in a cough drop. "Let's get to work then."

You spend the rest of the day attempting to fix the mess and your head is starting to pound by the time you and Abby finish. It's boring and tedious work, but at least it doesn't make you use your brain very much.

"You know you could have call in sick," Abby says as you two clean up the remaining papers. "Tod is super chill about stuff like that."

This you did know. Tod had told you early on if you needed a 'recovery' day, no matter what the reason, you didn't need to hesitate. But you didn't want to make it look like you were taking advantage of that. Besides, better to save those days for recovering from more serious things than a cold. "I promise I'm okay," you say to her, smiling as best as you can. "I'm much better than I was last night."

"I'll warn you now, I'm gonna send you home early if you're like this tomorrow," Abby says in a semi-serious tone. "Now go rest."

You wave goodbye and head home, looking forward to wrapping up in a warm blanket with another
bowl of soup. It's as you're passing a bakery that you remember you still have to find a sponsor. Ugh. You had told Tod it was no big deal but your sickness had thrown a real wrench into the mix. You still have no clues about where to go and you are starting to run out of time.

"Bake sale! Bake sale! Run by spiders, for spiders, with spiders!"

The words catch your attention as you're about to head up the stairs and you pause. It's a new shop in the circle called Muffet's Web. You can see a monster standing outside the shop in a gorgeous red suit and tie combo covered in a spider web pattern. You grin and turn towards the shop, grateful you had thought to stuff the sponsor file in your bag. You approach the monster, a reptilian creature with deep purple skin. She gives you a large toothy smile and hands you a flyer as you enter the shop. The inside is covered in spiderwebs, which wasn't surprising considering the logo. There's a large black chandelier that casts the whole room in a slightly purple lighting tone. The walls are lined with shelves displaying various baked goods and your mouth starts watering. You approach the counter, which is covered in decorative spiders. There's no one there so you tap the little bell. Immediately, the decorations start moving and oh those are real spiders! A whispering fills the room.

"Customer!"

"There's a customer!"

The hissing grows louder and you feel your legs quivering. You aren't the biggest fan of actual spiders. Hold you ground! You can do this!

"Welcome." The voice melts out of the dim lighting and a huge spider monster appears before you, gently bobbing her multiple arms. Her many pitch black eyes blink at you and she grins, showing off fangs. The whole deadly spider look is a little offset by the pigtails on her head and the sharp bow on her classy outfit. "How may I assist you today?" Her 's' hiss slightly. You have to assume this is Muffet.

"Um, hi I'm _____," you introduce yourself, trying to keep your voice from shaking. You pull the folder from your bag. "I'm with E.B.B.T radio, down the road a ways."

"Ah yes, delightful music," she hums and that sets you a little more at ease. So she's already familiar with the station. That will make this easier.

"I'm glad to hear that! We're holding a fall festival on the 21st and I was wondering if you would be interested in setting up a booth with us?" You hold the folder out and she takes it delicately with one of her many arms. "The booth itself would be provided by the station. You just need to provide the goods you wish to sell and any decorations you want to use."

"Hmmm. Seems like an interesting prospect," she hisses thoughtfully as she scans through the folder. "Is this a monster friendly festival?"

Honestly you hadn't thought about that. But Tod himself is very open to monsters. Abby of course would be thrilled to have a booth run by spiders in pigtails. "Yes of course. E.B.B.T values all listeners, regardless of race or species."

She regards you with those big black eyes. Her gaze flickers down for the briefest moment. Sans had done that last night when he mentioned your Soul. Could she see your Soul too?

Muffet smiles again and extends a thin hand. You swallow nervously and shake her hand (claw? feeler?) and her strong grip surprises you. You match her smile and explain the rest of the folder and what information she would need to send directly to the station. And then, because you feel it would
be rude not to, you order a bag of muffins. You munch slowly on one as you climb the stairs. It's really good but you sincerely hope it's not actually made WITH spiders.

Your phone buzzes just as you reach your door.

s: i have too much soup now. dinner?

You smile and walk down the hall.
How To Deal With Embarrassment

Chapter Notes

Just a pro-tip. Fuzzy socks, while cute are not the safest thing to wear. Also, thank you for commenting! I promise I read every single one and every one gives me a warmly feeling in my heart. I just suck at replying. So keep 'em coming!

Find me here! theninjamouse.tumblr.com

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There's a sharp bang from one of the offices down the hall. You jump, almost scattering the stack of CDs on the desk. Abby seems a little less surprised but still looks up. Muffled yelling drifts through the door.

"What the heck is that about?" you whisper to her. Abby shrugs.

"It's probably Emily," Abby says with a scowl. "Happens every couple of weeks. She doesn't agree with all of Tod's decisions about, well, anything. And since her grandpa was the one who got this place up and running years ago, she gets to have a say in big decisions. She can get pretty vocal."

Oh so it was that kind of set up. You try to get back to work as the argument continues. Well, it actually sounded more like a one sided yelling match. You had never heard Tod raise his voice since you had started working at the station. When you finish, you scoop up the stack and head towards the library closet where the CDs were kept. The trip takes you right by the office and the mumbled words become clear. It is indeed Emily behind the door.

"-and you can't seriously expect them to adhere to the rules of conduct-"

"Why not?" Tod's voice, still not yelling, is a little sharp. "What makes you think they would cause a scene? It's a festival Em, not a rave. They're participating to make a profit and enjoy the fall spirit, just like everyone else. Besides, it's an open event and I think that it would be a good step in welcoming the new monster community."

"Community?" Emily sputters. "Those monsters are not a community. They are a hive and you are making a huge mistake! Don't come crawling to me when they send our turnout rate plummeting."

The door suddenly slams open, knocking you in the back. The CDs fly across the floor with a sharp clatter. Emily storms out the door and her sharp high heel lands directly on an Fall Out Boy album. It cracks under her shoe. She looks down at the broken CD, face twisted unpleasantly. She points at you.

"That's coming out of your paycheck," she snarls before stomping back up to the booth.

You gape after her for a moment. What a nasty-! You grumble quietly and kneel down to gather up the mess. The door creaks slightly and Tod pokes his head out. At the sight of you on the floor, he winches and joins you in cleaning up.

"Caught in the crossfire huh?" he says, giving you a small grin.

"Um, just passing by actually," you mumble. Well, you had been before you had paused to listen in.
You gather up the broken CD. It was one of the older albums, but it had several of your favorites on it. "I'm sorry about this."

"It wasn't your fault," Tod says firmly. "Don't worry, it won't come out of your pay."

It couldn't be more than eight bucks, but it's a relief to hear. "Thanks Tod."

He follows you back to the library, holding a portion of the CDs and helps you put them away. You have a sneaking suspicion as to what the argument was about, but given that Tod was your boss, you're not sure if you should bring it up.

"W-was the place I picked for sponsoring okay?" you finally ask, sliding an Owl City album in place.

Tod sighs. Looks like you hit the nail on the head. "Of course, it's a wonderful place. I visited them myself after you sent me their information. Marvelous donuts. There are just some people who aren't open to different kinds of...people. Emily comes from a very, very old fashioned back ground and gets a little too passionate about things sometimes. Monsters in particular seem to be a tender subject with her."

That you had gleaned even before you had gone into Muffet's shop. From the way the argument had sounded, Tod had taken all responsibility when Emily had gotten mad about the spiders participating in the festival. Just hearing the fight had gotten you heated up. For the sake of your job, you didn't want to be on the receiving end of one of those yelling sessions.

"I'm sorry," you say to Tod, guilt twisting at you.

"For what? Ahh." He notices your expression and pats your shoulder. "You did good. Don't let it bother you. 'Kay?"

So he says, but it's not so easy. The whole situation stays on your mind for the rest of your shift. The city was big, and not everyone was a complete jerk to monsters, but the majority of what you had seen was not exactly heart lifting. People were scared and in a way you could understand. Monsters from the stories and the movies now walked the streets among the masses. But to see such open hate and distaste still shocked you at times. Why couldn't people just give them a chance?

Another worry ate at you as you walked home. You had tried to get Sans to talk about his magic and soul stuff last night at dinner, but he had been oddly hesitant and quiet about it. He had kept glancing at Papyrus, so you assumed he didn't want to talk about it in front of his brother. Was it a intimate, private kind of thing? What if you had been pushing him beyond his comfort zone? You had no idea what monster etiquette was about that sort of thing. You stare down at your chest and squint again. Curiosity was eating at you. You wanted to know what your soul looked like.

You enter your apartment, tapping the door with your foot. You were far too tense. You need to relax before you anxiety got too worked up and the fog crept in. Dumping your work bag and pants, you pull on your coziest sweats and fuzzy socks and hook your iPod up to a speaker. It was time to tackle those dishes that had been building up. Shakira pounds from the speakers. You let yourself sway a bit as you wash, humming along. Music really was the best. It spoke to you in ways that people never could. Your blood could match the tone and speed of a song, your heart pounding out the beat. You felt alive, really alive when you were listening. You could fly, you could escape to a world where your worries meant nothing. And the words, oh the words of a song told stories. Every song had a story behind it. A story that was meant to be shaped to your own experiences in this world. Not a single person experienced a song exactly the same as another. It could be light, it could be silly. It could also be dark and chilling, speaking to your darkest feelings and thoughts and giving
Shakira dies away and P!nk's 'Raise Your Glass' blares from the speaker, prompting you to step away from the sink. You start dancing, letting your body flow with on the spot moves. You let the music flow through you, shaking your hips and throwing your arms up. Your feet tap against the tile and you sing along as you skip around. You jut out your legs and arms in sharp movements, your head swinging freely with every beat. You weren't exactly shy about dancing, but you never let yourself completely go unless you were alone. And you certainly didn't sing when anyone could hear. You arch your back slightly, drawing your arms close and then glide into a spin as the song comes to an end.

And scream.

Sans is standing your doorway, his eye sockets wide with wonder. His cheeks are tinted bright blue and he's watching you make an utter fool of yourself. With your shriek of surprise, you lose your balance and your fuzzy foot slips against the tile. You're falling, the floor is rushing up and OH CRAP! You throw out your hands to break your fall and-

You slam to a stop, like someone tugs sharply on your chest, but there's no pain. You gasp at the sight of the floor just a few inches away from your face. Your body is completely frozen. You literally can't move. Not just that...you're floating! "What the hell?" you choke out. Your eyes flash to Sans.

His hand is stretched out towards you. His left eye is glowing an intense blue, just like the night he had that nightmare. A bead of sweat rolls down his skull as he moves his hand slightly. In response, your body starts lifting until you're upright, feet hovering just above the ground. He blinks. The light vanishes and you gently touch down. The pressure in your chest disappears. For several long seconds, the two of you stare at each other. The awkward silence is broken when you realize that Colbie Caillat's 'Falling For You' is playing. How oddly appropriate. You can't help but let out a loud laugh.

Sans rubs a hand against the back of his skull. His eye sockets are tight with a mixture of embarrassment and worry. "you ok?"

You take a breath and pause the music. "First of all. DON'T sneak up on me while I'm dancing! And secondly, what the ever loving hell was THAT?" you gesture to yourself and then point at his eye. "I need explanations."

"i uh...heh. ok. guess i owe you that." Sans shuffles to, where else, the bean bag. "you've uh...got some pretty nice moves." He's blushing again.

"Okay buddy, I need you to do something for me." You plop down next to him and stick your finger against his forehead. "I need you to forget you ever saw that. I would be overcome with humiliation right now if it wasn't for that levitation thing. Speaking of which, don't change the subject! Talk!"

You pull your feet up and put your chin in your hands, staring at him intensely. Etiquette be damned! "So I'm guessing that eye thing is part of your magic? You can move things? People?"

His skull is still bright blue and it's adorable. "uh yeah. that's part of it." He takes a breath, perhaps getting his thoughts in order. "all monsters have a certain amount of magic. it's what makes us up. so all monsters have certain abilities and attacks they can use."

"Attacks?"

Sans shrugs. "with the possibility of a human falling down to the underground, everyone wanted to
be prepared. it's kind of like how you humans can arm yourselves with swords or spears. our weapons are just manifested with magic and are not physical objects."

"Will you show me?"

Sans hesitates, then nods slowly. His eye sockets close in concentration and he lifts his hand, palm up. There's almost a slight shimmer in the air, like the way you had seen it shift above an intense flame, and a long white bone blinks into existence, hovering just above his hand. Your jaw drops. It's as long as your arm. Without thinking, you reach out and Sans flinches back.

"careful. it's a weapon. just touching it will hurt you."

You pull back, berating yourself. "Sorry. I wasn't thinking." You study the bone. Other than its large size and hovering state, it looks like a plain old bone. Was it hot to the touch like an oven or something? After a moment, Sans lets out a quiet sigh and the bone disintegrates into the air. He watches you, clearly waiting for your reaction.

"That is insanely cool." You smile widely. "That must be so handy. No need to wear yourself out carrying a big old tool around. You can just-" you snap your fingers- "bam! and there it is. Does everyone's look like that?"

He's taken aback by your enthusiasm. "uh, no that's just me and paps. everyone is different, according to their magic type and personalities. undyne uses spears. the king has a trident and fire abilities. stuff like that."

So cool. You sit back and ponder this for a minute. You wonder if you can get Undyne to show you her abilities the next time you saw her. Sans is still watching you and he shakes his head.

"isn't this freaking you out?" His tone is low. "i just told you that monsters have powers developed to use against humans and you're just...smiling about it."

When he put it that way, you guess it was a little frightening. But.... "I haven't seen a single monster hurt anyone since I moved here. I'm sure there are some bad monsters, just like there are bad humans. But like you said, humans can arm themselves too. Mankind has always found a way to defend itself against threats. I can't blame you guys for finding a way too." You shrug. "Maybe I've just read too many fantasy stories. I can't help but think it's pretty cool that you guys are literally using magic. I always wanted to believe that it really existed."

"so you're not...scared of me?" Now his voice is so soft you barely hear the words. He's not looking at you and you can hear a quiet rattle coming from his hands. Poor guy was so nervous he was actually shaking.

"Of course not!" You grab his hands, squeezing tightly. "Sans you saved me from a broken nose! I think you're amazing!"

He squeezes your hand back and gives you a relieved smile.

"So you can use your power on anything? Make stuff move wherever you want?"

He nods and his phalanges flick. Your cell phone, which was over on the counter is encased in a blue light. It lifts up and drifts through the air into your waiting hands. "Sans this is so cool!" you squeal. You can't hardly contain your excitement about this and you tap him with your fist on his shoulder. "It's no wonder you're such a lazy bones! You literally never have to get up if you need something."
A smirk lifts his smile. "there's something else i can do." He stands up and offers a hand. He pulls you to your feet and holds on to your hand. "do you want to see it?"

You nod vigorously. "What is it?"

"i'm pretty good with...heh, shortcuts."

Shortcuts? You open your mouth to ask what he means by that and he takes a step forward, tugging you after him. You gasp as a strange feeling sweeps over your whole body, like a dull electric tingle combined with the sensation of stepping through a stream of water. You blink, your head spinning and realize you're not longer standing by your beanbag. You're not even in your apartment anymore.

You've somehow moved to Sans' place, smack dab in the middle of his living room. You whirl, eyes feeling like they're about to pop out of your head. You must move too fast because the room sways slightly. A groan slips out and you crouch, holding your hand to your mouth.

"sorry!" Sans pats your back a little helplessly. "it's tough the first time. it'll pass in a sec."

It does only take a second and you're back to normal. You stare at the carpet, not moving. He had just teleported. He could freaking teleport! YOU had just been teleported! By a skeleton!

"_____?"

You practically launch to your feet and grab Sans by his shoulders. He jumps.

"You are officially the coolest guy I know!" It almost feels like actual stars are in your eyes. You let go of him and start touching random stuff to make sure you're actually at his place and it's not some scary weird illusion. "I-did we really-oh my-what?!"

Sans starts laughing, his sockets scrunching up. "geez, you scared me for a sec."

"Consider it payback for earlier. Oh my gosh!" You have a sudden thought. "Is that how you got me over here when I was sick? I don't really remember, but you had to have moved me right?"

Sans shrugged and plopped onto the couch. "i was gonna use a shortcut but since you were sick i didn't wanna make it worse cause it was your first trip. so i just-" he wiggles his phalanges- "gave ya a lift."

It's not even a funny pun, but you're already so wound up it sends you stumbling to the couch before you fall to the floor, laughing so hard tears are leaking from your face. You can feel Sans shaking slightly with suppressed laughter as he watches you with great amusement.

"I'm sorry," you say when you catch your breath, wiping at your eyes. "You probably think I'm some kind of freak huh?"

"you a freak? never." Sans pats your head. "you are many things but a freak isn't one of them."

You let out a breath and let your head slump to his shoulder. Definitely not the most comfortable of places to rest your head, but you don't really care. You can't help but notice he smells really nice. A hint of ketchup and something you can't quite describe. Like fresh mint only not as strong. "Okay. I have one more question for you. For now."

"what's that?"

You look up at his face, attempting to look stern and serious. You're probably failing, going by the
snicker he gives you. "Why were you in my apartment, peeping on my sick dance moves?"

Well that cuts his chuckles off. "oh. i was uh, coming over to ask you something. your door wasn't closed all the way and i was gonna knock anyway, honest!" he adds at your snort. "but then i heard music and i could kinda see you and i got curious and i just...walked in. sorry."

You can't be mad at him with such a worried expression on his face. Besides it was your own fault for being lazy about the door. "That's fine. You still should've said something and let me know you were just standing there." You really don't want to think about how long he had watched you dance before you noticed him. "Is this about the space museum? I'm free tomorrow night," you say a little shyly. "Sorry, I guess we never agreed on a good time."

"no, that's not-i mean yeah that's great." He starts drumming his phalanges against his kneecap. His cheeks flared blue when you mentioned the museum. "tomorrow is perfect. but that's not what i was coming to ask ya about."

"What then?"

"well there's."

He's cut off by a sudden knock at the door. You both look at it. It couldn't be Paps, he would just walk in. Sans grins at you a little sheepishly. "toriel and the kid wanna meet ya. so they kinda invited themselves over for pie. surprise?"

Your jaw drops as he stands up to get the door. Toriel as in QUEEN of monsters, Toriel? And Frisk, the savior and ambassador to monster kind?

*Surprise indeed.*

Chapter End Notes

I promise the space date is coming soon! Also GASP problems with blondie Emily?? Who would'a thunk it?
Pie and New Friends

Chapter Summary

You meet some new friends and prepare for your 'not' date to the museum with Sans.

Chapter Notes

Man this chapter was rough. Sorry there was no release yesterday, it's been a crazy couple of days.
Feel free to comment/share and thank you so much for reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Sans!" You hiss, scrambling up from the couch. "I'm not ready! I'm wearing p.j pants and fuzzy socks for heavens sake!"

You both glance down at Sans' usual attire of shorts and slippers at the same time. You groan loudly.

"trust me," Sans says with a smirk. "tori'll be cool with it." Then he opens the door and the queen of monsters steps through.

She's big, quite a bit bigger than you or Sans and has to duck slightly to fit through the doorway. Honestly, the first thought you have is that she kind of looks like a goat. She's wearing some type of deep purple robe/toga thing with an odd symbol you vaguely remember seeing on the news a few times. It's probably the royal seal or something. The monster herself is covered in thick cream colored fur that seems elegantly cared for and brushed. A pair of horns poke up from between long floppy ears. She smiles warmly at you.

"Hello my child." Her voice is soothing and just as warm as her expression. "I am-oh careful," she says to Sans, who takes the pie from her. "It's rather heavy."

"don't worry. i goat it." he winks and she laughs. You never would have expected such a joyful sound to come from such a large monster.

She extends a paw towards you and finishes. "I am Toriel." You shake her hand and her fur is so soft you can physically feel yourself relaxing a little.

"Uh buh...______," you blubber intelligently. "I's very nice to meet you."

Toriel pats your hand reassuringly. "You don't need to be so stiff ______. I simply wished to meet you after hearing so many delightful things about you from Papyrus and Sans."

That does absolutely nothing to ease your nerves. But it was interesting to know that even Sans had talked about you to the queen. At that moment, another face pokes out from behind Toriel, shyly watching you. They can't be more than eight years old, at most. This was the kid that saved the monsters?
"_____, this is Frisk." Toriel introduces you to the child, gently nudging them forward.

"Hi," you say, waving to them. They wave back, a smile growing on their face as they take you in. Then they skip over to Sans, who rubs their head affectionately.

"hey kid." Sans is smiling widely. "how's school treating ya?"

Frisk makes a flurry of motions with their hands, pulling out what looks like a math book from the bag on their back. Sign language?

"now c'mon kid," Sans responds with a pointed look at Toriel. "you know your mom considers my help cheating."

Mom?!

"It's only cheating when you give them the straight answer Sans. I don't mind you simply assisting them." Toriel sighs and turns back to you. "Let's sit down, my child. The pie is still a little warm."

The four of you sit at the table. Sans and Frisk lean over the math book, lost in chitchat about its contents while Toriel cuts you a slice of the pie she brought. "I hope you like cinnamon and butterscotch," she says, placing it in front of you.

"Yes! Of course. You majesty," you add hurriedly.

"Oh my." Toriel waves a hand, shaking her head and chuckling gently. "I haven't been queen for a long time my dear. Please just call me Toriel."

Your face goes a little red, but you nod and dig into the pie. It's absolutely amazing and you have to fight not to shove it all in your mouth. "This is fantastic Toriel!"

She smiles proudly. "You are very sweet."

"Just like this pie?" You wiggle your eyebrows and she breaks into more of that loud laughter. Sans grins at you.

"I can see now why you like her Sans," Toriel says, wiping at her eyes.

Sans pulls a piece of pie towards him as Frisk nudges him. They have a huge smirk on their face. Sans pokes them in the cheek, staring fixedly at the pie. "heh. yep. her sense of humor's a real slice."

Frisk makes a quick sign with their hands and Sans almost chokes on his pie. "where did you even-tori what're you teaching those kids at that school?"

Toriel giggles. "Oh believe me Sans, they don't get it from me." She turns to you and explains. "I've recently started teaching at a school close to the ambassador offices. Mostly monster children but there are a few humans, like Frisk. It's what I've wanted to do for a very long time. I'm very lucky that I've been able to secure a position so soon."

"yeah, i'm sure that's got nothing to do with asgore," Sans mumbles. Toriel gives him a sharp look.

"sorry. how are the negotiations going?"

"They're...going." Toriel rubbed her face. "It's difficult to get the meetings set up. Always seems like the courts have more important matters to deal with."

"What negotiations?" You felt terribly out of the loop and you weren't quite sure if it was your place to ask.
"Oh, I'm sorry my child." Toriel gave you a gentle smile, but her eyes were strained. "Your human system isn't exactly built to accommodate monsters. The king and I, along with a few others have been working to get basic civil rights established. We're had some successes, like making sure our people at least have places to live and such. Those of us directly involved have fared decently in matters like housing and jobs but others have run into a lot of...difficulty."

"that's putting it mildly." Sans' face was tight, the lights of his eyes dim. "majority of monsters still don't have jobs and are living on what gold they had saved up. not that it's worth here. can't imagine it lasting for much longer."

Your faith in humanity was dropping with every word that she spoke. You knew things weren't ideal, but fighting just to make sure monsters had a place to live? A way to make a living? You felt like scum. "I had no idea. I'm sorry. Is there anything I can do?"

Toriel put her hand on yours, squeezing gently. "Oh my dear, simply having people like you as a friend and ally to monster kind is enough. It helps to show those not as willing that such relationships are possible."

There had to be something else you could do. But try as you might, you were drawing a blank. You really were useless. Sans patted your back, noticing your soft sigh.

"hey, she's right kid. don't sell yourself short."

Frisk tapped Sans on the shoulder and gestured towards you. Their hands formed fast signs and Sans grinned.

"kid wants to hear about the first time you met me and Paps," he told you. "i told them the basic bones of it but figured you'd tell it better."

You laughed and told the whole story to Frisk and Toriel, who listened very attentively and laughed at all the right moments. You had just reached the part about trying Papyrus' spaghetti when the skeleton himself showed up, bursting through the door with a loud "NYEH HEH HEH! I HAVE RETURNED BROTHER!" It seemed Sans had forgotten to mention the visit from the friends to him as well because Papyrus had squealed loudly at the sight of Frisk and Toriel. Frisk jumped up with a happy yell and ran straight to the taller skeleton. Papyrus scooped them up and spun, nearly smacking into the walls.

"BROTHER WHY DID YOU NOT TELL ME THE QUEEN AND OUR SMALL FRIEND WERE VISITING?" He sternly asked Sans as Frisk made themselves comfy on Papyrus' shoulders. Their head nearly brushed against the ceiling. Sans shrugged.

"You're not the only one he forgot to tell," you say, glaring at Sans. "Hence the reason I'm dressed like a hobo."

Toriel laughed. You really like her laugh. "I honestly hadn't even noticed." She takes in your pants, which have a large cupcake on the side and smiles widely. "But seriously Sans, your laziness must be baking your poor brother crazy!"

"i'm 'fraid there's muffin i can do about that," he snickers as Papyrus howls in mock agony. Frisk placed their hands over where his ears would be, if he had any. Sans and Toriel launch into a pun-off and you could only watch and smile at the crazy scene. Oh, but speaking of baked goods....

"Hey Toriel, the station I work at is throwing a fall festival next week." You cut in as soon as they pause for breath. Otherwise, you're pretty sure the two of them would go on for hours. "You and
Frisk should come! There's gonna be music and games and free food and there will be a big bonfire when it gets dark! I'm in charge of Muffet's booth and they're gonna have some pretty nice stuff for sale. It's open to the whole city and there's always a good turn out. Or so I hear. It's my first time doing it."

She claps her hands together delightedly. "That's sounds absolutely wonderful! What do you think Frisk?"

Frisk pumps a fist in the air, nodding enthusiastically. They tap at Papyrus' head and he lets them down and they scurry over to you excitedly. You feel bad when they start signing at you.

"Sorry Frisk, I don't know sign language."

They pout a little and open their mouth. "...w-will...."

"don't push yourself kid," Sans cuts in. 'i'll translate for ya. kid can speak but it's kinda tough for them," Sans says as a quick explanation. "go ahead."

They nod and sign quickly. **Will a lot of monsters be there?**

"I don't see why not," you say with a shrug. "Like I said, it's free to anyone to attend. The more you spread the word, the more monsters will show up right?"

They grin widely and make more signs. Sans doesn't translate right away. His cheeks go blue.

"What?" you ask curiously.

"uh, kids wants to know if we're gonna do the space museum before then." Frisk frowns and jabs Sans in the shoulder, leading you to believe he hadn't said quite everything Frisk had been trying to tell you. His blushing makes you go a little red too.

"We're actually gonna go tomorrow, I think," you stammer. "How'd you even know about that?"

Frisk grins and taps their nose knowingly before scampering back to Papyrus, who is eating a huge chunk of Toriel's pie.

"Sans, what else did they say?"

"nuthing!" He turns away quickly. "h-hey tori, maybe you should let asgore know about the festival and he can spread the word. it'd be fun for monsters to have a night out."

Toriel, who has been watching the exchange, is smiling warmly. But at the mention of Asgore, her smile dims slightly. "Yes, I suppose I should," she sighs deeply. Well, there certainly was a story there. Papyrus had mentioned to you once before that the queen and king were no longer together but Papyrus, being Papyrus, didn't really know details about it. You chat with Toriel a little bit longer, mostly about the festival details and your job at the station. She admitted she hadn't heard of the station but promised to give it a listen. Around nine, she glanced at the clock and declared that it was getting late. Both Frisk and Papyrus, who were playing with some of Papyrus' toy figures groaned loudly. As they two were getting ready to leave, Toriel pulled you into a tight hug. It surprised you and for a split second, you found yourself utterly frozen. The embrace was warm and solid. She smelled like butterscotch and cinnamon. You found yourself gripping the back of her robe, letting yourself sink into the hug. When had you last been hugged like this?

Had you ever been held like this?
Toriel seems to sense you needed the hug and tightens her hold slightly. "Be strong my child," she whispered to you. "You have a good soul. Do not forget that."

"No, you can't wear that," Abby says, her nose wrinkling. "Nothing says 'I don't care' like plaid on a first date."

"I told you! It's not a date," you mumble, tossing the button up on the bed. You've got Abby on facetime and about an hour before you're supposed to meet Sans. "We're friends who are going to a museum."

"Yeah, a museum about space and stars!" She sighs happily. "I can't think of a better place for love between two nerds to blossom."

"I'm ending the call," you threaten, finger hovering over the end button.

"Don't! Fine you jerk. Just show me what you've got in your closet. No skeletons hiding in there I hope."

You groan, but pick up your phone and duck into your closet, sweeping the phone in a slow circle.

"No. No. Hmm. How old is that dress?"

"Old. It barely fits."

"Perfect. Take it out."

You hesitate, but grab the dark green dress. It's one you've barely worn so it doesn't look that old. But it was bought for a you that wasn't quite as developed in the chest area. You slip it on at Abby's encouragement. It fits surprisingly well, even though it falls pretty high up on your legs and stretches a little over your chest. Abby gives you a thumbs up when you show it off.

"Nice! With those legs, he'll be after you in heartbeat! Do skeletons have hearts? For that matter does he even have a d-"

"Yeah, I'm gonna stop you right there," you say quickly. "It's too cold to wear this without leggings anyway."

"Fine, party pooper. Just make sure you wear the dark brown jacket then. And your ankle boots, not the knee high ones." As you gather up the rest of your outfit, Abby giggles. "I can't believe this is actually happening. Just answer this and girl, you better be honest. Do you like him?"

You hesitate. "I-I think I do," you finally whisper. "It's just...confusing you know? I mean, we're not even the same species. That doesn't really matter to me, but what if he doesn't see it that way? What if he thinks I'm some kind of freak?"

"Hey, listen, love finds a way. It always has, and always will. Beside, snowflake, you're not the only one involved with monsters." She says this so smugly, you turn and your jaw drops.

"Abby!"

"Yes!"

"Who?!"
Abby flicks her hair back. "His name's B.P. Tall, fuzzy and a total dork, but let me tell you something." She wiggles her eyebrows at you. "He's got the GOODS."

"I am both proud and slightly disgusted with you," you laugh. "Seriously though, you go girl. I wanna meet him sometime."

"He's coming to the festival. Make sure you bring your boy too!" she orders. "'Kay, you look fabulous. I gotta go but make sure you get something tonight!"

"Goodnight Abby," you say dryly as she ends the call. You take a breath, your heart starting to pound. This was actually happening. Could you call this a date? Like a real date? No, it was better to go in with no expectations. It would be better that way. You finish getting ready, blasting your music to calm your nerves. Soon enough though, it's time and you hear a knock at the door. You pull at the sleeves of your jacket, making sure your scars are completely covered before opening it up.

Sans has actually dressed up a little. He's wearing black jeans (it's the first time you've seen him in something besides sweat shorts) and a dark blue button up. The top button is undone and you can see his clavicle bone. Dang, when he puts in a little effort, he actually cleans up pretty nicely. He takes in your appearance and smiles nervously. His cheeks are tinted with the lightest blue. He holds his hand out to you.

"heya. you ready?"

You take his offered hand and smile. "Let's go, space boy."

Chapter End Notes

I wanted to write about the date this chapter but then it ended up being too long so that will be coming in the next chapter!
You start to head towards your car when Sans tugs on your sleeve.

"ya know, if you're in a hurry to get there we can use one of my short cuts," Sans says with a wide smile. "might save on some travel time."

Oh right, duh. Man, having this teleportation thing around is gonna be really nice. "Sorry, I didn't think about that."

He approaches you and you stick your hand out to take his, like before. Sans shakes his head. "since the distance we're going is gonna be longer than just the hop from your place to mine, i need to keep you a little closer." He hesitantly takes another step and you find yourself staring straight into his sockets. You haven't been this close since the night you both fell asleep on the beanbag. His hands brush against your waist and warmth blossoms in your stomach.

"i need to uh, hold you here." He hesitates for a moment longer before gingerly placing his hands on your sides. You feel heat bloom across your skin from the contact. Your checks flush red and you try desperately to calm your racing heart.

Sans tightens his grip, pulling you close. "is this ok?"

You nod a little breathlessly. You don't trust yourself to speak just yet.

His cheeks are blue now. "and uh, just hold on to me where you can. ok?"

With no idea of where else to hold, you grasp his shoulders. You can feel that strange humming sensation from before, just barely noticeable through his clothes. Combined with the awkwardness of your intense blushing and his tinted cheeks, you almost feel like the two of you are at a middle school dance.

"You know, if you wanted to dance you could have just asked," you try to joke. Your voice is a little too shrill and your face a little too red to be convincing. Sans chuckles and the deep sound makes your heart race even faster.

"i'll keep that in mind. hold tight."
His left socket flashes blue and then the world jolts from under you. The rush of falling, the electric tingle and sensation of stepping through a waterfall is over in a few mere seconds. You gasp sharply as the world fizzes back into view. A roar of sounds assaults your head and you moan, clinging to Sans.

"Does it ever not make you dizzy?" you groan as your head spins.

"you get used to it." He pats your back slowly. "you ok?"

"Yep." You realize you've got your face buried in the front of his shirt and stand up quickly. "Ah, sorry!"

You quickly try to cover up your embarrassment by looking around. The two of you are standing at the edge of an alley, a little out of sight. You suppose that Sans didn't want to startle anyone by suddenly popping out of the air. Judging by the noise, you're somewhere downtown. Across the street from where you're standing is the museum. Dusk is just beginning to fall so its lights are on, illuminating the massive stone statue of the solar system outside the entrance. Sans is staring at the display with intense interest.

"do you need to sit for a sec or...." he trails off, not taking his eyes off of the place. His obvious desire to run over makes you laugh and you tug at his arm.

"Nah, I'm good! Let's go!"

The two of you quickly head across the street and enter the museum. The place is huge and the first thing you see when you step in is an even larger version of the statue outside that takes up the entire first room with the greeting desk and ticket booth. Unlike the stone one outside, this one is painted with full color and each planet spins slightly. Sans stares upwards with open awe. He mouths the names of each planet, eye lights darting from display to display. You pull your phone out as discreetly as you can. There's no way you can't take a picture of his face. You snap a quick picture and your heart melts all over again as you study the shot. The enlarged lights of his eyes, the genuine smile of delight and the light blue blush across his face. You've never seen him look so...at peace and happy.

You send the picture to Papyrus and leave Sans staring upwards while you buy the tickets at the desk. When you come back a few minutes later, he hasn't moved. You tap Sans on the shoulder.

"hmm?"

"There's a whole lot of museum to see," you tease him. "Unless you wanna stand here all night."

He looks like he's actually considering that so you grab his arm and drag him to the next room. The first area is all about the ancient methods of studying the stars and Sans is fascinated by the old tools. He reads every display and every card, excitedly pointing out various facts to you. When you reach a display with an very old and rusted telescope inside, he actually presses his face against the glass. He's like kid window shopping at Christmas.

"imagine being the person who invented this," he whispers almost reverently. "the first telescope had only a three x magnification but it was enough to inspire others to make even greater ones. in june of 1609 galileo happened to be in venice...." he trails off into a mumble, soaking in all the information the display had to offer. You had no idea that telescopes meant so much to him. You remember him telling you about the old one he had found in the dump underground. It was amazing how such a thing had clearly influenced what he held dear.
Your phone buzzes.

P: YOU HAVE MADE ME, THE GREAT PAPYRUS WEEP DEAR HUMAN. I HAVE NOT SEEN MY BROTHER LOOK SO HAPPY IN A LONG TIME

y: Aww pap I'm glad you like it :) don't tell him I sent you a pic

P: HE DOESN'T KNOW YOU TOOK A PHOTO?

y: No and I'd like to keep it that way

P: VERY WELL. YOU CAN TRUST THE GREAT PAPYRUS WITH YOUR SECRET. HAVE FUN ON THE REMAINDER OF YOUR DATE

y: Thanks Pap

y: p.s not a date

P: ;)

Seriously? A winking emoji? Where on earth did he learn that?

"who're you talking to?"

You jump and slip the phone back into your purse. "Pap. Just letting him know you're totally spacing out!"

Sans smiles. "it's cause i'm scoping out some stars!"

You two laugh loudly, drawing some looks from the few other patrons in the room. Giggling, you shove Sans into the next area, which focuses on more modern day space sciences. Sans again acts like a little kid, hopping from display to display, excitedly spurting out confusing science terms that you only vaguely recognize. You had always been more interested in the stars and galaxies. The mathematical side of it was rather unknown to you. But you let Sans go on. His excitement more than makes up for your confusion. When you reach the section with displays and pictures of the various space missions, including the moon landing, his hands actually go up over this mouth. He goes straight to the side about the moon and NASA's missions.

"i read that humans went to the moon," he says to you, staring at the exhibit for the moon landing. They've recreated the shot from the famous video, American flag, spaceship and all. "but i just couldn't quite believe it."

"You wouldn't be the only one." You lean up against the railing. "A lot of people thought the whole thing was a hoax. That the video of Neil Armstrong on the moon was actually filmed in Africa."

His gaze flickers to you. "was it?"

"No you bonehead," you laugh, tapping his skull gently. "At least, I don't think so."

He sighs in relief. "good."

You pull your phone out again and set the camera in selfie mode. "C'mere a second." You pull Sans close to you and angle the camera so that the two of you and the spaceship are in the shot. "Smile!"

"cheeeeeeese." He says this in such a deadpan tone it catches you off guard and you laugh just as the camera flashes.
"Sans! Not while I'm taking a picture!" You pull the picture up and just as you feared, it caught you mid-laugh. You mouth is open, eyes scrunched up and Sans is looking at you, a devilishly delighted grin on his face. "We're gonna do it again!"

"nope." The phone is suddenly encased in blue light and sails right out of your hands. Sans plucks it from the air and looks at the picture. "it's perfect. i'm sending it to myself."

"No!" You leap for the phone and Sans is gone, just like that. You blink and look around. He's moved behind you, humming innocently as he taps at your phone. "Oh come on, that's cheating!"

"it's called using a natural talent. aaand sent." He's all smiles as he hands your phone back to you. "still wanna take another?"

You growl, a blush rising up your face. "Nope. Moment's gone."

"don't be mad," he chuckles as you move away from him towards the next exhibit. "i promise i didn't planet that way."

Oh that deserves some payback. You turn back to him, striding up confidently. "Well, I suppose I can't blame you. Especially after I took this one! Ha!" You flash the picture you took of him earlier. "And don't bother telling me to delete it, I've already sent it to someone. It's on the satellite waves forever!"

His smile falls just slightly and his face goes blue. "oh geez." He rubs his hand over his skull, like he always does when he gets flustered. "didn't realize i was that lost in space before."

"Haha! Payback complete," you crow smugly, waving the phone at him. He makes a half-hearted grab for it and you hold it up just out of his reach. It was only then that you realize that the two of you had drifted close together without even realizing it. Sans is only a few inches away, still lazily reaching for your phone. His gaze falls back to meet your eyes and there's suddenly something there in the space left between you. Something full of warmth, promise and a wild storm. But it's a wall you're terrified to touch. You blush and take step back.

"How about we take one more before we leave? And we'll make sure we both agree on it. Deal?"

"heh, sounds good." Sans' voice sounds a little funny and you look around for something else to talk about. You spy a poster on the far wall, advertising ads for an IMAX film about galaxies on the upper level. Ooh and as luck would have it, there's another showing in ten minutes.

"Hey, I've got a wonderful idea," you say with a wide smile. Sans was going to love this.

The two of you head to the theater. Sans seems a little reluctant at first, clearly more interested in the actual displays than watching a movie. But when he sees how large the screen is, he stops in his tracks. It stretches across the entire wall, tilting in slightly at the edges to create an immersive experience. "oh. wow. it's uh...big."

"That's why it's called IMAX, silly," you laugh as you find seats. The theater is pretty empty, only a few other groups scattered here and there. You've seen one of these before, back when you were little on a family vacation. But that film had been about the amazon rain forest and the section about piranhas had scared you so bad you'd had to leave. Still, from what you could remember, it was completely different from normal movie screens.

The two of you chat quietly until the lights dim to black and turn your attention to the screen. Well, you do for a few minutes. The film begins with a wide shot of Earth and you glance over at Sans. His eye sockets are so wide they're practically circles now.
"We as mankind cannot truly understand just how small our beloved Earth is," the narrator says softly, then with a loud bang, the shot on the screen zooms away from Earth, moving faster and faster, planets and stars zooming by. Sans jumps slightly at the noise and his hand suddenly grips yours. Your not sure if it was an accident or not, but you make no move to pull your hand away. His bones are warm, and solid and feel so wonderful against your skin. You smile and turn your attention back to the film. It really is stunning. With the over-sized screen you feel like you're actually up there among the stars. Your stomach drops and rises as the camera sends you flying through galaxies and nebulas. You feel your heart racing as you're dropped down into a black hole, only to once again sail up among clouds of light and smoke and stars.

Sans' hand tightens on yours slightly. You're sure he's never experienced something like this before and you look over to see his reaction.

He's crying.

Silent tears roll down his cheekbones as he stares at the screen. Your heart stops at the sight. You start to whisper his name but it dies in your throat. He's utterly transfixed by the movie. So much that he's letting his tears fall freely. You bite your tongue and simply put your other hand atop his. You rub the top of his bones softly and you hear his breath hitch slightly. Oh Sans. You feel an almost physical ache to reach out and hold him.

The movie ends soon after that and the dim lights turn back on. You sit there silently, still holding Sans' hand as the other viewers leave. He turns his face away from you, rubbing at his sockets with his sleeve.

"sorry," he mumbles.

"Are you okay?" you ask softly.

A sniffle answers you. You tug gently on Sans' arm until he turns to look at you. The area under his eye sockets is dull blue. "Hey. You can talk to me. It's okay."

He closes his eye sockets tightly. There's some kind of battle going on inside him and you stay quiet while he fights it. You hesitate, then rub your hand over his arm. Under the cloth of his shirt, you can feel the two separate bones. The ulna and radius, if you were remembering right. He shivers and you draw your hand back.

"Sorry! Does that feel weird?"

Sans shakes his head. You open your mouth again, and notice some of the museum staff standing awkwardly by the door. Probably here for cleanup. You stand, not letting go of Sans' hand. "Let's go somewhere quiet, okay?"

He follows your lead silently. Where could you go in a museum for privacy? The answer actually comes pretty quickly. There's a room set up with projections of the stars and constellations. There are several cushioned benches and thank heaven, it's empty at the moment. Sans looks around as you enter and you have a feeling that he would be a lot more thrilled to be in such a room if he didn't have so much on his mind.

And normally you would be mortally embarrassed to be alone in a dark room with a man. But well, Sans isn't exactly a man right? You sit down on one of the couches and Sans slowly joins you, staring up at the projected stars. You wait for a moment, then put your hand back in his. His digits twitch slightly before tightening around your fingers.
"i didn't think i was ever gonna see them." His voice is low, strained. "the stars. planets. the moon. the sky was so far away underground. we came so close, so many times. it just started to hurt to see it just outta reach. then i figured it was better to just...let them go. forget about ever seeing them. it was better that way. made it easier." He takes a shaky breath. "this place, that film, it just. i dunno. it got to me. it made me want to hope again. that first night the barrier fell, i stayed outside all night just staring at the stars. i wanted to burn the sight in my mind. i didn't want to every forget it. i wanted a memory to have when it was all gone."

"What do you mean?" Gone? You're a little lost. "Sans, the sky isn't going anywhere. Okay?"

"it's just...hard to for it all to really sink in. the idea that it's here to stay." Another tear slips down his skull. "every morning i wake up and expect to be back there. back in the snow, and the cold and the fake stars in the ceiling. it could all just be gone. just like that."

He looks at you, and he looks so torn about something. "s-say the barrier went back up. say everything went back to the way it was. monsters underground. humans with no idea we exist. no memory of our freedom."

Like time travel? He's not making much sense, but he's finally opening up to you. You inch a little bit closer to him, trying to comfort him with your presence. "Sans-"

"i know i probably sound crazy," he cuts you off gently, finally looking at you. "i know it. but i can't talk about all that. not right now. it's...it's...."

"Sans," you say as firmly as you can. He falls silent. "You don't have to talk about it. Honestly, I'm so happy you've trusted me with as much as you have." You rub your fingers against his phalanges. Seeing him cry, seeing him vulnerable, it was making your heart ache. Yet at the same time, an overwhelming happiness was filling you. "I-I hope that one day you can trust me with whatever is going on. I know what it's like to hold on to something you feel like you can't share with anyone."

What a hypocrite. How could you be spouting all this when you had told him nothing about your scars? About that box hidden in your room?

"I'm not one to talk. I'm terrible about being honest," you say with a dry laugh. "But I know it hurts. And...I don't want to see you hurting Sans." You reach up and wipe away the moisture on his cheekbone. Without thinking about it, your thumb traces down his face, very gently pressing against the bone. It's beautiful. Unlike human bone, his has almost a sheen to it, glistening just enough to catch the dim light. He looks like he's made of stone, not bone. Yet the texture under your skin is warm and slightly malleable. But then again, it would have to be right? Otherwise, how could he make expressions at all? Looks of wonder, mirth...pain and sorrow.

You realize with a start that you've fallen silent, stroking his face like some kind of freak. He's frozen, staring at you with a look you can't quite name and you pull away. "Sorry," you mumble, suddenly feel self conscious. You look away, staring up at the projection of Orion on the ceiling.

What are you doing? You barely know Sans. Your heart screams otherwise, but it's the truth. And he barely knows you. You can't get carried away with this. Just help him with whatever it is that's so clearly causing him pain and leave it at that. Asking for anything else, hoping for anything else would be wrong of you.

But...would it really be so bad to want something with him? You feel so at ease when he's by your side. Safe. Happy. Isn't that why you moved out here? To start over. Let go of what happened all those years ago. Maybe, just this once, you can let yourself hope for someone who will stay by your side.
Maybe you can just let yourself enjoy this while it lasts.

You can't bring yourself to let go of his hand and sit in silence for a few more minutes. He makes no move to pull away, gently keeping his phalanges gripped around your hand.

Finally, you whisper, "I'm went too far didn't I?"

"no." His voice is whisper soft. After a moment, you feel his free hand on your chin, turning you back towards him. His gaze is soft, his eyes glowing in the darkness of the room. "i'm uh...heh, i'm not usually the type for talks like this. but...it feels ok when it's you. thank you. bringing me here and just...being you...it means more to me than you can imagine."

You find yourself leaning into his touch. You meet his gaze, staring back into the gentle light that makes up his eyes. That warm feeling in your chest is spreading. It washes away the hesitation and doubt. The confusing thoughts and feelings you've been struggling with all seem to fade away in the moment. The truth of the matter is, you care about Sans. Perhaps more than you've ever cared about anyone. "S-Sans...."

There's a shuffling cough at the door and you jerk away from Sans. Another couple has wandered into the room, talking softly to each other. Sans looks over at them too before giving you another easy smile. Your heart twists a little in your chest. His mask is back. But perhaps now it's a little thinner than it was before.

"i think there's still some more things to galax-see." He stands and offers you a hand. "shall we?"

"Oh. Um, yeah. What's left? The planets room?"

The two of you leave the starry room. Instead of the awkward silence, you instead feel a strange happiness and contentment. You finish up going through the museum and Sans once again acts like an excited school boy with new toys, but with a little less enthusiasm than before. You stay until closing, lingering in front of the large display of the solar system. Sans is once again staring up at the planets.

"i think i wanna see that movie again sometime," he finally says. "it was cool. really cool."

"I agree. It was pretty intense." You check the time on your phone. 8:58 "Hey, I think we have time for that selfie. But you better not make me laugh again or I'm gonna smack you."

Sans chuckles and slides up next to you. His hip bone presses against you and warmth spreads across your face. You try not to let it show as you get the camera ready. "Ready?"

"ready."

You both smile widely and the picture turns out as well as you hope. There's only the tiniest hit of red in your cheeks, so you decide it's a keeper. You both take your time as you stroll outside. It's chilly and you press your arms close to your chest. "So was it as out of this world as you hoped?"

"hmm. no comet."

The two of you laugh loudly, your voices meshing in perfect harmony. You jump a little when you feel his bony hand take yours.

"we should probably get home. i gotta read paps his bedtime story. and you look a little chilled to the bone."
You don't want to leave just yet. You want to keep walking with him. But you know he's not gonna leave his brother waiting. "I guess you're right." You let yourself sink into his grip, pretending for just a moment that his hold was an embrace. You close your eyes as the world jolts again. Huh, it was a little better this time. You straighten, eyes adjusting to the sight of your door. He's brought you just outside of your place.

His hands linger for a moment on your waist before pulling away. "sorry about...you know," he mumbles a little sheepishly.

"Sans, it's okay. Really. Besides, you saw me cry, I saw you. We're even." You smile and rub your hands together. Okay, if this was a date, isn't this the part where you're supposed to share a kiss? Oh, you don't know if you can bring yourself to do it. "I had fun," you say quietly. "Grillby's for lunch tomorrow?"

Sans nods, tucking his hands into his pockets. "sounds good."

You both linger for a second. It stretches into a full minute. You can almost feel a nervous energy emitting him from him and desperately you plead with yourself to just move, just go for it! But you're frozen, a deep rooted fear keeping you from moving.

"whelp. g'night." Sans finally turns to leave and your heart shoots up your throat.

"G-good night!" You croak out. Your legs won't move. Why can't you move?!

He pauses, and gives you a smile. Then he vanishes with a small flash of light. You jump when he reappears right next to you. You feel him lean in and something cool touch the side of your face. It lingers just long enough for you to realize Sans is pressing his teeth against your cheek. A kiss?!

He pulls back slightly and his low voice softly whispers, "thank you ______."

Then Sans vanishes again and leaves you leaning against your doorway, hand against your cheek and knees trembling.
You don't meet Sans for lunch the next day.

Or the next three days after that. In fact, you only see him in passing a few times, usually on your way to or from work.

It's not that you don't want to see him. In fact, it almost physically hurts to go without seeing him for so long. With the festival only a few days away, the station is overrun with activity and your usual lunch hour gets bumped up to much later in the day. The station is a storm of activity and you barely have a moment to breathe in your increasingly long work days. There are quite a few times when you get sent out with the traffic van, or sent with electrical crews for repairs and supplies simply to add another pair of helping hands. It's a lot of unfamiliar work and while you enjoy the activity, your stress levels are starting to sail through the roof.

It didn't help that Tod himself was mostly absent at the station itself during this activity. He ran most of the programs and took it upon himself to oversee their progress and projects. So he was seen only in flashes as he moved from one place to another. Which meant Emily was left in charge at the physical station. You try to excuse her bad mood and shortness of temper on the stress of running everything but to be perfectly honest, you can't. Worse still, you have a sneaking suspicion she knows that you were the one who brought Muffet's bakery on board and is subtly punishing you for it by giving you several large tasks to handle completely on your own.

Sans had very understandingly accepted your multiple rain checks. Work has him busy too and he finally let's it slip that it's because another coworker had quit after the broken window incident. He hadn't said why, but going by the tone of his text message, he blamed himself. Still, through the craziness, the two of you continued to text back and forth, sharing a seemingly endless supply of jokes and puns.
He doesn't bring up the kiss. You want to, oh you REALLY want to, but you don't know what to say. When you do have a rare moment to breathe and think, the memory of your night out floods your mind. It's like the touch of his teeth against your skin left a permanent mark that burned and tingled randomly. Was Sans just thanking you? Or had it meant something more? Do you WANT it to mean more? It's confusing and maddening and quite frankly, it's difficult to think about in the midst of everything else.

It doesn't help that the nightmares are back. They're terrifying and confusing and you almost immediately slip back into your old habit of staying up extra late to try and combat the dreams with pure exhaustion. You do manage to at least go running for a bit every night. You even get Undyne to come out with you. She likewise has been busy with teaching at the martial arts studio. She was a hit with teen and young adult crowd and her few classes had filled up so quickly that she had decided to open a few more. Boy did you get an earful from her about getting sick from 'a pathetic misting of rain!'. But you notice that she does keep an eye on the sky and never once drops her encouragement while you are running.

It's on the fourth night since the date that you finally work up some courage. You need some advice, and you certainly can't ask Sans or Papyrus.

"Hey Undyne," you pant as you wipe at your face. It's a colder night and the sweat on your body feels like icicles. "I was wondering, um...how did you meet Sans?"

"The shorty? He worked for me for a while. Back underground." Undyne shrugs and takes a long swig from her bottle. "Worst sentry I've ever had. I only met him cause of Papyrus. Big goof would stay outside my place all night, waiting for me to train him if Sans didn't come get him." She laughs loudly. "For such a lazy bum he sure goes to some crazy lengths for his brother. He's a good guy. His jokes aren't all bad either." She gives you a wide grin and leans in a little too close. "So what's your actual question?"

Holy smoke, she saw right through you. You avert your gaze, blushing a little. "We kind of had an...outing?"

"Like a daaaaate kind of outing?" Her voice is almost shrill with glee.

"No! No, we just went to a museum he wanted to go to. I mean, I thought that was it. But afterwards he kinda-" you lower your voice until it's just a whisper "kissed my cheek."

Undyne lets out a whoop, pumping her fist and you frantically wave your hands at her, trying to quiet her down.

"Wait, wait! I don't know if he meant anything by it! Look, he had a little emotional moment in the museum and I talked him through it so I don't know if it was just a thank you or...something else," you mumble.

"Just a thank you?" Undyne wraps an arm around your shoulders, rubbing your head roughly. "Kid, I'm surprised he stopped himself at just a little kiss. He's been holding back for a long time, trust me."

"Huh?"

She rolls her eyes. "Did you even see the look on his face that night we ran in the rain? And then he dropped everything to nurse you back to health? It's like you're living an anime!" She suddenly whips her phone out. "I gotta tell Alphys, she's gonna flip."
You groan, putting your hands over your face. "Please don't." You peek from between your fingers. Your heart is going nuts. "Do you really think he likes me? I mean, like you said, he's a good guy. He's just being a good friend-"

"When did this happen?" she cuts you off.

"Uh, four days ago."

"What!? Have you talked to him about it?"

"Well. No. We've been texting but-

Undyne actually puts her hands under your sweaty arms and lifts you into the air.

"Hey!"

"You know, for being the one with actual skin and stuff, you sure are a bonehead," she says seriously, her eyes narrowing at you. "That was his pathetic attempt at a move you dork. What are you waiting for?"

Your feet dangle in the air. "Work's been busy for both of us, you know how it is!"

"Excuses!" She plops you back down and slams both hands on your shoulders. "If you don't go see him right now, I'm gonna throw you both in the river!"

You have a sinking feeling that she'd actually do it. Hah, you'd have to remember that one. You put your hands up in defeat. "Okay! He's at work right now, but I'll ask him to come over tomorrow. Promise!"

Undyne stares deeply into your eyes for several long uncomfortable moments before her mouth spreads in a wide smirk. "Now that's more like it. Nerd."

~~~~~

9:59 AM

y: Hey, I feel like you're neglecting your duties as manager of the beanbag

10:35 AM

s: u gonna fire me?

y: Hmm as tempting as it is to reclaim my throne, I guess I'll settle for a mandatory movie night. I have a feeling you'll like Star Wars.

s: will there be ketchup?

y: Duh

s: see ya tonight then

~~~~~

You drop into the kitchen chair that night after work, head in your hands. You had been so nervous and distracted the whole day you could barely focus. You had screwed up so many times, taken files to the wrong places, played the wrong audio tracks and spilled an entire tray full of coffee all over
the break room floor. Emily had called you out in front of everyone, threatening a dock in pay if your mistakes continued. A dull ringing pounds through your head. You can feel an attack building up. Panic is fluttering through your chest, making your stomach churn. No, no you can't have an attack now. Sans was going to be here any minute. You can't let him see you like this. If what Undyne said was true, and he did have feelings for you, you can't let him see. Deep breaths.

In.

Out.

In.

As you breath outwards again, there's a knock at the door.

Three more seconds. You let yourself stay still for just a moment longer, gathering your control. You can do this. This is supposed to be a happy night. You paste a smile on your face. You get up, open the door. The sight of him standing there helps to calm you. A warm feeling burns in your chest and your forced smile eases into a real one. You had missed him so much.

"heya." Sans studies you for a second. "you ok?"

"Yeah! Sorry, long day at work." You step back and he enters the apartment. You notice that he's carrying a small bag. "What's that?"

"it's uh, for the movie," he says quickly, pulling it away when you attempt to look inside. "it's a surprise. no peeking."

You laugh and cringe when it comes out strained. "Okay then."

A long silence stretches out. Neither of you seem to know what to say.

"Well, mister manager, you better take your place on the bean bag!" you say a little too loudly, heading towards the fridge. "I have your ketchup all prepared!"

"wait." His hand is on your arm. Did he seriously teleport three feet? You stop and look at him. His eyes are glowing brightly. The sight makes your knees a little weak. "before that...i wanna show you something. is that ok?"

"Oh. Yeah, sure. What is it?"

"it's uh. up there." He points to the ceiling.

You look up. There's nothing there. If it was a prank, it wasn't a very good one. "Might want to work on that one my friend."

He laughs a little. "no, i mean it's up on the roof. but i know a short cut."

"To the roof?" What could possibly be up on the roof? You're pretty sure you guys weren't even supposed to go up there. Then again, there wasn't really a way to stop Sans' teleportation skills. "Is it safe up there? It's just an angled shingled roof right? Pretty easy to slip."

"i won't let you fall." His serious tone calms your worries. You take a breath and nod, stepping a little closer.

"Okay."
His hands gently touch your waist and then you're flying through the air and within a few seconds, you're up on the roof. You instinctively grasp at his shirt as a sudden chilly wind bites at you. Dizziness from both the trip and the sudden height makes you close your eyes. You breathe deeply, face pressed against his chest. Sans smells faintly of ketchup and mint.

"i've got you," he murmurs, rubbing a hand against your back.

"Haaah." You let out a shaky breath. "Sorry." You peek your eyes open. Sans has you sitting right on the top of your apartment building. There's a small flat surface, so it's not completely angled like you thought. The city stretches out in front of you, crowded, alive and thriving. In the distance you can see the mountains, including Mount Ebbot. The place that so many monsters had been forced to call home for so long. The sun is up just above its ridge, casting a deep orange light on the world around you.

"Wow," you murmur. "You can see so much up here." You look down towards the circle and its park. The dull sound of children laughing and playing reaches you even up here. Is that Pap down there? You squint and just make out the shape of Frisk darting around, playing some sort of chasing game with the large skeleton.

Sans notices your look and laughs. "tori had to be at the courts this afternoon. paps and i watch the kid whenever she needs us to."

"Oh, sorry if I pulled you away from that." You should have checked to make sure he was actually free before calling a 'mandatory' movie night.

He shrugs. "nah, paps has it covered."

Another breeze rushes by and you shiver. "Should've grabbed my coat! It's chilly."

"oh, i didn't even think. hang on."

He blinks out of sight.

"Sans?" Being on the roof along makes your heart clench slightly with fear but he's back in less than ten seconds. He's holding your jacket. He places it around your shoulders and you snuggle into the fabric, thankful for the warmth.

"That seriously is a handy trick," you say with a laugh. You lean up against him, your heart still pounding from the scare. He hesitates, then places an arm around your shoulder, pulling you in to him. This is really nice. You let out a sigh. For the first time in several days you feel yourself loosening up a little. The fog of anxiety that has been hovering retreats just a little and the world grows a bit more clear.

"seems like you've got some stuff on your mind," Sans says softly. He starts running his phalanges through your hair. Ah, so he hasn't forgotten about that little trick.

"Yeah. There's just a lot going on right now. Festival stuff, holidays are coming up. Tod isn't at the station much these days so Emily is in charge of the stuff I work on."

"that nasty lady from the talk show? never did much like listening to what she had to say." If Sans had a nose, you're pretty sure he'd be wrinkling it. "seems pretty full of herself."

"You have no idea." You lean your head against his shoulder. "Have you been up here before?"

"yep. i bring paps up here sometimes. he loves to watch the sun rise. can't really see it from the
"I've always like the sunset more. Don't have to get up early for that."

Sans laughs. "i feel exactly the same. i do love to see it though. every one seems more beautiful than the last." His eyes are fixed on the setting sun. "i'll never get tired of seeing it."

"I used to do this back home. Sit outside with friends sometimes. Or by myself. Just watching the sun go down. The different colors always made the clouds looked like cotton candy. I used to try and reach for them when I was little. Thought I could actually eat them if I just reached high enough."

Sans chuckles. "sounds like something paps would do."

The two of you sit in comfortable silence for a little while after that, just watching as the colors of the sky slowly darkened from orange to red to blue and finally faded to black. The city flickered with lights. All the colors and flashing lights made you think of a stained glass window. The noise and bustle of the city are oddly comforting to you. Looking down at it, you can't help but feel hope for the future. Surely such a creation showed that humans could show emotion and love. Surely now an even brighter future is ahead. If only people could let go of their fear of the unknown.

Which is exactly what you need to do.

You look up at Sans. He's not staring out at the city, or even at the stars now glimmering above. He's looking at you and the gentle expression on his face makes your lip tremble.

"Sans, about the other night..."

He stiffens slightly.

You take a breath and push on. "When you dropped me off and you...what did you mean?" You press your fingers against your cheek.

That deep blue glow you're beginning to love so much lights his face. He shrugs, fiddling with his phalanges. "um. you know. that was. a thing."

"Uh huh. And what did that thing mean?"

He doesn't answer for several long moments and your heart starts to sink a little. "i'm sorry if it was too much," he finally mumbles. "i shouldn't have done it."

Ouch. You sit up as he shifts slightly, no longer looking at you. "It didn't bother...I um, I liked it," you admit in a mumble.

His blush deepens and you see his strained smile widen with genuine happiness. "oh."

You scoot a little closer. "You didn't answer my question."

"it...it was..."

You lean in closely. "Yeees?"

He lets out a nervous chuckle. "ya'know, this ain't easy for me to say. i just...ah hell." He grabs the hood of his jacket and pulls it up over his head, hiding his face from you.

You can't help a soft giggle.
"d-don't laugh," he mutters, tugging on the drawstrings. Almost his entire skull is covered now.

"Sorry," you say, putting a hand up over your mouth. You can't help it. Seeing him so embarrassed is beyond cute.

"...i really like your laugh." You can see a blue glow from the one little section of his hood that is open. "it's a really good laugh." A beat passes and then in a voice so soft it can't even be called a whisper he says, "it was a 'i like you' kiss."

Your heart is racing and there's a voice inside that's screaming at you to stop, that you're pushing too fast. But there's a deeper, stronger feeling that is prodding you forward that you just can't ignore any longer. You reach for his hood, tugging at it gently until you reveal Sans' face. He meets your eyes and you can feel yourself growing red.

"Sans-"

"i told a fibula before!" he blurts out. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out the small bag he brought with him. "s not for the movie. it's for you. right now."

You take the bag from him, unwrapping it carefully. There's one of those small black jewelry boxes inside. You lift the lid of the box. Your breath catches in your throat. It's a necklace of a skeletal hand holding a large gem, set on a fine silver chain. The stone itself swirls with an image of a galaxy, its colors bright and shimmering. It's absolutely breath taking.

"Oh Sans," you breathe. "It's beautiful." You pull it from the box, unclasping the chain. "Help me put it on?"

You can't help but notice his phalanges are trembling slightly as he takes the necklace from you. You turn slightly, and the feeling of his bones against your neck sends pleasant shivers up your spine. He lingers for several long seconds, his touch soft against your skin. He says your name gently and your heart nearly stops. You try to tun but he puts a hand on your shoulder, stopping you.

"i don't know what i'm doing right now," he admits. "i'm not the kinda guy who...i never try at anything. least of all relationships. given our circumstances down there, it just seemed pointless. even now sometimes i feel like this is all too good to be true and one day it's just gonna be gone. but now, being here, meeting you, i'm, heh, starting to care again. i'm starting to think that maybe something is worth a bit of work, even if it will be gone. somethings are worth having, even for a little while."

His voice is so serious it sends a shiver up your spine. "Are you talking about the stars again?"

He very gently knocks a hand against your head. "i'm talking about you."

You can't help but make a small noise at that, blushing deeply. Is he...is he really...confessing?

At your silence, he releases your shoulder but you don't turn around. "i know that it would be hard. you're a human. i'm a monster. you've got no reason to want to be with a bag of bones like me. you're so bright and beautiful and your jokes are just as bad as mine. you love paps and you've stood up for us so many times. people have already given you a bad time just for being around us. it probably won't be worth it for you-"

"Of course it would be worth it. F-for me" Geez, your voice is strained, thick with emotion. You can barely speak. Tears prick at your eyes. He's got it all backwards. You're nothing special. You've always been nothing. But him? He is like the moon to you, shining down on your world that long ago went dark. He welcomed you, a complete stranger, into his odd and wonderful world of magic and bones. He has no reason to want you. "Sans, you're wrong about me. I'm not bright."
His hand reaches out, brushing against yours. "if you could see what i see, see the way your soul is glowing right now, you'd never doubt that you're one of the brightest things in this world."

"I've got baggage. Like, really heavy baggage."

"so do i."

You finally turn to face him. "Sans, I've done bad things. I'm a mess. I'm just really good at pretending."

His smile is gentle, hesitant and a little scared. "you don't have to pretend with me."

You wring your hands, fighting the urge to both burst into tears and laugh at this impossible situation. He has no idea what you've done. He's never seen the scars. But you want to share that with him. You want to believe that someone might want you, just as you are. "If...if I say I feel the same, what happens then?"

He looks down at the park. "i dunno. i've never done this before. the movies and stories don't really show you what happens after. but..." He looks back up at you and his sockets are glowing brightly. He holds his hand out towards you. "i want to find out what happens next. and i'd like to do that with you."

The soft laugh that escapes you sounds more like a sob. You hesitate for just a moment more and then you accept his waiting hand. "I think I'd like that too."

His phlanges wrap around your hand and he pulls you closer. He's staring at you with an intensity that sends your already pounding heart into overdrive. The force of his blush casts a light over your face as he leans in. He hesitates, gaze searching your face for a moment. You smile and close the distance. Then, right there on the roof, looking out over a city filled with hope and life, Sans kisses you. You sink into him, gripping desperately at his shirt. He doesn't have lips, and yet you can feel a mouth moving against yours, warm and filled with tenderness. You would ask how he's doing it, but honestly at the moment, you don't care. His hands move to grip the back of your head. Soon, you're dizzy from the rush of his kissing but you don't want to stop. You want to live forever in this perfect moment.

He finally pulls back slightly, gasping. His expression is one of pure delight, with just a hint of smugness. "so, does this answer your question?"

You giggle and pull him back in for another kiss.
We're Still Here. So Let's Party!

Chapter Summary

It's festival time!
It's also time for some new faces to appear. How will they react to the news that you and Sans are officially together now?

Chapter Notes

Hey guys, sorry for the delay with this chapter, had a rough couple of days. I've made a tumblr page just for my writings, if you would like to find me there! http://theninjawrites.tumblr.com/
Main blog is here! theninjamouse.tumblr.com
Please feel free to comment and share!

This was real, wasn't it?

You look up at Sans. His gaze is fixed on the t.v but his fingers are tracing idly over your hands. It sends electric sparks up your arms.

"they should really fire the guy who designed the death star," Sans murmurs, fingers dancing up your arm. "some one messed up big time if a single shot can bring it down."

"Ah, but who's fault is it really? The architect or the builders? Could have been an on-site mistake."

"Hmm." He sighs sleepily. You're honestly surprised he's managed to stay awake for the whole movie. It would be the first time you've seen him actually watch a movie to the end. Aside from the one at the museum.

"Don't fall asleep on me just yet," you laugh, giving him a little nudge. "We're almost to the end."

"don't wanna sleep yet." His hands stop their movements but remain touching your skin gently.
"don't you to be gone when i wake up."

"Sans, we've been together" the word sends a thrill of joy through you "for three hours. I promise I'm not sick of you already." You give him a wide smile to let him know you're just teasing.

"'s not what i mean." His eyelids are half shut. "it's kinda like i'm already dreaming. don't want it to be over."

You get that. As happy as you are, there's a part of you that can't believe it's actually happening. That such happiness couldn't be real. Not for you. You snuggle in closer to him. "This isn't a dream," you murmur, trying to convince yourself just as much as him. "You're here. I'm here."

"right now is what's real." There's a heaviness behind those words you don't understand. He says it the same way you say 'I'm allowed to be happy'. Like he doesn't quite believe it, but desperately
wants to.

You finish the movie in relative silence. But you can hardly pay attention. You can feel Sans breathing next to you, his bones rising and falling slightly. He shouldn't even need to breathe, let alone be able to. Yet, his solidness, his aliveness, is right there. It's still a little hard to believe.

The credits finish and the two of you remain there on your beanbag, unwilling to move, unwilling to break this perfect comfortable silence.

"what time's it?" Sans finally mutters.

"Late."

"huh."

Another long silence stretches by. You're on the verge of nodding off yourself when-

"guess i outta go." He starts to slowly stir and your hand grips his arm.

"You don't have to," you whisper. What are you saying?! "You can stay. If you want."

There's a brief flash of blue across his cheeks. "heh, you wanna jump my bones that badly?"

"No! Shut up." Heat rises in your face. "I just...you're having trouble believing this is real. I'm pretty sure this is just a really wonderful dream. So why not make it last as long as it can? Then, when we wake up, we'll both be here and then there'll be no denying it. Right?"

It wasn't that big a deal anyway, was it? You were technically a couple now. And you'd already fallen asleep with him before. This wasn't a big deal. Sure, it was the first actual night you two were 'together' but...you feel safe with him. And after the long couple of days you've had, you really don't want him to leave.

He's quiet for a minute. "heh," he finally whispers. He sets his head back down, meeting your gaze. His eye lights are shimmering slightly. "ya know, i like the way you think."

You giggle. "Or maybe I'm just a big lazy bum and don't wanna get up. Like someone else I know."

"that's even better. we're two of a kind." You feel the bones of his hands grasp yours. The soothing sensation of his phalanges running over your skin soon sends you to sleep.

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When you feel yourself slowly easing from sleep, you keep your eyes closed. You breathe deep. You can smell him next to you. It's a good smell. A wide smile is on your face as you slowly let your eyes open. He's still asleep, arm resting over your waist. It's just like that morning that feels so long ago. But this time, you don't struggle to escape his embrace. You slowly brush your fingers over his skull. The open expression on his sleeping face makes you really want to kiss him. You hesitate and as gingerly as you can, press your lips against his cheek. The bone is solid and a little warm with a surprising amount of give. He isn't as squishy as a human would be of course. But given that he is able to make expressions and move his mouth and eye sockets, he couldn't be made of regular old bones. It's gotta be more of that magic bio-make up he talked about.

He murmurs slightly but doesn't wake up. At that moment, you stomach rumbles quietly. You ease out from Sans' grip. It's still fairly early, according to the clock. It's the day of the festival but it doesn't start until later in the afternoon. You've got some time before set up starts so you figure you
might as well make some breakfast. You pad over to the fridge, bones popping as you went. You really needed to stop sleeping on the bag. It was never as comfortable after a full night of lying on it. You pull out eggs and the last of your bacon. Hey, it was a sort of special occasion, right?

The bacon is sizzling, its sweet aroma filling the kitchen when Sans jerks awake. He sits bolt upright, looking around wildly. When his gaze falls on you, he visibly relaxes and flops back to the beanbag. His hand presses up against his face and he starts laughing.

"heheheh. looks like we're still here."

"Still here." You scrape the bacon and eggs onto the two plates you've set out. "Hope you're hungry, cause I sure am. And yes, ketchup on eggs is actually acceptable."

There's a quick flash of blue and Sans appears in the chair next to you. You jump slightly. "Really? Too lazy to even walk across the room?"

"you know it," he says with a wide grin. "do ya mind if paps comes over?"

Shoot! You completely forgot about him. "Of course! Pap is always welcome, you don't need to ask." Besides, there's plenty of food.

It barely takes a minute after Sans sends the text for Papyrus to all but karate kick your door down.

"YOUR HOME SMELLS DELIGHTFUL HUMAN! GOOD MORNING SANS!"

"mornin' bro," Sans greets his brother as he drowns his eggs in ketchup.

You sigh, deciding it'd be a waste of time to scold Sans on overdosing on ketchup and pull out a plate for Papyrus. He eagerly shovels in the food so fast you wonder if he's even tasting it.

"DID YOU ENJOY THE SUNSET LAST NIGHT HUMAN?"

Sans chokes on his eggs.

"Yeah, I did," you say, smiling at the memory. Wait. "Pap, how did you know about that?"

Papyrus gives you a grin to rival the Cheshire Cat's. "NYEH HEH HEH! THE GREAT PAPYRUS TAKES GREAT CARE IN OBSERVING HIS SURROUNDINGS AT ALL TIMES. BESIDES, I KNEW MY BROTHER WAS UP TO SOMETHING WHEN HE ASKED ME TO WATCH FRISK FOR THE NIGHT. IT WAS ABOUT TIME HE PROPERLY FINISHED YOUR DATE!"

So Papyrus had seen the two of you, all the way up on the roof. Your face goes red, but at least you're not alone. Sans is staring at his plate, skull lit up.

"not cool bro," he mumbles.

"OH COME ON SANS, YOU DID A TERRIBLE JOB OF HIDING YOUR OBVIOUS FEELINGS." Papyrus turns to you, eye sockets almost glinting. "DID YOU KNOW THAT NIGHT OF YOUR MUSEUM DATE-"

"aaaaah no!" Sans waves his hands at Papyrus frantically. "hey, the festival's today right? we'd better let ______ get ready for that."

"BUT BROTHER I'M NOT DONE WITH MY DELICIOUS BREAKFAST!"
"Yeah c'mon Sans. There's no rush," you say with a wide grin. "Pap, you take your time. Now, what were you saying about Sans?"

Sans groans loudly and blips out of sight. He's actually running away? Okay, now you *have* to know what happened! Papyrus sighs deeply. He doesn't seem surprised at Sans' disappearing act, so you guess that means he knows about it.

"I DO LOVE MY BROTHER VERY MUCH BUT HIS LAZINESS IS A REAL PROBLEM," Papyrus grumbles, tucking back into his plate. "HE WOULD RATHER RUN AWAY FROM HIS PROBLEMS THAN FACE THEM."

"I think he's just embarrassed Pap," you laugh, scooting your chair a little closer. "And speaking of, spill! What'd he do that has him so flustered?"

Papyrus grins to himself, obviously reliving the memory. "WELL, AFTER HE DROPPED YOU OFF AT HE WANDERED IN BACK HOME LIKE HE WAS SLEEPWALKING OR SOMETHING. WHEN I ASKED ABOUT YOUR DATE HE JUST SMILED AND SAID IT WAS GOOD. THEN HE STARTED STARING AT A PICTURE ON HIS PHONE."

"Oh no, the one where I'm making a weird face?"

"IT IS NOT A WEIRD FACE!" Papyrus protests over your groan. "YOU WERE HAPPY AND IT MADE MY BROTHER VERY HAPPY TOO. I COULDN'T EVEN GET HIM TO READ ME A BEDTIME STORY. HE JUST WANTED TO LOOK AT THE PICTURE OF YOU TWO. THEN JUST JUST AS I WAS ABOUT TO SLEEP, SANS CAME AND ASKED ME, THE GREAT PAPYRUS ABOUT DATING ADVICE!"

You almost choke on your eggs just like Sans did. "He asked you about dating?" You try to keep the surprise out of your voice. You don't want to sound rude but Papyrus, as great as he is, didn't exactly seem like the type who went on dates. Romantic ones anyway.

"OF COURSE!" Papyrus strikes a pose in his seat, knocking over his now thankfully empty plate. You manage to snag it before it hits the floor. "GOOD CATCH HUMAN. ANYWAY, I BEING THE GREAT BROTHER THAT I AM TOLD HIM ALL THAT I KNOW. I EVEN LET HIM BORROW THE DATING MANUAL I GOT FROM THE LIBRARY. AND I CAN SEE THAT HE MUST HAVE FOLLOWED THE INSTRUCTIONS PERFECTLY! HE EVEN GOT YOU A GIFT!" He points to the galaxy necklace still around your neck. "FOR ONCE HE ACTUALLY FOLLOWED THROUGH! I AM SO PROUD OF HIM!"

A dating manual huh? You'd like to get your hands on it. "Well, he did do a fantastic job Papyrus," you say softly, your heart warming for the obvious love the brothers shared. "So I guess I have you to thank for getting Sans to act huh?"

"DO NOT SELL YOURSELF SHORT HUMAN." Papyrus pats you on the head. "YOU ARE NEARLY AS GREAT AS ME. EVEN IF I HADN'T HELPED MY BROTHER, I'M SURE YOU WOULD HAVE MOTIVATED HIM SOON ENOUGH." You smile at him.

"I'd like to think so Pap."

Papyrus soon finishes and now you actually do have to get ready to head out. Papyrus cleans his plate and heads back home, promising to bring Frisk and Toriel to the festival. You see him out and start cleaning up. You put some music on, glancing around carefully to make sure Sans hasn't popped back in before letting yourself go and dance as you shower and pick out your clothes. For the first part of setting up and running the festival, you've got a black tee shirt that has the station's
logo and a list of all the sponsors participating. Nothing fancy, but since it was close to Halloween, Tod had highly encouraged dressing up a little. You've got a witch's hat and a black and purple dress that you plan on changing into after your shift is officially over. You're painting a spider web and a few small spiders on your face with face paint when you hear a soft noise at the bathroom door. You glance over in the mirror, seeing Sans leaning against the frame.

"Hey, you," you say as you try not to move your face. "Dating manual huh?"

"heh. um yeah. believe it or not, paps knows more about this kind of stuff than i do." Sans scuffs his slippered feet against the ground. He curiously watches as you finish applying your spider make-up. "you're pretty good at that."

"I used to take theater classes in college." You apply one last coat of drying powder to keep it in place and don your hat. You pose for him, hands on your hips. "Ta-da!"

"nice," he says with a large grin. he nods towards your still bare feet. "your toes might get little cold."

"Oh haha."

He follows you out to the living room. You slip your boots on and grab your bag. "Do you remember where the university park is?"

He nods.

Acting on an impulse, you lean over and give him a quick kiss on the cheek. "See you there then. Don't forget to lock the door!" You leave him standing there in a slight daze and escape to your car. You're grinning like a complete moron the entire drive over. The festival is taking place at the park near the university, a few blocks down from the station. When you pull up, there's already a flurry of activity going on. Booths are partially set up, cars are coming and going with various wares and food and right smack dab in the center, there's a bunch of firemen setting up the pit for the bonfire. It wasn't that big. After all, there would be a lot of children running around but it was big enough that it would require some of the firemen to stay on watch the whole time and make sure it didn't get too big. When this had been discussed earlier in the planning process, Tod had assured you that in the eight years they had been doing the festival, there had been no major incidents with the bonfire. Other than a few blackened s'mores and lost hot dogs that is.

Still, you're glad that the booth for the station is a little ways away from where the fire will be. You're quickly drawn into the craze of setting up, running here and there until you're actually sweating a little in the brisk fall air. You help out with Muffet's stand when you can. The whole thing looks fantastic! The spiders working the booth chitter excitedly the whole time, offering you samples every few minutes. Before you know it, everything is done and ready to go and the first of the party-goers start to show up. You finally get a moment to sit down. Abby and Tod are in the booth with you at the moment. Tod is talking into the microphone, once again welcoming everyone out. Abby nudges you as you sip from your water bottle.

"Hey, your skeleman is coming tonight right?" She's got full skeleton make-up on and large bone earrings dangle almost to her shoulder. She looks good, and you grin as you imagine Papyrus' reaction when he saw it.

"Yeah, him and a bunch of other monsters are coming-what?"

She's grinning delightedly at you. "You didn't deny that he's your skeleman!"
Oh. "W-well, I guess, we kinda got together? Officially just last night?"

Abby squeals and hugs you tightly.

"Ah! Watch your make up!"

"Oh right, sorry." She swipes her thumb against the side of your face. "All better. Girl, that's fantastic!"

You can't help a pleased smile. "Thanks Abby. I'm actually really happy about this."

"As you should be! When is he coming?"

"Um, I'm not sure actually. The brothers are bringing Frisk so I think they should be coming soon?" You'd never actually talked about what time they would show up. Oh well. As long as they came, right?

Tod stretches. "I need food stat," he groans loudly. You jump to your feet.

"I'll go get you something if you want," you offer, but he shakes his head.

He turns the mic slightly towards you, grinning. "Why don't you take over for a few minutes?"

Your heart leaps up your chest. "Really?"

Tod stands and all but pushes you into the chair. "You've got this kid. When this song ends, just make a general announcement about the bonfire and hit the next song when you're done. I'll be back in a few minutes."

He leaves the stand and you glance at Abby, nervous butterflies in your stomach. She gives you a thumbs up. You take a deep breath. You could do this. You had seen and heard Tod do stuff like this all the time. The current song ends and you press a button on the mic.

"Hey everyone, thanks for coming out to the 9th annual E.B.B.T fall festival! There's lots to see, and lots to do! Don't forget to stick around for the lighting of the bonfire, happening right here at dusk!"

Your voice echoing throughout the park gives you a thrill of excitement running through your chest. There, that wasn't hard at all! You tap the switch to get the music rolling again. It takes you a second to register the clapping happening in front of you.

"I KNEW YOU COULD DO IT!" Papyrus stands in front of you, wearing a pair of rabbit ears on his skull. He bounds forward and shakes your hand proudly. "I KNEW YOU COULD MAKE IT ON TO THE SHOW!"

"T-thanks P-Pap," you stutter out, barely able to speak from the force of his handshake. "It's not really the show, but thanks! Nice ears."

"THANK YOU! FRISK PICKED THEM OUT."

Frisk peers around Papyrus, grinning widely at you. Their nose is painted black with little whiskers drawn on their cheeks. A pair of mouse ears pokes out from their mess of hair. They wave at you.

"FRISK SAID YOU CAN'T GO TO A HALLOWEEN FESTIVAL WITHOUT COSTUMES. I CAN SEE THAT YOU DRESSED UP AS WELL!"

"I sure did Pap," you laugh, tilting your witch hat. Then your eyes fall on Sans and you snort loudly,
throwing your hand up over your mouth. He's wearing a grumpy cat shirt that simply says 'no' and a cheap pair of cat ears on his skull. He lifts one hand and winks at you, mouthing 'meow'. Oh you have got to get a picture of this! You pull your phone out, only to have it snatched by Abby. She pushes you out of the booth towards the trio.

"Everyone smile!" She calls, clearly trying to hold back her squeals of joy at finally meeting your monster neighbors.

You feel Sans slide up next to you, his arm gently wrapping around your waist and in that moment, you swear you've never been happier. Abby takes the picture and then you introduce her to the skelebros and Frisk. As expected, Papyrus is fascinated with skeleton make-up and showers her with compliments. Sans lets out an audible snort when she proudly shows everyone a picture of her standing next to a cat monster who quite honestly looks fed up with the world.

"didn't see that coming," he mutters to you. "burgerpants with a human. what a world."

You nudge him, holding back your giggles. At that moment, Tod returns and it's another round of introductions. Tod, while not bouncing with joy like Abby is more than polite and thanks the group for coming out. You notice him make the connection between you and Sans and you have to swallow down a blush at his knowing smile. After a while, Papyrus and Frisk wander away into the steadily growing crowd, yelling about candy apples. Sans lingers for a bit by the stand.

"Where's Toriel?" you ask him as you set out more flyers.

"with asgore, i think." Sans shrugs. "there's quite a few monsters that have turned up and they're sticking pretty close to the king. toriel's doing her mom thing of making everyone comfortable."

You had seen quite a few monsters coming and going. Perhaps it was the Halloween spirit, but humans seemed to be more accepting of them than you would have expected. In fact, you had seen a lot of human and monster children chasing each other around, waving streamers. There was still a distance and a few cautious looks, but there had been no incidents thus far. It seemed that Muffet's stand was doing extremely well too. People were flooding her stand by the dozens, eager to purchase the spider themed goods. And with good reason. You could still taste the pumpkin muffin one of Muffet's helpers had dropped off for you.

"The king himself came out? That's wild." You crane your neck to look over the crowd, hoping to get a glimpse. Sans laughs loudly.

"don't worry, he'll stop by soon enough," he says in a suddenly dry voice. "but for now, i think you have some other company."

"Oooh just look at those two nerds!"

You know that voice. Undyne smashes her way through the crowd, on a warpath straight to your booth. She's followed by two monsters. The first one, clinging pretty closely to her is a small yellow dinosaur like creature with a pair of large glasses perched on her snout. "U-Undyne, don't move so f-fast."

"Oh, sorry love." Undyne immediately slows down, giving the dinosaur a quick smooch. The small monster immediately goes red as Undyne turns to you and Sans. "So, did you two get your whole thing-" she gestures to you two "sorted out? Didn't chicken out did you _____?"

Sans leans against the stand, giving her a lazy smile. "i guess you could say we're in skele-tune with each other."
The yellow monster squeals quietly as Undyne pumps her fist in the air. You start to wonder if you can just sink into the ground out of sight.

"S-sorry, I never introduced m-myself." The stuttering monster holds out a clawed hand. "I'm Alphys."

Oh so this was Alphys! You take her offered hand, leaning over the booth. "It's so nice to finally meet you!"

"You as well." She gives you a toothy smile. "Undyne t-talks about you all the time."

You groan. "About how I'm a weakling who gets sick in the rain?"

Alphy's eyes dart up to Undyne, who starts laughing loudly. "N-no! Well, I mean y-yes but she says nice stuff t-too."

"I'm just teasing," you snicker. Sans gives you a proud look.

You suddenly hear Abby gasp loudly. "Oh no way! Is that....?"

You follow her gaze to the second monster that had been trailing after Unydne and Alphys. They were turned away slightly, talking to a group young teens.

"And that my darlings, is why you never agree to a to dance with a vulkin."

You notice with some surprise the monster is signing autographs and the kids are whispering excitedly to each other. They scamper off and the monster turns to you with great flourish. Sans groans quietly next to you.

"Mettaton!" Abby squeals, just as you recognize the humanoid figure.

It's the robot you've heard so much about on t.v. You never would have expected to see him here! He's even prettier in person than he is on the screen and good heavens, he's got legs for days. You can't help but gape at him as he looks over the two of you in the booth.

"Hmm." His voice rings in a metallic way, oddly pleasant and yet somehow slightly annoying at the same time. He steps a bit closer, which makes Abby clutch at your sleeve. "Tell me darlings. Which one of you is the girl who's managed to steal the non-existent heart of this sorry bag of bones?"
Abby, in a show of true friendship and loyalty, immediately sells you out to Mettaton. She points to you, ignoring the quick glare you give her. The robot leans in over the table, closely examining you. A very strong aftershave smell assaults your nose and you have to fight not to cough. His intense gaze has you squirming a little.

"Hmm, not a bad face." He plucks your hat off your head and tilts your head up slightly. Geez, he sure was getting friendly for a first meeting! "We simply must give you a fresh new style and quite frankly, a very serious eyebrow job-"

Hey!

"Oh, but I do see potential in you darling." Mettaton gives you a glimmering smile, plopping your hat on your head with a little too much force. "You've already got the voice of a star!"

"Oh, well thanks," you say, a little flustered at you re-adjust your hat. Given his popularity, that's actually a pretty nice compliment.

"Now you must simply tell me how you got such a lazy-"

"hey buddy," Sans cuts in dryly. "pretty sure you have to work at the station to go behind the booth." He glances pointed at the table Mettaton has practically crawled over in his attempt to study you. The robot rolls his eyes and waves his hand at Sans.

"Darling, I've spent more than enough time in radio stations to be considered traveling talent."

"then how 'bout you give _____ some personal space?" He's still smiling, but there's a little edge to his grin. "She's still working."

Mettaton sighs dramatically and poses against the table for a minute. His eyes flicker to the cat ears on Sans' skull. He smirks. "Fine then. Don't get your whiskers in a twist, kitty cat."

Sans visibly shudders, quickly pulling the ears off. Mettaton turns back to you, handing you a silver card. "Darling, we simply must have a chat sometime soon! And if you are ever in need of some big talent on your show, just give me a ring."

"Oh, wow! Thanks, but it's not really up to me." You glance at Tod, who has been watching the interaction with a bemused expression.

"Oh but of course," Mettaton purrs, extending a hand to Tod. "Same offer to you as well. I would be more than happy to shed some of dazzling light of my talent to your station!"
"I'll keep that in mind." He's clearly holding back laughter as he also takes a card.

"Well then, my lovelies!" Mettaton swoops his hair back, shoots a wink to Abby (which nearly sends her swooning) and places a hand on his hip. "I must see to my other fans present at this quaint festival! Ta-ta!"

"Ahh, M-Mettaton!" Alphys calls after the robot as he starts to saunter away. "D-don't forget about your maintenance check-up tomorrow!"

"Of course Alphy dear!" And then he's gone, disappearing into the swarm of people.

You're actually not sure what to say first. You look over at Sans, whose expression is just about as sour as you've ever seen it. "Guess you're, uh, not a fan?"

"was it that obvious?" he says dryly.

"Nah, it was just a feline."

Everyone but Sans groans loudly.

"Poor Papyrus." Undyne shakes her head. "It's a miracle he hasn't gone insane with the two of you around. Or maybe he already has."

"that is pawsible." You can tell by the glint in his eye Sans has a whole list of cat puns prepared.

"W-well! I'd b-better keep an eye on Mettaton," Alphys cuts in, a small smile tugging at her snout. "Undyne, you wanted to try that bobbing for apples game too, right?"

"Hell yeah I do!"

You're a little concerned for the apples due to the gleam in Undyne's eye but you laugh anyway. "Yeah guys, go enjoy the festival! Alphys, it was really nice to meet you." You give the small monster a warm smile. The couple waves goodbye, promising to stop by more often before heading in Mettaton's general direction. You turn to Sans, who appears to be making himself quite comfortable leaning against the table. "You don't have to keep me company. You should go find Pap and Frisk, spend some time with them. I've only got an hour-ish til I'm done. I'll text you after I change my outfit."

He considers your words for a moment before nodding. He motions you closer. You lean towards him, not sure what he's doing. Then he reaches over and quickly snatches your witch hat, plopping it on his own skull. He places his cat ears on your head, fluffing your hair a little.

"if you're sure you won't feel left meowt." He winks at you. "i'll leave you to your mewsic."

"You're seriously too much sometimes. Shoo!" You wave him away and watch as your hat bobs into the crowd. What a goober. And he was your goober. You couldn't contain your smile. Of all roads you expected your life to turn on, this wasn't one of them. It was just so....so....

Abby let out a deep breath. "Holy crap. Holy crap! That was crazy!"

Yep, that just about summed it up.

The next hour passes fairly quickly, though you're definitely eager to get going by the time your shift draws to a close. Abby and even Tod had teased you about Sans. It was a far better reaction that you could have hoped for. Hey, at least Emily wasn't around. Though she was supposed to take over for
the evening portion. You wanted to duck away before she showed up. When Tod gave you the go ahead, you eagerly grabbed your bag and headed straight for the bathroom to change into your more festive outfit. The cat ears didn't exactly match the way the hat did, but you leave them on anyway. You give yourself a quick look over in the mirror, making sure your new necklace was lying just right against the top of your sternum.

You pull your cellphone out as you leave the bathroom, letting Sans know you were ready. The stalls are set a little ways away from the actual festival, so you turn around the building, rather than going back out to the path, cause c'mon, it'd save you a whole five seconds! You're surprised to see two people standing there against the wall. You're even more surprised when you see one of them is Emily. She's talking to a tall man you sort of recognize. His dark hair is long and his back is slightly hunched. You're pretty sure you've seen him at the station a few times. A boyfriend maybe?

That gets confirmed when Emily hands the guy a large brown bag filled with...something and pulls his face towards her. You quickly turn away and head to the path after all, not wanting to be caught snooping. You have no desire to peek into her private life. You dive back into the swarm of the crowd; there's a lot of people and monsters here now and they all blend together in a wonderful flood of noise and color. You would be a little worried about finding Sans, tiny guy that he is but he's not the one you're keeping your eyes peeled for.

"I HAVE SPOTTED HER SANS!"

And there you go. Papyrus is easily seen above the heads of everyone else and a path naturally appears as the tall monster strides towards you. Sure enough, there's Sans and Frisk trailing right behind. The kid has chocolate smeared all over their face and is currently devouring a huge stick of cotton candy. Oh, Toriel's in for a rough night dealing with that sugar crash. Sans is holding a thing of cotton candy too. His gaze flickers over your witch outfit, taking in the the slightly ripped fabric and the way it sits on your body. You grin widely as he clears his nonexistent throat and offers you the cotton candy.

"the cotton candy clouds are outta my reach but i figure this stuff probably tastes better anyway."

You delightfully take the treat. "How sweet of you."

He nods, clearly expecting that, but pleased anyway. He pulls a piece of the candy and presses it up against his teeth. It vanishes and his sockets widen slightly. He's never had cotton candy before?! You giggle and take a large bit for yourself. Between the two of you, you make fast work of the cotton candy. You walk around with the brothers and Frisk. Papyrus is practically vibrating with hyper energy, running ahead and you wonder just how much sugar he's had.

"I'm never going to get sick of that stuff," you sigh happily, tossing the stick in a bin. Then, you notice Sans staring at you. Or rather, staring at your mouth as you lick at your sticky fingers. Maybe it's the dress or the look on his face, but something emboldens you and you meet his eyes as you give your finger one last deliberate lick. You both blush brightly at the same time and look away from each other. Oh good grief, since when did you have that kind of courage?!

Frisk is snickering loudly at you two. They wiggle their hips slightly. You blink, not quite sure what they're trying to accomplish. They pout at you then chase after Papyrus again.

"They look like they're having fun," you laugh as you and Sans move at a much slower pace after them.

"hm. yep." His voice is kind of quiet. He's staring off at the crowd and following his gaze, you see that the two of you are attracting some weird looks from the humans passing by. Sans' shoulders are
a little hunched and his smile is strained. The staring makes you a little uncomfortable, but for his sake, you reach out and brush your fingers against his hand. He jumps and looks at you. Your concern must be clear on your face because he laughs a little and gives you a reassuring grin.

"hey, don't worry about me. i'm used to the stares. but it's gotta be kinda weird for you. right?"

You swallow your nerves and take his hand. You're nervous but not because of the people watching. You're scared Sans might pull away. When he doesn't, you sigh a little in relief. "I've had to deal with stares before. It doesn't bother me much."

"heh. you're an odd one." His grip tightens slightly. "thanks."

You pull on his hand, trying to get him to move a little faster than a slow shamble. "C'mon, it's gonna get dark soon. I still have stuff I wanna see before they light the bonfire!"

You two finally catch up with Papyrus and Frisk, who have been caught at another game stand. You quickly learn that Papyrus has a wicked and precise aim and have remind him to leave prizes for others. He's got quite a collection, and yet, by the time dusk begins to fall, he's given nearly all of them away to different children (both monster and human) he's come across. Most of those are currently trailing after him like ducklings. They're noisy, excited and Papyrus is loving the attention from the tiny beings. Frisk long ago claimed the position on Papyrus' shoulders, looking like a ruler on a throne of bones.

You all follow the crowd to the large stone square for the lighting of the bonfire. A loud cheer echos through the crowd as the fire roars to life. A small chill goes through you at the sight. It's been a long time since the accident. But the fear of fire that was born from it never quite went away. It probably never will. Now that the fire is lit, the music swells through the speakers, prompting people to go up and dance. Funny enough, the song playing is 'Shake It Off'. You're gonna take that as a sign to shake off the creeping anxiety and have fun.

"LOOK AT EVERYONE DANCING!" Papyrus bounces excitedly, nearly sending Frisk flying. They scramble down from his shoulders and tug on his hands. Their eyes are gleaming.

"Go for it Pap!" You give him a tiny push and they need no more encouragement. You turn to Sans, only to find that he's managed to snag a spot on one of the many benches set up around the square. "Please don't tell me you're gonna be a party pooper."

"dancin' isn't really my thing. too much work."

You tug on his sleeve, pouting. "Come on Sans. It's fun!"

He just smiles at you. "i'm having fun right here."

He's clearly not gonna move so you sigh and say "Fine. I'll go dance with Pap then!" So that's exactly what you do. You join the skeleton and let the music take you. For being all bones, Papyrus is a surprisingly good dancer. More than that, he's just FUN to dance with. For several songs you dance with him and Frisk and whoever else you happen to bump into. Humans, monsters. Everyone is dancing. Finally, you're out of breath and starting to sweat so you decide to check on Sans.

He's not on the bench. You look around. Did he actually get up to dance and you just missed him? You pull out your phone and are just about to text him when you hear a dull bang and distant yelling. It's coming from the direction of the booths. You stow your phone and quickly head towards the commotion. Your heart sinks when you discover that the noise is coming from Muffet's booth. There's a group of men standing there, mostly college age or older. The sign that the spiders had
worked so hard on is on the ground, tattered and dirty.

"Who the hell do you think you are?" One of them is snarling at Muffet. He's got one worst hair styles you've ever seen and faded, torn clothing to match. It's partially shaved on the side and falls down to his shoulder on the other. "Stay out of this!"

"would you rather i go get the cops?"

The group shifts slightly. Sans. He was blocked from your view before. His hands are in the pockets of his coat. His grin is still present, like always, but there's a strange energy about him that sends shivers up your spine.

Nasty hair laughs loudly. "Like the cops are gonna help you freaks!"

"Oh, but what about me?" You storm up, pulling your phone out. The group turns at your arrival, their surprise fading into sneering contempt.

"And who the hell are you dolly?" Nasty hair gives you a piercing look up and down your body that makes your skin crawl. "This is none of your business."

You stand your ground. "I'm with E.B.B.T radio," you say coolly. "This is my stand and my friends. So yeah, I think it is my business."

The group of boys just laughs at your words and you flush with anger. A different guy, pimply and tall, saunters over to you. "Big talk for a little girl." He stops in front of you. He reeks of booze. "You're not gonna tell me you're one of those monster lovers are you? 'Cause that'd be a real shame."

He reaches for you and you flinch back.

But then his hand is stopped midway. Sans is suddenly standing right there, gripping the guy's wrist. The lights have disappeared completely from his sockets.

"you're gonna want to rethink what you're doing pal." His voice is void of any emotion. His hand tightens and the boy yells out in pain.

"Shit!" He rips his hand away, glaring at the two of you. But now the group is rattled. You can see it on their faces.

"Leave." You're proud of the fact that you manage to keep your voice from shaking. "Last warning."

The group hesitates, looking at Nasty Hair. He snarls and points at you. "You're gonna get what's coming to you, freak."

Sans tenses next to you and you put a hand on his shoulder. "'Kay, then, calling the cops."

Those words are enough to finally send them away. One of them kicks at Muffet's stand as he goes, shaking loose several spiders and remaining decorations. Both you and Sans stare at them until they're out of sight. You're shaking with rage.

"Muffet, are you guys okay?" You take a breath and turn to assess the damage. The sign is destroyed beyond repair, but everyone in the booth seems unharmed aside from being shaken. There are a few baked goods spread across the ground. Fortunately it looks like most of the wares had already been sold. Muffet nods sadly, holding her many arms out. The spiders shaken from the stand crawl up her arms, disappearing into the safety of her clothes.
"What happened?"

"made up some excuse about being cheated out of goods," Sans hisses. "starting throwing a fuss about being compensated for food they didn't pay for."

You hear footsteps. Tod comes running up with a security guard. He must have heard the noise. "_____! What's going on?"

You explain the situation to them. Tod shakes his head, frowning heavily. But....

"You don't look surprised," you say slowly.

He sighs. "I was hoping I was wrong, but I had a feeling something like this would happen." He turns to Muffet. "I'm very sorry. We should have been better prepared for something like this. _____, thank you for your help. I can handle things from here."

You hesitate before nodding. There isn't much more you can do now. "I'm sorry," you say to Muffet. You feel miserable and utterly useless.

Sans taps your arm. "let's go back to Pap." The lights have returned to his eyes, but they're dim.

You nod. "Yeah, okay." You head back to the bonfire. Both of you are quiet. You want to say something, but what can you say? Sorry could only go so far. The noise and the laughter from the dancing helps to calm your anger as you get closer to the fire. You tug Sans to a small clearing, a little closer to the fire than you would like, but it's further away from the dancers. The crackling of the fire is soothing in its own way.

Sans is staring up at the stars. "you ok?" he finally asks.

"I'm fine. But what about you? Don't say you're okay, cause I can see you're not."

Sans sighs. "just sucks. y'know? can't go a single day without some kind of crap happening. underground had it's problems but...folks didn't go around smashing bake sale signs just cause."

You take Sans' hand, squeezing tightly. "People do stupid things when they're scared. I'm not excusing those jerks. There's no reason for them to act like that. But humans don't exactly have a good track record of getting along with others. But with time, maybe things can get better. I mean, just look at Pap."

You can see him still dancing. His army of ducklings are squealing and jumping around him. Human children are mingling with monsters while their parents watch on. "Those kids love him and I'm sure their parents were scared to death at first. But they saw that he's harmless. Their fear just needed a chance to be eased. It sucks, but what most people need is time. Even though we don't deserve it."

Sans looks at you and he looks so tired. "i wish more people were like you," he murmured. He steps a little closer. He leans in, like he's about to kiss you and stops. "sorry. probably don't wanna do that with people watching."

There are people watching, openly staring at the two of you. You reach up and touch Sans' cheek. "People will think what they think. Doesn't change how I feel." You gently kiss his cheek bone. A hint of genuine smile lifts his expression.

The song playing on the speakers changes. "Look at the stars. Look how they shine for you."

Hmm, Coldplay. Nice choice. You take Sans' other hand. "Okay, I know you said you don't dance,
but I've got news for you. There is a mandatory rule that everyone at the festival dances at least once. It's your turn now!

"oh, heh, um...." Sans looks at you, a little flustered. "i guess if it's mandatory. but i don't...i've never really...."

You guide his hand to your waist, laughing. "Here, you hold me here and then I put my hand here-" you place one hand on his shoulder "then we hold hands like this." You start swaying and Sans follows your lead, looking down at his feet. You can't stop a giggle. "There you go, you got it!"

He's blushing. "guess this isn't so bad."

As the song goes on, his confidence grows and soon he's leading you, gently swirling the two of you in a circle. His grip is firm, but gentle and your body feels like it's humming with happiness. "Well look at that. You're a natural."

Sans finally looks right at you. "nah, you're the natural. i'm just going with the flow."

"Give me time. I'll make a dancer out of you yet!"

"heh." He smiles gently. "you looked like you were having fun. before the jerks ruined things."

You nod. "Pap is fun to dance with. You'd know if you weren't so lazy and actually danced with us."

He hums, tugging you a little closer. "maybe i'll join you guys next time."

His body is warm. Or is that just the heat of the flames? You don't really know. You lick your lips. Sudden shyness makes you glance away. Oh you're definitely attraction attention now. People are watching you with a mixture of open curiosity and disapproval. But you are glad to see some who seem extremely happy about your circumstances. You even spot Undyne slow dancing with Alphys. She shoots you a thumbs up, toothy smile glinting.

Suddenly your neck prickles. You catch a flicker of movement and notice a man staring at you with vicious hostility. It's hard to tell because of the lighting, but he almost looks familiar. Was it one of the pricks from the group before? You squint, but before you can really tell, he turns and you see him toss something into the bonfire. A brown bag? Oh, come on. There were trash cans literally everywhere-

Then without warning, the fire exploded.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the cliffhanger! Getting into some of the serious stuff now. Just a warning now that the next chapter will contain mentions of blood.
There's screaming and a sharp popping and harsh whistling and colors exploding from the bonfire and it's all just noise mushing together as the world shifts and suddenly you're pulled away and dumped on cold cement. Everything is shifting and your head feels like it's swirling on your neck. You can dimly hear a low, urgent voice.

"-re you ok? hey an-"

You stare at Sans blankly. Your voice won't work.

You hear him swear under his breath. "Stay here."

His presence vanishes and you try to call out for him, but your voice is still closed off. You look around for him frantically. Odd details come into clear view. People are running. Papyrus is standing with his limbs stretched out, shielding a wailing group of children. There's a row of bones in front of him, towering impossibly tall. Smoke is everywhere, but it doesn't hide the bright flashes of blue and red light still exploding through the air.

Blue? Red?

The word comes slowly as you continue to stare. Fireworks. Someone threw fireworks into the bonfire.

But now all you can see is the fire.

Fire.

FIRE.

FIRE.

"What's going on with her?"

"i dunno, she won't move or anything."

Your body is trembling. Your nerves are screaming at you to run, to just move but your muscles are locked in place.

"Hey c'mon nerd, you're freaking us out here."

"_____?"
YOU CAN'T BREATHE.

His hand reaches out.

"D-don't!" A timid voice warns.

Sans touches you gently and you flinch away like he hit you. The jerking movement unblocks your airway and a great gasping sob wracks your whole body. You're scrambling backwards and wrap your arms around yourself. Memories, bad memories are flashing in front of your eyes. The burning room, the suffocating smoke, burning, aching, screaming! No! No! Stay here, stay in the moment!

"what's happening?" His voice is tense with worry.

"It's a panic attack. Sans, get in front of her. Block the fire. Don't touch her."

A dark shape drops down in front of you. Sans. He holds his hands out hesitantly. "sweetheart? look at me. i'm right here."

You force your eyes to focus on his face. His eye sockets are tight.

"Breathe with Sans ______." Alphys' voice is oddly calm. Focused.

Sans takes a long deliberate breath, never once breaking eye contact with you. It takes several tries to calm your harsh gasping but you finally manage to slow your breathing. The panic turns into an overwhelming wave of shame. You put your hands over your face as you start to sob.

"S-Sans....I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

"no, shhh. babe, it's ok. i just need to know if you're hurt."

You manage to shake your head. It doesn't feel like anything is physically wrong.

"ok. that's good. undyne, go get paps and frisk."

"Got it." She leans and gives Alphys a swift kiss. "Stay with the kid. I'll be right back."

"Be c-careful." Alphys watches Undyne head over to where Paps is trying his best to calm the crying children as their parents dart around in a panic trying to find their kids. "D-did you see anything Sans?"

Sans shakes his head. "i was uh...distracted." He's still watching you. "babe, can i touch you? is that ok?"

A quick nod. You hear him scoot closer. You let yourself lean into his arms, shoving your face against his shirt. Your heart is slowly starting to go back to its regular pace. Sans rubs his phalanges over your head. It's then you realize the cat ears are gone.

"The ears fell off," you mumble.

"that's ok," he assures you. "don't worry about it. i'll buy frisk another one."

The other two are silent as you try to stifle your tears. You're suddenly exhausted and you want to just fall asleep in Sans' embrace.

"HUMAN! ARE YOU HURT?"
Papyrus' voice, concerned but booming makes you jump a little. Sans' grip on you tightens.

"she's fine bro. are you and the kid ok?"

"YES! I DEFENDED FRISK AND THE OTHER CHILDREN WITH GREAT SKILL." Papyrus frowns deeply. "WHAT HAPPENED BROTHER? WHY DID THE FIRE EXPLODE LIKE THAT?"

"someone pulling a really bad prank maybe." His voice is sour. "i dunno. have you seen toriel?"

Papyrus gestures off somewhere. "SHE IS CONTACTING THE POLICE. SHE HAS ASKED ME TO WATCH FRISK FOR JUST A LITTLE LONGER."

Sans looks down at you. "i need to get _____ home. will you be ok here for just a bit?"

"OF COURSE I WILL BE SANS. YOU DO NOT NEED TO WORRY ABOUT ME. I AM VERY CAPABLE OF HANDLING MYSELF."

Sans lets out dry chuckle. "i know bro."

"I'm okay Sans," you protest, attempting to pull away. "We should stay and help."

"no, you're not ok." He fixes you with a stern look. "i'm gonna take you home and come back. got it?"

There's no arguing with him. You don't have the energy for it anyway. "Fine."

You shakily get to your feet. Sans keeps a firm hold on your arm, like he's scared you're going to run off on him, or fall. "are you good with a shortcut?"

"Huh? I guess, but my car...."

"i'll bring you back tomorrow." He gives a short nod to Alphys. "thanks for your help."

"Make sure you get her some water." Alphys gives you a shaky, knowing smile. "Panic attacks can dehydrate you."

You press in against Sans' ribs. "Sorry you had to see that," you whisper to her.

Alphys fiddles with her fingers. "Don't worry. I g-get them too. Now just go home and r-rest. Okay?"

You nod and Sans takes that as his cue. The world spins and reforms. You blink. You're standing in a kitchen that is filled with startling amounts of spaghetti noodle boxes. Definitely not your place.

"This isn't my apartment," you say to Sans.

He gives you a sheepish grin that quickly turns into concern. "no. i just...i just want to keep you close tonight. you kinda scared me," he whispers.

You stare down at the floor. "I'm sorry." Seems all you've done is apologize. You can tell that he wants answers. But he isn't pushing you and for that you're grateful.

Sans releases you. "i can take you back to your place if you want. i shoulda asked."

No, you're glad he didn't. You don't want to be alone tonight. "It's okay. But I don't have anything
with me."

He pulls you gently down the hall. "'s ok. i'll give you some of my clothes. why don't you take a
shower and wash the smoke off? i'll go back for paps while you're cleaning up. just so you know if
i'm not back when you're done."

Sans sets you up for your shower, towel and pj's and all. He hesitates and leans in to give you a
quick kiss on your cheek with his teeth. "i'll be back soon," he promises before blinking out of sight.

You spend a long time in the shower. The hot water pounds against your body as you simply stand
there in a daze. He had seen you in a full on panic attack. You haven't had one that bad in a long
time. Granted, you've never been in a situation with an exploding bonfire before either. It was
frightening, and you had every right to be scared. That's what you try to tell yourself anyway. At
some point, you wind up sinking to the floor of the tub, exhausted tears running down your face.

You were going to have to tell him. You should have told him before you even agreed to go out with
him. Guilt eats at your heart. You stay there in the tub until the hot water turns cold before finally
shutting the faucet off. You move at a snails pace getting dressed. The clothes Sans gave you consist
of a pair of dark blue shorts and a plain black shirt. You press the fabric against your face. It smells
like him. The shirt fits just fine but you have to pull the drawstring on the shorts as tight as you can.
Which didn't make sense, considering you were the one with actual flesh and he was literally made
of bone.

Freaking magic.

The soft murmur of the t.v floats down the hall as you head back to the living room. Sans looks up
from his spot on the couch. He's got a glass of water in his hand, which he offers to you as you join
him. You sip at it and hope he doesn't notice how red your eyes are.

"How's Pap?" You wince at how hoarse your voice is. "Was Frisk okay?"

Sans nods. "kid's fine. they don't get rattled easily. they went through the underground by themselves
remember?"

Guess compared to facing off against monsters trying to kill you, a prank with fireworks gone wrong
isn't gonna bother them.

"pap is in bed now," Sans continues, his gaze drifting down the hall. "he saved a lotta kids from
getting hurt tonight. it wore him out."

You tuck your feet up under you. "What happened after you went back? Was anyone hurt?"

"nothing too bad from what i heard. a few minor burns, scrapes from falling over. the jackass used
smaller fireworks. i think it was meant to be more of a scare than to hurt anyone."

You sigh in relief. That was one good bit of news at least. You frown as you suddenly recall the man
who threw the bag into the fire just before it happened. "Oh my gosh. I think I saw the guy who did
it."

"what?"

"Yeah, some guy was staring at us when we were dancing. I saw him throw something into the fire
and I just assumed it was a bag of trash or something and he was just too lazy to use a trashcan."
You straighten and start to get up. "I gotta tell the police or someone."
Sans tugs you back down. "it's late now, you can do that in the morning." He's pulled you a little closer to him and it's all too easy to sink against his solid frame. You're so tired. Sleep feels so close and yet completely out of reach. Your mind is still swirling and your body feels tense with the threat of nightmares lingering by. You always had nightmares after an attack. You didn't want to sleep just yet.

Besides, there's something you need to do before anything else.

You sit up, pulling away from Sans. He lets you go, but with great reluctance. "hey, is everything ok?"

You fold your hands together, looking away from his concerned gaze. "Sans, there's something I have to tell you. It's about what happened with my...attack tonight." Damn it, you're already starting to shake.

"babe, you're barely holding on as it is," Sans says gently. "we can talk tomorrow."

You shake your head stubbornly. "I need to do this now. There will always be an excuse to put it off and well, that's not going to make it any easier. Will you...will you just promise that you'll let me tell the whole story before..."

Before he starts to despise you.

Sans lets out a long breath of air. He pulls his feet up onto the couch and sits cross legged facing you. "ok. say what you need to say."

You take a long, uneven breath. Then you begin.

~~~

You were one of those typical smart kids. Never had problems with acing classes, got along with everyone. Teacher's pet. 'We're expecting great things from you!' perfect child. But as you got older, you started to learn that you weren't anything special. The world around you caught up and suddenly, you weren't able to ease by on natural talent. What was worse, you'd never learned how to properly study, or even how to make real, lasting friendships. You scraped by, hiding the truth of your failures as best as you could from those who had such high expectations from you. But there was one person you never once had to pretend to be that perfect student and child.

Your grandfather. He was a man who held little regard for expectations. He cared far more about the stars and the stories that they told. He taught you to love the sky and gave you that deep longing to reach them. He taught you to love music and stupid jokes and to take life at a slower pace. Your parents didn't see it that way of course. Many times you would flee to your grandpa's house, crying and feeling like a worthless disappointment and he never failed to bring a smile back to your face. He would let you vent, scream, cry, whatever you needed to do.

But one day you went too far. You were still young. You couldn't even be called a teenager yet. A bad week, a bad failure on an important test and a harsh reprimand from both your teachers and your parents. You can still remember such odd, stupid little details. The sky was in that odd place of being sunny yet hovering on the edge of a storm. The grass in front of your grandpa's house was a little brown on the edges. A light bulb on the ceiling was out. The house smelled of cinnamon thanks to the large candles placed in random places like the coffee table and the shelf where the special occasion dishes were held. Your grandmother had died when you were barely a year old, so you'd never really known her. But what you did know is that she loved candles. All sizes, all scents. So in her memory, your grandpa almost always had at least one lit, its flame always steady and bright.
He had stepped out to the store to get something. What that was, you couldn't remember. You went up to his study on the second floor. It was messy, like always. There was a candle burning on the edge of the desk, like always. You turned on the loudest, angriest song you could think of in his old stereo and just started dancing, letting your anger and frustration seep into your movements. You had closed your eyes and you must have bumped into the desk at some point, knocking the candle over. That was also something you couldn't remember. Then it got hot and hotter and your throat itched something awful and you finally opened your eyes to find the room engulfed with flames. The memory gets a little blurry at that point. You remember hitting the ground, crawling down the hallway, fire licking at your heels as it raced throughout the whole house. Your lungs were filled with smoke. You couldn't see. You could barely even scream.

You remember being picked up. You remember crying. You remember your grandfather's face, red, blistered and burning as he pulled you out of the smoke and flames. A wailing siren. White walls. Waking up to be told that he hadn't made it through the night. His lungs had filled with smoke, his heart had given out.

You had killed him.

After that...well that was all a little fuzzy too. You simply stopped caring. Grades, friends, expectations. All that had fallen away. Everyone told you to your face that it was an accident, that it wasn't your fault. But you could see it behind the words and pitying stares. If you hadn't made such a stupid mistake, he would still be here. It was your fault.

Eventually, your parents moved you to a new town. A place where the reminder wasn't a few blocks down the road. A place where you could hide your past. And for the first few months, things got a little better. You made a few friends. One friend in particular that you grew close to. She loved space and sci-fi. And as you grew closer, your guilt over hiding your past grew unbearable. You trusted her and wanted her to know.

She told everyone. She called you messed up freak. All that pain and loneliness was only worse after that. For the rest of your high school days you were left pretty much to yourself. No one wanted anything to do with the new girl who had killed her grandpa, even if it was an accident. You fell back into that odd numb state that you had pretty much lived in since the accident. Days went by when you didn't eat a thing, then you'd eat everything in sight. You never slept. You slept for endless hours. The nightmares ate at your mind every night. You started having panic attacks, triggered by the smallest thing. You tried to hide these, but sometimes they happened where people could see. Their pitying stares burned you.

You always felt numb and the numbness hurt. It was an odd thing to feel, wasn't it? How could you be completely numb and yet in so much pain at the same time? You wanted to feel something, something besides the endless nothing. And so you made the worst choice you possibly could.

Your voice trails off. Sans has not said a single word this whole time. He hasn't even moved. It's like he's frozen, simply watching as you relive your past. Strangely enough, you're not crying. Maybe your body's just run out after your panic attack. Now you've reached the point that you're most scared to reveal. You're not sure how to even word it, so you decide to just show him.

You push the sleeves of his borrowed shirt up, turning your arms palm up to face him. His gaze finally flickers down to your arms.

"I just wanted to feel something," you murmur, running your fingers over the many thin, white scars on your skin. You had been so careful before. Placement, cleaning up, how deeply you cut. So the
scars are easy to miss if you're not looking for them. "I just needed to be reminded."

He's just staring at your arms. At your scars. Finally, he looks back up at you. "i...don't understand," he finally says slowly. "what does this mean?"

He doesn't get it. Of course he doesn't. He doesn't even have skin. Did monsters even have the concept of self harm?

"I h-hurt myself." Your voice breaks. "I did this. I made myself b-bleed just to feel something. I did it to punish myself. The physical pain was easier than feeling just...nothing."

You can see the moment it clicks. The lights in Sans' eyes vanish, like a flame on a candle going out. "oh my god."

There it is. The horror, the disgust. His voice is just a whisper and it makes your whole body quiver all over again. You pull your arms to your chest, hiding the scars. You stare at the couch cushion because you can't bear to see the expression he must surely be making right now. You keep talking because now everything is just pouring out and now he already knows the worst of it. You might as well finish.

~~~

You somehow managed to graduate high school. Maybe your teachers just took pity on you, letting you slide by. It was a night not long after you had numbly accepted your diploma. You had nothing now. No plans, no more distractions during the day. You were sitting in the bathroom on some random night, on some random day. Blood was dripping down your arms and you were just sitting there and you just didn't care anymore. The world didn't need you. All it offered was pain. You pressed that blade against your wrist, ready to just get on with it. You were ready to let that pain end. And you couldn't do it. It was almost like you could see your grandfather there in front of you. His gentle, rumbling voice begging you not to do this. And the dam in your heart finally snapped. You cried like you hadn't cried for years, sobbing in a puddle of your own blood on the bathroom floor. That was how your parents you. After that, it was constant doctor and therapist visits. You'd long since gotten used to seeing a therapist for the trauma of the accident but they had never done much for you in the past.

Until you met Doctor Duncan. An intimidating woman in her fifties with a sharp pixie haircut and sharp eyes. She was the first one to acknowledge that yes, you had caused the accident. That couldn't be changed. But it could be accepted and you could move on. You were allowed to move on. She told you to find one thing in this life that was worth living for.

So you put your broken heart and soul into music. You constantly had music playing, grounding you when the cloud of numbness started to sink back in. When the overwhelming need to see your own blood nearly sent you to the ground with the force of your panic attacks, you screamed along to songs until your energy ran out. Music helped you put yourself back together, one little piece at a time. You even managed to go to college for a while. You started to feel like a human being again. That was how you met Tod. He had been a patient of the doctor's back when she lived in another city. She never told you his story and you never asked. But you knew that he had suffered many of the same attacks and self loathing in his past. You got his number, you chatted and he offered you the job. A safe place where you would be surrounded by music. You had decided to move to the city, give this life another try.
You packed the razors and the match box and a burnt, crumpled photograph into that black box. You couldn't forget and you still couldn't completely let go. You still haven't forgiven yourself just yet. Then you picked up your life and moved to the city teeming with monsters.

That's why you ran down the hall that very first day. A fire alarm meant fire and you couldn't bear the thought of having another person be claimed by flames, even if it was someone you didn't know.

And that was how you met the monster that had changed your life.

--------

Complete silence. You still can't bring yourself to look at Sans. You close your eyes, letting your head slump against the cushion. "I'm sorry." Your voice is hoarse from talking for so long. "I should have told you from the start. I should've been completely honest. I didn't want to lose your friendship. I was just so happy. I wanted a chance to be wanted by someone." Huh. You did have tears left. They're falling down your face slowly. "If you want me to l-leave, I understand. Just say the word and you and your brother won't be bothered by me any more."

He says your name. Softly and full of emotion. "look at me."

You shiver and open your eyes. You're expecting pity, disgust and maybe anger but you don't see it. The lights are back in his eyes and his face...it's full of understanding. And warmth. He's holding his hands out towards you. Simply waiting. You stare at his bones for several minutes. They don't waver and he doesn't lower them. Finally, you reach out to him. You place your shaking hand on his. His digits wrap gently around your wrist, pulling your arm towards him. He lowers his head and presses his teeth against the skin of your arm. Slowly and with precision, he kisses every single scar on your arm. A broken sob escapes you.

"thank you," he murmurs. He holds your arm gently as he brings his face up to look at you. "______ thank you for trusting me. thank you-" his voice catches "thank you for choosing to live."

You place your free hand over your eyes as the tears fall faster. "Is it okay if I stay? Can I stay with you and Papyrus?" It's hard to get the words out.

As an answer, Sans pulls you towards him, wrapping his arms around you. It's the first time he's hugged you like this. "yes. please, please stay."

You cry for a good long while against his chest. It's like the words have finally released something dark that you've been holding onto for so long. That weight isn't gone, but now you feel like perhaps it's grown lighter. You feel like maybe you can finally hope that it will someday disappear altogether. If this wonderful, perfect skeleton is by your side, such a future doesn't seem like an impossible dream.

You look up at Sans and you're shocked to see tears gathering in his own sockets. He's crying, for you. That warm feeling you've held in your chest bursts out and now you know for certain. You love him. You love him with every fiber of your being and nothing will be able to change that. You rub your hand against his skull and pull yourself up. He meets your kiss and for a long time after that, no more words are spoken between the two of you.
As expected, you have nightmares. Flashes of being thrown into a pit of flames, feeling fire eat at your skin. They're all ones you've had before but they still strike terror through your whole body. Your limbs feel bogged down by sludge as you try to force yourself awake, desperate to escape. But as soon as you feel the cool touch of bones against your face you stop struggling and almost immediately slip back into a slightly easier sleep.

Sans is already up when you wake the next morning. The two of you are still on the couch. At your soft grumbling, he looks down at you and gives you a wide smile. "morning sleepy. thought i was supposed to be the lazy one."

"Given the fact that you're still lying here with me, I'd say you're still the primary holder of that title." You yawn widely and rub at your eyes. "You know, I think I can count the number of times I've actually slept in my bed on one hand since I bought the freaking thing. no offense, but you're not exactly a goose feather pillow."

"rude. and after i stayed with ya all night to chase away the bad dreams," Sans sighs dramatically. You can't help but stiffen at little at that. He notices, and quickly pats your head. "sorry. i'm just messing with you."

You let out a small, strained laugh. "Right. Um, I'm sorry about that."

His bony finger pokes your cheek. "look, you really don't have to apologize. what you've been through...anyone would break down. hell, i'm surprised you've held yourself together so well."

This was so weird. You poured your deepest and darkest secrets to this guy. You completely opened yourself up. But there's no regret. Instead, you feel an odd sort of contentment. It almost feels too good to be true. You pull the blanket up around your face. "Are you sure about this?" you can't help but ask quietly.

Sans tugs the blanket away from your face. "i'm probably the laziest guy we both know. so if i actually put effort into something, it means i want it. you're worth a bit of work."

You blush at his admiring tone. "It's just embarrassing," you mumble. "Breaking down like that."

"just as embarrassing as dancing in the kitchen?"

"I told you to forget about that!"

He grins widely and shakes his head. "nah, can't forget something that cute."
You stick your tongue out at him. A sigh hisses through your nose and you play with the edge of his shirt. He's definitely made of bone, but his clothes have actual shape to them, like they would on a human body. You poke lightly at where his belly would be. Your fingers sink into the cloth slightly, but there is definitely some resistance there. "You don't actually have a pillow shoved under there do you?"

Sans lifts up his shirt, letting you peer at the complete lack of anything but bone underneath. There's no visible sign of what gives him shape under his clothes. "That's so bizarre," you mutter. You can't stop yourself from running your fingers against his rib cage. His bones are oddly warm and you can feel the soothing hum of energy running through them. "How does this even work?"

He makes an odd little noise. "uh...magic?"

You poke him again and he squirms. Is he ticklish? You dance your fingers over his ribs and he starts to shake a little under your touch.

"h-heya pal, that's-pfft!" He tries to smother a laugh and suddenly you're wide awake. Grinning devilishly, you tickle him until he can't hide his laughter. He tries to get away but find himself trapped by the couch. His laugh is contagious and soon you're giggling along with him. He attempts to tickle you back, but you pin his hand down before he can grab you.

"i give, i give!" he finally gasps.

"Never give up! Never surrender!" You crow in your best Tim Allen impression.

"what are you even-oh geez!" His face goes bright blue as your fingers brush against his neck bones. "o-ok that's kind of a sensitive area."

Now that's an expression that sets your heart racing. Perhaps a little too much. You finally cease your attack and fall back to the other end of the couch. Both of you spend a few seconds trying to get your breath back. You jump when you feel bones on your feet. "Ahh!"

"relax. this is far too easy for my revenge. i'll get you back later," he promises with a smirk. You ease up slightly as he studies your foot. He presses his phalanges against the top, turning the limb slightly. "huh. there's barely any squishy stuff here. i can actually see your bones a little. are humans actually ticklish here?"

"Some of them. Not me of course," you drawl. "Just warning you now, I claim no responsibility if I accidentally kick you in the face."

"noted." You wiggle your toes as he starts tapping his bony fingers against them. He's oddly fascinated with your digits.

"You don't have a foot fetish, do you?"

"a what?"

Your phone rings, interrupting that delightful topic. You lean over the edge of the couch and stretch for it, since Sans is showing no signs of releasing your foot. "Little help?" you groan as you fight not to topple over. The phone glows blue and slides within reach. "Thanks." You sigh as you look at the call number. Tod. You had completely bailed last night without making any kind of effort to help. Of course you weren't on the clock when the explosion happened so you technically didn't do anything wrong. "Hey, Tod."

"Oh thank God," Tod breathes. He sounds tired. "Are you okay?"
"Yeah I'm fine. I'm sorry I didn't stick around last night. I was...well I had a pretty bad attack."

"I figured. Listen, I'm sorry to ask, but can you come back to the park to assist with clean up? Also, I told the police about that group of punks you dealt with earlier. They think that they might have had something to do with the explosion and want to get a statement from you."

Sans runs a finger down the bottom of your foot and a shiver crawls up your spine. You make a face and kick him lightly. "I got something even better. I think I saw the guy who did it."

"Seriously?"

"I think so at least. I saw a guy throw a big brown bag in the fire right before everything happened so I think it's safe to assume it was him."

"And you're sure it was a man?"

Something in his tone sets your nerves on edge. "Yes, I'm sure. Why?"

A deep sigh. "Look, it's not me making the assumptions but...there were a lot of monsters at the festival. Word has been going around that it was a monster trying to disrupt the dance and hurt people."

You sit up and Sans stops playing with your feet. "People are trying to blame monsters for this?"

"Word of mouth and it travels fast. Jerks say things to other jerks and suddenly you turn a campfire-"

"Into an explosion," you finish in a whisper. This was really bad. The festival was supposed to help the general public see that monsters were just like ordinary people. If they were being blamed for this, all that progress could be lost. Or worse.

"The sooner you can get down here to help clear things up the better." You hear a loud noise in the background. Tod groans. "I gotta go."

"Okay, I'll be there as soon as I can." Sans is grimly watching you as you hang up and swing your legs off the couch. "I'm sorry to run, but can you give me a lift in a few minutes?" You couldn't exactly drive there without a car. He nods silently and you give him a quick kiss on his skull. You're pleased to see a blue blush dust his cheeks. "You okay?"

"Yeah." He sighs. "do you mind if i ask paps to meet you there? he'd be happy to help with cleaning up."

"Sure, if he doesn't mind. I'm sure we can use the help. Where is he?"

"he had a short shift at work this morning. which is where i've gotta go or i'd stay too."

You snort. "And what, offer verbal encouragement?"

"that is my strongest talent." He grins but it's a little sad.

You lean down slightly so you're eye (socket) level with him. "Hey don't worry about what people are saying. I'm gonna talk to the cops and we'll get this cleared up. Okay? I'll see you in a few minutes."

You run back home and throw on some actual clothes. You start to grab the p.j's from Sans and stop. Well, you were technically his girlfriend now right? It wouldn't be so odd to hang on to some of his clothes. He's waiting for you outside and holds his arms out. A few seconds later and you're
stumbling back into a dark corner of the park. You stop and gasp, observing the damage. It looks like a few stands closer to the pit actually caught on fire from the fireworks and are just a piles of blackened wood and plastic. People are scrubbing at blackened marks on the stone and the air is still heavy with the smell of ash. Your breath catches in your throat as the fiery memory starts to rise in your mind. Sans puts a reassuring hand on your back.

"don't push yourself if it gets too hard," he says softly. "do you need me to stay with you?"

You shake your head, clearing it of the cobwebs. "No, don't skip work cause of me. Besides, Pap will be along soon right?"

Sans chuckles. "yeah, i had to convince him to finish up his shift and not just rush over. got your keys?"

You nod and squeeze his hand. "See you tonight."

He disappears and you feel a slight pang of loss. Clingy much? You brace yourself and head into the thick of the mess. You soon find Tod, who is talking to a pair of officers; a black woman with the largest set of curls you've ever seen and a much smaller man. Tod notices you and waves you over. "_____ this is Officer Leinbach and Officer Beeson. Go ahead and tell them what you saw."

The officers nod at you and you quickly recount what you saw just before the fire exploded.

"Did you see any details we can use? Hair? Clothing?" The man, Beeson, is jotting down notes.

It's hard to remember. With all the noise and your panic attack, a lot of those details are fuzzy. "He had long hair," you say slowly. You try to conjure up that memory, being careful to remember the happiness you felt while dancing with Sans and not the terror from the explosion. "About to his shoulders. And he was tall. He looked familiar but...." You're forgetting something. You're forgetting something important but it's lost in the haze of your attack.

"Could he have been with the group harassing the spiders before?" Officer Leinbach asks you. You shake your head.

"No, most of those guys were college aged. I'm pretty sure this guy was older than that."

The officers exchange a look. "So you were dancing with your boyfriend?" Beeson confirms slowly. "Did he see the man as well?"

You really don't like the look he's giving you. "He wasn't on the look out for nut cases with fireworks," you say a little coolly.

"That's fine," the female officer says quickly, tapping her partner on the shoulder. He sighs and scribbles on his notebook before ripping a page out.

"If you remember anything give us a call here." He hands you the paper and you nod. The cops soon take off, seeming to have all that they need. You hope that this will be enough to at least calm down the rumors that monsters were behind the prank. You dive into the clean up process, made quite a bit harder with the fire damage to deal with. You're honestly a little shocked no one was seriously hurt, going by how far the damage actually spreads.

You're there for a little less than an hour, struggling to put a large duffle bag filled with metal poles into one of the trucks when the weight is suddenly lifted from you.

"BE CAREFUL HUMAN!" Papyrus peers down at you, easily lifting the bag into the back of the
"This load seems a little too heavy for you."

"Oh hey! Thanks Pap." You give him a quick hug. "You're really doing me a huge favor. I hope I didn't pull you away from your job."

"Not at all! The Great Papyrus is always willing to lend a helping hand," Papyrus says proudly. And sure enough, with his help, cleaning up finishes a lot faster than anyone expected. You and Papyrus are just finishing up with the last of the trash bags.

"And the power forward makes her move!" You grab the bag, thankfully light and toss it to Papyrus. He easily catches it and slam dunks it into the dumpster bin. "And he scores! The game is won and the crowd goes wild!"

"Nyeheh heh heh!" Papyrus cheers as you whoop loudly. "That was an excellent play!"

You blow on your finger guns. "I got mad skills bro."

Papyrus laughs loudly. "You sound just like my brother."

"Oh yeah? I'll take that as a compliment," you say with a wide smile. You happen to glance past the still laughing skeleton and notice two guys heading towards you, one of them with a large camera on his shoulder. You recognize the logo on his jacket from the local tv news station. "Um, I think we've got company."
Sometimes No News Is Good News

Chapter Notes

Find me here! theninjamouse.tumblr.com
My writing blog: theninjawrites.tumblr.com
Keep those comments coming and thanks for all the support and love!

The reporter, with perfectly slicked back ash brown hair and a glinting smile approached you without hesitation. Without realizing it, you step slightly in front of Papyrus. "Hey there!"

Papyrus easily peers over your head at the two men. "HELLO! WHO ARE YOU?"

The man extends a hand to you and you hesitantly shake it. "Drew Ranson, WELS News. I hear that you're the person who saw the one responsible for last night's incident?"

"Yeah, that's right." You eye the camera man, who's already pointing his camera right at you and Papyrus.

"Excellent, I'm glad we caught you." Drew smiles a smile to rival Mettaton's. "I'd like to ask you a few questions about the whole mess. There's a lot of speculation going around and the people are looking for answers."

Oh. Oh. You weren't exactly thrilled about the idea of going on the news, but if this was chance to help clear things up without waiting for the cops.... "Um, sure. I guess that's fine."

"Excellent," Drew says again. "If you'll allow me, this will only take a few minutes of your time." He pulls out a small mic and clips it to your jacket. Papyrus watches the whole thing with great interest.

"____ I DO NOT UNDERSTAND. WHAT IS HAPPENING?"

"They're from the news station. The one on tv," you explain. "They're gonna help spread the word about what happened last night."

"YOU'RE GOING TO BE ON TV?" Papyrus claps his gloved hands over his face in delight. "THAT MAKES YOU A STAR JUST LIKE METTATON!"

"I'm afraid we're not quite on that level," Drew laughs. "Your name is...?"

Papyrus strikes a pose. "I AM THE GREAT PAPYRUS! I TOO-"

"Nice to meet you. Mind standing over there out of the shot?"

You frown as Papyrus' expression drops slightly. "Hey, can he actually stay in the shot with me? He did save a bunch of kids last night from being hit by the fireworks. If anyone deserves to be on the news it's him."

An brief flash passes through the reporter's eyes. He smiles widely. "Sure thing!"
Papyrus beams at you and you can tell he's holding himself back from wrapping you up in a hug in an attempt to look professional. Drew attaches another microphone to him but thinks better of it when the camera man winces and points to his headset. Drew then launches into a stream of questions: your name, where you work, how long you've lived in the city and others like that. You can't see what it possibly has to do with the festival, but you answer as best as you can.

"So, tell me exactly what you saw last night," he finally asks and you let out a small sigh of relief.

"Firstly, there was a group of guys who attacked the stand I was in charge of. Muffet's Bakery. After we sent them on their way we went back to the bonfire."

"'We' being you and the great Papyrus?" Drew asked, nodding at the tall skeleton.

Papyrus burst out laughing. "I'M AFRAID YOU ARE MISTAKEN. I DO CARE ABOUT _____ BUT IN A VERY PLATONIC WAY. SHE IS REFERRING TO MY BROTHER."

The speed at which the camera turns back to you is astounding. You feel your face growing red. "Pap!" you hiss. "They weren't asking if we were together!"

"THEY WEREN'T? OH." Papyrus has the decency to try and cover up his blunder, but now Drew's eyes are glinting.

"Please, continue," he says to you, whipping out a notepad and scribbling something down.

You can't help but feel that something bad has just happened, but you continue on, telling Drew about the man you saw and as many details as you can remember. He nods the whole time, and snaps his notebook shut.

"So, am I correct in assuming that you are in a relationship with this skeleton's brother?"

Crap. "I don't see what that has to do with anything."

"Is that a yes?"

"That is my personal business." Your sense of unease is growing steadily with every passing moment, even though you don't really understand why. You had told Sans last night that you didn't care about people staring at the two of you. But announcing your relationship on tv? It felt a little invasive. "Look, do you have everything you need?"

Drew's smile is far too wide and satisfied. "Yes, I believe we do."

~ ~ ~

Papyrus is unusually quiet as the two of you head back to your car. It's only when you're almost home that he asks, "ARE YOU MAD AT ME?"

You look at him in surprise. "No! Why would I be mad at you?"

He shifts uneasily in his seat, looking miserable. "YOU SEEMED UPSET BY THAT REPORTER ASKING ABOUT YOU AND SANS. HE WOULDN'T HAVE KNOWN IF I DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING. I JUST WANTED TO HELP WITH THE INTERVIEW."

You lean over and pat his bony knee. Now you feel bad. Pap had been so excited about being on tv and you were ruining it for him. "No, Pap. I promise I'm not mad at you. You did great!"

"WHY DO YOU NOT WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW ABOUT YOU AND SANS?"
You shrug, turning your attention back to the road. "It's just kind of a private thing. I'm happy with your brother and that's what matters. Bragging about it just seems a little...rude. I don't want people to get jealous after all."

Papyrus sniffs, wiping at his face. "IT IS TRUE THAT MY BROTHER IS VERY GREAT. ALMOST AS GREAT AS ME!"

"That's right Pap. Hey, I've got an idea," you say, changing the subject as you pull into the apartment's parking lot. "It's almost Halloween and I still haven't put any decorations up. Want to help me?"

This cheers Papyrus up considerably and the two of you soon get to work on making over your place. He's fascinated by the spooky decorations and bombards you with questions about the holiday. He's hanging up a long chain of skull shaped lights across your ceiling and you're just about to put some snickerdoodle cookies in the oven when Sans knocks and pokes his head in.

"there you are paps-woah." He looks around your transformed apartment and nods approvingly. Black translucent curtains are draped over windows, a plastic tombstone and fake skull sit by the door, cut outs of bats stretch across the walls and poofy spiderwebs cover the counter top. Papyrus plugs in the skull lights and poses under the flickering light.

"GREETINGS BROTHER AND WELCOME TO HALLOWEEN!" he says in his best spooky voice. You can't quite hide your snicker.

"Hey Sans," you say as you finish up with the cookies and wash your hands. "How was work?"

"it was fine-"

"SANS YOU WON'T BELIEVE WHAT HAPPENED!" Papyrus can't hold back any longer. "REPORTERS FROM THE TV INTERVIEWED US! WE'RE GOING TO BE ON TV!"

"interviewed? about what?"

"The accident last night. And," you look at the clock. "it's just about time to it to air."

Papyrus drags Sans to the bean bag, bouncing up and down with his excitement. You join them and Sans tugs you a little closer to him. "an interview huh?"

You nod, clicking the tv on. "Yeah, they wanted to know what I saw and hey, it's a good way to clear up the rumors right?"

He grunts quietly and you all turn your attention to the tv as the news starts. It's the first story, which isn't surprising considering the nature of the accident. The announcer, a pretty Asian lady starts the story.

"Last night's annual fall festival hosted by radio station E.B.B.T was brought to a sudden a dramatic end last night when an unknown being threw a bag of fireworks into the center park's bonfire, injuring at least seven. Drew Ranson has more on this story. Drew?"

The camera cuts to Drew, who is standing in front of the park. You can see people cleaning up behind him.

"Thanks Erin. It's a terrible thing that happened and I think that everyone is thankful that there were no serious injuries. As you can see behind me, clean up is a little more difficult than usual. Now the big question is of course, who did it?"
A woman, holding her child. "I don't know of any person who could do something like this. Children were running around everywhere and honestly it was hard enough keeping an eye on our kids with all the...unusual crowds hanging around."

The clip switches to a voice over, showing video of you tossing a garbage bag to Papyrus. "Though there are speculations that one from the monster community is responsible, I had a chance to speak with a woman who works at E.B.B.T and claims to have seen the one behind the prank."

"HERE IT COMES!" Papyrus shouts excitedly, shaking Sans' arm. You bury your face in your hands as you see yourself appear on the screen, embarrassed. Sans nudges you.

"who's that beautiful lady hanging out with my brother?"

"Shut up!"

"Miss _____ who was at the festival with her monster boyfriend-"

Your jaw drops and you feel Sans stiffen slightly.

"firmly believes that the one she saw was in fact a human man."

Your own face appears on screen, standing next to Papyrus, who is so much taller than you the top of his skull is cut off. "It was dark and kind of tough to see, but I'm positive the one I saw was a man. He was just watching me and my boyfriend dancing which is why I noticed him and then he threw something into the fire."

"So you don't think it was a monster?"

The you on the tv frowns. "There's no doubt in my mind it was a man."

It cuts back to Drew. "Though there is still much speculation about what happened, here's to hoping that the matter will soon be resolved."

It cuts back to the woman, who finishes with "The police are currently investigating this incident and encourage anyone who might have seen something to contact this number with the information." And that's it. All those questions and you were only on screen for maybe thirty seconds. Poor Papyrus didn't even get to say anything. Papyrus himself, however, is absolutely elated.

"DID YOU SEE THAT BROTHER? I WAS ON TV!" He whips out his phone. "I'VE GOT TO CALL UNDYNE! I HOPE SHE AND ALPHYS SAW IT!"

"i'm sure they did bro." The fake smile is back on his face. He grasps your hand tightly.

He's upset but trying his best to hide it. "Hey Pap, do you mind if I talk with Sans for a minute?"

"SURE. I WILL START DINNER." Papyrus heads out, phone pressed against his skull. You can hear his excited voice as he heads back to his apartment. You turn to Sans.

"What's wrong?"

"nothing's wrong. you made paps happy. nothing to be upset about."

"But?"

He sighs. "you're not exactly a self-preserving person."
"What's that supposed to mean?"

The fake smile on his face is wavering. He gestures to the tv. "well for starters, the whole city now knows that you're together with a monster and where you work. did you stop to think about what that means?"

"Hey, I'm not happy about it either," you say, a little annoyed. "But it's done. I told them what I saw and they reported it. That was the whole point."

"that was your point." His sockets narrow as he sits up. "they painted you as a monster lover. you're going to be targeted just like the rest of us. or worse."

You squeeze his hand. "You're blowing this out of proportion Sans."

"no i'm not!" He's raising his voice and it scares you a little. You've never heard him shout before. "you haven't seen what i've seen. kids have been beaten up by other kids just for playing with monsters on the playground. the window at work was smashed because people can't bear the thought of my dirty hands on their food. monsters have been hurt. monsters have lost everything." His bones are starting to shake. "what do you think people will do to you? a human who's dared to cross that line and openly announce that they're going out with one?"

"Sans nothing is going t-"

He shakes his head. The lights in his eyes have gone out. "you don't know that. they might hurt you. i can't...." he presses his hand over his sockets. "i can't stand the thought that something might happen to you because of me."

You gently rub your hand over the bones in his arm. Now you get it. "So what then? Was I supposed to just hide it? People saw us at the festival. People will see us whenever we go anywhere. Am I supposed to hide away? I'm not ashamed to be dating you Sans."

A shaky breath escapes him. "i know you're not," he whispers.

"Are you ashamed to be with me?"

"no. never."

"That's that then," you say with finality. "If they want to paint me as a monster lover, that's fine. Because I love you monsters very much." You kiss his cheek. "You don't need to worry." The timer on the oven beeps and you move to stand. Sans' hand whips out, wrapping around your wrist.

"wait." His voice is a soft murmur. He takes a deep breath and moves his lights up to stare right into your eyes. There's no color to see there. No 'eyes the color of the sea after a storm'. No deep green forest gaze. But still, it's the most beautiful thing you've ever seen. He hesitates, face blushing. His hand comes up to cup your face. You lean into his touch. "promise me that you'll be careful," he whispers.

You nod, your heart racing in your chest. "I promise."

Then he pulls you in and kisses you, slowly and gently. Your hands come up to grip his shoulders as a soft moan escapes you. He feels so warm and every touch sets a fire burning across your skin. His hands move from your face to your shoulders, pushing you against the bean bag. He begins peppering your face with kisses and you giggle. The oven beeps again.

"Sans, the cookies," you say as you wiggle under his hold. "They're gonna burn."
He lets out a disgruntled noise. "hold on."

You blink and he's gone. You crane your head back as the oven door opens and Sans hurriedly pulls the pan out. A few moments later and he's back where he was, his hip bones pressing into yours. His kisses feel almost desperate. A strange warmth blossoms in your belly as he shifts slightly, moving more of his body on top of yours. You drag your fingers along his back, trailing over the bumps of his spine. He shivers when you reach his neck bones.

"Still sensitive right here?" you whisper.

"it's a good sensitive," he says with a smile before he starts moving downwards with his kisses. You can't help but arch your back a little as his mouth tickles against your neck. "hmm, looks like you're sensitive too."

"Looks like," you gasp breathlessly.

He pauses and pulls back a little. "is this okay? am i going too fast?"

You take a deep breath. You can feel your face flaming. "Look, I've haven't exactly been...physical with a guy for a long time. I want to know you Sans, really know you but...."

"ok." He kisses your forehead softly. "we'll go as slow as you want."

Relief sweeps over you. "Thank you."

"just tell me if i do something wrong, ok?"

You nod and then the two of you spend quite some time just exploring each other's body. Sans loves every curve and every scar and his touches remain gentle. Not once does he demand anything of you. The weight of his words and worry from before seem to be just that. Empty worries. How could anything bad happen when you were loved like this?

~~~~~

For the next few days, nothing is exactly what happens. Sure, you get some stares and a few people slip some snarky comments to you about how your soul was damned and blah blah. It wasn't anything you couldn't deal with. On this particular day, just two days before Halloween, you were on the evening shift at the station. It was pretty late now and you were 'bone tired'. All you wanted to do was go home and crash. And hey, now you actually had a bed frame and not just a mattress on the floor. You had bullied Sans into transporting it home to save on the shipping time, even though he whined about it. Still, sleeping in your own bed by yourself felt really lonely. Maybe you'd ask Sans to stay over tonight.

"Night Tod," you call into the office. "I'm heading home."

Tod looks up from his papers. "It's pretty dark out. I'm almost done. I can walk you to your car if you don't mind waiting a few minutes."

"Thanks, but honestly I am ready to crash. I'll be fine."

You wave goodbye to the other bleary people who have been working all day and the overly cheerful night crew just coming in. You shiver as you step out into the cold night air, pulling your jacket tightly around yourself. You seriously hope it isn't too cold on Halloween night. You've had more than a few years in your childhood where the weather ruined your costume plans. You didn't go trick or treating anymore, but Toriel had invited you to go with Frisk and Papyrus, who was
dressing up. Sans had already claimed working the candy bowl (though you were pretty sure he would just set the bowl outside and not bother with actually answering the door) so you weren't quite decided on what you were going to do. But you did invite everyone over to your place for movies and junk food on the eve of Halloween. You needed to remember to pick up said junk food for the party tomorrow night.

You round the corner of the building, heading towards the parking lot. One of the bulbs in the street lamps was almost out, it's dim light throwing shadows across the area. You can see two people heading up towards the station. Your eyes land on them just as they notice you. Your heart stops as you recognize Emily and the man beside her. The long haired man with a hunched back who had stared so hatefully at you as you danced with Sans. The prick who had gotten his bag of fireworks from Emily at the festival. It all comes back to you and the clues snap together. Emily had been in on it with her boyfriend. How could you have not seen it before? You duck your head, hoping that your look of panic hadn't been seen. You reach your car, fumbling with your keys. Come on! Move faster!

You jump as a large hand slams against your car door, stopping you from opening it. "In a hurry?" A gruff, throaty voice, like a man who smokes too much. You whirl around and try to step back. He traps you with his other arm and you press yourself up against your car.

"H-hey, it's rude to go around scaring people like that," you say, trying to keep your voice neutral. "Do you need something?"

"Yeah, I think I do." He leans in, getting way too close to your face. You can smell the cigarettes on his breath. "You know me, don't you?"

You look away from him, knees quaking. You see that Emily is standing right behind him, watching her boyfriend get in your personal space with a sour expression.

"Look, I don't want trouble." Your voice gives your fear away and he sneers. "That's good. Because I don't want trouble either. Now, you're gonna forget what you saw that night. Or we are going to have a problem."

Emily nods, but she won't meet your panicked eyes. "I will make your life at the station a living hell," she says to ground. "And then I will see to it that you never work in radio again if you breathe a word about this."

"See?" You gag as the man breathes in your face. "Don't say a thing, and this whole thing disappears. After all, it was just a prank. It's not worth your job. Understand?"

You nod, closing your eyes. Fear is eating at your throat.

"Say it."

"I-I understand," you choke out.

The long haired man laughs. "Then we're good. But keep in mind what I said. If you blab, I will find out about it. And a nasty monster skank like you can't afford to lose much." He lifts his hand away from your car and wraps an arm around Emily. She gives you one last look as the two of them walk away.

You gasp harshly as your knees give out and you sink to the cement. Your whole body is shaking. Your vision starts to swim and you press a hand against your mouth in an attempt to stop your panicked gasping. You can't have an attack now, not here. You start to reach for your phone and
stop. What if they were still watching you? You couldn't call Sans to you now. That would just make things worse. You've got to handle this.

So that's what you do. You take several longs breaths until your attack subsides, gather your keys and shakily enter your car and drive home.

What were you going to do now?
10:27 PM

Y: Are you still awake?

s: barely. u bonely without me?

Y: Something happened

s: where r u

Y: Home

It's the fastest you've ever seen him teleport. You've got your head in your hands, sitting at the table. You sense more than hear his appearance and don't look up. The other chair scrapes slightly as he sits next to you and softly touches your shoulder.

"It was Emily and her boyfriend," you say in a croaky voice. A dry chuckle escapes you. "I don't even know the dude's name."

"we can call him asshole if that makes you feel better."

"That actually does." You give him a weak grin.

"so what did asshole one and two do?"

You tell Sans about finally making the connection to the fireworks man, and how they cornered you by your car. How they threatened you to keep quiet about the whole thing. You shiver at the memory. "I don't know what to do," you finish lamely, looking over at him. His sockets are pitch black. "Sans, your eyes are doing that bottomless void thing again and it's not really helping me to calm down."

"sorry." He closes his sockets. "it's hard to control. babe, tell me you're not thinking of doing what asshole says. you can't keep quiet about this."

"I know I can't!" you snap. You take a shaky breath. "Sorry. I didn't mean to yell."

"yell if you have to." Sans still has his sockets closed and his hands are curled into fists. You put your hand over his and rub his bones until his grip eases slightly.

"Look, I've thought over every option," you say softly. "Best case, I tell the cops, asshole and Emily get in serious trouble and go to jail. But for how long? No one died, no one even got seriously hurt.
What if they only stay in jail a few months? What would happen when they got out? Or, what if asshole gets arrested but Emily doesn't? She could claim she had no idea what he was going to do with those fireworks. Then there'd be nothing stopping her from firing me."

He finally opens his sockets. The lights are back. "do you really think tod would let that happen?"

He's right. There's no way Tod would just sit by and do nothing. "No, he wouldn't but-"

"emily let her boyfriend threaten you right outside your work place. don't you humans have rules against work harassment?"

"Yes but-"

"they're just trying to scare you," Sans says firmly. "don't let them do that."

You look away from Sans. "I am scared Sans," you finally blurt out. "The station means so much to me. But Emily has more pull there than you think. If I lost my job...if I had to leave-" you swallow the lump in your throat "Sans, I don't know if I could take it. I love it there. And I've nothing else. No other work skills, nothing that I could contribute to the city. And if I lose the job, I could lose this place and then I might lose you too-"

"you're not gonna lose me like that." His voice is quiet, but steady. "if the worst happened, and you did lose your job and couldn't pay for this place, do you really think paps and i would let you go homeless?"

You wipe at your face as a few stray tears escape your eyes. "You'd do that for me?"

He nods and straightens slightly. "i never showed you your soul, did i?"

"Huh?" You're taken aback by the sudden change in topic. "My Soul?"

"don't tell me you forgot." He taps a phalange against your forehead. "i don't like making promises, but i really don't like breaking the ones i do make."

Oh. Right. To tell the truth, you had forgotten about him promising to show you your Soul. "I mean, yeah I want to see it but is it really the best time?"

Sans rubs a hand over his skull. "i'm not exactly...." He trails off then sighs. "i learned the hard way that waiting is the worst thing you can do. wait for things to change, wait for things to get better. waiting doesn't do anything. and then before you know it, you lose your chance and you have to start waiting all over again. so yeah, it might not be the best time but i think i've waited long enough."

He motions for you to turn towards him. Despite your hesitation, your heart is starting to pound with excitement.

"look, uh...this is normally something monsters only do when they're about to fight someone. it's gonna feel a little weird but i promise it won't hurt. you ready?"

You nod, holding your breath. Sans narrows his sockets, staring down at your chest. He releases a short huff of breath and twitches his fingers. Sudden pressure builds up in your chest and you gasp. The world feels like it shifts slightly, like it does when Sans teleports but you stay in the same place. There's a sharp popping sensation and all color drains from the space around you. It bleeds into the space in front of you and you gasp again as a shape floats out from your chest. It looks like a heart, but not a normal human one. Rather, it looks like something that could've come out of a cartoon. But it's real and solid and you can barely breathe as you stare at it. Even though the world around you
has grown dull, your Soul is pulsing with color. Deep purple light swells with a lighter tone of orange within its shape. It's full of life, hope and pain and it's completely and utterly you.

*It's cracked.*

Sharp red lines span the surface of your Soul, glowing brightly over the softer hues of purple and orange. "It-it's broken," you finally croak.

Sans shakes his skull. "remember what i said before? when you were sick? you soul was broken but you pulled it back together with pure determination. that's what this is. those cracks are the glue holding you together." He's gazing at your Soul, the lights of his eyes wide and soft. "i've never seen anyone with as much determination as the kid. i've seen them do...impossible things. but i'm not sure that they could do this."

You feel a sense of pride wash over you and your Soul pulses brightly. "Can I touch it?" you ask him. Even in the faded black and white state the world is in, you can see blue light his cheeks.

"uh, yeah. if you want." He shifts his eyes away. "but don't hold on for too long. i don't think you're ready for something like that."

With shaking fingers you reach towards your Soul. You stop just above it's surface and look at Sans. He's staring off at the wall. The way he was acting was a little odd. Was this something too intimate for him to watch? What kind of rules did monsters have about this? Your curiosity is burning and you decide that you can ask about that later. You gently put one finger on your Soul.

Your body reacts instantly, tensing and filling with an almost painful heat. The most private and darkest parts of your heart feel like they're exposed to the open. The pain, the emptiness, the joy and sorrow and hope that you've held in your heart for so long hits you all at once, almost overthrowing you in its intensity. It hurts, but it feels good all at once and the sensation is so unfamiliar and intimate that you can't bear more than a few seconds of it. You pull your hand away like you've been burned. "That's enough," you whisper and you're not surprised to feel tears running down your face again.

Sans looks back at you and his sockets widen. "oh geez, i'm sorry." His fingers flicker again. Your Soul descends back into your body and color flows into the world once again. You gasp at the rush of everything returning to normal and slump against your chair. "crap, crap, i'm sorry, i shouldn't have let you touch it." Sans' hands flutter over you, unsure of whether he should touch you or not. You decide for him, crawling into his lap. The bones of his legs dig into you but it's an oddly comforting reality check. You bury your face in his shoulder.

"Just give me a second," you breathe. That was by far the most intense thing you've ever experienced and your head is spinning. You take in Sans' smell, using it to calm yourself down. He wraps his arms around you, holding you in place and starts rocking you gently.

"sorry," he mumbles again.

"It's okay. I asked for that. I just...wasn't prepared."

He rubs your back slowly. "i promise i had a point to all that."

You laugh weakly. "And what was your point?"

"i don't want you to give up. i did, over and over again because it was easier. being there in the underground, it got too hard to even try. i can see that there's a part of you that wants to give up. but i know that you wouldn't be able to do it. your soul is too determined to give up. i just wanted to show you that. a soul like yours doesn't know how to give up."
You snuffle and give him a gentle kiss on his cheekbone. How had you gotten so lucky, to find this wonderful skeleton? He was right. This was nothing to give up over. Not after everything else you'd been through. "Thank you. You always seem to know just what to say."

"nah. i'm just being your backbone."

It takes a second for that one to click. You snort in a very undignified manner. "If I wasn't recovering from seeing my own Soul I would be very cross at you right now."

"but you laughed."

You nuzzle his neck and grin when you feel him shiver. "Because I appreciated the attempt." Then you sigh. Amazing Soul experience aside, you still had Asshole to deal with. "Look, I know you said waiting is the worst thing I could do. But I'm not scheduled back at work until the day after Halloween. I just want to enjoy the holiday with everyone. Can I just wait until then?"

Sans shifts enough to give you a skeptical look. "not just an excuse?"

"I promise. And that will give me time to to figure out what I'm going to do about Emily."

He sighs. "fine. but will you at least call tod tomorrow and let him know?"

You really really don't want to. What if Emily overheard? But you nod. "Okay. Promise."

Soon after, you completely crash in Sans' arms. You wake briefly as he's putting you in bed, fumbling for his arm and manage to whisper "Stay". You sleep completely through the whole night, exhaustion from everything that had happened keeping your dreams uneventful and forgettable. In fact, you sleep a little too long. You finally wake up around one o'clock in the afternoon, tangled in Sans' grip. He whines quietly without opening his eye sockets as you struggle to escape the bed.

"Sans we overslept!"

Soft grumbles are all that answer you. He looks so cute curled up in your blankets that you can't bring yourself to force him to get up. You give him a quick kiss and start getting ready for the party. There's a lot of baking to be done. Cookies, puppy chow, hot dog spiders (per Sans request) and it takes you a while to find your brain shaped jello mold. Sans eventually drags himself out of your bedroom, rubbing at his sockets. The moment he sits down at the table, you slide over a bowl of melted chocolate and pretzel sticks. Ignoring his pointed sighs, you busy yourself with the rest of the preparation. This was the first time the group of monsters you called friends would spend time at your place and you wanted to make sure everything was perfect.

"Sans, please move faster than a snail crawl!" you plead with him. "The chocolate is gonna harden up and melting it again could burn it!"

"uuggh fine," he groans. He waves his hands and the pretzel sticks glow blue. He dips at least four of them at a time into the bowl. Lazy, but effective. "did ya call tod yet?"

You almost drop the apples in your arms. You dump them on the counter top before you answer. "Not yet." Your phone floats next your head. You give Sans an exasperated look and snatch the device out of the air. "Make sure those pretzels are coated well enough, lazy bones," you mutter as you bring up Tod's number. He doesn't answer and you're not sure if you're happy about this or not. You decide to leave a message, feeling Sans' gaze crawling up your back. "Hey Tod it's me. Um, something happened after I left last night and I need to talk to you about it when you have a chance. Give me a call." You hang up. "Happy?"
Sans hums in confirmation. At that moment you hear a massive thud against your door. You leave the phone on the counter and open the door. You're greeted by the sight of Undyne balancing an entire couch on her shoulder.

"What kind of nerd doesn't even have a couch?" She shifts her grip slightly. "Well, c'mon, don't make me stand out here all day!"

You quickly step back and wince as Undyne scraps the edge of the door as she forces the couch through. Well, there was a security deposit you weren't getting back. "Do I even want to know where you got this?"

"The university was throwing it out. Move it!" she snarls at the couch when it gets stuck briefly. "Alphys told me that you didn't have a couch and she wanted to make sure have one for tonight."

"And where did Alphys hear about that?"

Sans coughs quietly from his spot at the table.

"I see." You can't quite manage a glare at your boyfriend. "And they just gave it to you?"

She laughs loudly. "Like the weakling humans they are, they were having a tough time getting it out to the dumpster. So I said I'd take it off their hands and came straight here!"

You can't help but laugh as you picture the blue fish lady walking all the way from the university to your place hauling a couch. Did it count as stealing if they were throwing it out anyway? Probably not.

Undyne finally succeeds in pushing the couch into your living room and you have to admit it looks good next to your beanbag. "Finally! You've gotta have somewhere for us to sit if you're gonna invite us over." She kicks the bag. "Did you think we could all fit on this?"

"Hey, don't kick my baby!" You throw yourself onto the beanbag dramatically. Undyne glares at you for a minute before flopping down too.

"Okay, this is pretty comfy," she grumbles. "Still not gonna fit everyone."

"Fair enough," you laugh. You look up just in time to see Sans shuffling over. "Ah wait-!"

He too drops down, landing on both you and Undyne and the weight of his bones on your stomach makes a great 'oof!' of air escape you.

"What the hell!" Undyne yelps, shoving Sans' slippered foot out of her face. "Get off me!"

"nah," he says simply, head on your chest. You give the top of his skull a quick smooch and Undyne sticks her tongue out at the two of you.

"Gross."

There's a tapping at the door and Alphys peeks her head in. "Hey everyone. T-the door was open s-so I-"

Undyne hops up and strides over to her girlfriend. "There you are slow poke!" She wraps the dinosaur monster in a bear hug and kisses her snout. Both you and Sans fight to hide your snickers.

Toriel and Frisk show up with Papyrus in tow soon after and the party starts full swing. Toriel, bless her, has brought pie and a number of other Halloween themed dishes for dinner. Frisk is dressed up
as a werewolf, little tuffs of fur sticking out of their ripped jeans and flannel shirt. The outfit is complete with a cheap set of fake teeth (which soon get forgotten on the counter). You all crowd around your small dining table, borrowing a few chairs from Sans' place. Your mouth waters as you sit next to Sans and stare at the feast spread out before you. With your spider shaped hot dogs, brain jello, apples and caramel combined with Toriel's signature pie as well as a steaming dish of hamburgers cut like skulls, veggie tray and pumpkin muffins and all the different deserts, you don't know how you're going to be able to eat it all.

Papyrus has of course contributed to the feast with a worms and dirt dish (which turns out to be spaghetti). Frisk takes a huge helping of this, eyes glinting as they go for the biggest meatballs. Everyone loads up their plates and your apartment is filled with the sound of laughter and chatter. It's been a very long time since you've had a group so noisy over to your home and despite the slightly chaotic nature, you are filled with a content happiness.

"You would not believe the creative ideas that many of the children have," Toriel is saying, talking about the kids in her class designing Halloween themed crafts. "Jimmy made an entire jack-o-lantern out of paper and paint!"

"gee tori, you certainly sound delighted about pumpkins."

"SANS!"

You laugh loudly but then you're distracted by a piece of broccoli that lands on your plate. Frisk gives you a wide smirk when you look up. Oh is that how the night was gonna turn out? You pick up a grape and toss it back at them. They surprise you by catching it in their mouth, rather than dodging it. You give them an impressed clap. They excitedly motion for you to do the same, grabbing another piece of broccoli. They miss your mouth by an inch and frown. Wait, they sign and grab bigger ammo. The kid carefully selects a meatball from their plate, positioning it on the end of their fork. Okay, this might not end so well.

"Um, Frisk-"

Sans, finally noticing that the two of you are up to something, starts to turn. "what're you-"

Frisk slams their fist on the edge of the fork, sending the meatball flying through the air. It seems like the entire table watches in fascinated silence as the food sails gloriously through the air and lands smack dab in Sans' right socket. He yelps and flails and the movement makes his chair tilt backwards. He hits the ground with a heavy thud. The table explodes with various degrees of roaring laughter and horrified gasping.

"Oh my gosh!" You leap from your chair to help him. "Sans, are you okay?"

He's flat on his back, bones twitching. "j-just meaty," he stutters, giving you a weak thumbs up.

Undyne is howling, smacking the table with her fist. "Nice shot kid!" Frisk accommodates her high five, looking only a little guilty.

It's absolutely horrible of you, but you can feel yourself shaking with suppressed laughter. Holding it back only gets harder when you notice spaghetti sauce on the edge of his eye socket. "Um, what should I do? I think you've got a little something in your eye."

"Just reach in and pull it out," Undyne calls helpfully.

"i think that might be impastable," Sans cracks but you can't help but notice the lights are gone from his eyes. He's right though. You don't think you could fit your hands into his socket. Plus the idea of
reaching inside his head sends shivers up your spine. You help him sit up and he groans.

"i can feel it in my skull."

"Okay, just stay calm. Maybe we can tilt your head and make it fall out again?"

He nods slowly but before either of you can move, Frisk suddenly appears at your side.

"don't-!"

They shove their smaller hand inside of Sans' socket and he jerks wildly. After a few seconds of fishing around, Frisk triumphantly pulls the meatball out and holds it over their head like a trophy. This sends Undyne to the floor with the force of her laughing. Poor Sans looks completely shell shocked. It's his expression more than anything that breaks your hold over your laughter. Papyrus and Toriel are the only ones not giggling at all.

"BROTHER, ARE YOU OKAY?" Poor Papyrus looks downright concerned.

"i'm good bro." Sans slowly gets to his feet and pats Frisk on the head. "i'm gonna go wash my skull out for a few years." He teeters down the hall, disappearing in to the bathroom. You're not sure if you should follow him or not.

Frisk taps you on the shoulder. They look worried. "Is...Sans...mad?"

You give them a reassuring rub on the head. "No, it was accident. And it was just as much my fault as yours. He'll be fine. Let's get ready for the Halloween movies!"

You and Toriel clean up from dinner as Frisk, Papyrus and Alphys go over the movie selection. Alphys brought several dvds of her own, but she's thrilled to discover that you've got a decent collection of anime as well. You have to promise to have a few anime marathons with her before she actually looks at your Halloween collection. They decide on Nightmare Before Christmas to start, with Hocus Pocus next on the list. You all grab various snacks and make yourselves comfortable. Despite her methods, you're really grateful to Undyne for bringing the couch. You couldn't picture the regal Toriel attempting to fit in on the beanbag. You actually have to take a spot on the couch because, despite her complaining, Undyne has claimed a section of the bag. So naturally, Alphys is curled up next to her and Frisk wants to sit on the bag and be next to Papyrus at the same time, so those two take up the rest of the space.

The movie starts and you're about to get up to check on your traumatized boyfriend when he finally slinks out of the bathroom. You make room for him on the couch and he wordlessly slides up next to you. He wraps his arms around your waist and buries his skull in your shirt.

"You okay there? I was getting worried."

He moans into your side. "that wasn't fun," he mumbles.

"I spa-get-hetti why that would be the case. Ow!" You yelp as he jabs your side slightly. He looks up at you, smirking.

"that's for laughing before. that's two times i gotta get you back for now."

"Bring it on, bone boy."

Sans chuckles before turning his attention to the tv. He keeps his arms wrapped around you and you notice Toriel watching the exchange. She gives you a warm smile and a nod of approval. For some
reason, this makes you blush. You rub Sans' skull as you watch Halloween movies all night with the oddest company. Your skeleton boyfriend and his brother. The queen of monsters and the ambassador who freed them all. A fish lady and her dinosaur girlfriend. Despite everything that had happened- the explosion, the stares, the threats from Asshole and Emily- you've never felt so welcomed and at home.
Let's James Bond This Crap!

Chapter Summary

Halloween is over. Time to stop running from your problems

Chapter Notes

Find me here! theninjamouse.tumblr.com
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Keep the comments coming! If you have requests about what you want to see, feel free to drop me a message!

You stood outside the radio station, your hand tightly grasped in Sans'. Halloween was over and now you had to face reality. Tod hadn't said much after you told him about what happened in the parking lot. He merely asked that you come in and act like normal, promising that things would turn out all right. Your hand was sweaty, but if Sans noticed, he didn't say anything about it. You kept trying to come up with an excuse for him to stay at the station besides 'just because', but eventually dropped it. If Sans wanted to stay, there wasn't much anyone could do about it. Besides, as long as he didn't go into the actual recording studio, there were no rules saying he couldn't hang around.

He had told you last night that he had a plan to expose Emily and make sure she got into serious trouble along with Asshole. It was a little risky but if it worked, you wouldn't have to worry about Emily at the station any more.

You suck in a deep breath of chilly autumn air. "Let's do this."

Sans gave your hand a gentle squeeze. He wrapped his arm around your waist and pulled you close for a second. "it's gonna be fine."

Together the two of you enter the studio. Abby was in her usual place at the desk and looked up. Her face lit up gleefully as her gaze fell to Sans. "Hey there! What's cooking?"

"nacho much," Sans replies with a wide grin. You snickered as Abby's expression froze. She looked up to the ceiling.

"Truly a match made in heaven," she groaned in monotone. "_____’s been nearly unbearable with her puns recently. Now I see why."

"Come on, they're not that cheesy."

Abby threw a pen at your head.

Sans makes himself comfortable in one of the chairs in the waiting area, thumbing through a music magazine and you got to work. Tod isn't in his office when you duck in to check. No one seems to
know where he is when you ask around, so with nothing else to do, you try to get started on your usual duties. You can barely focus and every little sound makes you jump. Abby noticed after a while and pulled you over to the corner.

"Is he making you nervous by hanging around? 'Cause I can totally kick him out if you want." She jabbed her thumb over at Sans who, by all appearances, looked like he had fallen asleep in the chair.

"No! No, it's not him," you say quickly. "I'm sorry, he's here because he's worried."

"About what?"

You bit your lip. "Things happened the other night," you say in a hushed tone, looking around. "I can't talk about it right now."

Abby's eyes narrow at you. "Is this about the bonfire accident?"

You nod. "I'm sorry."

Abby looks at you, chewing the inside of her cheek. "You can tell me what's happening," she finally says. "I want to help."

The door clangs open and you jump, looking guiltily to it. Just a tech coming in. She waves and heads upstairs and you let out a frustrated sigh. "I can't take this waiting," you mumble, as the door swings shut. But just before it clicks, a hand reaches out and pushes inwards. Emily. You tense up, sliding a little closer to Abby without realizing it. Her eyes fall on the two of you and it takes every ounce of strength you have to keep your face clear of guilt. She frowns at you and starts to turn away and for a moment you almost relax.

Sans coughs and Emily's head whirls to the sound. He's got one socket closed, a perfect picture of relaxation but the light of his open eye is small and oddly bright. "heya. you must be emily. i'd say i'm a fan but i'm trying to kick my lying habit."

Emily stares at Sans in a mixture of shock and open disgust for several seconds before arranging her face into something that resembled detached politeness. "Is there...something I can help you with?"

Sans stands slowly, putting his hands in his coat pocket. "oh you know. just keeping my girlfriend company with my booming humor." He sends an exaggerated wink in your direction. "they really crack her up."

Emily tilts her head, the plastered smile on her face slipping at little. "Girlfriend?" She looks to you and back to Sans, the connection snapping in her mind. You shift uneasily under Emily's quick glare. She turns back to Sans, no longer bothering to keep up the facade of politeness. "As...charming as that is, you need to leave. You have no business lingering around if you have no official reason to be here."

"hey no need to explode lady," he says, lifting his hands up slightly. More firework puns?! What on Earth was he doing? He might as well just say 'hey I know about the fireworks!' at this rate. You glare at him desperately, trying to silently tell him to knock it off.

Emily goes eerily still. There's no way she could miss Sans' obvious stabs at her secret. "_____, I need you to go print off today's weather report. Now." Her voice is ice cold. "Abby, see to it that this skeleton leaves or call security." She turns on her heel and heads down the hall. Right to the computer and printing office.

It feels like ice is crawling through your blood. This was not going well at all! Sans is staring after
Emily, his grin tight and thin. Abby looks between the two of you, concerned confusion clear on her face.

"Sans!" you hiss. "What was that? Weren't we supposed to go for subtle hints?"

He quickly crosses to you, expression softening. "trust me," he says in a low voice. "just follow the plan." He gives you a gentle push, prodding your frozen legs forward. You take a shaky breath and look back at him. This wasn't the time to doubt him.

"I do trust you. But I swear if you get me fired, I'm going to kick your bony butt."

He smiles widely, pleased at your renewed spirit. "that's my girl."

Despite your show of bravery, your legs feel weak as you head towards the media room. Where on Earth was Tod? Your hand goes into your pocket as you pause right in front of the door. Oh, you really don't want to do this. You barely step over the threshold when you feel Emily grip your upper arm tightly, yanking you into the room. She slams the door shut. Her eyes are filled with rage.

"What part of keep your damn mouth shut didn't you understand?" she hisses.

"Let go of me!" You rip your arm out of her hand, backing away from her.

"This could've been so easy." Emily runs a hand over her face, looking almost...shaken? "You just couldn't stay out of it."

You take several breaths to calm yourself. "Why did you do this? People could've gotten really hurt. Someone could have died. Did your boyfriend force you to get the fireworks? Was it all his idea?"

"Scott force me?" She glares at you between her fingers. "Hey, now you knew Asshole's name! Please, I was proud to help."

"But why? There was no point!"

Emily actually throws her head back and starts laughing. It's such a pleasant sound, one that would normally be associated with a kind soul. But hearing it here just sends shivers up your spine. "You don't see it? I suppose you wouldn't, filthy monster lover."

An entirely different kind of chill crawls up your back. "This whole thing was about monsters? What, to scare them?"

She crossed her arms and shakes her head at you in an almost sympathetic way. "You have no idea how big this is. In fact, I'm doing you a favor." She takes a slow step towards you and you can't help but back away. She's frowning at you, but there's something else besides contempt and anger. You've gotten good at reading faces, thanks to Sans' subtle expression changes. Under all that, there's a hint of sadness and relief. She leans in close to you. "Do yourself a favor. Don't get involved. Leave that monster trash. In fact, you'd be smart to leave the city. Of course, I have to uphold my promise, so you'll never work in radio again. But there are plenty of options for a young lady like you. Do the smart thing and just accept this."

"Is that a threat?" you whisper.

She smirks in an almost mad way. "Absolutely."

"huh. guess that's all we need then."
Emily starts, looking around for the source of the deep voice. You pull your hand out of your pocket, opening your palm to reveal the small black device hidden away. There's a dull light flashing on one end. She gapes at it as Sans' voice floats out again.

"man, i thought it was gonna be tougher than that. good job sweetheart. i was a little worried you might get rattled."

"Please, I totally had it handled."

Sans snickers. "that you did."

Emily's eyes are bugging out of her head. She flinches as the door to the media room opens. Tod, Sans and a police officer are standing there. Well, it was about time Tod showed up! He steps into the room, anger seeming to radiate off his tall frame. Emily shrinks back against the wall. Sans quickly heads to your side, eye lights bright and, despite his wide smile, a little concerned.

"you ok?" he asks quietly.

You nod, taking his hand. "Remind me to thank Alphys for the walkie-talkie thing."

"Tod! What's the meaning of this?" Emily demands.

"I can't believe you Em." Tod's voice is quiet but you've never heard such anger and disappointment from him before. "How could you let this happen? You helped to put countless people at risk and ruined our festival."

"No! Please Tod, it wasn't my fault! I-I didn't know Scott was going to throw the fireworks in the fire!"

"Well maybe you should've thought about saying that before confessing to everything. What's worse, manhandling and threatening an employee in our station? Unacceptable." Tod locks eyes with Emily and there is no mercy there. "Emily, you are officially fired."

Emily gapes silently for a second. "No! You can't do this to me!" Emily shoves a finger in your direction. "If you want to blame someone, blame this monster slut! She tricked me!"

Sans growls quietly and you put a hand on his shoulder. His smile stretches into a thin line.

"you'd be smart to watch what you're saying pal," he says coldly.

His tone makes Emily snap. "You're the one who needs to watch out! Freaks! You're all freaks! You're gonna regret this! Just you wait."

"EMILY." Tod's voice, sharp and full of warning, stops Emily's rant. "Don't say anything else that you're going to regret."

Her mouth opens and closes several times as she stares at Tod. "How dare you," she finally snarls. "After every thing I've done for you. You're gonna just cut me off?"

Tod turns away. "You're only making this worse for yourself," he says tiredly. "Officer, if you wouldn't mind. _____ please come to my office once you've caught your breath."

The cop steps forward and Sans puts a hand on the small of your back. "let's go," he says, leading you out of the room. Emily slumps against the wall, like a puppet who's strings have been cut. She meets your eyes just before your line of sight is broken and gives you a sneering grin.
"Remember what I said!" She yells to you as the officer cuffs her. "Leave that freak before you regret it!"

You have to fight not to turn back and sock the bitch in the face. Your hands tremble with rage.

"breathe," Sans reminds you gently.

You turn into him, wrapping him in your arms. He had reminded you to breathe, but you can feel him shaking a little too. "That was scary," you whisper into his shirt.

"you did great." He presses his teeth against your forehead in a gentle kiss. "are you ready to talk to tod?"

"Yeah." You take his bony hand and head down the hallways. The commotion has caused several curious heads to poke out of various offices. At the sight of you holding hands with your skeletal boyfriend, most of them duck back in. You reach Tod's office. The door is open so you knock on the frame, stepping inside. Tod is at his desk, head in his hands. He looks up and gives you a weary smile.

"Good work kiddo," he says, motioning for you and Sans to come in. "God, that wasn't pleasant."

"you're telling me," Sans groans, dropping into one of the seats. You are a little more dignified and sit on the edge of your seat. The Emily thing is over, but there's stuff that still needs to be address.

"What about her boyfriend? Scott?"

"The moment she confessed to Scott being responsible the officer sent a call for some cops to pick him up at his apartment. They shouldn't have any issue nabbing him." Tod sighs and rubs at his face. "I know she was a snob and I'll gladly admit she got on my nerves, but to think she would actually participate in a hate crime like this...."

A grim silence falls over the office. Sans is staring at his knees, tapping a bony digit on the arm of the chair. "i'm worried about what she said. about this whole thing being bigger than we thought."

You nod your agreement. "I don't think this was just a simple hate crime," you say slowly. "I should've tried to get more out of her."

"That's the police's job. If there's something deeper going on, they'll find out about it." Tod leans back in his chair. "You did good."

So he says, but there's an itch in the back of your mind that whispers that something isn't quite right. Ah, it had to just be left over nerves right? You let yourself smile, looking at Sans. "So, I guess it's over huh?"

He gives you a genuine smile. "i think we can take a breather."

"Hm, maybe not." Tod sits up suddenly and steeple his fingers together as he studies you intensely. You feel your heart drop to your stomach. Oh crap, were you going to get fired after all? Your anxiety must be clear on your face because he's quick to wave his hands. "Don't look so scared, you're not in trouble! I'm the one who's in a bit of a pinch now."

"Is there something I can do?" you ask as your heart slows down from the scare.

Tod smiles widely at you. "I'm glad you asked. After today's events I'm suddenly finding myself short a host for the show. Interested in filling the spot?"
Your jaw drops. Uhhh what? "I-I'm sorry, did you just ask if I want to be a speaker on the show?"

He laughs. "I want you to be a host. Little more long term than a speaker."

You've been rendered speechless. You, a host? An actual radio host?! Your heart swells and to your complete mortification, you feel your eyes filling with tears. You bury your face in your hands. You had to be dreaming. You had come in today fully prepared to lose your job, whether your plan to expose Emily worked or not but you never expected this!

Sans nudges you gently. He's gazing at you with open pride. "I think he needs an actual answer sweetheart," he says, nodding to Tod.

"Oh my-yes! Yes!" You cry happily, reaching over to take Tod's hand. "Thank you so much!

Tod smiles at you, the scar on his face scrunching. "I'm glad I could make at least something good come out of this. I'll be honest; I've been looking for a way to let Emily go for a while. Not that I'm happy it happened this way!" he adds quickly. "But you know, when life gives you lemons!"

"You make life take the lemons back!" You say through your laughter. Sans cocks his head in confusion but Tod laughs appreciatively.

"Agreed. Now, I know you're excited but I want you to take the rest of the day off. Rest, recover, do whatever you need to. I'll pay you for your full shift. I'll need you in by eight tomorrow morning and I'll give you the rundown."

You nod eagerly, all traces of your anxiety gone. "Yes! Of course! Thank you, thank you Tod!"

Tod laughs again and waves you and Sans out of the office. Could this really be true? "I gotta tell Papyrus," you mumble in your happy daze as the two of you head out to the street.

"Can't wait to see that. The apartment might not survive his excitement," Sans says with a chuckle. "So uh...lemons?"

You nuzzle his cheek. "Video game reference. And now I want some cake."

Sans pulls you close his side. "Whatever you wish, starlet."

~~~~~~

You stop by Muffet's shop and buy the biggest, most outrageously decorated cake in there. You've become a regular of the place and Muffet gives you a discount to help celebrate the news. You head back up to Sans place, balancing the cake and nearly drop it as you run into Papyrus himself. He catches it with his large hand before it hits the ground.

"This is the largest cake I've ever seen! What is the occasion?"

You smile widely at Papyrus. "You listen to the show from my station right Pap?"

"Of course! It is very enjoyable, even though I don't get to hear you."

You can't help but bounce a little. "Well, that's going to change! Tod asked me to help him host the show!"

Papyrus stares at you for a second. Then he squeals, and wraps you in a hug, spinning you around and oh crap THE CAKE-!
Sans stops it with his magic just before it hits the ground. "careful bro. icing that you're excited but we don't want to make a mess."

"I AM SO OVERJOYED THAT EVEN YOUR TERRIBLE PUNS CANNOT RUIN IT SANS."
Papyrus whips out his phone as he pulls you into the apartment. "I MUST TELL EVERYONE! THEY WILL BE SO THRILLED TO HEAR THE NEWS!"

So Papyrus does just that and your head is still swirling from everything that's happened that day when monsters start pouring into the apartment. Alphys, Undyne, Frisk and Toriel and even Mettaton shows up (much to Sans' dismay).

"Oh darling, I knew you had what it took to be a star!" Mettaton wrapped you in a solid, metal hug, coating your clothes with traces of glitter. "Well, not as big as me of course. I would be happy to give you any tips on how to face the adoring fans you are sure to bring in!"

"Thanks Mettaton," you laugh, trying to brush off the glitter and failing miserably. You thank Alphys for her help. Sans had asked for recording device and she had given it to him without question. She blushes at your thanks, stuttering out that she was just glad to help. She asks for details about why you needed it and you find yourself telling everyone what had happened, starting from the night of the bonfire, to the threat at your car and finally with Emily's arrest.

Sans lets you do the talking, but he is practically oozing pride the whole time. When you finish and everyone start devouring cake, he slides up to you and plants another kiss on your cheek. Hmm, you could get used to this affectionate Sans.

"i'm proud of you," he whispers in your ear.

"Couldn't have done it without you," you say back with a smile that you can't contain. "Thank you. For everything."

"Stop your nuzzling loveners!" Undyne calls. "Or we're gonna eat this cake without you!"

You can't stop yourself from giving Sans another kiss before going to the table, dragging your skeleton boyfriend with you.

What an insane day. But things had worked out, just like Sans promised.

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.
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Right?

Chapter End Notes

Don't worry, this is not the end of the story!! There is much more to come!
Sans fiddles with the radio, smacking it lightly to clear the static. The thing is a piece of junk but it was the first machine he had tinkered with in a very long time and felt an odd sort of attachment to it. He leans back in his chair and smiles as the signal clears. It's still early and the shop is quiet. Not many people wanted a hot dog before ten in the morning.

"regret to say that Emily will not be returning to our show."

If he had lips, they would have curled. Yesterday had gone far better than he had hoped but he hadn't missed the light bruise on your arm where that nasty lady had grabbed you. He didn't point it out but it made his bones crawl. Honestly, the pair had gotten off lightly in his mind. Watching you follow after Emily, hiding your obvious nerves with bravado nearly drove him crazy. It would have been so easy to dunk her, right then and there. See if she or anyone else ever bothered you again.

But then you'd probably want nothing to do with him if he did that.

Tod continues. "The police have yet to release an official statement but I think it's safe to say the one behind the tasteless prank at our festival has been dealt with. Moving on to happier things, I am pleased to have my new co-host in the studio with me this morning."

"Hey guys! This is ______. It's wonderful to have the chance to be here." Your voice floats through the radio, strong and sure. Sans put his skull in his hands, sockets gazing at the radio. He wanted to be there in the studio with you. He could just picture your face. Bright, happy, eyes glimmering like you were holding an entire world of joy behind them. But he had to admit this was nice in its own way. Sans loved your voice. It could calm him in an instant then turn around and send his nonexistent heart racing. He could listen to you speak all day.

"So ____ why don't you tell us a little about yourself?"

"Oh, well there's not much to tell."

Liar. There was an endless depth of things you could share. Wonderful, terrible, heart wrenching things. Still, he couldn't help but feel oddly smug about the fact that only he knew that side of you. Sans never thought himself to be a jealous kind of monster; that took far too much energy and it was pointless when everything he had was ripped away over and over.

Sans slowly got to work on unwrapping hot dog buns as you and Tod chattered about how life in the city was different compared to where you came from. He hated working here. The only thing worse than having to work at all was being forced to do the same mindless task day after day. His phalanges ached to do far more interesting things, like he did before the resets started. Hell, even in the early days of the hellish nightmare he found himself in he still made an effort. How long ago did
he start to lose all energy and interest for things like that? The science, the inventions, simply trying. His memories regarding the time underground were more than a little screwed up. All he knew was that for the first time in a long time, he found himself a little bored and almost restless with doing nothing. All thanks to you.

"What do you miss most about your old home?"

"the stars," Sans mouths along with your response. He had asked you the same thing that very first night you had burst into his life.

"Ah, yes I suppose the stars are a little hard to see with all the city lights."

"Yeah, but I hear the mountains are a good place to go for stargazing."

"I've heard that too, though I haven't been myself. Oh, looks like we've got a caller. Go ahead."

There's the sound of muffled giggling then a very familiar voice booms "Hey! Just wanted to congratulate the NERD on her new job and let her know this doesn't mean she's getting out of her training!" Sans can hear Alphys whispering in the background. "Oh and we wanna request a song!"

"Thanks for the congratulations." You're speaking in that voice that means you're holding back laughter. "Don't worry, I plan on- bzzz- my running up. It's a good way to exer- bzzz- folks, give it a shot! What song- bzzz- you like to- bzzz-"

Oh come on. Sans smacks the radio as the signal starts to give out.

"Excellent choice. I think - bzzSANSzzz- arrange that."

Sans yanks his hand away from the little radio. What was that?

"At my good friend's request here is - bzzYOUAREFORGETTINGzzz.-

A semi familiar song starts to play but Sans was frozen. No. No he wasn't hearing this.

The radio fills with static again and scratchy words filter through.

**YOUMADEAPROMISE DONOTFORGET**

Sans slams the power button, cutting the noise off. His hand lingers on the radio, shaking. Noise, it was just noise. He had to be hearing things. Yeah, that's all it was. With every thing that had happened recently, the fireworks, asshole, the news throwing his girlfriend to the raging throws of the city, sleep hadn't come easy for a while. He was sleep deprived. Of course, that was something he was used to.

He jumps when his phone suddenly rings. He doesn't have to look at the screen to know it's Paps calling. He doesn't get a single word out before his brother starts singing your praises.

"SANS SHE SOUNDS WONDERFUL! IT MUST BE THANKS TO THE BREAKFAST I TOOK SUCH CARE IN MAKING FOR HER."

"i bet that's what it was bro." Sans can't take his eyes away from the radio. "listen, i'm gonna be back late tonight. i gotta check something."

"I-" Papyrus hesitates. Try as he might, it's tough for Sans to completely hide his unease from his
brother. Paps can almost always tell when something is up, even if he doesn't understand what it is, or why he knows. But like he always does, he trusts Sans.

"WILL YOU BE HOME FOR DINNER?"

"i dunno," Sans says softly. "depends on what i find."

~~~~~

Your first morning as a radio host couldn't have gone better. You send a quick text to Sans at the beginning of your lunch and practically skip to Grillby's. You've become a regular here and you're greeted with cheers as you enter. Several slaps on the back and congratulations later you weave your way up to the bar and take a seat.

Grillby nods at you, crackling gently. You smile widely at the fire monster. You were slowly getting better at being able to interpret what he was saying, thanks to Sans.

"Thanks Grillby. I'll take the usual."

Sans was late. Which was really odd for him. You glance at the door, worry starting to twist your stomach.

"you waiting for a hot date or something?"

You nearly fall off your stool. Grillby makes a noise you've learned is his version of chuckling. Sans smiles at you, hands behind his back. You pull yourself back up, scowling at him.

"Is that your payback? Cause I'll accept that."

"you wish you were that lucky." Sans joins you and reveals a bouquet of flowers. "congrats on your first day."

You gasp softly, taking them. It's a beautiful mixture of white carnations and pink roses. "Oh my gosh! Sans this is so sweet."

He shrugs, watching you expectantly. "didn't know what kind you liked. store lady said these were popular."

"They're perfect," you gush. You bring the flowers a little closer to smell them. A shriek of surprise rips out of your throat when a sudden spray of water catches you right in the face. There nestled among the petals is a plastic flower you had completely missed. A fake flower? Really?! Sans howls with laughter as you sit there sputtering.

"geettt dunked on!" Sans crows triumphantly. His eye sockets are scrunched with glee. Grillby puts a hand over the space where his mouth would be. It's the most expressive you've ever seen him.


"and you fell for it." He wipes away an imaginary tear. "somehow makes it even more satisfying." He grabs a napkin and holds it out for you. You huff at him and reach around, grabbing one for yourself. His smile twitches but doesn't fade.

You wipe at your face, trying not to smudge your makeup. "I'll admit it, I wasn't expecting that. Happy?"
He hums quietly. The mirth on his skull fades a little. He reaches for the ketchup bottle but doesn’t drink from it. Instead he twists it around in his hands, examining it like it holds the answers to the universe. You sigh. You give him a quick kiss on the cheek to let him know you’re not mad. "We even now?"

"for the moment. so how's the life of a star?"

"Oh please, I'm not a star."

He shrugs, staring at the bottle. "you are to me."

His soft words make your heart swell and you blush. You nudge him with your shoulder, trying to hide your embarrassment. "Okay, I officially forgive you just for that." He smiles at you but it's oddly tight."Is everything okay? You're look kind of tense."

He nods quickly. A little too quickly. "yeah, i just have some work i gotta do tonight. I have to cancel my hot date with my bed."

What kind of work could he possibly be talking about? He occasionally worked doubles at the hot dog place, but going by his demeanor he's talking about something else. "Work like...?"

"just...just work. something i gotta check on."

There's something in his expression that's begging you not to pry. Sans has secrets, this you know. The logical part of your mind said that you couldn't force him to tell you everything that he had hidden away, but damn it, you wanted to know!

"heh. you're doing the lip thing." Sans reaches up and pokes your lip. "when you want to know something, or get frustrated you bite your lip. it's cute."

"You're changing the subject," you say grumpily as he continues to poke at your face.

"it's nothing to worry about," he mumbles. "i'm just making sure."

"Sure of what?"

"'s classified."

You sigh and take a bite of the burger Grillby's placed in front of you. It stung a little that he didn't want to tell you what was going. That had to mean...he didn't trust you with this. "Okay," you finally say, forcing your voice to be cheerful. "I'll see you tonight then?"

Sans shifts a little in his seat. "i might get back pretty late. you don't need to wait up."

Another small stab in your heart. "Okay. But if you need me or want to crash at my place, you know you always can. Right?" Your voice wavers a little.

You feel his arm slip around your waist and he presses his skull against your shoulder. His grip tightens slightly, like he's trying to hold on to something solid. "i know," he whispers.

You finish up lunch and head back, feeling a pit of worry building in your stomach. Why didn't he trust you? Was it because you had so easily told him about your past? Maybe he didn't trust you to keep a secret. Thoughts of what you did wrong, what you could do to try and get him to trust you and attempts to rationalize your own worries has you distracted the rest of the day. You spend the night at home trying to keep yourself busy, glancing at your phone every few minutes.
There was barely a breeze as Sans appears out of thin air, stepping into the forest clearing. His skull feels like it's spinning and he put a hand up against a tree, trying to balance himself. It's been a while since he's teleported that far and he can feel the strain on his magic. His bones are trembling a little, and it's not entirely because of the strain. He looks over the clearing. There is it. Like a great gaping wound in the side of the mountain, the entrance to the underground sits dark and silent. The darkness within seems to call to him, beckoning him in and he wants to run away. He wants to rush into your arms and shut out the rest of the world.

But he had to know. There was no choice here.

Slowly, one step at a time, he forces himself to walk over to the place where the barrier had stood for so long, keeping everyone he cared about trapped within the depths of the mountain. The ground right in front of the entrance is littered with rocks and chunks of wood. The force of the barrier breaking had caused some damage to the surrounding area and no one had bothered to come back to clean it up. He steps around a stone, his foot falling on a branch. It snaps loudly under his sneaker and he jumps. His limbs are locked at he has a sudden flash back. How many times had he crushed that massive stick by the ruins? How many times had he watched the kid pass by, sometimes nervous and twitchy and sometimes striding forward with utter surety?

He shakes his skull, closing his sockets. The faster he moved, the sooner this would be over. He reaches the edge of the cavern and pauses, putting a hand up against the stone wall. The dim light from the rapidly falling sun lights up part of the path within but it is soon overtaken by darkness. He can smell the sweet scent of flowers drifting out. He takes a breath. Just go in. Go check and then he can run right to you.

He can't move. He stares into that blackness and his breathing grows harsher. A soft whisper surrounds him, speaking words in a language he has not heard for an eternity. He stumbles back, his Soul slamming against his rib cage. He can't, he can't do it, he can't go back! His tibia knocks against a huge chunk of stone and he sinks onto its surface. He presses his phalanges against his skull as he gasps loudly. Breathe, breathe. He pictures you, remembering your smiling face. The way your eyes glinted and scrunched with mirth at his jokes. The way you so freely danced in your kitchen. The touch of your soft skin against his bones, warm and full of life.

It's enough to calm him slightly. He lets out a huff of air. He couldn't get trapped in there again. It was over. The kid had promised. There would be no more resets. He slowly stands. This time, he hesitates for only a moment. Then he steps into the darkness, heading back into the underground.

9:02 AM

Y: Good morning. How'd last night go?

9:15

Y: You still sleeping lazy bones?

9: 47

Y: I'm heading to work, grillby's for lunch?
You're starting to worry me, are you okay?

Sans, please answer your phone.

Paps told me you were home, so that's good at least. Says you've been sleeping all day. You must have actually worked last night huh?

Ok, I'm gonna stop by after work to check on you because you're seriously freaking me out a little. Are you sick?

not sick. sorry. just bone tired. gotta head to work myself. on evening shift.

Relief mixed with just a little bit of anger floods over you as he finally responds. You frown at your phone, trying to decide if you're going to yell at him or not. Abby notices your glare. Thanks to Sans' lack of response, you had decided to have lunch with Abby in the breakroom. Fortunately you had decided to keep a box of random lunch things in the closet when your lunch time had begun to fluctuate in case Grillby's didn't work.

"Trouble in paradise?" she asks, slurping at her cup of noodles.

You sigh, tapping your phone against the table. Your hot pocket sits in front of you, mostly untouched and boiling hot. "I don't know. Sans went somewhere last night and he wouldn't tell me where. I've been trying to reach him all day and he just now responded. I mean, he sleeps a lot, but he usually wakes up enough to answer the phone."

"He's a guy," Abby says, pointing at you with her fork. "Sometimes they crash like that."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. I've slept in like that plenty of times too."

I was worried bone head. Glad you're okay. See you tonight?

Yeah

You set your phone down, attempting to eat the lava mess that is your lunch. "Speaking of paradise, how are things with you and B.P?" you ask Abby.

"We broke up," she says casually and you choke, burning your tongue.

"Ow! When did that happen?" you cough. "You okay?"

Abby shrugs. "A few days ago. It wasn't going anywhere. Plus, I could see he had his eyes on this rabbit guy that sells ice cream near the library. It was fun, but I'm over it. Besides he was kind of..." she makes a face "uptight."

"Sorry to hear that," you say as you attempt to soothe your burnt tongue with an ice cube. Your phone suddenly rings. Sans? You pick it up and are surprised to see that's it not your bony boyfriend, but Toriel. "Hey Toriel. What's up?"

"Hello my child." She sounds a little breathless and distracted. "I'm terribly sorry to ask, but could you do me a huge favor and pick Frisk up from school and keep an eye on them for the afternoon? A
spot opened up for our discussions with the city council and we have to take this before someone else does and Sans and Papyrus are both busy and I've asked them so many times-

"Toriel, please slow down. I'm happy to watch Frisk."

She lets out a huge sigh of relief. "Thank you so much. I should be finished no later than seven this evening."

"Hey, it's not a problem. I've been wanting to hang out with Frisk. Just let me know where the school is."

Toriel gives you the address, thanks you again and hangs up. The school isn't too far away and you're off the clock with just enough time to make it just as school ends. It's a small building, rather run down, but the bushes in front look spectacular. You have to wonder if it's Papyrus' handiwork. Most of the kids pouring out of the building are monsters, all shapes and sizes. Toriel soon appears at the door with Frisk, looking around. She looks a little frazzled. Ah, that's right she was a teacher here. She probably needed to book it over to the courthouses. You honk your horn and wave out the window.

"Thank you so much my child," Toriel says with a wide smile as she brings Frisk over to your car. Frisk hops into the front seat, bouncing excitedly.

"Seatbelt," you remind them. "It's seriously no problem Toriel. We're gonna have fun, right Frisk?"

Frisk nods and waves at their goat mom. Toriel takes off and you start the drive back home. "How was school?" That's what you asked kids after school right?

Frisk gives you a thumbs up. They lean forward, fiddling with your radio and Fall Out Boy blasts from the speakers. You laugh at the wide grin that crosses their face. Looks like the kid's got good taste. The two of you jam out the whole way back and take the party upstairs. Frisk is fascinated with your music collection and urges you to dance with them. The kid's got moves, you gotta give them that.

"You're pretty good!" You sway your hips and spin. "Where'd you learn to dance like that?" The kid grins and strikes a pose that is remarkably similar to a certain, over the top robot. "Ah, guess that answers that!"

You dance until sweat pours down your face. Then the two of you sit at the table and Frisk starts trying to teach you sign language. You grab a notebook, jotting down the different signs and their meanings. There's a lot, but the alphabet itself is fairly simple. Frisk is a very patient teacher, signing slowly and repeating the same simple signs for you to memorize. After a while, they decide to give you a break and pull out a folder of homework. They hunch over the table, pencil flying across the pages. You watch them for a while, feeling an odd sense of amazement.

"You're really something Frisk," you say finally. They look up, tilting their head at you. "I mean, after everything you went through down there, and what you're trying to help the monsters do now? It's amazing."

Frisk smiles shyly. **Monsters are good people**, they sign slowly. **Just needed to be shown love and mercy.**

"Love and mercy. I wish people up here could do the same. Hey, if you don't mind me asking, why do you live with Toriel? I mean, she's great and I love her, but I can't imagine the government would be too happy about a human child living with monsters. Even if the monsters are better than a lot of
people.

Tori is my mom. She loves me. I love her. Didn't want to go home. Frisk frowns sadly, looking at the table. Bad place. Bad memories. Got hurt and ran away. They point at their throat and you feel your own close up with emotion. You would be lying if you said hadn't wondered why Frisk used sign language. They could talk, but only with great effort and quietly.

"I'm sorry Frisk, I didn't mean to pry," you say quickly. Frisk shrugs.

It's okay. Happened a long time ago. Happy here.

"That's good then! It's better to be around people you love, right?"

Frisk pats your hand and points to your chest before making a sign you don't quite recognize. "Sorry buddy, didn't quite get that one."

They just smile and shake their head. You will.

Oookay? You both start as a loud rumble echos from Frisk's stomach. They smile at you sheepishly. Dinnertime?

You laugh. "You got it kiddo. What are you in the mood for?" You get up and peer into your cabinets. "I'll assume you're sick of spaghetti-"

They stick their tongue out and nod.

"Hmm, how about some homemade chicken noodle soup?" You pull out various ingredients, spreading them over the counter. "It's good for cold nights like this. Mind getting the carrots out of the fridge?"

Frisk eagerly helps you get everything ready and while you handle cooking up the chicken, Frisk washes the veggies going into the soup. They tap you when they're done and points to the drawer and back to the veggies. Knife?

"Okay, go ahead and slice up the carrots. But be careful with the knife, it's not a toy."

They smile widely, nodding and pull out a chopping knife and get to work on the carrots. They hum as they work and you turn on some quiet music. "Sans should be getting off work soon," you muse, glancing at the clock. "He said he'd stop by. I hope he likes soup-"

There's a loud bang. You jump and whirl around. "Frisk! You okay?" Oh God, you pray they haven't cut off a finger.

It's not Frisk. They're staring at the door, knife still in their hand and all limbs intact. You follow their gaze. Sans is standing at the front door. Standing actually isn't the right word. He's pressed up against door, practically leaning on it. He must have slammed it shut.

"Geez Sans! That scared me. What-" You stop as you realize that he's staring at Frisk with wide, pitch black sockets. "Sans?"

His left eye flickers blue. "K-kn-kn-"

Frisk takes a step forward and Sans flinches. The knife goes blue and flies out of Frisk's hand, embedding into the wall.
"Sans!" you scream, rushing to Frisk. You pull the kid away from the knife. "What are you doing?"

He doesn't take his eyes off the kid. It's like he barely notices you standing there. "knife they had a
knife, they have a knife."

"Sans, we're cooking! We're making soup!" You move towards him slowly, putting your hands up. "Honey, what's going on?"

"frisk, you promised. you promised me!" He's quivering, his constant smile stretching further and
further, growing far too big for his face. "not here, not her!"

Frisk wrings their hands, shaking their head. "No, no," they croak. "P-promise!"

You step in front of Sans, blocking his view. Your heart is going nuts and you're honestly scared. You've never, ever seen him like this. In fact, this looks eerily similar to... "Sans, hey, look at me." He stares right through you. "Sans, are you having a panic attack?"

He flinches again, finally looking at you. He reaches up and touches your face. "you're okay. you're here."

"That's right baby. It's okay. We were just making dinner." You take his hand. The bones are clammy. "It's okay."

He closes his sockets, trembling. "sorry."

Then he vanishes and you're left holding nothing.

Chapter End Notes

Ask for angst and you shall receive
Some Things Are Revealed

Chapter Notes

Hey so uh....I'm no artist, but I drew a thing to go along with chapter 14
http://theninjawrites.tumblr.com/post/143762173017/sneak-peak-for-my-tumblr-followers-all-10-of

Just so you guys are aware, my sister is coming to visit me and is going to be here for a week. I will try to post at least one new chapter during that time but if updates are slow that is why.
Also another note my poor fingers are aching after my first aerial silks class so typing was kinda rough. So if you see a ton of typos that is why and I will fix those as I spot them.

Find me here! theninjamouse.tumblr.com
Writing (and drawing?) blog here: theninjawrites.tumblr.com

"Sans!" You pound on the front door of his apartment, fist stinging. "Please, let me in!" There's no answer. Either he isn't in there, or he isn't answering. Your phone remains silent in your pocket, despite the numerous calls and you finally step back with a frustrated growl. You're gonna have to wait until Papyrus gets back. Man, this is a time when teleportation would REALLY come in handy.

Frisk lingers in the walkway a few feet away, wringing their hands slightly. They're not crying, but they look so sad and so...old almost. Like they have the entire weight of the world on their shoulder. They start signing rapidly, too fast for you to see.

"Hey, hold on Frisk." You put a hand on their shoulder and they stare down at the ground. "Let's...let's go back inside. Standing out here banging at the door isn't doing any good."

They nod and follow you. They look so miserable you decide you might as well finish dinner. The two of you are silent and Frisk stays at the table this time. You finally look at the knife Sans flung into the wall. He told you once before, when you were pestering him with questions about his magic, that his ability to move and lift non-living objects without a Soul was pretty much equal to his own physical strength. So if you were holding onto to something tightly, he'd be able to make it wiggle, but not really go anywhere. "gotta have the element of surprise' he had said.

The knife is embedded a good two or three inches into your wall. You have to really work and strain to get it out. When it finally slips free, you toss the blade into the sink and study the hole. That wasn't going to be fun to patch up. Frisk watches you closely and signs sorry when you make eye contact.

The soup is simmering so you join the kid at the table.

"Frisk, do you know what that was?" you ask softly. "I've never seen Sans like that."


"Can you try?" You push your notebook and pencil towards them. "Please."
Frisk hesitates, staring at the pages.

You sigh quietly, rubbing a hand over your face. "I know I'm asking a lot. But I can't help Sans if I don't know what's going on. And knowing Sans...he won't tell me a thing. He'll blow this off and I can't let that happen."

It's going to sound crazy.

"I'm dating a magical, talking skeleton," you chuckle, giving them a weak grin. "I think I can handle a little crazy."

Frisk grins a little at that and slowly picks up the pencil. I write. You cook. Then, they start writing. You leave them to it for a minute and finish up the soup. Frisk is bent over the page, scribbling furiously when you bring over some bowls. They pause to eat a few bites and then get back to writing. After about fifteen minutes, their pencil slows and stops. You've just about finished your soup and look up.

Frisk puts the pencil down, hand resting over the paper. They look over to you, their eyes tired and pleading. They start and stop signing several times and you put a hand on theirs.

"Frisk, whatever you've written here, I promise I won't judge. Okay?"

Their shoulders slump and finally, they slide the notebook to you. You take it and start to read the most incredible, insane story that you could possibly image.

Resets. Timelines. A Soulless flower who used to be a prince. A demon awoken by a strange outside force that Frisk still didn't understand. As you read, your hand goes up over your mouth. Frisk's handwriting gets messier as they describe the times they killed every living thing in the underground, forced to do unspeakable horrors by an unseen hand. How Sans was the one who stopped them, over and over and over again. How they finally broke free and tried their very best to set things right once and for all.

You set the notebook down and you can't find the words to say. "Frisk...I...oh my God...."

Frisk is staring down and their lap and finally starts crying softly. Oh, this poor, strong, determined child. You knew they were brave, but you had only ever heard the story of how they freed the monsters. How long had they been holding on to this? Did anyone else even know? Oh no. Suddenly, Sans reaction made sense. He knew about all of this. Knew, and hadn't said a word to you. You stand and kneel down in front of their chair. "Frisk, I am so sorry. I'm...I don't know what to say."

They snuffle loudly. You believe me?

"Of course I do," you say as tears threaten to fall from your own eyes. "Frisk, you are so brave and I'm so proud of you."

Their small frame shakes with a sob and they climb down from the chair and throw their arms around you. "I-I did b-bad things," they cried harshly.

"Frisk, no no, that wasn't you." You wrap your arms around them and rock them gently. "You said you didn't want to, that you tried to stop. You said it was Chara, right?"

"No. Not Chara." They pull back slightly, signing with shaking hands. Chara wasn't a good person but didn't do that. Things I did woke them up. It was something else. Someone else.
You don't fully understand, but they're starting to get really upset. "Okay, I'm sorry." You both sit there on the floor for a minute as Frisk wipes at their face. "Who else knows?" you finally ask. "Besides Sans obviously."

**You. Maybe Asgore. Never asked. And...Flowey.**

"Flowey? He's still alive?"

**In the mountain.**

Huh. That was a little concerning. But as long as he stayed there.... "How much does Sans know? Does he remember everything?"

Frisked shrugged. **We don't talk about it. Too painful.**

You both jump slightly at the sound of a knock at the door. You glance at the time. It had to be Toriel. Frisk looks at you quickly. **Don't tell mom. Please.**

You don't even hesitate. "I promise." No matter what you personally felt, it was Frisk's decision who or who not to tell. "Thank you for telling me Frisk." You take a moment to arrange your face into a more happy expression and let Toriel in. Poor thing is frazzled and worn out but seems pleased. Looks like the court meeting went well. Toriel sticks around for a while and you offer her some soup. You're careful not to say anything about Sans or what happened earlier. She does notice the hole in your wall and you sheepishly blame it on dancing. It feels wrong lying to the sweet monster, but you can't exactly tell her Sans went nuts and almost hurt Frisk.

As they're leaving, Frisk wraps their arms around your waist in a tight hug. "Help Sans," they whisper. "He needs you."

You hug them back. "I plan on it."

After they leave, you send a text to Papyrus, asking him to call you when he got home. You restlessly pace your apartment. You try to call Sans again.

"heya. you know what to do," his voicemail answers.

"Sans. I talked to Frisk. They told me about...they told me everything. Please call me. I'm worried about you."

It takes an agonizingly long time, but your phone finally rings. Your heart shoots to your throat and sinks a little when you see it's Papyrus. "Hey Pap, where are you?"

"I AM ON MY WAY HOME HUMAN. IS SOMETHING WRONG?"

You hesitate. How were you supposed to explain this? Papyrus didn't know about the resets. "I need you to let me into your place. Sans had a...well he got upset. I think he's locked himself in his room but he won't answer his phone or open the door."

"....I SEE. I WILL BE THERE SOON."

You're waiting out by the skeleton's door when Papyrus comes leaping up the stairs. His face is unusually serious and he doesn't say anything as he pulls his keys out. He unlocks the door and you bolt inside straight to Sans' room. It's closed and there's no light coming from it. Still, you try the handle, only to find it locked. You tap gently against the door. "Sans? Sans are you in there?"
"Sans I-" Your throat is closing up. How could he shut you out like this? "Sans, please just let me know if you're in there."

"HE'S IN THERE"

You look over at Papyrus. He's watching you, gloved hands clasped together. "HIS COAT IS ON THE COUCH. HE'S SO LAZY ABOUT PICKING UP AFTER HIMSELF." He attempts a weak 'nyeh heh'. You can tell his heart isn't in it. "WHAT HAPPENED?"

You turn away from Papyrus. Even more than Toriel, it hurts to lie to him. "I don't know Pap. I think he got reminded of something bad. Something that happened underground. But he won't talk to me." Dammit and now you're starting to cry. You let yourself sink to the floor, leaning up against the wall. After a moment, Papyrus sits next to you, gangly limbs barely fitting in the hallway. He pats your shoulder gently. "Sorry Pap."

"My brother is...he does this sometimes." Papyrus is speaking more softly than you've ever heard before. His voice sounds...normal and for some odd reason, that feels so wrong. "He was doing so much better."

"Has this happened before?"

Papyrus nods, staring at the wall across from you. "It happened a lot. Sans has always been lazy, but there came a point where it went far beyond that. He slept all day, and if he wasn't sleeping he would just sit there, staring off at nothing or stay locked up in his room. When we finally got to the surface, I thought maybe he would get better, but after the first few days it only got worse. He tried to hide it from me, but I could see something was wrong. I tried to talk to him. I tried so hard but he...he never trusted me enough to tell me why."

Papyrus' voice hitched. You lean over and try to hug the skeleton. It's tough at this angle, but he seems to appreciate the attempt, putting his skull on the top of your head. "Pap, Sans loves you. I've never seen someone care so much for a brother as much as Sans does. He was just trying to protect you."

"I told him that I, the great Papyrus doesn't need to be protected," Papyrus says in a quivering voice. "But my brother does like his secrets."

You rub his arm. "Pap, I don't think it's just that," you say softly. "Judging from what's happened, I think I know what Sans is feeling. It's not that he doesn't trust you, it's just...difficult to open up. Especially to the ones we love. You get scared of rejection, or hurting them. You get scared to face what might happen even though all rational thought will tell you that they won't leave you. Rational thought is hard to hear in your own head."

"Then what can I do?" Papyrus asks, shifting to face you.

"Keep doing what you're doing. I know it doesn't sound like much, but acting normal and just being there if he needs you is sometimes the best thing you can do." You give Papyrus a wide smile. "I promise, you're the best brother that Sans could ask for just the way you are."

"It is true that I am a very great brother." Papyrus returns your smile.

"Hey, there's my guy," you say, patting his shoulder. "Why don't you go make some dinner and relax. I'm sure work was tough."
"Heh heh. It is nothing that I can not handle." Papyrus stands, looking a little better. "VERY WELL. I SHALL MAKE SOME SPAGHETTI. WOULD YOU LIKE TO ASSIST ME?"

"Tempting as that is, I think I'm gonna stay here. Maybe see if I can get Sans to open the door."

Papyrus nods and starts to walk away. He stops and looks back at you. "MY BROTHER WAS DOING VERY POORLY, DESPITE BEING ON THE SURFACE. BUT WHEN WE MET YOU, HE STARTED TO MAKE AN EFFORT AGAIN. IF ANYONE CAN REACH HIM, I BELIEVE THAT YOU CAN. AFTER ALL, YOU ARE ALMOST AS GREAT AS ME."

"I do try Pap," you whisper as he heads into the kitchen. You lean your head back against Sans' door. "I hope you heard that bonehead," you say a little louder. "You're making your brother worry about you. I know you probably don't mean to, or want to but those are the facts."

More silence.

You sigh and keep talking. "Sans, I'm not mad about what happened. I get it. I really do. Sometimes the way we react to a trigger can't be helped. Though tibia honest that hole in my wall isn't going to be fun to take care of. You owe me big for that... Oh come on, no reaction? I thought my pun was pretty knife. Okay, that was a bad one, I'm sorry." You pull your knees up to your chest. "I don't know if you heard my message but...I talked to Frisk. They told me about the resets. I know I can't possibly understand what that's like. I can't even imagine. So I can understand why you wouldn't want to talk about it. But you don't have to shut me out when something like this happens. Even if I don't understand, I want to be there for you."

You hear a slight noise from just behind the door, like a quiet shuffling. You force yourself to stay where you are.

"It's easier to shut everyone out, isn't it? You told me it was easier to just give up. But I don't want to give up on you Sans. I can't do that. You may be the laziest, pun loving person I've ever met and your taste in ketchup is, quite frankly really nasty. But you're also kind and considerate. You say you hate making an effort and working at anything, but Sans, you've made it this long. You've been fighting your own fight this whole time. You're not weak Sans. You're so strong and I...I love that about you."

Not exactly how you had imagined your first time saying the 'L' word to Sans, but in this moment it feels right. "Sans, I love you. No matter what happened to you in the past, I don't care. I mean, I do, I care about you so much I don't even know what to do but I mean...geez, I'm a real master of words, huh?" You put your hand on the door, like you could reach right through the wood and touch him. "Sans I'm so sorry. I was so wrapped up in my own fight that I didn't even see that you've been struggling just as much as I have. I'm sorry."

You knock at the door again and now you're starting to cry again. "Sans, please. I trusted you with everything. I told you my darkest secret and I've not once regretted it. You don't have to tell me everything. I won't ask you to do that. All I'm asking is that you let me in. Sans, please trust me."

There's a soft tap, tap from the door.

"Sans?"

"supposed to say 'who's there." His words are just a mumble, strained and hard to hear.

"Who's there?"

"i do."
"I do who?"

"i do trust you."

The lock clicks quietly. You scramble to your feet, grabbing the handle. "I'm coming in," you call and push the door open. The room is dark. Despite the amount of times you've been here, you've never actually gone in his room. Even on the nights you slept over, you never seemed to make it past the couch. It takes moment for your eyes to adjust to the darkness. Sans has moved away from the door and is now huddled against the wall on a bare mattress. His knees are pulled up to his rib cage and he watches you as you step inside and shut the door behind you. "i-i'm sorry," he croaks and now you can make out faint blue tracks trailing down from his sockets. Oh God, he's been crying in here, alone in the dark. You immediately drop down beside him, pulling him into your arms.

"Oh Sans, it's okay." You kiss the top of his skull as he starts to shake.

"i didn't want you to see, i didn't want you to know."

"Shh, baby it's okay," you say again. "I'm the one who's sorry."

He puts a hand up over his mouth, trying to stop a soft whimper that escapes. You continue to kiss him, murmuring his name and whatever words of comfort pop into your head. He wraps his arms around you and finally starts to sob softly. He presses his skull against your shoulder and soon your sleeve is soaked with tears.

"i should've told you, i'm sorry. i was just so...so scared and then you t-trusted me with your scars and i didn't...i had to be strong for you."

"Sans, being strong for someone doesn't mean hiding your own struggles," you say softly. "It makes me far happier when you trust me with your problems."

"i ran away."

"Yeah, and scared the crap out of me. But I get it."

"i'm a freak."

"I think we established that a long time ago."

Sans finally pulls back from you a little. His eye lights are dim and dark shadows line the underside of his sockets. "how do you do it? how do you deal with these...this..." He gestures at his head and chest, seeming a little lost for words. "hell, i don't even know what this is."

"I call it a fog in my head," you say softly. "It's that numbing pressure that just builds up and keeps growing and growing until it feels like your body is going to give out. You want to run, want to scream and yet everything takes far too much effort. And then, even when you do feel something, it's like it's not really you that's feeling it. Is that what you mean?"

He nods slowly.

You take a deep breath. "That's why I cut at first. It's sick and wrong, but it helped in its own way. The pain brought me back, brought some clarity into my head. I could focus, only if it lasted for just a little while. That's why I use music now. It's a far healthier option."

"music," he murmurs, leaning back against you. "there was a statue in waterfall. kid got it to sing again. it was nice."
"Do you want me to get my iPod? I can-"

"no." Sans grip tightens on you. "don't go. please."

"Okay, okay, I'm not going anywhere." You scoot back until you hit the wall, leaning against it as you held your still trembling boyfriend in your arms. "Do you want to talk about what happened?"

He's quiet for a long moment. "i didn't want you to hate the kid," he finally says. "frisk is a good kid. they made mistakes but i know that they really did want to do the right thing. i know that thing they became, the thing controlling them wasn't them but...god, i saw the knife and it was like i was back there. back in that judgement hall and i just lost it. i didn't want them to hurt you. i've seen it happen over and over again to everyone else. i've seen, i've seen paps-i tried to stop it at first and it didn't matter, nothing ever mattered!" His voice gets choked off and the tears start again and for several minutes he cries quietly. You can't imagine it. Frisk said there had been times when they-the one controlling them- had slaughtered everyone and that means that Papyrus had died, actually died over and over again and every time Sans had to watch it.

You rock him, rubbing his back. "If this is too hard, you don't have to talk right now."

He sniffles against your chest.

You lean your head back against the wall. "You know, that thing you said about not wanting to lose the stars makes sense now. A lot of things make sense now."

"i haven't made it easy for you huh?" He chuckles weakly. "sorry."

"Easy is boring. You make my life exciting bone boy." He finally sounds like he's starting to calm down. His grip is less desperate and the shuddering in his bones is gone. "Everything is going to be okay. You're here now. I won't let you go anywhere."

Slowly, he rubs a hand over your face. "thank you," he murmurs.

You kiss him on his teeth, letting your lips linger for a long moment. "Always."

He shifts and pulls you down to the mattress, curling around you like a cat. You pull up the blanket, wrapping it around the two of you. "i'd like to listen to your music," he says as you get comfortable.

"I'll make you a playlist," you laugh quietly.

"no i mean, i'd like to hear it now."

You stare at him. "What, like you want me to sing or something?"

He finally smiles a little and nods.

"You know I can't sing."

"that's a fibula. i heard you that day in the kitchen-"

"Oh, you mean the day that never happened?"

"i like your voice," he says, ignoring you. "please? will you sing?"

Oh crap, he's somehow managing to make puppy eyes with his freaking sockets. You sigh and sit up slightly. "Fine. I'm warning you now, your ears will bleed."
"i don't have ears."

"Do you want me to sing or not?"

"yes please."

You clear your throat, trying to ignore the burning heat in your face. "Okay, a one night only special. I'll even let you laugh at me if you want." You think for a moment and decide on Vanilla Twilight by Owl City. It's a calming song, one that you listened to a lot after your panic attacks. "The stars lean down to kiss you, and I lie awake and miss you. Pour me a heavy dose of atmosphere."

You're too embarrassed to look at him, but you can feel him staring at you. Your voice wavers and cracks a few times and oh this is so dumb, but he is listening with rapt attention. When you finish, you lie back down and burrow under the blanket. He pulls it back slightly, revealing your head. You feel the cool touch of his teeth against your cheek.

"i love you."

The words stop your heart. He pulls you tightly against him and he's so warm and you're just so happy that he's finally opening up to you that suddenly you don't care about your horrible singing. If it made him happy you would do it as many times as he asked.
You are filth! Go back to the underground with those beasts you love so much!

Bitches like you will all burn in hell! Go f-

"Please tell me you're not reading the hate mail again." Tod frowns at you as you jump and click out of the email program. "It's just noise. Don't get yourself worked up over it."

"I'm not getting worked up," you mumble. It's a lie. Even though you knew better, you can't stop yourself from looking through some of the vicious messages that have been pouring into the studio since you started working the show. People have realized that the new host of their favorite show was the one responsible for getting the 'beloved' Emily put behind bars. Never mind the fact that you helped uncover the ones responsible for putting the people of the festival in danger. All people seemed to care about was giving you hell for dating a monster. Being called a bitch was one of the nicer things you've seen.

"Why do you force yourself to read them? It won't change people's minds."

You shrug. "I don't know. I mean, they're not all bad. There's one from a Jane who says I'm her new hero." Of course Jane was a proud death fanatic who had a rather unhealthy obsession with corpses and all things dead and you found her email far too creepy and TMI but still....

Tod reaches around you and powers the computer down. "Good. Read ones like that. Do I need to have Abby clean out your inbox each morning?"

"No." You give him the best smile you can manage at the moment. "I'll stop."

You don't stop. The next two weeks slide by mostly uneventfully. Mostly. You get approached a few times while out and about by various parents who snarl at you that you've ruined one of the family safe stations in the city, surely it's not too late for your soul, have you tried church? and other such garbage. You start driving more and though you tell Sans it's because it's getting too cold to walk, you're actually a little scared at times to walk alone, especially on your late nights. But you really don't want to bring that up to him. He's finally starting to talk about his time underground, bit by bit. You find out that while he can't remember every exact moment of each reset, the most painful moments are the ones that stand out the most in his mind. He can remember the color of the dusty walls in the judgment hall and the sensation of dying over and over. But he can't remember the number of times he's watched Papyrus die. He can't remember the number of times he's killed the kid. Said it just got too hard to keep track. You can tell he's trying to spare your affection for Frisk.
because he is very careful to never mention their name while talking. It's hard to hear sometimes but you can see it's far harder for him to finally say everything he's been holding on to for so long. So you try your best to understand and keep quiet about the hate mail.

The two of you have started sleeping together every night. Sometimes at your place, and sometimes at his, but you both need the warmth of another body during the night. The night after you sang to him, Sans knocked at your bedroom door quietly, startling you from your reading. He eased around the door, expression hesitant but pleading. So of course you wordlessly scooted over and Sans practically ran to you, wrapping his arms around your waist as you finished reading. So now it's become a thing. Whoever was home first was where you would spend the night. It's a very nice advancement in your relationship. It was even nicer to have someone by your side when the nightmares woke you in a cold sweat or worse. Sans never complained about being woken up and thanks to his gentle reassurance, you found falling back to sleep easier than ever. Sometimes it was you who did the comforting when Sans woke in a panic, clinging to you and mumbling in that strange language you've heard only once before. And again, he often woke with the name 'Gaster' falling from his mouth.

But despite the new trust and deepened bond between the two of you, you can tell that Sans was still holding onto something big. He never told you where he went right before his panic attack about the knife. He always found a new topic to discuss every time you tried to bring it up. The one time you tried to mention Gaster, he went completely still and stared at the wall for a solid two minutes before loudly talking about a new joke shop that opened downtown. It was frustrating, but he needed time. You could give him that.

You slink into the boy's place after a particularly hard day. Someone threw rotten fruit at the studio windows during the night. Three guesses as to why. Clean up took forever. Sans sees the look on your face and says "Early night sound good?"

"Yes please."

~~~~~

It's dark. Darker than a moonless night and far, far colder. Sans reaches out blindly, stumbling in the inky blackness. Oh, God not again. "Paps! Where are you?" His voice is sucked up into the darkness and he can feel it pressing in around him. He had to find Paps before it was too late. He fights to move, his bones sticky and heavy. He sees a flash of red in the distance, a single spark of color among the black. "Papyrus!" He finally gets closer only to see that it's not Papyrus' scarf. No, no it's blood, thick and heavy and it's coating a human body.

Your body.

He wants to scream. He can feel it building up but no noise escapes him. He falls to his knees as he stares at your torn body. He calls your name, his voice no more than a whimper. Your head turns slightly, eyes dim and gray. More blood trails down from your mouth as you attempt to speak. Your hand reaches for him, trembling and he takes it with his own. But the moment his bones touch your skin, your hand starts to peel away. Your skin flakes and turns to dust, revealing the stark white bone underneath. Sans jerks back. No, no!

You slowly sit up, your head limp until the very last moment as your body continues to disintegrate. Then it snaps up sharply and Sans trembles as the last of your features twist in pain. "Sans!" Your scream echoes in the space around him, shrill and filled with terror. You jerk once more as the face he knows and loves melts into nothing but an empty human skull staring blankly at him. There's a sharp snap and two cracks appear. One trailing down from your left socket, the other shooting upwards from your right. Sans scrambles backwards as the skeleton that used to be you shifts and
starts to melt into a gooey heap, mouth turning upwards in a broken smile. The face of the man lost to the space within spaces gleams at him, glitching and fading in and out of the darkness. It's agony to stare at it, but Sans can't look away. Glistening white hands slowly bleed out of the mass in front of him. They reach up to its center and pull apart its own body slightly. There, dripping with black ooze is your Soul, pulsing weakly. Your strong, beautiful mess of a Soul has been utterly absorbed into the creature and it's his fault.

SAAaAnnNsS

He can't breathe, he can't move, he can't scream.

YoU dID thIS To ME.

No, he didn't mean to.

yOu BrOKE YOur WORD

He just wanted to protect Papyrus!

DO NOT FORGET.

The hands shoot towards him, the holes in the palms of the bony appendages filled with a blackness darker, yet darker and then he sees falling snow and he's back there and he's all alone again and finally-

Sans screams.

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You jerk awake at the harsh scream that breaks suddenly from Sans. He thrashes violently, hand catching the edge of your face. You fall off the edge of the mattress, palm against your stinging cheek. You scramble back up, blinking the sleep from your eyes. What the hell?! A nightmare? He continues to scream, sockets tightly shut as you struggle to pin down his flailing arms. "Sans! Wake up!"

"don't! gaster! gaster!" Sans starts sobbing your name as tears seep out from his sockets. "'m sorry, i'm sorry."

"Sans, please baby I'm right here. Wake up!" You put your hand on his skull, rubbing his cheekbones. "Everything's okay. I'm here."

He jerks under your touch and finally his sockets snap open. His gleaming blue pupil focuses on your face, then darts to the hand on his skull. He reels back, smacking against the wall. "no, don't touch me!"

The door bursts open before you can do more than gape at him, and Papyrus strides in, wearing a extra large tee with a cartoon dinosaur on it and pj shorts. He barely looks at you as he kneels down next to Sans. "BROTHER, I'M HERE."

Sans flinches away but Papyrus reaches down and pulls him up regardless, holding Sans like a child. "ARE YOU OKAY?" Papyrus asks you. He gently pats Sans' back. Sans is shivering, curling into his brother.

You nod wordlessly.
"WILL YOU GIVE US A MINUTE?"

You shakily get to your feet and leave the room. You wind up in the living room and sink onto the couch. You bury your face in your hands and even though you know that Sans was still caught in the hold of an obviously terrifying nightmare, his rejection hurts. It hurts far more than the still burning mark on your face and you have to take several long breaths. Your head is still spinning from waking up so suddenly. Leaning back against the couch, you close your eyes and listen to the murmur of Papyrus talking to Sans. It's not long before Sans runs out to the living room, startling you back into wakefulness. He looks around in a frantic sort of way and as soon as he spots you, he makes a beeline for you. You barely manage to stand before he smacks into you, wrapping you in his arms. You lose your balance at the unexpected force of his hug and fall back on the couch. Sans doesn't let go and you both hang awkwardly half way on and off the cushions.

"Sans-

"i'm so sorry. i freaked out, i thought you were...oh god, i thought i melted you."

"Melted me?"

You ease down to the floor and Sans follows, still not letting go. "bad dream. really bad. i touched you and you melted."

You rub his skull, all traces of hurt gone. "Oh baby, I'm so sorry. I'm fine. See? Not melted."

Sans breathes shakily, running his phalanges over your face, trailing down your neck and arms. He's obviously not taking your word for it. He stops short when he brushes your cheek and you flinch at the brief contact on your swollen skin. "did i do that?"

"It's nothing."

He presses the lightest of kisses against your cheek. "damn it. i'm so sorry," he whispers in a voice rough with self loathing.

"Sans it was an accident. It's okay." You study him for a second. His bones are glistening with sweat. "What did you see? Who is Gaster?"

He takes a deep shuddering breath. "he's...heh. he was...." Sans rubs at his skull. "it's a long story babe."

You tap the edge of his nasal cavity. "This is fifth time you've woken in a panic shouting his name and those are just the times I've seen. Please just say it. Get it off your chest."

Sans buries his head in his arms, pulling his knees up tightly. "ok. but i'm gonna warn you now. it's not a happy story."

"No offense love, but duh." You smile at him crookedly. You keep your voice light in hopes to help him stay calm. He stays silent for a while longer and you sigh. "Okay. If you're not going to talk, I'm going to go back to sleep." You shift slightly and faster than you can blink, his hand is on your wrist.

"he was the royal scientist. before alphys," Sans mumbles. "and uh. my dad."

"Dad? Sans and Papyrus have a father? Well why wouldn't they? For a brief moment you wonder how on earth skeleton reproduction worked and very quickly shove those thoughts aside. Not important right now. "Okay. I'm guessing something bad happened to him? I've never heard Papyrus even mention him. You keeping quiet is kind of to be expected but-"
"papyrus doesn't remember him." Sans stares darkly down at the ground. "no does. not even the kid really knows who he is. was."

"How is that possible?"

Sans gives you a ghost of a grin. "i'll get there. i gotta start at the beginning if i want it to make any kind of sense. w.d. gaster was, if nothing else, a genius. he was essential in building the underground, making it possible for monsters to form some sort of life after the wars forced everyone into the darkness. i was made well after all that-

"Hold on, made?"

"babe we're not going to get anywhere at this rate."

"Sorry." You snuggle close to him and mimic sealing your lips.

Sans leans his skull against your head and his hand fishes for yours in the dark before he continues. "the underground is powered by a huge complicated system we call the core. it provides all the energy we used. before i was made, gaster created a simpler version, one that only worked for limited amounts of time and was very unsteady. it wasn't safe to use and despite all his smarts, gaster couldn't figure out how to create a source of safe, constant energy. this was probably because he was also researching ways to break the barrier. he believed that collecting the seven human souls would take too long, if it was even possible to do so. so while working to create a better core, he was also researching ways to create clones of the souls he already had. even for him, it was too much. no one else could match his brain and thought processes. that was when he had the bright idea to use his cloning research for his own benefit. if the only one smart enough to work on his level was him...well."

"You're a clone?" Your voice is almost a yelp.

"babe." There's a teasing spark in his socket, despite his stern tone. "'m not exactly a clone. monster reproduction is all about soul magic anyway. but gaster wasn't interested in a son. he wanted a partner that could match his knowledge and share the load of trying to accomplish the impossible. plus i don't think he could find a monster mate no matter how hard he tried. the process is super complicated, but it's enough to say he succeeded. but unfortunately for gaster all his experiments still gave him a child to raise. he wasn't a bad dad but...let's just say i had to learn how to take care of myself very early on. thanks to gaster's brain power in my head i was working alongside him very quickly. but since i was his first success with the cloning process, there were some pretty serious drawbacks and flaws."

You can't help but speak up again. "I think you're perfect," you whisper, smooching his cheek.

He glows a light blue. "well, personality wise, i know i'm a gem. but i'm talking about as a...weapon."

"I thought Gaster wanted a brain partner?"

"yeah, but if we managed to break the barrier, what was to stop the humans from shoving us all back under? gaster knew the monsters needed something more, someone who could fight for them. so gaster threw in some extra ingredients when he made me, hoping that i could be a tool for the fight to retake the surface as well as a scientific genius. i've got some tricks but in the end, i'm not made for fighting. after some-" Sans' expression twists into something dark- "experiments, he soon learned that i was too fragile for constant fighting. one good hit in a fight and i'm dust."
Your hand tightens around his at this. You can't image this solid and strong monster beside you as nothing but dust. From his tone, those experiments must have been extremely dangerous. Being put through something like that by the man he considered his father must have left deep scars in him that would never heal.

"still, we managed to make great progress on the core. we were close to perfecting it when gaster decided to try cloning again. when i was eight i got a new baby brother."

Holy crap, Sans went through all of that by the time he was eight?! "Geez, he's not winning any dad of the year awards is he?"

Sans hesitates. "he...he tried. he really did. he knew nothing about being a father but by the time paps was created, he knew he had to do something different with the way he raised us. i think that's why paps is the way he is. can't even picture paps hurting someone, can you?"

You shake your head. "Never. I don't think he could do it."

"exactly. gaster's mind set was different at the time paps was made. when it was me, he was at the end of his rope and was almost out of hope. i was made from a desperate attempt to fix things. paps was made from belief in the future and hope for our kind." He smiles. "heh, paps and i used to get into all kinds of trouble. there was one time we covered the entire throne room in goop and gaster took the blame for us. i can still remember the way king 'fluffybuns' tried to give him a stern talking to and the whole time we could see gaster signing to us behind his back. stuff like 'look at the mess in his ears. i bet you can't get the outer hallways covered in the stuff before he finishes ranting,' always said i got my sense of humor from him. gaster used to love joking around and messing with his lab assistants and with me and paps helping, oh boy the pranks we pulled. he told me about the stars too. he described them so vividly, it was like i could actually see them with my own sockets."

Sans' voice is growing quieter and hoarser as he gets lost in the memories. He rubs his thumb over your palm in an absent minded sort of way. "still, when it became clear that papyrus had no chance at being a weapon and couldn't contribute to our research, he started to change. i dunno if it was an effect from working with the machinery and its constantly fluctuating levels of magic or if the years of failing finally started to wear him down, but he started to crack. the final step in settling the core was always just out of reach, and his soul research never left the experimentation levels. he was always kinda weird and socially awkward, but i was never scared of him until the day he got truly desperate. he started experimenting on me and paps again. i was still young, i didn't know how to stop him, or understand that he was doing something wrong. he was always careful to stop just before crossing lines. i guess i lied to myself and told myself that he did love us somewhere deep inside. that he wouldn't permanently hurt us and that everything he did was for the good of monster kind. he told us we would be heroes if we could just make that final breakthrough."

"then it was like none of it mattered anymore. he was different. he wasn't the man i had grown to love so much. he hurt paps. i didn't think paps would recover. paps has always been so much stronger than me, so he could handle the harsher experiments. paps never told me what went on behind those doors and i was too wrapped up in my own research to see it until it was too late." Sans buries his head in his arms again. "i f-found him after a bad night. gaster went on a rampage while i was gone. paps tried to stop him and gaster b-broke him. i still don't know exactly what he did. paps was just lying there on the floor and he couldn't speak, he wouldn't even look at me. his hp was almost gone."

"i was livid, outraged like i've never been before. i went to confront gaster. i found him in the heart of the core and he was completely lost in a frenzy of work, standing on a ledge overlooking the core. he was messing with the control panel set up on the edge of the cavern, kept shouting about how he
finally had the answer to everything. i was too angry to be happy about that, or even care that the whole room was screaming with alarms. we fought and...i lost control. my powers have never really been my strong point. but all of my anger and hurt and confusion just manifested and i just attacked. and honestly? he kicked my butt. i screamed at him while he just held me down and laughed. he told me that i just couldn't see the greater purpose of our existence. then the ledge started to shake."

It's not the only thing shaking. Sans himself is shivering, his bones rattling quietly. No tears are falling, but his quivering voice is practically wailing.

"my attacks did some damage to the core. gaster was distracted and ran to fix what i had broken. he was just standing there with his back to me, completely ignoring me. i stood up and started moving to him. i don't even know what i planned to do. the entire room shook again and i lost my balance. i started to fall over the edge and i guess my scream finally broke his focus. h-he grabbed for me and in my scramble to get back on solid ground, i knocked him on the head. he slipped and fell, right into the heart of the core. i could hear him screaming as the force of the magic and contained energy ripped him apart. but then it like the addition of gaster's life energy triggered something in the core. everything went still and then everything just...broke."

He gestures wildly, a dry sob breaking from him. "hell, i don't know how to describe it. i don't think i can. i don't even remember all of it. i just remember gaster screaming at me. he said, 'promise me you won't ever stop. do not forget.' when i finally had some sense of myself again, gaster was gone. it was like he had never existed. pretty sure people thought i was crazy. no gaster, paps was fine and the core was complete and solid. no idea how. somehow, gaster was taken away and i was the only one who remembered any of it." His voice trails off.

He's quiet for so long, you almost wonder if he's fallen asleep. You peer at him, gently rubbing his arm. "Sans?"

"still here." He sucks in a deep breath. "basically, i figured that he's not completely gone. the signs were there. i had to dig, but i found traces of his existence. i think he's stuck in a space that can't be reached by any kind of normal means. something about the core reacting to his soul's magic sent him there. i tried to find a way to bring him back, but then the resets started and all my work would vanish. and finally i gave up. i thought there was no point. gaster was gone, and there was nothing i could do."

"But?" you prompt him softly.

He closes his sockets. "but then i started hearing his voice again. not like in memories. like he was actually speaking to me. at night, in the wind, through the static in the radio. i had to check. that's where i went that night. there's a machine i developed in the basement of our house to try and track any traces of him in this reality. but there was nothing there, there's never anything there!" His fist slams against the ground as a frustrated tear finally slips free. "i thought maybe it was just a dream, maybe i was just being paranoid. but then tonight it happened again and he was there and he hurt you and i can't let him do that, i can't lose you too."

You gather him in your arms, your emotions just as conflicted and fragile as his. How could he have carried all this for so long? How had he not gone completely mad? You kiss his skull as he cries quietly. "I'm so sorry. I know my words can't fix anything. Hell, I don't even know what to say."

"don't have to say anything," he sobs. "just d-don't go."

"I won't ever leave you bone boy," you murmur. "We're stuck together now. Better get used to it."

Sans pulls your face to his, kissing you in a desperate way. You return his affections, your heart
almost bursting with love for this broken man. A promise rises in your heart to do whatever it takes to make him happy. You kiss him tenderly, your own fears and sins melting away in the heat of his passion for you. As daylight starts to slowly light the room, you pull back slightly from him. His sockets are hooded with exhaustion and he looks like he's on the verge of falling asleep again.

You laugh quietly. "Man, this really has been a couple of sucky days hasn't it?"

"yup."

"You know what we need?"

"hmm?"

You trail a finger down his arm and you feel him shiver. You turn to face him, a slow grin crossing your face. "We need to have some fun."
Chapter Notes

Work is getting insane again (like 6 am til 10 pm insane) so sorry for the delay.
I write and sometimes draw here: theninjawrites.tumblr.com
Main blog: theninjamouse.tumblr.com

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"you're really kind of a freak, aren't you?" Sans mutters as the ticket gate lady scans his card.

"What was that?" you call sweetly, already on the other side.

"i said you're a gem, doll face."

"SANS QUIT WHINING AND HURRY UP!" Papyrus is bouncing impatiently, eager to experience absolutely everything in the theme park. It's no Disneyland but the station did some promo work for a amusement park just a little ways out from the city that had a few roller coasters and other fun stuff. And bonus, you were able to pull some strings and get free tickets for everyone.

Undyne pushes past Sans, almost knocking him to the ground. "Yeah, come on! We don't have all day!"

"Um, actually we do," Alphys interjects quietly, handing her pass to another worker, who is openly staring at the strange party.

"Not the point!"

You smile widely at Sans as he joins you, nudging his shoulder. "You excited?"

"for sure." He's trying to keep his voice casual but you notice that his eyes are bright as he takes in the main square of the park. Lively carnival type music pulses from several hidden speakers and overpriced shops line the stone square. The park's mascots, a collection of neon colored animals cover every possible surface. Sans is staring at one mascot in particular; a white dog with a wide, goofy smile.

"Got a thing against dogs?" you ask, noticing the slight smirk on his face.

"nah, i like dogs. i just can't seem to escape that one."

You pick up a brochure. "You can't escape...Snowdrop the Maltese and her band of wacky friends?"

Sans grunts. "something like that."

It's a school day, so there aren't very many people here. Getting Toriel to agree to let Frisk skip class for the day had taken a rather undignified amount of begging and bribing with babysitting promises. Speaking of Frisk, there they come now. The kid scans their card and bounces up next to you and Sans. You keep your face straight, but you watch Sans' reaction carefully. The two of them haven't seen each other since the knife incident. The smile on Frisk's face fades a little as they glance at Sans.
They wave timidly at him.

"heya kid." Sans smiles widely, ruffling Frisk's hair. "are ya missing school?"

Frisk's shoulders visibly relax and they laugh before giving Sans a hug. They give you a tight squeeze as well before bounding over to Papyrus, who is loudly comparing the hats in one of the shops. Sans watches them, a genuine smile on his face. He sees your concerned look. "don't worry 'bout me. i don't blame frisk."

You take his hand. "Good. But if it gets to be too much, let me know. Okay?"

Sans shakes his head, but his fingers tighten around yours. "you're a big worrywart, you know that?"

"I pride myself on it. Now c'mon, I think that hot dog hat is calling your name."

The entire group ends up getting hats. Sans, instead of going for the hotdog hat like you thought, picks up a regular ball cap that has a picture of an ear of corn on a unicycle. You groan at the 'unicorn' pun and take a hat with bright pink spikes. Alphys and Undyne get matching bird hats and Papyrus (after debating for a good ten minutes) finally settles for a bright red slinky type hat that adds another foot to his already insane height.

You clap your hands together as you all head back into the square. "All right! Now that we're properly outfitted, what should we do first?"

Frisk, Undyne and Papyrus all immediately point to the rather intimidating roller coaster that is visible above the treeline. Thus decided, you all head over to the coaster, called Fire Cracker. Real original. It takes a lot of prodding from Undyne to get Alphys on the ride. As you're waiting in the short line, you feel Sans press up against you.

"it's uh...kinda high isn't it?" He watches a cart take off, shooting up the steep incline. "and fast."

"That's the whole point," you laugh. "Wait, you're not thinking of chickening out on me, are you?"

"nah, it's uh...it's just. y'know. lazy guys like me like to take things slow."

You take a step forward as the people in front of you load the cart. You're up next. "But you don't have to do any of the work. You just have to hold on and enjoy the ride." You study his face. "You've never been on a roller coaster, have you?" You look over to the others. Poor Alphys is quivering with nerves but Undyne and Papyrus are practically glowing with excitement.

"It's uh...it's just. y'know. lazy guys like me like to take things slow."

His grin is a little nervous. "they weren't exactly in high demand underground."

You lean over the rail. Papyrus and Frisk are in front of you. Undyne and the still shaking Alphys are directly behind. "Frisk, you've been on stuff like this before, right?"

They nod and hold up a single finger. The gate swings open at the moment and you all climb in. Sans settles next to you, studying the safety bar. "will this be enough?"

"Of course it will. Stuff like this has to go through all kinds of safety checks before they let actual people on it." You smirk at him teasingly. "Wanna hold my hand?" He takes your offered hand, startling you with the intensity of his grip. "Easy there bone boy! Don't break it."

"you're the one who told me to hold-" Sans is cut off as the cart shoots forward and a delighted scream rips from your throat at the intense speed. You can hear Undyne hooting and Alphys
shrieking loudly. You reach the top of the coaster and Sans gasps loudly. His sockets are impossibly wide and the lights of his pupils are almost as large. He finally lets out a holler as you speed down the coaster and you can't help but laugh at the terrified joy in his voice.

When it's over and you all stumble off the ride, giddy with exhilaration, Sans immediately announces, "i wanna do that one again."

You flex your numb hand, laughing. "Let's check out some of the other stuff first, huh? Oh look! Pictures!" You hurry over to the screen on the shop counter, the others huddling around you. There must have been a camera somewhere on the ride and it's perfectly captured the entire group. You and Undyne howl with laughter over the terrified expressions on Alphys' and (surprisingly) Papyrus' faces. "Okay, I'm getting this one. Gotta get something to remember your first roller coaster!"

You purchase the pictures, getting a sheet of wallet sized ones to give to everyone. Before you tuck the picture away, you smile at the delighted expression on Sans' skull and the sight of his hand wrapped tightly around yours. You move on to other rides and it's like a new side of Sans has awakened. He wants to try everything, much to Papyrus' and Frisk's delight. Everyone loves the towering drop tower ride, but you and Alphys decide to sit out on the spinning cups. You mentioned to Sans that it might be a good idea not to match Papyrus and Undyne up on this particular ride, given that the riders control the speed of the spinning. So he makes sure to share a cup with his brother. You grin as you watch them go at it. Frisk's and Undyne's cup is a mere blur, spinning so fast you're almost worried that it's going to fly off. It probably would if the two mega monsters were together. Papyrus is doing all the work in the skeleton's cup and Sans gives you a lazy wink as they spin by.

"How you holding up?" you ask Alphys.

She wipes at her face, still sweating a little after the last ride. "I'm g-good. It's all so intense. B-but I am having fun!" she assures you. "H-how are you doing?"

You tilt your head a little. "I'm good, having a lot of fun!"

Alphys shakes her head. "N-no I mean...well I've been listening to your show and stuff and I've heard what some of those callers have to say and then you know, I hear things, being out at the university and it's not really nice things..."

"Oh. That." You shrug, watching the others for a moment before you give her a smile that feels a little too wide on your face. "I mean, it's not great. But it's just people being dumb."

She hesitates, then pats your shoulder. "Y-you're a good person. We monsters v-very lucky to have you on our side."

"I'm just trying to do the right thing. I care about you guys." You stand as the ride finishes. Poor Frisk almost immediately hits the ground and Undyne soon follows, cursing loudly at the earth. It sounds like she's demanding it to stop spinning. "Look, I appreciate your concern. But I'm really fine. And I don't want to think about anything like that today. I just want to have fun."

Alphys smiles and gives you a shaky smile. "Y-yeah, that sounds good." She rushes over to help her girlfriend and you kneel by Frisk.

"Hey buddy. Thanks for taking one for the team."

Frisk groans and gives you a thumbs up without lifting their head. Sans joins you and pokes Frisk's shoulder. "ya know what they say; what goes 'round, comes around."
They make a weak swat at Sans and groan. You can tell recovery might take a while so you suggest taking a food break. You find the closest food stand and study the offerings with everyone else. Hmm, corn dog or chicken? You take your time and everyone else wanders over to the picnic tables set up in the shade of the trees. You feel a sudden tug against your pants and look down.

There's a little girl holding onto you, staring at the group of monsters. She can't be more than five. "Mommy, what are those?" she asks in a quivering voice.

Uh...oh boy. "I'm uh...not your mommy sweetie."

The little girl looks up at you and jumps away with a shriek. After looking around and realizing her mom is no where in sight, her eyes well up. Oh no, no no, no crying! You kneel down, getting onto the child's level. "Hey, hey it's okay. All legs look the same from down here, don't they?"

She nods, lip trembling.

"My name is ______. What's yours?"

"Sadie." Her eyes keep going over to your friends.

Sans has noticed the commotion and is watching curiously. When he starts to rise, you make a quick motion for him to stay where he's at. "That's a nice name," you say to Sadie, smiling gently.

"Are they monsters?"

"Yeah, they're my friends."

Sadie looks back at you, eyes wide. "You're friends with monsters?"

"Well yeah." You shift slightly, knees aching from kneeling. "But they're not like the scary monsters under the bed. They're nice monsters. Good monsters. Like Mike and Sully, from the movie."

"Nate says monsters are bad."

You don't know who Nate is, but you shake your head. "No, not these guys. Most monsters are actually really nice. See the short one? That's Sans. He's my boyfriend."

Sans waves and Sadie shyly waves back.

"Would you like to meet them?"

Sadie rubs at her eyes and hesitates before nodding. She takes your hand, or rather your finger, in her tiny hand and the two of you walk over. The others finally notice you're not alone and stop their chatter, staring curiously at the little girl at your side. She presses against your leg, hiding behind you slightly. "Hey guys, this is Sadie. I think she's lost."

Frisk climbs down from their chair and smiles widely at Sadie. Seeing another kid seems to put her at ease and she curiously looks around at the monsters. Everyone introduces themselves and soon enough, she's sitting next to Frisk, laughing and smiling with the rest. She seems particularly taken with Papyrus and peppers him with questions. Paps of course loves this attention but you notice that he's taking care to keep his voice slightly lower than it's usual booming level. The level of tact and awareness Papyrus has still takes you by surprise sometimes. While she's being entertained, you manage to find a phone number written on a bracelet around her ankle and give it a call. The mother on the line sounds like she's in hysterics and you give her a detailed description of where you are.
"Just look for the group of monsters," you say with a laugh. "Can't miss it."

She goes quiet for a second and you brace yourself for the worst.

"I see. I will be there soon. Thank you again."

You hang up and let out a breath. Well, that could've gone a lot worse. Sans has his skull in his hand, watching you. "she on her way?"

"Yeah. I thought I was gonna get screamed at for letting her daughter hang out with us. But I think she's just glad we found her."

Sans grunts softly. "still might."

You frown at Sans. "Hey now, don't sound so excited."

"sorry. didn't know you were so good with kids." He nods at Sadie, who is running her hands over the scales on Undyne's arm. "you don't have a secret kid i should know about, do you?"

"Oh no, you found my big secret," you snicker. "Nah, I just spent a lot of time in hospitals after the accident and...the other thing. I was still young enough to be put in the kids ward. You get bored real fast in hospitals so I got to know some of the kids there. Some were in for short term stuff. Broken bones, fevers. But then there were some that had no chance to leave. Cancer patients. Terminally ill. Some of those kids had more bravery than I ever will. The stuff they had to go through was terrible. But those kids were so bright and warm, despite everything. I learned a lot from them. Including how to comfort a child when they're scared. It's really not...what's that look for?"

Sans is smiling gently at you, pupils almost fuzzy. "nothin'. you're just...glowing a little."

You look down at your chest, but see nothing there. You hear a muffled snicker from Frisk and Undyne. Alphys has her clawed hands up over her snout in delight. A blush lights your face but before you can respond, you hear a voice cry out.

"Sadie!"

Sadie jumps down from the table, running to a woman with bright red hair. "Mommy!" She leaps into the woman's arms and you can hear her mom fighting back tears. She looks at you, patting her daughter's back. She's clearly out of breath from running.

"Thank you," she says breathlessly. She eyes the monsters around you and her expression eases slightly. "Thank you all." As they walk away, you can hear Sadie excitedly telling her mom all about her new monster friends. You smile as a warm feeling blossoms in your chest.

"Where should we go next?" Alphys asks once everyone finishes their food.

"I WANT TO RIDE THE FERRIS WHEEL," Papyrus says excitedly.

"No! Dummy, we can't do that yet!" Undyne protests, shaking her head viciously.

"WHY NOT?"

"We have to wait until nightfall! Right?" she says to Alphys who, pushes up her glasses.

"T-that's right! According to all the anime with a ferris wheel, the ideal time to ride is when it's dark and the city lights up!" Her voice has risen to an excited chatter but falls again. "W-we can still see the city from here right?"
"I think so?" You think about how far the park is from the actual city. "As long as the mountains aren't in the way. But if nothing else, we'll see the town lit up."

Undyne pumps her fist. "Good enough! We'll get that romantic setting!"

A romantic, nighttime ferris wheel ride? You sneak a glance at Sans, your stomach fluttering slightly at the idea. He meets your gaze and by the light blue blush on his face, you can tell he's thinking the same thing. He clears his throat. "still have a while before night falls though. how about that house of mirrors?"

You all waste time running around the park. Sans loves the house of mirrors, especially the one that makes him look stretched out and tall. For some reason, the disfigured reflections seem to spook Alphys, so you move on from there fairly quickly. By the time darkness starts to fall, you've ridden every ride and almost made yourself sick on greasy park food. Frisk and Papyrus insisted on getting their faces painted. Frisk has a star on their cheek and Papyrus has a place of spaghetti. You've been very pleased with how the park workers have treated your group. Work policy or not, everyone has been very kind and though they had trouble with staring, no one treated your friends any differently.

You climb into the cart of the ferris wheel, scooting over to make room. However, after Sans gets on, Papyrus and Frisk hang back, smiling widely at the two of you. "WE'LL GET THE NEXT ONE BROTHER! ENJOY YOUR DATE!"

Sans' blush lights up the dim compartment. "thanks bro."

The ride starts, moving at a snail's pace. The sign in the front said it was a eight minute ride all around, so you've got some time. You peek at Sans, feeling a sudden shyness creeping over you. Sans is watching you too, and he moves to sit next to you. He looks out the window, peering around you. "huh, you can see the city from here."

You follow his gaze. The city is bright and colorful, glittering like a lake of light in the darkness. "Wow. It's beautiful. I'm glad we can see it from here. Undyne and Alphys would be super disappointed if they couldn't."

"nah, after the day we've had, i'm sure they wouldn't have cared much."

You look back to Sans. "So you had fun today too?"

He smiles and takes your hand. "i did. thanks for bringing everyone out here. i think we all needed a day of fun."

You rub your hand over his bones. "I'm glad they had fun. But...can I be honest?"

"please do," Sans says curiously.

You blush and look down. "I mostly did it for you. Your dreams have been so bad recently and...I felt like I was losing you a little."

"what do you mean?"

You wave your free hand in the air. "I mean, like I was losing you to yourself. I mean, I even made the dumbest pun the other day and you didn't even notice. I'm so happy you finally confided in me, but I was starting to worry that it was all you were focusing on. I thought that because I kept bringing stuff up, it was my fault that your nightmares kept getting worse. But...." Oh geez, you sounded so selfish! "I just wanted to have you back. Even for a day."
Sans is quiet for a moment.

"I'm sorry," you mumble. "I'm probably not making sense."

"Am I scaring you?" His voice is barely a whisper. "Telling you everything, is it making you scared of me?"

You quickly look up, squeezing his hand in yours. "Sans, no. Of course I'm not scared of you. I'm just...worried. And I know you don't want me to be," you add, cutting him off. "But I love you bone boy. Worrying kind of comes with the territory."

"That's why I didn't want to tell you." Sans looks away, brow bone furrowing.

"Secrets in a relationship aren't a good thing," you tell him. "If it's on your mind, I want to know."

Sans scoffs. "Sure, cause you're a real pro at secrets, aren't ya?"

You let go of his hand, a little stung. "What are you talking about?"

"The radio stuff? The emails?" At your blank look, he adds, "Abby told me. Besides, I listen to the show. It's no secret people are harassing you, even though you try to hide it. When were you gonna tell me about that?"

You cross your arms a little defensively. "I wasn't going to keep it from you. Piling on the troubles while you were dealing with this Gaster thing didn't seem like a good idea. And it's really not a big deal. People in the media business get hate mail sometimes. That's just how it is."

"Sure, but how often do those messages carry threats to end your life?" His voice has risen slightly. "You're overreacting!"

"And you're not reacting enough!"

You two glare at each other for a moment. You turn to look back out the window. You're almost at the top of the Ferris wheel. Your eyes are stinging. "Fine," you finally say. "I'm a hypocrite about keeping secrets. I'm sorry."

Sans sighs. "Damn it. I really am no good." You peek back at him. He's got his hand over his sockets. "This was supposed to be a romantic ride and I ruined it by being an idiot. I'm the one who's sorry." He reaches for your hand and you allow him to hold it. "You did all of this today for us. For me. I shouldn't have tried to push. I know you trust me. And I trust you." His pupils are dim as he meets your eyes. "Are you mad at me?"

You give him a pout with puffed up cheeks. Then you grab his 'unicorn' hat and swap it with your spiky one. You can't help but snort at the sight of Sans' befuddled look as he pokes at the soft spikes. He looks like a punk hedgehog. "Okay. Now I'm not mad."

Sans laughs loudly and you feel the warm tingle of magic as he slides you up against him. His arm slips around your waist. "So, how much time do we have left for our romantic date?"

"About four minutes. Better move fast, bone boy."

"Hmm. I prefer to take things slow," he murmurs as his hands gently rise on your back. "But I think I can make an exception for you." He presses his teeth against you and you feel the sensation of a mouth against yours. He kisses you deeply and makes you melt against him the entire ride down.
Chapter End Notes

Sorry no skelesins for you! :D
It's almost two weeks into December when snow finally hits the city. You wake up one morning to see a heavy swirl of white flakes outside your window. Sans is curled up against you with his back to the sight. You kiss his forehead gently in several spots, trying to ease him awake. "Hey sleepy bones."

He grumbles without opening his sockets.

"It's snowing out there."

That finally wakes him up a little. He rolls over to look out the window. "huh. look at that."

You snuggle up against his spine, wrapping your arms around his ribs. "You okay?"

He's quiet for a moment, idly rubbing your arm. "i am actually," he says with a little surprise. "probably 'cause you're here."

"Well, snow way was I gonna let you wake up alone with the year's first snowfall." You keep your voice casual as relief sweeps through you. You've noticed on more than one occasion that when Sans woke from his nightmares, the very first thing he did was look to the window. It took you a while to piece together that he was checking to make sure it was the glow of the city out there and not the quiet dimness of Snowdin.

Sans chuckles. "you see white through me." He startles you by suddenly rolling over and pinning you beneath him. His pupils are bright but fuzzy and his voice thick as he whispers, "sometimes it's still hard to believe that you're really here. that i was lucky enough to find you."

You place your hands in the back of his skull and pull him in for a slow kiss. "That's my line bone head," you whisper in an embarrassingly hoarse voice. You kiss and cuddle for a while after that, purely content with a comfortable silence. But eventually you drag yourself out from the warmth of the covers and into the shower.

You wrap your hair in a towel after lingering in the warmth for a while and head to the living room. Sans is on your beanbag, watching the activity in the snow filled park. He's wearing your headphones and bobbing his head slightly in time with the music on your iPod. You sink down next to him with a content sigh. Sans slips the headphones down around his neck. The music bleeds out quietly;

"-and IEE would walk five hundred miles and IEE-"

"you humans made wonderful inventions called cars and planes for traveling. why would anyone walk a thousand miles?"
You snicker. "It's supposed to represent just how far you're willing to go for the one you love."

"it's impractical."

"It's romantic," you correct. "Actually, a walk in the fresh snow does sound nice."

Sans groans. "ya know what else sounds nice? anything that doesn't involve getting up and going out into the cold."

"Come on you big baby." You tug at his sleeve and pout in that way he can't resist. "Go get Pap and we'll all go get some hot chocolate at this place Abby told me about. I promise it's not too far."

Sans, who had pointedly looked away at your pout, peeks back at you and sighs. "ok. make sure you bundle up." He grins widely. "we don't need the human getting sick again."

You throw your wet towel at his face.

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You hate to admit it, but Sans does have a point. You put on your cutest scarf, black buckled boots and arrange your hair around a thick knitted hat with a little floof at the top. Sans has swapped out his usual blue coat for one that is...also blue but a slight shade darker and lined with fur in the hood, which he has pulled up over his skull. Papyrus is wearing a surprisingly stylish long black coat and his red scarf. You whistle as you approach the brothers at the bottom of the complex.

"Going my way boys?"

You see Sans give your outfit a quick look over and smile cheekily. "sorry well dressed lady. 'fraid i'm taken."

You swing your hip around and start to prance off. "Oh, guess I'm just too hot for you!" You're so busy teasing you miss Sans sliding up behind you. You squeal as he wraps his arms around your waist, almost making you slip.

"Sans!"

"just trying to cool you down babe," he snickers.

Papyrus is obviously trying to be patient but his foot is tapping quietly in the snow so you choose to take pity on him. "C'mon boys, shop is this way."

The wild snowfall from this morning has eased into a few gentle flakes glistening in the air. Your breath makes a cloud in front of your face, but curiously, not from Sans or Papyrus. You put a hand in front of Sans' mouth just to check.

"uhh. what're ya doing?"

"You are breathing right?"

'i think so?"

He actually has to check?! He laughs loudly at your expression.

"course i breathe. i just don't have the hot gooey stuff inside that you humans do." He pokes your belly. "thus, no breath cloud."
Freaking monsters and their stupid magic.

You continue walking, finally letting yourself appreciate the Christmas decor set up in the shops and buildings you pass. As a personal rule, you didn't celebrate Christmas until after Thanksgiving. But now that everything is covered in a fresh layer of snow, it's easy to slip into the joyful spirit. Papyrus is entranced with the sparkling garlands and decorations and soon moves ahead. When he's out of earshot, you lean in a little closer to Sans.

"I've been thinking-"

"dangerous pastime."

You scoff. "For you maybe. I was thinking about some of the stuff you said about Gaster. You said he wasn't a bad dad in the beginning."

"yeah?" Sans confirms a little hesitantly.

"I know it's hard to let go of the bad stuff. But I think one reason it's so hard is because you did love him. He was family. When my grandpa died, all I could think about was everything I did wrong. But when I started remembering the good times, those mistakes and bad memories didn't seem so bad. Am I making sense?"

Sans is quiet and doesn't answer you. You hesitate for a moment and squeeze his hand.

"Will you try something for me? Whenever you start thinking about the horrible stuff regarding your dad, try to think of one good memory instead. It can be anything! Maybe he brought you a sweet or spilled a drink once or...or something." Your voice trails off in a mumble. Maybe it wasn't such a good idea after all.

Sans looks at you from the corner of his socket. He's silent for several gut wrenching minutes. "when paps was still a kid," he finally says slowly, "i was at home taking care of him. gaster had been in his lab for two days. this happened all the time so i didn't worry too much. then that night he comes bursting through the door and he goes 'sans! sans, we have to move! i need you in the lab!'." His voice is growing slightly more animated as he talks, his pupils glinting. "i was so flustered i just grabbed paps and ran after him. we got to the lab and he started shouting about how he cracked it, he had found the solution but there was just one thing left. i said 'what? what do you need?' he looked at me and said 'go grab the updog'."

Your hands fly over your mouth. "Sans you didn't!"

Sans covers his face in shame. "i did."

You howl with laughter, actually having to hold on to him for support. "You fell for the updog joke?! Babe!" Actual tears are in your eyes.

Sans is bright blue with embarrassment but he's grinning widely. "heh, you shoulda seen gaster. he actually fell down he was laughing so hard. real proud of himself for coming up with that one. even paps thought it was hilarious."

"Wait, wait," you gasp. You pull out your phone, setting it to video. "Okay, I need you to actually say it. For science."

"no way."

"Say it! Saaaay it!" you whine. When he attempts to walk away, you turn the camera to your own
face and pout. "See that, future Sans? I'm wounded."

He sighs deeply. "you're not gonna let it go, are ya?"

"Nope!" You turn the camera back to him. "Might as well get it over with."

After a slight scowl, Sans pulls the hood down over his face. "isaidwhatisupdog," he mumbles quickly.

It's so silly but you're grinning from ear to ear. You kiss his fluff covered cheek, giggling uncontrollably. "Atta boy!"

"you are a stinker," he growls.

"Well, it's a doggone shame you feel that way!"

"WHAT ARE YOU TWO DOING BACK THERE?" Papyrus asks, drawn back by your undignified snorting. "WHAT IS SO FUNNY HUMAN?"

"Just laughing at your brother's expense," you say cheerfully as you shove your phone away.

Papyrus nods in understanding. "ALWAYS A FUN PASTIME."

"yeah, yeah, laugh it up you two." Sans shuffles off in a huff. You follow after him with Pap, fighting to control your laughter the rest of the walk. You soon reach the shop and it appears Sans has forgiven you because you two are holding hands as you head to the door. Through the wide windows you can see it's absolutely packed inside. Your stomach rumbles and you check to make sure you're not drooling. Hot chocolately goodness, here you come!

"____." Sans says quietly. His grip on yours tightens. When you look back him quizzically, he silently points at the window.

NO MONSTERS ALLOWED

The sign next to the door is loud in it's bluntness. Your jaw drops. How could you have missed it? "What the hell?"

"think abby forgot to mention this." Sans' tone is bitter but not surprised.

"No, no Abby wouldn't just forget about something like that." You can't stop staring at the sign as disgust crawls up your throat. "Hell, she'd never eat at a place that...I don't...." You're speechless with rage. Abby ate here not three days ago! This must have just happened. Your gaze finally shifts back inside to the crowded room, to the completely human crowd, that is beginning to notice the two monsters standing out in the snow.

A few of them jeer, and though you can't hear them through the window, you see their mouths moving, uttering cruel, disgusting things about your closest friends. You sneer back at them and loop arms with Sans and Papyrus. Sans attempts to pull away and you hiss, "Don't you dare. Don't give them what they want."

You drag the skeletons away, no direction in mind. You just need to get away from those hateful stares. Sans is silent but Papyrus is sniffling quietly.

You have to say something. "Hey, it's fine guys. We'll just go somewhere else. You know, they say there's a Starbucks on every corner. Starbucks has pretty good hot chocolate and there's coffee and
cakes and...crap." You stop suddenly. You're shaking. "I'm so sorry. I had no idea."

Papyrus puts a hand on your shoulder. He smiles at you, clearly trying to put on a brave face. "DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TIME WE HAVE COME ACROSS SUCH A SIGN."

"it's not your fault," Sans adds. Damnit the fake smile is back. So much for progress. You frown at him before looking around. Lovely. You've got no idea where you are.

"Let's just...walk til we find something," you mumble.

You wander for a while, each one of you lost in your own thoughts. Your stomach is still twisting. After a time you happen to look up and see a corner store with a large music note above its door. Ooh a music shop!

Your feet have already started moving over to the store entrance. "Let's stop in here for a second." You pause to check for any more disturbing keep out signs and enter the store.

It's like a balm on your soul. Some of the tension eases from you as you glance around eagerly. It's a lot bigger than you originally thought. All kinds of instruments of various colors and sizes line the walls. There's a brass section, strings, drums and entire section dedicated just to guitars. The middle is filled with rows of sheet music, CDs and pretty much everything a musician could possibly need. Sans and Papyrus look around curiously as they enter behind you.

"Hey there! Welcome to-oh." The voice, belonging to a stick thin Asian guy covered in tattoos rounds the corner and stops short as he registers that two skeletons are standing in his store. You puff up instinctively. Oh hell no! You've had enough of dealing monster phobic assholes-

"Woah. You guys are real monsters right?" The guy is staring at Sans and Papyrus in awe. Sans is a little taken aback but Pap immediately leaps forward to shake the guy's hand.

"HELLO! I AM THE GREAT PAPYRUS!"

"Jake," the guy answers. His entire frame shakes from the force of Papyrus' greeting. "Nice grip there."

Papyrus beams. "YOU AS WELL! YOUR SKIN IS SO COLORFUL. WHAT DO THESE PICTURES MEAN?"

Jake looks at his arms proudly. "Oh man, each one has a story. Like the tree and snake was from-oh crap!" He seems to realize he's still working because he straightens and smiles sheepishly. "Sorry, kinda got off track there. You guys looking for anything in particular?"

Put at ease by the fact that Jake clearly isn't a bigoted jerk, you smile back. "Just looking around. I kinda have a thing for music."

Jake cocks his head, frowning slightly. After a second, his eyes widen. "Holy crap! You're ____ right? I listen to E.B.B.T all the time! Excellent tune choices."

"Oh! Thank you," you say, a little flustered. This is a first. Usually people who recognized you in public immediately talked about your view on monster policies. You've never been complimented on the music before. "That's very sweet of you."

Jake smiles widely and you can't help but notice the whiteness of his teeth. He looks to Sans and sticks his hand out. Sans shakes it, seemingly amused by the skinny guy.
"sans," he says just as a farting noise comes from their clasped hands. Oh good grief! When he even pull that stupid whoopee cushion out?

Jake jerks back in surprise. "Uhh, funny man. Huh."

Sans shrugs and puts his hands in his pockets. "just got a big funny bone."

Jake finally laughs. "Well, feel free to look around and let me know if you need any help."

"got any trombones?"

"SANS I AM NOT LETTING YOU GET ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE THINGS!"

"c'mon bro, how else am i gonna provide background music?"

You watch in amusement as the brothers follow Jake over to the brass section, arguing playfully about why the previous trombone had mysteriously disappeared when they came to the surface. You had no idea Sans knew how to play. Though given its name, it does make sense in its own way. You head to the guitar section. There's a huge selection of acoustic and electric. You run your fingers over the strings of slightly faded older acoustic. A little tingle runs up your arms at the sound it makes. How long has it been since you played?

You find you can't resist gently picking the instrument up. There's a stool near the wall so you sit and strum out a few notes, fiddling with the tuning. Just like riding a bike, your fingers naturally fall into place as you pluck out a simple song. The sound is so familiar and soothing and your heart aches painfully after such a long absence.

After a few simple warm up tunes, you close your eyes and try to remember the notes for Mayberry. You hum quietly as you fumble through the first few notes. Then your fingers grow steady, falling back into the familiar rhythm.

"Well I miss Mayberry, sitting on the porch drinking ice cold cherry" -strum- "coke. Where everything is black and white." You sing softly to yourself, eyes still closed.

You finally open your eyes as you reach the last few lines and it's no surprise to see Sans sitting on the floor in front of you, skull in his hands and a gentle smile on his face. He claps as you finish, the bones clinking together lightly.

"didn't know you played."

"Could say the same about you."

Sans shrugs. "it was more to annoy Pap. i only knew like two songs."

You play a random melody, picking the notes at whim. "I used to play. Or I was learning to at least. I lost my guitar in the fire. After that time just...got away from me and I never replaced it."

"do you miss it?"

A sigh slips out. "I really do. Maybe I'll get one soon. It'd be nice to start playing again."

Sans stands and runs his phalanges over the wood. "can i try?"

You brighten at his curiosity and switch places with him. He picks up your instruction quickly and soon he's strumming out 'Row Your Boat.'
You watch him as he concentrates. "I'm sorry about the cocoa place," you finally say. "It makes me sick that people are so narrow minded."

Sans stops playing. "That's what Tori and Asgore are fighting so hard for. We've really been lucky so far, but now the shock of everyone comin' out of the mountain is starting to wear off. People are getting bold."

"It's not right. Monsters are people not...not mindless creatures to keep out." You're getting worked up and Sans can see it. He beckons you close. When you lean down, he gives you a light kiss.

"It's gonna be fine," he whispers. It almost sounds like he's trying to convince himself. "Look at it this way; never would've found this place if we had just gone in the cafe. Jake looks like a good kid."

Jake is showing Papyrus how to use a drum set. He's completely at ease around the tall skeleton.

Sans is right. You give him another kiss and straighten. "Let's just go make cocoa at my place. I think it's high time we broke out the Christmas movies."

As you're heading out, Jake shyly approaches you. He hands you a torn out sheet of paper. "Hey, if you're ever looking for some new music, these artists are really good and totally under appreciated."

You take this list and glance over it. You don't recognize a single band name. Wouldn't hurt to check these out though. "Thanks Jake! I'll give them a listen."

Jake blushes and runs a hand through his hair. You don't notice Sans slip a little closer to you, giving Jake a smile that was just a little too wide.
"That last song was recommended by my new friend Jake. Shout out to him if he's listening."

Tod nods his approval, shifting his headphones slightly. "Always nice to get recommendations. If any of our listeners have hot new or hey, even old music you want to hear, drop us an email at ebbradio.mail. So moving on, it's been announced today that the committee for the integration of monsters have finally been granted a date when their proposed bill will be voted on. That will be happening mid January I believe."

You nod. "As I'm sure most of you know, monsters have been on the surface for almost ten months now. While certain privileges have been granted, no legal rights have been passed. This bill will help monsters gain basic rights throughout the country. Stores will no longer be able to deny service and employers will face racism charges if they deny hiring a monster who meets job requirements and things like that."

It was a huge step and Toriel was nearly in tears when she made the announcement to everyone a few days ago. Even Sans, doubtful as he was about the whole thing, had been swept up in everyone's happiness. Nothing was set in stone, and there was still a long ways to go, but progress was progress.

Tod motions to the intern manning the control panel. "Ok, we'll take a caller now. Mind your manners and we'll all have a good time."

You can't help but grit your teeth at the fact that Tod has to say that now. Mostly because of you. You tap the call button. "Hey there! You're on."

There's a few seconds of staticky noise then a man's voice comes over the speakers. "Hi, thanks for taking my call."

"Thanks for calling," Tod answers. "So tell us some of your thoughts on the monster bill."

"I actually have a question for ____.

Your heart sinks a little. "Go for it," you say, bracing yourself.

"I've heard you say before that you are close to the human ambassador for monsters. Is that correct?"

"That's right."

"Are you fully aware of what happened down there?"
You hesitate for a second, which is a mistake. The man continues, his tone growing harsher.

"I know the kid has mostly kept quiet about what exactly happened down there, but it is no secret that she had to fight against monsters. The monsters attacked her. Why should we as a people have our rights and safety put in jeopardy to satisfy beings who have attacked mankind before?"

"They," you answer, stressing Frisk's correct pronoun, "have indeed chosen to keep the exact events of what happened private. But I also know that when anyone is confronted with something they don't understand, the basic instinctive response is fight or flight. So if attacks did happen, they happened because of fear for their safety."

"Humanity certainly cannot deny acting the same in the past," Tod chimes in.

"Exactly. What happened in the past is in the past. What we need to be concerned with is what's happening now."

"What about the attacks that have happened in our city since monsters came to the surface?" Geez, this guy is persistent.

You tap your fingers against the table. "King Asgore has stressed that the few isolated incidents that have occurred have been based on misunderstandings and in self defense. And if you want to talk about attacks, I can name far more attacks that have been made towards monsters, rather than by them. Should I start?"

The only answer is a dial tone. You sigh. At least it hadn't ended with the guy yelling at you. As you ready the next song, Tod continues talking.

"To those still listening, such concerns do have a point. But fear is the real enemies here, not the monsters. Mistakes have happened in the past and I'm sure many more will be made."

The music starts (Shakira's Try Everything) and you slip your headphones off.

Tod sighs and tugs his down too. "Hey no screaming this time. That's a plus."

"Yeah," you mumble. You stand up and stretch. "I'm gonna go grab something. Be right back."

Perks of being a host, you now have an office. It's small, more like a large closet, but it's your space. After Emily's stuff was cleared out, you put up a few framed posters of your favorite bands on the wall and pictures of you with the skelebros on the desk next to your work computer. You head there now, wanting to grab the list Jake gave you. You actually liked several of the songs and Tod wanted to see it.

You round the corner just in time to see the gray haired and wrinkled Charlie, the station's resident custodian, step out of your office. It's not time for vacuuming is it? It's barely six. "Hey Charlie," you call.

Charlie jumps a little and looks to you. His face is extra wrinkly, thanks to the frown on his face. "Miss _____ you shouldn't go in there right now."

"Why?" You ignore his protests and peer through the door.

Your office has been trashed. All your papers and files are spread across the floor, most of them ripped up. The framed posters are smashed. The picture of you and the boys is out of its frame and taped to the edge of your computer. Large red X's cover all of your faces and written on the cracked screen of the monitor are the words 'YOU'RE GONNA BURN BITCH!' in the same red marker.
Your knees go weak. An odd ringing builds on your head as you sag against the door frame and stare at the destruction.

"I'm so sorry miss," Charlie says in a shaky voice. "I heard a crash and came to see what it was. Found it like this."

So this had just happened. And what was worse, this either meant someone from outside had managed to sneak all the way in here, or someone inside the station did it. You reach up and grab your galaxy necklace as your breathing gets harsher. Hold on, just hold on. "D-" you clear your throat- "did you see who did this?"

Charlie shakes his head. "I'm going to contact security." He's gone before you manage to respond.

You numbly enter the office. Something reeks like rotten eggs. You find the source to be your chair, covered in the foul goop. You stand there in a daze, hardly able to form a coherent thought. The only thing you can think is why? Why did this happen? You were just trying to do the right thing! In your whole crappy, fake life, you just wanted to do something good. Was it punishment? Maybe that was it. Nothing you did ever turned out right. You were just garbage who deserved this. How could someone like you ever accomplish anything good in this world?

When Abby bursts in, followed by one of the security guys, you realize you've sunk to your knees and you're gasping harshly. You feel her hand on your back and fight not to pull away.

"Oh my God," she says in a horrified voice. "Are you okay?"

No, no you're not okay. "I'm fine," you choke out. Panic is bubbling under the surface of your skin, screaming to be released. "I-I need to clean this up."

Abby pulls you to your feet, shaking her head. "No, Charlie and I are gonna take care of this."

You shake your head right back at her. You can't ask her to do that. "It's fine, I can help-"

"Where's Sans?"

You take a gulping breath. "Work. I think." Sans has been so busy recently. Gone early in the morning and back late at night. With Christmas now only three days away, work has been insane for both of you and Sans had even picked up some holiday work for the extra money. It's almost hard to keep track of exactly where he is at any given moment.

Abby steers you out of your thrashed office. "Okay, I'm gonna walk you over to Grillby's. Will you stay there until Sans can come get you?"

"Grillby's," you repeat numbly. "Why?"

Abby's voice is tight. "Cause the freak that did this might still be around. And they aren't gonna walk right into a bar full of monsters after a stunt like this. Grillby can watch you til Sans can get here."

"But the show-"

"Girl, you are in no state to be working the show right now." Abby grabs your coat and purse, shoving them into your arms. She barely gives you a chance to slip the coat on before pulling you out into the cold. You both hurry to the bar but the warmth that washes over you when you step inside doesn't do much to ease your shivers. You let Abby direct you to the bar. Grillby is in his usual place and he looks at you, the usual crackled greeting fading away when he sees how pale
your face is.

**What's going on?** He signs slowly to you, the flames on his hands dimmed slightly. That's right, Frisk was teaching Grillby how to use sign language to help him communicate with the human customers that couldn't understand his fire speech. Abby, who doesn't know a speck of sign language, still gets the gist of what he's asking.

"Hey there Grillbz," she says in a low voice. She's been in here with you a few times and picked up on Sans' nickname for the fire monster. "Is it cool if _____ just hangs out here for a bit? There was an incident at the station."

Grillby tilts his head questioningly.

"Someone tore my office apart," you mumble, staring at the bar counter. The flames on Grillby's head crack sharply and the heat coming from his body rises slightly.

"And I'm worried the jerk might still be there and...well." Abby rubs your back gently. "I'm worried about her. Sans is still at work and I know she'll be safe in here while we clean things up until Sans can come get her. That cool?"

Well, Grillby is anything but cool. You snort quietly to yourself in an almost hysterical way. Grillby nods after giving you a long look and holds his hand up to his head like a phone. You shake your head.

"I haven't called him yet," you answer, putting your head in your hands.

Abby gives you one last pat. "Do that now. I gotta get back and let Tod know what's going on. Just let me know when Sans gets here, okay?"

You nod, your voice getting stuck in your throat. Abby heads back and you continue to just stare at the tabletop, running your finger over a pattern on its surface. Grillby stays by you for a while, the gentle sound of his flames oddly comforting. But soon, he has to attend to other customers. He leaves you with a glass of your usual drink and points at your phone before moving away. You still haven't called Sans. It takes all the effort you have to finally pick up the phone. Unsurprisingly, you get his voicemail.

"M-hey." You voice cracks. "Um, I'm at Grillby's. I need you to come get me. Call me. Please."

You shove the phone back in your purse with shaking hands. You sip at the drink for a while, your leg bouncing uncontrollably. It's getting loud in the bar as the monsters pour in during the after work rush. The noise is making your head pound and you just can't keep sitting there. You get to your feet and almost run out of there, desperate to escape the noise and the crowd. You stand just outside the bar, your breath fogging up the air in front of you. It's freezing and night has fallen. You look at your phone one more time. No response from Sans. You swallow down a sob and start walking towards your car. You just want to go home. You want to be alone you so can fall apart without anyone seeing. It's honestly a miracle that you don't wreck your car on the drive back to the apartments. You can't focus through the panicked haze that's fallen over your mind and because of the distraction have several close calls that just rack up your anxiety.

When you pull into the parking lot, your chest is heaving with the force of the panic screaming to be released. There's no danger and yet your body is screaming at you to run. Your hands are trembling as you get out of your car. In your haste, you lose your footing and fall. A sharp cry escapes you as your hands scrape against the cement and you scramble to your feet. You can barely breathe as you climb the stairs and finally, finally reach your apartment. Great sobs escape you as you force the door
open and fall inside. You somehow manage to close the door behind you before you start wailing.
Your hands are wrapped around yourself and pain shoots up from your palms at the force of your

grip. Slowly, you peel your hands away and look at them. The skin of your palm is torn from the fall,
bright pink from the cold of the snow. Little hints of red peek at you from the cut, almost like a
challenge.

You stare at the trace amounts of blood and it's like a trigger is flipped. You have to release this
overwhelming, terrifying panic before it consumes you. There's a voice, a tiny, desperate voice in the
back of your mind that's screaming at you to stop as you lurch to your feet and stumble to the
kitchen. But the rational thought is eaten up by the panic and you're almost numb as you open the
silverware drawer. The knives in there glint coldly. The shaking has stopped as you reach in and pull
out the sharpest one. It's the same one that Sans had embedded in your wall. It seems like a lifetime
ago.

You sink to the ground, and oh god, you want to cry, you want to stop, you want to bleed, no you
don't, you need to do something!

The blade is cold against your skin and that numbness, that terrible, all consuming numbness has
eaten all rational thought. You slide the blade across your lower arm. At first, it's just another thin
line. It matches all the others. Then blood beads up along the slit and it starts to roll slowly down
your arm.

It's not enough.

Another cut, another and another. You can feel your heart and Soul crying out, sobbing but now,
now the panic is starting to ease, just a little bit and finally you can cry. Tears roll down your face
silently and you lower the knife to the ground. Six cuts. Crimson trails cover your arm and a new
kind of numbness is creeping up your limb.

What is that buzzing?

You sway slightly as you look at your purse. You had dropped it when you came in and phone slid
out. It's lit up now and you can see it's Sans calling. You reach for your phone and topple over, your
head smacking against the tile. The pain barely registers but it does make the room spin a little. Your
non-bloody hand creeps forward and you manage to brush the accept button.

"_____?" His voice is panicked. "shit, babe, where are you? i'm at grillby's and he said you left and-
please tell me you're ok."

You try to speak but all that comes out is a strangled sob. You can't let him see you like this. This is
far worse than any panic attack. Oh God, what have you done?

"shit," he says again. "baby, i'll come to you. just tell me where you are."

"I-I...can't....Sans."

"please." He's begging you. The pain in his voice is so much worse than the numbness. "are you at
home?"

"...Yes."

It's barely a second later and the air shifts just slightly. "oh my god."

You can't look at him. You turn your face into the ground, harsh sobs racking your body. His
kneecaps hit the tile with a sharp clang. "I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm so sorry!" The words pour of
you but they mean nothing. It fixes nothing.

"baby." The word is strangled and no, no he's crying. You did this to him and it's another sharp cut to join the others. "i-oh god, what do i do? i don't...."

You can't fight him as he gathers you up into his arms, rocking you gently. His tears splash down on your face but you still can't bear to look at him. Crap, you're getting blood all over his work clothes. You try to pull away but he crushes you to his ribs.

"Your shirt," you croak out.

"damn it, i don't care about the shirt!" Sans takes a long shuddering breath. His voice is trembling almost as much as his body. "ok, ok, i-i'm here now. tell me what to do. i gotta...i gotta clean you up. yeah, that's a start."

The world spins as Sans stands up, holding you in his arms. You clutch at his shirt and moan.

"i'm sorry," he whispers as he struggles to the bathroom. "just hold on. hold on for me."

You blink slowly, head groggy. "I've been holding on for a long time," you whimper. "I'm so tired Sans."

"heh, me too sweetheart. we'll make a club out of it. lazybones club. sound good?" Oh bless him, he's trying so hard and you, like the useless garbage you are can't even respond as he fights to open the door to the bathroom. He sets you down as gently as he can and you hear water running in the sink. You continue to stare at your knees and endless guilt eats at you. You're such a coward. You can't bear to look at Sans and see that pain you've carved into him.

He kneels next to you, wet rag in his hand. "'m gonna...clean your arm a little first. ok?" You nod wordlessly and he takes your bloody arm. Some of the blood has started to dry and crack in a few places. He dabs at the cuts, flinching every time you whimper at the stings. Soon, the rag is stained red and some of the cuts are still bleeding. And it turns out that you hit your head a lot harder than you thought. His phalanges brush your hair and you hear him suck in a deep breath.

"'m gonna...i'll get a bath ready," he says, voice thick with sorrow.

You don't move as his does this and when the tub is filled, he kneels back down. "babe, i need you to just move to the tub for me. ok?"

Wordlessly, you stand and start to enter the tub. A soft tug on your uninjured arm stops you. "might wanna take this off first, huh?"

Oh. Your clothes. You start to tug at your shirt and stop. You've never been naked in front of him before and it feels wrong to just strip with him watching.

"i'll uh, i'll turn around. but m'not gonna leave you alone right now."

You wait for a moment, watching his reflection in the mirror face the door before undressing. Normally, such a situation would have you mortified with embarrassment, but your actions have already stripped you of any dignity. You slip into the tub, hissing a little as the hot water hits your cuts. He's filled the tub with bubbles that help to cover your nakedness. "I'm in," you say softly.

Sans nods. "can i...can i help? please?"

You can't manage more than a 'mm hm' and look downwards again before he turns. He kneels down
next to the tub and with caution of one handling hot glass, washes away the remaining blood. He even washes your hair and the sensation of his bones running through your hair, gently massaging your scalp, makes your eyelids droop. When he finishes, he blinks out of sight for a few seconds and returns with pajamas. As you leave the tub and dry off, he digs through the cabinet, taking care not to look over until you are completely dressed. He has you sit on the toilet as he bandages your arm. Neither of you move when he finishes. His hands are gripping yours tightly and it hurts but you can't bring yourself to say anything.

"look at me," he finally says. "_____ look at me."

More tears seep out from your eyes as you finally look at him. The hurt and the fear in his face makes your heart feel like it's shattering all over again. Faded blue tear trails run down his face and his pupils are nearly swallowed by the darkness of his sockets. He sighs shakily and slowly lowers himself to the floor. He brings his skull down until it taps against your knees.

"you can't do that to me," he whispers. "don't...don't ever do this again. i'm begging you."

You want to curl in on yourself and shrink away. "I was doing so good. I haven't hurt myself in months. No, I guess it's been a full year." You sniff miserably. "I really am full of crap."

Sans looks up at you. He stands after a moment and starts to reach for you. At the last second he stops and looks at his shirt. The red polo is splattered with darker red spots. He tugs the shirt off and tosses it to the pile on the floor before picking you up again. His bare ribs press against you, warm and solid. Exhausted as you are, you can't help but notice that they're not shaped like normal human ribs. They're thicker and looked partially fused together in a few places.

Sans is puffing quietly by the time he makes it out to the living room.

"I can walk," you say quietly.

"just lemme do this." His voice gives no room for argument. He must be angry at you. As he should be. He sets you down on the couch, grabbing the throw you kept tossed over the back. He's silent as he wraps it around you and gets you some water. The quiet continues as he mops up the bit of blood on the kitchen floor and disappears down the hall. When he returns he's wearing your oversized Phantom of the Opera shirt and fuzzy star pj pants. The sight is enough to bring a ghost of a smile to your face.

It's not until he sits down next to you that he asks, "does it hurt?"

You glance at your arm. "Not as bad as it did." You resist the urge to press your fingers against the cuts and instead clasp your hands together. "Sans I'm so sorry."

He looks on the verge of breaking down himself, sitting there on the edge of the couch. "i thought i understood," he whispers. "god, i had no clue."

You shrink back against the arm of the couch. Tears are threatening to fall again. You are so sick of crying.

He must hear you sniffling because his skull snaps up. "sweetheart, it's ok." He scoots closer and puts an arm around your shoulder.

"Betcha thought I couldn't be more of a freak huh?" You smile shakily at him, but his expression remains tight.

"what happened? grillbz said someone trashed your office?" You nod and quietly give him the
details. His grip tightens with anger. "why didn't you wait at the bar?"

"I couldn't. It was like this voice in my head was telling me to run." You gesture at your head. "I can't think clearly during attacks. I know it was stupid. And I feel worse because of that. It just...it got too loud and I knew I was gonna lose it." You reach for his hand. "I hate it when you have to see me like this, but you're the only one I trust."

Sans presses your hand against his teeth, sockets squeezed shut. "i should've paid more attention to my phone," he says hoarsely. "you were counting on me and i let you down."

"I can't expect you to be at my beck and call at all times-"

"you would drop everything if it was me, right?"

Yes, absolutely. You don't even have to say it out loud before Sans continues.

"i heard it ringing, but i didn't answer it. i'm sorry." He hesitates, pulling you closer. "you...you weren't gonna..."

He can't get the words out, but you can tell what he's trying to ask. "I don't want to die anymore Sans. I have too much to lose now."

He sags with relief. He kisses your head over and over, trembling a little. That's right. You had people that did care for you and love you. Your actions now had consequences that went far beyond just yourself. You had thought that it couldn't get worse than seeing the horror in your parents faces when they found out. But the you've hurt Sans so badly tonight. You know that, despite his assurances, you've crossed a line here. You've left a wound on him and that hurts far more than any physical pain you've experienced.

"I'm so sorry," you whisper. "I'm sorry I gave in."

"no, no baby you are so strong. i swear if i find the asshole that did this-" His left eye flashes blue-

"i'm gonna give them one hell of a bad time."

The force of his promise sends a shiver up your back.

Sans starts rubbing your head, taking care to avoid the tender spot. "so. movie or music?"

"music please."

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You pass out before the end of the fourth song. Sans watches you sleep for a long time after that. He rubs his thumb over your cheek. His Soul lurches as once again the memory of seeing you lying on the floor, arm covered in crimson flashes through his mind. He's seen you die in his dreams many times. As terrible as they are, he always wakes to find you right by his side, alive and warm. Tonight, for a single, terrifying second, he thought the worst of his nightmares had come true.

He doesn't blame you. The human mind is complex. An ill human mind is even more so. He knows that you had simply lost control. No, he blames the scum that ripped your office apart and sent you into this dangerous spiral. He blamed the people the called the station just to scream at you. He blamed the asshole and Emily that started this whole thing.

But mostly, he blames himself. He could've, should've done more for you. He narrows his gaze and your Soul flickers into view. The edges are still slightly faded, but the swirl of colors has mostly
returned to normal. The anxiety and depression effects your Soul in strange ways that he doesn't really understand. It scares him, far more than he's willing to admit.

He reaches over to grab his phone. The movement makes you shift slightly and mumble in your sleep. He freezes until you settle down again. He rubs your head as he dials up Alphys.

"hey. i need your help with something."
I apologize for the lateness of this chapter, but it didn't feel quite right to end it where I was originally planning, so it is a lot longer than I first thought.
You guys are amazing and are the reason I continue writing this story! Thank you so much for all your support! *throws confetti*
I love comments and questions so keep them coming!
theninjamouse.tumblr.com
theninjawrites.tumblr.com

Tod gives you until the day after Christmas off. You protest, even though you honestly feel like you need it. He's livid about the whole thing, and the level of his anger quiets your protests. He promises a repaired office and lock on the door when you get back so it's with great guilt that you accept the sudden mini-vacation.

Sans tries to hide it, but you can tell he's relieved. There's an odd sort of tension between the two of you thanks to your breakdown. It's Christmas Eve now and for the last three days, Sans has hovered at your side like he's scared that you'll collapse at any moment. He has every right to be worried about you but his constant, quiet fussing is starting to drive you nuts. He wanted to take work off as well to watch you and it was only when you threatened to throw out his entire ketchup stash that he reluctantly left you alone for five minutes. You know that you're the reason he's acting like this. The fact that he cares so deeply about you only makes you love him more. But seriously! He won't even let you use the bathroom without waiting outside the door!

Not only that, but he has completely stopped talking about anything to do with Gaster, his nightmares or the underground. The smile on his face feels forced and at times, a little faked. It's like the door to his heart that you've worked so hard to crack open has completely shut once again. It's only been a few days but the emotional distance between the two of you feels like it's been ripped open. It hurts, but how are you supposed to bring it up?

The more immediate problem however, is that thanks to his constant hovering, it's been impossible to complete the last part of his Christmas present. But thanks to a clever bit of acting, you managed to send Sans running to the store on a last minute errand before the party at Toriel's place. You've got to hurry and finish before he gets back.

"Okay, now to the left. Your other left."

"GOT IT!"

You're currently balanced on Papyrus' bony shoulders in Sans' room. There's a sheet of glow in the dark stars in one hand and sticky tack in the other. Pap takes a step over and you start on the Scorpio constellation. It's the last one. "Can I see the paper again?"

Papyrus lifts the reference sheet so you check on the star positions. "SANS IS GOING TO LOVE THIS!"

"Of course he will!" You boast. "It's from me after all. Now hold still, I gotta finish before he gets
Papyrus stops shifting and goes stone still. "WHAT WAS IT YOU SENT HIM TO GET?"

You push your thumb against a star, smiling a little evilly. "Something that's gonna take him a while to find."

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You're finished and lounging on the couch when Sans finally stomps in, brushing snow off his skull. He's got a brown bag under one arm.

"ya know what the store clerk did when i told her i was looking for 'sparkling spamberry' juice? she laughed at me! said there was no such thing." He's glaring at you as you put on your best confused expression.

"No way! That's so weird, it must be a country thing I guess, how silly of me, hey look at the time!" You bounce up and take the bag from him. A quick look confirms that he wound up getting the cranberry juice. Excellent. "We've gotta get going!"

You and the boys pile into your car, three separate bags of presents and overnight stuff in the back. Toriel wanted everyone to spend Christmas together and Frisk suggested that everyone just spend the night. It was gonna be a little tight in the goat monster's house but with you sharing with Sans and Papyrus in the Frisk's room, Alphys and Undyne claiming the guest room and Frisk sleeping with Toriel, you would make it work. You were excited; Christmas was always fun but this year you have a brand new quirky family to spend the holiday with.

If you can even freaking get there! It's Christmas Eve at rush hour and though Toriel's place isn't actually too far, you've been stuck in traffic for almost forty five minutes. You got out much later than you wanted and now you can't even get off to a side road.

"You know. What would. Be. Great?" you growl, smacking your head against the wheel in time with your words. "If we knew someone who could, I don't know, teleport?!"

Sans has his feet up on your dashboard and pouts at you. "babe, all those trips would burn me out. you don't want me to sleep all evening and miss the party do you?"

"YOU'LL PROBABLY END UP SLEEPING ANYWAY SANS," Papyrus points out from the back. He's more restless than you are. There's barely room for him back there as it is and frankly, holding still isn't his strong point.

"probably. look, i'm not the one who insisted we stop at grillby's to drop off a present first."

"The point of a Christmas present is to give it before Christmas!" You smack at his feet until he lowers them. "And who wanted to stay until he opened it?"

"but his face!" Sans grins widely. You can't help but giggle too. Grillby was a little...well expressionless but when he finally spared a minute to open his gift, even you had been able to see the exasperated look on his flaming face. Sans could barely contain himself as Grillby unfolded the 'Hunk of Burnin' Love' apron. He seemed to appreciate your cd of best bar tunes you made for him a little bit more.

"Okay, fine it was worth it."

Sans puts his hands up. "but if you wanna point fingers at wasting time, we can talk about the
interesting lack of spamberry juice-"

"Oh look we're moving!" You quickly turn up Jingle Bell Rock and start belting along and soon Papyrus joins you, filling your car with off key singing. It takes another twenty minutes but finally you pull off onto the road that leads up to Toriel's place. It's a quaint two story Southern style place, in a quieter section of the city. It was because of Frisk and Toriel's status that they were able to get such a place. Most monsters had to make do with smaller apartments and trailer homes or if they were extremely lucky, a shared townhouse. Despite the general mistrust towards monsters regarding large purchases, some people were still willing to take their money. Some places, like the apartment complex you lived in, had no issues with allowing monsters and humans to live side by side. That's why your complex was a very heavy monster community.

The house is bright with Christmas lights and snow in the yard is kicked up from various snow-related activities. The university car that Alphys has access to is already parked in the driveway and you carefully pull up next to it. In a flash, Sans is on the other side of the door, opening it up for you. You snort. Burn him out huh? You accept his hand but when he also takes your bag from you a soft sigh escapes you.

"Hey Pap, would you mind going in and letting Toriel know we're here? I want to talk to Sans for a second."

Sans shifts in the snow a little as his brother heads inside. A rise in noise reaches you when he opens the house door and then disappears. You turn to Sans.

"it's kinda cold out here, can't we talk inside?"

"This will only take a second," you promise. You're not sure how to word this without sounding like a prick. "Sans, I know I scared you. It was wrong of me. And I know I keep apologizing, but I'm going to do it again. I'm so sorry I did that to you."

"i don't blame you for that," Sans starts to say, but you lift your hand.

"I'm going to promise you something right now," you say softly, starting straight into his concerned sockets. "I'm okay now. I'm going to be just fine. If something like that...if I get into a bad place again, I won't hesitate to run to you. You've shown me just how much you care the past few days, but you can't treat me like I'm a cracked egg forever. It's not fair to me and it's not fair to you. I'm not so fragile that I can't handle being on my own."

He blinks and a quick flash of hurt sweeps over his face. "you want to be alone?"

You shake your head quickly. "Not like that. I want you to not be afraid of leaving me alone sometimes. I love you, but if you keep acting like I'm about to fall apart at any moment, I'll be more likely to do just that. I can't stand feeling on edge and I don't want you feeling like that either." You hands fiddle with the edge of your Christmas sweater. Why is it so hard to get your thoughts out? "Do you...do you get what I'm saying? I know we can't go back to exactly how things were but...I just want my pranking, goofy, lazy skeleton back. I want you to trust me again."

"you think i don't trust you?"

You bite your lip. "I-I don't know. It feels like it."

Sans sets the bags down on the snowy driveway and pulls you close to him. He softly taps his forehead against yours. "you did scare me," he breathes. "i haven't felt anything like that in a long time."
"I know." You hands clutch at the back of his jacket.

"i don't wanna lose you."

"You won't," you promise strongly. "Not ever."

He sighs and his breath sweeps over you. Not hot or cold. It's simply there. It makes your face heat up. "you'll let me know if it gets bad again?"

You nod as emotion clouds up your throat and makes your lips tremble a little. "Can we start over?"

His hands move down your back slightly as he kisses you slowly and deeply and you kiss him back, hungry for this feeling of bliss. He hasn't kissed you since that night and your body was starved of his touch. Heat blooms in the places his hands grip you and oh heavens, you want to stand here forever. When he pulls back you have to fight back a whimper. You can't help but lean into his touch as he smiles at you.

"ok. let's start fresh then. heya. i'm sans."

You blink at him for a second before rolling your eyes. "I didn't mean that fresh bone boy."

"how fresh then? like outta the oven fresh or week old fresh or...?"

You giggle and poke his cheek. "You really are a sassy goofball."

"and you-" you bite back a surprised yelp when he suddenly grabs your waist and dips you. His sockets are gleaming with mirth. "are a beautiful mess."

You fan your face. "I think you mean a hot mess," you say a little breathlessly. Your face feels like it's on fire.

Sans chuckles and shakes his arms slightly. "wanna me to drop ya? snow might cool you off."

"Don't you dare!"

"Are you two done flirting in the snow or what?!" Undyne howls at you. The door is crowded with monsters, all watching the two of you and smiling like crazy. Frisk is barely visible, but they give you a thumbs up. And...oh geez, is that Mettaton? You didn't know he was going to be here. Sans pulls you back up and you both hurry inside, blushing intensely. Of course the moment you step inside, you immediately find yourself under mistletoe (which you're pretty sure wasn't there just a moment ago) and when Papyrus and Undyne start chanting 'SMOOCH SMOOCH!' you give Sans another quick kiss. You can't help but laugh with everyone else when his entire skull goes bright blue.

The interior of the house has been completely decked out in Christmas cheer. Garlands, lights, and paper strings are hung over the ceilings and walls. You can smell gingerbread and turkey. You drop your bags off in Frisk's room and it's time to start dinner. You're just glad that the food hasn't gone cold from your delay in traffic. Toriel has outdone herself with cooking. There's more food here than there was at Halloween and a lot more table space at which to eat it. The dining room is filled with noise and laughter, something you haven't experienced for a very long time. Sans keeps a careful eye on Frisk, pulling the bowl of spaghetti and meatballs (provided by Papyrus) close to him and out of their reach. A little bit of food did end up flying around, thanks to Undyne, but all eye sockets are spared from being targets this time around.

When dinner finishes and everyone wanders off to do various Christmas related actives, you stay
behind to help with the dishes. Sans hesitates, gaze searching your face for a second. You give him a
gentle smile and motion for him to join Papyrus and Frisk. He nods and heads into the living room.

"Is everyone alright with you two?" Toriel asks gently.

You pick up a few dishes from the table, carrying them over to the sink. "I think it is now." You roll
up your sleeves and start washing. It's only after you finish a few plates that you catch Toriel staring
at the bandages on your arm. Crap! You hurriedly pull the sleeve down, soaking the fabric. "Sorry,"
you mumble. Stupid, stupid! You were so used to only having the faded scars that you didn't even
think. Maybe...maybe she doesn't know exactly what it means. Sans didn't.

"My child." Toriel pulls the wet plate out of your hands, setting it to the side. She wraps her arms
around you in a tight hug. She smells of cinnamon and sugar. "I'm so sorry."

Crap. You shrink in on yourself, shame washing over you. "Toriel, I don't...it's not-

Her paw gently touches your head. "You don't need to explain, my child." Her voice is full of
understanding. "I could see it in your Soul the first time I met you."

You suppress a shiver and wrap your arms around her, squeezing tightly. "And you didn't say
anything?"

"I could see that you and Sans needed each other. That was enough. Frisk loved you too. What kind
of mother would I be if I didn't love my child's friend?"

A odd sounding laugh breaks from you. "You've goat to be the best mom ever."

She laughs loudly, a bright cheerful sound. Soon, you're laughing along with her, eyes leaking a
little. You finish cleaning up, chatting about her experiences teaching and the various recipes she has
yet to try. She's thrilled when you promise to make a copy of the various dishes you've learned to
make over the years. When all that is done you follow the excited chatter, most of which is coming
from the living room. A rather beat up copy of Ticket to Ride is out on the floor. Undyne and Alphys
are on a team with the green trains, Pap and Mettaton with the pink, and Sans and Frisk are on their
own with blue and red respectively. From a quick look, it seems like Sans and Frisk are closely tied.
Undyne isn't far behind but poor Pap....

"Darling, we can't win the game if you keep letting other people take our tracks!" Mettaton is
obviously frustrated but trying his best to be patient. Papyrus is visible flustered.

"BUT FRISK NEEDED THE TRACK FROM SALT LAKE TO LOS ANGLES!"

"Yes, but we needed it too! Now we have to go all the way around!"

"hey there buddy, watch your tone," Sans says cheerfully as his sockets go dark for a second.

Mettaton waves a hand distractedly. "Yes, yes, whatever."

You sit next to Sans, peering at the cards in his hand. "Oooh, that's a tough track."

He shrugs. "i'm almost there." He places down five new tracks and Undyne slams her fist against the
ground.

"Dammit Sans!"

"Do not break the floor!" Toriel comes into the room as well, frowning at Undyne. The fish monster
quickly pulls her fist up.

"Sorry," she says sheepishly. She leans in to Alphys and starts whispering furiously.

You lean against Sans' arm, watching the rest of the game unfold. You're pretty sure that Undyne would send the game flying at several moments if Toriel wasn't sitting there, watching with a sharp eye. The game is almost over when the doorbell rings. You hop up. "I'll get it!" No one else really seems to notice, as Frisk is on their last set of trains. You laugh to yourself as you head to the door. It's probably carolers.

"Oh, howdy! Merry Christmas!"

You jaw hits the floor.

The King of Monsters peeks in, having to duck his head a little. "Oh, you must be ____. I have heard about you from Frisk."

"I uh...yeah that's me," you say dumbly, staring up at the huge monster. He's a goat like monster, like Toriel but far bigger. He also has golden fur surrounding his face and extended horns. It takes you a moment to realize he's wearing a Christmas sweater with a large Santa face on it that's just a little too small for him.

He smiles at you almost a little nervously. "I am Asgore. It is very nice to meet you." He sticks out a hand and you shake it, your limb disappearing in his mass of fur.

"It's very nice to meet you, your Majesty." You start as you realize you haven't even invited him in. Not that's it's your home to invite him into but...he's the King! Surely it would be fine. "Please, come in."

He steps through with a deep laugh. "Please, just call me Asgore. Is...is Tori home?"

"Wha...oh yeah! Um, hey Toriel!" you call. "There's uh...it's..."

Toriel is already standing there and...oh boy. She's frowning heavily. "Asgore," she greets him coolly. Geez, looks like winter has come into the house too. Sans and Frisk peek around the corner and Frisk leaps towards the king. Asgore scoops them up, a gentle smile on his face. He looks back to Toriel. "I just came by to drop some gifts off Tori-Toriel," he corrects quickly.

Frisk looks to their mom and signs something you can't quite make out. Toriel sighs.

"Would you like some cider?"

Asgore brightens like Toriel's announced a second Christmas. You slide over to Sans as Asgore follows Toriel into the living room.

"Hey! Asgore, I didn't know you were coming!" Undyne sounds considerably more happy to see the King.

"YOUR MAJESTY! MERRY CHRISTMAS!"

You bump Sans with your shoulder. "So uh, did the room drop several degrees, or am I imagining it?"

Sans glances towards the living room. "monsters splitting up just...it doesn't happen very often. tori's been holding onto those betrayed and hurt feelings for a long time. she gets along with him, but only
just."

"I see."

He pulls on your hand and you follow him back into the living room. You finally take a moment to appreciate the Christmas tree that's been jammed into the corner of the room. It's huge and barely fits. The star on top is dangling at a dangerous angle and every branch is covered in various kinds of lights and ornaments. Most of them are hand-made, probably by Frisk and the students at the school. You study a macaroni framed one; the picture inside is of the entire group here tonight, excluding Mettaton. Everyone looks so happy and a little overwhelmed. It must have been taken right after everyone came to the surface. Several presents are already under the tree, including something large that is covered by a blanket. Maybe a small bike or scooter for Frisk?

"this tree's a little more impressive than that sad charlie brown thing sitting on your table," Sans remarks, hands in his pockets.

"Hey! Don't insult Chris!" The little twelve inch Christmas tree has been with you for a long time and you're fond of the worn out little thing. "Tell me this; how on earth do you know Charlie Brown well enough to make references, but have no idea what I'm talking about when I say 'beam me up Scotty'?"

Sans gives you a long look. "cause charlie brown is the only thing that's been on tv at work for the last freaking month."

"...Okay fair enough."

"SANS! _____!" Papyrus bounces into the room. "THE KING IS GOING TO HELP US MAKE COOKIES FOR SANTA!"

Oh good heavens. Pap believes in Santa? You give Sans a quick look and he smiles at you.

"every year babe."

You shrug and go with it. Why not? The rest of the night is spent making sugar cookies (this ends with multicolored icing on pretty much everyone) and Christmas movies. Mettaton insists on showing his Christmas specials, much to Papyrus' delight and almost everyone else's quiet despair. You've never seen any of his old stuff before, but fifteen minutes into the first movie and you understand. It's like some high schooler's drama film project. The film quality is bad, the writing is worse and good grief, why does everything keep exploding? You try to whisper to Sans about exactly why this was popular underground only to find that he's fallen fast asleep. As expected.

Asgore stuck around for a while and while the initial impression you had of him was that of a gentle giant, there's almost something...unsettling about him. It's very subtle, a quick look of sadness in his eyes or a hesitation in his movements. It's hard to tell exactly what it is, but to you he just feels old. So much older than any of the others, more weighted down. But that made sense. He had to make a lot of difficult decisions for his people. Choices that left six humans dead. Maybe more. You're pretty sure that he was around for the war that put all the monsters underground in the first place. That would put thousands of years of experiences on his shoulders. That meant Toriel had to be just as old. For that matter, how old was Sans? With all the timelines jumping around and changing, he had offhandedly said he wasn't sure. He guessed around twenty six or so, but he honestly had not way to tell for sure. It hurts to think about so you decide to drop it. Monster aging certainly doesn't work the same way as humans do. It doesn't really matter at this point.

Mettaton has to leave as the second film is ending, dramatically blaming the constant rush of a star's
You find out from Alphys later that he's going to be helping to host the city's Christmas parade the next morning and needed his full beauty sleep. Robots need sleep? That was new. Still, you all say your goodbyes and Mettaton gives you a kiss on the cheek that leaves a sparkling mark. You're quick to wipe it off before Sans wakes up and sees that.

You manage to watch How the Grinch Stole Christmas before everyone else starts nodding off and decide to head for bed. Papyrus has to carry Sans, which is one of the most adorable things you've ever seen. You crawl into the bed with Sans while Papyrus flops on to an extra foam mattress on the floor.

"Human, will you tell me a bedtime story?" he asks in a soft voice.

You think for a second, rubbing your hand over Sans' skull. He mumbles in his sleep and curls into a ball. "Sure thing Pap." You strain to remember and you know it won't be accurate but... "There's a story I used to love as a kid called The Little Mouse, The Red Ripe Strawberry, and the Big Hungry Bear."

Papyrus falls asleep halfway through the story and you soon follow. Your dreams that night are full of sparkling square robots and tiny dancing white dogs.

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"IT'S CHRISTMAS!"

At that volume, more than one person is shouting. You groan and snuggle closer to Sans.

"CHRISTMAS!"

Sans, in the lowest, sleepiest voice you've heard from him, mumbles, "please tell me it's not before seven."

You peek open one eye, staring at the clock on the bedside table. "It's not. It's 7:03"

A tiny huffing moan is his only response. Soon enough though, the constant shouting outside the door, as well as the tantalizing scent of maple syrup is enough to drag you and the semi-conscious Sans out to the kitchen. Toriel's been hard at work again (where on earth is all this food coming from?) and the three crazies are shoveling waffles and cinnamon rolls in their mouths as fast as they can. Alphys, a little bleary eyed, waves slowly as you join the others. Sans almost immediately slumps to the table, skull barely missing a plate of bacon. You move it away from him, taking a piece for yourself.

"Morning Alphys," you yawn, nibbling at the bacon. Oh heavens, this is tasty.

Papyrus' mouth is still full when he hops to his feet. "OMHWARDFS! TIMHF:-" he swallows "FOR PRESENTS!" He scoops Sans up, who appears to still be asleep and practically runs to the living room, followed by Frisk and Undyne, who are pumping their fists in the air. You grin at Alphys and Toriel. You take a moment to scoop some breakfast onto a plate before heading to the living room. The amount of presents under the tree has grown considerably from the small pile last night, your own mixed in with the others. Sans is facedown on the couch and you nudge his feet until he lifts them just enough for you to sit down. They immediately fall on your lap as soon as you're comfy.

"You awake yet bone boy?"

"no."
You wiggle a piece of bacon in his direction. "I think this will help."

After a moment of silence, he holds his hand out without turning his head.

Everyone opens their presents from you; a cd of fighting tunes for Undyne, a collection of classic anime for Alphys, a snail shaped cake pan for Toriel and a handmade photo album and disposable camera for Frisk. Papyrus squeals as he opens up his present. It's a cookbook of famous Italian dishes, with a heavy emphasis on noodle and pasta dishes. "I LOVE IT! I SHALL COOK EVERY RECIPE IN THIS BOOK!"

You smile widely. "I'd better be the first to taste each and every one."

Sans snorts, finally lifting his head a little. He pokes your face with his bare foot. "aren't you gonna open your presents?"

"Says the guy pinning me down. Oh, thanks Frisk," you say as Frisk hops up and hands you carefully wrapped box. The tag says 'Love Toriel and Frisk' in curvy writing. Inside is a bright instruction book for learning sign language and a folded up hand made blanket. It's soft and fluffy to the touch and you pull it out and wrap it around your shoulders. "Thank you!" you say to the two of them, beaming with happiness.

Frisk grins and signs slowly. I'll practice with you.

"I'll be a pro in no time!"

As the present unwrapping continues, Sans eventually sits up and you can retrieve the rest of your gifts. From Papyrus, you get a hand made 'Jog Girl' t-shirt and a carefully crafted frame made with bones that contains a picture of you and Papyrus striking a heroic pose in the park. Oh yeah, you remember that day! That was the day you finally reached your jogging goal! You give Papyrus a big smooch on his cheek, making his face glow a bright orange.

From Mettaton, you receive a signed figurine of himself and a note saying 'For my fellow star and fan, burn brightly!'. You can't help but laugh a little. What else did you expect? But it was very nice to be called a star. Undyne gives you pair of new running shoes and a pass to one of her classes. Knowing how full her classes are, it's a pretty big deal.

"You're not half bad with running," she says when you thank her. "But we gotta work on the top half!" She pinches your arms, making you yelp. "You've gotta come soon, got it?"

"I got it," you say with a laugh, rubbing at the red mark she left. You scoot over as Alphys joins you on the couch, handing you a small box.

"Um t-this is from me," she says shyly. She's wearing a flower crown that Frisk made for her.

You take the box and open it curiously. There's a cell phone inside, a little bit thicker and far fancier than the one you currently have. "Oh Alphys!"

"It's a monster brand phone. I made it myself," she says proudly. She pulls it out, showing you the features. "I can directly download all of your info right here, you d-don't even have to change your number or anything. And this-" she points to a small red button and lowers her voice. "Sans asked me to put this here. It will send a special call straight to his phone if...if y-you ever have the uh, the need." She stutters, blushing brightly. "I k-know it's tough to talk about b-but if you ever need a fr-someone-"

You lean over and give her a tight hug. "Thank you so much," you whisper. "Sorry to be a bother."
"O-oh!" Alphys waves her hands frantically, but she looks pleased. "It's n-no trouble at all! Sans was the one w-who asked me."

"But..." You do the math. "That was three days ago! You made a whole cellphone in three days?"

She fiddles with her glasses. "Actually it only took a few hours."

"My girl is a genius!" Undyne says, having listened in on the conversation. She gives Alphys a kiss, which sends her swooning. You look to Sans, who has also been watching and he gives you a hesitant smile. You can see in his face he's asking if it's okay that he did that. You scoot over, practically sitting on his lap.

"You are the best boyfriend," you giggle.

"aw shucks. and you haven't even opened your present from me yet."

You tap his cheek. "You first."

Frisk hands you one of the remaining boxes, which you pass to Sans. You scoot back a little as he unwraps it. His pupils grow larger as he pulls out a brand new iPod and set of Skullcandy headphones. He stares at you in awe. "babe this is..."

"Ah, wait for a second!" You pull the player from his hand and bring up the playlists. "I put together some playlists for you. Here, take a look."

A little dazed, Sans scrolls through, murmuring the playlist names out loud. "Shake That Bass', 'Breathe', 'Don't Know If You've Heard, I love You', 'Scream It Out' and...'The Best Music You Will Ever Hear'?"

"A list of my personal favorites. Not to brag, but I've got pretty good taste." You bite your lip. "I know it's not hand made or anything, but...I just wanted you to have something that means a lot to me. And I mean...come on. 'Skull'candy headphones! And...I mean if you don't like it, I can take it back. And there's more, but it has to wait til later. You snap your mouth shut before you ramble any more.

Sans smiles so widely his sockets scrunch up. He stands and takes your face in his hands. After giving you a long, gentle kiss on your forehead he says, "thank you. i love it. and now, i think it's time to open yours. close your eyes."

You give him a puzzled look, but does as he asks. You can hear everyone in the room giggling and whispering to each other. "Sans, if you put a pie in my face, I'm taking the headphones back."

"dang, my plan is ruined." There's an odd sounding twang and you fight the urge to peek. "ok. go ahead."

You open your eyes and your hands fly up over your mouth. Sans is holding a guitar, the guitar from the store that you played on and fell in love with. There's a bright blue bow on the headstock. That's what was under the blanket! There's a quick flash as Frisk takes a picture with their new camera.

"it uh, it was a little too big to wrap and i suck at that anyway," Sans says, a light blush on his face.

You reach out with hands that are shaking just a little and take the guitar. You run your hands over the wood, lovingly stroking it's surface. It's a little hard to speak and you can feel your eyes welling up. "Sans, oh Sans! It's beautiful."
"What are you waiting for nerd? Play something!" Undyne calls, making you blush.

"Oh, I don't know, I haven't p-played for a long time," you stutter. The entire room showers you with encouragement, so you swallow and look right to Sans. He looks so proud and filled with joy. Oh geez, you're going to cry! "Okay," you finally say, wiping at your face. "But uh, it might not be very good." You strum out Learn to Fly and when Undyne and Papyrus start singing, you join in, voice a little shaky at first. But the love and support you feel from your new family soon turns your hesitation into confidence and you pour out song after song, no longer caring when you mess up, or miss a note. When you finally stop, everyone applauds loudly. You stand and bow, filled with an endless happiness. You set the guitar down and leap into Sans' arms, squeezing him tightly.

"I love you so much," you whisper. A giggle escapes you as he picks you up and spins a little.

"day's not done yet," he says, winking as he sets you down.

Huh?

Frisk takes that as some kind of cue and vanishes down the hall. They return a moment later carrying a flat white box. Toriel is beaming as she takes it from her child and holds it out to you. "You're going to need this."

Curious, you take the box and lift the lid. You gasp as you pull out a beautiful dark blue cocktail dress. The collar is lined with off white lace and beads and the fabric is smooth and cool to the touch. "What is this?"

Frisk grins widely. **That's what you're wearing to dinner tonight.**

Dinner? You glance to Sans who clears his nonexistent throat and blushes. Oh. *Oh.*
Sink or Swim

Chapter Notes

Dating Start! (part 2?)
Just so you guys know, in this next month my family is visiting for a week, I'm cramming as many hours in at work as I can because I'm going to be quitting my current job, and moving to a new state at the end of the month. So June is going to be insane. Again, writing will still be coming, but the release schedule's gonna be kind of wonky. As always, enjoy and please feel free to comment!

"Are you s-serious?" Alphys looks personally offended. "He hasn't taken you somewhere fancy even once since you starting going out?"

"What a...a NUMBSKULL!" Undyne pounds her fist in her other palm.
You giggle, raising up finger guns. "Ayyye-mmph!" Undyne slaps her hand over your mouth.

"This is no time to be messing around!" She waggles a long nailed finger in your face. "This is a huge chance for you!"

"A chance for what?" you ask, voice muffled.

"For...I dunno! A chance!"
You push her hand off your mouth. She sinks on to your bed, still shaking her head. Alphys is currently going through your rather lacking make-up box.

"You can't wear purple face paint!" she practically wails.

You shrug. "Look, I learned stage makeup. Big, loud, dramatic. I don't really know how to do this fancy dinner date kind of stuff."

"Maybe not darling, but I do!"
Oh no.

The door to your bedroom hits the ground with a heavy bang as Mettaton kicks it open, practically flying in with a shower of light and sparkles.

"My door!" You shriek, jumping up. "Mettaton!"

"Don't start screaming, you'll sploch your face." Mettaton pats your cheek, oblivious to your rage. He's got a massive silver box with him. After shooing Undyne off the bed, he plops it down and opens the lid. Actual smoke oozes from the inside and now you just want to run. You shoot Alphys a glance, trying as hard as you can not to glare at her.

She gives you a helpless shrug. "H-he overheard us t-talking and insisted."

"He wrecked my door!"
"Shouting!" He scolds you. He forces you to sit back down and sighs. "Fine, I will make sure it's repaired. Happy?"

"Not really," you grumble. "Look, I...appreciate you coming out, but I think my usual make up will be fine."

Mettaton throws a hand up over his face like you've uttered the worst of curses. "Oh you poor, simple thing!"

Simple?!

"But I suppose you can not be blamed for your ignorance. You simply have not had the utter pleasure of being the subject of my talents." He grabs your face, turning you head slightly as he studies your features. "Now, ideally, I would love to spend at least six hours giving you a complete make over, but reservations will not wait. We shall have to make do."

"Where exactly are the these reservations at?" you ask as he starts digging through his box. He waves a hand at you.

"Now darling, it's not very sporting of me to spoil the surprise, now is it?"

You slump in your chair. "I guess not." You eye the many brushes and creams he sets out on the bed. "Seriously, I don't want to over do it."

Undyne is clearing struggling to hold back howling laughter. "Just let the robot do his thing," she snickers. "He made be full of himself and a complete narcissist-"

"If you're going to make catty remarks you can leave," Mettaton says in a distracted sort of way as he pulls your hair back from your face. As he starts smearing some sort of green cleanser over your cheeks, you resign yourself to your fate and just try to get comfortable. Alphys starts chattering about her favorite anime to help pass the time; it turns into a very one sided conversation as Mettaton scolds you loudly every time you move your face too much. It's actually pretty relaxing and Mettaton is surprisingly careful with...whatever he's doing to your face. He covers the mirror on your dresser to 'build the suspense' so you've got no idea what you look like.

Or at least, it's relaxing until Mettaton threatens to bomb Undyne out of the building when she won't stop messing with his supplies and you silently beg Alphys to...heh, defuse the situation. She quickly takes Undyne out into the living room and it's just you and the robot. You're not quite sure how much time has passed by this point, but surely he's got to be almost done. You're in your dress and he's messing with your hair, humming a mechanical tune to himself.

"Hey, um, not that I'm not grateful," you say slowly, "but why are you helping me with this? You barely know me. Is it because of Sans?"


Oh. Well, you'd gotten the impression that Sans wasn't fond of the robot either. "Then...?"

Mettaton hesitates, which immediately perks your curiosity. "There are certain...people in my life who are very happy with you being with them."

"People like Alphys?"

"Well, yes her and...others." Mettaton clears his throat. "Anyways, you've had to deal with terrible people because of your relationship with Sans. It makes a nice change for once to be rewarded for
your efforts, doesn't it?"

"I'm not dating Sans for a reward," you say but you can't help but smile at the robot. "I like being with him. And everyone else. I know you're a super busy superstar but you should try hanging out with everyone sometimes. It's a lot of fun."

Mettaton chuckles, the noise pleasant in an odd, metallic kind of way. "I'm sure it is darling," he says in an oddly subdued voice. He snaps his fingers (how does he do that with metal digits?) and steps back slightly. He makes you spin and pose for him before finally he deems you ready. Positioning you in front of your covered mirror he grabs the blanket, pauses for dramatic effect, and rips it away.

You barely recognize the girl in the mirror. Your skin glows with a subdued magical glimmer, soft to the touch and you can almost swear that your veins are dimly alight with color, like a finger held over a flashlight. Your face is smooth and clear, lips lightly coated in a colored gloss. Your eyes almost seem to pop, the color of your pupils magnified by the solid black eyeliner rimming your lids. A dusting of shimmering eyeshadow extends just beyond your eyes, trailing down the side of your face. Your hair is bright and full, so different from your usual style. The dress hugs your body just enough to show off your curves and paired with the heels you dug out of your closet, your legs look extra shapely and long. To complete the look, your galaxy necklace hangs just above the cut of the dress, glinting brightly.

"Well darling?" Mettaton beams at you, looking very proud of himself. "Now I know that you could never be as glorious as me, but try to focus on yourself for just a moment."

You can't speak. You slowly touch your face, stunned. Your skin feels like silk. Never in your life have you ever imagined looking so...alive. After the accident, looks just didn't seem to really matter. You've never thought of yourself as beautiful or ugly. You just were. But now....

Mettaton sighs, giving your hair a gentle floof. "I know it was a rush job, but well, I've gone above and beyond. As expected of a star like me."

A rush job? You spin, surprising the robot when you grab his hands. You have to admit, he knew exactly what he was doing. "Mettaton, this is perfect. You're a genius!"

"Oh come now, no need to state the obvious." He tries to brush it off, but he's clearly pleased. "Oh, go on and say it again!"

"A genius!"

"Again!"

There's a tap at the door. "You freaks done or what? There's a strangely dressed skeleton out here and he's getting antsy."

A flurry of nerves wash over you. Sans has never seen you done up this way (you haven't seen you so fancy for that matter) and you're honestly a little worried about how he's going to react. What would be worse? Him not really reacting at all or thinking it was weird seeing you so dolled up?

"Darling, you're overthinking things," Mettaton says in a sing song voice, tapping your forehead. "Now no frowning. You're far too young for such wrinkles." Before you can say anything, he steers you out to the living room.

Alphys and Undyne are still here and they've been joined by the brothers. Everyone looks up as the two of you enter and though you can hear their enthusiastic reactions, your eyes are focused only on Sans. He's staring at you, sockets growing wider as he takes you in. Are his pupils...star shaped? No
way, you must be seeing things. Your heart races as you walk up to him. Holy crap, he cleans up nice. Sans himself is dressed in a dark blue suit and dark red tie. It's the first time you've ever seen him in something fancier than his button up from the museum night. The tie is knotted loosely and it's slightly off center, but it gives the whole look a sort of odd charm. That and....

"Are you going for a David Tennant Doctor look?" you ask as you look down at his sneakers. He follows your gaze, shifting a foot.

"um...yes?"

You put your hand on your hip. "You forgot to buy fancy shoes."

"i forgot to buy fancy shoes," he admits in a mumble. He looks back up to you and...holy crap his pupils flash in that star shape again! "you uh...you look good. really good."

"SANS! SURELY YOU CAN DO BETTER THAN THAT!" Papyrus' sockets are gleaming. "YOU LOOK SO BEAUTIFUL! OH! THAT'S RIGHT, WINK WINK!"

You flush, an embarrassed smile on your face. You're going to take his audible wink as his way of letting you know he managed to keep Sans out of his room so as not to spoil the surprise.

"Damn, girl!" Undyne whistles. "If I wasn't already dating the perfect woman...nah, I'd still pick my girl." She gives you a toothy smile and a thumbs up.

Alphys can't even contain herself. She bounces on the balls of her feet, whipping out her phone. "Go-stand-by-Sans-I-have-to-get-a-picture-this-is-too-cute-oh-my-god!"

"What is this, prom night?" You slide up next to Sans, who is blushing and still staring.

"SANS! HOLD HER CLOSE!"

"huh? oh, yeah." Sans puts an arm around your waist, pulling you closer and his awkwardness makes you blush.

Alphys squeals, camera flashing. After a few uncomfortable moments, in which you feel very much like a daughter being doted on for her first date, Sans moves his hand from your waist to your wrist, tugging you to the door. "look, we gotta go if we're gonna make it."

"Have fun and get in lots of trouble!" Mettaton winks at you.

"Thanks Mom," you say sarcastically as you grab your coat. "Don't forgot to lock up when you all leave okay?"

Laughter follows you out the door and then it's just you and Sans. He stops and just stares at you again. You squirm under his gaze. "Um, so where are we going?"

He blinks and starts, blushing furiously. "oh, it's uh, it's a surprise. but i uh, i know a shortcut."

"Okay?"

"ok."

"....Shall we get going then?"

"oh. yeah, probably should." He's so flustered that you can't help but giggle. This only makes his blush grow. "geez, you've got me a little tongue tied here," he says.
"I noticed." Maybe all this makeup was too much. "I know Mettaton went a little overboard. You probably don't even recognize me, huh?"

He shakes his head furiously, pupils shrinking a little. "no, no, it's not that! it's..."He reaches for his hood, phalanges grasping thin air for a second before he remembers that he's not wearing his hoodie. He gives you a shaky smile, instead running his hand over his skull. "geez, guess i can't hide in my hood this time, huh?"

"Looks like you're gonna have to fluff it out!" You give him finger guns.

It takes him a second (it really is a terrible pun). He bursts out laughing but you really doubt it's from the joke itself. Still, you pretend to shoot off your finger guns as he wheezes and wipes at his sockets. The laughing fit seems to have calmed him a little. He holds his hand out, winking at you. "'m no tardis, but if you're ready."

You step into his embrace, still chuckling. "We need to get you a catch phrase. Like allonsy or geronimo."

"already got one," Sans says in a smooth voice, pulling you close. He leans to your ear and whispers, "get dunked on."

Then the world spins and you spin right along with it. You cling to Sans' suit, closing your eyes until it's over. When the world stills, you stay right where you are, even though your head clears fairly fast. Sans keeps his hands on your waist, clearly hesitating to let you go as well. You can't stop yourself from licking your lips because of your sudden nerves.

Ooh, strawberry flavored gloss. Good to know.

Sans rubs his hand on your back gently. "you ok?"

You smile and give him a tight squeeze before straightening. "Simply fantastic."

He's brought you to a place you don't recognize. Dusk has fallen so the surrounding area is filled with a gentle golden light from the many high end shops and businesses that are still open for Christmas. It's crowded and even though he had teleported you to a semi-dark corner, it didn't take long for people to notice the well dressed skeleton in their midst.

"Sans, this is a really fancy area," you say in awe. "Where the heck are we going?"

He grins and points to a very large glass building. "over there."

'Over there' turns out to be a fine dining establishment called La Reve, which you distinctly remember means 'The Dream'. It's up on the twentieth level of the building and it's packed inside, mostly with humans. As you approach the greeting table, the older man sitting behind it starts a little and fixes the two of you with an intense stare.

"Welcome to La Reve. Name?" he asks, his strong French accent making you straighten a little.

"it's uh, snowdin," Sans says, smiling widely. You fight back a snicker.

The man flips through a book, a plastered smile lifting his face when he finds the reservation. "Margaret, table for Snowdin," he says to a girl with raven black hair. Her waitress outfit is fancier than most of the clothing you own. She takes the two of you into the restaurant and your jaw drops. Jeweled chandeliers light the large room, the light dim and soft. Each polished table has cushioned seats and candles. Most of the tables are full of elegant people who stop their chattering just long
enough to stare as you and Sans pass. Margaret leads you to the far end of the place until you reach a two seater table right next to the large window that spans the entire wall. It gives you a perfect view over the city and you have to fight the urge to press your face up to the glass.

You sit and Margaret gives you menus to look over (geez, even the menus are printed on thick paper books!) and leaves to give you time to decide. Your jaw drops as you look over the options. Or more specifically, the prices of the options. "Sans! How on earth are we supposed to afford this?"

Sans peeks over the edge of his menu. "don't worry about the price. mettaton's paying."

"He is? Why?"

His sockets glint at you. "wouldja believe me if i said it was outta the goodness of his heart?"

"Not for a second."

"yeah, didn't think so." He vanishes behind the menu. "just order what you want. it's taken care of."

Hmm, that sounds oddly shady, but you go back to looking over the menu. You're fairly certain there's a whole world of puns you could make from these dish names, but you can't even hardly read it, let alone pronounce any of them. But you manage to make a selection by the time Margaret returns. You kind of hopelessly point to your choice, shrugging sheepishly. She writes down the order before turning to Sans. To your complete shock, he smoothly starts speaking in French. Margaret brightens, the waitress cheer slipping into actual delight. That is, until you catch the word 'ketchup' and her expression twitches.

You stare at Sans with an open mouth as she leaves. "What the heck was that? You can speak French?"

"sure, can't you?" he says with a wink. When you continue to gape at him, he shrugs. "it's a monster thing. what, did you think english was the only thing we spoke in the underground for thousands of years?"

"Uh, yeah, actually." Huh, well that was certainly interesting. You sip at your lemon water and look out the window again. It's snowing again and the light of the city makes every flake glisten as it floats through the air. It's almost like the air itself is sparkling. You put a hand up against the glass; your veins are still glowing with that subtle translucent light. "It's funny isn't it?"

"what is?"

You shrug, still looking out the window. "It kinda feels like we skipped that part. The awkward dates, the getting to know you questions."

"hey, i recall plenty of questions."

You laugh. "Okay, yeah, but I mean. You know, first date kind of stuff. We went really fast. I mean, we went straight from movie nights to spilling our darkest secrets and needing to hold each other during the night. We full on flew over the small stuff."

Sans is quiet for a moment, fiddling with his glass. "are we going too fast?" he finally asks in a subdued tone.

You reach across the table and take his hand. "I'm not saying that. A drowning person doesn't ignore a rescue ring being thrown to them just because they've only been in the water for thirty seconds right?"
He grins. "a tsundereplane might."

"It-it's not like I wanna be rescued, dummy!" you pout, turning your head away dramatically.

"i can rescue myself!" Sans says with a suppressed giggle.

You snort in a very unlady like way. "Point being, there's plenty of things I haven't done with you yet. I just think it's really cool to still be learning things about you after all the...heavy stuff. I honestly thought I was going to scare you away by telling you all my baggage so soon. But you're still here."

"still here," he repeats. He rubs your hand with his thumb. "i know i'm not the best with words...but you trusted me. that meant a lot. it means a lot." He blushes again as he struggles to form his thoughts. "i uh...you keep surprising me. in good ways. i mean, you...you're beautiful."

A flutter rises in your heart at his compliment. "Mettaton did a surprisingly good job," you laugh, trying to play it cool.

He shakes his head. "not just tonight. i mean, you're stunning right now. you saw how much of a mess i was earlier. you're stunning and you're...you're with me." His pupils glisten brightly. "but you're always amazing. your laugh, your puns and jokes, the way you care so much about my bro and the kid and everyone else and your beautiful soul is why i wanted to be with you."

Embarrassment washes over you and you stare down at the table. Sans tightens his grip on your hand.

"you're right. i was drowning, but you didn't just throw me a lifeline; you jumped in and dragged me out yourself. which is good, cause i gotta admit something."

"What?"

He puts his hands up in a 'what can you do' gesture. "i can't swim."

For some reason, this strikes you as insanely funny and your laughter draws a few looks from the patrons. But you don't really care. "Are you serious?" you snort, hand over your mouth.

"no." Beat. "i'm sans."

You nearly bust a lung containing your howl of laughter. "You're too much, that's what you are!"

Sans looks entirely too pleased with himself. "aw, you know you love it."

You stand and lean over the table, giving him a kiss which very quickly turns his smugness into embarrassment. "Yes, I do."

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Dinner finally arrives and as expected, it is absolutely wonderful. Since it's Christmas, a special dessert is thrown in for free which you very eagerly devour. When you finish up, you decide to walk around for a while, just enjoying the Christmas sights before they're gone. Sans tells you about the undergrounds version of Christmas, which seems to have started because of a bullying prank on a random monster, but thanks to the various media that got flushed in through the dump, turned into a very similar tradition. But without the religious bit of it.

"so the whole thing started because of some guy being born?"

"Well, there's more to it than that. But if you celebrate the religious side of it, then, yeah. I guess it
kind of is."

Sans nods thoughtfully. "huh. and here i thought it was just an excuse to get presents."

You nudge him. "C'mon, it's about the joy of giving!"

"still weird."

You laugh, looping your arm through his. "I'm in the mood for something warm. Let's find some cocoa."

You eventually come across a place and Sans offers to get the drinks while you sit on a bench and attempt to warm your hands. As you sit there, rubbing your palms together, a sudden flicker of movement catches you eye. You turn slightly to find a monster standing a few feet away from you. But it's like no monster you've seen before. They're shaped rather like a blob, with a wide smile that appears the cut through their body and a large round black eye that stares unblinkingly at you. Oddest of all, they're completely gray. Not a speck of color is on them. A trickle of unease crawls up your spine.

"Um, hey there," you call.

The monster doesn't respond. It just continues to stare. Okay....? You're about to get up and leave when it suddenly speaks.

"It's rude to talk about someone who's listening."

Their voice, scratchy and void of emotion makes you shiver. What are they talking about? You glance around; maybe they're talking to someone else? But there's no one there. You look back and bite back a shout of surprise. The odd monster is gone. Stranger still, the snow where they were standing is completely undisturbed. Okay nope! Nope, nope. You run over to the cocoa stand, nearly knocking Sans and the drinks over.

"woah, hey, slow down there, where's the fire?" he teases. Seeing the look in your eyes, his smile thins into concern. "you ok?"

"I-I'm fine. There was a...a..." You blink and shake your head. Wait, what was it? You know you saw...something, but now you can't even remember what the thing looked like. It said something, didn't it? Sans is still watching you, so you force out a shaky laugh. "Guess I just spooked myself."

"you ready to head home?"

You sigh in relief, nodding. "Yeah, let's go home."
"Wait, so instead of keeping a ketchup stash in a couple of sentry stands, you moved the entire station from place to place?"

"yep."

"How the heck is that easier?!"

"more stations means more places to refill. it's simple math," Sans says with a smirk.

"That doesn't even make sense!"

He kicks off his shoes as you flop down on the skelebro's couch. "look, being lazy is an art. don't blame me if you don't get it."

"Oh yes, you certainly have made it an art," you drawl, pulling your heels off. Oh sweet freedom! You wiggle your toes, sighing with relief. It's just the two of you in the apartment; Papyrus went to spend another night with Alphys and Undyne. Pap was eager to try his new dishes and Undyne was more than willing to offer her place for experimenting. You pat the spot beside you, but Sans continues to stand, fiddling with his tie, trying to loosen it.

"Need help?"

"nope, i got it." He clearly does need help but the look of mild frustration on his face is cute enough to make you stay right where you are. He soon gives up and you snicker as you stand up.

"Come here you big baby." You move in front of him and start working on the knot he's somehow managed to make. "I really liked seeing you in a suit. You should wear one everyday."

Sans groans. "only if you wear those shoes."

"Ew. No way. Ah, got it!" You finally manage to free Sans from the tie. You slip it off, laughing when you realize what you thought was just plain red fabric actually has imprints of skulls in it.

"Okay, maybe we're both better off doing our usual look."
"hm. i gotta say though, i wouldn't mind seeing you like this again." Man, it was nonstop blushing for Sans tonight. His hand came up to graze across your cheek. "i'm not the type of guy to really care 'bout looks but i really really like how you look. all the time i mean. not just tonight. but you look really really pretty tonight."

"Geez, you're a regular Romeo aren't you?" you say, trying to hide your happy embarrassment.

"the guy who ended up dead along with his lover?"

"...Bad example." You put his tie around your neck, leaving it untied. "Okay. How about once a month, we go somewhere nice. Just the two of us. We can dress up and...I don't know, go see a movie or go dancing or something."

Sans grins, tilting his head slightly. "once a month? sounds like a lotta work."

You poke his sternum. "Hey pal, you just have to put on a suit. I had to sit there with Mettaton fussing over me for like two hours."

He grabs your hand and brings it up to his mouth, pressing his teeth against your skin. The magical glow is finally starting to fade but occasionally you see a soft flicker.

"it's a deal," he says softly. His pupils flicker upwards. "did you have a good time tonight?"

You nod quickly, heart hammering. "Yes, of course I did. This was the best Christmas I've ever had."

He gives you an almost nervous grin. "it's not quite over yet. will you wait here for a sec?"

You nod again and he heads down the hall. Oh shoot! Your happy haze is momentarily hit by panic. He's not heading to his room, is he? A heavy breath escapes you as he stops at the hall closet. He looks back at you.

"close your eyes?"

You laugh, doing as he asked. "Okay, now you're going to shove a pie in my face, right?"

"eh, not quite." You feel his hand on your arm, guiding you back to the couch. Several long seconds pass before he finally clears his throat. "um. don't laugh, ok?"

"Why would I-" A gentle strum interrupts your question and your eyes pop open. Sans is seated next to you, guitar in his lap. It takes you a second to realize it's not the same guitar he gave you that morning. "Sans, what is this?"

He plucks at the strings lightly, playing out a tune. He smiles at you, a dim blush on his face. "that day we went to get cocoa and found that shop, all it took was a little music to set your Soul at ease. i could see it. and then watching you play, seeing how happy it made you, i wanted to do the same. i knew right away i wanted to get you one. when i went back to get it, that scrawny kid jake asked if i played at all. he offered to teach me when i said i didn't." Sans shrugs. "not a bad kid, once i cleared up a little...misunderstanding."

Misunderstanding? "So all that time you spent away at work in the time before Christmas...."

"i didn't lie. i was working hard," he says with a wink. "i thought it'd be nice to know how to play and surprise you. after a while...i started enjoying it. it's relaxing. and i uh, i wanna play you something."
Your hands come up over your mouth. "You learned a song? For me?" you squeal.

He shifts a little, pausing in his playing. "you can't laugh. ok?"

You quickly pull your legs up, tucking them under you. "Sans, I won't laugh, I promise." Is this really happening? You press your hands up over your face, smiling with glee.

Sans clears his non-existent throat. Then, still blushing, he starts a new song, an acoustic cover of one that you recognize. His phalanges dance over the guitar and he closes his sockets. The music swells and he starts to sing softly, his voice a gentle rumble that rises and falls with the notes strumming under his hands. "aren't you something to admire, 'cause your shine is something like a mirror. and i can't help but notice, you reflect in this heart of mine."

You're barely aware of the slight shake in his voice. You don't notice the tears that are beginning to form in your eyes. Sans is singing to you. You've never once heard him sing before. The most he ever did was hum softly, in a way that was barely noticeable.

"it's like you're my mirror, my mirror staring back at me. i couldn't get any bigger with anyone else beside of me." His sockets open and he meets your eyes. His pupils are glowing gently and the smile on his face is pure and genuine. The love and admiration in his face makes a soft sob escape you. You put your hands over your face. Shoot, your make-up is going to be completely ruined. Somehow, you can't bring yourself to care all that much.

"'cause with your hand in my hand and a pocket full of soul i can tell you there's no place we couldn't go. just put your hand on the glass, i'm here trying to pull you through. you just gotta be strong." Sans continues to sing, blissfully losing himself in the song. You can honestly say it's the most beautiful thing you've ever heard. As he finishes, the notes lingering in the air like snow, you can't bring yourself to speak. You just sit there, lip trembling.

Sans rubs a hand over his skull; his blush is mostly gone now. "heh, that bad huh?"

That gets a strangled laugh from you as you wipe at your eyes. "Sans, that was beautiful," you whisper. "I've never had someone do that for me. Thank you."

He sets the guitar aside, taking your hand. "you did it for me. you've done so much. i wanna do the same. scars, tears and all, i wanna be here with you."

In his eyes, you can almost see a glimmer of how he sees you. It must be the same way that you see him. Scars, imperfections and fears all helped to create the fascinating, beautiful puzzle that he is. To be seen in the same way is more than you could ever hope for. You grab the collar of his unbuttoned suit and pull him close, kissing him deeply. You try to put the full extent of your love for him in the simple act and he melts beneath your touch.

When you finally part, he lets out a shaky laugh. "guess i chose the right song, huh?"

"Yes you did bone boy." You stand and reach for his hand. "Now, it's time for your surprise."

He's taken aback, but takes your hand and follows you down towards his room. "um, what kind of surprise?"

"Kinda missing the point of a surprise dummy." You approach his door and you're so relieved to see the light seeping out from under the frame. The stars needed the light to properly glow in the dark. Well done Papyrus! You mentally make a note to high five him later.

Sans notices the light too. "huh. that's weird."
"You probably just forgot to turn it off," you say quickly, opening the door. As soon as he steps in, you flick the light off and he freezes. The walls and ceiling are covered in stars, arranged in constellations and patterns that extend nearly to the floor. Each star shines brightly, giving the room a semi-green glow. He spins slowly, taking in the sight. His pupils are almost the size of his sockets, shimmering brightly. You can't stop a laugh from escaping at his surprised joy.

"you did this? when...." He slaps a hand over his sockets, a grin spreading over his face. "spamberry juice."

You nod, shrugging sheepishly. "I needed you out of the apartment!"

"and paps not letting me in here earlier?"

"He helped me put the stars up. I had to sit on his shoulders and everything." You move behind him, wrapping your arms around his ribs. "I know they're not the real thing. But when you wake up in the middle of the night, you don't have to look to the window. As soon as you open your eyes, the stars will be right here. And you'll know exactly where you are." You rest your head on his shoulder. "Do you like it?"

His hands are trembling as he takes hold of your arms, pulling away just enough to turn around before wrapping you in a tight hug. "i love you so much," he whispers in your ear. His hands move to your waist, lifting you slightly off the ground. You giggle as he spins a little, his bones rumbling with laughter.

"Why Mr. Snowdin, I didn't peg you as one for dancing in the starlight."

Sans gives you a wide grin. "i may be lazy, miss sassy pants, but i know when to grab an opportunity."

He lowers you back down, but continues to sway a little. Your bare feet brush against his, warm skin against bone. He hums a quiet song, one you don't recognize. It makes your heart swell. How did you get here? Dancing in the dim light on Christmas night with the man of your dreams, who just happened to be a skeleton. If the terrible things that happened in the past put you on the path that led you here, you would do it all again.

"you do realize that we're gonna have to sleep in here every night from now on," Sans says lightly, phalanges dancing up your side.

You look around the messy room (made slightly less disgusting thanks to Papyrus) and wrinkle your nose. "You're gonna have to do something about the tornado of garbage in the corner if that's the case."

"hmm, you drive a hard bargain." Sans shrugs. "well, whatever. there's only one thing i need to see when i wake up."

"And what's that?"

"i'm looking at it right now," he says with a cheeky smile before kissing you. "merry christmas sweetheart."

"Merry Christmas, bone boy."

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You scowl at the staggering amounts of socks and slippers spread across the floor. Good grief,
would it kill him to pick these up!? You bend and scoop up one of his pink slippers.

"hey, easy on the lifting pal."

You almost drop the slipper when a familiar voice sleepily emits from it. You look inside to find Sans, somehow shrunk down to the size of a small doll nestled inside.

So. Cute!

"There's gotta be better places to sleep," you say, poking at his tiny cheek. He opens his sockets, lazily waving a hand at your finger.

"it's fine."

"It's really not. You wear this thing everywhere. It's gotta be really dirty."

He yawns, snuggling down deeper. "skeletons don't sweat."

That can't be right. You've seen him sweat before!

"you don't believe me?" He reaches up, sockets closed. "come on in. see for yourself."

You hesitate, the reach for his itty bitty hand when-

A loud, cheerful jingle rips you away from the odd dream. You jerk up, heart painfully rushing in your chest. What the heck? The noise plays again and you dimly recognize the sound as the opening song for that Mew Mew Kissy anime Alphys was so obsessed with. It's coming from your new phone. It's also telling you it's a little after two in the morning. A stream of sleepy curses slip from you as you blindly reach for it. "Hmm 'mello?"

"I'm so s-sorry I d-didn't k-know w-whotocallpleaseineedhelp-!"

"Whoa, hey, slow down," you say, sitting up. Sans (properly sized) stirs slightly, cracking open a socket. "Take a breath. What's going on?"

There's a loud sob on the line. "I-it's Undyne. She...she's b-been arrested!"

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You've never been to a police station before. Certainly not at three in the morning. You pull your car up into the mostly empty parking lot, stomach twisting. Alphys was too upset to really explain what had happened. All you know is that Undyne got in some sort of fight.

"yeah, we're here," Sans says into his phone, staring darkly at the station. "we're gonna get in there and find out what's going on. yep, sure thing tori. He hangs up and looks at you. "tori has to contact asgore but she said she'll start heading down this way if we need her too."

"Okay." You hiss through your teeth. "Let's just figure out what happened."

The two of you head inside and despite the quiet parking lot, it's rather busy and noisy inside. Officers and civilians are moving around, most of the latter either drunk or shouting. The police look exhausted and for a moment you almost feel bad.

Then you spot Alphys, who is off in a corner, trembling under the stares and harsh shouting of people who are being forced to wait as well. Papyrus is just in front of her, arms crossed defensively. When she spots you and Sans she runs right to you, eyes bloodshot and filled with fear. Papyrus
follows closely behind.

"THERE YOU ARE!" Poor Papyrus looks so shaken, but he tries to give you a smile. "I AM SORRY TO WAKE THE TWO OF YOU. WE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO."

Sans looks to Alphys and tilts his skull slightly. You rub at her shoulder, trying to calm her down.

"paps what happened?"

Papyrus wrings his hands. "WE NEEDED ADDITIONAL INGREDIENTS FOR A DISH IN MY NEW BOOK AND UNDYNE SAID WE SHOULD ALL WALK TO THE MARKET. WHEN WE ARRIVED WE SAW A GROUP OF MOLDSMALS AND HUMANS WHO...THEY WERE NOT BEING NICE TO THEM. THEY WERE HITTING THEM BROTHER. THE MOLDSMALS COULDN'T DEFEND THEMSELVES."

"S-she w-was just t-trying to h-help," Alphys cries. "They p-pushed her a-and s-she t-ried t-talking b-but then one of t-them...h-he y-yanked m-my t-tail...."

You bristle with rage and it's clear that Undyne must have done the same and snapped. "Okay, look she was acting in self defense and protecting you. They can't keep her here because of that."

"THEY WON'T TALK TO US." Papyrus' jaw quivers. "THEY SAID WE NEEDED A HUMAN REPRESENTATIVE."

You set your shoulders. "Well I'm here now." You head over to the counter, trying to keep a hold on your anger. Losing your head would not help in the slightest. The officer you approach is an older man with salt and pepper hair. He gives you a quick look, eyes flickering to the ensemble behind you. His badge says "Roberts"

"Hi," you say flatly. "I'm here for my friend. Her name is Undyne."

Roberts nods, looking almost bored. "Are you claiming responsibility for the monster in custody?"

"Excuse me?"

He sighs, going into a clearly rehearsed spiel. "Monsters are not recognized as beings with the country's inalienable rights and as such must be represented by an adult or ambassador with those rights when dealing with affairs of city and state."

"Hold on," you say, trying to wrap your head around this. "Taking responsibility means what exactly?"

The officer pulls out a thick folder and slides it over. There's got to be well over fifty pages. "All details are here. All forms must be completed and filled out before release of the monster can be considered and granted."

You take the folder, even more dread building in your chest. "What exactly are the charges against my friend?"

"I can't answer that unless you are the established human representative."

You fight the urge to growl. "Fine. I'll be back." You head back to an empty seat and start flipping through the forms. Long end of it, filling these out would basically make you like Undyne's guardian. "Geez, she's not gonna be happy about this," you mutter, reaching for a pen.
Sans stops you. "hey, think about this. you can't just do this without considering the consequences."

"What is there to think about?"

Alphys wipes at her face. More tears have started crawling down her face. "S-sans is r-right _____.
T-this is v-very s-serious. We s-should w-wait for-
"

"Alphys, no offense, but you don't look like you'd last much longer," you say as gently as you can. "It's going to be okay. Let me do this."

It takes another twenty minutes or so to fill out the forms. You just seriously hope you're not signing away your life because most of what this is saying is mumbo jumbo to you. When you take it back up, Roberts takes the files and starts flipping through them. You only wait for a few seconds before saying, "Okay, now tell me exactly why you arrested my friend."

"The monster Undyne has been charged with assault of two human citizens and destruction of public property."

"She was acting in defense of fellow monsters!" You gesture to Alphys and Papyrus. "These two were there!"

Finally, his bored persona slips. His eyebrow quirks upwards. "And did your friends tell you what happened to the two men she attacked? Did they mention that they ended up in the hospital with severe injuries?" Your shock must show on your face because he gives you a smug grin. "Didn't think so. Still want to be the representative?"

You scowl at him. "Yes," you say coldly. "How long will it take to get her out?"

"The forms need to be processed before a decision can be reached. It will take about an hour and a half. I suggest you get comfortable."

It doesn't take an hour and a half. It doesn't take two. At this point, almost three hours have passed. Sans is fast asleep, leaning against your shoulder and you are very close to following suit. Poor Alphys is lying across Papyrus' lap; she fell into an exhausted sleep about two hours ago. You had asked her if she wanted to go home and just wait for you to call her, but she had no intention of leaving without Undyne. Papyrus is the only one still alert, rubbing a hand over Alphys' head. He starts suddenly.

"UNDYNE!"

Alphys shoots up like she's been tasered, eyes wide. Roberts has just walked through the door leading deeper into the precinct. He's accompanied by another man, one much larger and far nastier looking, who has an iron grip on Undyne's arm. She's scowling so fiercely, you're shocked that she hasn't summoned her spears. But the moment she lays her eyes on Alphys, the rage on her face fades into something softer, more desperate and she barely waits for the man to let go before ripping her arm away. She sprints towards you, eyes only on her girlfriend.

"Alphys!"

Alphys barely has time to stand before Undyne crashes into her, holding her tightly.

You let out a sigh of relief, rubbing at your sleep heavy eyes. Sans, who jerked awake the same time Alphys did, takes your hand. Roberts approaches you as you and Sans both stand. He frowns, stare
falling on your clasped hands. "Release has been granted. This counts as a first offense for the monster Undyne. A second will result in fees and a monster trial, which could lead to jail time. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

Then finally, he says the words you've been waiting to hear. "Then you're all free to go. Bail information will be mailed to you. Failure to submit payment will result in legal actions."

You'll take it. The group quickly heads outside, eager to get away from the station. It's now nearly six in the morning and the morning traffic has already begun. Oh sweet heavens, you have work in three hours. "What a nightmare. I am ready to crash," you say through a yawn. You start to head to the car, when Undyne suddenly grips your arm. You're too tired to yelp, even though it hurts a little.

"What the hell did you do that for?" she snarls.

"hey." Sans is at your side, sockets black. "don't think you should be talking like that to the one who just saved your butt."

"Stay out of this Sans," she growls. Her eye turns back to you. "Why'd you stick your nose in my business huh? I didn't ask you to do any of that!"

Oh you are far too exhausted for this. "What are you talking about? What was I supposed to do? Leave you there?"

"I don't need to be saved!" She's furious, but you can't understand why she's taking it out on you. You rip your arm free.

"That's what friends do!" you yell back at her. "You were in trouble!"

She folds her arms, scowling at you. "Yeah, trouble I got myself into. You shouldn't have gotten involved. And now you're like what...my owner? Like I'm some kind of freaky pet?"

You run your hands through your hair. "Of course not! Look, the system is stupid and it's wrong, but you have to know I would never do that to you. I didn't exactly have a lot of options. It was either sign the papers or leave you there until who knows when."

Alphys places a hand on Undyne's arm. "I'm t-the one w-who called her h-here. I d-didn't know what t-to do. It's m-my f-fault."

Undyne looks at her girlfriend for a long moment, expression slowly softening into something you can't quite define. You sigh, rubbing your arms. It's really cold out here and in your rush to get to the station, you didn't exactly dress for the weather.

"If you want to be angry with me, fine. But think about Alphys waiting without you, having no idea when she was going to get you back." You know you're being blunt, but you are too tired and now too cranky to care. "Sorry for caring about my friends."

Undyne lets out a long breath, the air in front of her face steaming. "Damn it!" she finally says, pulling you into an extremely tight hug. "You're a dumb softie, you know that?"

"So I've been told," you choke out, patting her back.

"Sorry I yelled. And uh, thanks," she mumbles. "Guess I'm the bigger moron."
You sigh, pulling back just a little. "It's okay. Let's just...let's go home and rest. I think we're all too exhausted to deal with everything right now."

You take Alphys and Undyne home; the university is fairly close, thank goodness before heading back to the apartment. Your eyes feel like lead and it doesn't help that the car behind you has its brights on; the lights shine directly on your face, making you squint. Papyrus has passed out in the back seat but Sans, to his credit, is still awake. He rubs your arm gently.

"you ok?" he asks softly.

You nod. "Just need some caffeine asap," you say in a croaky voice. "And I need this freaking car off of my tail."

Sans turns around in his seat. "how long's it been there?"

"I dunno? At least a few miles now. Maybe since the university?" You can't really remember. Sans keeps his sockets trained on it until you turn into the parking lot and it finally moves on. Stupid, impatient driver. You rub at your face as you park. What a night. And now there's no point in going back to sleep. Even better, it's your first day back at the station since the attack on your office.

Freaking splendid.
And That's When The Day Went From Bad To Worse

Chapter Notes

I know this chapter is a little short but I've been on vacation with my family all week!
Thanks for sticking with me!
theninjamouse.tumblr.com
theninjawrites.tumblr.com (I take requests for crappy drawings here!)

You're not the only one who feels (and looks) like crap at the station that morning. You blearily lift your head as the door to the booth opens. Tod walks in and the side of his face without the harsh scar is swollen and red with what looks like three deep claw marks running down his cheek. You sit up, your exhaustion momentarily replaced by shock. "Tod! What happened?"

Tod winces, touching the wound gingerly. The scratches barely miss his eye. "Bad run in with a cat."

"That looks pretty deep for a cat. What the heck did you do to the poor thing?"

He gives you a bemused look. "And you assume it was my fault? I was trying to help the 'poor thing'." He sits down, taking a heavy chug from his coffee. "But you know how creatures are. They don't see that a temporary discomfort is better for them in the end."

"Sure, but they don't know that." You rub at your eyes, another wave of exhaustion washing over you.

"Not looking too good yourself," he drawls.

You shrug, slumping back to the table. "I was at the police station all night. Don't ask. Did you know the police won't even consider releasing monsters in custody without some kind of human representative? I can't even imagine how many times Frisk has had to get involved. Poor kid."

Tod scowls at his coffee cup. "The whole system is a mess. It has been for a long time, even before monsters came to the surface." He starts pulling out papers, frowning heavily. "We have another problem on our hands that we need to deal with."

You take the papers, a sinking feeling in your chest. As you thought, there's been a dip in listeners, leading to a dive in profit. This isn't good. Honestly, you had gotten used to people being nasty to you. But for it have this bad of an effect on the station itself... "Tod, I-"

"If you even mention resigning or moving to a new department I'm going to force you to finish this God awful sludge they dare to call coffee," he grumbles. "Do you think that even if you left, I'd stop talking about monster issues? Trust me, you're exactly the kind of person I need right here."

You give him a smile, trying to convey your gratitude.

He gives the cup one last slurp before chucking it at the trash can way over in the corner. It hits dead center, landing with a dull clang. Dang, what you wouldn't give for an aim like that. "Now, if you were going to say you have an idea and I went on that heartfelt rant for nothing, please do continue."
You drum your nails on the table, thinking. What can you do to help up the listener count? You need something big, something exciting, something people already love... You stare at your freshly manicured nails and a lightbulb goes off. A smug grin crawls across your face as you pull out your phone. "Actually, I think I know someone who could help."

"Oh darling, I saw you just yesterday and you're already desperate to hear the sound of my voice? If you were such a big fan then you should have said!"

Maybe this isn't such a good idea. "You uh...you know it. Do you remember Tod, who works with me at the station?"

"The man with that outrageous scar on his face?"

A twitch of annoyance flicks through you. "Yes. Please don't say mean things about his scar."

"Oh darling you misunderstand. The rugged, scarred look is a huge hit among some crowds. And his voice more than makes up for anything else."

You're not sure if Mettaton is trying to compliment Tod or not. "I guess? Anyway, are you still up for being on our show?"

Instead of the immediate 'oh darling if I MUST' response you're expecting, Metatton goes quiet for a second. "There's something I would need you to do first," he finally says, voice oddly subdued. "Two things actually."

"What is it?"

"First off, I have a cousin who is...well he has passion for music and he is quite good at it, but because of his nature, he isn't having any kind of luck with finding a job. Poor thing tends to send people running before he has a chance to speak."

You see what he's getting at. "I'm not the one to talk to about employing but...bring him to the station. I can't promise a job, but I can promise a fair shot."

"That's splendid darling!" Mettaton purrs in a warm tone. "Now as for the...the other thing. You cannot tell Sans about this."

That can't be a good sign. "Um, I kind of have a 'don't keep secrets from my boyfriend' promise I made to myself-"

"It's not even really a secret!" Mettaton says quickly. "He knows, he'll just throw a stink about it. For everyone involved, I think it's better to avoid that, don't you?"

With a growing sense of apprehension, you slowly say, "Tell me what it is you want first."

"I promise it is nothing drastic. Just a simple thing really."

"Spit it out then!"

"You really must work on that shouting," he grumbles. "Fine. I want...anightoutwithPapyrus."

"You want to hang out with Papyrus?"

"Not...not hanging out exactly." He sounds almost...shy? Your jaw drops. Oh!
"Mettaton, are you telling me you're crushing on my boyfriend's sweet, caring brother?" He doesn't reply, which is all the answer you need. No way! No wonder he didn't want Sans to know about this. "Wait, you said Sans knows?"

"It's more like he has a sneaking suspicion," he admits.

Ah. "Look, I'm not going to use Papyrus as a bargaining chip." Besides, Papyrus is the embodiment of love and sunshine. He's not stupid, but he is caring and trusting to a fault. And Mettaton is pretty much the exact opposite of that. It would be pretty irresponsible to just agree to this. "No offense, but Papyrus doesn't seem like the type of person you'd be into. What gives?"

"Well...I just...he's refreshing to be around, all right? You don't need to worry about me *corrupting* the skeleton, Sans does enough of that already." Mettaton sighs in a great suffering kind of way. "I just want to take him to dinner. No tricks, no ulterior plans. Okay?"

You bite your lip. It's not that you don't trust Mettaton...no that's exactly what it is. "I will mention the idea to Papyrus," you finally say. After all, he's a grown (?) skeleton; he can make his own decisions. And as you've seen, he can take care of himself if need be. "And I'll talk to Sans. Is that good enough?"

"You're a star, love," Mettaton says warmly. "All right then! Charlie!" he calls slightly away from the phone. You have to assume Charlie is his manager. "Cancel my appearance tonight! I'm going on the radio!"

You hear an angry squawk, probably from poor Charlie. "No, not tonight!" you say quickly, taking pity on the poor guy. "We need time to properly advertise after all. We've gotta get the biggest audience we can!"

"My word, you're already learning from me!" If Mettaton was in the room with you, you're sure he would be patting you on the head at this moment. "Very well!"

You finish finalizing the details with Mettaton's manager (how does the guy do it?) and hang up. Tod finally looks like he's waking up a little, and he's clearly pleased with you. He gives you a thumbs up. "I need more coffee. Mind pulling up the news email? Abby probably sent it already."

"You got it," you say as you pull up the program. It's the usual; crashes in the busier parts of the city, some politician was caught cheating on his wife and oh, some guy claiming that monsters were using mind control to corrupt the minds of the youth. How *original*. You roll your eyes and scroll down. As you read the next headline, your heart freezes and twists into an agonizing shape in your chest.

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"A five year old girl was found severely beaten in local park early this morning by a member of the gardening committee. Authorities believe Sadie Thomas was beaten by step father Nate McNevan after Sadie attempted to bring a monster child to her home. An arrest notice has been made for McNevan, whose whereabouts are currently unknown."

Your fidget and try not to stare up at the tv in the waiting room at the hospital. Instead you fix your eyes on the bouquet of flowers in your hands. This has to be some sort of nightmare. Sadie had even told you about Nate not liking monsters. But like the idiot you are, you just brushed away the concern. A bunch of stupid flowers isn't nearly enough to fix this. But you don't know what else to do.

Aside from a man who is currently buried behind a magazine, you're alone in the room; Sans was
just as upset as you but the hot dog joint was severely understaffed thanks to so many of the employees taking vacation time. Also, as he pointed out, a skeleton in a hospital probably wasn't the best idea. Especially given the circumstances. He told you he would come regardless, but you said you would be fine by yourself. He made you promise to call him if things got bad. You half expect him to just show up anyway.

You look up as the door opens and the nurse walks out. Since you weren't a family member, or hell, even really a friend, the nurse had told you that he would have to check with Sadie's mom before letting you visit the room. It hardly seems possible, but your heart sinks even lower as the mother herself follows the nurse through the door. You barely have time to stand before the woman crosses you to and starts snarling.

"How dare you show your face here." Severe bags line her eyes. "What do you want?"

"I-I heard what happened," you stumble over your words. You lift the flowers. "I know that you barely know me but I just wanted to see if Sadie is okay."

She crosses her arms. "Of course she's not okay. Ever since that day, she's gone on and on about how monsters are nice and monsters could be friends. Look at where it got her!"

"I just...I didn't know-"

"That teaching my daughter that monsters could be friends would lead to my husband beating her nearly to death? No, why would you know? Because this is none of your business." She gives the flowers a harsh stare before turning away. "Just go. You are not wanted here. And tell your monster 'friends' that if I see any of them near here I will call the police."

And that's all she has to say. The flowers fall from your limp hand as you watch her walk away. You can't bring yourself to pick them up. You can't form a clear thought. Finally, in a numb daze you head back to your car. You bump into someone on your way out; normally you would at least give a quick apology but your voice is lost somewhere in the storm brewing in your head. It wasn't your fault. That was the truth. You didn't beat the poor tiny child who just wanted to be friends with a monster. But it somehow feels like you handed the bat to the heartless animal that did this.

As you drive home, a few tears make their way down your face. But under the guilt and horror and utter disgust, something else is brewing inside of you. Something hot and almost painful in its intensity.

Rage. Pure, agonizing rage eats at you. Your fingers grip the steering wheel tightly. How could such cruelty exist in this world? How could people like Nate McNevan and Emily and asshole have such mindless hate towards a race that had done nothing but fight for a chance to live under the open sky? It was disgusting and senseless and so...so wrong! You wipe at your face angrily. Enough! Enough of this crap! Something needs to be done, before things get worse.

You're jolted from your thoughts by the car behind you honking loudly. The light was green. "I'm going, I'm going," you mutter. You pull forward, only to have the car follow you right on your tail. Geez, what is it with drivers in this city? You speed up a little and when it matches your speed, worry finally gnaws at you. You change lanes, keeping your eyes on the car. It stays where it's at and you breathe a sigh of relief. You're being paranoid, that's all. You soon reach another light and your heart is starting to slow when-

A shriek escapes you as your car suddenly jumps forward with a ear piercing metallic screech. In your rearview mirror, you can see that the car you thought had just gone away is right back behind you. The engine roars and they slam into the back of your car again. The light goes green and you hit
the gas, racing away from the car. You've gotta get off the road! You twist the wheel and the tires screech in protest as you whirl into the parking lot of a supermarket. You crane your neck just in time to see the attacker zoom by; the windows are dark but you just barely catch the shape of a figure in the drivers seat.

Shaking, you get out of your car. What the hell was that?! After waiting a minute to make sure the lunatic isn't circling back, you move to the rear of your car to check the damage. A long harsh scratch runs through the paint and there's a large dent on the left side. You grab at your hair and let out a scream of frustration. Seriously!? What an asshole! All because you didn't notice the light was green?

Your hands slowly lower. No. No that can't be the only reason. Not with the car that wouldn't get off your tail last night too. Was it the same car? No matter how much you strain, you can't remember. Thanks to the glare of their headlights and your own exhaustion, you can't get more than a dim image of a larger car. But there's no way you could have missed the dark blue SUV that just mashed up your car. Oh shoot, you didn't get the license number!

"Are you all right there?"

You jump and whirl around, but it's just some old lady. She's hobbling towards you, her wrinkled face tight with concern. She must have seen you drive into the parking lot like a madman. You put a hand over your racing heart, nodding. "Yes, yes I'm fine."

"Goodness me, you're white as a sheet!" She reaches out to pat your cheek. Her mouth drops open when she sees the state of your car. "What kind of horrible person would do something like this?"

"That's what I would like to know," you say, letting out a shaky breath.

"Let's call the police; they can get this sorted out."

Oh you've had more than enough of dealing with the police. You shake your head, attempting a reassuring smile. "Um, I think I'm gonna drive home first. I'm just down the road."

"Are you sure?"

Absolutely. "Yeah, I don't want to stick around in case they come back."

The old lady frowns. "Well, if you're sure. Here, take this." She pulls out a paper, writes down her number and hands it to you. "If you need a witness statement, call me. And here-" She drops a handful of mints into your palm. "Mint is calming you know."

She waits until you get into your car, waving. You wave back, your throat going tight. What a nice lady. The world needs more people like that. It occurs to you as you pull into your apartment lot that you didn't even ask for her name. Well, given everything that's happened in just the last twenty-four hours, you really can't be blamed for forgetting some basic manners. You drag yourself upstairs and pull out the insurance information on your car. Uggh, you really don't want to do this.

Calling the police and insurance company takes a good hour or so. The police get a description of the car from you and a promise to contact you once more information has been found. Given the nature of the accident, they seem pretty confident they'll be able to find the freak. And one sliver of light, your insurance will pay for all the repairs for your poor car. That of course leads to another thirty minutes of finding a car repair shop and setting up an appointment. It's looking like you're going to be without your car for at least a week. Well, at least you've got a transporting boyfriend to help out.

Finally, you set the phone down and lean back in your chair. What a terrible day. You really just
want to snuggle up on the beanbag with Sans and watch some crappy movie and just forget about everything for a while. But Sans isn't off work for another two hours. You groan and stand up, heading towards the bathroom. You need a bath. A long, boiling hot bubble bath. You get everything ready and sink into the water. Ahhh, now this is heaven. Steam rises from the tub, helping to soothe your body and mind.

As you soak, you can't help but think about Sadie. You can't blame her mother for being angry. Hell, you're furious. But both you and Sadie had done nothing wrong. You both just wanted to treat monsters like regular people. Why couldn't the rest of the world see that? You close your eyes. You have to remember that the world wasn't filled with complete jerks. Jake, the old woman in the parking lot, Tod, Abby. Frisk. Papyrus, Alphys and Undyne.

Toriel.

Sans.

Really, you haven't met a single monster that hasn't treated you with anything but respect. Why can't people do the same?

You stay in the bath until your skin wrinkles. After you dry off and throw on some sweats, you grab your new guitar and head back into the living room. You plop down and start idly playing. You soon lose yourself in the music, closing your eyes. You even sing a little and finally, finally, you start to relax after the craziness of the day.

You hear the door open and close quietly. Huh, Sans must be home early. You keep your eyes closed, finishing up the song you're on. "I've had the worst day," you say to him. "I hereby decree we have a night of movies and pizza."

Sans doesn't answer.

"Okay, movies, pizza and ketchup. Deal?"

When he remains silent, you open your eyes. "Sans, is something wrong?" You sit up and freeze. It's not Sans standing there.

It's three men wearing black masks, staring coldly down at you.

You open your mouth and scream.
There's several impossibly long seconds, an infinite moment that passes as your brain simply tries to process what's happening. Then, of its own accord, your body shoots up from the bean bag, dashing towards your room. However, you barely take three steps before the burliest of the men snags your arm with an iron grip. You attempt to scream again and his gloved hand slaps over your mouth, muffling your cries.

"You know, I expected someone who dares to so publicly announce their love for monsters to have a better sense of personal safety." The one speaking, the smallest of the group, plops down at the dining table. The only part of his face you can see are bright green eyes that glint at you as the man holding you drags you over. You buck and struggle, but his hold is too strong to break. His hand lifts from your mouth briefly as he forces you to sit in the other chair.

"Help-!"

A rag is shoved in your mouth, making you gag.

"I mean really, an unlocked door? You're making this far too easy." Green Eyes digs around in a small bag at his side. Terror makes you freeze as he pulls out a hand gun and a large syringe. "Not that I'm complaining. Just a little disappointed. Now, let's get to business." He sets the gun on the table and you can tell from the way his eyes scrunch that he's smiling. "Then we can have some fun."

The third man grabs your wrist, forcing your arm to stretch out over the table. Small whimpers escape you as you twist your arm uselessly. What the hell is happening? Green eyes observes your scars and makes a small, knowing nod. He looks up at you.

"Betcha wish you had finished the job huh?" He jabs the needle into your arm, the pain making you shriek. You're expecting something, maybe a drug to flow into your veins. But instead, Green Eyes fills the syringe with your blood. When it's full, he pulls the needle out and pats your arm. A bead of blood bubbles up from the hole in your skin.

He must see the confusion in your eyes because Green Eyes laughs loudly. "Now don't you worry about this just yet. Our boss needs this and...well that would be spoiling the surprise now, wouldn't it?" He leans over the table and takes your face in his hand, squishing your cheeks painfully. "But don't go thinking this makes you special. Chances are one in a thousand you've got what the boss is looking for." He slaps your cheek before standing. "Go ahead and take that gag off her, I wanna see her lip tremble. But don't go yelling now, or I'm going to have to use this thing." He waves the gun almost playfully at you.
You fight to keep your lips from doing just that. You run your tongue over your teeth; the cloth reeked and left an awful taste in your mouth. "Who are you?" Your voice is surprisingly steady.

"Oh you don't remember me?" He simpers mockingly as he hands the syringe of your blood to the third man. He slides it into some strange looking device and starts tapping away at the buttons on its surface. Mr Macho still has a firm grip on your shoulders. Your mind races as you desperately think of something you can do. Your eyes dart to the counter; your phone is right where you left it. All you have to do is press the emergency button Alphys added and Sans would immediately come to you.

"I don't think I've had the pleasure," you drawl, trying to keep your face straight.

"Well I suppose we haven't officially met." He clears his throat. Then he speaks in what's clearly meant to be an impression of you. "I swear I didn't know poor little Sadie would get beaten to a bloody pulp because I thought humanity could be one with monsters. Sadie's mom really wasn't happy with you, was she?"

A chill runs up your spine. The man in the waiting room!

"How's your car by the way? Hard to tell, I was moving so fast, but I'd say at least your fender is going to need some major work." He moves closer until his face is mere inches away. "I've been dying to know, how did it feel, kissing that skeleton freak in the snow on Christmas Eve?"

Your entire body is starting to shake. "You've been watching me this whole time?" You whisper hoarsely.

"Not me exclusively," he says cheerfully. He straightens, laying a hand on the table. "Though I will say I'm the one who had the pleasure of ripping your stolen office to shreds. You see, there are people in this city, like me, who see monsters as the disease that they are!" As he finishes, he throws the table over, smacking it against the wall. You flinch as the big guy digs his fingers into your shoulder. Green Eyes heads into the kitchen, dumping all of your dishes onto the ground, shattering them. He even opens up your fridge and takes a swig from your milk before emptying it over the shards of your plates and glasses. You can do nothing but watch as he destroys the home you've made for yourself.

Green Eyes pulls out a knife, bringing it dangerously close to your face before sauntering into the living room. "And there are people like you who stand at every corner and preach your misguided notions about monsters being the same as humans!" He starts slashing away at your bean bag, sending the fillings flying through the air. In the same motion, he turns and kicks your t.v, sending it hurtling to the ground.

No, no! "Stop it!"

"And the only way people like you will learn," he pauses as his eyes fall on your guitar. Your heart freezes in your chest. Not that! "Is if you lose everything." He picks your guitar up, ignoring your begging screams and slams it against the floor. The noise it makes as the wood cracks and the strings snap sounds to you like an agonized scream coming from the instrument itself.

"No! No!" You scream, shaking with angry, tear-less sobs. How dare they! How dare they!

Green Eyes slips his knife back into the holster on his belt. "See? You've done wrong and now you are being punished. This is simply what you deserve."

The machine holding your blood beeps loudly and the man holding it frowns. "That can't be right."

Green Eyes turns away from you. "What?"
The guy gestures to the machine. "These readings. They're...they're all over the place. It's making the analyzer crash."

"You're just not doing it right!" Green Eyes stomps over to look himself.

"I'm telling you, it's her!"

You don't know what's going on, or what that machine does, but this is the best distraction you're going to get. You arch your head down, biting the large man's hand as viciously as you can. He yelps, loosening his grip just enough for you to wiggle free. You throw yourself at the counter, fumbling with your phone. One button, just one button!

Your hair is yanked painfully backwards and you shriek as you are thrown to the floor. Your phone clatters away. Green eyes kneels over you, eyes glinting with glee. "Well now! Looks like you're not just talk after all!" He digs his fingers in your hair and drags you up. You scream and thrash, eyes watering from the pain. He laughs in your face. "It's so much fun to break the fighters! And I-"

"P U T  H E R  D O W N."

Green Eyes flinches and looks up. You almost sob with relief at the sight of Sans standing in the hallway. His left socket is blazing with blue and yellow fire and pure, untethered rage is clear even through the wide manic smile on his face. But...oh dear heavens what the hell is behind him? It looks like some kind of floating goat or dragon skull. It's size is so massive it barely fits between the ceiling and floor and you have a feeling that it could swallow you whole if it wanted to. It growls and bares sharp fangs at the men. In the back of its throat, a blinding white light is building. The air is humming with energy. You can feel it in your head, in your skull, in your bones.

Green Eyes gets to his feet, dragging you with him. He wraps an arm around your neck, positioning you in front of him. "How the hell-"

A howl of terror interrupts him. The big guy is staring down at his chest, utterly petrified as a glow builds. With a pop his Soul floats into view, dim and almost brown. "What the hell is going on?" He yells, pawing at the air around his Soul. His fingers brush against it and his whole body goes rigid. His eyes roll backwards as his mouth drops open. There's a loud *clink* as his Soul goes blue.

"buddy, this is hell," Sans growls and throws his hand down.

The man hits the ground and in the same instant, a row of bones erupts from the floor, piercing his arms. You can only watch in horror as he thrashes and screams. Yet...there's no blood. The bones pass right through his body without actually cutting the skin. How-?

His Soul flashes back to its original color and as he scrambles to his feet, you notice that the edges are white. Before he can move, the thing behind Sans releases the built up energy in its mouth in a blinding flash of light and scorching heat. Your attacker is enveloped in the light and his screams reach a new level of agony as his Soul continues to lose its color. Finally, it clicks. Sans is killing him. No! You can't let this happen!

"Sans! Stop!"

His gaze flickers to you as the giant skull ends its attack. The big guy is on his knees, panting. The smallest bit of color remains in his Soul. He reels back, eyes wide with terror. "What the hell is this?! They said the skeleton was a joke!"

Green Eye's grip tightens around your neck. "Looks like we were misinformed. Enough of this!"
You feel a sudden pressure against the side of your head. You can't help a terrified whimper as he digs his gun into your skull. Sans goes completely still, his blue pupil shrinking slightly.

"You really don't want to do that," he warns, voice low and steady. Only you catch the tiny tremor that tells you he's just as terrified as you are.

"You're right, I don't want to. But I will if you so much as lift a finger! I don't care how fast you are. I see you move, I pull the trigger!" You dig your heels as Green Eyes starts to walk backwards towards the door. He yanks you back, making you choke. "Get to the car," he says to the other two. You hear the clatter as the men make their escape through the door.

"Let her go!" Sans is visibly shaking but he hasn't moved. The skull behind him growls again and then vanishes, blinking out like an image on a t.v.

Green Eyes chuckles in your ear. "You know, I'd really rather keep this one for myself. But you've gone and thrown quite the wrench into our plans. So for now...enjoy the time you've got left!"

His arm suddenly disappears from your neck and he shoves you with such force you pitch forward. Sans is there in a flash, catching you before you hit the ground and Green Eyes is gone.

"I've got you, I've got you sweetheart," Sans murmurs, wrapping his arms tightly around you. You clutch at his shirt, gasping and shaking and oh God, you're okay, you're still alive, you're right here and....

Your legs give out. Sans staggers a little, and you both sink to your knees. His hands run over your face, as if to assure himself that you're okay. Your chest starts to heave.

"S-Sans. Sans. Sans!"

"Baby, I'm right here, stay with me." He cups your face, rubbing your cheeks. "I'm right here. Are you-oh hell." His gaze falls to your neck and then to your arm, which is covered in bits of blood and an already forming bruise. His sockets narrow with rage. "I'm gonna kill them," he growls.

You shake your head, still gasping. "No. No. You can't."

"Babe-"

"Get me out of here," you whisper, pressing your face against his sternum. "Please."

He takes a deep, shuddering breath. "Ok. Hold on."

The moment the world stops spinning you lurch away from him and vomit onto the carpet of the boys apartment. You gasp and shudder as Sans rubs your back.

"SANS? HUMAN?! WHAT IS-"

"Paps, watch her. I gotta take care of something," Sans says grimly.

"No!" You try to reach for him but just end up retching again. You cough, mouth filled with bile. "Don't-!"

He's already gone. Damn it Sans!

"HUMAN WHAT HAPPENED? WHAT'S GOING ON?" Papyrus leans over you anxiously, putting a hand on your shoulder.
"I...there was..." You can't talk. You squeeze your eyes shut and shake your head. Papyrus seems to understand that much at least. He scoops you up, holding you princess style and rocks you gently.

"IT WILL BE OKAY. I PROMISE. THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS RIGHT HERE."

You wrap your arms around his neck, burying your face against his armor. It's not nearly as comfy as Sans' hoodie but it helps you to calm down a little. Papyrus gets you a cup of water and sets you down on the couch, sitting close enough you're practically in his bony lap. Slowly, you tell him what happened. Papyrus is utterly distraught that he didn't hear a thing, despite being just down the hall. "I AM SO SORRY _____." Great tears start falling down his face.

You give him a weak grin. "Geez Pap, I'm the one who should be crying."

Papyrus slaps his hands up over his face. "NYOO WHOO!" he sobs. "I-I AM SORRY. YOU ARE RIGHT. A ROYAL GUARD SHOULD NOT CRY." He wipes his sockets. "GIVE ME YOUR ARM. I WILL HEAL YOU."

You had no idea Papyrus could do that. You stretch your arm out but then stop. "Wait, Paps. I'm gonna have to call the police. They'll need to see this first."

Papyrus opens his mouth, probably to protest when Sans suddenly reappears, face grim. "they're gone. no sign of where they went." His sockets are black but his pupils start to flicker back as he sits down next to you and Papyrus. Paps lets you go so you can crawl over into Sans lap. Sans holds you tightly, stroking your hair. You sigh with relief, snuggling into him. You're glad he didn't find them. He was angry and rightly so and of course you didn't want them to get away with this but...

They had guns. They very easily could have shot Sans. You don't even want to imagine that happening.

"paps, could you heal her please?" Sans asks quietly.

You sit up, shaking your head. "He already offered but I have to have something to show the police." You sigh deeply before grinning up at Sans. "I can't believe I have to call them again. They might as well save my number at this point."

Sans doesn't laugh.

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Standing amid the destruction that your apartment has become as the police crawl around, you can't bring yourself to even accept this as real. This has to be some sort of prank or nightmare, right? Sans is right at your side and he brushes his phalanges across the back of your hand.

"are you ok?"

You blink slowly. "I can't stay here," you whisper. "They know where I live. They'll come back."

"ok. ok, you'll move in with us-

You shake your head. "It's too close."

Sans is quiet for a few seconds. "shit," he finally mutters. "ok, we'll figure something out."

You take his hand as the lead investigator comes up to you. He's got a little notepad out, listing the damage done and other things. "Just want to double check," he says, tapping his pen against the pad.
"Did the men take anything?"

"Yes...well I mean...." You bite your lip. "They took my blood."

Sans starts in shock. You forgot to mention that to him in the crazy rush of events.

"Blood?" The officer writes something down. "Did they say why?"

You shake your head. "They put it in some kind of...analyzer? I don't know what it did. They took it with them."

"I see." He taps the pen against his lip. "Well, I think we have all that we need. I would highly suggest staying somewhere else for at least a few days until we get more of a solid lead. I have a feeling that this wasn't just a random attack."

"what do you mean by that?" Sans asks sharply.

The officer hesitates for a moment. "Look, sharing details of other cases isn't permitted but...this isn't the only instance we've had of blood being taken from victims of robbery or assault. And lot of those have lead to disappearances."

Sans presses closer to you as your breath catches in your throat. "How many people?"

"Over half of those attacked." He looks between you and Sans. "We can have a security detail put on you if you want. I would recommend it actually."

You open your mouth, but Sans answers for you. "i know some guys in the guarding business. we'll take care of it."

He looks dubious, but doesn't say anything more on the matter. You exchange a few more details before he and the other officers leave and you're left standing in the mess of broken glass and ceramic. Numbly, you kneel next to the remains of your guitar. You brush your fingers over the limp strings. A lump builds in your throat but damn it, you are so sick of crying. You're sick of simply giving in and wailing about how the world was being unfair.

You're too angry for tears.

Sans kneels next to you. "i'll get you another one," he promises in a low tone.

"But this one was mine." You blink furiously. "It was mine." It wasn't just a guitar. It was a gift from Sans. A gift that showed he truly knew you. It was a chance to finally let go of that guilt that still ate away at you because of the fire.

Sans wraps an arm around you, pulling you close. "i know."

You stay there in his arms for several long minutes, simply staring down at the ground. "Sans, what was that thing?"

You don't have to explain. He knows exactly what you're talking about. "i didn't think i was ever gonna have to use them again." He shifts so that he's no longer kneeling but sitting down, leaning against your ruined beanbag. He looks so defeated. "they're called gaster blasters. a sort of...gift from my old man. my normal attacks are so weak. he wanted me to have something else i could use. something that dealt more damage. i was really hoping you would never have to see it."

"You were going to kill him." It's not a question.
"they hurt you."

You turn to look at him. "Sans, you can't do that. It's wrong."

His pupils fade away before he answers. "i've killed before."

"That doesn't make it right." You gesture to the mess. "We're trying to show people like them that monsters are not mindless creatures. Killing them will only give the others fuel."

His smile curls into a bitter snarl. "there will always be fuel for their fire. it doesn't matter."

"It does!" you snap. "I love you Sans. And I understand that you went through hell in the underground. I understand that you did what you had to. But things are different now."

"are you saying you wouldn't love me if i did kill scum like them?"

You reel back, shocked at his toneless words. "Sans-"

"are you?"

What's gotten into him? "Look, I don't know if you're trying to make me feel bad, or make me leave you to keep me safe." You poke his ribs. "To answer your question, I will always love you. No matter what happens, or what you do. But don't you dare try to pull this crap with me. We've already got people to fight. Don't let them make us fight each other."

Sans blinks at you in surprise. He puts a hand over his sockets, groaning loudly. "i'm sorry," he finally mumbles. "that was a really shitty thing to say."

"Yes it was," you pout, crossing your arms.

He peeks at you from between his phalanges; his pupils are back. "guess i'm carrying extra bag-age."

He tosses some of the beads from the ruined bean bag at you.

"Nuh uh. No punning your way out of this." You fight not to smile.

"dang, that's a shame. i guess that's just the way i've bead doing things for so long."

You snort. "Did you even try with that one?"

He shrugs, grinning. "you laughed."

"I snorted. Not the same thing."

He flops back dramatically. "no, i will not admit def-" The force of his flopping makes a shower of beads explode from a slit in the bag, showering him in the filling. Going by the shocked expression on his face, he wasn't expecting that. That finally gets a laugh out of you. You hold your stomach, laughing until your eyes water. Sans reaches up and tugs you down on top of him. Giggling, you brush a few beads off his skull.

"there's my girl," he murmurs before pressing his teeth to your mouth. You kiss him for a long moment, letting your body sink against his bones.

"We're gonna be okay, right?" You finally whisper against his cheek.

"yeah. i promise." His hand comes up to stroke the back of your head. "we're gonna get through this."
It's going to be okay.

It's got to be.
Not long after that, Toriel and Frisk show up. Turns out Papyrus called them while you were talking with the police. Toriel takes one look at your ruined home and immediately sweeps you up in a tight, furry hug. Frisk and Papyrus trail in after her.

"Oh my dear child," she whispers in a horrified voice. "I am so sorry."

You pat her back, closing your eyes and letting yourself enjoy the warmth of her embrace. When she finally lets you go, Frisk immediately slams into you, wrapping their arms around your waist. They're shaking.

"Hey, I'm okay," you say hoarsely as you pat their head. The movement draws Toriel's gaze to your arm, which by this point is a quite startling shade of purple.

"Oh my! Child, please let me heal you." She doesn't give you a chance to answer before she quickly, but gently takes your arm and hovers her palm above your skin. Goosebumps rise on your arm briefly as a dim green light begins to emit from her. It's warm and sinks into your skin almost like water. The pain and stiffness in your arm is eased and before your very eyes, your bruise fades and shrinks until it vanishes. It only takes a few moments. Then she moves to your neck and it's similarly washed in a wave of gentle warmth. The essence of her magic fills your body and it speaks of home, and a deep, buried pain and unconditional love. And...butterscotch?

You let out a deep breath, the feeling making you almost dizzy. You examine your arm. "Wow. That's incredible!"

Toriel blushes, the color just barely lighting her fuzzy cheeks. "This is nothing really."

Frisk releases you and Sans quickly gives you a once over before giving Toriel a relieved smile. "Thanks Tori."

She nods and then the smile fades from her face as she looks around again. "This is...I don't even have words for it." Her eyes flash with something that's not quite anger, but most certainly isn't just sadness. "What happened here?"

You're too tired to go through it again, so Sans gives Toriel the rundown while you attempt to start cleaning some things up. Frisk and Papyrus immediately join you.

"HUMAN! I SHALL HANDLE THE BROKEN DISHES! AFTER ALL, I THE GREAT PAPYRUS, HAVE NO SKIN WHICH MAY ACCIDENTALLY GET CUT!" Papyrus
brandishes your broom like a trident.

"Okay Paps," you say with a smile. "Frisk, you wanna help me put the filling back inside my poor bean bag?"

They nod eagerly and the two you get to picking up the beads that have spread across floor. Frisk has the bright idea of actually rolling across the ground and the beads stick to their shirt like some kind of human lint roller. They are so proud of themselves, standing there covered in fluff and dust. You giggle, keeping your hand up over your mouth.

"I guess that's one way to do it," you snicker as you kneel and start plucking beads off of their shirt. Their small hands gently touch your cheek and you flinch. The memory of Green Eyes holding your face like you were some sort of doll is still too fresh in your mind. Frisk pulls their hands away and start signing slowly. You don't get it the first time so they do it again.

**Stay. Determined.**

Stay determined huh? You finish brushing Frisk off before you answer. "That's the plan kiddo."

They grin widely for some reason and pat your head.

"FRISK? COULD YOU ASSIST ME WITH THE DUST PAN?" Papyrus calls. He's swept all the broken dishes and glasses up into an impressive pile.

"Be careful!" you call as Frisk bounces over. You get to your feet, brushing off your pants. Well, that's probably as much of the filling that could be saved. You'll have to find time to sew up the cuts in the fabric later. The t.v and your...guitar are beyond repair. You sigh and pick up the busted t.v, angling it so you don't brush your arms against the broken screen. You barely make it to the door when-

Sans appears just in front of you, almost making you drop the t.v. "Geez, I think I've been through enough scares tonight," you grumble, shifting your grip.

"sorry. where are you going?"

"Dumpster. Please tell me you're not going to go over protective boyfriend on me."

He gives you a sheepish shrug before his expression changes into something more serious. "you were attacked like two hours ago. i think i deserve to feel a little protective right now."

"SANS IS RIGHT HUMAN." Your protests are ignored as Papyrus lifts the t.v out of your hands. He places it under one arm before picking the trash bag of broken dishes back up. "I WILL TAKE THIS OUT. DON'T PUSH YOURSELF."

You give Sans a withering scowl as he side steps enough for Papyrus to move around him. Frisk follows him out like a duckling, holding another trash bag. "Sans...."

"just let me be a little protective, at least tonight. all right?" Sans' shoulders slump wearily as he meets your eyes with a pleading gaze. "i could have lost you tonight. i...i can't..." He takes a deep breath, clenching and opening his hands several times while he tries to compose himself.

Your annoyance fizzles away. You pull him into a hug and he slumps against you. "I'm sorry," you whisper, rubbing his skull.

"i can't lose you." He's shaking. "i never thought...god, why is this happening?"
"'Cause people are stupid." You kiss his cheek. "Well, some of them. I mean, Jake is pretty great."

Sans snorts against your shoulder.

"And um, the pizza guy from last week, remember him? He thought you were pretty rad."

"I'm pretty sure you were the one he thought was 'rad'." He nuzzles your neck in a way that makes you squeak.

"I said no tickles!"

"Yeah well you're being a stinker." The gleam has come back in his eyes as he steps back.

Toriel clears her throat loudly and the two of you jump, blushing furiously. Geez, you'd completely forgotten she was standing right there! You give her a sheepish grin as you take Sans' hand and move away from the door. "Sorry Toriel."

She tilts her head, smiling in a knowing way. "Please, do what you must to feel better." Her smile fades. "You're not planning on staying here after all this, are you?"

You sigh and shake your head. "No. Even if there was no threat of them coming back, I don't think I could stay here anyway. It doesn't feel...safe here." If you stayed, you would always remember the exact places they stood. Every time you sat at the table, you would feel their hands on you. They had not only threatened and terrified you, they've violated your home. No, no you can't stay here.

Sans tightens his hold on your hand. "We're gonna have to find someplace new. My place isn't exactly a trek to get to."

We? You look over at Sans. He meets your gaze and gives you a lazy wink. You bite your lip, fighting down a smile.

Toriel nods, seeming to come to a decision. "Then, the both of you and Papyrus will come stay with me."

Huh? You lift your hands. "No, no I couldn't do that. That would just be imposing."

"No it wouldn't," Toriel laughs.

"I can just stay at a hotel for a few days while I find a new apartment," you stutter. "Really, it's fine."

Toriel places a hand on your shoulder, cutting off your protests. "My dear, it is really no trouble. You can stay for as long as you need to. You've been through a lot. You need a chance to stay someplace safe while you figure things out."

"I-" You hesitate. You want to say yes. You really want to. But... You look at the ground. "I don't want you guys to be in danger. I mean, Frisk is just a kid. What if they come to your house?"

Toriel shakes her head firmly. "They will not get that chance. Not to toot my own horn, but I am a fairly powerful monster. They would be very unwise to mess with me or those I care about."

Sans nods. "Torii's got a point. If it's a safe place you're looking for, it doesn't get much safer than her house. And remember what I said? I got friends in the bodyguard business. We get them on the job, no one will be getting in the house. Besides," he taps your shoulder and jabs his thumb towards the door. "I think the kid can handle themselves."

"FRISK, DO NOT BRING SNOW INTO _____ APARTMENT!" Papryus comes tearing in
through the door, Frisk hot on his heels with a handful of snow. "SANS! I NEED ASSISTANCE!"
In his haste, he trips over his own feet and falls straight towards your bean bag. There's an explosion
of fluffy beads, raining down like a snow cloud burst in your apartment. Frisk tries to skid to a stop
but winds up falling too. The snowball flies out of their hands, smacking against the far
wall. Papyrus pops his head up; the foam beads are sticking to his skull. He looks like a vastly
malnourished Santa Claus.

"Pfft!" You can't hold it in. Laughter explodes from you and Sans and Toriel soon join in. The
apartment, where two hours ago you had been threatened and filled with terror, is now alight with
joy and hope. Yeah, how could you say no to this?

With everyone helping, it takes a surprisingly short time to pack up what you need. The long term
stuff, as well as the rest of the cleaning you leave for tomorrow. You need the night to relax. The
drive over is fairly quiet and when you pull up to Toriel's house, Sans is on his phone, chattering
away to someone on the line.

"yeah. asap. what? uhh...well i got plenty of 'bones'. ok. yep."

Bones? You give him a questioning look and he just waves a hand. You unload everything into the
house, settling down in the guest bedroom. For now Frisk is going to crash with Toriel and give their
room to Paps while and you and Sans share. It occurs to you that, if Sans was a normal boyfriend,
sharing a room so soon after you started dating would be rather scandalous. Of course Sans wasn't a
typical boyfriend. And you've spent almost every night with him for the last little while anyway. But
still. It was no longer 'your' room or 'Sans' room. It was yours together. An odd sense of shyness
overtakes you as you unpack your clothes into the drawers. Well...it's not just the shyness keeping
you quiet. Now that things are settling down a little, you can't shake the memories of those men. You
can't stop feeling the needle in your arm.

Sans hasn't brought much with him. Some basic clothes and his guitar, which he has propped up
against the wall. The one thing he did insist on bringing immediately was the glow in the dark stars.
He's currently at work putting them up in the exact same way you had back at his place. The
bedroom is slightly bigger than his old place and he's going on about how he wants to add more
galaxies and stuff.

"hey, we could even put a moon in the corner. i bet i could make it one of those clap on, clap off
things," he says in an almost overly cheerful voice.

"Hmm."

He pauses in his star sticking. "hey, you ok?"

You quickly fold up your underwear and shove it in the drawer before he gets a good look. "Yeah,
I'm fine. Just...a lot of stuff is happening so fast, you know?" You look over at him. "Is this really
okay? Us staying here?"

"sweetheart, tori would'a dragged you here kicking and screaming if she had to."

You chuckle. "I don't doubt it."

Sans eyes you for a few moments. Setting down the stars and sticky tack, he sits down on the floor
next to you. "hey, um. i know you've been a lot in the last...hell when did the craziness start?"

"I think when I first met you and Paps," you say with a smirk.
He nods before fiddling with his phalanges. "fair enough. so that being said, there's um...i wanna do something for you. rather i wanna show you something. i guess? and you can totally say no if you want, i mean it won't hurt my feelings or anything. i just...you're hurting babe. your soul i mean. i wanna help."

Huh. He's blushing furiously. Now he's got your full attention. You push your suitcase aside and turn to face him, crossing your legs. "Sans, if you think it will help, I'm up for whatever you want."

"ok. ok." He nods to himself a few times before putting his hands out towards you, palms up. "i wanna...um. it's soul stuff. so if it makes you feel uncomfortable, just tell me and i'll stop. ok?"

You put your hands in his and lock eyes with him. "I trust you. All the way." He takes a breath, a flicker of wondrous joy lighting his face. Then his gaze falls to your chest. To your Soul. You feel that tugging sensation and it materializes in front of you. Man, you'd forgotten just how beautiful it was. It hovers before you, still cracked, perhaps a little dim but pulsing strong. The light of your Soul falls on Sans' skull and you can see that he's staring at your Soul with utter awe. The complete adoration in his expression makes you blush.

But he's not done yet. After a few moments of silent staring, he closes his sockets. You see a glow building up in his rib cage. A delighted gasp escapes you as his own Soul begins to appear. It's the same cartoon heart shape, but it's upside down. While the essence of his Soul is a startling white, you can see a blue aura that pulses from deep within. His Soul hovers in the air, just a few inches away from yours. Your Soul almost seems to brighten slightly in its presence while his takes on a faint hue of purple and orange. Their combined light dances with energy and life.

"is...is it ok if i..." Sans lifts his hands, digits trembling just a bit as he stops just before touching your Soul. You can't bring yourself to speak, but you nod. Clearly and firmly.

His phalanges oh so gently cup your Soul and you gasp as you feel yourself being opened up. When you touched it before, it was like peering down into a vast canyon of emotion and memories that threatened to sweep you away. Now, that vast, dark world is utterly exposed before the monster before you. You are fragile, like a newborn child and Sans has the power to utterly crush you. But he doesn't. Within his grasp, you feel only love, and worry and a deep well of emotion that you've only just begun to see. Your Soul holds a sea and Sans feels like strong wind, breaking over the surface and brushing against your most intimate thoughts and feelings. You can see in his expression that he is overwhelmed. Shock, love, empathy and fear all battle for dominance and are finally beaten out by understanding. In this moment, you know that Sans has felt everything. He knows you and your pain on a whole new level.

He gasps for breath, pulling your Soul close to his chest. For a instant, for an eternity, he just breathes. Then his gaze rises from your Soul to meet your eyes, which are streaming tears. "now you," he whispers. His Soul waits for you, it's light pulsing like a heart beat. This is Sans. This is his everything. You lift your hands and hesitate only for a moment before touching it and you're swept away.

If your Soul is a canyon, his is a galaxy. The vastness, the knowledge, the pain contained within this tiny Soul makes you weep. He is patience, he is love, he is suffering. Oh, the pain he has endured. It's unbearable. He Soul contains so many fine cracks, spreading across it's contained power that you feel as if you are stepping on ice. Yet within that pain is a steady determination. There's is a speck of
hope that will not, cannot be beaten. And his love, his love knows no bounds. He gives and gives and never expects a thing back in return. His love for you burns so brightly within him. It is woven into his very being and with it there is a terrible fear. A fear that he will one day lose you.

There's more here, there are countless years of memories and emotions but you can't take anymore. You release his Soul and he does the same. Your Souls return to their place and then you're in his arms and he's crying and you're crying and you feel like there is no end to you and no start to him. You are together and in this moment you are one being, breathing, living. You are one in your past pain and your current love and hope.

Time passes. You don't know how long. You don't care. Eventually though, the tears stop. Your heartbeat slows and you realize that at some point, you both fell to the floor and are curled around each other. Your legs are tangled and your limbs are starting to buzz from falling asleep. Well, that's okay. A little static in your legs was nothing compared to what you just felt.

Sans brushes his hand over your face. "was...was that ok?" he murmurs.

You let out a breathy sigh. "Yes. That...that was. Wow."

He chuckles. "wow indeed." He presses a long, slow kiss against your forehead. "god, i've wanted to do that for a long time."

You lift your head slightly. "Why didn't you?"

He shrugs. "it's...well it's a serious thing. sharing souls. i didn't want to pressure you."

Well that was for certain. You sit up, rubbing at your face. "I'm glad," you say as he sits up too. "I mean...that you shared your Soul with me. Thank you."

Sans wraps his arms around your waist, pulling you into his lap. "i should be thanking you," he says in a hushed voice. "i just..."

"I know." You turn slightly and kiss him. "I know."

There's a knock at the door. "Sans? _____?" Toriel calls. "I believe your bodyguard unit is here."

"Okay, we'll be out in a minute," you call. You really don't want to move. Sans is pretty reluctant to let you go as well. "C'mon Sans, we can't keep them waiting."

His grip tightens. "i love you," he whispers in your ear. He's scared. He's so scared of what tomorrow will bring. You can hear it in his voice. You felt it in his Soul.

You turn and kneel in front of him. Cupping his skull, you kiss him deeply. "I love you." Your words hold a promise and he understands without needing the words.

The two of you walk hand in hand out of the room and head towards the door. You can hear a noisy commotion and when you round the corner, your hands fly over your mouth with glee.

It's a dog! A dog in a suit of armor! Wait, you've seen this dog before. At Grillby's if you're remembering right.

"hey there lesser," Sans calls cheerfully, sauntering out. "babe, this is lesser dog. less, this is _____."

"Hi!" You walk up, stars in your eyes and hand outstretched. "It's very nice to meet you-"

Both Sans and Frisk reach out at the same time in a 'wait' motion, but your hand has already landed
on the white dog's head, petting him gently. You jump back in shock as his neck suddenly extends, lifting his head up above yours. His tail is wagging furious, making his armor clink loudly. His snouted face is the definition of glee and happiness.

"sorry, shoulda warned ya," Sans says with a laugh as you stare up at the dog. "lesser uh, likes to be pet. a lot."

Okay, so your new dog bodyguard has an extending neck and a rather enthusiastic personality.

You can live with that.
New Home

Chapter Notes

I got my first fan art and I'm still staring at it so you should toooo!!

So short chapter because I am moving in five days and my life is chaos right now. This also means the next update will probably take a while thanks to all the packing and then two day drive I've got ahead of me. Love you guys!

New Year's comes and goes and you slowly start to settle in to your new home. To say living in a house full of monsters (and a child ambassador) takes some getting used to is a massive understatement. It's not bad! Not at all but you're used to being able to play whatever kind of music you wanted and wander around in boy shorts or less. Now you have to actually pay attention to that sort of stuff. And it's not that being around everyone makes you self conscious. No it's because Toriel has so many freaking visitors!

The first incident happens a few days after you moved in and you could not resist the urge to pull a Tom Cruise on the wooden hallway floor. Thus dressed in an oversized shirt, fuzzy socks and sunglasses, you slide over the floor, belting 'Just take those old records off the shelf!' and triumphantly skid past the living room.

Only to find the room filled not only with Toriel, Asgore and Sans, but also six dog like creatures with huge round ears and small black eyes you later learned were called Temmies. You freeze as everyone stares at you in confusion. Then, as one, the Temmies cry out "It's HUmaN! Sooo cUte!"

And so faced with no other choice, you flee to your room, Sans' roaring laughter right at your heels. He comes to check on you soon after. "come on, it wasn't that bad." His reassurances didn't really do much thanks to the snorts and giggles he kept making.

You kick your feet against the bed as you lay face down, groaning into your pillow. "I looked like such a moron!"

"seriously, it's no big deal. monsters aren't exactly the type to care about appearances." He rubs your back reassuringly. "even though it was pretty cute."

"Call me cute again and I'm gonna kick you."

His digits tap down your spine. "i find that acutely unfair." You smack at him with your foot, toes hitting the bone of his arm. "ow. you're really breaking my boney heart here."

You lift your head, a smirk on your face as you wiggle your toes. "I told ya..."

Sans grins at you, waving the stump that is his right arm. It's completely detached from the elbow down and sitting on the blanket. Your resulting scream brings most of the house hold running. When Sans finally stops cackling, he shows you that he can detach and reattach the arm as he pleases. You don't talk to him for an hour after that.
Turns out that while most of the official meetings and discussions held with human representatives are held mostly at the courthouse, or other professional places. But most monsters felt very uneasy and overwhelmed in such imposing human environments. So those with issues to talk about were invited to the queen's house. So it seems like a steady flow of monsters come in and out and most of them are very eager to meet you. You shake hands, tentacles, claws, and even a piece of ice. It's all very...overwhelming at times. But everyone is so nice and you have to admit, it's kind of nice to be treated like some kind of star.

It's also very, very nice to wake up almost every morning to find breakfast on the table. Toriel always woke before you or Sans did and unless she has to immediately dash, she takes time to prepare some kind of breakfast in the morning. Since she refused to accept any kind of rent or payment from you, you try to help with cooking and cleaning when you can. It's nice to keep yourself busy, especially when the noise in your head starts to grow to unbearable levels.

Your nightmares, which had slowly started decreasing in both occurrence and intensity thanks to Sans' arms wrapped around you as you slept, surge to a new, terrifying set of dreams that plague you every night. It always starts and ends the same way. You are in a white room, with no windows or doors. As you scramble to find a way out, the walls turn crimson, burning with a bright flame that creeps closer and closer to you. And then, a dark figure with green eyes peels away from the fire and reaches for you with burning skin and needles in hands covered in blood. Every night you are locked in petrified terror as you are stabbed and burned by the laughing man, unable to move or breathe or escape.

Sans has to fight to wake you from every nightmare. The first night it happens, you can only hyperventilate into his chest as he holds and rocks you, gently murmuring words that barely register in your panicked mind. There are a few times, when you're clinging to the bed sheets, shivering, Sans will press a hot mug of tea into your hands. The funny thing about that is he doesn't once leave the room when this happens. It wasn't until the third time that you were aware enough of your surrounds to see the door open just slightly and a large, furry hand set a steaming cup on the ground before retreating without a single word.

You owe so much to Toriel.

As the days go on, you can tell that Sans is barely sleeping. He's too busy watching you and stroking your head when you twitch and spasm with the horrifying images. You try to plead with him to get some sleep, even suggesting he takes a night or two to sleep with Papyrus. Get a good night's rest where your screaming wouldn't wake him. The first few times he shrugs it off, or dodges answering, but eventually he puts his foot down.

"babe, even if i did sleep away from you, i'd be awake worrying," he says, peeking up at you from under the blanket on the couch where he's currently napping. "so there's no point."

"Yeah but-"

"i don't have a butt. stop worrying about me, ok?" He burrows under the blanket and promptly falls asleep, the matter closed in his mind.

So there's that. At least he is still napping whenever you have a free evening at home where he can wake a moment's notice if he needs to. It's not ideal, but it's something.

Another huge adjustment you have to make is getting used to having an actual bodyguard. Lesser Dog is...well a dog. A dog with sharp, monster intelligence, but still a dog. But Sans is confident that Less can keep you safe, so you try your best to trust him but you can't understand him in the same way you can the others and that leads to a few frustrations and misunderstandings. Like him getting
distracted by the most random things and eating the lunches you pack for work. And explaining him to the station...!

"So," Tod says slowly, staring at Less the day you sheepishly bring him to the station. Or rather Sans brings him, thanks to your MIA car. While it's in the shop he's your current ride, dropping you off with a shortcut before very quickly going back to get Less. "You were attacked in your own home, moved to a new place and got a dog? All within the time between Christmas and New Years?"

"Girl, have you seen how high his neck goes?!" Abby squeals with delight, scratching Less' neck. The dog's head is currently lodged in the ceiling.

"He's not my dog," you say to Tod. "He's...I mean, it was this or have cops hanging around me twenty-four seven."

Tod isn't quite convinced, but thanks to Sans' assurances, he agrees to let Less stay in the lobby area. Sans himself is almost oddly calm about the whole thing, until it comes time for him to leave you for the first time since the attack. Less makes himself comfortable in the corner by the plants, neck shrinking and you give Sans' hand a squeeze.

"Well, back to work I go," you mutter.

He tugs your arm, pulling you back slightly. He waits until Tod heads back to the booth and Abby suddenly has 'something to do, uh, somewhere' and gives you some privacy. Then he presses his skull against your shoulder.

"you'll call me if you even think something is wrong?"

"Nah, I'll just curl into a ball and cry," you say with a weak smile.

"I'm being serious here." His tone is low, a little scared.

You rub his arm reassuringly. "I know. I promise I will call if anything happens. But I have Less here and after what happened to my office, Tod made sure cameras were installed. This is almost as safe as Toriel's place. I'll be okay."

He holds you for several long seconds more. "ok. i'll...see you at five then." He gives you a quick kiss and then he's gone.

You take a moment to compose yourself and Less whines at you in concern. You pat his head (making his neck grow several inches) and head back to the booth. Tod is waiting for you and he wants to know everything. He's done so much for you so, as hard as it is, you quietly retell the story. He's silent the whole time, face growing grim and dark.

"Are you okay?" he finally asks when you finish.

You shrug. It's all confused and jumbled in your head. How could you be okay after that? The fear is there, just waiting for a noise, a slight movement in the corner of your eye. And yet, the love and protection that has poured in from those monsters who blamed themselves for getting you into this situation helps to keep you calm. "It's...it's really complicated Tod."

He nods, like he understands. "May I see the phone you used to call Sans?"

"Oh, sure." You pull it out, handing it to him. He examines it closely, a bemused look on his face.

"This is fascinating," he murmurs, running a finger over the buttons. He pauses at the emergency
Sans' button, finger lingering just over it. "And this works like what, a GPS signal?"

"Something like that," you say as he hands the phone back. "It runs on magic. Alphys tried to explain it to me. You know that monsters have the ability to see Souls, right?"

"Yes."

"To an extent, they can sense them from far away and that's something Sans is actually pretty good at. That's how he was able to follow Frisk around when they were underground. But that was just one human Soul among monsters. Easy to spot. Here, there are so many that he said it's like looking for a single speck of color in a stained glass window. There's just too much. But this sends out a special kind of signal straight to his phone. It lets him know I need him and where I am just in case...well in case I need him."

For your attacks. For the times when you can't bear to speak. And now, sadly for if you actually got attacked.

He gets what you're talking about. "Ah, I see. So you managed to contact him and he came running." He steeples his fingers, eyes going distant. "Imagine what humans could do with technology like this. Rescue missions in war, locating missing people. The potential is astounding."

You give him a wry smile. He doesn't know about Sans' teleporting (not many people did) and while yes, having such a powerful, magical GPS would be very useful, without the skeleton and his shortcuts, it wouldn't be exactly the same. "Yeah, but people are still too scared to see that. Alphys is making good progress on combining human technology with monster science and magic at least. I think she's working on some kind of power source for the city?" She's mentioned it to you a few times but she tended to very quickly dive into complicated sciencey and magical terms that are difficult for you to understand. "And hey, the bill for monster rights is being voted on soon. So hopefully progress will be made after that gets approved."

"That's if it gets approved," Tod says dryly. "When is the voting? A week from now?"

"Eight days."

He leans back in his chair, running a hand through his hair. "Well. We can only hope. Speaking of that, did we get a date for the Mettaton interview confirmed?"

Ah, shoot. You've completely forgotten about Mettaton's requests. Particularly the one about Papyrus.

Well, you can do that tonight.

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"you want to what?" Sans, who is currently flopped on the floor next to Frisk as they doodle in a large sketchbook, stares up at you like he can't believe what you just said. "please, tell me you did not agree to send my brother on an...outing with that robot."

"Of course I didn't!" You join them on the floor, sitting cross legged. Frisk turns their book slightly to show you a drawing. It's some kind of weird...t.v looking thing with vines and a creepy, wide eyed face. "Very...nice Frisk. Anyway, all I said is I would bring up the idea. Which is what I'm doing. And you should be thanking me, he told me not to tell you."

"for good reason," Sans growls, pupils shrinking slightly.

You lie down, putting your head where his belly would be. There's just enough support from whatever it is that gives him shape to keep your head from sinking. "Sans, do you hate Mettaton?"
He hesitates and lets out a breath. "not the word i'd use."

"Then what would you use?"

"...intense dislike and mistrust?"

You turn until your head is facing his. "He's really not that bad. I mean, he did pay for our meal and made me look pretty for once."

"stop that, you're always pretty." He idly runs his phalanges through your hair. Frisk makes a gagging noise. A pillow flies off the couch in a cloud of blue and smacks them in the face. He continues like nothing happened. "the dinner thing, well that was um. blackmail? kinda?"

"You blackmailed Mettaton into paying for dinner?" You sit up, giving him a smack on his stomach.

"all i said was it would make paps happy and that i'd um...spillhissecretotherwise."

"Sans!"

He puts his hands up. "i wasn't really gonna!"

You scowl at him. "Fine then. You've got no right to stand between a nice dinner for those two after that."

Sans shuts his sockets. "i just don't want paps to get hurt. met just...he seems like the kind of guy who would ending up doing that. intentionally or not."

You sigh. He has a point. It's the same worry that's been eating at you. "Pap is a strong skeleton. Stronger than I think you realize sometimes. If Mettaton does end up...if he takes one step out of line I will be the first to smack him in the face."

Sans is still hesitating. "...that tacky robot has really bad movies anyway," he mumbles as he rolls over and reaches for the remote. Recently, he's taken to watching the evening news for any sign of the group responsible for attacking you. Not that there's been anything unusual aside from the fact that more and more businesses have begun barring monsters from entering. It seems now that the initial shock of monsters entering the city has worn off, people have begun to get more and more bold in their declarations of hate.

Sans clicks the t.v on. The three of you freeze as a screaming headline as well as the image of a snarling monster fills the screen.

'MONSTER ATTACK IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA. PUBLIC WARNING ISSUED TO REMAIN INDOORS.'
The three of you watch the t.v in horrified shock as the live footage starts to roll in. The camera is shaky and dark shadows from the various buildings makes it hard to see the rampaging monster. But then it steadies and the creature on the screen is like nothing you've seen before. It's hunched nearly in half but it still has to be at least six feet tall. Its skin is gaunt and stretched thinly over its bony limbs. Some sort of torn, dark clothing barely covers its body. Its face has no discernible shape. In fact its head almost looks like a constantly shifting pile of goop set on uneven shoulders. But even with the shaky camera, you can see a mouth full of sharp teeth that is open and panting.

Suddenly, like it can sense that it's being watched, its head turns sharply to stare right at the camera. A chill runs down your spine. It lets out a roar that sounds more like a strangled scream. "What is that thing?" You look to Sans, who's sockets are glued to the t.v.

"i don't know," he says in a hushed voice. "i know everyone from underground. but i've never seen this guy before."

"Police are attempting to engage the monster but non lethal weapons have so far proven useless against the creature." The reporter, a man standing at a safe distance is clearly shaken but determined to report the situation. "Currently four civilians have been injured and transported to the hospital. Authorities have shut down all surrounding roads and are attempting to keep the monster in the current area."

The camera turns slightly and you realize you recognize the area. That's not far from Toriel's place. Sans realizes it at the same moment and blips out of sight for a few seconds, probably to check the locks. Frisk tugs on your sleeve and points to the t.v. You squint and gasp as you recognize the red headed figure charging towards the creature. Undyne's face is twisted in a snarl as a green spear materializes in her hand.

"I'm getting word that the monster confronting the creature is the old captain of the monster Royal Guard and--oh God!" Undyne chucks the spear at the beast and it-

Bounces off before falling to the ground and dissolving. The beast looks at it for several seconds before slowly shuffling to face Undyne. It screams again and Undyne's hands go up over her ears.

"It appears that even monster attacks have no effect on this creature!"

Not that that's stopping Undyne. She starts churning out spear after spear, dancing around the creature in a terrifyingly graceful way. The thing swipes at her a few times with claw tipped hands but she manages to jump away before it can hit her. Her attacks continue to either bounce off or pass right through the monster without doing much damage.

"tori, have you seen this?" Sans is back, talking urgently into his phone. "yeah. no we're at home. ok. i'll call al." He hangs up and starts typing on the keys when Frisk suddenly stands and puts a hand on his arm. Sans pauses. "what kid? we don't-"

He stops as Frisk points to the t.v, their face set with determination. They release him and sign quickly. You only catch the words 'help' and 'hurting'.

"no way buddy. do you know what your mom would do to me?"
Frisk frowns and points to the t.v again. Oh crap, they want to help.

"Frisk, it's too dangerous," you say, getting to your feet. "I mean, look at it. It's not even flinching at Undyne's attacks."

Frisk shakes their head. **I want to talk. No fighting.**

"No offense, but this doesn't look like a talk it down situation."

**They're going to keep hurting people. I have to try.**

You rub a hand over your face. "Look-

"can you do it?" Sans asks quietly.

Your mouth drops open. "Sans you can't be thinking-!"

Frisk nods firmly. **You can keep me safe.**

Sans sighs. "fine. your mom's gonna dust me."

You can't believe what you're hearing. "Sans!"

"hey, the kid made it all the way through the underground and survived right?"

Frisk snorts loudly.

"not helping your case kiddo," Sans says, shooting them an exasperated look.

"Sans, if even you have no idea what this thing is, I really don't think you should be messing with it."

"The use of assault weapons is being discussed with the king of monsters Asgore." The tv man cuts in right at that moment. "The monster King is reluctant to use heavy firepower against the creature."

Frisk gives you a pleading look. **They're in pain. I can see it.**

You look back at the tv and let out a hissing breath. They both have a point. Frisk is the ambassador, as young as they are. They have experience with calming enraged monsters. And if something didn't happen fast, the police were going to bring out the big guns. Out of control raging aside, it was still a monster. Something must have happened to set them off. They deserved at least a chance to be reasoned with. "Fine. But I'm coming with you."

Sans' pupils shrink. "sorry, but i'd really like you to stay here."

You gape at him for a second. He's not serious is he? "If you say it's too dangerous I swear to God-

"then i won't say it." He avoids your gaze. "sorry. paps."

You whirl around to find Papyrus in the entryway, wringing his hands together. He must have been upstairs. He and Sans share a long look. After several long seconds, Papyrus nods in understanding. Before you can move, he strides over and wraps his arms around you, lifting you a little and pinning you to him.

You kick and glare at Sans. "What are you doing!?"

"you can yell at me later. c'mon kid." Sans reaches out and grabs Frisk and then they're gone.
Oh forget Toriel. You're going to kill him when he gets back! You yell out wordlessly in frustration, squirming in Papyrus' grip. "Papyrus, put me down!"

"I HAVE TO KEEP YOU SAFE FROM HARM BECAUSE LESSER DOG IS OFF DUTY TONIGHT!" His voice is quivering and his bones are making a quiet clacking. "WILL YOU PROMISE ME YOU WON'T TRY TO GO AFTER THEM?"

You consider lying for a brief second. But you can't bear to do that to Papyrus when he's so clearly scared. Besides how would you even get there? Your car is still in the shop and even if you ran, you wouldn't make it in time. "I promise," you mumble, going slack.

Papyrus sets you down slowly. "I AM VERY SORRY." His chin is trembling. "I WISH TO GO AFTER THEM TOO. AFTER ALL, T-THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS THE B-BEST AT CAPTURING THOSE WHO NEED..." He trails off, looking miserable.

Oh Pap. You take his hand. "It's my fault you can't go with them. I'm sorry Pap."

He shakes his head, like he's clearing it. "NO. KEEPING YOU SAFE IS A VERY IMPORTANT DUTY AS WELL."

"The Monster Ambassador has arrived on the scene!" The reporter cries out.

You and Papyrus hurry to the t.v. You can see Frisk and Sans lingering just behind them. The rampaging monster takes its goopy eyes off of Undyne and turns to Frisk. The moment they lock eyes, the creature roars and charges towards Frisk, moving with terrifying speed. You gasp but Frisk has vanished. It takes the camera a moment to find them again.

The creature skids to a halt, slamming against a parked car and looks around in confusion for a moment before whirling. Again it charges and again Sans and Frisk vanish and reappear in a different spot.

Undyne continues to hurl spears at it but it's paying her no mind. It has become solely focused on Frisk. You can't help but continue to hold Papyrus' hand as the two of you watch the ones you love dance around the creature that is showing no signs of slowing or giving up. Simply watching, being unable to do a thing to help is infuriating. You want to be there by Sans' side, keeping him safe.

As the fight drags on, Sans is clearly slowing down and the beast nearly hits them a number of times. Every time it happens your heart freezes in your chest. Every time they reappear, Frisk holds a hand out towards the creature, clearly attempting to communicate with it. But finally, they take a different stance.

The camera zooms in on Sans; his tight smile is still in place but you can see sweat running down his skull. He lets go of Frisk and they take a step forward and open their arms wide, as if welcoming the monster in. The monster, spotting them again, takes a few steps forward, snarling. Frisk opens their mouth but you can't hear what they're saying. The monster freezes, limbs spasming. As Frisk continues to speak, it claps its hands up over where their ears would be, shaking its goopy head. It curls in on itself, screaming at such a velocity that it makes the speaker on the camera screech with feedback. It stands to its full, terrifying height, clawing at its chest. For a brief moment you see a flash of something. Something twisted and broken and wrong thudding where its Soul should be.

Then its legs give out and it collapses to the ground. Within a few seconds, its body disappears into dust and leaves behind a twisted, broken skeleton. Frisk is staring at the remains in shock and then chaos erupts and the camera is moving too fast for you to see what's happening.
Papyrus lets out a sob, covering his face with the hand you aren't gripping. From relief that Sans, Frisk and Undyne are okay or sorrow that monster died, you can't tell. You don't know what to say so you continue holding his hand, fear and worry and confusion all twisting your stomach into a knot.

That knot of worry only grows as time passes and you don't receive so much as a text from Sans. Or from anyone. You call Sans multiple times as well as Undyne and even Alphys. No one answers. You start pacing in frustration. Papyrus watches you closely, lifting his hand slightly if you get too close to the door.

"I AM SURE THEY ARE FINE!" He tries to assure you. "AFTER ALL, YOU SAW HOW FAST MY BROTHER IS."

"Then why haven't they called?" You try not to snap at him. It's not his fault. You're just so scared. You feel like the fear and panic is running through your veins, screaming at you to do something!

Almost an hour passed before you hear a car pulling up in the driveway and an exhausted Sans, Frisk and Undyne followed by a quivering Alphys stumble in through the door. You're furious with Sans but you can't stop yourself from almost knocking him over with the force of your hug.

He stumbles back, almost hitting the wall. He pats your back a little hesitantly. "heh, not the reaction i was expecting."

"Oh the yelling is going to come," you growl as you squeeze him tightly. "Count on that, bone head."

You let him go and everyone trudges into the living room. Undyne collapses on the couch; her armor is dented. The thing must have hit her after all.

Everyone is silent for several long seconds. "Where is Toriel?" You finally ask. "Since she's not here I'm assuming she went to the place where that thing was?""Yeah," Undyne groans. "It was a freaking nightmare over there. I thought the cops were gonna arrest me again."

"What happened after..." You glance at Papyrus who is trying valiantly to keep his bones from clacking "After it fell? The t.v cut out."

"Oh you know humans," Undyne groans, waving a hand in the air. "Soon as it was down they started swarming. Some guys in black suits took what was left of the thing before I could really get a good look. There were people everywhere, shouting at us, at each other. It looked kinda bad but then Toriel showed up and calmed things down a bit."

Alphys, who looks utterly miserable, pulls a tiny bottle from her pocket. It's filled with gray dust. "I m-managed to g-get a sample of what w-was left," she mumbles. "I'll run t-tests at the university."

"Do you have any idea of what that thing was?" Undyne asks her, tilting her head just enough to look at her girlfriend. "That wasn't an amalgamate was it?"

An amala-what? You start to ask but Alphys shakes her head. "There are s-similarities but I've n-never seen a c-creature like that."

You look to Sans, hoping he might explain but he's slumped in the armchair, sockets partially closed. He looks like he's barely even awake.
"Took forever to get outta there, 'specially since Sans was outta juice." Undyne continues.

Sans starts in his chair, lifting his skull. "you try teleporting two souls over and over. i never wanna work that hard again."

You bite at your lip. You know that using his shortcuts took a bit of a toll on him after a while but you've never seen him wear out so fast. Was this because he wasn't getting any sleep? You look to Frisk, who is just standing there by the fireplace, arms wrapped around themselves. "Hey," you say softly as you approach them. "Are you okay?"

Frisk slowly nods. Then they shake their head, lip quivering. That's right; they killed a monster tonight. Technically not for the first time...but those instances before hadn't really been them acting of their own free will. But this....

Like they hear what you're thinking, they slowly sign, **I thought I was getting through, I found the right words. But then they started screaming. They hurt so much. Then they just....** Frisk's hands are shaking. **They just...died!** Frisk throws their arms around you, squeezing tightly as a noiseless sob breaks from them.

They didn't kill the monster? You glance at Sans as you rub Frisk's head.

He nods. "it was like it...gave up." His brow bone furrows. "when it started listening to the kid it's body just stopped working. it's soul just gave out. if you can call what it had inside a soul."

So you weren't just seeing things. You rub Frisk until they sniffle and pull back. "Hey, how about you go sit with Pap and I'll make you some tea. Sound good?"

They nod and you give them a push towards the taller skeleton. "Sans, come give me a hand." You don't wait to see if he follows you. You don't need to. You pull out the kettle and the monster tea that Toriel always made. Since it was monster food, it worked like...well like magic when it came to restoring energy.

You hear Sans slouch into the kitchen and pull out a chair at the bar. He's quiet, watching you pour water into the kettle. "alphys tried to help monsters that had fallen down by injecting them with human determination," he says in a tired whisper. "didn't work like she wanted. it made their forms unstable. sticky. they had to mold with other fallen down monsters or melt away completely."

"And those are the amalgamates?"

"yep. thought maybe that was what that thing was. but it was something different. worse."

Worse than monsters forced to mold together to survive? The hairs on your arms stick up with goosebumps. You take a breath, focusing on the tea. "Did you get any of my calls?"

Sans pulls his phone out, flicking it open. "...crap."

"Gonna take that as a no." Breathe. Don't get worked up. "I was really worried. Paps was scared. We had no idea what was going on."

"i'm sorry."

"Did you seriously not think to at least let us know you were ok? I mean, since you forced me to stay here where I had to watch everything on the freaking news channel."

Sans puts his phone down on the counter. "you understand why i had to do that don't you?"
"How about you tell me clearly because I'm not fond of going off assumptions." You turn to him, crossing your arms.

"it was too dangerous!" His sockets narrow a little. "that thing could have come after your, or the men that hurt you could have shown up."

"Those are a lot of what ifs Sans. But what you're saying is that it was too risky for me, but you could take the literal eight year old-"

"yeah, a kid that has insanely powerful gifts who knows how to use them!" Sans stands up, irritation starting to lace his tone. He wobbles a little and has to balance himself with the counter. "what was i supposed to do? whatever that thing was, it was clearly not gonna stop. should i have waited for the police to bring out missiles? let humans kill a monster? don't you understand what that would mean?"

"Yeah, I get it. Which is why I didn't try to stop you. But you should have taken me with you! I could have helped!"

"how?" His tone is cold, rational.

You open your mouth, but nothing comes out. All of your fussing and now you can't even give him an answer. "Look I...I don't know what i could've done. But I wanted to be with you regardless. You just dove off into danger alone. I can't bear the thought of something happening to you. Especially when I'm not there." You gesture to him. "just take look at yourself! You can barely stand! What if something had gone wrong?"

"i'm fine."

"No you're not!" You clench your fists. "This is because you haven't gotten a wink of sleep for the past week!"

He shrugs carelessly. "i knew i'd be ok. i'm fast."

"Doesn't matter how fast you are if you are too exhausted to move," you point out, jabbing a finger at him.

"you're right; it doesn't matter because as long as i'm not distracted by-" He stops talking as your jaw drops in rage.

"Care to say that again?" You say in a scarily calm voice. "I'm a distraction?"

"that's not what i'm saying."

"That's exactly what you're saying!"

He throws his hands up in exasperation. "fine! if you were there i would have been distracted making sure you were safe and possibly gotten myself and the kid killed! happy?"

Damn it, your lip is starting to tremble. "So that's that. I'm just the poor helpless human who needs to be tossed aside while the grown ups deal with the problems that get thrown our way huh?"

Sans rubs his hands over his skull, groaning into his palms. "you're not a helpless human-"

You shake your head, looking away from him. "No, I am. Fine, I'll...I'll learn how to fight. Undyne can teach me."

The lights in his sockets shrink. "that's not necessary."
"So what? Just continue how things have been? I see," you say sarcastically. "Oh no! My office was attacked? Get away from the site. Bad men sneak into my home and take my blood? Quick! Drop her off with someone else while the monsters search for them! Because clearly I'm too fragile to deal with the problems!"

"Getting away the logical thing to do!" Sans is yelling now, in a volume that you've never heard from him before. "You don't stay and invite danger to come back! You leave and make a plan!"

"And what plan is that? Being followed by bodyguards for the rest of my life?" The tea pot starts to whistle and in your hasty anger, you accidentally brush your fingers against the boiling hot kettle. "Ow! Damn it!"

Sans steps forward, his anger easing into concern and you turn away from his outstretched hand. You run your red fingers under cold water as he continues to stand there, slowly lowering his hand. You shut the water off but don't turn around. "I know I'm not a powerful monster like you or Paps or hell, like Frisk." The savage anger has left your voice. Now you're just so tired. Tired of being afraid, tired of feeling helpless and weak. "I love you and everything that you've done for me. But I don't need to be coddled."

"____." His voice is shaking.

"I...I think you should stay in Papyrus' room tonight," you whisper. Then, before he can answer you push past him and escape to your room. You manage to close and lock the door before the tears start to flow.

Chapter End Notes

Writing believable fights is hard!
Thank you everyone for your patience and for all the wonderful compliments on writing the fight in the last chapter. You guys are so sweet! Oh my gosh, so much art to be shared!!

Sans in a slipper
What Is That Thing?
Are You The Doctor?
(I finally figured out how to do this link thing YES)
I Write and Draw Here!
Find Me Here!

At some point, you hear Toriel enter the house and she starts berating Sans for allowing Frisk to fight against the creature. Her words are too muffled to make out, but still loud enough to hear the rage in her voice. You sit there on the edge of the bed, cheeks stiff with dried tears. Guilt and worry battle in your chest and you wonder if maybe you should go out there. He's already been yelled at by you and despite your anger, he was just trying to do the right thing.

No. You don't feel sorry for him.

Eventually, you fall asleep but the nightmares don't allow you to rest for long. It's the usual ones, except now the hulking figure of a goopy monster is the one reaching for you, screaming in agony. You jolt awake, your hand immediately reaching for Sans, only to meet empty air. You take several large gulps of air, body trembling. As your breath returns, you hear the door handle jiggle quietly. You never unlocked it before going to bed. You go still, staring at the door. Did you scream when you woke up? You honestly can't remember. You must have and now Sans is out there, trying to get in. He could teleport in here if he wanted to. A locked door was pretty useless when it came to keeping Sans out. But eventually, you hear the floorboard creak as he moves away. Giving you space? Or maybe he's angry with you.

Going back to sleep is useless, so you pull yourself out of bed and grab Sans' guitar. Or as he kept insisting, your guitar. You told him you were fine with getting a new one, but honestly, you were so happy when Sans held on to the new one. This one held the memories from Christmas night. You run your hands over the wood and strings. It chimes quietly. Even now you can see his hands gripping the neck with care, strumming out the song that he sang for you. You press your face against the headstock and close your eyes tightly. This is the first fight you've ever had that's lasted this long and with all your heart you want to run out there and find him. You want to wrap your arms around his bony frame and tell him that you love him, no matter what. But there's a stubborn, angry hole in your heart that won't let go. He was wrong to just abandon you like that. He was wrong to dump you off on his brother without even stopping to think. You are more than just a fragile human. Sans himself was the one to show you that. You have to do better, show him that he could depend on you.

You do manage to fall back to sleep, cradling his pillow in your arms. You wake with his scent in
your nose and your heart lurches with guilt. When you open the door, you almost step on a tray that's been left there in the hallway. There's a single rose, a plastic wrapped plate with some slightly burned muffins and a folded up note. You bend down and pick up the note.

*heya. um, i tried to make a nice breakfast but 'muffin' really turned out. al asked me to go to the lab with her to help with the dust sample so i called abby to take you to the station. less ate something bad so he's taking day off. paps would like to keep you company.*

*but if you want me to*

*just give me a call if you need anything*

*i'm really sorry*

*i'd like to take you out someplace nice tonight, if that's ok?*

*i love you*

*sans*

You press your hand up over the wobbly smile stretching over your face. Oh Sans. What an adorable, infuriating, goofball. You put the letter pocket and pick up the tray, heading for the kitchen for a vase. Frisk, Paps and Toriel are sitting at the table, talking quietly. Their conversation halts as you enter the room and they all give you a hesitant look.

"GOOD MORNING _____!" Papyrus is, unsurprisingly, the first to break the silence. "DID YOU SLEEP WELL?"

Frisk jabs Papyrus in the arm, shooting him a frantic look. Papyrus flushes.

"UM, NOT THAT YOU WOULDN'T SLEEP WELL BECAUSE MY BROTHER WAS NOT THERE, I MEAN HE DIDN'T BUT HE NEVER SLEEPS WELL ANYWAY AND...OH NO." Papyrus buries his head in his hands, groaning loudly. "I'M SORRY HUMAN. I WASN'T SUPPOSED TO BRING UP YOUR FIGHT."

You sit down at the table and pat his arm. "It's okay Pap. Couples fight sometimes. It's not like I hate him now."

He brightens considerably. "THAT IS A VERY GOOD THING! BECAUSE EVEN THOUGH HE WOULD NOT SAY IT, I COULD SEE THAT SANS WAS WORRIED THAT YOU MIGHT DISLIKE HIM AND-"

"Papyrus, I believe you are going to be going to the station with ____ right?" Toriel cuts in quickly, perhaps seeing the shock flash over your face. "You should probably get ready."

"YES, YOU ARE RIGHT LADY TORIEL!" Papyrus stands quickly, checks still tinted orange. Frisk plants their head on the table as he quickly heads back to his room to change out of his oversized pajamas.

You're not quite sure what to say, so you nibble on the muffins Sans left. They're actually not bad, despite being a little black on the edges. Toriel watches you eat with a sorrowful expression until you can't take it any longer. "You're looking better," you say to Frisk, desperate to change Toriel's focus.

Frisk lifts their head off the table. They bite their lips and sign, **The fight was my fault, wasn't it?**
You shake your head. "Frisk, last night was...a mess. Everything happened so fast. Blame can't be put on any one but that thing hurting people. I'm just glad you're okay." You take their hand, smiling gently. "The fight with Sans was bound to happen sooner or later, thanks to everything that's going on. But I'm not mad any more. Don't worry, okay?"

They still look glum. You sigh and pull out your phone. There's a few texts from Abby left from last night.

A: Hey, Sans said you needed a lift? Everything ok?
A: He sounded bummed out
A: Are you fighting?
A: P.S just got word that we are good for the Mettaton interview today.

Ah, that's right. Today was the day you were shooting and advertising for, but Mettaton had waited until the last possible moment to confirm that he was coming. But that gives you an idea. It's a Saturday, so that means no school for Frisk.

"Hey, Frisk, since Papyrus is going to be keeping me company today, do you want to tag along? We're doing the interview with Mettaton today so it's going to be a pretty interesting day at the station."

Frisk perks up, smiling widely. They look to Toriel, signing quickly.

Toriel likewise seems to brighten a little until a thought occurs to her. "My child...after what happened last night and..." She frowns and clasps her hands together. "I don't know if it will be safe."

You set down the remainder of your muffin. "Toriel, out of everyone effected, I know that you have the most right to be concerned. But Papyrus will be there and the station is filled with people who sympathize with monsters. I promise that Frisk will be safe. And I mean, after last night," You give Frisk a wide smile, which they return, "I think they can handle themselves."

Toriel puts her head in her hands, sighing deeply. "I am still very unhappy about all of that," she says in an almost growl. "But I will agree that there was not much of a choice." She goes quiet and both you and Frisk give her puppy dog eyes. Her mouth twitches as she attempts to hide a smile. "All right then."

"Yes!" You give Frisk a high five. "Thanks Toriel."

This time, she does smile.

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Abby picks you and the others up around twelve. Poor Papryus and Frisk are crammed in the back of her tiny car but Frisk is so excited about spending time at the station they don't really seem to mind. Even better, you got a call from the car shop just before Abby pulled up; your car was just about finished and would be ready to be picked up after work. The shop was close to the station so you could walk there with the others. Maybe you'd treat the two to some ice cream or something as thanks.

"So," Abby starts in as soon as you're settled, giving you a side eyed glance. "Do you want to talk about it or...?"
You give a pointed glance up to her rear-view mirror, where you can see Paps desperately trying to squeeze his bony frame as closely together as he can.

"Ah. Okay then." She sounds disappointed. "Just answer this; are the seas calm or raging?"

You snort at her attempt at subtly. "He had to go take care of something first thing this morning so I haven't seen him since but...he left me a rose and breakfast. Wants to take me out tonight."

"So you're...?"

You lean your head back against the seat. "I'm not exactly mad anymore. He was doing what he thought was right and I can't blame him for that. He was just trying to keep me safe from that creature going crazy last night."

Abby likewise glances at Frisk through the mirror. "I saw all that," she says in a hushed whisper. "What the hell was that thing?"

"That's what Sans is trying to figure out." You tap your fingers against the arm rest. Now that you've calmed down from last night, really, you're starting to feel stupid about starting up the argument. A petty fight was not the thing to be worrying about right now. "I just...I don't know what's going on. It's scaring me."

Abby sets her jaw, staring out the window. "This whole thing is scary. The attacks on you, the disappearing people, the rise in monster hate crimes. Do you remember what Emily said? That day her butt got arrested?"

You do. Emily, the jerk who had been involved in the fireworks incident at the festival had told you that this whole thing wasn't just a simple prank. She said that it was a whole lot bigger than that and even said you'd be smart to get out of the city. At the time, you had thought that it was just talk. But what if it wasn't? "You don't think all of this is connected, do you?"

Abby shrugs. "I don't know. I hope not."

Goosebumps rise up your arms. You notice Frisk watching intensely from the back, so you decide to switch to a new topic. Soon enough, you pull up to the station and you're surprised to see a black limo already there. The interview wasn't scheduled for another two hours right? You give Abby a questioning look and she shrugs helplessly at you. Wait, if Mettaton was already here....

"Hey Paps!" You say, turning around in the seat. "I'm so sorry, I kept forgetting to ask you about something."

"THAT IS UNDERSTANDABLE WITH EVERYTHING THAT HAS BEEN GOING ON!" Papyrus says cheerfully, despite his current tangled position in the seat. Oh good grief, how did he even manage that? "WHAT IS IT YOU WISH TO ASK THE GREAT PAPYRUS?"

"Mettaton wanted me to ask you if you'd be up for dinner with him? His treat for his biggest fan."

"M-METTATON WANTS TO HAVE DINNER WITH ME?"

You can't help but laugh at his enthusiasm. "Of course! I mean, you are his biggest fan, right?"

"OF COURSE I AM!" He struggles for a moment to strike a pose and fails terribly.

"Let's get you out of the car," you snicker, feeling a little bad about laughing. It takes both you and
Frisk to free the skeleton but he eventually pops free and you head into the studio. You open the
door and the transformation that has overtaken the front office stops you dead in your tracks.
Flowers, posters and oh good grief, cardboard cutouts all of Mettaton take up almost half the space in
the room. And the other half is taken up by the team all dressed in color coordinated outfits putting
up the decorations.

"Phil dear, that frame is crooked by .25 inches. Don't give me that look, of course I can see it. I am a
robot after all. Darling!" Mettaton spots you and makes his way over, throwing his arm around you
in a hug. "It is about time you showed up!"

"Mettaton, you're two hours early," you say, trying desperately not to burst out laughing. Poor Abby
looks utterly scandalized that her area has been so completely transformed.

"Yes, and not a moment of that can go to waste! Celia!" He motions to a woman holding a silver
case. Oh crap that's the same case he used on your date night!

You wave your hands, trying to escape his hold. "Wait, wait, wait! This is radio! They won't see our
faces!"

Mettaton waggles a finger in your face. "You truly must embrace the future of technology! That is
what live streaming is for!"

Oh NO-

"Papy dear!" Mettaton beams with happiness as he spots Papyrus, who is staring at the chaos with an
open jaw. He makes his way over to the skeleton as Celia drags you into one of the front offices,
which has been set up as a temporary make-up room. Poor Tod is already seated there with another
woman fussing over him and he does not look happy.

"Did you know he would pull something like this?" he grumbles to you as Celia forces you to sit.

"I had no clue," you mutter back, resigning yourself to your fate. "Believe me, I would have warned
you otherwise."

Tod sighs. "At least we've still got Sam and Elizabeth on the booth for now. And they brought
enough food to feed everyone and then some. So I guess I can handle this much."

Well that was good news at least. You try to relax as Celia starts on your face. Tod is finished a lot
sooner than you are and heads out to try and do some damage control. You pull out your phone
while she fixes up your hair and send a text to Sans.

Y: I got your note this morning. I'm sorry too. I overreacted. I just worry about you bone boy.

He replies almost instantly.

S: heh, we're a couple of boneheads i guess. i'm so sorry i made you feel that way.

Y: Don't worry. 'Muffin' could make me stop loving you.

S: omg i think i'm gonna cry.

Y: Don't go getting sappy on me! If I start tearing up and ruin my make up, Mettaton's gonna kill
me.

S: knock their socks off. i'll be listening. see u tonight?
Y: Yeah :) Love you

S: love you too

Finally, some of the tension in your shoulders eases up. There were still things to talk about but you really didn't want to stay mad at Sans. You hear the door open and look up. Frisk pops their head in, grinning widely.

"Hey kiddo! How do I look?"

They give you a double thumbs up, which you're gonna take as a good sign. Finally, Celia finishes up and you have to run to the booth. The booth itself has a camera set up in the corner, which is being manned by a guy wearing a skin tight purple suit that he somehow manages to pull off. Tod motions you over and you quickly take your spot, sliding your headphones over your ears. Mettaton cues the cameraman and you see the recording light blink on.

"All right everyone it is that time," Tod announces into the mic.

You decide to just completely ignore the camera and turn your eyes back to the list of questions that have been prepared. "That's right everyone! We have with us in the studio today, the one, the only! Mettaton!" You flip the switch for the celebration music, a little tune that you used on a pretty regular basis. But you're taken by surprise when an odd slightly mechanical tune plays instead. Oh you know that song; it's Mettaton's theme that played before a lot of his movies.

"Hello and thank you all for tuning in," Mettaton says, turning to face the camera. You'd ask him to turn back but at the level he's speaking, the mic isn't going to have any issues picking him up. "A beautiful day for an interview with such a beautiful person, if I do say so myself!"

It's all too easy to slip into the list of questions about himself and honestly, you barely have to give him any direction. He talks about some of his movies, current shows, plans for the future, things like that. It's oddly fun and Mettaton certainly knows how to handle himself during an interview. As he's talking, you notice Papyrus and Frisk standing out by the soundboard, watching with complete rapture. You wave and they both wave back enthusiastically.

But after a while, Tod leans in, his smile replaced by a more serious expression. "Now Mettaton, I wanted to ask you. Am I correct in assuming you are up to speed on all of the attacks that have happened to our very own _____?"

Mettaton nods solemnly, his own smile shrinking. "I am afraid I am."

"And she is not the only one who has been the victim of hate crimes to those involving people who have shown basic human decency to monsters in this city. And to monsters themselves. What are your thoughts on that?"

Mettaton takes a moment; as self absorbed as he is, surely even he realizes that what he says next needs to be worded carefully.

"To be honest darling, I despise those who think that performing such hateful acts is at all acceptable. Creatures such as that don't deserve an ounce of my attention."

Or not.

"But to those who have suffered, I give this message." Mettaton locks eyes with you for a moment before turning back to the camera. "Be strong darlings. Monsters may be different and at times, perhaps a little overwhelming. Your strength and compassion makes you all stars in my book. If
monsters could survive being held in the darkness for so long, then I believe that this too will pass. I want to have faith in humanity. Hold on to your determination. Let's prove the doubters wrong."

You nearly applaud as Mettaton finishes. Holy cow, who knew he had such...inspirational words in him? "And with that, ladies and gentleman, here is Mambo No. Five." You cue the music and then those in and out of the booth do applaud as Mettaton stands and takes a bow. "That was fantastic," you say as you pull your headphones off. "Well done!"

"Oh, it is all thanks to such fantastic hosts." Mettaton beams at you and Tod and then almost shyly glances to Papyrus. Paps looks like he's about to cry from happiness. The robot gives you a quick, surprisingly gentle hug before heading out to speak with the crowds of station workers that had gathered to watch the interview. You slump back in your chair, letting out a breath of air. For being just an interview, it sure took a lot out of you.

"That's Frisk out there, right?" Tod asks as he sets his headphones on the table. Frisk is dancing out there, getting a few laughs from the adults gathered around.

"Yep," you say, an odd sense of pride coloring your words. "They're a great kid."

Tod shakes his head, watching Frisk. A smile crosses his face. "It's truly amazing that a child was able to do so much. And is still doing so much for the monsters." He looks over at you. "Good job with the interview by the way."

"I was a little nervous," you admit with a laugh. "With everything that's happened recently, I haven't even had a chance to properly prepare. So I'm glad everything went smoothly."

"You deserve a bit of a break," Tod says, nodding. "What are your plans for tonight?"

You shrug. "My car's finally done so I think the three of us are going to walk over to go pick it up. I was thinking of surprising them with ice cream or something."

Tod brightens and pulls over a piece of paper. He starts drawing out a map. "If it's ice cream you're looking for, I know this fantastic hole in the wall place. It might be a little out of your way, but I promise you an experience you won't forget."

You take the map and look over it. "Oh! That's right on the way to the shop! I think anyway. We'll check it out!"

Tod smiles widely at you. "You won't regret it."

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"You sure you don't want a lift?" Abby asks as you gather up your things. "I'm off in twenty minutes. I really don't mind."

"That's okay," you assure her. You gesture to Papyrus, who has become quite popular with some of the younger people who work the station. They're laughing and talking with him and he's loving the attention. "I've got Paps and Tod told me about this ice cream place that's on the way. It's still decently light out so we'll be fine."

"Well, if you're sure." Abby finally relents and gives you a tight hug. "Text me when you get your car, okay?"

"You got it," you promise. "Frisk, Paps, you ready?"
"YES! FAREWELL MY NEW HUMAN FRIENDS!" Papyrus waves and quickly hurries over, opening the door for you and Frisk. The three of you head down the street, excitedly chattering about the interview. You show the other two the texts from Undyne, Alphys and even Asgore giving you congratulations and other such encouragement. How the King of monsters got a hold of your number, you're not quite sure but decide it's better not to worry about it. After walking for about twenty minutes, you start really paying attention to your surroundings, glancing at the map.

"I think it's down this way?" You stop in front of a break between two buildings. This area is a little older and though there are a lot of shops around, not many of them are open. In fact, there aren't even many people around. A few people here and there, lingering on benches or leaning against buildings talking to each other. Papyrus looks at the map.

"I BELIEVE YOUR MAP IS TELLING YOU TO GO THIS WAY," he says, pointing down into the alley. "THE SHOP SHOULD BE JUST ON THE OTHER SIDE."

Frisk tugs on your sleeve, a worried look on their face.

"I agree," you say to them. "I'm not a fan of alleyways either. But if Tod says it's this way...." You continue to hesitate, looking down the alley. There are a few lights down there. But then, as you're pondering whether the ice cream is worth it, you feel a sudden, harsh bump against your shoulder. You are pushed forward, nearly hitting the wall of the building. "Hey!"

The culprit, a man dressed in a hoodie with the hood pulled up, is sprinting away. And-

"He's got my purse!" you shriek, as you realize that you've just been robbed. Seriously!? "Stop!"

"DO NOT FEAR HUMAN! I SHALL RETRIEVE YOUR BAG!" Papyrus immediately takes off after the thief, his long legs very quickly carrying him away.

You tug at Frisk. "Come on! We've gotta keep up!" The two of you take off after Papyrus, who has a huge head start on you. You run as fast as you can but keeping up proves to be impossible. You see Papyrus turn a corner and by the time you and Frisk reach the same spot, panting, he's gone.

"Where...did...he go?" You fight to get your breath back, looking around. He's no where to be seen and now, you've got no idea where you are. And worse, you no longer have your phone. Frisk presses against you, pointing. They're looking at a pair of men, who are staring at the two of you. "Oh, good idea. Let's ask if they saw where he went."

You only take a single step forward when the two men start moving towards you. Something whispers in the back of your mind and a shiver of unease makes you stop. You put your arm out, stopping Frisk as well. They look up at you in confusion.

What's wrong?

"Frisk, I...I don't like the way those guys are looking at us," you say in a hushed voice. "Let's go in one of the shops." You turn and stop short. There's another man coming up behind you and oh shit, you really don't like the glint in his eyes. You pull Frisk's arm, leading them away. You run up to the first door you see and tug on it. It's locked. You glance over your shoulder and it's no mistake, these men are coming after you. And now there are four of them.

Frisk pulls your hand, running down into one of the alleys. No, no! This is the worst place to run when being chased! And as expected, there's another two men standing at the end and now they're running towards you. Frisk skids to a stop; their hand is sweaty.

"This way!" You push them down a break in the alley that leads into another walkway. The two of
you run as fast as you can. It's darker down here and you can't see to the end. But what choice do you have? Your heart is pounding painfully in your chest. Where is Papyrus?!

"Oh shit!" The curse slips out as you realize there is no end to this alley. It's fenced off and just beyond is freedom back to the street. You whirl around and as you feared, the men are gathered in the entryway, terrifyingly close. You grab Frisk and lift them up. "Start climbing!" you order, voice shrill. "Over the fence!"

Frisk scales the fence, their small hands fitting easily between the links. You jump and grab at it, scrambling for more of a foothold. Frisk makes it to the top and you hear them scream just as someone grabs the back of your shirt and yanks. You manage to hold on to the fence, kicking out at the man grabbing you. Your foot nails him in the groin and you hear a pained yelp. But the others have caught up and there are too many. You are ripped away from the fence and hit the ground so hard your head spins.

Frisk pounds the fence on the other side, screaming and crying.

"GO!" You scream as hands descend on you, pulling, ripping, tearing. "FRISK, RUN!"

You see a man attempt to start scaling the fence and Frisk takes off, disappearing around the corner.

"Leave the kid! We've got this one!"

You suddenly feel something smelly pressed over your face. Numbness begins to creep over your limbs and though you scream at your muscles to move, to fight, you feel your body going limp. No, no! You give one last struggle as your vision begins to blur and you see a face with bright green eyes grinning down at you before darkness claims you.
Things are getting pretty serious now aren't they? 

**Look At This Art!!**

Sans never understood the hype for flowers until he met you. Well, to be honest, he still didn't completely understand. Given his history, he actually doesn't care for flowers at all. But the spark that would light up your eyes whenever he surprised you with a bouquet made him more than happy to participate in the silly human tradition. He glances over the huge display. Loud and gaudy arrangements don't seem appropriate for an apology. His Soul lurches as once again he sees your face, hurt and closed off from him. How could he have been so stupid? To you, a human who had fought through so much, being protected and removed from harms way wasn't a way of showing affection. It was a breach of trust. More than any else he understands the agony of being forced to stand by and watch while the ones he cared about were put in danger. Despite his good intentions, it wasn't the right thing to do.

But if anything ever happened to you....

Sans shakes his head. No, there's no space for thoughts like that. He'll make sure that you are safe. Perhaps getting lessons in defense from Undyne was a good idea. He'll bring it up tonight. After he gave you a proper apology. He finally picks up a simple bouquet of red and peach roses. These would do. Hopefully the flowers and his plans for tonight would be enough to help soothe things over with you. He'd found the perfect spot, just outside the city where the two you could see the stars without the city lights obscuring the view.

He gets in line, clutching the flowers when his phone starts buzzing. He fishes for it, half expecting the call to be from Alphys. Despite his help in trying to analyze the sample from the monster that attacked the city, not much progress had been made on figuring out exactly what it was. It couldn't simply be a monster; he had seen for itself that when it died it left behind bones. Monsters, all monsters, left only dust. So that meant it couldn't be a monster. Well, not completely. After all, its outer shell did dissolve into dust and-

He's slipping into science mode again. Despite the knot in his Soul from the fight and the whole situation, it was actually rather...nice, getting back into the sciencey stuff. He'd missed it. But now's not the time to be thinking about that. He tries to clear his thoughts, flipping open the phone. It's Papyrus. Probably calling to tell him all about Mettaton's show and what happened at the station. He'd listened of course, despite his distaste for the robot. He listened for you and your voice. He heard you cry out last night and his Soul screamed at him to go to you. But the locked door surely must have meant that you didn't want him or his comfort. He'd spent all last night awake, worried...no...terrified that he had messed up too much. He was so scared that he'd finally drawn the last straw and that you were done with him. But then you'd sent him that message, apologizing when he was the one who had hurt you and made you feel unwanted.

What in his sad, miserable life could he have possibly done to deserve a Soul like yours?

He hits the accept button, pressing the phone up against his skull. "heya paps. how'd the-" He can't finish before Paps starts wailing, babbling and crying so hard he can't make the words out. "woah,
hey bro, c'mon slow down. what's wrong?"

It takes several, agonizing seconds while his brother fights to breathe before finally speaking. Then, Sans feels his Soul go cold.

The bouquet of roses falls from his limp hand and hits the floor.

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It's the jostling and severe bumping that wakes you. You can't see a thing and your heart races, thinking the worst. Did they blind you? Bury you alive? No, no it's a cloth wrapped around your face, tied just below your nose. It reeks, but it's just a cloth. Your breathes eases just slightly and you fight not to move. They must have used chloroform on you or something. If whoever took you think that you're still out cold, you might be able to figure out what's going on. Okay, just breathe. Listen. Just figure things out one at a time. Where are you? You can feel a steady movement beneath you and the floor you're lying on is hard. You shift just enough to feel ridges in the ground. Okay, some kind of van or car maybe? Your arms ache terribly; they're pulled back behind you and tied together with rope. There's another bump in the road and you can't stop a pained groan.

"Is the girl awake?"

You jerk at the voice coming just to your left. You hold your breath as you feel a hand pat at your covered face harshly.

"Nah, just moaning in her sleep." The answer is bored, indifferent to the fact that there's a tied up girl right in front of him. "The dose was strong; she should be out for a while longer."

"Hmm." A third voice hums. "Shame we only got the older one. Kid's got a pair of legs on 'em."

Frisk got away! Relief sweeps through you. Maybe they were able to find Papyrus. You strain to hear more of their conversation but then the men fall silent again and you desperately try to listen for something that might give you some idea of where you're going. Are you even still in the city? Judging from the noise and honking that flares up whenever the vehicle slows, it's a safe bet to say that you are. You consider counting turns, but what good would that do? As delicately as you can, you start working your wrists together. Maybe you can loosen them, just a little and make a break for it when the car stops. And finally, after at least another twenty minutes, it slows and you hear the engine stop. You brace yourself, rubbing your wrists a little faster.

Suddenly, something hard slams into your stomach and you cry out.

"Don't think I don't see what you're doing!" The first voice gleefully calls

Another hit sends you skidding across the floor. You cough harshly, barely able to breath. Someone grabs your arm, yanking you upwards. They pull you from the van and you stumble at the drop to the ground. You have no choice but to move forward, propelled by the man pulling on you. Even through the mask, you can smell the reek of oil and metal. It's noisy here. There's clanging and the roar of machinery. But it only lasts for a few seconds. The noise suddenly grows dimmer and the cold eases into the warmth of being inside. The floor must be tile, judging from the noise your shoes make against it. This time, you do try to count your steps. Twenty three steps and then a left. Another ten and then stairs. The air grows considerably cooler as you stumble down the steps. When it levels out, the man holding you spins you a few times, making you lose all sense of where you are. Damn it! Thoroughly dizzy, you start walking again. You can hear more machinery, but this noise is more of a quiet buzz. Almost like a hospital noise. You're led into another room and forced to sit in a chair.
"I'm gonna untie you now," says a female voice, oddly gentle. "But don't try anything. There are a lot of us and only one of you."

You hold still as whoever it is slides a knife up and slices the rope, freeing your hands. You fight the urge to rub your wrists and continue to stay still. You swallow your fear as best as you can. "What's going on here?"

"You'll find out soon enough," the woman answers. Her hands fiddle with the knot of the cloth and it falls away. You take a look around, squinting a bit at the sudden light.

The room itself is bland. Gray walls, a table, a few chairs thrown around. The furthest wall is one of those one way mirror type walls but the room beyond it is pitch black. You try to whip your head around to look at the woman, but she's already left, closing the door behind her. You get to your feet hesitantly. What's going on here? After a few minutes of absolutely nothing happening, you start exploring the room. It doesn't take long to determine that there really is nothing in here but the chairs and table. And a camera in the corner. It's on and recording, a small red dot the only clue that you're being watched. You face the camera, scowling.

"This is kidnapping!" You say to it. Your voice is trembling, and you don't even know if they can hear you but you don't really care. "What the hell do you want with me?!"

No surprise, there's no answer. You kick at one of the chairs in frustration and sit down against the wall. Your hands tremble as you pull up your legs and bury your face, hiding from the camera. You complete idiot! You should have taken Abby's offer! You shouldn't have tried to chase after Papyrus! Oh God, poor Papyrus. He has to be distraught over this! And Frisk, the poor kid was so scared.

Sans.

Your eyes burn. Sans must be out of his mind with worry. Knowing him, he's probably teleporting all over the city looking for you. True fear starts to set into your heart, making your body shake. What if that fight was the last time you saw him? What if you die here and Sans has to live his life never knowing that you truly did forgive him for the stupid petty argument?

Your head jerks up at the sound of the door opening. Scrambling to your feet, you back away into the corner as several men enter the room. Two of them have guns and the others hold thick black rods at their belts. One of them gestures towards the chair in the middle.

"Sit," he orders.

Seeing as you don't have much of a choice, you do as he says. The chair is positioned so that it faces you away from the door and you really don't like that. You eye the men as they take up positions along the walls. They make a point not to look at you. "Geez guys, what a cold welcome," you drawl.

The door slams suddenly, making you jump. Everyone is silent, but you can feel that someone is standing right behind you. For several long seconds, you stare down at your lap. Goosebumps rise up your arm. Why don't they say anything?

Finally, a deep, heavy sigh. "You know, I was really hoping it wouldn't be you."

Your blood turns to ice. You know that voice. No, it can't be him!

"I mean, it makes sense that it would be you, but I still hoped. So I'm sorry about all of this." Tod, your boss, your fellow radio host, your friend, steps carefully around you, one hand shoved in the
pocket of his coat. He grabs one of the chairs, spinning it around and sits down in front of you. You
can only stare, mind buzzing with shock and disbelief. Tod sighs and nods. "You're surprised. That's
good then."

Your hands clench together. "I...I don't understand what's happening here."

Tod crosses his legs, leaning back in his chair. "That's why you're right here. Normally in
this...situation, the less that our subjects know about what's going on, the better. You're lucky; I like
you so I'm going to tell you exactly what your purpose is before we get started."

Your shock is turning into rage. You try to stand and heavy hands slap down on your shoulders,
keeping you in place. "I don't believe this! You're responsible for everything?" you snarl at him.
"Tod, why?! I thought you stood with the monsters! Not these pathetic, narrow-minded-ow!" The
hands squeeze your skin tightly.

"Easy there," he says softly. To you, or the man holding you down, you're not sure. "Now please,
don't make such assumptions. Give me a chance to explain."

"Explain what?" Your voice is rising into a shriek. "Bottom line is, you sent people to attack me and
who knows how many others. You made a fake map and sent goons to kidnap me! I'm not interested
in any excuse you've got!"

He sighs, rubbing a hand over his face. "All right then. Let's explain by example."

At his words, the men in the room suddenly train their sights on the darkened window. The two with
guns raise them up, aiming at the wall. Tod snaps his fingers and the light flickers on. The room
inside is not empty, as you thought. You can't help but cry out as the light reveals a hideous monster
trapped behind the glass. It looks like the creature from the attack, but this one is far bulkier and less
goopy. It lifts a hand up over what remains of its face, shying away from the light. It turns and slams
its palms against the glass, howling. The glass shudders, but holds.

"Disgusting, isn't it?" Tod stands and the man behind you pulls you up as well. You dig your heels
in as best as you can but you are dragged closer to the window. Terror pulses through your veins.

"D-don't!"

"Take a good look," he says softly, gesturing to the creature. A hand grabs your head and pushes
you until you are mere inches away from the glass. The creature's face hovers right in front of you
and you can't move or even breathe. Up close like this, you can see everything. It's goopy face holds
more expression than the one from last night; its eyes are completely sunken in, and it's more like
staring into pitch black holes in its face. One of them is smaller and slightly curved and its mouth
holds less teeth. It's staring right at you, through you and you just want to run away as fast as you
possibly can. It shakes its head and you see a brief flash of color in the darkness of its eyes, a silent
plea for help before it roars. You flinch as its spittle hits the glass. It slams a fist up as well and this
time, cracks web out from the force of the hit.

"Enough, tap it out!" Tod orders and a sudden smoke fills the smaller room. The creature wails,
digging at its face before falling to its knees. The room goes dark as it topples over and your knees
nearly give out as well. The thug holding you hoists you up and drags you back to the chair. Tod
remains standing this time, arms crossed. "Are you ready to listen now?"

You can't manage more than a nod. It's finally hitting you just how much trouble you're in. Emily
was right; this is all so much bigger than petty hate crimes.
Tod rubs a hand over his chin, deep in thought. He taps a finger against the scar on his face. "Let's see now. I never told how I got this, did I? In fact, you never asked about it."

You stare at him blankly. His scar? What did that have to do with anything? "No. It wasn't my business."

He smiles warmly. "Another reason I liked you from the start. People are so nosy; it's never 'how are you?' or 'nice to meet you'. People see me and all they want to know is how I got this scar. Might as well call myself the Joker."

"You're certainly insane enough for it," you mutter darkly.

Tod laughs. "Now, now, remember what I said about making assumptions?" He finally sits down again. "Long story short, before I worked in radio I was in a very special unit within the army. One that worked specifically in developing biological and chemical weapons. You see, I'm smart. Very smart. The people running the program barely waited until I was out of high school to recruit me. They immediately sent me overseas. At the time, I thought it was the best opportunity I could have gotten. A chance to defend my country, to be a hero who saved lives." He frowns harshly, eyes flashing with a rage you've never seen from him before. "War is hell. Make no mistake about that. I have seen the lowest and foulest of humanity at work. And I was working right along side them. I was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of people. People who also thought they were doing their duty. And worse, people who had nothing to do with our war. They were merely caught in the crossfire."

Tod is no longer looking at you. You can see in his eyes that he is far away from here, caught in horrific memories you can't even imagine. "My story is the usual one; caught in an accident, hurt by someone trying to kill me. I was too injured and broken to continue working. And what did I receive as thanks for my efforts and work? A pat on the back and a ride home. I was left with only the nightmares and flashbacks. I had to try and rebuild my life in a world that acts on blind hatred and bigotry." His eyes snap back to you and he leans forward, putting his hands on his knees. "You are right; I am on the monsters side. I love monsters and their overwhelming ability to love and accept others as who they are. But be honest with yourself. How could the human race, who barely takes moment to breathe before starting another fight with itself, ever accept creatures so completely different and strange?"

You're loath to agree with anything he has to say, but he has a point. You even used to joke that if aliens did exist, there's no way they would ever try to contact the constantly squabbling human race. "But."

Tod puts a hand up. "Yes, there are those who are willing and accepting. People like you, and like me. But we are vastly outnumbered, you must understand this. When the monsters came up to the surface, I did not feel fear or even excitement. All I felt was dread. Humanity has been given a gift and I knew that it was only a matter of time before that gift would be trampled and thrown away without ever being opened. But what could a radio host do?"

He stands up, offering a hand. You don't take it. You just glare at him until he lowers it and looks to Mr. Handsy. You're dragged upwards again. Tod moves to the door, opening it and holding it open.

"Let's take a walk and I'll show you exactly what a radio host can do."

Given no choice, you follow him into the hallway. It's dark down here, flickering lights throwing shadows over the whole area. All the armed goons follow as well, silent and focused. You all head down the dark hall and hit a pair of doors. Tod doesn't hesitate before throwing them open and striding in. The humming machinery noise grows louder as you enter. This area is a lot bigger and
brighter; it looks like some kind of underground warehouse that's been modified into a makeshift lab. There are several medical tables set up against the wall. Each table is set up with complicated machinery and tubes. One of these tables is occupied by a skinny kid who is out cold and surrounded by several men and women in lab coats. They only spare you a glance before looking back down at their notes. The other side of the room has several computer stations, work tables and a huge device that reaches up nearly to the ceiling. It's shape is oddly familiar and after a few seconds it hits you. It almost looks like Sans' Gaster Blasters. But sharper faced and filled with tubes and wires. That's where most of the humming is coming from.

Right in the middle of the room there are four clear boxed cells made with reinforced glass. Two are empty, but the other two hold more of the goopy monsters. These however, are more goop than monster and don't appear to be moving much. You feel your heart lurch with horror as you start to put the pieces together.

"You made these things?" you blurt out as Tod leads you to the computer side of the room.

He smiles widely. "Very observant! Of course, it was a joint effort." He waves to a woman currently bent over a laptop, furiously tapping away. She looks up, annoyed, but that slips away when her eyes land on you. She brightens and taps the screen once before quickly walking over. She's tiny and though she can't be much older than Tod, her long black hair is struck through with strands of gray. She excitedly walks around you, examining you like you're some kind of toy.

"Ah, and here she is!" she says brightly, just the barest hint of a Korean accent coloring her words. She's oddly chipper, despite the fact that you're certain she knows that you are not here of your own free will. "I have to say, your blood has done wonders for our research!"

Your blood?

"This is Doctor Nahn," Tod says, clapping a hand on the tiny woman's shoulder. "We worked together back in the day."

"And now I work with your dear friend Doctor Alphys," she adds. "Brilliant, but I have to say she really needs to work on her social skills."

Alphys! No, she couldn't possibly....

The doctor laughs at the expression on your face. "Oh don't you worry; the doc has no idea what we're doing down here. I think even she'd have a few protests about all of this. But I've learned more about monster Souls and magic from her than I ever could from some dusty old history books." She looks to Tod eagerly. "When can we get her in S.A.A.M?"

"Soon enough," he says, a little less enthusiastically. "There's a few steps before we get to that."

You can't help but try to back away at that, instantly slamming up against a goon's chest. He shoves you forward, grinning widely. Tod sighs at your pathetic attempt to run.

"Believe me, this will all go a lot smoother if you just cooperate."

You swallow harshly. "And what is it exactly I'm supposed to do?" you ask in a hoarse voice. "What is all of this?"

Tod gestures to the room. "This is our fight to save humanity from itself. Nahn and I met up soon after the monsters surfaced. Nahn had already started working with Doctor Alphys and the knowledge she gained in just a few short weeks was enough to convince me that something had to be done to preserve this gift that the mountain gave us. We soon realized that a war was inevitable.
And with monsters being as they are, they would not survive. This is a whole different world now than the one they knew. But what if the monsters were properly motivated? What if they were given a weapon that could fight against humanity's numbers and guns?

He takes your arm, steering you towards the glass cells in the center of the room. Each cell is empty on the inside but various scanners and other scientific devices are hooked up to each one. As you approach the cell with one of the creatures inside, it lifts up part of it's body, forming a vague head shape. You see black eyes blinking tiredly at you. It's so foul, so wrong that you feel bile creeping up your throat.

"We got our answer the day we found out about the Amalgamates," Tod says almost reverently as he comes to a stop in front of the cell. "Virtually indestructible and versatile. Imagine what we could do with a force like that."

Nahn taps the glass, making the blob within flinch. "Alphys brought one in to the lab for a check up. As her concerned friend I of course had to reassure her that she had done nothing wrong. Couple glasses of scotch and she told me everything I needed to know about human determination and the effect it has on monsters.

"Of course, after a few tests we knew we couldn't do it the way Alphys did," Tod continues. "Monster's bodies are too unstable to handle human determination. Every monster we tried it on just melted away."

That means they've been abducting (and killing!) monsters as well. Why didn't anyone notice? Did Asgore know about the missing monsters? Did Toriel?

"So then we had the bright idea to try it the other way!" Nahn proudly points towards the unconscious boy hooked up to the machines. "We started injecting monster's magic into human Souls! Of course it hasn't been easy. Monster magic runs out pretty quickly. Keeping enough monsters here and alive without arousing suspicion has been a real pain. We've had more failures than successes but we've made great steps thanks to a little help." She gestures down towards your feet and you glance down.

There's a monster standing there, gray with dull lifeless eyes. It looks like a miniature dinosaur with no arms. You shriek and jump away, colliding with Tod. As the monster looks up at you, a sharp pain flashes through your mind. A memory surfaces of another gray monster standing in the snow, leaving no footprints. You gasp sharply as Tod helps you regain your balance. That's right! How could you have forgotten?

Nahn laughs. "Ever see Doctor Who? These guys are kinda like the Silence. You just kinda forget about them until they show up. But they do every time we hit a road block and give us the clues and answers we need. Of course, there's still quite a ways to go. The experiments haven't exactly been what we hoped for. Human bodies aren't really equipped to handle monster magic. It's led to some unexpected...transformations. Worse still, they don't last very long."

You push away from Tod, utterly disgusted with him. You give the monster another quick look. This monster...this creature was helping them? Why? Your gaze lifts up and you meet the eyes of the glob inside the glass cage. Within the tiny black eyes set in its melting face, you see only pain. A section of its body starts to lift up, forming a hand that presses up against the glass. Your hands fly up over your mouth. Oh God, you're going to be sick. "Are you saying...this is a person??"

Tod actually has the audacity to look upset. "It's not what we wanted. You have to understand that."

"Understand what?" you scream. "Understand that you are killing innocent people and monsters for
the sake of your war? That's your plan right? Create the ultimate monster, wipe out humanity and rule whatever is left?"

Nahn rolls her eyes. "Oh please, don't be so obscene."

Tod shakes his head, frowning heavily. "No, no of course we don't want that." He takes your hands, ignoring your disgusted shudder. "Please, you must understand. We want to save what is truly left of humanity. Those people out there, the greedy cooperate leaders, the twisted freaks who hurt others just for being different cannot be called humanity. It is the people like us, who care, who give a crap! This is a chance to cleanse the dark stain that they cause on this Earth! The ones who truly deserve this planet will survive and create a new life alongside the monsters. They will be our saviors!"

He's so desperate for you to get it, so sure of what he's doing. And that is what truly terrifies you. He's completely insane and you missed it! This whole time, you were completely fooled by his act. "You're sick," you whisper. Shock and disappointment wash over his scarred face. You rip your hands away. "You can't seriously believe this is the right thing to do!"

Tod straightens, his face growing frighteningly expressionless. "I'm truly sorry you feel that way. I was so sure that you would understand. But it doesn't matter; you will help our cause, willingly or not."

Two men appear on either side of you, gripping your upper arms with enough strength to make you cry out in pain. You struggle uselessly. "What are you going to do?"

Nahn shakes her head sympathetically. "We've got one last problem we need to overcome. Stability. As it turns out, humans who spend great amounts of time in close proximity with monsters can absorb the residue of their magic. They have a greater tolerance so to speak. We need hosts and Souls who can handle the amounts of magic needed to keep their form stable. And your blood sample held unbelievable readings. Just an ounce of it made our latest experiment last 45% longer than any of the others have before!" She approaches you, stroking your face. "So my dear, you are in for all kinds of tests. We need to find out what makes you tick."

The men start to drag you away and you go kicking and screaming. "It doesn't matter! Monsters won't go to war again! They won't!"

Tod gives you a sad smile. "Oh they will. We just have to find the right trigger."

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A tiny child in a stroller. An old man huddled under an awning. A boy with more tattoos than skin. All of them holding Souls that are similar, and yet completely different to yours. Sans spends no more than three seconds with each false lead, his panic growing as he teleports without thought and without direction. There are too many people in this damn city! He knows your Soul. It is so bright, so burdened and completely and utterly original. But this city holds an entire ocean of glimmering, glistening Souls. All he can do is search desperately for a single spark that might be you and go directly to it. How many has he sought out now? It must be at least fifteen Souls, all of them not you. His bones are screaming at him and he can feel his own magic beginning to sputter out. He wasn't meant to travel this fast and this far without stopping.

But he can't stop, he won't. He has to find you!

There! Another spark, a glimmer of purple and red. He reaches out with his Soul and takes hold of it, stepping through the code of space. No, it's not you! He oversteps his landing and instead of hitting the roof where a noisy party is being held, he winds up several feet away out in the open air. He
plummets down and damn it, he's too dizzy! He reaches out blindly for the ground and he flashes through space once again, this time just a foot above the pavement next the space museum. He stumbles, knees buckling. His palms hit the ground and he can't breathe. Sweat rolls down his skull, leaving wet marks on the sidewalk below him. His left eye flashes sporadically, throwing harsh shadows over his quivering hands. He can hear people shouting, frightened by the scary monster suddenly appearing in the midst. He doesn't bother looking up, it doesn't matter.

Damn it, damn it!

His phone buzzes, making him jump. He fumbles for it and it nearly slips from his hands. "what?" he barks into it.

Undyne's voice, just as sharp, roars out of the phone. "Sans, you need to come home and make a plan! You're gonna kill yourself if you keep hopping around the city like this!"

"i told you not to call me unless someone found her." He shakily gets to his feet.

"Listen to me you numb skull!" she growls. "Your brother is out of his mind with worrying and he won't stop crying. He's blaming himself for this and you need to be here for him!"

Sans pauses, the words finally cutting through the panic induced haze that had fallen over him. At his continued silence, he hears Undyne take a deep breath.

"Look, I know you're freaking out. But you can't help her if you run yourself into the ground. Come back to Toriel's. We're all here and we're gonna find her."

He puts a hand up over his sockets, his eye fizzling out. "fine. i'll be there in a minute." He hangs up and then puts his hands on his knees, puffing slightly. That's right, he can't panic. That wasn't gonna help you. But damn it, he's so scared. He's completely and helplessly terrified. He shouldn't have left you alone. He shouldn't have argued with you.

When he finds the ones responsible for this, and he will, there would be no mercy this time.

The anger gives him the boost he needs and he steps through space once again, heading back to the place where you should have been waiting for him.
Poor Souls and a Douche Art

I am seriously loving reading all of your comments, please keep them coming! Sorry for the delay, things have been rather rough the last week and I had a really hard time writing this chapter so I hope you guys enjoy!
And to those who left me such kind words on my writing blog when I was feeling down, this chapter is dedicated to you guys.

I Write and Take Drawing Requests Here
Main Blog

Your struggling and screaming does nothing to stop the men from dragging you over to the large machine that looks so eerily similar to Sans' Gaster Blaster. As you approach, the machine groans and then the jaws of the skull like feature open not horizontally, but vertically, splitting right down the middle. Inside is a black dentist like chair with leather straps and cuffs. You buck and kick, getting a few hits in, but the men soon succeed in strapping you down so tightly you can't do anything more than squirm. Directly in front of you, about twenty feet away is a sheet of protective glass which Tod and Nahn are currently standing behind. They're arguing; you can't hear what they're saying, but Nahn is clearly getting aggravated. She points to you and Tod shakes his head. Just like he did as the station, he doesn't once yell. Finally, she throws her hands up and starts fiddling with what must be a control panel of some sort.

"Alright, we're gonna just do a scan and first layer probe. Is the subject secured?" Her voice carries over some sort of speaker system, scratchy and loud. One of the men gives a thumbs up before moving away.

You can't help a whimper as the machine around you starts to whirl and groan, making the seat under you shudder. A dull light starts to fill the area around you, narrowing and focusing right on the center of your chest. For several long seconds, nothing happens. Then the light grows in intensity and your chest clenches tightly. Your back arches as you gasp and fight to breath. Your thudding heart races at a painful rate and it feels like something, someone is reaching down inside your chest, fishing around in your insides. Then there's a sharp tug and you scream as it changes to a pulling sensation. You can feel your Soul being dragged out of your body and it is resisting. You thrash as best as you can in the restraints as tears of pain start building in your eyes. You can't breathe!

Then your Soul appears with a slow, sluggish pop and air rushes back into your lungs. Color has bled away and as you fight to get your breath back, your gaze is drawn to your Soul. It is bright, pulsing with life and utterly exposed. When Sans pulled your Soul out before, you were completely open to him and yet you never doubted for a moment that you were safe. Here, in this dark place, you feel only terror and violation. This wasn't ever supposed to happen. No one was supposed to see this except for Sans. You fight not to cry. You can't give them that.

A woman approaches, one you haven't seen yet. She's wearing a surgical mask over her face and she's gripping a notepad tightly. She peers at some numbers and figures that have appeared on a screen on the side of the device. "Initial readings are strong, over 80% percent," she says.
"Okay, let's begin phase one," Nahn calls over the speaker.

The machine whirls again and a pointed rod extends from somewhere above you. At the end of the rod is a huge metal ball. It clicks and shifts and the ball splits into two halves; the inside is hollow. It lowers down towards your Soul, each half of the sphere on either side. A dim glow rises from each half sphere and the air between the two starts to shimmer, like air above a fire. A shiver runs up your spine and your skin breaks out in severe goosebumps. You can feel something sweeping over your Soul, almost touching it. It feels like nails against a chalkboard. Just as it grows to an unbearable level, the machine beeps and the sphere pulls away. You can feel yourself shaking, skin covered in a layer of sweat. Your Soul remains out in the open and it almost looks like it's trembling a little.

"Scan complete," the woman announces, scribbling in her notes. "Subject's HP remains unchanged."

HP? Your eyes flicker to the glass window. Nahn is grinning viciously. "Excellent! Start the surface examination."

That was just the scan?!

The jaws of the machine open wider, as if mocking your terror. A new device drops down, one with extending metal arms with sharp edges that glint in the light of the machine. The cuffs cut into your skin as you fight to escape but there is absolutely nothing you can do to stop it. "Don't!" you scream hoarsely. This is wrong, this so wrong! The rods buzz with a magical energy and then they move closer to your Soul, hovering just above it's surface. No, they wouldn't!

The metal rods touch the surface of your Soul and you scream as your very being is ripped open.

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Sans gasps loudly, falling to his knees as his Soul lurches with pain.

"SANS?" Papyrus, voice hoarse from crying, drops down next to him as he curls in on himself. "WHAT'S HAPPENING?"

He can't answer, bones clacking as he fights to regain his composure. His Soul throbs in his ribs. The world seems to spin beneath him and then, just as fast as it came, the pain is gone. His Soul shudders once before falling still again. He sits up, wiping at the sweat that gathered on his skull. What the hell was that?

The room full of monsters is staring at him in concern, Paps most of all. "BROTHER, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?"

"i..." He shakes his head. "something...i felt something."

"What kind of something?" Undyne demands. Sans can tell she's trying her best to remain calm and focused. As the head of the Royal Guard that is her duty. But this has shaken her. It's shaken all of them.

Sans looks down at his palms. He doesn't know how to put it into words. But somehow, he felt your Soul crying out, your pain reflected in within his own. "i gotta check something," he mumbles, getting to his feet. Ignoring the others calling him back, he runs to the room he shares with you. He doesn't have the energy to teleport right now. As soon as the door shuts behind him, he manifests his Soul, holding it just above his palm. At first glance, it looks the same as always. White with a pulsing aura of blue. But as he stares at it, he realizes that there's something new inside. The tiniest swirl of purple and orange hidden deep within. So deep that he hadn't even noticed until now. Oh. Oh.
It's you. That night he opened his Soul to you, part of yours had mixed with his, leaving a scorch like a burn mark. He had unknowingly connected his Soul with yours. He didn't even know it was possible to do that with a human Soul. This is something that usually only happened between married monsters and the bond that they built over time. But if that was the case, then that pain...oh God! No, no you can't be-!

He pulls his Soul in close to his sternum, closing his sockets. He reaches down deep, brushing against the glowing spot in his Soul. Warmth rushes over him and he nearly weeps with relief. You're still alive. You're in terrible pain, but you're still alive.

There's a sudden knock at the door, making him jump. "Sans? May I come in?"

"uh." Sans quickly pushes his Soul back inside his ribs, stepping away from the door. "sure tori."

She enters hesitantly, concern clear on her face. Her eyes drop to his rib cage and Sans realizes he's still clutching the space above his Soul. He lowers his hands, attempting to hide his panic. "Sans, are you all right?"

No. No he's not all right. How can he be? He dragged you into his messed up life, he put you in danger over and over again, he made you feel unwanted and now you've been taken away from him and he has no idea where you are and what kind of horrors you're going through and-

"i'm fine," he says shortly.

"Sans." Her voice is gentle and so familiar. Back in the underground, when he used to practice knock-knock jokes on her door, just hearing her voice helped to chase away some of the dark clouds that constantly hung over him. He didn't need to see her face to know when something was wrong and she was the same way. Of course, because they never saw each other's faces, Sans only had to worry about what to say to put concerns for him at ease. But now, standing in front of her, after everything that's happened, he can't do it. He can't pretend anymore.

"tori...i...." He shakes his head, staring down at the floor. "god, tori i'm not ok."

She moves closer and he doesn't pull away when she wraps her arms around him, pulling him close. "We're going to find her Sans."

His hands remain limp at his side, but he lets his skull rest against her; with their height difference, he barely reaches her shoulders. "they're hurting her tori," he whispers. "her soul is screaming."

"How do...oh." Her voice trails off as she realizes what he's done. Normally, she might berate him for something like that. But she says nothing and continues to hold him as he fights not to fall apart. "She's strong Sans. You have to know that."

He does. Damn it, he does.

"Asgore's already got the dogs out looking," she continues, pulling away from him. "And he's talking with the police as well-"

He laughs humorlessly. "yeah, cause they've been so helpful."

Toriel frowns deeply. "We've had...rough patches with them in the past, I'll admit, but they are working with us now."

Sans has to bite back another retort. Perhaps the one downside in which finding someone to completely confide in, is that he's finding more and more it's difficult to keep his true thoughts to
himself. "Sure Tori," he mumbles. He rubs at his skull, which is a little sweaty. "Look, I'm ok now. Let's get going." They had all been in the middle of making plans for a sweep in teams before his new discovery interrupted everyone.

She gives him a long, piercing look. "Sans, you're exhausted and it's very late. You almost ran yourself dry looking for her. Why don't you stay here and get some rest while we-

"I'm gonna stop you right there," he says, voice a low growl as he pushes past her. "Don't bother with trying that crap with me." He knows Tori's right. He's burnt out and deep down, the voice of logic is telling him to get some rest while he can. But he can't bring himself to do that; not when he can feel the pain that you're in.

Paps is lingering at the end of the hall. "Are you all right?" he asks in a subdued tone.

Sans blinks, bringing the lights back into his sockets. He can't always control when it happens, but he hates letting his brother see him unnerved. "I'm fine Paps. Just a little rattled, you know?"

Papyrus opens his mouth, perhaps to pry further but Sans can see the words get caught in his nonexistent throat. God, he hates seeing his brother so upset. But he can't face the raw pain right now; not when he's barely managing to keep his own in check. He passes by Papyrus, tapping his arm. "Come on bro. Let's go get her back."

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When it's finally over, when your raw and ravaged soul is finally allowed to escape back into your chest, you have no strength to resist as you're pulled up out of the chair and led into a side room. Your skin feels sensitive, like you're on the verge of getting sick. Every beat of your heart sends an odd pulse through your whole body. At some point during the ordeal, your tears stopped. Now you're just numb.

The room they take you to is small and plain; there's a chair with straps in the corner, a simple cot and blanket line one wall and there are a few books carefully piled up next to it. How freaking thoughtful. You flinch when one of the goon prods you towards the cot. "Yeah, I got it," you mumble, sitting down on it's surface. You bend slightly, clutching at your chest. You know that you should be full of rage and hate, but all you feel is a terrible sense of hurt and humiliation.

After a bit of time, in which you try very hard to look anywhere but at the guard lingering by the door, Nahn enters carrying a medical case. She hums quietly to herself as she pulls out a syringe and empty blood bag. You flinch when she approaches you and she gives you a quick slap across the face for it.

"Hold still now," she chides.

Cheek stinging slightly, you hiss at the pinch of pain that follows when she inserts the needle into your arm.

"Tod wants to hold off on putting you back in S.A.A.M until we've had a chance to run a complete analysis," she says conversationally.

"Is that what that machine was?" you ask carefully.

"Soul Analyzer and Manipulator. It's thanks to our monster friends we've got it." She seems pleased you asked. "But until then, I'll get some more of your blood to work with while we analyze the readings of your soul." She beams at you like a proud mother. "You should be happy! Just the initial readings look very promising!"
You know it's probably useless trying to reason with her, but you have to try. "Please don't do this. You can't seriously believe Tod's doing the right thing here."

Nahn pauses. Her cheerful manner very slowly slips away as she leans in close. "Listen sweetie. I'll tell you right now," she whispers coldly. "Tod is the nice one here. If I had my way, you would already be on my operating table. When that time comes, I'm going to have so much fun slicing your Soul into tiny. Little. Pieces." She backs away, a wide smile on her face as you stare at her in horror. "All right then! I'd say a pint should be enough for now. After all, we don't want to go bleeding you dry just yet!"

You don't say another word as she continues to drain blood from your arm. When she finishes a wave of vertigo sweeps over you.

"Hmm, that will do," Nahn murmurs to herself. She packs up her stuff, ignoring the way you're swaying on the cot. She taps the guard on the arm as she passes. "Get her food and water. We don't need her passing out."

He nods and follows after her, closing the door behind him. You topple over on the cot, the world spinning.

You're going to die down here. The thought occurs to you rather sluggishly. You curl up into a ball and wait for tears to come.

But they don't. Instead, you close your eyes and think of your family. The monsters you know without a doubt are searching for you. They won't give up until they find you. You can't give up so easily. What was it that Frisk said to you?

**Stay determined.**

You force yourself to sit up, gritting your teeth against the dizziness. The door opens briefly and a plate of food is set down. You stare at it and consider refusing to eat just to spite them. But...ugh Nahn is right; just standing up makes your knees weak. If you're going to fight your way out, you need strength. You eat the offered food (crackers, a sandwich and a bottle of water) and consider your situation. Locked door, no windows. No bathroom, which means they'll have to let you out once in a while to use one. Closely escorted you imagine. You need to see more of the outside. Maybe the next time they put you in that machine, and you know they will, you'll be better prepared for what happens and can fake falling into shock. It's not a solid plan, but it's the best you've got. Of course, that's assuming that you don't actually go into shock. You feel so fragile and violated and that was supposedly just a scan and first level analysis. You don't know exactly what they're hoping to find, but you know that if they go any deeper, you might not survive the ordeal. Or worse, you might end up like those poor people stuck in piles of goop.

Still, as time passes and nothing happens, you finally sink down onto the cot. It's got to be...at least midnight. Maybe later by this point. You lay down with your back to the wall and clutch at your galaxy necklace. Despite everything, you feel your eyes getting heavy.

That is, until the door suddenly slams open.

You sit bolt upright, pressing against the wall.

"Well! Long time no see!"

Your heart drops into your stomach as two men walk in. You don't need to see his eyes to recognize the voice and tone of the first man. He's just as ugly as his personality. Green eyes plops down a
large bag, looking like a kid who's been told Christmas has come early. You can't bring yourself to
speak so you sit there, utterly petrified. The man behind him is huge and glaring at you like he'd like
nothing more than to crush your skull in his hands. It clicks in a few seconds where you've seen him
before; you remember seeing his wanted picture in the news. This is the man that beat his step
daughter nearly to death. McNevan, the man who hated monsters enough to hurt a little girl because
of it.

"You know what I realized?" Green eyes grins widely and the two of them leap at you. You
scramble off the cot, knocking it over. But there's no where to go and it only takes them a few
seconds to grab you. Once again, you're dragged over to a chair with straps and locked down.

"Help!" You scream for someone, anyone to help you.

But, of course, nobody came.

"Hold still and there!" Green eyes locks your wrist in place and grabs your face in his hand. "I never
introduced myself at our last little meeting. My name is Austin." He pulls his hand back and slaps it
so hard across your face you see stars. "And you're the little brat who put my sister Emily in jail."

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2 Hours Earlier

Nahn almost skipped back to her desk. What promise! What potential! She's never seen a Soul quite
like the one contained in the young female subject. This was the key she needed to break that finally
wall in her research that she's been slamming against for months. Oh, how her fingers itch to dig into
that bright Soul and see exactly how it works. Human Souls were supposed to be so powerful and
yet all the ones she's had to deal with have been so...dull. Weak and single colored. Boring. But this
Soul! Nahn's heart danced just at the thought of it! She would almost think that it resembled the
Souls of the old mages that had been responsible for shoving the monsters underground in the first
place. But those records were old and unreliable. Besides, the lack of monsters on the surface had led
to the extinction of mages. It was funny; by 'saving' the human race, the old mages had doomed their
own race. It was possible that the reappearance of monsters had awakened that old blood. There
were just so many questions to be answered!

Tod glanced up from the analyzer screen, a sucker stick poking out of his mouth. "You've got the
blood?"

She wiggled the bag at him. "Of course. There's no time to play around."

He grunted and turned his gaze back to the screen.

She sighed and plopped down in the seat next to him. "Your attachment is getting in the way here.
Surely you can see that it would be far better to use her as a host than-"

"We are not using her as a host." His tone, sharp and final, was usually enough to shut most people
up. But Nahn wasn't most people.

"You're the one who keeps saying that we must stop the monster bill from passing!" she snapped
back. "Releasing S-12 into the public was a very good step in achieving that. You saw how well it
held its form! We've never had an amalgamate last that long before. But we need something more
solid, something that won't fall apart within the hour."

Tod sucked on his sucker for several long seconds before answering. "If you have more of her blood
and the Soul samples, you can solidify the experiments, correct?"
"That's the theory," she admitted, snapping on a pair of gloves before placing the bag of blood up on a hook. "But if you want real results by the voting day, you have to let me go deeper into her Soul."

"We've never had a subject survive more than a level three probe. Not to mention having any of their essence removed," he said dryly.

She shrugs. "Our little gray friends have a new method for me to try. And either way, she's not walking out of here. You have to make that sacrifice, friend or not."

Tod didn't answer, tapping his fingers on the table. Nahn swallowed her complaints and got to work on the blood. He was thinking and interrupting him would only make that process last longer. She took a portion of the blood out of the bag and set it aside as a control group example before mixing what was left into various solutions that would be injected into the 'marshmallows' first thing in the morning. Tod hated her nickname of the gooey creatures, but he couldn't stop her from thinking it.

"Her Soul is going to be difficult to pierce," he finally muttered.

Nahn discarded her gloves and came to take a look at the screen. She frowned, nudging Tod out of the way. "Huh. I thought Souls were a little more...malleable than that."

"Yes, but look at the red cracks." Tod tapped at the screen which held an image of the Soul. "She's been through hell, emotionally speaking and now she's created a strong shell over it. It's like super glue; getting past that without shattering the Soul completely is going to be hard."

"So we need to break her spirit," Nahn muttered, scrolling through the results. "Make her Soul nice and squishy again."

He grimaced, but nodded.

"Looks like Austin and McNevan are going to get their chance after all." Nahn straightened and reached for the walkie on her hip. Tod put a hand out, stopping her briefly.

"Just...tell them not to kill her. We need her broken, not dead."

"And if she doesn't break?"

Tod lowered his hand and spit the sucker stick at the trashcan; it hit bulls eye with a dull clang. "If she doesn't break in three days, we'll use her as a host."
In Which Sans Attempts To Pull A Liam Neeson

Chapter Notes

Wow, the weekend retreat I went on with my mom resulted in an nice long chapter that I'm actually pretty happy with.
You know, besides all the bad stuff happening in the actual chapter
Feed the comment monster, I am hungry!
Look At These Baddies (P.S these are totally the canon looks for the bad guys now)
I Write and Take Requests Here
Main Blog

"You were never wanted! Say it!"

"No!"

Austin presses the taser into your arm again, making you shriek. They've ripped the sleeves of your shirt off, leaving your arms open to the weapon. Your skin is covered in red splotches and bits of blood from some of the times he pressed the taser too hard against your skin. You gasp harshly as he pulls the taser away.

"Now, you need to be honest with yourself," he simpers. "If that monster really loved you, he would have come for you by now."

You shake your head, barely able to keep your eyes open. "No. He's looking. They're...all looking..."

"Even if they are-!" He shoves the taser into your side. "It's only because they don't want your disappearance on their hands!"

You thrash and scream as he continues to hold the taser against your side. When he finally stops, you can barely speak. "Why...are you...doing this?" you gasp out, eyes watering from the pain. "Do you know...what Tod is doing? You hate monsters...and he's-"

"Trying to use them to wipe out humanity?" Austin shrugs, fiddling with the dial on the taser. "Yeah, I know about his 'save the gifted' crap. Load of bull if you ask me."

"So you realize what he's doing is wrong!"

He gives you a wide grin. "Never said that. I just don't think it's gonna work. And I don't care if it does either way."

You flinch as he waves the taser close to your face. "Then why? What do you stand to gain from all this?"

Austin laughs loudly, looking to McNaven. "Do you hear this? I think she's trying to get me to monologue!"

McNaven shrugs, still scowling. "You're acting like you're not gonna do it anyway."
"Well, yeah, but still. It's hilarious." Austin puts the end of the taser under your chin. You brace yourself, but he only uses it to lift your head a little. "Look sweetie, I ain't got some tragic backstory like scar face. I was hired to stir up hate between people and monsters and I do it cause I like it. I'm just helping to get the inevitable war started. And once it does, the monsters don't stand a chance, even if our boss manages to make a mega monster that doesn't melt away. And in the meantime, I get the immense pleasure of making sure you're in as much pain as possible."

Your body spasms as he flicks the taser on, making your teeth rattle. This continues all night long. Exhaustion makes your entire body feel like jelly and yet every time you come close to passing out, one of them will taser you again or hit you, cruelly waking you up. The entire time they continue to snarl insults or try to convince you that Sans and the others don't care about you. Austin strokes your face, whispering that it would be better to just give up all hope. You spit in his face, receiving a blow to your stomach that makes you throw up the food you ate earlier. Finally, covered in vomit, blood and sweat, they leave you strapped to the chair and you immediately fall asleep, head slumping to your chest.

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"walk me through it again," Sans says, staring down the alley where you were taken.

Frisk nods, holding on tightly to Toriel's hand. It's morning now; Sans had been out nearly all night, retracing the path you had taken from the station. But Tori wouldn't let the kid wander around in the dark. Now that it's light out, Sans brought them back out here, hoping that maybe there was something he missed. Some clue that would tell him something about the ones who took you.

We went down that way. Frisk points and starts walking down the alley. Sans expects Tori to protest, but she just sets her jaw and follows. I think...we turned here and...no, it was here. The kid stops at the corner of the building, pointing down into a side alley. There's a chain link fence and several small trashcans that have been knocked over. Sans moves slowly towards the fence, trying not to picture what must have happened. He scans the ground; maybe in the struggle one of them dropped something?

But there's nothing here.

"you can go back to the square," he mutters, staring at the fence.

"Sans-"

Frisk tugs on Toriel's hand, shaking their head. He waits until he's alone before he finally uses his pent up rage to summon a Blaster. It rumbles as it hovers in the air, waiting for his command. He lets out a strangled yell and unleashes the power contained, his eye flashing blue. The Blaster roars, enveloping the knocked over trashcans with blinding light. But the attack effects beings with Souls, not objects and the cans simply roll around in the wind created by the force of his attack. The Blaster dissolves away as Sans continues to just stand there. You must have been so scared. Chased by men you knew were going to hurt you. And yet you had managed to help Frisk escape, putting the kid's safety before your own.

He releases a long breath, staring up at the slice of sky visible between the two buildings. You were holding on. He has to do the same. He pulls his phone out as he heads back to Frisk and Tori. Abby should be back at the station by now. She doesn't know you've vanished. Unless she's involved somehow. She was the last one besides Paps and Frisk to see you and he wants to see her face, gauge her reaction when he told her the news.

"Did you find anything?" Toriel asks as he walks up to them.
He shakes his head. "I'm gonna head to the station, ask some questions. You should take the kid and go talk to the police, see if they've had more luck."

She nods and places a hand on his shoulder. "Don't act rashly," she warns in a low voice. "If someone at the radio station is responsible, you might scare them off and then we'll be in trouble."

"We're already in trouble Tori," he says with a weak grin. "Don't worry. I know how to be subtle."

Toriel and Frisk take off for the police station while Sans turns on his heel and starts heading back to your workplace. He sends Pap a quick text.

s: heading to radio station. gonna talk to abby

P: OKAY. UNDYNE AND I ARE STARTING A SWEEP OF THE WEST SIDE OF DOWNTOWN

s: k. be careful bro

P: YOU BE CAREFUL AS WELL SANS.

Sans looks around and, seeing that he's alone, takes a quick shortcut, landing in the parking lot by the station. His knees threaten to buckle underneath him. He's so tired and jumping around through space was hard enough when he wasn't running on empty. He rubs at his sockets until his head clears and ducks into the station. How can things look so normal when you're not here? Abby is behind the desk and her head pops up at the sound of the bell tinkling. Her expression eases when she spots him.

"Hey Sans! Geez, tell your girlfriend to answer her freaking phone. No, actually I'll do the yelling." She stands, confusion crossing her face as she realizes he's alone. "Um, is she outside or something? Where's Lesser?"

Sans studies her face for a moment before answering. "Abby she's..." It's harder to say the words than he thought. "She's missing. Some freaks attacked her and...took her away."

She blinks at him for several long seconds while this computes. Then Abby's hands fly up over her mouth. "Oh my God. Oh my God!" Her eyes start to tear up and she falls back into her chair. "Sans, if this is a prank of some kind-"

"You think I'd joke about something like this?" His voice is ice cold and she flinches.

"God, no, you'd never...oh no. How could this happen?"

She's very visibly distraught and Sans' tiny suspicion vanishes even as his Soul sinks a little. No, she's truly upset. She's not part of your disappearance. But that also means she has no information.

She looks up at him, eyes red and puffy. "This is my fault. Crap, I should have made her wait for me to drive them over. Sans, I'm so sorry. I'm such an idiot."

"It's not your fault." He shoves his hands in his pockets. He's no good at the comforting people thing. "Look, I know you're upset. But you gotta tell me what you know. You were the last one who saw her before she was taken. Did you see anything?"

Abby shakes her head, rubbing at her eyes. "No. She just said she was going to stop and get Papyrus and Frisk some ice cream before getting her car."
Something prickles at the back of his mind, but Sans can't put a finger on exactly what it is. "anyone follow after them?"

"No. I cleaned up and left. I mean Tod headed home just before I did but-"

The door tinkles again and, speak of the devil, Tod walks through, exhaustion clear on his face. The guy always looked exhausted whenever Sans saw him. He brightens a little when he spies Sans. "Hello there. I don't think _____ is supposed to come in til later. Did she leave something here?" He looks between Sans and Abby and his smile fades. "What's going on?"

Abby cuts in before Sans can say a word. "_____ is gone! Someone took her!"

Tod's mouth drops open. "What?" He turns to Sans, putting a hand on his shoulder. "Are you okay?"

Sans merely shakes his head, sockets narrowing. Why was he feeling so uneasy? He shrugged Tod's hand off, taking a step away. "i'm managing."

"God, if...if there's anything I can do, please tell me." Tod runs his hand through his hair.

Sans nods shortly.

"I'll...I'll let the staff know."

Sans watches the man go, his Soul shuddering. No, it couldn't be Tod. But...crap. He can't take the risk. He can't ignore the twisting feeling in his nonexistent gut. He turns back to Abby, who's wringing her hands. "abby, if you remember anything else, call me."

"Of course," she sniffles. "I'm so sorry Sans."

He nods stiffly again and leaves. As soon as he's out of sight of the doors, he teleports up to the roof of the neighboring building. From here, he can just see into the window of the sound room. He sees the soundboard and the old man who's always there...what's his name? Scott? No...Sully. He's got a perfect view of the back of his head. As he sits there and watches, Tod passes by, tapping Sully on the shoulder. Sully seems just as shocked at the news. Tod shakes his head and heads into the recording booth, vanishing from view. But if he leaves he'll have to pass by the window again.

Sans' bones are starting to clack again and he laces his phalanges together. He knew that Abby was telling the truth about her shock. She was a good person, with a good Soul. But Tod's was damaged too and with a scar like that on his face, Sans had just brushed it off. Besides, your Soul was the only one that he had studied for any amount of time. And Souls didn't exactly reveal everything about a person.

So why was his suspicion of Tod growing?

Sans sends another message to Paps and sits down, making sure to stay hidden from view as best as he can without losing sight of the window. If he was wrong, then he'd apologize about all this later. But your safety was all that mattered to him. And this way he can try and recover some of his magic while he waits for Tod to leave the station. Then he'd follow the man and see exactly where he went after work. And if he led Sans to you, then no force in this world was going to stop Sans from sending his Soul to hell.

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It seems like a heartbeat later that the door opens again and you jerk awake. Please, not again! You
struggle, limbs heavy and weak as hands release you from the straps. They pull you up and your legs give out. The cold floor feels good against your face so you just stay right there, closing your eyes. You flinch as something wet touches your arm and it takes you a few seconds to realize it's a rag.

"Clean yourself," a voice demands. Not Austin or McNaven.

Your body screams at you as you force yourself to sit up. The room is spinning. Your head hurts and your vision swims slightly. A foot nudges your leg.

"Hurry up."

You blink and take the wet rag. You bite your lip as you dab at the harsh red marks on your skin, wiping as gently as you can. The vomit on your shirt has dried and the woman who brought you the washcloth tosses a plain white smock at you. You hesitate but she makes no move to leave or even look away so you pull your ruined shirt off. Your stomach and ribs are covered in deep purple bruises and more red marks from the taser. You try to change quickly; her bored gaze makes your skin prickle. But it hurts to lift your arms and the effort leaves you gasping and shuddering. As soon as you're dressed, the woman motions for you to follow her. You stumble after her, legs buzzing with static from being still for so long.

An armed goon follows you as soon as you enter the main area. It's busier out here than it was last night and another creature has joined the two in the middle class cases. With a horrible twist of your gut, you realize it's probably the boy you saw strapped to the table. He's almost goop-less, though his human features are gone from his face. It's stark white, bald and slightly egg shaped, with his eyes sunken deep into his sockets. His body has still clearly been stretched beyond the normal human form, but has limbs that are more anatomically correct. They did this overnight? Your blood did this?

You don't get more than a quick look before you're ushered down a side hall and to a bathroom. The woman follows you inside, leaning against the wall as you use the toilet. As you wash your hands, you get a good look at your own face. Your skin already looks gaunt and pale. But your eyes still hold life and resistance. That and the soft glimmer of your galaxy necklace, which has been hidden under your old shirt, help your resolve. Sans is coming. He won't let them do this to you. You just have to hold on until you find some way to let him know where you are.

You're hurried out of the bathroom and, unsurprisingly, led back to S.A.A.M. Tod isn't here (he's probably at the station, acting like he wasn't a maniac who abducted humans and monsters and allowed horrible experiments to be performed on them) but Nahn is bright eyed and cheerful as she approaches. She's got a syringe filled with a dark liquid.

"You're moving pretty fast," you say as you crawl into the seat, eyeing the huge man with the thick gun on his hip. He hooks you in tightly. "I thought it'd take longer to figure out how to use my blood."

"Oh, I've been preparing since we got your first sample. I just didn't have enough." Nahn takes your arm, tutting at the marks on your arm. "Those boys; it's going to be difficult to find a vein."

"Gee that's a shame; guess we'll have to skip the cruel experiment today."

Nahn very quickly finds a vein, despite her words. "You're spunky this morning. Not what I was hoping to see."

"Sorry to disappoint," you mutter, fighting the urge to rip your arm away. Resisting was only going to result in getting hit again. Your heart is in your throat and you're honestly shocked you're able to hide it as well as you are. "What is that stuff?"
She smirks at you. "We're not making you one of my marshmallows just yet, don't worry about that. That being said, this is going to be rather painful. Or so my monster friends have told me. We just need you a little...squishier." She jabs the needle into your arm and injects whatever it is before you can say another word. Instantly, a great chill runs up your arm and spreads through your whole body. Your body spasms and twitches and you fight to breathe. Something black creeps up your arm under the skin like those beetles in the mummy movies and you can feel it sinking deeper and deeper. It feels like your insides are being frozen. Then, like a light switch has been flipped, the ice turns to fire and now you're burning, melting away. You scream, your eyes popping. Your entire body feels like it's overflowing with heat and energy.

"Prep for extraction!" Nahn calls, backing away from your thrashing. "We've got to move!"

Your eyes roll back and pained grunts are the only noise you can make as the machine whirls to life. You feel your Soul pop out and it does nothing to ease the burning in your blood. "P-p-ple....s-s-top...." Your whimpered pleas turn into a howl of agony as the pointed device touches your Soul again.

"What's the give stats?" You dimly hear Nahn bark out.

"Less than 40 percent!" A voice answers. "I wouldn't recommend more than level one."

Nahn curses as you continue to flail. "It'll work! We're going to level two!"

The pointed device begins to spin and your screams reach a new level as you feel it pierce the surface of your Soul.

"Subject HP dropping! Doc, we gotta pull it!"

"Keep going! We need extraction!"

You're falling apart, you're being ripped away, you're dissolving.

"Extraction failure! Surface cracks detected."

"Subject HP is fifteen and dropping!"

"Oh God DAMMIT! Pull it!"

You're pulled back together with a painful force and you're a living ember and then the fire is extinguished and you let darkness embrace you.

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Twenty-six hours. It's been over a day since you were taken away from him. Sans sits at the table in near darkness; the only light in the kitchen comes from the stovetop clock. He's been sitting here for a while. He didn't bother keeping track. But he can't stop himself from keeping track of how long you've been gone.

Tailing Tod was a bust. He'd waited, hidden away and an hour into his silent watch, his Soul had been wracked with a pain so great he'd nearly passed out. This time, he had been sure, you were being killed. And yet, at the end of it, as he lay on the pebbled surface of the roof thrashing through the agony, your spark remained burning. But God, you were so weak. They'd nearly extinguished you. He couldn't move for nearly another hour, locked in petrified terror and staring at your flame within his Soul. He begged whatever deity there might be that you would survive this and you did. His brave, strong girl.
When Tod had finally left the station, Sans barely had the strength to keep up. He teleported from rooftop to rooftop, watching Tod's car make it's way through the swarming traffic. He nearly overshot several of his landings and what did it get him? A view of Tod's dingy apartment complex as he went inside and turned on some t.v. Sans even waited another hour, watching the flickering light through the window before giving up and heading back home.

Home. Could he call it home without you here? When you had been driven from the place that you had made for yourself?

He'd nearly collapsed upon landing back in the living room. He'd ignored everyone's concern, save Papyrus. Even then, he knows that he'd been short with his brother. But he just doesn't have the energy to fake it. So he'd sat himself down at the table, put his head in his hands and just Stopped.

Moving.

A light flickers on in the hall. He can hear the kid's feet padding softly across the ground. The table shifts slightly as Frisk pulls a chair out and plops something heavy on its surface.

"Sans?"

They're speaking. His eyes flicker a little at that, looking over at the kid. "it's awfully late pal," he says, voice hoarse. "you should be sleeping."

You're one to talk, they sign, smiling a little. They pat the object in front of them. It's a book. A photo album actually. Since we're both up, let's look at my pictures.

Sans sighs, putting his head down on the table. "kid, i really don't wanna do that right now."

If the kid answers, he doesn't see it. Instead, he just keeps his head down and listens to the sound of the pages turning and the occasional snicker or sigh. They tap his shoulder occasionally and finally, Sans turns his head just enough to see. The page Frisk is turned to is filled with pictures of them with Paps in the park at the old apartment. Heh, that's the time he got stuck in the monkey bars. It took forever to get him untangled. Frisk turns the page. Halloween pictures from the night of the party. Huh, he didn't even realize that Frisk had a camera that night. The kid giggles at a picture of them with you; the two of you have your fingers pulling at your mouths with your tongues out, making googly eyes.

"when did that happen?" he asks softly, inching a little closer.

When you were sulking in the bathroom, washing the sauce outta your socket. Frisk grins widely.

"heh, i'm still cross with you about that," Sans says, gently shoving Frisk with his shoulder. They only giggle in response, flipping the page again. The two are mostly quiet as they go through the book, occasionally pointing out a certain picture or laughing softly at a memory. Then Frisk reaches the Christmas pictures and there you are. Frisk managed to capture the exact moment that Sans presented the guitar to you. In the picture, you face is alight with joy and shock, your hands caught in the midway motion of covering your mouth. Your eyes are sparkling. He can remember that moment clearly like it just happened. He'd never been so happy, so at peace with the life that he was living. You gave that to him.

A dark, wet spot appears on the page. It takes Sans a moment to realize that he's crying.
He's terrified that he's never going to see you again. He's scared that you were going to spend your last days in agony, wondering why he hadn't rescued you yet. The thought that he might never see you again, never feel the touch of your skin against his bones, never curl his fingers in your hair and pull you close, leaves him paralyzed. His hands clench as he bows his head over the book.

During those endless years in the underground, Paps was the only one who ever saw him cry. Hell, maybe he was wrong about that. He can't remember and his dreams and reality of that time was more than a little screwed. But he does know that he fought to keep those dark emotions to himself because there was no point in sharing them. All it did was make the pain worse when those he confided in simply forgot the next 'day'. It was agony to wake up and not remember who he had told, who he had confided in. If he had wept and opened his Soul.

So he didn't do it. And after a while, he forgot what it was like to cry. He forgot what it was like to truly grieve.

But you taught him how to feel all of that again. Now he can't hold it in. He didn't want to cry in front of the kid, but he can't stop. The dam has been breached and tears roll down his face.

Frisk hesitates as Sans continues to weep quietly before placing their hands on his shoulder. The show of affection from the child that he knows he's killed countless times makes a sob break from him.

"kid...god, kid what am i supposed to do?" he whispers, putting his skull against the table. There's a option there, an option that he doesn't want to voice. But time is starting to slip away. He's desperate now. "frisk, i'm the worst kind of trash bag for even thinking this but..." He lifts his head, meeting Frisk's eyes. "can...can you...." He can't say it. The word burns in his throat like bile.

Frisk frowns, guilt and sadness clear on their face. "I can't anymore," they whisper. "what do you mean?"

They open their mouth but pull their hands up instead of speaking. I promised. No more resets. "i know kid, and i'm going to hell for asking you to break that but-"

I can't do it. At all. Frisk looks away from him. I...tried to Load. Just to that morning. I tried but I couldn't do it. It's like it's just...gone.

Gone? How is that even possible? It doesn't make sense! Of course, the power to reset never made sense in the first place. Sans slumps in the chair, skull filled with an odd buzzing. There had been a time when those words would have filled him with unspeakable joy. But now, he just feels utterly wretched.

"I'm sorry," the kid whimpers, voice broken and wavering. "I broke my p-promise."

"don't be sorry for that," he whispers. He rubs his face, wiping away a few remaining tears. He laughs humorlessly. "geez, the hits just keep coming, don't they?"

Frisk reaches out, taking his hand. "It will be okay. I promise." They drop his hand and continue with signing. We'll find her. We've got so many clues and so many people looking. We just have to make all the connections.

"it'd be easier to do that if she still had her phone," he says miserably. Which is why that freak had stolen your purse away before you were attacked. Paps had heard you screaming and had turned
back before catching the guy so there was no way to know where your phone was. There was no connection there now. Wait....

He looks up at Frisk. "say that again."

They tilt their head, confused. **Say what?**

"connections. we need a connection to her." He stands, a new, borderline manic energy surging through his bones. "i'm so stupid! i AM connected!"

**I...don't get it.** Frisk frowns, clearly a little startled by his sudden excitement.

Sans jabs at his ribs, right above his Soul. "i've got the connection right here. if i can make it stronger, can make the bond more solid, i can find her soul without even blinking!" He whips his phone out, digits trembling a little. He presses the phone up against his skull as it rings. Come on, pick up!

There's a click, a sleepy "Wha...?"

"al, i need you at the lab. now."
"You do realize it's three am?" Alphys grumbles, rubbing her eyes as she unlocks the lab door.

"that's why i brought coffee."

She takes the offered cup and enters the room, flicking the light on. The room hums with machinery and Sans can't help but once again admire the setup. It's a huge area, since several scientists and students work in here, but Alphys is one of the few given complete access to all the devices within. There's computers, huge freezers holding countless chemicals and other such things, tables covered in machines whose cords are spread across the floor to reach every outlet available as well a replica of the DT machine down in the underground lab. Alphys had asked for his help on that ages ago and he had very hesitantly agreed. That thing had only caused pain underground, but maybe up here it could do some good.

And now, it might be the key to locating your Soul.

"So, I didn't clearly get what you were saying on the phone," Alphys says, dropping down into a rolling chair. Exhaustion it seems has taken away her stutter for the time being. "You know. Because it's three in the morning."

"sorry pal, but this can't wait. i need your help."

His desperate tone seems to wake her up. As he tells her his idea, her eyes grow wider and she has to set her coffee down on a tiny clear space at her desk. She laces her fingers together. He can't tell if she's more shocked at the fact he managed to create a bond in the first place, or the craziness of his idea. Probably both.

"Sans...I get what you're thinking," she finally says slowly. "But I don't know if it's p-possible. I mean, it'd be one thing if she was here too but..."

You're not. Sans fights not to pace. "then you're thinking the same thing i am. if we use determination extract, we can make it stronger. right?"

Alphys hesitates, pushing her glasses up. "That...is the obvious solution here. But it's not that simple!"
"why do you think we're talking then?" He tries not to snap but it's hard. "sorry. but we're running out of time." He places a hand on his ribs, right above his Soul. "they're messing with her soul al. if we don't find her before they do it again, she might not make it."

She wrings her hands. "T-that's another problem. Right now, a-according to my theory at l-least, you're just feeling an echo of what they're d-doing. But if we do somehow manage to m-make the bond strong enough to find her then you...." Alphys takes a shuddering breath. "You'll feel everything. And w-worse...it might affect your Soul too. And I'm s-sorry but with your HP level being w-what it is-

Sans, waves a hand, cutting her off. "i don't care."

"But I do!" She snaps back, unusually sharp. "You know what DT does to monsters! I w-won't be responsible for killing another mon...a friend."

Sans blinks at her, a little taken aback. She looks away from him, eyes tight with guilt and pain. After a moment, Sans pulls another chair closer and sits down in it. He looks at his knees, speaking quietly. "i can't lose her al. she's my world and if...if the worst does happen, i don't know if i'll make it. please. help me do this. i know we can find a way."

Her tail twitches and she sighs, closing her eyes. Sans stays quiet, the only sound in the room the hum of computers and the steady ticking of a clock on the far wall. Finally, she opens her eyes, staring right at him. "It's a long shot but...I have an idea we can try. But I d-don't know how long it will take or if it'll even w-work-"

Sans puts a hand on her trembling claws. "thank you," he says softly.

She gives him a weak smile. Taking a deep breath, she stands, nearly knocking her cup of coffee over. "Okay! L-let's do this!"

Of course, that is easier said than done. They start with a basic scan of his Soul. The feeling of standing in the machine, the familiar feeling of ice crawling down his spine as his Soul is analyzed, reminds him far too much of the 'good old days'. He spent countless hours under Gaster's various machines, sometimes strapped down and other times of his own free will. What would his old man have to say if he could see Sans now?

After the initial scan they spend hours simply theorizing and debating on what to do next. His readings are fairly normal. Well, normal for him at least. Alphys is fascinated by the nature of his magic and Sans can tell the scientist in her is itching to figure out exactly how his magical biology works. But she stays focused and they make a little progress. Injecting pure determination into his bones is out of the question. They both know what the result of that will be. They figure if they can mix something into the determination extracts to help dilute it then the effect will work more in their favor. The problem is of course, time and the lack of things to experiment on.

By the time the sun rises, Alphys has managed to help at least one of their problems; she uses a dummy injected with a hint of determination and magic donated by various monsters that works as a stand by for an actual monster. Of course, it's not perfect but it's better than purely theorizing. The problem is, magic and determination do not make a good combo. Sans pulls the googles off his face as the third dummy melts into a puddle on the lab floor.

It's the same problem that he and Gaster ran into countless times before; they need the human element. It's something they were never fully able to understand and could never hope to recreate. Sans throws his googles on the table and sinks into a chair. He's exhausted and his excitement from finally being able to do something is starting to run thin. "i know it's possible," he grumbles. "mages
existed and they used a combination of determination and magic. We know they did!"

By this point, a few students have trickled in, working on whatever school projects and experiments they had. Sans recognizes a few of them from the times he's been in the lab before. One kid, a girl with a bright pink mohawk, steps over to the remains of the dummy, poking it with a plastic rod.

"Does this have to do with the monster dust you've been trying to analyze?" she asks.

Alphys shakes her head. "No this is s-something different. More DT and magic work."

"Huh." The girl peers at the end of the stick, which is covered in goop and dust. "Want me to run a side by side analysis?"

"No that-"

"actually, yeah, do that please," Sans cuts in, a light bulb going off in his skull. As mohawk girl scoops up a sample and heads over to an empty table, Sans turns to Alphys. How could he have missed such an obvious thing? It's because he's a short sighted, arrogant skeleton, that's why! He didn't even consider the possibly that maybe, just maybe, someone out there was smarter than him."okay, what are the key elements that make up a human being?"

She blinks at him, a little confused. "Water, 35 liters; carbon, 20 kilograms; ammonia, 4 liters; lime, 1.5 kilograms; phosphorus, 800 grams; salt, 250 grams; saltpeter, 100 grams; sulfur, 80 grams; fluorine, 7.5; iron, 5; silicon, 3 grams; and trace amounts of 15 other elements."

She says this in such a way that he just knows she's quoting some 'historical' anime. And he's not sure it's entirely accurate, but that's besides the point.

"and what do we know is contained in the dust from the monster in the city?"

"Not much. There are trace elements of carbon, nitrogen, calcium..." She trails off as it clicks. "Oh my God. It's a human!"

Sans shakes his head, grinning grimly. "No. It's a human and monster amalgamate. Whoever did it, somehow managed to fuse together a monster and a human, even though it didn't last for very long."

Alphys has her hands up over her mouth in horror. Then she lowers them, shoulders slumping. "But how does that help us now? We have no idea how they did it. And worse, it...it very obviously killed the creature that was left from whatever they did to the poor guys involved."

"it..." Okay, it doesn't help much. But it's something. "It means that it's possible. I don't need a massive transformation. I just need to be able to use determination."

His Soul twinges suddenly and Sans hunches over, groaning.

"Sans?!"

Alphys jumps up, hands hovering over him as he fights to get his breath back. This one isn't as bad as the one on the roof, but it still leaves his Soul trembling. He freezes as a thought occurs to him. He's positive now that the people who took you, and your blood are the same people who are responsible for the human, monster mash up that wrecked havoc in the town. They're messing with your Soul which can only mean....

His SOUL!
"al that's it!" He jumps up, making her squeak with alarm. "it's not magic, it's the souls!"

She gasps, catching on. "It's the one thing that all humans and monsters share!"

"right. instead of trying to combine magic with dt, we need to mix it with the essence of a soul before it is injected." He practically sprints to the DT extractor, flipping switches and dials. "how long will it take to change the settings?"

Alphys is right behind him and places a clawed hand on his shoulder. "Hold on Sans, we can't move rashly with this. Y-your HP might be permanently damaged."

"as long as we only take a sliver, i'll be fine," he mumbles, already making adjustments to the machine. Besides, exchanging slivers of the Soul was how baby monsters were made. It'd be fine. How different could it be from extracting determination and magic?

Very different, as it turns out. There are pages of calculations to be made, parts that have to be adjusted, moved or added to the machine. At one point, part of it actually catches fire (Alphys nearly quits right there on the spot) and threatens to break down altogether. But eventually and with only minimal screaming, they make it work. It's getting late now and Sans worriedly looks at the clock. Your Soul has been pretty quiet today but that doesn't mean they aren't hurting you.

After hours of grueling work, taking very few breaks, Alphys deems it ready. Her students and some of the other staff had lingered around, offering help or advice but now that they're ready to go, she's shooing everyone out for a bit of privacy. As Sans steps back into the machine, a though occurs to him. If he can feel it when your Soul is being messed with, wouldn't that mean you would feel this?

"hey al, just curious. uh, is this going to...hurt?"

She gives him an incredulous look. "I've spent the last three hours trying to think of a different way, despite your stubborn protests and you're just now asking that?"

"will it?"

"What do you think?" she asks dryly, triple checking the settings.

Well crap. Sans closes his sockets, brushing his magic against your flare in his Soul. This was going to hurt and hurt a lot. But it would be over quickly. For once, he hoped that you would be too out of it to feel the echo of his pain. "ready when you are al," he says, opening his sockets.

"Sans, I really don't like this," she protest, wringing her hands again. "It's too fast, and there's no way to test it first."

"alphys."

"F-fine! Just...tell me if it h-hurts too much and I'll stop." She flicks a few dials and the DT machine whirrs to life, humming loudly. It makes his bones rattle. It's louder now and he can hear the gears whining. For the first time, nerves start to whisper doubts in his head. What if his calculations were wrong? God, what if this somehow caused your Soul to shatter?

It's too late to stop it now. He manifests his Soul on his own to speed the process up. Alphys is hesitating, her hand hovering over the final switch. She meets his eyes and he nods quickly. She swallows and slams the button down. As his Soul is enveloped in the magical outpouring from the machine, Sans feels his bones lock up and his left socket begins to burn. He's no stranger to his Soul being examined at it's most intimate level, thanks to all the experiments he had to endure as a baby bones. He's been poked, injected, squeezed and stripped down to the core. But not once did Gaster
attempt to remove part of his Soul. That was just something that wasn't done.

And for very good reason.

He can't stop a agonized moan as the device prods at his Soul. It instantly tenses up and tries to sink back into the safety of his rib cage. He grits his teeth and pushes it back out.

"Sans, you have to let down your guard!" Alphys calls, her voice slightly panicked. "It's too brittle!"

Of course it is. He takes deep breath and lets his thoughts drift to you. He brings up that memory of the first moment that he realized was in love with you. Of course, it wasn't the way it was in the story. There was no real moment that he fell. No, it was a slow but inevitable thing that only grew when he saw you smile, when you cracked bad jokes with him, when you held him close when he felt weak and vulnerable. But the moment that it truly became something he could not deny was the time he saw you dancing freely in your kitchen, released from all your worries and fears, just for a moment. His Soul had lurched, slipping from the rock he had forced around himself and he had fallen.

"That's it! Hold on!"

He has to reach out and grab the bars set on the inside of the machine to remain standing as the drill begins to spin and pierce the surface of his Soul. But as it begins to dig a hole, he falls to his knees regardless, a pained shriek escaping. Icy fire shoots through his bones, making his limbs numb.

"Sans?!

"I'm fine," he growls out. "Don't stop."

He has to keep his Soul soft, open. Focus on the memories Sans!

His Soul shivers and screams under the pressure of the drill.

*The way your mouth would turn into a pout when you lost at your little pun games.*

He's being drained, emptied.

*The feeling of your fingers dancing over his bones while you watched stupid t.v with him, your warm body pressed up against him.*

It's only a sliver, only a moment.

*Your eyes sparkling whenever he walked into a room, full of love and just a hint of playfulness.*

Please, let it end.

Then it does. He's released and he sees Alphys running towards him and oh crap, he's losing his balance and as his face rushes to the floor he sees someone else standing there just for a fraction of a second. Dark, flickering with glitches, a face locked in a wide smile.

Then he sees nothing.

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When he opens his sockets, it takes him a second to recognize where he is. He blinks, looking around. Oh, that's right; this must be Alphys' office. It's small but big enough for a love seat couch, which he's currently on. He sits up, pushing off the thin blanket covering him. His ribs ache and his
head feels like it's been dunked in candle wax. Instinctively, he checks his HP. 1.5/1. Well, if nothing else, sleeping had restored whatever HP was lost during the Soul extraction and a smidgen more.

His head jerks up, the painful haze cleared by panic. How long has he been out?! He tries to jump to his feet, only to have his knees buckle under him, leaving him sprawled on the floor. He's seriously considering just taking a shortcut back to the lab when the door opens and Undyne stomps in. In fact, she nearly steps on Sans, leaping back with a yell.

"Geez! Are you trying to get stepped on?" She growls, running a hand through her hair. It's not up in her usual ponytail.

Normally, he'd attempt a joke, but he's too preoccupied with the fact that he clearly passed out after the experiment. "What time's it?"

Undyne blinks in surprise; she must have been expecting the joke too. She sighs, sticking a hand out to help him up. "Almost seven. AM."

"What?" He's been out all night?!

"Calm down," she says, tugging him up. "Alphys has been working on mixing your Soul piece with DT this whole time." She gives him a stern look. "You scared her, passing out like that. She was in hysterics when she called me."

"Sorry," he murmurs, a little unsteady on his feet.

"When was the last time you slept? Not including just now."

Including the night of your fight before you were taken? "Um...three days. I think."

Undyne opens her mouth, rage making her visible eye spark but then she just shuts her mouth and grinds her teeth. "You're a numbskull. And that's not a pun!"

"Yeah, I know." He pushes past her, heading back to the lab. "You should've woken me up."

"You nearly killed yourself!" she snarls, stomping after him. "How was I gonna explain that to if-" The light-less glare he sends her stops that sentence very quickly. "Look, if you want this crazy idea of yours to work, you need to be ready and rested. Got it?"

He doesn't answer that, even though he knows she's right. They reach the lab; inside, Papyrus is standing next to a very bleary eyed Alphys, who's hunkered over several vials of filled with liquids that vary from bright blue to dull red to nearly white. Paps brought more cups of coffee, most of which are empty.

"SANS!" The relief in his brother's voice makes Sans' Soul twist with guilt. "DON'T EVER DO SOMETHING SO RASH WITHOUT CONSULTING SOMEONE!"

"I did consult someone, pap," he says, trying his best to put an easy smile on his face. "She's standing right next to ya."

"SANS! YOU COULD HAVE BEEN SERIOUSLY HURT! OR WORSE!"

"Stop with the yelling!" Undyne shrieks, gesturing at her girlfriend. "Alphys' head hurts!"

With a death glare only the truly exhausted can achieve, Alphys stands, snatching one of the vials. Sans does some quick math in his head. Except for a short nap she took yesterday, Alphys has been
up for roughly twenty-six hours. Now, he's used to that, but she clearly isn't. Her fierce look softens as she holds out the vial to him. This one is hovering on a light shade of purple.

"This is the one Sans," she says softly. "I made every combination I could think of and this one should give you enough control over the determination to expand the Soul's bond without..."

"without making me a pile of goop. good to know." He takes the vial, studying it carefully. The scientist in him wants to run more tests but he doesn't have that kind of time. And besides, if Alphys was sure then he had to have trust that it was done right. He meets her eyes, which are tight with worry. "thank you alphys."

She smiles and nods, hands clasped tightly. "I t-think it's time we got your girlfriend back, don't you?"

This time, the grin that stretches across his face is one of terrifying rage. "oh hell yeah."

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It's hard to tell how much time passes. You sleep, curled into a ball, you are woken and beaten, threatened, and torn apart with words. Then it's back to the machine that violates the deepest parts of your Soul over and over again, then it's back to the room and you're so tired and you just want this all to be over. With every hit, with every probe, you retreat deeper and deeper into yourself because if you let yourself be aware what's, then you know that you will break. And you can't do that. Sans is coming. He has to be.

Of course, the numbness can't block out the pain. At this point you're pretty sure some of your ribs are at least cracked, if not broken. Moving, blinking, breathing hurts. Nahn's taken more blood and judging from the scowl on her face when she did it, she's running into more problems than she expected. It's a sort of victory, seeing her so frustrated. But now you've lost a lot of blood and Austin and McNaven have to back off slightly on the physical torture. That doesn't stop them from continuing to spew filth from their mouths and that is still hard to block out. Somehow, they found out about the fire and they both seem more than pleased to tell you about the horrible person you really are. How you should have died in the fire that day. How you were weak for throwing the blade and the razors away. They touch your scars, they dig into your skin with their knives and needles, mixing the old white marks with harsh new ones that never seem to stop bleeding.

You blink slowly, the haze slightly cleared by the panic that always sets in when you hear the roar of S.A.A.M and feel the now familiar jerk in your chest. You look away; your Soul must surely be shriveled up, the brightness of your Soul dirtied by all the gazes that have seen it, all the metal that has broken it. You brace yourself and yet, in that very moment, a strange new feeling starts to grow in your chest. It's warm, but it's not the burning agony of the black ooze that Nahn keeps injecting into your blood. No, this warmth is the sun on a cool day, the softness of a blanket heated by a living body, the overflowing love of the man you know is searching so desperately for you. It fills you up and though you had thought your tears had been utterly bled dry, your eyes flow with moisture that trails down your bruised face. You know this feeling, this wild yet contained magic dancing through your battered Soul.

Sans.

"What the hell is that?"

The shock in Nahn's voice makes you look over and your gaze falls to your Soul. It's not wrinkled and gray, like you feared. But it is covered in new cracks thanks to the violent beating it's undergone. Within those cracks there's something new.
Your Soul is glowing blue.

~~~~~

Sans snaps his head to the side, staring out the window of the lab. "she's that way. the old university. south end."

He takes a shortcut, following the tugging in his Soul. It's not like he had hoped. No map appeared in his mind, no bright neon sign to show him the way but his Soul and yours are intertwined and he can feel your sobbing relief and he lets his love pour into you, gently stroking the flickering light in his Soul that, despite everything, is still you. It's leading him there, like a magnet.

*I'm coming sweetheart.*
Sans crouches on one of the roofs of what used to be the main campus for the city's main university, staring at the large four story warehouse type building that his Soul continues to tug him towards. It may be old and used mostly for out of norm classes and film students, but the area is still crawling with people. Smart of them, to stick you in a place with so many Souls. But now, he can see you. Your glow is brighter than the others, a splash of color in the dark sea of Souls. You're in the basement, probably in some kind of holding area. He has to be smart about this. There are a lot of Souls in the same area, all of them blending together and he can be sure that many of those are armed, dangerous and willing to kill. He should wait for Undyne and the others, maybe scope out the area. Make a plan.

Ha! There's no way he's going to sit here and wait!

His bones are buzzing with power. He's never had such energy and such rage flowing through him before. It's...exhilarating. To think, humans had this power right at their fingertips. Determination. It's no wonder that monsters lost the war so long ago. Determination in and of itself was simply a feeling, a drive. But the possibilities that opened up because of it were endless. And terrifying.

Of course those are the last thoughts on his mind right now. His sockets flicker and a small part of his mind registers with dull surprise that both of his sockets are radiating power. There's no time to wonder about such trivial things. He spies a window that shows an empty room and takes a quick step through space. He has no idea what kind of state you're in or what kind of guard they have on you. Simply popping in blindly is out of the question. And besides, there are some freaks who are long overdue for a heavy dunking.

It's time to cause some havoc.

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You're unceremoniously shoved back into your cell, Nahn seemingly satisfied with a mere scan of your now blue tinged Soul. When it sank back into your chest the intensity of the connection you felt with Sans was blanketed slightly, but you can still feel the warmth of his power moving through you, giving you back a spark of your energy. You squint down at your chest, but it's no good. Without Sans or...the machine, you can't see anything. What happened? Sans must have done something, but what?

A sudden alarm makes you jump and then groan at the painful protest in your ribs. It's muffled, coming from outside your room. Your heart leaps in your chest even as you feel the fire of his Soul swell. He's here! He's finally here!
And facing down a platoon of goons with guns. And by the sound of things, he's making no effort to hide his appearance. That stupid bonehead is going in guns-er...eyes blazing, isn't he? You drag yourself to the door, hissing with pain. You've got to do something. Cause a distraction, anything! You pound on the door.

"Hey!" Your voice is hoarse, cracking sharply. It's the first you've spoken besides screaming in the last twenty hours. "Hey I need help! My stomach hurts!"

There's no answer outside the door. Ignoring you? Or maybe no one is there. After all, why would they guard a beaten up girl in a locked room? You slap the door, throwing your eyes around uselessly. He's finally come for you and you're stuck in this stupid cell! It'd be one thing he if just popped in with a short cut and grabbed you but clearly, he doesn't know exactly where you are. Or...

A distant gunshot rings out. Terror grips you and you pull at the handle desperately. C'mon, open! Open! Your heart races, sending an odd tingling throughout your whole body. Please, open!

Your left eye suddenly stings and you cry out, slapping your hand up. At the same time, a loud click emits from the lock with a small puff of blue light. You slowly lower your hand, staring at the knob in shock. Did that just...? You reach out and very slowly turn the door handle. It opens easily. No way! Oh that can't be a good thing.

Well, at the moment, it's exactly what you need. You gingerly push the door open. When you meet no resistance, you stick your head out. There's no one around. They're probably all being sent to deal with Sans and whoever else he (hopefully) brought with him. You slip out and into the hallway, every nerve on high alert as you sneak towards the lab area. Heading straight towards the most populated area doesn't seem like the best idea, but it's the only place you're familiar with. If there's anything you can use as a distraction, it's going to be in there.

You slink along as best as your bruised and battered body will allow, staying in the shadows as much as you can. You peer around the edge of the hall; there's still people in the lab but they're all moving with a panicked energy. Getting ready to run probably. It's easy enough to hide behind various machines, though you do have some close calls. Slowly, you make your way across the room, looking around for anything you can use. You do find a medical scalpel, which you keep gripped in your hand. You just pray you don't have to use it. But other than that, it's all just medical supplies and papers. Nothing useful and certainly nothing that's going to cause enough of a distraction. Maybe it would be better if you just got out, found someone who wasn't part of this nut case cult.

But as you hear more gunshots, you know you can't leave Sans while he's fighting the people who did all this. And you can't let these people get away with all the lives they've ruined. Argh, you feel so useless! Even with your sudden...magic like talent, which might have just been a fluke, you've got nothing you can do. Worse still, you're right on the edge of the heavy equipment near the center of the room. Your only choices are to sneak back and attempt to go around, which you couldn't do in the first place thanks to all the scientists and people running around, or bolt out in the open and make a run for it. Neither option is appealing.

The hairs on your neck stand up suddenly. You're being watched. You look around, attempting to shrink closer to the desk you're pressed up against. Then you realize, it's no human watching you. Or at least, not any more. The plastic cages in the center of the room still holds two of monsters that Nahn has created. You've never seen them taken out but there are doors, which are currently locked. During your torture in S.A.A.M occasionally you would see them staring at you, twisted hands pressed up against the wall of their cage. They're both doing that right now, slapping their hands slowly against the thick plastic. You lock eyes with the less goopy one. It tilts its head, mouth
struggling to form words.

"...elp...fr...ple...

It's asking you to free it. Which means killing it. While contained inside the cubes, it seemed Nahn had managed to create an environment that the creatures could endure and survive, at least for a time. It was when it was released into the open air that its body fell apart. You chew your lip, glancing around before making a pained dash towards the containment. You crouch down next to a control panel set up between the cages, gasping. This might be a really bad idea but...you poke your head up, trying to make sense of the dials and buttons. The monsters are slapping the walls more desperately now, leaving trails of slime.

"Shh," you gesture desperately. They go quiet and you finally locate the proper keypad and release. Of course, you've go no idea what the code is. You look back up at the monsters, pointing to the board. The goopier one forms a floppy hand and holds up a five, a six, one and then another five. You type in the code and hesitate. What if this was some kind of trick? Nahn made these guys to destroy humans. They might come after you.

"There she is!"

Oh *crap*. No choice now! You slam the button and an alarm begins to blare as the doors to the cages slide open. The monsters exit faster than you would have thought possible and you scramble out of the way as best as you can. The solid one heads straight for the remaining scientists, who scatter with screams of terror. The other one however stops and turns its head towards you. It reaches for you with its ill formed hand and you try to get to your feet. Your knees buckle, sending you back to the ground and you scream as you feel the cold hand grab your bloodstained shirt, pulling you back to it. You sink into the surface of its body, your struggles doing nothing but getting you more tangled in the goop. Was this seriously how it was gonna end?! Swallowed up by goop you set loose? "Let me go! Sans! Sans!"

You close your eyes as you feel the goop reach your neck but then it stops and suddenly you're moving forward at a terrifying speed. Past the machines and the people who scramble out of the way of the creature as it moves forward. Your body is stuck and you can do nothing but watch as it takes you...somewhere. You move down a hall you've never been down before until you reach a staircase. You only have a moment to wonder how it's going to get up before you feel the goop surrounding you bunch and roll upwards like some kind of anti-gravity slinky. The creature carries your broken body up the stairs and soon you hear the sound of men yelling and screaming and you can tell by the way your Soul leaps in your chest that Sans is close.

As you near a door that says 'fourth floor' the creature slows and you can feel its body shuddering. You are suddenly pushed out of the goop and deposited on the floor like a human hairball. Your clothes are covered spots of goop, which you attempt to wipe off as you turn back to your unexpected savior. It's staring at you with sad eyes and you feel your own welling with tears.

"I'm so sorry," you whisper, reaching out to what once was a normal human and monster before their lives were destroyed for a pointless cause. "Thank you." It nudges your hand, making an odd sort of rumble. Then before your eyes, it melts away, dissolving into a pile of dust and bone. Your hand is covered in a fine layer of dust. You stare at it, a bubble of panic trying to force its way up your throat. There's another gunshot. There's no time for panic. You pull yourself up and push on the door. It doesn't move. You brace your legs and shove, pained whimpers escaping you. After much pushing, you finally manage to make the crack the door open enough to slip through. You stumble away, the door slamming shut. It's blocked by several large pieces of furniture. An attempt to stop people from getting help? Sans probably put it there. You turn around.
The sight that meets you sends you reeling back, hitting the wall. It's another lab kind of set up, one that was probably an original part of the building. It's been smashed beyond recognition. Glass from both the windows and various tubes cover the ground, chairs and desks are knocked over and broken. The walls are filled with bullet holes and massive bones stretch out from almost every surface. Some are blue but most are white and...oh God, blood drips from many of bones, the red liquid bright against the stark white bone. But what makes your heart clench in horror are the bodies lying on the ground. There's at least three and two of them are groaning in agony, their limbs clearly broken. One isn't moving at all. You can't tell if he's dead or just unconscious. For Sans' sake, you hope it's the latter.

A massive thud sounds from somewhere on this floor, making dust trickle down from the holes the bones have smashed into the ceiling. The fight must have moved further inside the building. Just recently too, since just a minute ago you could hear them shouting. You carefully skirt around the injured men, heading for the door out of here. You recognize them from the original group that kidnapped you. One of them stirs enough to spot you and he groans, reaching for a gun that's just out of his reach. You hobble over and kick it away before he can grab it.

"Ha...hah..." he gasps for breath, a gurgling chuckle breaking from him. "Looks like your pet came for you after all," he snarls, struggling to lift himself up his unbroken arm.

You back away. There's no point in staying to listen to his rambles. You've had more than enough of that in the lab downstairs. You start to walk away, fully intent on ignoring him when-

"Or maybe you're the bitch and he just came to fetch you."

You stop and after a moment, turn around. He gives you a vicious grin.

"You've got to really be something in bed," he drawls, watching you as you stride over to the mess of glass, searching through the remains. "I was hoping to find out what kind of kinky, nasty things you're into. Hell, I could've-"

You dump one of the few unbroken containers of liquid over his head, dousing him in a smelly liquid. "He's my boyfriend, you jerk," you snarl before giving him a kick in the face. It's a rather weak, pathetic kick, considering your state, but it's enough to send him back to the floor. Then you head straight for the door, moving at your best shuffle down the hall. As you tuck the small knife into your pocket, it occurs to you that maybe you should have grabbed the gun. But your hands tremble at the mere thought of touching a weapon like that. Despite everything that they've done, you don't think you could bring yourself to actually kill someone.

By sheer luck, you don't run into anyone. But you do come across more bullet holes and bones lining the walls. By this point your legs are starting to tremble and your head is throbbing with pain. Your left eye keeps itching and you have to fight the urge to rub it. Holy crap. You actually used magic, didn't you? Or rather, you used Sans' magic. As you get closer you feel his Soul throbbing with rage, boiling with power. It would frighten you, but right now you really don't care. You just want to see him.

You want to go home.

You reach a set of double door and you peek through the cracked glass. Flashes of blue, blurred shapes and bones are all you see. You push through, holding your cracked ribs and-
men scrambling for cover in the remains of what used to be a massive ballroom. There's so many! One of them screams in terror as his body is suddenly encased in blue and he is sent shooting upwards and met with a row of bones that erupt from the ceiling. His cries are masked by the harsh roar of one of the Blasters as it mercilessly shoots energy at him. He flops back to the floor, utterly still and Sans turns to his next enemy. His mouth, which you so rarely see opened all the way, is bared in an almost animalistic way.

"Are you reflecting on your actions?" His voice, normally so deep and soothing, echos hollowly with rage. "I dunno about you but I'm having a good time!"

More bones burst from the floor, sending the men hiding behind an overturned table scattering. They aim at Sans, pulling the triggers of their guns and you feel your heart stop but Sans is gone. He reappears not two feet away, his grin manic. "like i'm just gonna stand there and take it!" He throws his fist out in several sharp movements and more men fly through the air, one right after the other. They hit the floor to ceiling glass walls, shattering them. It's a miracle that not a single one falls out and plummets down the four story drop.

He's going to kill them. There's a part you, a dark, terrifying part of your mind that stood strong during your torture, that screams that he's right to do so. You should stand aside, let him finish these people who hurt you. These people were willing to start a war! They were willing to hurt innocent beings! If they died, it would be exactly what they deserved.

But you can't let Sans become that killer. You don't know if it's already too late. You bravely step forward, standing as tall as your injured ribs will allow. "Sans!"

At the sound of your cracking, weak voice calling his name, Sans freezes. His pupils snap to you and in that single moment, you see the monstrous rage vanish. The harsh colors in his sockets fade into black. In a instant moment, he is vulnerable, broken with relief. He's on the other side of the room but he reaches for you in pure desperation. Then horror snaps the colors back into his sockets and you feel an arm wrap around your neck. A gun presses against your skull.

"Isn't irony the best?" You could never mistake the snarling voice in your ear. You scream as Austin squeezes your neck, choking off your air. "Here we find ourselves yet again!"

Sans blinks out of sight and reappears much closer, his Blasters right behind him. He is beyond all reason, his mouth curling into a snarl. "L E T  H E R  G O. NOW."

Austin backs away, dragging you with him. You don't have the energy to resist him. Glass from the broken window cracks under your feet as Sans and Austin circle and the remaining men who can still fight form a line behind Sans. You see sudden movement. "Look out!" you croak.

A harsh bang rings out but Sans has moved again. He doesn't bother to look behind him at the man who attempted to shoot him. He merely slams his fist down and the guy hits the ground. "L A S T  W A R N I N G."

Austin laughs hysterically. "Your stupidity truly astounds me! You should have run! You must be a glutton for punishment." He puts his face next to yours. The wind from the open window sweeps over you, carrying the reek of his sweat. "You should be proud of her, freak. She screamed and screamed while I played my games but she never stopped believing you would save her! How's it feel, knowing that you've so completely failed to keep her safe?"

Sans' bones are clacking loudly as his pupils shrink to mere pinpricks of light. He's stuck, unable to pull you away while this freak has such a tight grip on you.
Another shot rings out and though he moves, it's too slow. He grunts, stumbling to the side. His hand comes up to grip his arm. His jacket sleeve is ripped and spots of blood blossom under the fabric. The bullet just grazed him. Your eye twinges again as sudden numbers flash in your head. 29/1. Somehow you know instantly that this is his life force. You can see his strength and health in numbers. Another side effect from his magic in your Soul?

His magic....

An idea starts to form in your head. A crazy, stupid idea. A quick glance to the side confirms that Austin's managed to drag you over to the windows. You release a breath, locking eyes with Sans. Trust me.

Sans blinks slowly, sockets tightening. After a long second, he gives the slightest of nods.

You try to focus your thoughts as Austin continues to laugh and taunt Sans. Breath. Think. Remember. You let that same desperation you felt in the cell sweep over you. It fills you up, making your limbs tingle with an electrical wave of energy. Your eye burns. You picture the gun in your mind. Move. Move! MOVE!

"Let's face it! I've seen sides of her you never will-" Austin suddenly stops talking as the gun in his hand is enveloped in a weak blue light, shuddering in his hand. "What the hell?"

It's not enough to pull the gun away. But it's enough of a distraction for his grip on your neck to loosen. You twist, grabbing the scalpel you put in your pocket. You plunge it into his shoulder, shoving him towards the broken window. He howls in pain and then his feet knock against the edge of the wall and he loses his balance. He drops the gun, hand shooting out to grab your arm and then he's dragging you with him as he falls into the open air. Sans screams your name and you see the ground so far below rushing up and it's too late, you're falling-!

And time stops.

It's like the world has gone dark all around you and you can see everything in sharp, frozen detail. Austin is below you and his face is twisted in a scream, his hand still gripping yours. Shards of glass hover in the air, light glinting from it's surface. You hang there for an infinite moment, staring down at the ground below and suddenly you feel a presence wrap around you and the world jolts sharply, ripping your hand away from Austin. You feel time skip and you're back inside and arms are circled around you and Sans is whimpering your name and you press yourself up against his bones. Your gasps linger on the edge of hyperventilating.

"i've got you, you're here, i've got you." His voice is a quivering murmur in your ear. "i'm so sorry, baby i'm so sorry."

You can't speak so you press your face into his shoulder. He's squeezing you too tightly, it hurts but you don't ever want to let him go. Your Souls are dancing, bright and alive now that you're back together, just the way you should be.

Until the illusion is broken by the click of guns. You jump, eyes popping open. The remaining men, recovering from the shock of Austin falling, have pulled out their weapons and every single one of them is trained on the two of you. Sans shifts and you can feel his magic attempt to swell but it falls short. Whatever he did to pull you back from the window sapped his remaining energy. He can't teleport.

"shit." Sweat pours down his skull and he turns his body, uselessly attempting to shield you. He stares down at you, his sockets filled with utter despair. "i love you," he murmurs urgently, running
his hand over your matted hair.

You grip his jacket in your hands and pull yourself up, pressing a deep kiss against his teeth. "I love you Sans." Your voice cracks with fear. "I love you so much!"

He burrows his face in your neck, trembling and you brace yourself for the agony of bullets to riddle your body when-

"Don't shoot!"

Tod rushes in through the doors, followed by a few more men. They're covered in goop. Your heart lurches as you realize it must be from the other creature. Sans lifts his head and freezes in shock. Then you feel the rage ripple through him as he stares at Tod.

"I was right!" he snarls, getting to his feet. You follow, holding on to him for support. "how could you do this? to her? you're her friend!"

"Sans, please, you don't understand." He puts his hands up, puffing a little. He must have sprinted from the basement.

"I don't need to!" Sans is screaming. "nothing is worth this! look at her! look at what you've done!"

Tod lowers his hand, face tightening. He gestures around the room, at the destruction and blood. "I didn't do this Sans. This is what you did."

You're exhausted, terrified and lingering on the verge of passing out from the pain of your countless injuries. But at his words, you sit up slightly, still holding on tightly to Sans. "How dare you," you hiss at Tod. "Don't you dare try to place the blame on him. You took me away, you betrayed my friendship and trust. You let Nahn treat me like some kind of science rat! And for what? Your war to save humanity? War means people die! You started all of this!"

He gives you a truly sad look. "I know you don't see it. But this is what must happen. People like you are the ones who deserve the gifts that monsters have to offer us." His gaze shifts to Sans. "I am truly sorry. Step away from her and I guarantee that she will survive. We still need her."

"but you don't need me." His voice is flat.

"Your help would be greatly appreciated. I was even going to approach you soon, ask you to help our cause but..." Tod gives him a weak smile. "You'd never work with me or my associates, right?"

"go to hell."

Tod sighs and motions to the men at his sides. They lift their guns again. "You understand why I can't let you live then. Step away from her."

Sans flinches but before he even has a chance to release you, you tighten your hold on him, pressing up against his ribs. "Don't you dare," you hiss at him softly.

He takes a deep breath before letting out a low chuckle. "i'm never letting go of you sweetheart. besides, i think it's just about time for-"

"DIDN'T WE TALK ABOUT THE NOT RUNNING OFF ALONE THING?!!"

The doors are knocked off their hinges with a bang and Papyrus and Undyne, along with several of the dogs from the guard pour into the room, eyes blazing with fury. Papyrus waves a hand and with
insane precision, a single bone shoots up in front of every goon with a gun, knocking it from their hands. In the same instant, Undyne pelts them with magical spears, knocking them off their feet. Tod spins in shock as his remaining men are subdued right before his eyes.

Sans takes the moment and summons up more bones, which knock Tod to the ground. He shouts in pain, attempting to roll away. He's met with more and more bones until he's completely caged in. Sans takes your hand and storms forward towards your old friend. Another bone shimmers into view in his free palm.

"you hurt what is most precious to me." His voice is a growl. Tod stares up at Sans, face nearly as white as the bones surrounding him. "you know what my job was when the kid went through the underground? i judged them for their actions. it's high time that you were judged and punished for yours." His sockets flash and he hefts the bone, holding the end over Tod's chest, right where his Soul resides.

"Sans."

He flinches, looking over at you. He meets your eyes, his gaze pleading and filled with anger. "baby, please don't."

"You can't do this," you say softly, touching his cheek.

"i can't just let him go!"

"That's not what I'm saying." You gesture around the room. Almost everyone has been subdued by Undyne and the others. "It's done. He can't hurt anyone else."

Sans looks back to Tod, his mouth twisting in disgust. "i don't care. he...hurt you so badly! he...i let this happen and..." His voice cracks. "he deserves this."

You tighten your grip in his hand. "I'm not saying he doesn't. But if you do this, you're no better than he is or any of these other people. Don't let him turn you into a murderer. Don't become a killer because of me. I can't take that."

He's shaking. With a frustrated yell, he plunges the bone into the ground, very narrowly missing Tod's head. Tod flinches, continuing to stare at the two of you. You pull Sans away, holding him close. You press soft kisses on his skull. You know just how hard that must have been. That same dark part of you that was born during your torture is disgusted that you stopped him. You look back to Tod as he slowly stands, still trapped by a cage of bones.

"Please, you can't do this," he pleads. "War is going to happen, one way or another."

You regard the man you trusted coldly, taking a step closer. "Tod, I understand that you've been hurt. But pushing that same pain onto others is wrong. It won't make your scars go away."

Finally, the calm, gentle facade fades away. He sneers at you. "If you think this will stop it, you're deadly mistaken. We have other plans, other courses of action that are already in place."

"Then we'll stop those too." You reel your arm back and punch him square in the face. You feel his nose crunch under your fist and blood instantly squirts down his face. He falls on his butt as you pull your throbbing hand back to your chest. Owww!

Sans stares at you in shock before bursting into laughter.
The police show up just a few minutes later. Nahn, McNaven and several of the scientists got away. You're assured that the best of the police force is on their trail. There are several monsters and another human who are found and released from more cells in the basement. It seems that the human was the next to be used as a host, but Sans showed up before any of the serum could be injected. The entire area is under police and monster guard. Alphys shows up with Toriel and Frisk and is immediately sent in to help with handling the chemicals and machinery.

Sans helps you outside to where an ambulance is waiting. Frisk, Toriel and Asgore are there. Sans barely manages to stop Frisk from tackling you with a hug. Toriel hugs both you and Sans, since he makes no move to let go of you.

"Oh my dear child." She's crying softly, the tears matting the fur on her face. "I'm so sorry this happened. Come, sit down and I will start healing you."

You shake your head. "Toriel, there are monsters who are barely holding on," you croak, tilting your head over at the rescued creatures. Many of them are still and had to be carried out. "I'll be okay for a few more minutes. Please see to them first."

Sans lets out a grunt of disapproval. But he doesn't say anything as Toriel moves to help the rescue crew. "c'mon, let's sit down at least."

You nod, following him to the ambulance. You're given a blanket and a woman starts checking your vitals. As you thought, your ribs are cracked and you've lost enough blood that the woman insists on blood transfusion as soon as you're taken to the hospital. But since you're not in danger of dying on the spot, she leaves to help attend to the men injured in the fight with Sans. None of them died, aside from Austin. You caught a glimpse of his mangled body on the ground as you were walking out. The sight only made you feel sick.

Sans rubs your back gently. "i'm so pathetic," he whispers tightly. "i can't even help heal you."

You lean over slightly and kiss his cheek. Your throat hurts too much to talk. You instead stare out over the crowd that has gathered because of the commotion. They're all staring, some recording the scene with their phones. It's noisy. There's a few news crews here too. A reporter is talking to both Asgore and Frisk. The kid's eyes are red but they're standing strong, answering whatever the reporters throw at them. You're too far away to really hear what they're saying.

You're so tired. Your head is swimming and throbs with a headache. At least your eye has stopped twitching. After you sleep you're going to have to ask Sans exactly what he did. For now, leaning against him as he holds you is enough. You've been hurt so badly, but you survived. You're here, alive, with the man you love.

An officer approaches you. "There's more work to be done here, but the king wants you sent to the hospital," he says. "If you'll come this way we'll have an officer drive you both over."

Sans lets out a pent up breath of relief and helps you to stand. Your legs are shaky but you manage to walk. The path the officer leads you down makes you pass right by Frisk and the King. There's a surge in noise as you come into sight and cameras flash blindingly in your face. You blink as a growl rumbles through Sans' bones. He steps in front of you, helping to block you from the prying press. You look over the crowd. There are monsters and humans gathered together, for once joined in their horror for what's been uncovered right here in their own city.

It's kind of funny in it's own way. Tod had fought to split humans and monsters apart. Yet the result of his work seems to have brought them together.
A flash of movement in the crowd catches your eye. Someone is weaving through, big enough to shove people aside. Everything stops as you lock eyes with the man who's face is covered by a scarf. Time slows to a crawl as you see him lift up a gun, pointing it not at you...

But straight at Frisk.

Your body is moving with a surge of energy you didn't know you still had but you can't feel it. All you can see is Frisk, standing next to their family. There's a wobbly smile on their face because they believe that it's all over now. Everyone has been rescued. Everyone is safe.

A scream. Yours? You can't tell. Your hands lift up, shoving them out of the way. You feel a desperate grip on your arm, a sharp tug as someone tries to pull you back too. Then the air shatters with the crack of the gunshot and lightning rips through your whole body. Pure agony tears you apart and you thought you had known pain. Down in that room, you thought you had faced all that you could possibly endure. You thought it couldn't get worse than the nightmares you faced at the hands of Austin and the man who's just shot you.

You're on the ground. You don't remember falling. Everyone is screaming. You see McNaven go down, tackled by people in the crowd. Red covers your vision and the world goes fuzzy. Your chest is bubbling, you feel it rising up your throat and then it creeps down your mouth and you're drowning in the blood. There is fire in your lungs and oh God you can't breathe, you can't breathe!

There's a face hovering above you, screaming. Calling your name but the words sound so far away. The face of the monster you love, the monster who is wailing your name in a heart broken cry of agony.

"no, no please! please, please you can't!" He's sobbing, hands pressed against the gushing wound in your side, like he can stop the blood from leaving your body. It hurts. "Help! Someone help her!"

Sans. You can't do this to him! You try to answer his cries but there's blood in your mouth and your lungs are filled only with fire.

"S...sa..."

He holds your face in hands soaked with your blood. "i'm here baby, i'm right here. you're gonna be ok, i promise! you've gotta hold on, just hold for me! keep looking at me!"

He pulls you into his lap and a weak whimper escapes you. The world is growing dark and you fight to keep your eyes on his face. Tears are pouring from his sockets, splashing against your face. You feel a numbness creeping over you and it's beckoning to you, begging you to let go. You grasp desperately at his jacket with what strength you have left. No this isn't fair!

"I'm...sorry...."

"don't you say that. don't you give up." He rocks you, body wracked with sobs. "i just got you back!"

Tears leak from your eyes. You don't want to go. You can't die here, not now. Not after everything. Your life with him was just starting. There was so much life to live and you can feel it slipping away.

"Tori!" He's screaming in desperation. You've never seen him so broken and helpless. "Help me! Tori!"

There's a soft warmth helping to ease the pain. But it doesn't chase away the icy cold your body has
been locked into. "It's...it's too late."

"No!" He presses your hand against his face, nuzzling you desperately. "It's not too late! Stay here with me!"

You can't move...breathe...you see only his agonized face. Then he's gone, swallowed by darkness.

"I...love...you...." It's just a whisper, the last of your breath escaping.

"NO! PLEASE DON'T LEAVE ME ALONE!"

You fall and fall deeper into the black nothingness and you're gone. Everything is.

Gone.

There's a voice.

Ah. THIS iS An oDD TuRn of EvEnts.

WELL. i CaN maKE tHiS wORK.
Loss

Chapter Notes

Holy cow! You guys sure fed that comment monster last chapter! I was actually more nervous about that chapter than any I've written so far and I feel so loved by you guys it makes me weepy

Check out this ART

Writer craziness here aka yell at the author here
General craziness here (also a place yelling is accepted)

A monster's body is made up of magical energy, all of their workings and life sustained by the Soul within them. That means that when they die, their body dissolves into dust, leaving nothing but ash and memories behind.

You're still here. You're solid under his trembling, blood soaked hands. How can you be gone if you're right here?

"sweetheart? baby?" Sans whimpers your name but your eyes stay closed. He wants to beg you to end the joke, it's not funny, it was never funny. But he can't say a word. Mindlessly, he presses on your chest and tries to force air back into your rattling lungs because that's what humans did right? He saw it in movies all the time. Press on the chest, breathe into their mouth and then they'd gasp and sit up. Crisis averted. One, two! He presses his mouth to yours, blowing as much air as he can between your quickly chilling lips. He has to bring you back, he has to!

"c'mon, c'mon, c'mon!" It's a whimper that's building into a scream. "damn it don't do this to me!"

"Sir, you have to move!"

"Sans, they can help her!"

"Move out of the way!"

He feels hands grip his shoulders and he flinches, curling into you. No, he promised he would never let go!

"SANS PLEASE!"

"Pap, move over!" Another pair of hands grab him, drag him away from you with a force he can't fight. He screams, kicking his feet. Undyne wraps her arms around his middle, hoisting him up. "Stop it! They're going to help her!"

"put me down!" The shriek escapes him as paramedics swarm your bo-swarm around you, blocking you from his sight. Undyne holds on to him with an iron grip, her jaw set even as her eye waters. He
can't escape. He can't do anything but watch as once again you're taken away from him.

-----

Bullet lodged in your intestine. Three cracked ribs. Multiple lacerations on the surface of your arms, face, legs. Severe taser burns. Bruises. Blood loss. Sans stares at your still frame, hooked up to machines that continue a weak steady beat as the doctor rambles the reasons why you should be dead.

But somehow, despite all medical logic, you're still alive.

Your heart is beating. Blood is pumping through your veins. But something vital inside you is missing. YOU are not here.

Humans call it a coma. Certainly more professional and medical sounding than the monster's term of 'falling down'. It's just as much a mystery to the humans as it is to the monsters. After the human medics did what they could, Tori stepped in, pouring all of her energy into her healing magic while the human doctors watched on in awe. The problem was the extent of your injuries called for a greater healing than Tori could provide in a single go. And given the state of your Soul and the fact that the human system was so insanely complicated, she doesn't want to push too much magic into your system and heal something incorrectly. He can see you Soul now but it's painful to look at. The bright colors are almost gone. The purple and orange have shrunk down to a dull glimmer in the center. The red lines of determination are still strong, like lines of blood on your nearly white Soul. But perhaps most surprising of all is the dim blue scorch of his Soul seared into yours. But after all, didn't that make sense? Not that it really mattered now.

Shock is what they're blaming it on. They say there's a chance you might not make it anyway. Or you might not ever wake again. There's nothing to do but wait.

So Sans waits.

People trickle in and out of the room and the entire time, Sans simply sits there, watching you breath through the mask set on your face. He doesn't respond to the soft assurances that things will turn out or the murmured sympathies of this damned situation. The nurses try to shoo him out at one point, but a silent stare from his light-less sockets and a quiet word from Asgore soon stops that. They wouldn't be able to keep him out anyway, but he's dully grateful that he's spared the effort needed to do that.

It's taking everything he has just to sit and count every breath you take.

"-ld your hands out?"

The voice of his brother, soft and subdued finally breaks through the haze in his head. He blinks, looking around. It's just him, Pap and you in the room. How long has he been sitting here? Hours? Days? "What?"

"Your hands," Papyrus says softly. He's holding a washcloth and a bowl of water.

Sans looks down. His hands are still stained with dried blood. Part of it has flaked off but most of it remains as a stark crimson reminder of what's happened. "Oh."

Papyrus turns Sans' chair around slightly, taking his hands. He gently wipes the blood off his hands. The water from the cloth slips through the thin cracks in his carpals, splashing down on the tile floor. Pap has to scrub a bit to get the most of the stain out of his bones. Then he wipes at Sans' cheekbone; he didn't even realize he had blood on his skull.
"All done," Pap says, still speaking in that odd, quiet voice. He sets the bowl of now pinkish water down and picks up a plastic bag. "The queen brought you some clothes Sans. Why don't you go ahead and change?"

Sans makes no move to take the bag. Papyrus sighs and stands before pulling Sans to his feet. Sans lets his brother remove his jacket and shirt. Papyrus observes the bloody cloth, ticking a non-existent tongue, pulling the new clothes out of the bag before shoving the shirt in.

"I don't think I can save the shirt. But I know how much this jacket means to you, so the great Papyrus shall make sure that it is thoroughly cleaned." He makes a face at the jacket. "When was the last time it was washed anyway?"

Sans shrugs.

"Well, that's fine, as long we wash it now," He picks up the new shirt, shaking it out. It's a t-shirt speckled with stars and the words 'I Need Some Space'. You bought it for him after your first date at the space museum. Sans freezes as Papyrus tugs it down over his skull. "There we go!" Papyrus smiles widely but his eyes are tight. "Um, Sans. You need to put your arms through the sleeves."

Slowly, each movement sending waves of pain through his Soul, Sans finishes putting the shirt on. It must have just been washed. He can smell that detergent you liked on it. It's almost enough to mask the sterile stench of death and illness that oozes from every inch of this place. You shouldn't be here. None of this should have happened.

"There! That wasn't so...." Papyrus trails off as tears start to pool in Sans' sockets. "Brother?"

Sans falls back into the chair, staring at the ground. Papyrus kneels in front of him so their sockets are level. His jaw is quivering but for once the younger brother who has always been the loud, emotional one isn't crying. He takes Sans' hand, holding it tightly in his gloved one.

"it's my fault." The words pour out of him uncontrollably, just like his tears. "i should've just taken her away, i shouldn't have tried to get them back for hurting her. it's my fault she's lying here. if she d-d-dies-

"She's going to make it Sans," Papyrus cuts him off, voice cracking. "I know it!"

Sans shakes his head, tears dripping onto his shorts.

"You shouldn't doubt her! She's the bravest, strongest human I know! Just like our friend Frisk!" Papyrus looks over at you, lying motionless on the hospital bed. "Right? _____?"

An odd, strained wail breaks from Sans and he puts his head on his brother's shoulder. "i w-want her back pap," he whimpers brokenly. "t-tell me she's g-gonna be ok. please."

Papyrus returns his desperate hug, enveloping his smaller brother in his arms. "I promise Sans. She's going to okay. She just needs rest."

He nods, unable to speak. It's odd in a way. The last time he felt this overwhelming sense of loss, it had been for the very person holding him so tightly right now. His memories are jumbled with images from his nightmares, meshing into a web of confusing and terrifying pictures but he knows that when he lost Pap before, he pulled away from everyone. He suffered that loss alone because it was just one more thing that was never certain or set in stone. He's sure that he even moved in with Tori once after the kid made a run and killed only his brother and never said a word about it to her. It never got easier when it happened, but he never broke down where others could see.
To let himself be comforted this time, to let himself openly weep is strange. It doesn't help but...well. It's too much effort to hide it now in this timeline that was here to stay. "thanks bro," he says in a watery voice, wiping at his sockets.

"Of course Sans." Papyrus sniffs loudly before standing up. "I will prepare our bedding for tonight!"

"you're staying too?"

"Of course I am!" Papyrus looks almost miffed that Sans would even ask.

Bedding turns out to be the two of them squished on the two arm chairs set by the window with sheets borrowed from the staff. Papyrus falls asleep quickly. His limbs are splayed and askew, barely fitting on the chair. It's been a very long couple of days and even before the fight at the warehouse Pap had been running himself ragged searching through the city. Sans watches him sleep for a bit before getting up and adjusting the blanket around his brother. More guilt eats at him. Paps used to be his whole world and he still is of course, but when you came barreling into his life, suddenly that one solid anchor to this world turned into two. Paps never complained, never said a word about Sans spending less time and attention on him. He was ecstatic about it actually. Part of that is because Papyrus loves you too. But Sans knows he's been neglecting his brother. When this is over, he vows to spend more one on one time with Papyrus.

He looks over to you, a still dark shape illuminated by the lights from the machines keeping you alive. He hesitates for a second before moving to the bedside. With the greatest care he can muster, he slips his hands under your shoulders and legs and moves you just enough to give him a slice of the bed to curl up on. He crawls in, pressing his face against your shoulder. He breathes deeply. Under the sharp tang of medical gel, he can smell your sweet scent. He lets that and the warmth of your body give him a small measure of comfort. His sockets fall shut, his endurance finally giving out now that you're back in his arms, even in this small way. Maybe Paps is right. You just need to sleep. You've been through hell and that's something that you can't just get up and walk away from. You'll wake up.

You have to.

~~~

But you don't.

~~~

It's dark here.

Sometimes you see flashes of something. Colors. Sounds. They fade quickly. You're left alone with the flickering lights. Then they go out too.

It's just you.

But...who are you?

You can't piece it together. You have nothing and the silence and the dark eat away at you. It wants to take you away. It wants you to let go but something in you simply refuses to drift apart.

You're not supposed to be here.

Stay determined.
There are words that echo dully. Are they yours? Someone else's? You can't remember but you hold on to them because they help you stay focused. You have to hold on.

But what exactly are you fighting for?

~~~~~~~~

Sans spends his every waking moment at your side, watching for some sign, anything that you're about to wake up. Your eyelids flicker a few times and the slight twitch in your hand nearly sent him into hysterics when nothing more happened. But you continue to sleep and sleep and sleep. He only leaves the room when the nurses come in to wash you and even then he paces out in the hallway, straining for any sound that you might make.

News of what's happening outside comes to him in the form of Papyrus, Undyne and Toriel. He learns all about the insanity Tod had planned for monster kind, thanks to an arrested scientist who was all too willing to take whatever deal the police offered for information. It seemed that one of the plans set as a last resort measure to start their war was to kill the very person who brought everyone up in the first place. Without their human ambassador, monsters would surely give into their own fear and begin striking back at the humans who hurt their kind. The man who shot you, the same guy who beat up the little human girl from the amusement park, was facing a life sentence with no option for parole.

His rage surges briefly when Undyne quietly tells him what you went through at their hands. But it soon fizzles down into despair and hopelessness.

He only leaves the hospital itself twice over the next three days. Once, at Alphys' insistence, he stops by her lab so she can run a few quick tests to see if there are any lasting effects from the injected mixture of Soul juice and determination. But it seems that it was burned out by all the magic he used dunking the jerks in the building and saving you from tumbling out the window. The rise in his HP proves to be temporary as well and it's back to the usual 1/1. Alphys attempts to keep him there at the lab after her tests are done, stuttering about wanting to know exactly what did happen and how it felt to have DT in his system and any theories on why it worked. She's trying to make sure he doesn't waste away at your bedside. He can see it, and dully appreciates the attempt. But after asking her about the possibility of using DT to help you recover and being told that all of her remaining samples were used to make his mixture he takes a shortcut right back to your side. Because if you're wasting away, shouldn't he do the same? With every second that ticked by, the remaining color in your Soul was beginning to fade away. He didn't notice it at first, the change was so gradual. But it was now something that always held his attention. It didn't matter what the doctors said about your physical wounds healing at an astounding rate, thanks to Toriel's magic. You were fading and there was absolutely nothing he could do about it.

The other time is at the end of the third day. Toriel shows up with Frisk and, after paying a brief visit and speaking with the doctors, she takes his arm and practically drags him from the room, saying something about replacing the flowers on the table. He follows without much resistance, only because it's too much effort to do so. A hazy cloud hangs over him and he's dimly aware of Frisk's hand on his arm, pulling him away from anything he might run into. He's silent as they leave the hospital and walk down the street to the market shop. Once they're inside, Frisk gives him a worried look before moving over to the greeting card section. Normally, it's a place Sans loves to check out; the sheer amount of 'punny' cards was almost always enough to pull him out of any hole he might be in, at least a little.

He barely glances at them, following Toriel over to the flowers. She peers over the selection. "There are so many choices," she says, pursing her lips. "What do you think Sans?"
Sans blinks, looking over the options. They're all the same to him. "um. those," he says dully, pointing to an arrangement with purple and orange flowers. At least those would match your Soul. What's left of it anyway.

"These are beautiful," she murmurs, picking up the flowers. "Oh, by the way. I don't know if you've heard; the monster rights bill passed in our favor."

"did it?"

"Yes. It seems everything that was uncovered at the warehouse and Tod's actions was enough to tilt the vote."

Yeah, that and a man attempting to murder the child ambassador. Sure that had something to do with it.

"We did it Sans," she says, a odd mixture of pride and sadness in her voice. "It's a huge step for us."

"...yeah."

She stares at the flowers for a long moment before turning to Sans. He sees the pity in her eyes before she even speaks. "Listen."

"i don't need more sympathy tori," he says, voice a little sharp. He's had more than enough of that from the humans and monsters that came to visit you.

"That wasn't what I wanted to say Sans." Her voice is infuriatingly gentle.

Sans shoves his hands into his pockets, looking away. "are we done? i gotta get back."

She steps in front of him, stopping him from walking over to the register. "Sans, I want you to listen to me. I understand what you're feeling. This...this agonizing loss. The guilt of not being able to stop it. I know it too."

He knows. The two royal children. Asriel and Chara. Taken away by poison and humans an age ago. Out of everyone he knows, Toriel is the one who has truly suffered a loss that would never heal. He pulls his hood up over his skull. "tori...she's not gone. she's still here. it's not the same. i know it isn't."

"And you shouldn't give up hope." She puts a hand on his shoulder. He fights not to move away from the gesture that right now hurts too much to accept. "This isn't me telling you to prepare for the worst. I simply want to help. You're my friend, and you're suffering." She pushes his hood back, forcing him to look at her. "No matter what happens, you have to understand that there are things that are simply out of your control. You blame yourself for this, but you never could have imagined that something like this would actually happen."

She's wrong. He had imagined everything that could've gone wrong. He'd seen it over and over again and still didn't do a thing to stop it.

She continues, seeming to guess what he's thinking. "Holding onto the past is going to eat you away. You can't change what's already happened Sans."

_Ha._ His gaze flickers to Frisk at that. Changing the past, rewriting the timelines. He'd never been in control of that. That didn't stop it from happening over and over again. And now, the time when he was desperate for a chance to go back, Frisk couldn't do it. Couldn't?
Or wouldn't?

"Sans?"

"i know tori," he mumbles. "can't change the past."

As if they feel his light-less stare, Frisk looks up, a card in their hands. They bounce over, showing the get well message on the front of the card while Sans' mind begins to whirl with a dangerous thoughts. The kid said they couldn't control the timelines any more. They promised him that they would never reset again. While his knowledge about how it all worked was extremely limited, he does know that it all had something to do with Loads and Save Points in time. To his knowledge, Frisk never created a new save point after they came to the surface. Why would they need to? Everyone was here and free. That's got to be why a Load didn't work when you were first taken. The kid couldn't reset that day because there was no point to go back to.

But what if that point still existed? It couldn't have just vanished.

Frisk touches his sleeve and Sans jumps, gasping quietly.

**Are you okay?** They sign, watching him with concern.

Sans stares at them for a long second before patting their head gently. "yeah. sorry kid. just lost in thought."

He offers to take the flowers back to your room and after a moment's hesitation, Toriel agrees. As she passes him the flowers, she leans down next to his skull. "Please don't hesitate to call if you need me for anything," she murmurs. "We're all here for you and _____ Please don't forget that."

His bones tremble a little and he has to look away. "i will. thank you tori."

His Soul is in a knot the entire walk back to the hospital. He skips on the short cut to give him some time to wrestle out his thoughts. God, what's wrong with him? How could he even think the kid was lying to him? They loved you just as fiercely as everyone else did. He's losing it. That's gotta be it.

As he approaches your room, the sound of broken strumming reaches his ears. He pauses, listening at the door.

"I KNOW I AM NOT AS GOOD AS YOU ARE AT PLAYING, BUT THAT IS ONLY BECAUSE I DID NOT WANT TO MAKE YOU LOOK BAD! AFTER ALL, THERE IS NOTHING I CANNOT HANDLE!"

Papyrus always did this when he came in. He talked to you like you were awake, like you could hear him. Apparently a nurse had told him that sometimes coma patients could hear what was going on around them. If it was meant to be a sort of comfort, it had certainly worked for Papyrus. He chattered nonstop to you, sometimes asking questions he would answer himself, sometimes trailing off hopefully, like you would pop your eyes open and answer. He even read some of his favorite books to you while Sans sat on the chair, sockets lidded but open as he listened to the story too.

Sans pushes the door open and Papyrus looks up from the chair pulled up by the bed. He's got your guitar on his lap and his attempts at playing trail off as he spies the flowers in Sans' hands. "AH HELLO BROTHER! I WAS A LITTLE CONCERNED WHEN I ARRIVED AND YOU WERE NOT HERE BUT LADY TORIEL SENT ME A MESSAGE EXPLAINING SHE WAS SUCCESSFUL IN HER ATTEMPT TO GET YOU OUT IN THE FRESH AIR!"

"she sure was pap," he says, setting the new flowers in the vase. "what'cha got there?"
Papyrus looks down at the guitar. "OH THIS! FRISK SUGGESTED IT! THEY THOUGHT IF WE PLAYED MUSIC LOUD ENOUGH, IT WOULD WAKE HER UP! AFTER ALL, SHE DOES LOVE MUSIC VERY MUCH. BUT..." he looks down sadly at the instrument. "MY ATTEMPTS THUS FAR HAVE BEEN...EMBARRASSINGLY BAD." His expression brightens and he holds the guitar up. "BUT YOU ARE HERE NOW! YOU MUST PLAY SOMETHING!"

Sans puts his hands up, backing up slightly. "nah, pap i'm sure your playing isn't that bad. why don't you try again?"

Papyrus sets his jaw and continues to hold the guitar out. "I WILL NOT LOWER MY HANDS UNTIL YOU TAKE IT!"

Sans reaches out and grabs the instrument, more out of concern Papyrus would drop it than acceptance. But at his brother's glowing face, he sighs and nudges him out of the chair. He sits, turning towards you. "hey babe," he says gently. He didn't speak out loud nearly as much as Papyrus or even some of the others did to you, but occasionally he can't stop himself. "any requests?"

"OH, YOU SHOULD PLAY THAT ONE SONG SHE LIKES SO MUCH! THE ONE THAT WENT...THE ONE BY THAT GUITAR GUY! I BELIEVE IT'S CALLED 'EVERYTHING'?"

He knows the one Papyrus means. His Soul lurches because this is going to hurt, all music hurts now but Papyrus looks so hopeful and he misses playing with you so much. "ok pap. but i'm not gonna sing."

He hesitates, his phalanges trembling a little over the strings. He takes a long breath and starts to play. The notes are shaky but the music rings in through his Soul and he closes his sockets, the words to the song rising unbidden in his mind.

*Find me here, and speak to me. I want to feel you, I need to hear you."

He would do anything, give up everything to see your eyes open again.

*How can I stand here with you, and not be moved by you?"

You shake his whole world to its core.

*Would you tell me, how could it be, any better than this?"

Why won't you wake up? Is there truly nothing more he can do? There has to be something, some way that he can fix things. This can't be the way it ends for you.

He won't let it be.

The song trails off into silence, save for the quiet crying coming from Papyrus. Sans sets the guitar down. There is something. Something that his very Soul quakes at even considering. He stands, staring down at your face. He reaches out, touching your skin gently. You're still so soft, so human beneath his touch. Slowly, he leans down and presses a kiss against your forehead, closing his sockets.

"pap," His voice is a croak. "will you...will you keep an eye socket on her? i'm...going to grillby's for a bit."

~~~~~

Ah! The colors are back! You reach out, brushing your...well, you don't exactly have a body here in
this strange place but you imagine that you must have fingers. Whatever it is, you touch the strands of color that float and swirl around you and you can hear the voice within. Most of the time, you can’t understand what they're saying. Random words, emotions are all that get through. This color, this bright orange is always full of kindness and cheer, yet holds a deep sadness within it too. This is the color you see the most and it almost gives you the sensation of warmth as it dances around you.

Then, oh there it is. Blue, soft, gentle and so, so sad. It's here too. It's full of endless sorrow and you feel an empty place within you throbbing every time you hear the soft murmuring within. You know these colors, these voices. They mean everything to you.

Why can’t you be there? These voices, these colors. They're just echos. You want to go where they come from.

But where is that?

Why can't you remember?

The colors vanish suddenly and you voicelessly cry out, begging them to come back. Then, there's a new sound. Something strange, something darker than the darkness around you and yet somehow darker still. You twist uselessly, fear crying at you to move, but where can you go?

ah. theRe yOu aRe. oh DeaR, yOU arE a mEss aReN'T yOU?

A voice that is not speaking yet somehow is talking. It grates and burns inside your head. What is this?!

Let'S pUlL yOu baCK tOgeTheR.

The darkness closes in on you and you're being crushed beneath the weight and you want to scream and cry but there's so much and-

The world around you pops and suddenly where there was only darkness there is now endless white. It stretches before you and behind you and in every direction. For the first time in what feels like eternity, you are whole again and the memories come crashing back. You gasp but you're not breathing. Oh, oh God, you died! You were shot and you died!

No. yOu HaVe NoT pAssEd FrOm tHiS wOrld jusT yEt.

You whirl and there's something...no, there is someone standing there. A tall black stain against the stark white and it burns your eyes to look. The features of the being are fuzzy and almost glitchy, like the image on a t.v with a bad connection. Their face is white and cracked. It stares for a long moment then it grins almost sadly at you.

Who are you? Your voice makes no sound and yet somehow, you know that this thing can hear you.

Where am I?

The being quakes briefly before speaking in that strange, painful way inside your head. tHeRe iS mUCH tO ExPLAiN aNd nOt eNOuGh TiMe. wE mUSt be qUiCK.

Tell me who you are!

i tHiNK yoU KnoW tHaT aLReAady. The grin widens. bEsT tO BE pROPer i SUPpoSe. i Am WiNG dinGs GaSTER. AnD mY sOn iS abOUt tO Do sOmETHiNg vEry rAsh.
The loud chatter of the bar falls to a complete silence when Sans walks through the door. God, he hates the pity and the stares. But monsters are monsters and it only lasts for a second. The noise starts back up, perhaps a little subdued. Hands in his pockets, Sans walks over to the bar and hops up on a stool at the end. Grillby holds up a finger and finishes pouring a drink before approaching Sans. He's quiet, as usual, but his flames look a little dim.

"hey grillbz," Sans mumbles. "how about some of the strong stuff?"

Grillby nods and soon returns with a bottle of his flame whiskey, a concoction he makes with magic, alcohol and who knows what else. Sans isn't a drinker, never has been but he's had this stuff a few times before and it's very good at burning out feelings of any kind.

"leave the bottle." Grillby hesitates, and Sans catches the quiet hiss of concern. "please."

Finally, Grillby nods and leaves to attend to other customers. Sans pours himself a glass and downs it in one go. The resulting wave of heat that rushes through his bones makes him shudder. Then he pours another and downs that one too before putting his head on the table and closing his sockets. He lets the sound of the bar sweep over him. It's a comforting, familiar sound. He spent a lot of time at Grillby's back when it was underground. Fell asleep there too, more often than not and Papyrus would have to come get him and carry him home. His magic is buzzing almost pleasantly, thanks to the whiskey running through it. It's almost enough to make him fall asleep.

But he doesn't because there are dangerous, terrible thoughts whirling around in his head and he needs to speak to Grillby before he does something stupid.

No one tries to talk to him as he sits there, though a few times he does hear someone approaching only to be chased away by Grillby's warning crackle. Good old Grillby. Sans himself barely moves, except to sip at more the flame whiskey. After a while, he pulls out his phone and stares at it, working up the courage to send a message.

s: kid i need you to be 100% honest with me. if you still could, would you reset if it meant saving a life? even if it meant erasing everything?

It takes a long time for the reply to come in and Sans stares at his phone during the entire wait.

F: I'm sorry. I couldn't do that to everyone again. I can't do that to you. We're finally here Sans. Erasing everything might get us caught back there again. We might not get out. I'm so so sorry.
Anger surges through him, probably thanks to the whiskey. Can't do that to him? They've already done it over and over and over again! What's one more reset?! He snarls in silent frustration and throws the phone back to the counter. It skids along the surface and falls off behind the bar with a loud clatter. What did the kid mean by saying 'can't'? Morally or physically can't? Either way, there's no reset coming from the kid.

Not a voluntary one anyway.

Sans quickly finishes the current cup of whiskey, horrified at himself for even thinking that. A sudden, quiet thud in front of him makes him jump and look up. A plate with a burger and steaming fries sits in front of him, as well as his phone. Grillby takes away the half empty bottle of whiskey, replacing it with water.

"Eat," he says in his quiet, crackling voice that only monsters can understand. "This time it's on the house."

He makes no move to leave so Sans picks up the burger and bites into it. He doesn't even taste it. "thanks grillby."

Grillby nods and goes back to work, occasionally looking over to make sure Sans is still eating. He eats it, piece by piece only because a dull part of him realizes it's been way too long since the last time he ate anything. By the time he's nibbling on the last fry, the bar is down it's last few patrons for the night. They head out, chattering loudly to themselves and then it's just Sans and Grillby. Grillby finishes wiping down the counters and then takes a seat next to Sans. They sit in silence for a few minutes before Sans finally talks.

"do you like it up here grillby?"

Grillby folds his hands, leaning against the bar top. "It has its hardships. But I do. Things are better up here. Our people have more hope."

Sans reaches for his glass before remembering it's just water. He pulls his hand back, rubbing his skull. "more hope of what? hate? violence? people who don't even try to understand us and hurt the ones who do?"

"I have hope for my daughter," he crackles quietly. "Hope that she can go after any dream she wants. That her friends can do the same."

Sans puts his head down on the table, bones shuddering with emotion. He feels the heat of Grillby's hand on his shoulder.

"I am sorry this happened to you and _____. She has one of the brightest Souls I've seen in a human. My friend, you must have hope that she'll make it."

Sans shakes his head. "it's not that easy grillby. i don't have a lotta hope to give. and sometimes hope doesn't do a single damn thing." Grillby doesn't say anything to that because what can he say? It's the cold, harsh truth. Sans takes a deep breath. "if...if you're faced with two choices, two terrible, unacceptable choices what are you supposed to do? how do you choose when both choices are hell?"

"What do you mean?"

Sans lets out a dry chuckle. "just speculation."

The flames on Grillby's head spark and pop loudly. "Sometimes, you have to listen to what your
Soul tells you. Even if it's not the wisest choice, or the one you want it to be. But don't choose rashly. I've seen the result of a choice made in sorrow and rage." His voice echos of past memories. Grillby is old, much older than Sans. He was there when the barrier was built and monster kind was forced into their prison, though he was just a young flame at the time. "If you must make a choice like that, make the one you can survive."

The words echo in his skull. A choice he can survive?

Even though Grillby doesn't have visible eyes, Sans can feel his concerned gaze piercing through him. "My friend, do not let grief cloud your judgement."

Cloud? No, his grief has made the answer clear. It was just something he didn't want to see. He stands up, an odd weight in his ribcage. "thank you grillby. i'm sorry for...for the tab. i'm gonna pay it off next time."

Then he steps through space before Grillby can say another word.

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You stare at the shifting, glitching pile of darkness standing (sitting? He doesn't appear to have legs) before you. This is Gaster? Sans and Papyrus' sort of father? How is this possible? Sans said his dad was beyond reach, stuck in a place between places. "I don't...how are you here?"

*The better question is why you are here. His words echo in your mind, scraping at the edges of your skull. It's not english, but somehow, you can understand what he's saying, despite the harsh, broken speech. Human Souls are not meant for this plane. The corner of his mouth quirks. Not really meant for monsters either.*

"Then why am I here? What happened to me?" You look down at your hands, which look solid and real and yet glow with a subtle light.

You are here because I brought you here. He's suddenly closer, looming over you. You try to scramble back, but you can't even feel the ground beneath you. There's nowhere to go. "Stay away from me!"

Do you understand how long it took me to find the correct timeline? His voice is suddenly clearer, deeper and far more hostile. The edges of his body grow more solid and terror shoots through your Soul. Do you understand what eternity in this place is like? All of my efforts, all of my energy and focus is nearly gone to waste because of you and Sans. He hisses out Sans' name like it burns him.

Eternity is what it feels like as the endless darkness of his sockets stare at you, his body so huge and versatile it almost completely surrounds you and all you can do is curl in to yourself, unable to break his gaze as you fight to hold back from screaming. He suddenly laughs; the noise a loud, broken screech and you clutch at your head at the sound. His goopy body appears to shrink and he moves away, gliding over the nothing around you.

*But the results of his affection for you are truly fascinating. Your own self sacrificing love for monster kind and the child were unexpected as well. When you and Sans fought against the humans my assistants were working with and created the fascinating link between his magic and your Determination, you threw the set path into a whirlwind. You were not supposed to die that night. It was a variable I overlooked. My own failure. But perhaps a better solution to*
my p-p-problem will be found thanks to this turn of events.

You lower your hands from your ears. "What are you talking about?"

Gaster is quiet for a moment, the substance of his body twitching and flickering. It is something that should not be discussed here in this place. Enough time has been lost while locating you. Suffice it to say that you need my help just as much as I need yours if you wish to return to your timeline.

Your heart leaps at that and a deep, painful longing sweeps over you. "Please, please if you can take me back-

I cannot. Not on my own. You think iF I HAD THE ABILITY- His voice grows sharply before he suddenly stops. Do you understand the concept of different timelines?

You nod shakily. "Yes, Sans told me about them. Like branches on a tree right?"

Gaster scoffs. A tree with infinite, shifting, changing branches perhaps. But yes, that is the most basic explanation. This place is like the wind between those branches. It brushes up against each and every branch, every sprout and stick. I simply ride the wind and if I move in precisely the correct way, I can reach out and touch the timeline. But without a link to that world, it is...d-d-difficult to hold on for long.

A stark white bony hand emerges from his body, waving through the air. Suddenly the whiteness of this plane is struck through with endless lights, all of the streaming and floating about in this infinite space. They weave and dance around each other, not quite touching. If you focus on one, images flash through your head with painful brightness and intensity. A golden hallway, a town filled with snow, the same town destroyed and filled with flames. Frisk, bloody and dusty, struck through with bones. Toriel, a crown on her head standing in a throne room with golden flowers and sunlight. Papyrus, dressed in the garb of a solider, a terribly grim look on his face. A tunnel of webs, machines, waterfalls, and monsters, all of the sights moving at a speed that makes you dizzy.

Then you see Sans. Sans sitting on a bench weeping, Sans laughing at a pub familiarly like Grillby's, Sans screaming over a pile of dust in the snow. Sans with Papyrus, Sans with Toriel, Sans and Frisk and then you see a Sans that you don't know. A Sans that blinks by with a flash of red and gold. A Sans smiling widely, the lights of his sockets shaped like stars. Those versions of him are so different so alien that you can sense that it isn't just the branches of time you're seeing. You're seeing something else, like the shadows cast by the original branches. You see everything. Sans, Papyrus, everyone of so many different variations and worlds and all of it is crashing down you and it burns, it's too much-!

NOT YET.

Gaster's voice cuts through the madness, rumbling in your very being and suddenly you're back in the white void, huddled in the fetal position. You gasp harshly, fighting to breathe in this place that doesn't have air. "W-w-what w-was..."

The sights I have been forced to watch for an eternity. Gaster's voice holds just a hint of sadness. You saw just the barest scratch of the tree, of the endless timelines and possibilities.

You want to sob but you can't stop shaking. Focus, stay focused! You try your best to push the overwhelming images of the different worlds from your mind. "H-how do we find my world?"
It's not a matter of finding it. I spent more than enough time doing that, he says in an almost dry tone. Our problem lies in getting there. Gaster is beside you again and you flinch. A bony finger points to your chest and you see the glimmer of your Soul, like it's responding to him. You hold a bond to...the trunk of the tree, shall we say. The original timeline. The start of everything. That is where your Sans resides. That is where this version of you resides.

This version? Your head hurts too much to completely understand.

I have a grip on that timeline and can see into it. Unfortunately, he continues, I have no way currently of placing myself within that timeline. Worse, since your body is technically still alive in your timeline we are bound by the rules of time. And as we speak Sans is about to make a deadly mistake. Your timeline is the current true path yes, but if you had died, it would have become a branch. It would no longer be the true set of events and I would have to spend another century finding the 'trunk' again. We send you back, we get back on track. But Sans believes he has lost you and is about to force a Reset out of desperation to save your life.

A reset?! Horror grips you. Sans can't force a reset, not for you! He would...you all would lose everything! "No, he can't do that!"

I see we share similar views on that. This will also cause your timeline to break away into a branch and there is a very good chance that you as you are will never see him again. I cannot have that happen.

"What do I do? You said I have a bond, how do I use it?" Your voice is shrill with desperation.

A second hand appears from within Gaster's goop. He makes a pulling motion above his general chest area, his sockets glowing dimly with two pupils of light. Something else bleeds from his chest, something torn and broken. He holds it in his palm and it hovers in the air. In that moment you realize that his palm has a huge circle in it, like someone took a cookie cutter to his hand. Then your gaze is brought back to what he's holding. It's almost like a thin shard of something white. One side is jagged, like ripped paper. The entire thing glows with a black aura.

You must absorb this portion of my Soul and focus on the bond you have with my son. He holds out the shard to you. I will then use your Determination direct your essence back into your body before Sans forces the Reset.

Absorb part of his Soul? You stare at the offered shard, gleaming and broken. Being connected to Sans and having his magic leak into you is one thing but... "What will happen to me if I do this?"

Gaster shrugs a goopy shoulder. It probably won't be pleasant for you. But no immediate, drastic changes will happen. In fact, I believe that you won't even remember having this conversation when you wake. So it doesn't matter. But you don't really have a choice. This is the only way. You must not hesitate.

But hesitate is exactly what you do. "Why are you doing this for me?" you ask slowly. "Sans told me about what happened. With the core and the explosion. Aren't you angry?"

Gaster's sockets flash and his black mass of a body swells up. That was- His gaze suddenly shifts and he's staring at something you can't see. No! We're out of time!

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One more kiss, one more time holding you in his arms. He doesn't want to let you go. "i'm so sorry," he whispers in your ear. You probably can't hear him, but he can't stop himself from speaking. "i love you so much."

If he looks past the mask and the wires and tubes, he can almost fool himself into pretending that you're just sleeping. He can almost imagine that you're just in the bed you share, a moment away from waking up and chasing this nightmare away. He presses his teeth to your forehead in a final kiss. He can feel his Soul shattering, leaving behind a vital part of him. "baby, i promise that i will find you again. i don't care how long it takes. i don't care if i lose the memories. i will never stop loving you."

Then he takes another step and he's surrounded by the dim light of the street lamps pouring into the dark bedroom. Frisk is fast asleep, their arms wrapped tightly around their pillow. For a long moment, Sans stands there, watching the kid sleep like a peeping tom. This is wrong, this is sick!

But...what choice does he have? Grillby was right; he has to make a choice he can survive. And he can't survive without you. He can't survive knowing there is no other way to undo the hurts he's caused you.

Still, his bones tremble. Going back there, back to the house in the snow and the cold and the fake stars...how can do it?! How can he willingly send everyone back there? Paps. Alphys. Undyne. Toriel. The kid. The poor kid fought so hard against the demon who made them hurt everyone. By doing this, he's spitting in Frisk's face. By doing this, he'll condemn them all. He puts a hand up over his mouth, so the whimper of fear doesn't escape. He has to be strong. He has to do this, for you. Everyone will forget. Everyone except Frisk. Frisk will probably hate him for this. Killing them in the judgement hall, that they had forgiven. But this? No, he can't be forgiven for this.

His hands are trembling as he summons a bone to his palm. He'll make it quick. Painless.

And send himself back into hell.

But....

What if he's wrong?

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You must do this now or it will be too late! Gaster's hand moves closer to you, attached to his body with only the thinnest string of black. There's no more time to waste. If this is the wrong move, you're going to have to accept the consequences. You reach out and take the shard. It instantly shatters in your grip and your gasping scream matches Gaster's strangled roar as you feel the Soul shard sink into your Soul. The piece of his Soul burns coldly as it fills in every crack and crevice in your Soul and the overwhelming power and knowledge from the creature threatens to drown you.

Don't lose focus. His voice is somehow closer now, like it's your own thoughts speaking to you. Find him. Follow your bond.

You do as he says, reaching into your own heart, feeling that rush of blue magic responding to your call. The whiteness around you once again explodes with the lights of the timelines, surging, flying, massive and alluring in their call. You call on your memories, picturing the man you love. His laugh, his smile, the way he trembled in your hold after waking from a nightmare. The odd way you could feel the heat of lips against yours when he kissed you. You never did ask how he did that.

There are so many Sans here. All of them so different, and yet at their core, they are still Sans. Each
one of them calls to you, pulling you apart at your very seams.

**Find yours.** Gaster's voice hisses in your head. **I cannot lead you. Find him, or lose him.**

You look past the other versions of the monster you love, following the tugging in your Soul. The light of his world, of your world, is glistening and calling to you. You can feel it in your heart and you reach out, brushing your fingers against the shimmering image as it floats by you. Instantly, you fall, down, faster and faster and the whole time you cry out for him with your heart, letting your longing and love fill up your entire being. Something propels you through time and space, something dark and insanely powerful that terrifies you even as you rely on its help.

The world steadies slightly. You see him. He's standing there, tears pouring down his face as he stands above a sleeping Frisk, a bone poised to strike in his trembling hand. You reach out in pure desperation, a scream that makes no sound tearing from your throat. The very air seems to rip, allowing your hand to grab his shoulder. He gasps at the same time you do as you feel your Soul swell and pulse, the connection of your Souls hitting you like lightning in your chest.

**Yes!** Gaster's triumphant crow echoes through your head and you're ripped away, spiraling through flashing lights and whirling images and for a split second you see yourself below, pale and hooked up to machines and you're falling again and you slam into your own body and then-

A fading laugh surrounds you as you once again are claimed by darkness.

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Your chest is heavy. Every heartbeat pounds and throbs in your chest. You shift slightly; your eyes feel like they're glued shut. What on earth happened? A whisper of a memory, something dark and ageless and wrong, flies through your head before disappearing. You've forgotten something. That's the only thing you're sure of.

Well, that and your entire body hurts like hell. That you do remember. McNaven shot you! What a grade a jerk! You struggle to open your eyes, squinting at the harsh lights overhead. You can hear the hum and steady beep of a machine next to your head. For some reason, this sends a overwhelming sense of relief through you. Relief to be alive? That must be it. You struggle to lift your head and-

Sans is right there, seated in a chair that's been moved as close to the bed as possible. His skull is resting against your leg. He's asleep, brow bone creased deeply in an expression of pain. The area under his sockets is nearly purple, the shadows are so dark. Your throat closes up. Oh Sans! He must have been so worried about you. You slowly reach up with your hand that isn't hooked up with wires and run your fingers lightly over his skull.

"K-knock, knock," you croak. Your throat burns. How long has it been since your last drink of water?

His head shoots up so fast you're almost surprised it doesn't fly off his neck. His sockets are wide and pitch black. He stares at you, utterly speechless as his pupils very, very slowly light back up and start to grow.

You give him a tired smile. "I think you're supposed to say 'who's there' bone boy."

The tears building in his sockets finally spill over. Holding your hand in a desperate grip, Sans buries his head on the bed and utterly breaks down. Every time you've seen him cry before, he's fought to stay quiet, subdued, like the tears are only barely escaping his iron grip. Now? He wails like a child,
shoulders heaving with the force of his cries. Tears run unchecked down his cheeks, soaking the
blanket.

"i...i....uuuaaah!" He can't even form words.

Your heart clenches painfully at the sight of Sans in such a raw state. "Sans, I'm okay, it's okay."

He lifts his head, still sobbing as he presses his teeth against your hand. "y-you're h-here!"

You rub his cheek. "Yeah, baby I'm here. I'm right here." You attempt to pull him up and he obliges,
crawling into the bed with you. He's so gentle, so careful to make sure he doesn't bump against of the
tubes but he still somehow manages to wrap around you even as he continues to sob. For several
long minutes, there's no words. Your own eyes water as you try your best to comfort him. This pain
and the overwhelming relief is almost too much to bear.

"i was...i almost...oh god!" He closes his sockets, breath hitching. "i'm sorry, i'm sorry, i'm so sorry!"

"Sans, please, it's not-" You cough harshly and his crying finally slows a little.

Sans sits up, wiping at his face. He flicks his hand and a glass of water floats into his reach. You pull
the breathing mask off your face; you don't need it now but you do need that water, badly. He helps
you sip at it. The cool liquid feels like heaven on your throat and he has to remind you to slow down.
You finish one glass, than another before the itch in your throat is finally appeased. Sans sets the
glass down, not taking his eyes off you. It's almost like he's scared you're going to suddenly vanish.

"Come here," you murmur, holding your good arm out. "I need to hug you and I can't move right
now."

His face twists with agony at those words, but he does as you ask, curling back into your side. You
rub his head as he buries his face in your shoulder. "None of this was your fault Sans. No one could
have stopped it. I just...I had to save Frisk. My body moved on it's own."

He shakes his head as a fresh sob breaks from him. "no...i...i almost made the biggest mistake of my
life."

"What are you talking about?"

His hand clenches the fabric of your hospital gown. "i..." He gulps harshly, his bones clacking. "i
thought there was no choice. i...tried to reset."

Your breath catches in horror. "You what?"

He flinches, pulling away from you. Your Soul cries out for him to come back, but it's clear he has
something he has to say. He stands, wringing his hands together. "i didn't know what to do. every
time paps died, or everyone was gone but me, i never really had to worry, you know? a reset always
happened, those deaths were gone, just like that. but with you? if i didn't...if i didn't do something i
thought i was gonna lose you." He stares down at the ground in shame. "i was wrong. i was so
wrong but...i went to the kid's house. i stood over their bed and...i..."

His voice catches and something, almost like deja vu flickers through you even as your heart
hammers with the horror of what he's saying.

"i thought i felt you there," he whispers brokenly. "i...felt your hand stopping me. i looked and you
weren't there and i was so ashamed and it was like that stupid fog in my skull broke and i...couldn't
do it!" His knees give out and he slumps to the floor, burying his face in his hands. "i couldn't do it
again! i couldn't go back, i couldn't do it to paps and al and tori and the kid and everyone else. even if it meant you never woke up, i couldn't d-d-do it!

He's crying again and your body screams at you to get up, go to him, comfort him! But you can't move and you can't speak now, conflicting emotions clogging your voice. Finally, you call his name. "Sans."

He hunches over, holding his shoulders.

"Please come here."

Shaking, great drops of blue rolling down his face, Sans stands up. You reach your hand out for his. He hesitates, clearly waiting for you to scream at him, or break up with him or curse him.

You don't do any of that. "Sans, I need you to promise me something right here." Your voice is thick with emotion. "No matter what happens to me now, or tomorrow or years in the future, don't you ever, ever try to force a Reset. You've been through too much, you've grown and changed too much to go through all of that again. You can't do that to yourself, or to Papyrus or anyone else. You can't do that to me. I don't blame you for choosing the lives of your family. But throwing everything away is the one thing I will never forgive you for."

A great shudder rolls through him as his jaw wobbles.

"Promise me you won't do that again. Ever." You continue to hold your hand out, despite the numb feeling creeping up your limb from holding it out.

He nods, a strained noise escaping him.

"Say it Sans. Please."

He finally takes your hand, dropping down his knees again. "i p-promise. i...i'm so sorry!"

You let him cry and do a little crying yourself. But now these tears are cleansing, washing away the pain of your separation, the agony of your torture and the terrifying threat of the bullet wound in your gut. You both cry until you have nothing left and then you just hold each other, letting the beat of your heart and the thrum of his magic act as a reassuring comfort for each other.

You're alive.

He's alive.

You're both right where you want to be. And for now, that's enough.

Chapter End Notes

Now just hold on my friends, we're not quite done with this crazy ride! There's a bit more to the story....
Hey guys! Sorry about the wait for this chapter. After all the intense stuff that happened in the last few chapters, I kinda fell into a creative slump and I've been preparing for my return to college after like 2 years of not doing it. And then my sister had surgery so I've been taking care of her too. So have a slightly shorter, less angst inducing chapter!

I got a ton of art over the past few days and I'm being super lazy so here's all of them please check them out they make me so freaking happy

I Write Here
Main Blog
Feed the comment monster if you like

The moment word gets out that you're awake, your rather small hospital room is almost instantly flooded with monsters, most of them weeping and/or dripping snot to various degrees. Papyrus, Undyne and Alphys, Toriel and Frisk. Papyrus, bless his sweet caring Soul, cries almost as much as Sans did, though his tears are from pure relief.

"I KNEW IT! I KNEW YOU WOULD BE OKAY!" Undyne is holding him back from actually leaping on you. Is...is that a tear-like shine you see in her eye?

"Papyrus, calm down!" she shouts, her voice loud enough to make your ears ring. She grins at you. "Geez, way to make us worry nerd! You owe us big time!"

"Does that mean I have to go running tonight?" you tease, holding back a giggle.

"Nah, I think you deserved a night off. But as soon as you're up and about, you're gonna come to my self defense class! No excuses!"

You nod. Her voice holds affection, despite her ordering tone. "You got it."

Frisk scoots around the monsters and clambers up into the bed. Sans is seated in the chair next to the bed, still holding your hand and you feel him flinch slightly as he looks away from the kid. You squeeze his hand as you smile at Frisk. "Hey buddy. How are you doing?"

They seem torn between trying to scold you and smiling with joy. You...don't do that again! They finally sign, pouting.

"Can't promise that," you say, patting their head with your free hand. "I care too much about you Frisk. I'd do it again." After a moment you add, "You're talking about the taking a bullet for you thing right?"

Their mouth twitches with a muffled snicker. They dig into a bag at their side and pull out a large folded piece of paper and open it up. It's covered in drawings and messages in different childlike handwriting. Right in the middle is a drawing of you done by Frisk. The crayon you is surrounded by various monsters and humans, all of them smiling and saying things like 'get better!', 'we believe in you!' and other things.
"The children at school put this together for you," Toriel says, beaming with pride.

"Wow!" You take the drawing, emotion making your eyes water. "Thank you Frisk."

They smile bashfully and glance at Sans, perhaps seeking his approval too. Sans jumps and keeping his gaze downcast, mumbles, "looks good kiddo."

The smile fades from Frisk's face, replaced by a brief flash of hurt confusion.

"Um...hey, why don't you hang this up on the wall right there?" you say quickly, pointing to the wall opposite you. "It's kinda dull and white, don't you think?"

Thus distracted, Frisk hops down and begins the search for tape while you shoot Sans a quick look. His brow bones are furrowed slightly. The remaining breath of his magic lingering in your Soul twinges with his guilt. You don't have the chance to say anything before Alphys approaches meekly.

"I-I'm so happy that y-you're okay," she says, wringing her hands together. "I don't know how m-much Sans told you about what we d-did to-"

"we haven't had time to talk about it much," he cuts in quietly, glancing over at Toriel, who has joined in the hunt for tape. "she just woke up al, can't it wait?"

"Of c-course!" she stutters. "I was j-just concerned about any l-lingering effects and t-these things tend to get worse if they're ignored."

You put your hand not currently being crushed in Sans' tightening grip against your chest where your Soul lingers. "Do you mean...that thing with Sans' magic in my Soul?"

Her eyes look like they're about to bug out of her head. "His magic?"

"Yeah, that's how I was able to get out of the room they kept me in. It was weak and pathetic compared to what he can do, but I managed to unlock a door with...um...." You wiggle your fingers in an attempt to explain the strange sparks of magic you had seen.

Sans' sockets narrow slightly, staring at your Soul. "i could feel you doing something back then but...huh. that's uh, rather unexpected."

"To say the least!" Alphys' voice is on the higher end of a squeak. "Sans, did you have any idea this might happen?"

His mouth thins and he shakes his head. "i wasn't exactly focused on the lingering effects of what we did."

"This could mean huge things in our human, monster research!" Her eyes brighten. "Once you're better, you can come by the lab and I'll run a quick analysis-"

At those words, quick flashes of the lab in the warehouse and the machine that ripped you apart fly through you mind and you feel your heart seize up with panic. No, not another lab!

Sans immediately notices your trembling and puts a hand on your face. He rubs his thumb over your cheek and you lean into his touch, your breathing shallow. "shh, it's ok. no labs, i promise."

Alphys looks between the two of you in confusion for a second before it clicks. Her hands fly up over her mouth in horror. "Oh, God! I'm s-so s-sorry, I'm such an i-idiot, I d-didn't even think!"
You close your eyes, swallowing back the fear. "It's okay Alphys," you whisper. "I just...I can't do it again right now."

"Y-yes of c-cOURSE," she says miserably. "We can...do it where ever you like or...not all."

You really would rather not ever do it. But you know she's right and for goodness sake it's Alphys, not Na...not them. You trust her. But it's too soon. "I'll...let you know when I'm up for it."

"Okay," she sniffs miserably, slinking back over to Undyne, who's been watching the conversation silently and with a slight frown.

It seems the heart monitor, triggered by your spiking pulse, sent out a notice to the nurse because it's only a minute later and she strides in. Concern quickly replaced by shock then frowning disapproval as she takes in the room full of monsters. Judging by that reaction, they didn't exactly check in with the front desk before crowding into your room.

"Okay, I need this room cleared out now, the patient needs peace and quiet!" She shoos them out, not intimidated or nervous at all, even when Undyne bares her fanged teeth slightly. "You, you and yes, even you," she says to Frisk. "Everyone...." She looks to Sans and it might be the sharp beeps that rise from the machine thanks to your suddenly clenching heart or Sans' sockets going dark for a split second that makes her sigh. "Fine. You can stay," she grumbles to Sans. "But she needs sleep! No keeping her up with any antics!"

"do i look like the kind of guy to cause a scene?" His very voice carries a wide smirk in its tone and you smack him lightly even as you grin. There's your boy.

With promises of visiting again soon, the rest of your monster family leaves the room and the nurse, a stern yet good-natured middle lady named Karen starts fussing with the various flowers and cards in the room from your various admirers. Seems being tortured by maniacs then taking a bullet for a kid put you on a lot of people's good side. "It smells like a flower shop in here," you comment.

"Is the smell bothering you?" Karen asks, pausing in refilling a vase.

"Not at all. Um...so how long am I going to be in here?"

She snorts a little with incredulity. "Are you in that much of a rush?"

"Well..." To be honest, the hospital scene is making you uneasy. You're trying your very best not to think of needles and vials and blood bags but with the sudden absence of warmth that your friends brought with them, it's getting hard to keep such thoughts away. "I've been asleep for a long time." It's a poor excuse, but you don't feel like bringing up the real reason.

"And you've been awake for two hours." Her scolding tone softens. "Just relax. You're very lucky to be alive. And despite the care the queen has given you that has helped your healing progress at a frankly terrifying rate, you still need to recover. You won't be here for much longer. But the doctor wants you to stay at least another twenty-hours to make sure that there's no relapse into a coma."

"that can happen?" Sans' voice is sharp with suppressed fear.

Karen tries to give him a reassuring smile, which doesn't quite reach her eyes. "The chances are slim, but they are still there. It is better to be safe."

She continues to tidy up your room and manages to shoo Sans away just long enough to help you shower and clean up a little. You can move but only just. Your limbs are locked and weak and you have to lean heavily on her to walk at all. Her professionalism helps a little with the embarrassment.
of her helping you bathe. But then again, she's been taking care of you all this time without you even realizing. Besides, privacy meant nothing down in that lab. This is quite a step up.

After you've cleaned up and Karen's helped you back into bed, Sans pops back in. His skull is covered in a fine layer of sweat that you're pretty sure only you notice. Oh boy. Karen leaves, dimming the lights and he's back at your side, his hand slipping into yours. He takes in your damp appearance and you flush a little. Even with Toriel helping you to heal up, your reflection in the mirror had scared you a little. Gaunt, worn and battered. You'd barely recognized yourself. This isn’t the worst you've looked in front of him but...for heaven's sake you're wearing a hospital gown!

"So, do you prefer my drowned kitten in a hospital robe look or drowned kitten caught in the rain while running look?" you try to joke and pray that he doesn't notice your blush.

His grin is a little too wide to be believable. "caught in the rain look all the way." He falls silent, lights in his sockets dim. "are you ready to sleep?"

You are tired but... "Not yet. Can we just talk or something?"

He's pleased but tries to hide it. "uh, sure. what about?"

You laugh lightly. "You're asking the patient?"

"oh. um, right uh..." He's flustered. You laugh again and decide to take pity on him.

"Just tell me what I missed the last few days. Did the bill pass?"

Set slightly at ease by having a conversation topic, Sans gives you all the information he's got, which honestly is not a lot. As you suspected, he's spent the entire time you were out right by your side. He does perk up a bit as you talk about the opportunities this will open up for monsters.

"paps will be able to get that car he's always wanted," Sans says happily, rubbing his thumb over your hand.

"Papyrus knows how to drive?"

"in theory; he's read the manual at least twenty-three times. only monsters with special job exceptions, like alphys and tori, were able to drive and get licenses. gotta get pap that driver's license first, but he's always been a fast learner."

"Well, I offer the services of my...my car!" Whatever happened to it? Was it ever picked up from the shop?

"asgore's got it for now," Sans reassures you. "he sent someone to go get it."

The King of monsters has your car? Well, stranger things have happened. "Papyrus has got to be happy about that!"

Sans shrugs. "it's barely been on anyone's minds with everything that's happened. didn't feel important, you know?"

You tug on his hood, making him lean forward enough to reach his skull. You give him a quick kiss, pleased at the blush that skits across his face. "We have a lot to celebrate now. But...

"but what?"

You take a breath. "Sans, I saw how you were acting around Frisk."
His gaze flickers away from you at that.

"I know you must feel horrible about what almost happened," you say gently, rubbing his head. "But Frisk deserves to know. They deserve an apology. And you know it."

His shoulders hunch. "It was sick of me to even think it."

"It was wrong, yes, but you were scared and desperate. If it had been the other way around and I was about to lose you...I don't know what I would have done." Would you have done it? Erased everything to save his life? It's a thought that hurts too much to even entertain, so you push it away. "You have to set things straight with them."

After a few moments of silence, he meets your gaze. He's scared. "What if the kid hates me? I...god, that kid's the only one who gets it. Not that you don't," he says quickly, but you're already nodding.

"I don't fully understand what that must have been like, reliving the same time over and over again. I never will." That's the sad truth.

He sags and nods. "I love that kid, babe. I don't...I just..." He's losing his words now and he buries his head in the blanket. You continue to rub his skull.

"That's why you can't keep quiet. You don't have to do it right now, or even tomorrow. But you have to tell them. They'll understand."

He nods into the blanket, keeping his head down. The two of you fall into silence and all too soon, your eyelids start to feel heavy. About the third time your head bobs, you tap Sans. He lifts his skull, the shadows under his sockets still very dark. He nods, not needing words and climbs up into the bed with you. He leaves the remaining lights on with no prompting. For that, you're glad. Having Sans with you helps to keep the memories at bay, but the darkness of night would only make them stronger. A great sigh escapes you as his phalanges start tenderly massaging your scalp.

"You'll wake up again, right?" His voice trembles slightly.

You kiss his cheek. "I promise. Hey, this is kinda like that first night, isn't it?" That night Sans confessed to you, that wonderful, blissful time spent on the beanbag afterwards watching a movie and simply basking in the impossible knowledge that you were with the monster who had stolen your heart.

"Hmm?"

"We didn't want to sleep 'cause we thought it was a dream."

He hums quietly, threading his digits through your hair. "So, we'll sleep and when we wake up together, that will prove that right now isn't a dream."

"Exactly."

"Heh, sounds like a good plan to me," he whispers. He presses a long, lingering kiss against your head that makes your insides squirm pleasantly and causes the heart monitor to beep warningly. He gives the machine an amused glance. "Getting excited are we?"


You honestly don't expect to be able to sleep and the fear of impending nightmares does keep you
tense until Sans manages to soothe it out of you by continuing to rub at your head. Just before your eyes slide shut, you almost see something. Something dark lingering in the corner of the room. You blink and it's just a shadow once again. Your stomach twists a little and once again the sense that you've forgotten something very important flits through your head. No, it's just shadows of the terror you've faced. That's all. And paying attention to it will only make it worse.

It might be the exhaustion, it might be the medicine. It's certainly thanks to Sans' presence next to you, but you manage to slip into a deep, thankfully dreamless sleep.
You're woken by your stomach growling at a mortifying level. Sharp pain laces through you and you grimace as you blink sleepily. When was the last time you actually ate food that wasn't being pumped into your system through a tube? You honestly can't remember. Sans, already awake, is staring at your stomach with unveiled curiosity. He's always been fascinated by the noises your human body makes. Another rumble echos from your tummy and you swear you can actually see the blanket move from the force.

"I need food," you announce to him.

"yes dear," he says, obviously holding back laughter as he reaches over and presses the nurse call button. A different nurse comes in and, after deeming you fit to eat solid foods, soon brings you a plate of eggs, applesauce and juice. It's not the most glamorous breakfast but your mouth waters and you can barely hold yourself back. Sans snorts loudly.

"i take it that the food is eggcellent?"

You wave your fork at him threateningly. "Nomp then 'm eating," you say around a mouth full of food.

He shrugs. "i may speak a lot of languages but I pear-ly understand you."

You swallow. "This is applesauce, not pear sauce."

"i couldn't think of a good apple joke on the fly."

You grin. "So you're saying this applesauce isn't the apple of your eye?"

The two of you are still laughing at that when a sudden knock comes from the door. A moment later, King Asgore himself steps through, barely fitting through the doorway. You nearly choke on your juice. "Oh!"

Asgore smiles warmly at you, his eyes drifting to your food. "Oh, pardon me, I didn't realize you were in the middle of breakfast."

You wipe your mouth quickly and set the napkin back down. "It's okay, I was pretty much done anyway."
"Well, I won't take much of your time." He produces a basket filled with various tea boxes and what looks like bars of chocolate. "I hope this is acceptable as a gift. I'm afraid I don't know much about what is acceptable in times such as these."

"Thank you," you say, a little surprised as you accept the basket from him. It makes sense that he would be here; after all, you did save his adopted child from a bullet and helped several monsters be rescued from the scientists experimenting on them. But still, you're a little embarrassed and nervous. Besides seeing him at Christmas, you've barely even talked to the guy. You pull the blanket up a little closer to your chest, scrambling to think of what to say.

Thankfully, he saves you the trouble. His easy smile turns a little serious and mournful. "On behalf of monster-kind, I want to offer my deepest apologies that you had to go through such a terrible ordeal. And I personally thank you for bringing this terrible matter into light. I truly believe that the monster rights bill would not have passed otherwise."

Sans tensely slightly next to you. "course, it would have been better if she hadn't been taken away and experimented on, right?" His voice is sharp and accusing.

Asgore blinks in surprise. "Yes! Of course, I am sorry. I didn't mean to imply otherwise."

"It's fine," you say, giving Sans a quick look. "It's over and done now. Who knows how many more would have suffered if it didn't end when it did."

The King visibly relaxes at that. "Yes, is over now. The police have been in contact with me and it seems that they have solid leads on finding the remaining people who were involved."

"That's good," you say softly, feeling your own shoulders tensing at the thought that Nahn and her cohorts were still out there somewhere. "I hope they find them soon."

Asgore nods in agreement. After a few seconds of awkward silence, he rubs at his beard and smiles. "Well, I shall leave you to your recovery then. Please feel free to stop by my home whenever you have a moment. I would like to chat over some tea. After you recover of course. Ah!" He smacks his head lightly. "That reminds me. I know that it doesn't nearly repay what you have sacrificed, but please rest knowing that all of your hospital expenses are covered."

What? Your heart lifts slightly; it was a quiet concern that's been lingering in your mind, but you had decided not to worry about it until you were out of this place. The thought that you wouldn't have to worry about that did set you slightly more at ease but you can't just accept such a grand gift. "I have insurance. It's not a problem," you mumble.

"You are quite correct; it is not a problem for me," Asgore laughs, a gentle twinkle in his eye. "The matter has already been settled."

"I...but..." The protests die in your throat and you try to match his smile. Yours is a little more wobbly and emotional. "Thank you."

He extends his hand to you and you shake it; like Toriel, his grip is fuzzy and warm. "No, it is I who must thank you," he says seriously. He releases your hand and smiles again, waving as he leaves. He isn't watching where he's going and smacks his head on the door frame. You wince as Sans snickers loudly.

"Do you not like him or something?" you ask Sans once Asgore is completely out of the room. You had noticed it at Christmas too; Sans didn't say much to the King and when he did, it was with cool politeness.
Sans nods and then shakes his head. "i guess? i mean, i don't hate the guy but...he hurt tori really bad. i mean, she didn't talk about it much during our knock-knock joke sessions but i could hear it in her voice. i see it every time she talks to him. and then there's all those other kids that..." Sans trails off, seeing your eyes tighten. "ah, it's in the past. he's trying his best. being a king can't be easy. i just don't agree with a lot of the choices he makes, you know?"

Yeah. Asgore had to think of his people. Making such decisions for an entire race had to be a heavy burden. He must have great regrets.

A knock comes from the door again. Nurse Karen pokes her head in. "Sorry love, but the police are here to speak with you. Are you up for it?"

Ah yes. You had answered some questions about your kidnapping before but nothing too solid since you weren't in a good state. And then you got shot. They must want a statement. You sigh mournfully, eyeing what's left of your breakfast. "Sure. Send them up."

Talking with the police ends up taking longer than you thought it would. They ask you to go over everything you remember from even before you were abducted. They ask a lot of questions about Tod, which makes your heart clench with an agonizing mixture of hurt and bitterness. Tod. You truly liked him. Trusted him as a friend. There's a part of you that still can't believe he had it in him to so completely trick you. But that's the thing, isn't it? He didn't think he was wrong. In his mind, he wasn't acting like a deranged villain intent on destroying the world. He was a hurt man trying to fix what was wrong with the world.

"Did he ever let slip some clue about all of this happening?" one of them asks you.

"I...I don't know. Maybe?" You think back as best as you can. "I guess there was something, but it was back when we busted Emily for helping with the fireworks thing at the bonfire. She was about to say something and he warned her to stop talking before she said something she would regret. At the time, I just thought he was trying to help her in his own way before she got into deeper trouble. But he must have been warning her to stop before she revealed anything."

The officers nod, scribble down some notes. Then they ask you about everything you went through down in the lab. You hesitate and struggle to even form words without breaking down right there in front of them. The rational voice in your head tells you that they have to know, they have to ask you now before time starts to cloud the memories. Like there's really a chance of that happening. Your voice is rough, breaking several times as you force the words out, even as they burn your throat. Sans too is shaken by the recounting. He wants to help but how can he? He wasn't there. It's not his story to tell. You tell him that he doesn't have to listen but he stubbornly shakes his head and simply grips your hands tightly.

The officers are clearly appalled as well; one of them even shivers slightly, though they try to hide it. The two ask about whether you heard any of their plans (no) and where they got their resources (you have no clue) and if you had any idea how they managed to actually create creatures from humans and monsters.

"Look, I don't know," you finally say, completely worn out. "All I know is they ripped me open and used me for their experiments. I was too busy being tortured to pay attention to the science of it."

The officers seem to get the hint and they quickly pack away their stuff, thanking you for your time and promising updates as they came in. Fine, you just want them gone. You don't want to talk about any of that stuff anymore. They finally leave and you slump back against your pillow, covering your face with your hands. Your heart is racing painfully, the harsh waves of a panic attack beginning to sweep over you. You swallow harshly as Sans rubs your leg, silent but trying his best to comfort you.
with his presence.

There's another freaking knock and you jump, a bit of a whimper escaping you. Sans' head turns sharply to the door. "I'll get rid of them," he says, getting to his feet.

"No, no it's fine," you sigh, reaching out to stop him. "Unless it's the cops again."

His expression tightens with concern, but he goes ahead and opens with door with a flick of blue magic. And the flow of visitors continues. First it's Abby, who's crying so hard you're almost afraid she's going to hyperventilate. She blames herself for letting you get taken that day and you somehow manage to convince her that no, you're not mad, and yes you still want to be friends with her. And you truly do. She leaves after talking for a while, mostly about how shocked she was to hear about Tod and the few people at the station who were revealed to be part of his organization as well. Police had come into the station to make the arrests pretty much shut down the station for the day.

After her, Undyne and Alphys stop by again, dropping off some manga you just know you're not going to have time to read. They also have a card from Mettaton, which they slyly hand to Sans to open up. He stares at the glittery card for a second, shrugs, opens it and is immediately doused in a thick wave of sparkles that explode from the page as a cheerful mechanical tune starts to play. Alphys and Undyne hit the ground laughing and your still healing ribs scream at you in protest as you cackle at the sight of his outraged, sparkly face. He looks like a scoop of ice cream covered in sprinkles.

You try your best to help him clean up, but you're pretty sure you're going to be finding glitter for the next few days.

You manage to eat lunch before your next visitor arrives. Surprisingly, it's Jake from the music shop. Poor guy looks super nervous but he smiles widely at your seemingly healing state. He's brought flowers with him, which Sans puts in a vase while the two of you chat.

"Man, I'm just...wow, I don't even know what to say." He rubs at the back of his head in a flustered sort of way.

"I'm just happy you came by," you say, smiling widely. "You didn't have to."

He shrugs, a happy grin crossing his face. "I wanted to. I mean, I knew you'd have a ton of flowers but can you really have too many? And I uh...I was really worried. It's creepy I know, but I kinda feel like I know you after listening to your show so often."

You pat his hand. "No, it's not creepy! That's kind of the point of a radio show. I'm just sorry I haven't had much of a chance to come by the shop more often. I'll have to drop in once I'm out of here."

"I'd like that," he mumbles in a quiet sort of voice before looking at Sans. Sans is watching him with an amused glint in his socket. Jake jumps up as a quick flicker of blue flashes through Sans' pupil. "Oh r-right. So anyway, I'll um...dude you've got something on your face."

Sans wipes at the speck of glitter you somehow missed while you cover your mouth to hide your snorts of laughter. "bye jake."

The last visitor who comes by, aside from various nurses who pop in to check on you, is Grillby. You actually hear the soft crackle of his fire before he steps through the door. His flames pop and brighten slightly in greeting.

"Grillby! What are you doing here? What about the bar?"
My daughter is there, he signs slowly to you. I am glad to see you awake. He turns to Sans, clearly saying more in his crackling language that you still don't understand. Sans surprises the both of you by suddenly standing and hugging Grillby tightly. Grillby seems stumped on how to react and looks at you, tilting his head questioningly. You shrug.

"I'm sorry Grillby," Sans mumbles. "I did the exact opposite of what you said to do and almost ruined everything. I'm sorry."

Grillby clearly doesn't understand exactly what Sans is talking about, but he pats the small skeleton on the head, leaving a small dusting of ash on his skull. His visit is fairly short, with Sans promising to pay his tab off next time (both you and Grillby snort at this) and Grillby offering to help prepare meals while you're recovering. You assure him that he doesn't need to go to the trouble but he waves off your concern. Before he leaves, he stands next to you and extends his hand out towards your head. You look to Sans and he simply smiles and nods.

When Grillby's glowing hand touches your forehead you feel a great rush of warmth run down your entire body. Your ribs and bullet wound, aching deeply despite the painkillers in your system, are soothed. You gasp as you physically feel your insides being repaired, the remainder of the cracks in your ribs sealing up and vanishing. Your chest, which has felt heavy since you woke is suddenly lifted and you feel your Soul responding to the magic, fluttering gently in your chest. But suddenly, there's a twinge of pain, something that almost seems to twist in your chest. It's gone in a flash and you put a hand on your chest. What was that?

Grillby's flames pop, his head lowering slightly. Are you all right? He signs with flickering hands.

"Yeah, I'm fine." You feel better than fine actually. "I feel great! What did you do?"

"Grillbz has some experience with healing up people who are hurting. Healing bones and stuff like that. He might be even better than Tori," Sans explains with a twinkle in his socket. "Haven't seen that in a long time, huh Grillbz?"

Grillby doesn't respond, continuing to stare at the place your Soul resides. He finally looks at Sans and Sans frowns slightly in response to whatever it is he says.

"She uh...well there's been stuff going on with that," Sans finally says after taking a long look at your Soul for himself. "It wouldn't surprise me if there was stuff left over from what they put in her."

That doesn't sound good. "What's going on?" you ask nervously.

"Nothing," Sans is quick to say. "Grillby just thought he felt something in your system."

"Oh," The light feeling in your chest is gone just like that. Grillby's flames pop with concern and you quickly smile at him. "I'm sure it was just a human thing. I feel perfectly fine. Thank you Grillby. That really helped."

You're quiet as Grillby heads out, your head swirling with thoughts. How could you have even hoped that your Soul would be completely undamaged after whatever they injected into you? And then there's sense of dread that you can't seem to banish from your mind. Everything is over now, isn't it? So why do you feel so anxious?

Karen brings in your dinner, which consists of turkey sandwich, apple slices and chocolate pudding. As she sets the tray up, she cheerfully informs you that the doctors have deemed you ready to head home after one more night just as a precaution. Sans steals one of your apple slices as you nibble at the sandwich. He starts to speak, doubtlessly to deliver an overdue apple joke, but he falls quiet,
"Hey, don't worry about what Grillby said," he finally says. "He wasn't even sure he felt something and I've been watching your soul. If there was something wrong, I'd see it."

"Yeah," you say softly. You pick up the spoon and start poking at your pudding. It's goopy and dark and... and it looks just like....

You barely manage to make it to the bathroom before puking. You're sobbing even as you continue to empty your stomach. Seeing that pudding, as stupid and pathetic as it is, brought memories of the poor creatures swarming to the front of your mind. Your skin itches and you can still feel the cold touch of the monster touching you. Your ears are ringing with their agonized howls. It's not fair. How did you survive and they didn't? You didn't even try to help them. You just let them out and tried to run. It was even because of them you escaped the lab and you had forced them out of your mind. What the hell is wrong with you?!

Sans hovers next to you anxiously. "Should I call the doctor?"

You shake your head, covering your face. You move back until you hit the wall and curl in on yourself, still shaking with uncontrolled tears.

"Sweetheart, what's wrong?" Sans reaches out and you flinch slightly. He notices, of course and his hand snaps back. "Ok. Ok," he says gently. He moves until his spine is against the wall too, keeping a few inches of space between the two of you. He doesn't say another word, but puts his hand on the floor next to you. When you finally slow down and the tears stop, he gets up to grab a cup of water and a bowl so you can swish your mouth out. You do so woodenly and then put your head on your knees. You speak, because if you don't, you feel like your chest might implode.

"Tod put me right next to one," you whisper. "One of those creatures. There was glass between us but it didn't matter. I could see it, see that pain and agony in its eyes and I was terrified. I wanted it gone, I wanted it to just melt away like the one in the city. I didn't know what it really was. There was a boy there, that first night. He was the next host. They used my blood to turn him and some poor monster into that... that thing! I was going to leave them, when I got out. All I could think about was escaping. They died helping me get out of there. And I... Sans, I didn't even know his name! I don't even know what those poor creatures were called!"

Sans inches closer and this time you let yourself lean into his touch. He rubs your shoulder. "That wasn't your fault. You have to know that they wouldn't have made it regardless of what you did. But you gave them that last chance to fight back against the people who did that to them. Helping you escape was their choice."

You shake your head. "I should have done something sooner. I should have seen that Tod was up to something. Maybe I could have saved him, if I had just fought back more."

Sans pushes gently on your head, guiding it to the groove of his neck. You're trembling and you fight to regain control. "You also could've died," Sans murmurs. "If you focused on anything but surviving, you might not have made it. It's a sick thing that they did. It's ok to be upset about it. But don't blame yourself for putting yourself first."

"I want to go home," you sniffle into his shirt. "I don't want to stay here any longer."

He presses a kiss against your head. "I know sweetheart. I don't want to stay here either. But I'm gonna have to trust the doctor right now. One more night, just to make sure you're ok. I promise we'll leave first thing in the morning."
You know he's right but it still makes a fresh wave of tears run down your face. The reek of medical tools and death and sickness have been in your nose all day. You can feel it sinking into your skin. "I'm not okay Sans," you whimper. "I don't think I ever will be."

Sans is quiet for a moment. He stands and picks you up. He does so with much more ease than he did the time he found you covered in your own blood, sobbing on the kitchen floor. You've lost weight, a lot of it. He takes you back to the bed and tucks you in before sliding up next to you. "it's ok if you think that right now," he finally says. "i've got our whole lives to show you that you will be. i'm gonna fix this."

You take his hand, squeezing it tightly. "You don't have to fix me. Just stay with me."

His arm wraps tightly around you. "ok then. i can handle that."

You don't sleep much that night. Your mind is too wound up with memories and every time you close your eyes, you only see the melting faces of those creatures. The most you manage is dozing for short spurts, waking up with a sharp jerk after thirty minutes at the most. So you and Sans wind up watching t.v all night. It's all terrible stuff and Sans tries to joke about whatever he can think of to keep you calm and distracted. It does help, but by the time morning light starts to peek in through the windows, you feel like your eyelids are coated in cement.

But you manage to summon up some energy as Karen comes in and officially declares you free to go. You hug her, thanking her for all of her help, even though you were unconscious for most it. It doesn't take long to change and pack up; most of the flowers just get thrown away but Sans takes the freshest ones to the house with a shortcut while you're changing in the bathroom. Papyrus shows up as you're walking out and he gives you a surprisingly gentle hug.

"ARE YOU READY TO RETURN HOME?" He asks you as he brushes off nonexistent dust.

"More than you know Papyrus," you say with a tired smile.

"ALRIGHT THEN! I HAVE ALREADY CALLED FOR A CAB! AFTER ALL, YOU CANNOT DRIVE JUST YET! YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE YOUR CAR HERE!"

He bounds ahead, leading the way to the front entrance. You take Sans' hand and finally, start heading for home.
You fall asleep at some point during the ride home, though you don't remember exactly when. You briefly wake when Papyrus pulls you from the taxi and carries you up to the house. Your fuzzy gaze meets Sans walking next to you and he pats your head. He whispers that it's okay to stay asleep. So you let yourself drift back into the comfort of unconsciousness.

And then the terror starts.

~~~

The floor beneath you is hidden beneath a pool of blood. It splashes up to your ankles, splattering your legs with it. You can see faces in the blood, screaming in silent agony as they fight to escape their prison. They push against the blood, reaching up to you desperately. And you run away, your heart pounding in terror. Hands latch around your feet and you pitch forward into the faces as they open their mouths and swallow you up.

You have to run! Have to escape!

You push yourself up even as the voices and faces beg you to stop, beg you to free them. But you don't know how.

You see a door, outlined in a white light. You struggle to reach it, pleading with the suffering souls to let you go. You have to open the door, you have to see what lies beyond! Your hand reaches the knob-

You're tugged back, thrown to the mercy of the blood-soaked souls and as you sink deep into the depths of darkness, you hear Nahn's light giggle in your ear. "Oh please, my dear. We're not done yet!"

Then blood fills your lungs and you're drowning in it and it's like you've been shot all over again and you can't breathe-!

~~~

You wake up thrashing wildly, your mouth opened in a silent scream that won't come because your lungs are filled with blood and you can feel it pulsing from your side. You're shaking so violently you can't even focus on your surroundings to try and escape.

No, it's not you doing the shaking.

"please! breathe!" Sans calls your name desperately and that, more than his shaking you does, finally
breaks the tight hold of terror in your chest. You suck in a deep breath and gasp harshly. "that's it, come on. deep breaths."

Your hands drop to your bullet wound. Slight tenderness. No gushing blood. You were dreaming. Only dreaming. Sans rubs your back as you continue to breathe harshly. "Sorry," you finally mumble.

"sweetheart, if you apologize for one more nightmare, i'm gonna have to start thinking up some really bad puns to retort with," Sans tries weakly. "i don't think you want that, do you?"

"Maybe one or two," you whisper, rubbing at your face.

"um, ok. when do elephants snore?"

"I don't know."

"when they sleep!" He grins at you and you smack his arm weakly.

"That is terrible. Even for you."

"so it's a deal. no more apologizing and i'll stick to my regular, high quality puns." He watches you closely, wiping at your forehead. "do you wanna talk about it?"

You shake your head silently. He doesn't push. Sometimes, when he was the one to wake in terror, he simply couldn't talk about what he had just seen. You never pushed him when he didn't want to talk about his nightmares and you're thankful that he does the same for you. "What time is it?"

Sans checks the clock on the bedside table. "almost four. you slept for a long time."

You only had one nightmare after sleeping that long?

"tori and the others are planning a surprise dinner for you. uh, surprise," he adds guiltily. "so if you wanna take a shower, clean up a bit? if you're up for dinner that is."

You take another deep breath. "Yeah. Yeah, I'm fine. That's a good idea."

You pull some fresh clothes together while Sans sets up the bathroom for you. The room is already warm and steamy when you enter and Sans looks up from lighting a candle labeled 'Relaxation'. "this would probably be better if you were taking a bath, but still." He sets it down on the counter and moves to leave. You catch his arm. Your nightmare is still bright and vivid in your mind.

"Sans." Your face heats up with a deep blush. You can't get the words out.

"...yeah?" He finally prompts after a few seconds.

"Um, could you...could you stay? I don't want to be alone right now." His skull goes blue and you stare at the ground. Geez, this is mortifying! You're almost regretting saying anything but you might as well plow through at this point. "N-not in the shower with me, I mean. Just right here."

He nods quickly, still blushing a little. "right, of course. yeah, i'll stay. um, i'll turn around while you get in."

He faces the door and after a moment of hesitation, you pull your clothes off and step into the shower. Somehow, this is far more embarrassing than the last time he prepared a bath for you and washed you up after your panic attack. You wash slowly, your thoughts stuck in a whirl that thankfully distracts you from your nightmare. You and Sans had never really pursued the physical
side of a relationship. It wasn't that you weren't attracted to him. You definitely had sneaked glances at him when he wasn't looking and the way his body moved at times never failed to send twisting butterflies through your stomach. Certainly there had been times when you explored his bones while he examined your body but at most it could be called a mild make-out session that never grew into anything more. For you, the cuddling, the soft touches and gentle kissing had always been enough. You had fallen in love with him for his kindness, humor and the incredible vastness of his Soul after all. But is it enough for him? He is a skeleton after all. You had just always assumed that he wasn't interested in that sort of thing. Maybe he was actually repulsed by your human body and all its scars. Logic and memories of all the times he's kissed you scream otherwise, but you can't stop something in your chest from twisting tightly. Maybe that's why you've never felt a desire to pursue that side of the relationship. If he could see you completely vulnerable with all your wrinkles and scars lay bare, he would surely look away.

"Sans?" You call softly. You can just see his silhouette through the curtain sitting on the floor against the wall. "I realize this is the worst possible timing but...um, am I uh...are you attracted to me?"

After a brief second of silence in which your heart clenches tightly, you hear him murmur. "course i am. what brings this on?"

You fiddle with the soap, nearly dropping the slippery thing. "I just...I've never really had a relationship like this. And after everything you've done for me, I'm just worried about...you know. Making you happy?"

"of course you make me happy." He says this so sincerely you feel bad.

"I'm glad you feel that way. I really am. But I'm talking about...physically. I guess." At this point, you're pretty sure most of the steam in the room is coming from your face rather than the hot water.

"physically?"

Oh geez, does he really have no idea what you're talking about? "Sans, I'm naked in the shower. Please tell me I don't have to give you the birds and the bees talk."

There's another beat of silence. "oh."

Crap, this was a mistake. "I'm sorry, just forget I said anything," you stutter, pouring way too much shampoo into your hands. "It was dumb."

"it's not dumb," he says quietly. "i know about how humans mate and show love. monsters can sometimes do the same thing, but we tend to focus more on the soul. i just...god, this is going to sound horrible. i've never really even thought about that side of things with you."

As you thought. You run your tongue over your teeth as your eyes water.

"sweetheart?"

"I'm fine." You take a breath. "I'm okay. You can go out now. I'll just be a few more minutes."

He must hear the catch in your voice. He says your name with a sigh, standing up. He almost reaches for the curtain, but stops. "i didn't mean it like that. it's a thing of...i wanna respect your body and that's why i look away and um. blush so much. it's not that i don't find you beautiful. i do, i really, really do. if i had a heart, i'm pretty sure it would have popped by now just from how insanely beautiful you are. but babe...i'm a skeleton. i don't naturally have the um...parts for stuff like that? i mean, don't get me wrong, i really like kissing you," he says quickly. "i'd never really done it before i met you but i do like doing that. i don't even know why. i just do. does that make any kind of
A strained giggle escapes you. "Yeah. It does. I feel the same way. I guess that's why I didn't even think about it either."

He groans, sitting back down. "I'm so sorry."

"Don't be." There's almost an odd sense of relief sweeping over you, clearing away the brief fog that had settled in your mind. Geez, you're being ridiculous. Where did that train of thought even come from? Of course he loves you. "I just know that the physical side of things comes pretty naturally in human relationships. Well, not all of them. I guess it just never seemed necessary for us."

You can hear the soft clink of his phalanges tapping against the tile. "You're not just saying that for my sake are you?"

"I promise I'm not." You poke your head out from the curtain just a little. His knees are pulled up to his ribs and when he meets your gaze he blushes again.

"If I've been letting you down, you'd let me know right?" he mumbles as he continues to hold your gaze. "If you want me to, I can um... I can do some research and-"

"You don't have to do that," you interrupt him. The last thing you want him doing is searching around on the internet and finding all the nasty stuff people put there for the sake of research. "I'm happy with how we are right now. Are you?"

He nods enthusiastically. "Very. Yes."

"That's enough for me then." You smile at him and duck back inside the shower. "Leave it to me to take so long to finally even think about this, huh? Guess I'm not a normal girlfriend."

"We're not exactly a normal couple sweetheart." That's fine with you. Maybe someday, you will completely open yourself up to him in that way. And hey, you'd already shared your souls with each other. How did it get more intimate than that? You finish showering and he turns back to the door to give you privacy while you dress. Once you're done, he holds up a green bottle of lotion that matches the relaxation candle. He must have bought a kit or something.

"Um, do you want some lotion? It's um... supposed to help with relaxing. I can put it on your hands if you'd like?" He's still blushing slightly but it's so adorable that you can't help but grin.

"I'd like that," you say as you plop onto the edge of the tub. You squeal a little, completely forgetting that the edge would still be wet and Sans chuckles. As usual, laughing calms him down and he pours some lotion into his bony hands. After he kneels in front of you, he takes your hand and gently rubs the lotion into your skin. It's a little cold after the heat of your shower and you shiver. If he notices, he doesn't say anything. It quickly warms up though and as the bottle says it would, it helps you to relax. Sans tenderly massages your skin, his phalanges moving smoothly up your arm. Toriel had managed to heal up most of the new cuts and wounds from the taser and other sharp items used during your torture, but she couldn't heal the scars that were already there. Sans gently kisses each one, as he usually did when he found you scratching at them during a panic attack. That's right; Sans has already seen the worst of your scars. You shake your head slightly at yourself. Maybe it was just the left over painkillers in your system making you think such a strange thing.

Sans pauses, noticing your shaking head. "Is this ok?" he asks softly, his teeth lingering above your arm.
You nod, placing your lips against the crown of his skull. "Yes. For you, always yes."

When he finishes and you're thoroughly lotioned up, the two of you head into the kitchen. Your surprise at the sudden flash of lights and shouts of congratulations is genuine. You didn't think they'd go this far for you and honestly, with what had happened in the bathroom, you'd almost forgotten that Toriel and the others would be waiting. The whole gang is here, including Mettaton, who gives you a surprisingly gentle hug and apologizes for not coming to the hospital himself. The life of a star is very demanding after all.

"You did get my get well card, didn't you?" he asks.

You grin and glance at Sans. "Oh yeah. We got it. And it made me feel a lot better."

"Of course it did darling!" He gives you a smooch on the top of your head before sauntering back over to Papyrus, who's helping to dish up everyone's plates. Toriel has made all of your favorite dishes. Your stomach rumbles at the sight. But before you can get your food, Toriel wraps you in a warm hug.

"My child, I cannot tell you how happy I am to have you back home," she says, a little teary eyed.

"It's good to be home," you say as you hug her back. You take your place at the table and Sans slides in next to you a few moments later. Frisk reaches over to grab the salt and gives the two of you a wide smile. Sans returns the smile easily.

"I talked to the kid while you were sleeping," he says in a low voice. "you were right; they didn't even hesitate to forgive me."

You take his hand under the table and squeeze it tightly. "I'm proud of you. I honestly expected you to keep putting it off."

He shrugs. "well, normally i would've. but there's a certain someone who taught me it's better not to keep secrets."

"Sounds like a smart person."

"eh, smart-ish. her jokes are pretty awful."

"Oh please! Mine are far better than yours!"

"ha! now that's a good one!"

~~~

Dinner, as it usually is with everyone present, is a noisy affair. You stay a bit quieter than usual and the others are kind enough to give you a bit of space while keeping you included. After dinner the board games are brought out. You choose to watch rather than play as everyone splits up into teams for battleship. It's hilarious to watch, especially since you are allowed to see the whole board as long as you promise to keep your mouth shut about it.

"Hey! Quit snickering!" Undyne says to you as Sans manages to land a hit on one of her ships. "You're helping him cheat!"

"please, like i need more than your terrible poker face to guess where to go." Sans isn't even trying to hide his smug grin as he leans back in the chair slightly.
"YOU ARE GOING TO NEED MORE THAN A POKER FACE TO WIN THIS GAME!"
Papyrus crows triumphantly. "LADY TORIEL AND FRISK! B6!"

Toriel and Frisk smile widely at each other. "That's a miss my dear," she says, covering her mouth to try and hide her grin.

"WHAT?!" Papyrus' shriek of disbelief is enough to send everyone into a laughing fit.

You giggle and wipe at your eyes. You tap Sans on the shoulder; he's shaking a little with suppressed giggles. "I'm going to go to the bathroom," you say, standing up.

He gives you a quick glance to make sure that it's just a trip for the normal reason. "ok. i'll have this game in the bag by the time you get back."

"Oh please! Like you'll be able to beat Papyrus and I that easily!" Mettaton says bravely, despite only having one ship left.

You leave them to it and head to the bathroom. A small smile lifts your mouth. This is where you're meant to be. Right here in the middle of your monster family. Whatever that weird feeling of inadequacy was during your shower was, it's been washed away by the warmth that you can still feel overflowing from the living room. All of them care about you so much and you care just as deeply about them.

As you're washing your hands, the bathroom light starts to flicker, throwing you in complete darkness for a second before flashing back to life. You glance up at it. Oh come on, you're almost done! You look back down to rinse the soap off your hands and your eyes are drawn to the mirror.

It's only for a split second, caught between the flickers of light and darkness. Your eyes flash pitch black. Something translucent, faded and almost...skeletal hovers on either side of your head, like a pair of hands cradling your face.

You throw yourself back, knocking over the bottles lining the sink, a soundless scream caught in your throat. You hit the wall with a loud bang. The light suddenly steadies and stops flickering and it's just your reflection in the mirror, eyes sunken into your face and wide with fear. What the hell was that?!

A sharp knock at the door makes you squeak with surprise. Your knees give out and you sink to the floor.

"hey, i heard something, you ok?" Sans' concerned voice floats through the door.

"I-" Your voice is cut off as a sharp pain pulses in your chest. You hunch over, groaning as the feeling shoots up into your head. Your ears pop painfully.

He calls your name, worry making it a little sharp. "what's going on?"

"I'm...." You sit up, the pain suddenly gone. "I'm fine." The words come out of your mouth almost on their own. "The light went out for a second and I slipped."

Slipped? No...no wait that's not right. Or is it? Wait, what just happened? Something bad. Something frightening and-

"oh. ok then. al brought some movies over. are you up for watching something?"

A movie? Your thoughts are oddly sluggish. "Yeah. I'll uh, be right out." You get to your feet,
groaning a little at the sudden headache that assaults your head. Again, that nagging feeling that something is wrong weighs heavy on your heart. But your head now hurts too much to think about it. Ah, you need to ask Toriel where she keeps the spare light bulbs. You don't want someone else getting startled and left in the dark when it finally did die out. You laugh at yourself in mild annoyance. Way to be scared by a flickering light! Already the memory of seeing...*something* in the mirror is fading away. It's just your traumatizing memories playing tricks on you. It's got to be.

You head into the living to join your family, trying to ignore the prickling sensation on the back of your neck.

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*Once again, you find yourself struggling through a thick pool of inky blackness, struggling to reach the door outlined in white. If you can just reach it, just open that door and see what lies beyond, everything will be fine.*

*You know it will.*

*But you can't reach it before the faces in the dark swallow you up.*
The funny thing, or rather not so funny thing about being healed up with magic is that your body doesn’t seem to get that the worst of the injuries have been taken care of. Over the next few days you have to deal with a lot of phantom pains and aches, especially in your ribs and your side. At times, sharp stabs of pain would hit you out of nowhere and then vanish just as fast. These never fail to send Sans into a quiet panic and you have to work hard to convince him not to call Toriel every time it happens. What's even more annoying is that your energy vanishes very quickly and you have to spend most of the day napping and just laying around. Of course Sans is happy to do just that and for the first several days, you waste time watching movies, playing card games and your personal favorite, flipping through old photo albums.

"I can't believe how tiny you were!" you squeal, pointing to a picture of a young Sans holding the hand of an even tinier Papyrus. It had taken a lot of digging to find, and the amount of pictures Sans has of his younger days are sadly in very short supply, but you finally managed to talk him into showing you what he does have. The young Sans in the picture, probably about ten years old has a tiny gap in his teeth and is grinning widely, waving at whoever is holding the camera. Papyrus is almost completely covered by a thick scarf and jacket that falls to the ground, but his sockets are gleaming brightly. "No, I can't believe Papyrus used to be so small."

"yeah, he was a tiny squirt for a long time." Sans grins at the picture and the memories it's clearly bringing to mind. "i used to be able to hold him with one arm. course he'd cling to me like a monkey, so it wasn't hard. then he just pew!" He throws his hand up lazily. "shot up like a freaking tree. took a while to get used to looking up instead of down."

You snuggle closer to him. "Does it ever bother you that he's taller? Even though you're older?"

He shrugs, digits dancing up your arm. "maybe a little in the beginning. mostly cause i was uh, you know. scared that he might forget to look down sometimes. i thought he might be too busy looking up at the world to remember his squat big bro standing next to him. but he always remembered. he never got too busy for me. kinda feels like he's the older brother sometimes." His tone has taken on a slightly sad note, but he perks up and says "you know what they say; people grow til they're perfect and it didn't take me long at all. plus having a tall bro always keeps me looking up."

You snicker while Sans quickly snatches one of your albums and starts cackling over your baby pictures instead of his. He gushes over tiny you in a way that soon leaves you utterly mortified and
red in the face.

Of course, while it is nice to be able to laze around, after a while you can feel yourself going stir crazy. Even though everyone tells you it's fine, you can't help but feel guilty at your complete lack of effort while everyone else caters to your needs. Even Grillby keeps his promise of bringing food, though after the first night he sends his daughter in his place, thanks to the crowds at the bar keeping him busy. She's the green fire elemental you had seen many times before working the bar and yet somehow never made the connection that she's related to Grillby. She's soft-spoken, like her father, but you are thrilled to find that she can speak English, thanks to her new human friends from her school. Her name is Fuka and you're surprised to find that she does a lot of the cooking at her father's bar on the weekends. It's impressive, especially since she's balancing a full schedule at college. Her face blushes a deep blue and her flames crackle loudly when you tell her as such.

But it seems like every time you try to help out, the task, no matter how simple, is taken away by an overly cheerful someone who is all too happy to help. There's a voice in your head whispering that usual 'it's because they think you're too weak!' and other such bull that you try very hard not to listen to. But it's hard not to get aggravated with no solid sleep under your belt and a pounding headache that just won't go away and the twisting feeling of dread that just keeps building and building and damn it, if you want to make yourself a sandwich, you're going to make a freaking sandwich!

"Sans, I swear if you don't sit down right this instant, I'm going to throw this jar of nutella at you."

Sans peeks at you from the safety of the hallway. "i just wanted to-"

"SIT!"

He vanishes to the safety of the living room and you grumble to yourself about overbearing monsters while you slap together a nutella and strawberry sandwich. Perhaps not the most typical of sandwiches, but damn it you've had enough of the soups and casserole! Sans is curled up on the corner of the couch and he watches you with wide sockets as you plop down and take a massive bite out of your sandwich. You chew loudly, still miffed. Man, this is really good!

"What?" you finally ask as he continues to watch you eat.

"i was um...i was just gonna ask if you could leave the nutella out so i could make one too." He seems torn between fear and great amusement as you stare at him. "babe, you're gonna lose your sanswich," he snickers, pushing your open jaw up with a finger.

"Oh I'm gonna lose something alright!" you mock screech and pounce on him, smushing the remainder of your sandwich on his face. He's not expecting that and the two of you wind up toppling off the couch to the floor in a tangled mess of giggling bones and smeared nutella. Sans is gasping through his laughter and though he wiggles a bit, he's not really trying to free himself. "ok! you win!"

Catching your breath, you grab a nutella covered strawberry that's stuck to his skull and pop it in your mouth. "You owe me a new sandwich."

"but i thought you wanted to be indep-ahh!" He squirms wildly as you wiggle your fingers threateningly over his ribs again. "ok! i'll make you a new sandwich!"

"Lots of strawberries please," you say with a satisfied smirk, rolling off of him.

Of course, it's not all food fights and fun. Your head pounds with a constant headache that just won't go away, no matter how much advil you take. The oddest things set you off. It's all stuff you
wouldn't expect, like the pudding at the hospital. A bowl of red jello triggers a severe panic attack, the glint from a pair of scissors Toriel uses to open a bag of something dark and liquidy sends you running blindly to your room and loud sudden noises never fail to make you flinch. But worst of all is when you decide to watch the entire Star Wars set in a row. Sans has seen them all by this point, but never in a full marathon. You had your own issues with the prequel movies, but you agreed to watch the marathon with him. When you reached the end of the Revenge of the Sith and got hit with that death scene again, you couldn't stop yourself from wailing and clinging to Sans, who similarly starts crying. That death, which had been sad and admittedly made you shed a few tears the first time you saw it, hits far too close to home now for both of you.

Poor, sweet, wonderful Sans. At times you almost forget that despite that strength and love that never failed to pour out of him, he has more than his share of terrors too. Having you here with him, needing him so desperately, doesn't miraculously cure him of that. Seeing you struggling so much is taking a toll on him as well. There are mornings over that next week where he can't even move from the bed and seeing him so despondent and drained makes your own head fill up with that terrible cloud. Those are the hard days, when the two of you can only sleep and hold each other. Even the better days are heavy with fear and it makes you both angry and sad. You survived your ordeal. Sans rescued you. Yet the shadows of what happened continue to haunt you. It's been less than two weeks since it happened, but it feels like an eternity. Isn't this supposed to be the happy ending?

Ha. Like life would be that easy.

"what're ya laughing at?" Sans asks sleepily. The two of you are currently sprawled on the couch. There's some kind of housing show on that neither of you are really watching.

You rub at your aching head. "Real happy endings are kind of complicated, aren't they?"

"life is complicated," he murmurs. "kinda sucks sometimes."

"Yep." You stare up at the ceiling. If you squint, you can almost see that odd glowing door that's been popping up in your dreams constantly since you got home from the hospital. Every single time you came close to opening it, something in your Soul would lurch with terror, forcing you to wake up. But the need to see what lays beyond is driving you crazy! You got so close last night too. You could actually feel the cold metal of the knob beneath your hand when Sans had started whimpering in his sleep, jolting you awake.

"'s not all bad though," he continues, giving you a wide smile. "got some pretty good company to pass the time."

You rub his hand, your smile fading a little. "Sans, please don't take this as me telling you to go away. But don't you think you should try to find another job? As much as I love having you stay with me, I think you need to get out of the house."

Sans had quit his job at the hot dog place pretty soon after you disappeared. You knew he had hated working there as it was, but it was something that kept him busy. You're worried about him falling back into his old habits that Papyrus had told you about. Of course, you can't really talk; the station's given you quite a bit of time off for recovery. Had you been forced to heal at a normal human rate, such a long time would be much appreciated but as it is, you're starting to go stir crazy. But at least you're getting paid for your 'recovery time'.

He's quiet for a long moment. "i've got savings," he finally mumbles.

"That's not the point," you say. "I just-"
The front door opens with a sharp bang. You flinch, pressing against the cushions without thinking. Sans sits up, putting a hand reassuringly on your arm and glares towards the front door. But before he can say anything-

"Alright people! It is intervention time!" Undyne strides into the room; judging by the wetness she's trailing in, it must have just stopped raining. Papyrus and Alphys are close behind her, also tracking in mud. Oh, Toriel is not going to be happy about that.

"Um, hi guys," you say, your heart slowing down a little. "What are you doing here?"

"IT IS AN INTERVENTION!" Papyrus shouts. "WE WERE ORIGINALLY GOING TO CALL IT A FRIENDLY CAPTURING BUT ALPHYS SAID THAT WASN'T A GOOD IDEA. SO WE SWITCHED THE NAME TO SOMETHING LESS FRIGHTENING FOR YOU HUMAN!"

Undyne nearly pounces on you, lifting you closer to her face. "Have you brushed you teeth today?" She sniffs and wrinkles her nose as your face goes red. "Go brush your teeth! Put your shoes on! We're going out!" She picks you up and stashes you under her arm as she stomps towards the bathroom. You squirm, but her grip is like iron.

"Wait, what? Where exactly are we going?"

"To quote a tiny man with hairy feet, we're going on an adventure!" She flashes you a wide, toothy grin before shoving you into the bathroom. "You have five minutes! Clean up!"

You stare at the door as she slams it shut, a little perplexed. But she does have a point. It's sometime in the afternoon and you haven't done a thing to clean yourself up for the day. You quickly scrub your teeth and brush through you hair before ducking into your room to put some actual pants on. You're not sure what's going on, but the chance to get out of the house has you oddly excited. It wasn't that you were banned from leaving or anything. But given circumstances as they are you just haven't had the energy. But it looks like Undyne and the others are about to force some of theirs onto you. You just manage to slip your jeans up over your hips when Undyne smashes open your door and practically drags you back into living room. Sans is up and not looking terribly happy.

"so where we going?" he asks Undyne dryly.

She wiggles a finger at him. "You and Papyrus are gonna spend some good brotherly bonding time somewhere else. We girls are gonna have some fun."

Sans doesn't like that at all. His sockets flash briefly and you step towards him. You lean forward, whispering gently. "Hey, it's okay. You should spend time with Papyrus."

He hesitates, glancing at his brother. Papyrus looks back at him hopefully and if you didn't know him so well, you might have missed with brief flash of loneliness and sorrow that passes through the taller brother's sockets. A breath escapes Sans' teeth quietly. "i...i guess."

You press a quick kiss against his cheek. "Have fun with your brother. You need this. Pretty sure Paps needs this too."

Sans left out a huff of resignation, his gaze slipping over to Alphys. "hey, watch and make sure your crazy gillfriend doesn't push her too much, 'kay?"

Undyne slings an arm over your shoulder. "Please, give her more credit you lazy nerd. She's strong and we all know it, right?" She gives you a light tap on the shoulder.
"D-don't worry Sans," Alphys says as well, smiling reassuringly. "We've got a g-good plan laid out. Oh! That reminds m-me." Alphys digs into her over-sized purse and pulls out a new phone, almost identical to the one you lost the day you got kidnapped. Papyrus had managed to catch up to the purse thief (who you are fairly positive was working with the kidnappers) and get your purse back, though the man had slipped away after throwing your purse aside. At that moment, Papyrus had heard you scream and ran back without checking the contents. Everything but your phone was still in there. You can only imagine that it had long ago been taken apart and examined somewhere.

"I added a few n-new security features," she says rather proudly, handing the phone to you. "Voice activated alarms, a permanently active tracking system that only those with the pass-code can access and it has a can of mace built in. I was originally going to p-put in a taser b-but...."

You put the phone in your purse, giving her a wide smile. "Thank you Alphys. You didn't have to."

Undyne looks to Sans, a little puffed up with pride for her girlfriend. "There, you see? She's got her phone back now. You've got nothing to worry about. Now let's go! We're wasting daylight!"

The two girls head out to the driveway and you move to follow them but Sans tugs you back, planting a long kiss on your cheek. "call me if you need to leave," he whispers in a voice hoarse with worry.

You return his kiss. "I will. Try to have some fun with Pap okay?"

"LET'S GO GIRLY!" Undyne's howl sends you scampering out to the beat up old car that Alphys sometimes borrows from the university. Of course, driving makes her insanely nervous so Undyne usually does the driving, which makes you insanely nervous. But she's a surprisingly careful driver and she takes you into the busy part of the city. All questions about exactly what they've got planned are either laughed off or completely ignored. So you lean back and just try to enjoy the ride. It feels like a lifetime since you've gone into the city for fun. This could be fun.

The first place they take you is a little corner spa and salon that's run by a very pretty family of tree-like elementals, all of them glowing with various colors and energies. They recognize you immediately, thanks to the news stories that had covered your abduction and monsters tendency to spread gossip like wildfire. They gently touch your arms and hair, sending pleasant waves of warmth over your skin. They lead you to a reclining chair and you're given the full spa treatment. You almost fall asleep when they wash your hair with warm water; the soothing massage of their fingers in your hair almost makes your headache go away. Then they give your feet and hands a scrubbing treatment, leaving your skin tingling with a strange magical energy. They offer you a huge variety of polishes for your nails and you finally settle on a color that shimmers with blues and greens. Undyne and Alphys are getting their nails painted as well. Undyne flashes her now deep purple fingers at you while Alphys quietly squeals over her hot pink claws. They gesture for you to show off your nails and receive a great whoop of approval when you wiggle your toes at them.

The elementals refuse payment, simply stating that what you've done for monster kind is payment enough and they're so sincere about it that you feel bad trying to press the issue. You leave the spa feeling like a new woman. The elementals had trimmed up your hair a bit and you can smell the sweet scent of flowers from whatever kind of shampoo they used floating around your head. The scent helps to keep your headache under control and you actually find yourself hungry as Alphys leads you to a specialized cafe a few blocks down. As expected, it's some kind of hip futuristic place that has bubble tea, nitrogen ice cream and other scientific themed foods. It's all very Alphy-like and she's clearly a regular here because the college aged kids behind the greet her warmly. They too recognize you and give you a free bubble tea. It's surprisingly good and Undyne gives Alphys a high five when your eyes widen at the first sip.
When you are pleasantly full, Undyne informs you there's one last place to hit before the sun sets. It's close enough that you just walk. It's still a little cold out but it seems winter has already moved on from the city. It's still wet out from the rainfall and the smell of wet asphalt and grass makes a warmth grow in your chest that is enough to chase away the chill of the air.

"Hey nerd," Undyne says suddenly, her voice a little subdued. "I know we kinda just snatched you out of the house and that definitely pissed Sans off a bit. But you know why we did it right?"

"Papyrus was really worried," Alphys adds, putting her hot pink tipped hand on Undyne's arm. "He s-said it was like b-being back underground. He was w-worried the two of you were just gonna s-sink into the couch. He can um...well you know he's a light sleeper and h-he's knows about the n-nightmares. He didn't know what to d-do so he asked us to help."

Papyrus had been that worried? A little guilt twists at your stomach.

"And nothing helps clear the mind like fresh air and pampering! Least that's what Mettaton says," Undyne admits with a shrug. "He's a stuck up prick but he's usually right about stuff like that."

You slip between the two girls and loop arms with them. "You guys are the best friends I could ask for. I'm sorry for worrying you guys."

Undyne ruffles your hair fondly. "Hey, that's what happens when you leave a pair of lazy bones alone."

"He's trying really hard," you murmur, defending him from the gentle jab. "He's not exactly the best at taking care of himself and he's been taking such good care of me this whole time. I just...I got pretty messed up in that place." You look down at the ground, little tears of shame stinging your eyes. You attempt to pull your arms out but they both squeeze your limbs tightly.

"We know that, dork," Undyne says kindly.

"You need t-time to heal. Sans does too. We just wanted to r-remind you that you don't have t-to depend on just each other. We're here for you too." Alphys sounds like she's going to cry and you certainly feel like it too.

You stop walking and pull them in for a hug. It's full of warmth and heart rending love. They're right; they've been right here for you this whole time. "Thank you ," you whisper, squeezing tightly. "I love you guys so much."

Undyne sniffs loudly, patting your head. "Geez, no waterworks nerd! That's not fair!"

The three of you walk with arms locked and soon arrive at your final destination. It's not what you expect.

"The park?" you ask in confusion, looking around the playground. It's after school hours, so there are some kids playing on the equipment. You've never been to this one before. It's pretty big.

"This was actually Papyrus' idea. And...ah, there he is." Undyne points to the other side of the park and you spy the skeleton brothers before they spot you. Sans is smiling widely, easily and he's wearing a new coat. It's black and stylish, but still has that slightly poofy quality he likes in his jackets. It looks really good on him and your heart does a little flip flop.

Papyrus notices you before Sans does and with a great shout, he covers Sans' sockets. Sans squirms under his grip while Papyrus yells "HUMAN! COME CLOSER SO YOU CAN SURPRISE SANS!"
The yelling kinda defeats the purpose of a surprise, but you grin and does as he says, walking over to
the brothers. When Papyrus deems you perfect, he releases Sans. His gaze immediately zooms on to
your face and a bright blush lights his cheeks even as he grins widely. He doesn't say a word before
pulling you close and crushing your lips with a deep kiss. You melt beneath his warmth, your arms
wrapping around his ribs. He smells amazing, like mint and chocolate yet somehow fresh and tangy
at the same time.

He finally parts from you with a gasp, his pupils gleaming. "you look so alive," he murmurs, running
a hand over your face. "you're so beautiful."

You blush brightly. "We um, we went to the spa. Hey, look at my nails!" You wiggle your fingers at
him and he catches your hand, turning it so the polish glints.

"dang paps, you didn't tell me they were going to a spa. i could've gotten matching nails."

"YOU DON'T HAVE NAILS SANS."

Sans' sockets squint with delight. "wow paps, you really-" "nailed that point home didn't ya?"

You can hear Undyne and Alphys groaning even over Papyrus' yell of dismay. He takes your hand
and tugs you away from Sans. "QUICKLY, WE MUST MOVE BEFORE HIS TERRIBLE PUNS
RUB OFF ON YOU ANYMORE THAN THEY ALREADY HAVE!"

"Oh no worries Pap," you say with a slightly evil smirk. "I've been really polishing up my act."

Papyrus stares at you like you've betrayed him and you can't help a fit of laughter that soon melts his
mock angry face into a wide smile. He picks you up suddenly, giving you a great hug. "IT IS VERY
GOOD TO HEAR YOUR LAUGH AGAIN! I SUPPOSE I CAN PUT UP WITH PUNs IF IT
MEANS YOU ARE HAPPY MY FRIEND."

You hug him back tightly, your legs dangling in the air. "It feels good to laugh. Thanks Papyrus."
He sets you down but you continue to hold onto his hand. "I'm sorry I've been taking so much of
Sans' attention. I'm sure it's been lonely for you."

Papyrus tilts his head slightly before kneeling down. He's so tall that he's still nearly eye level with
you. "I have not been lonely," he says in a voice that sounds almost normal. "I am very happy that
you are here and recovering. It is the same for my brother. He is recovering and he needs you too.
He just sometimes needs to clear his skull. That is why I asked Undyne and Alphys to help me with
our friendly capt-intervention," he switches quickly. "You do not need to worry about the great
Papyrus."

You wrap your arms around his neck with another hug. "I love you Papyrus. You're the best brother
Sans and I could have."

Papyrus lets out a loud 'NYEH HEH HEH!' that makes your ears ring. "THAT IS RIGHT! AND
YOU ARE THE BEST SISTER! NOW COME THIS WAY! WE SHALL FINISH WITH A
REFRESHING ROUND ON THE SWINGS! THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS WELL SKILLED IN
PUSHING HUMANS TO GREAT HEIGHTS!"

You follow Papyrus over to the swings, glancing back at Sans. He's talking to Alphys, a strange
expression on his skull. It looks almost like longing. But he's clearly hesitating about something. You
catch his gaze and he waves at you. You're curious as to what they're saying but don't get a chance to ask. Papyrus quickly helps you sit on one of the swings. He's eager to show you his pushing skills. You feel a little silly; you haven't been on a playground swing in years. You honestly can't remember the last time.

"All right Pap. Show me what you've got!" you call to him, lifting your feet slightly off the ground.

"NYEH HEH! PREPARE YOURSELF HUMAN!"

His gloved hands grab the chains on either side of you and pull back, lifting you up into the air. A flutter of excitement goes through you and you giggle. Papyrus keeps you up in the air for several long seconds.

"ARE YOU READY?"

"Totally ready!"

Papyrus releases you and your heart shoots up into your throat as you drop down and swing forward. Holy crap, you've forgotten how much fun this is! You swing back and his hands give you a gentle push, sending you flying upwards again. You close your eyes, savoring the dropping sensation in your stomach. You kick your feet as you reach the high point and fall back. "Higher!" you call to Papyrus.

He obliges, this push a little stronger. As you sail upwards again, you let yourself imagine that you're flying, up and away from the world below you. The tension that's had such a strong hold on your chest since you woke in the hospital eases and you smile widely as you feel the tightness and dread melting away.

Then with a bright flash, a strike of pain greater than any you've felt since your torture rips through your chest and travels up to your head. You can't see anything but flashes of white and you can feel yourself slipping from the swing as you curl in on yourself. You hit the ground and it knocks the wind out of your chest. As you fight to breathe you hear something echoing in your mind. Words, twisted, broken words that burn and don't make any sense.

There's a name. Not yours.

_Gast-_!

_Shhh. Not yet._

You see Sans running to you as the world begins to fade into darkness.
Someone jostles you, yelling in a voice tight with fear. A soundless snarl of frustration that isn't yours twists your face as the door and its secrets are pulled away, hidden behind a veil in your mind. You must have only be out for a few seconds because you open your eyes and you're lying on the damp ground, your head throbbing at an intensity that instantly makes your eyes water up.

Sans is hovering above you, his left socket flashing wildly. You grab at his jacket with a numb hand, desperate to tell him before it's too late, you have to warn him! "Sans, I-help-it's...he's-!" Your throat closes up painfully, like a hand is wrapped around your neck and you choke, struggling to breathe. He's silencing you, that thing is-!

"easy!" Sans pulls you into his lap, running his hand over your face. "breathe with me, calm down."

"there you go, that's it." Sans is clearly fighting to stay calm, every breath slow and deliberate. "still with me?"

You nod, closing your eyes again.

He shakes you, bones clacking quietly. "no, no going back to sleep right now, ok?"

"Not sleeping," you mumble, putting a hand on your forehead. "What happened?"

"HUMAN I AM SO SORRY!"


"What the hell happened?" Undyne's voice isn't much quieter than Papyrus'. It's like throwing whiskey into a fire.

"It is my fault!" Papyrus is making a great effort to speak softly but his voice is trembling and even from down on the ground, you can see orange tears budding in his sockets. "I pushed her too high!"

"No, no Pap." You try to reach for him, despite being on the ground. "I let go. I must've gotten dizzy or something. Not your fault. I'm okay, really."
Sans' grip tightens slightly. "babe, you're bleeding."

"Huh?" You pat your face only to find that you are indeed bleeding from a scrape on your cheek. The sight of blood on your fingers makes a wave of vertigo wash over you. "Oooh." Okay. Yep. Still fine. You are absolutely not going to pass out again or puke. Besides it's not like you've never seen your own...blood...before....Oh crap, you're going to be sick.

"pap could you heal her please? she looks almost pale as me." Sans tries to joke but his voice is too tense for it to work.

Papyrus kneels down and places his gloved hand just above the wound and his magic begins to pour into you. You've been healed enough times now to recognize the subtle differences the magical energies. Papyrus' magic sends waves of tingling energy through your body, like crisp mint and sunshine. Toriel was all things warmth and soft, her magic like the gentle glow of light through a window at home. Grillby's magic, which you've only felt the one time, was wild and yet somehow tightly contained at the same time. It made your insides burn in a pleasant sort of way, like the way your muscles would feel after a good run while at the same time slowed down any feelings of panic.

Papyrus' magic is a little unsteady, thrown off by his upset state and you squirm a little as his magic seals up the scrape on your cheek. It doesn't hurt, but goosebumps rise up on your arm. It's over in just a few moments and the stinging sensation on your cheek fades. But it does nothing for your headache.

"Can we go home?" You whisper.

He shifts slightly, helping you to sit up. Oh no, his new coat is splattered with dirt! "yeah, course."

You start to feel that familiar tingle crackle through the air and very quickly put a hand on his arm. "No shortcuts. Unless you want puke on Toriel's floor."

"Good point." Undyne kneels and throws your arm up over her shoulders, helping you stand. "Let's go wimp. Car's not far. We'll take you home."

People are staring thanks to the commotion, but thankfully none of them attempt to approach you as Undyne practically carries you out of the park and back to the car. She ignores your insistence that you can walk just fine. Sans is glued to your side as well, making it even harder to walk. But by the time you reach the car your legs are wobbling and your damp clothes are practically frozen to your body because of course you just happened to land in a puddle when you fell. You squeeze into the back seat between the boys, shivering. Undyne, as much as she hates the heat, cranks it up without anyone asking and it helps a little. You feel awful for ruining the day out and stay quiet the entire ride back.

When you get back to the house, the shivers have turned into full out shaking and you change into your fluffiest pair of pajamas as fast as your pounding head will allow while Alphys offers to make some hot tea. You head back out to the living room where the others are waiting and snuggle up to Sans. He pulls a blanket over you, rubbing your shoulders.

"Thanks baby," you whisper as you lean into him.

"any better?"

You nod and take the offered cup of tea from Alphys. "Yeah, I'm fine. Freezing, but I'm fine." Your toes and hands feels like icicles. Thankfully, Sans doesn't seem to mind. In fact, at your words you feel the heat of his bones increase slightly, buzzing quietly with magical energy. You sigh and let the
warmth wrap you up. "Seriously, I think I just got dizzy and let go. I think the chains on the swing might have been a little wet too. I'm sorry I had to cut our time out short."

"It's b-better that you're s-safe," Alphys says quietly. She looks down at her claws, twisting her hands together. "I know you said that you d-didn't want to be examined b-but Sans and I are both concerned a-about the state of your Soul...um, so if it's okay, I'd like t-to take a quick look." Color lights her cheeks and she quickly adds, "It'd be only visual and I'd be very fast, I just want to make sure everything is healing properly and I mean I'm no expert at human Souls but at least I'd be able to make sure nothing drastic is happening and-" she finally takes a breath- "that's only if you want me to."

You can feel your shoulders tensing up at the idea. But they're right. You haven't even let Sans really look at it since the rescue. It's just felt way too fragile and heavy to be exposed again. You grit your teeth and nod. "Okay. Just for a minute."

Undyne gets to her feet, pulling Papyrus. "Hey, um, let's go make dinner. Give them some privacy yeah?"

"YES! THAT IS AN EXCELLENT IDEA!" Papyrus heads towards the kitchen, sounding a little cheerier at the thought of making food. It always seemed to cheer him up. "LADY TORIEL AND FRISK WILL BE SO SURPRISED WHEN THEY ARRIVE AT HOME!"

Surprised? Most certainly, given those two's history of kitchen disasters. But admittedly, Papyrus was getting a lot better, thanks to instruction and guidance from Toriel. Hopefully the two won't get carried away this time. That reminds you, you need to make sure that mud is cleaned up too and-

No, now you're just trying to stall. You set the tea down before you take a breath, gripping Sans' hand tightly. "I'm ready."

Sans gauges your expression carefully, his ever present smile tight and small. "ok. just tell me if you need to stop. it'll be quick." His gaze drops to your chest and his expression softens, like it always does when he watches your Soul. His hand escapes the blanket and makes that quick pulling motion and you feel your heavy Soul sluggishly respond. It takes longer than it did before and if your Soul had heels, it'd be dragging them. But finally, with a quiet pop, your Soul comes into view and almost instantly your eyes well up as the world around you darkens slightly.

Sans immediately starts to lower his hand. "shit, sorry babe-"

You shake your head. "I'm okay," you whisper, staring at your Soul. The last time you saw your Soul out in the open like this, you were strapped down to a chair, screaming as liquid fire burned through your body. Ever since then, even with Sans' gentle presence occasionally sparking brightly in the deepest part of your Soul, it's felt heavy and weighed down in your chest and a quiet terror has eaten at you this whole time that something's wrong with you on a level you don't dare to even consider. But it's still bright, still glowing and alive and...

You frown. "Were there always so many white cracks?"

Among the glowing cracks of determination, you can sense more than see thin white lines twining and twisting around your Soul, barely noticeable but most definitely there. There's a very subtle hint of blue mingling with them, but most of them are pure white. Sans rubs your back reassuringly as Alphys takes a closer look. Her gaze is focused, sharp and you can't bring yourself to watch her. She's not Nahn. No, she's your friend and you fully trust her. But that look of curiosity and analyzing sends a chill up your spine.
Sans’ gaze is on your Soul as well, but it’s soft and open with wonder. He presses a kiss to your cheek. "those jerks did some really bad damage babe," he says gently, working his thumb over a knot in your back. It feels nice. "then when you...when i almost...." He’s having a hard time getting the words out. "um, in the hospital before you woke up, it was only your determination keeping your soul together. when you came back there were some new cracks and i think what was left of my magic in your system patched you up. that's gotta be it, right?"

He directs this question at Alphys, who's frowning slightly. "It definitely appears to be monster energy. I can't be sure without my equipment." She points to one of the thin white lines, carefully keeping a few inches of distance between her and you Soul. Her voice holds a mixture of horror and wonder. "Those scientists almost cracked your Soul by trying to pierce it. Normally that'd be enough to shatter a Soul, especially after the shooting. I think Sans is right; monster essence filled up the new cracks and kept your Soul from falling apart."

What does that mean for you? "Am I some kind of monster/human hybrid now?" You ask causally, like you're joking but it's a true thought that pops up in your mind. Not that being part monster would be bad of course. It's just...frightening. You aren't going to sprout horns or something right?

Alphys shakes her head. "No! No...well, I mean, I've never dealt with anything like this. I don't know exactly what this means. I can do some research and maybe I can find some answers."

Fantastic. You stare at your Soul that feels so familiar and yet somehow completely alien. There's something more that's off but there's nothing that you can see to explain the feeling. Sans, noticing your obvious distress, shifts his hand and your Soul sinks back into your chest. The heavy feeling in your chest returns as the colors surrounding you flash back to normal. You take a deep breath, pulling the blanket up over your head as you recover.

"but she's ok right?" Sans asks Alphys quietly, continuing to rub your shoulder. "it looks whole to me."

"Yes, it does to me too. But I'd really like to get a better look. I just have this feeling that we're overlooking something."

He's quiet for a moment. "hey, i need to talk to her about that thing we discussed. mind checking in on paps and undyne? make sure the kitchen's in one piece?"

"Oh, yes, sure thing."

You hear the armchair creak as Alphys stands and pads off towards the kitchen, which you now notice is oddly quiet.

"hey. you wanna hear a joke?"

"Not really," you mumble into the blanket.

"ok, here goes," he plows ahead anyway. What a goober. "what's the difference between a piano, a tuna and a jar of glue?"

Your own throat betrays you, letting a snort escape. "Ah ha...wait, what the heck does glue have to do with it?"
He nudges your shoulder. "ah, well i knew you'd get stuck there."

Oh this cheeky little-! "Noooo!" you groan loudly while Sans cackles. "Freaking...no!"

"oh sweetheart," he mock simpers. "everyone falls for the obvious ones at least once."

You burrow deeper into the blanket, curling away from his teasing fingers tapping you. "At least I didn't fall for the 'up dog' joke!"

"really? you're bringing that one up again?"

You peek out at him. His pupils are glittering with mirth. "You're the one who fell for the worst joke in history. This one was just misleading."

He shrugs. "i'm still counting it as a win."

"Keep telling yourself that babe." You snicker at the memory of Sans' mortified face as he realized his great mistake. Absolutely priceless. Papyrus had laughed so hard he knocked a mug off the desk. Of course that had only served to make you laugh harder....

Huh? Wait, Papyrus hadn't been right there when Sans told you about that story. Furthermore, you'd been outside right? Where the heck did a mug come from?

Sans waves a hand in front of your face. "hey space cadet, it wasn't that bad of a joke, was it?"

You blink, jolted out of your confusing thoughts. "Yeah, sorry. I was just coming to terms with joining the 'sad saps who fell for dumb jokes' club."

"as president of the club i warmly welcome you." Sans ruffles your hair gently.

You stick your tongue out at him. "Okay Mr President, what were you and Alphys talking about?"

His teasing mirth fades a little. He rubs a hand over his skull for a moment before answering. "um, it's about the university. more specifically alphy's department. they offered me a job."

You sit up a little straighter. "A job at the university? Doing what?"

"a bunch of stuff. i mean, they know who i am cause i've helped alphys out before. they even offered me a job back before we met but i didn't take it cause...well. it too much work and back then, i didn't think all of this would last anyway. but now they saw what al and i managed to do with bonding our souls and they're pretty impressed to say the least. they've lost quite a few of their guys, like nahn, they've got a lot of holes to fill. al thought i'd be a good fit." He doesn't look terribly excited about it though.

"Sans, this wonderful news!" You smile widely at him. "You're going to take it, right?"

He shrugs, looking away from you. "i dunno," he mumbles.

"Why wouldn't you?"

His sockets scrunch with confusion. "sweetheart, you were tortured for days at the hands of scientists who worked at this university. and now that same university wants me to be a scientist again. i mean, i haven't done real work in a lab since..." He lets out a humorless laugh and rubs at his face. "i don't even know how long it's actually been. i dunno if it's right to go back. not after everything that happened underground and then what happened to you."
You shift a bit, scooting your legs under his and wrap your arms around him. "Do you want to work as a scientist again?"

He shrugs again.

"Sans."

With a deep breath, he finally admits, "yeah. i miss it. i miss working, really working. it's messed up of me, isn't it? Especially considering everything I went through at my old man's hands."

"Baby, it's not messed up." You kiss his cheek gently. "You grew up around science. Even though you had a lot of really hard times, you learned to love the stars and the math and the big technical terms that make you sound so smart. It's part of who you are."

His mouth lifts very slightly. "and you're ok with that? you'd be with a scientist. those people...what they did is close to what gaster and i tried to do at times. hell, paps and i are the result of him messing with souls and monster energy. are you ok with me going back to all that? "

You gnaw at your lip for a second before answering that. "The past is part of who we are but I can't let it stop us from moving forward. You're not the people who did all of those horrible things to me. It's like saying all bosses are awful because a few of them may be jerks. I'm not gonna say it'll be easy for me and sorry, but I won't be dropping off forgotten lunches at the lab any time soon."

He lets out a little snort at that.

"But I'll be okay. You should do this." You intertwine your fingers with his. "I think it'll help us both move on. We can't keep laying around on the couch forever."

"i mean, i could-" You mock punch him and he laughs. "and uh, there is something else that might sweeten the deal a bit."

"And what's that?"

He runs his hand over the back of his skull, a habit you've noticed he has for when he's nervous. "the starting pay is nice. like really nice. enough to um...put a down payment on a house kind of nice. they're throwing in a big bonus for the short notice and the fact that they want me to do like three jobs at once."

You blink in surprise. "Really? Geez, they must be desperate to get their hands on you."

"right, but um about the house...thing." He squeezes your hand tightly before looking at you. "us staying here was supposed to be a temporary thing, right? and then everything went crazy and tori's been great and understanding and i know you really like it here but...."

You sit up a little, jaw dropping. Is he saying what you think he's saying?

He grins at the look on your face, a light blush dusting his cheekbones. "we've lived together for a while now anyway but, do you want to move into a home of our own?"

You leap at him, hugging him tightly and peppering his skull with kisses.

"oomph!" He laughs loudly, bones quaking under you. "gonna take that as a yes?"

"Did you really even have to ask?" You give him a long kiss on his teeth and he seems to melt under you. When you finally break apart, he's panting a little.
"there's just one thing."

"What's that?" you whisper, a little breathless yourself.

"i gotta start tomorrow morning."

...Oh.

~~~~~

"you sure you're comfortable?" Sans flutters over you like a distressed puppy, patting the pillows, rearranging the blanket and mug on the side table for the umpteenth time. "do you need more crackers? i can move the tv closer so you don't have to get up at all."

"Sans," you laugh, putting a hand out and stopping his frantic movement. "i'm okay i promise."

You're still absolutely freezing, even after spending the night wrapped in blankets with a hot water bottle. You're got thick socks and a hoodie on under the blanket Sans has tucked around you. He's already turned the heat up in the house but clearly it hasn't clicked on yet.

Everyone else is already gone. Toriel and Frisk left for school about an hour ago, Papyrus was out at his job, which had been super understanding of the circumstances and welcomed him back with open arms and Sans is dangerously close to running late for his first day. even though it's only going to take literal seconds to get over there. He's wearing some of the nicest clothes he's got; a dark blue button up and tie combo. It's the same thing he wore on your Christmas date but this time at least he's got proper shoes. He was going to just wear his usual stuff but at your insistence, he dressed up.

After all, you're sure he'll have plenty of opportunities to wear stained shirts and over-sized jackets once he's set to work.

He notices you giving him another look over and plucks at the tie. "isn't this too formal?" he mutters.

"it's your first day baby. it's always better to dress up than to dress down when you're making that first impression."

"but i already know all these people."

"...That's besides the point. now come here and give me a kiss." You take the tie out of his fingers and tug him closer to you. The kiss turns into something deeper and you can tell that as much as Sans is excited about his new job, there's a part of him that's also terrified to leave you alone.

"promise me you'll call if anything happens," he whispers hoarsely, staring into your eyes. "anything. i don't care what it is."

"i promise," you say, smiling reassuringly at him. "but nothing is going to happen. i'm just gonna sit here and look at houses." You pat the laptop on the couch next to you. "go have fun."

"eh, i'll try." The glint of his pupils betrays his glee. "see ya for lunch."

He blips out of sight and you chuckle to yourself. You jump when he reappears not ten seconds later, pecking your forehead quickly.

"one for the road," he smirks with a wink before vanishing again.

You love this goofy skeleton so freaking much.

True to your word, you spend the morning looking through houses for sale on a real estate website.
It's made slightly more difficult because while realtors are no longer allowed to discriminate, there are still some profiles that only accept human buyers; though it's very carefully worded to avoid legal trouble. After a while, you close the laptop and close your eyes.

You didn't sleep last night. Sans had stayed up with your for a while but eventually his sockets had slid shut. You had watched him sleep, the peaceful expression on his skull helping to slightly ease the turmoil in your mind. In all honesty, you'd been too scared to sleep. You couldn't shake the feeling that if you did, you might not wake up.

Now you can't fight the exhaustion that washes over you. You sink deeper against the couch cushions and let your eyes close. You begin to drift off almost immediately.

There's nothing to stop you now. No distractions, no screaming memories holding you back. You reach out and take the door handle, shoving the door open.

There's a hallway, shrouded in fog. You can't see the walls, or how far the walkway goes. Dim light from an unseen force partially lights the way. You take a step forward, the motion is completely soundless.

You can see something in the fog. Faces that you know. But there's something different about them. You see flashes of places that gleam with familiarity even though you know you've never been there before. A glowing lake, blue flowers, a golden hall, a snowy town covered in dust. The images fade away as soon as you look at them, like dust scattering in a breeze.

Keep going.

You continue to walk, silent and cold further into the fog. It seems to grow thicker, shrouding the walkway at times. It makes your feet stick and you have to sluggishly rip your legs from it's grip. The images grow more solid and yet more fuzzy, like a static image on a tv. You see Undyne jump across the walkway, obviously chasing something that's hidden in the dark. You see Sans kneeling in the snow, face buried in a blood-red scarf. You see Papyrus fall, his bones melting into dust before your eyes.

You've seen this before.

No, no you need to stop, you need to go back!

You try to drag your heels but now your legs won't follow your commands. There's another door melting from the shadows. It's pitch black and wobbling slightly, like it's make of thick ink. There's a dim part of your mind that feels your body, your real body thrashing against the couch, fighting to wake you up.

I think it is finally time to unlock that door. The voice in your head is almost gleeful.

You reach out to the door. It has no knob. Your hand is trembling. The fog is creeping up your legs, pinning you to the spot. Please, don't do this!

I told you the results would not be pleasant for you. A hand reaches out from the fog. It's stark white and cold and a perfect circle is punched through the palm. It takes your wrist and icy fire rips up your arm. It's time for you to remember our deal.

The hand forces you forward and the moment your fingers touch the door, the darkness within explodes and surrounds you, dragging you down into a place with no light and you scream as you
His first morning at the lab is admittedly, a little boring. Introductions, hi-how-are-you's, yada yada. He wants to get to the lab part. He still has questions about exactly how he managed to make your Soul and his bond like that and why the determination he injected into his system didn't leave any lasting effect. Or at least one that he could see. More important however, is the mystery surrounding those human and monster beings that Nahn and the others created down in that lab. All of the work that managed to get recovered is in code and while Alphys has managed to translate some of it, there are huge chunks of hidden text that may hold the answers he's looking for. What's really concerning about the whole thing is that you told him that there were monsters helping the psychos, providing answers when they ran into problems. As hard as it is to believe that monsters would actually help create the tools of their downfall, he trusts you and knows you wouldn't be mistaken about something like this. Yet he's never heard of these strange gray monsters. That and the fact that nobody else seems to know of them either is extremely worrying.

But Sans forces those thoughts out of his skull. He's eager to see you, even though it's just been a few hours. The old him would have scoffed to see him form such a needy attachment to anyone other than Papyrus. Even now he's a little unsettled by how unsettled he feels without you by his side. Of course, he knows the feelings are justified. He came so close to losing you. To losing everything once again. That thought still terrifies him.

His magic ripples through him as he takes the shortcut back home. He wonders how the house hunt is going. The look of utter joy in your eyes when he brought it up made all of his hesitations about taking the job disappear. He would do anything to keep that happiness on your face. He steps into the living room, frowning a little when he sees the rumpled blanket on the ground and no sign of you.

"babe?" He calls, looking around. His Soul lurches but is immediately soothed when he hears a drawer open and close from the kitchen. He lets out a pent up breath, walking towards the noise. "ok, i know i still owe you that nutella and strawberry sandwich so how about i make good on my tab today."

You're standing with your back to him and don't reply. You're standing so still.

Sans pauses, a trickle of unease moving through his bones. "unless you already made something. sweetheart?"

"Fascinating. I never thought that you would ever call someone sweetheart."

His bones lock in place. His mind goes blank. The inhuman words, the hoarse voice coming from your mouth are not yours. He can't be hearing this! It's not possible!

"Then again, you have caught me by surprise before." You turn and Sans feels his Soul throb with terror. Two deep bruise like lines are spread on your face. One reaches down your left cheek and the other is set above your right eye, disappearing into your hairline. Your eyes, your beautiful, colorful eyes are black and emotionless as you stare at him. You tilt your head and smile as Sans starts to hyperventilate.

"Hello Sans. It has been a while, hasn't it?"
Sorry about the super long wait for this chapter. This chapter was freaking nightmare to write for some reason. But here it is, better than late than never right?
The comment monster awaits your thoughts

Sans has occasionally heard the phrase 'so quiet you could hear a pin drop'. He's come across such a silence before. That memory is one of the clear ones. But even then, standing in an empty town full of dust, was it ever really silent down there? The crunching snow, the ever present wind that somehow existed in the caverns created a faint noise that was easy to miss under the usual clamor and life that filled the underground. It was when everyone was gone that he finally heard how loud those tiny noises could be.

In this moment however, he finally hears true and utter silence. It presses down around him like a smothering blanket and his mind is completely filled with a senseless confusion. He must be asleep, caught in one of the most vivid nightmares yet. This can't be real. Ga-he can't be here. A wide range of emotions threaten to overwhelm him; terror, disbelief, a tiny spark of something that might be...joy? But it's gone in a flash, eaten up by the horror of what's happening to you.

Gaster stares down at your right hand, flexing the fingers in a slow and curious manner. "Humans are very strangely solid. Or perhaps I merely forgot the feeling of having a body at all."

That can't be him speaking with your voice, harsh and straining to make the inhuman sounds of Wing Dings. It's the same language that Sans spoke for the first several years of his life, back before he was allowed to meet other monsters and learned that such a language was seen as confusing and strange.

"They truly are fascinating. It was my own mistake to underestimate just how strong these fragile creatures can be when driven by their determination." That pitch black gaze snaps back to him and Sans takes a single sharp breath; it's the first one he's taken since he walked in here. "Ah, but there I go getting caught up in all of the sensations." You-he laughs lightly and though Sans can hear the undertones of your beautiful laugh, it's drowned out by a terrifying clicking noise, like machinery in your throat. There are far more important matters that must be dealt with."

"d-dings!" Speaking breaks the hold on his bones and now Sans can't stop shaking. "i don't...what is this? how are you...?" His voice is weak, pitiful.

Gaster smiles. "It is good to see that you truly haven't forgotten me like everyone else. What a waste this all would have been if this turned out to be the wrong timeline. Or as you put it, the wrong branch." He rolls your eyes. "All of that time spent teaching you the fine points of scientific theories and you reduce the phenomenon of time and space to a tree. I expected more of you. I expected more than this." He gestures to the house. "A family home, a human partner?"
Sans, have you completely forgotten what humans have done to monster kind? Have you so easily forgotten what you went through at the hands of a single human?

There's a glint in your left hand and Sans is reeling back so fast he slams against the wall. The force of his bones sends a picture falling to the ground. It shatters on the tile floor, sending glass shards scattering. You're holding a thick kitchen knife tightly, the tiniest tremor shaking the blade. It takes every speck of strength Sans has to resist curling into a ball and screaming. He gasps harshly as the panic threatens to throw him back to that golden hall. No, focus. It's you. It's not that thing that massacred his people. You would never hurt him or anyone else like that.

But there was a time he believed Gaster could never commit an atrocity on such a high level either.

Gaster waves the knife casually, the harsh disapproval on your face turning into a smirk. You step past the broken glass; thankfully, you've got on thick socks so your skin is protected. Not that Gaster would have paid it any mind anyway. "That's right; you know just as well as I what humans and their determination are capable of. That will make this conversation easier." You take another step, glass crunching underfoot.

"s-stay back!" His socket flares and a wall of bones shoots up between him and Gaster. Gaster pauses, looking almost sad by the defensive response.

"How cold of you. That's not a kind greeting to give your revived guardian."

The laugh that escapes Sans is little more than a grunt. "no, i'd say this is a pretty normal response to seeing a guy's girlfriend possessed by the ghost of an old man." As usual, his sass response to stress makes a shining appearance as Sans focuses his gaze on your Soul. The bright twisting colors he knows so well are shrouded by thin strings of black that squirm almost like worms sticking out of an apple. The black tendrils extend outwards and up, the edges fading away into nothing. But something is clearly holding them up. In fact, you almost look like a puppet lifted by black strings that are tied to invisible hands. The sight makes his already weak knees threaten to give out completely. It's a vile violation, the likes of which he's only seen in his worst nightmares. If he had a stomach, he'd be emptying it.

Gaster of course notices what he's doing and your Soul sinks back behind a defensive wall, hiding it from view. "It seems you've forgotten basic manners as well Sans. Soul peeking is not polite."

"what have you done?" Sans growls, his socket flashing with rage. For a moment the disbelief and the terror are shoved aside because you are being toyed with and violated right before his eye sockets and this is unacceptable. "what have you done to her?!"

"She's still right here, you do not need to worry about that." Gaster puts the hand not holding the knife against your head. "Watching everything and quite frankly making this far more difficult than it needs to be." A frown crosses your face and for a split second, the color of your eyes flashes back before the inky blackness sinks back in. Sans still doesn't fully understand what's happening, but he feels a spark of pride nonetheless. That's his girl.

"Try to understand that is not an ideal situation for me either," Gaster continues, shifting slightly. He rolls your shoulders back, almost like he feels uncomfortable.

"if it's not ideal, how about you find some other place to hole up in and let her go?"

Your head tilts slightly, your darkened eyes growing terrifyingly wider. "Oh Sans, if only it were that easy."
Gaster's voice is distant and cold and it brings up memories of the way he acted in the days before the accident; when the man that Sans had slowly come to respect and even...care for disappeared into the harsh, uncaring persona that haunted him for so long. The wall of bones tremble slightly as his magic wavers with fear.

"Of course, you have only yourself and this girl to blame for this entire situation. I spent an eternity crafting my escape from that hellish place." Gaster takes a step closer to the bones. The glow of Sans' magic throws dark shadows over your face. "A lifetime of searching, the essence of countless timelines consumed chasing after false leads and hopes until I finally found the core line. Until I finally found you. And all of that was nearly wasted because you unleashed a storm inside the world and interrupted the flow of time. You and this girl did something I failed to foresee. And it nearly cost me everything." He's not stopping; only one more step and he'll hit the bones. Will it even effect him? You most certainly won't escape without damage.

"stop!" His attempt to sound commanding utterly fails and Gaster knows it. Sans presses himself against the wall as the bones flicker and fade away. You smile, finally stopping a few inches away. The scent of ozone pours off of you, sharp and strong. It makes his bones shiver.

"It's odd in it's own way; I had calculated that I would end up in this human's remains but certainly not with her Soul still intact. However, thanks to that little incident and our deal, this may work out better than I had imagined."

Sans blinks. "what the hell are you talking about? her remains?"

Gaster extends your hand, placing a single finger against Sans' cranium. If Sans pressed any closer to the wall, he'd end up molding with it. Sweat creeps down his skull. He can't break eye contact.

"Come now Sans. Use that knowledge I taught you. Do you really think that human scientists could have come up with the magical technology needed to create a monster vessel? Even with my help they were years away from creating anything usable."

There's too much information and twice as many questions running rampant through Sans' skull. Gaster helped the crack pot scientists? But how...it clicks. "those monsters that helped...oh my god. the other assistants." He had completely forgotten. When Gaster fell and the Core imploded into the Void, or whatever the hell had happened, Sans and Gaster weren't the only ones in the building. There were others there. Sucked up into neither the Void or back into an unsteady timeline where no one knew who the Royal Scientist was but dumped somewhere in between. Nameless. Faceless. Forgotten.

"Finding them was almost as difficult as finding the core timeline." Gaster pulls away, seemingly satisfied by the look of horrified realization on Sans' face. "But what a find they were. By myself, I could not connect to a single timeline without great effort and loss of self afterwards. But I could send them for brief periods of time, using them as a means of communication to those willing to listen. Those idiots only got as far as they did thanks to my knowledge sent through the Void. Of course, they thought they were creating a weapon that they could control at will." He laughs humorlessly. "Those fools had no idea what was really happening. Tell them what they want to hear and humans will run right in the direction you want them to, all the while thinking it's their idea."

But why? Sans' eye lights dart to the knife still in your hand before speaking. "dings, if you knew what those people were up to, why would you help them? you hate humanity. they wanted to use us as weapons-"
"You think I was helping them to build a weapon?" He actually sounds amused. "No, I was not building a living weapon for their pointless cleansing. I had one goal: finding a way to escape the Void. But without a body, my Soul would simply dissolve into nothing, if I managed to get here at all."

It's like a sucker punch to the ribs. Gaster was trying to create a body? "ok, hold on just a moment there," he says in a shaky voice. "i don't really get what's going on here, but i do get being desperate. i get it, ok? but those pieces of garbage killed humans and monsters for their sick research. if you were helping them, does that mean you told them to rip apart the souls of monsters and humans and mush them together like clay?" He doesn't want to believe that Gaster is the one responsible for that. That would mean that his old man was behind the cruel torture that you were forced to endure. "dings, how could you?"

"Do you think I wanted to see my people killed?" Gaster snarls suddenly. "I had no choice Sans. Not after you gave up on trying to find me. Not after you THREW ME IN. THE. VOID."

Sans shrinks before the sudden unchecked rage in your eyes, Gaster's hissing triggering a reaction in him that nearly sends him to the floor. He can't bear to see the disgust and hatred burning out from the face he loves, even though it's not your anger. "i tried dings," he whispers desperately. "i tried to find you. i did everything i could-"

"But it wasn't enough." The hand holding the knife is shaking. With your fear or Gaster's rage? He can't tell. "You ran into problems and just like you always do, you gave up. Worse, when I tried to reach out, almost losing myself in the Void every time I did it, you ran away. You're a coward Sans!" Gaster brings the knife up and Sans flinches as he embeds it in the wall next to his skull. He can't stop a whimper of fear. "You threw me away and never looked back. Well, too bad for you; I made it back regardless. And now-"

His voice is cut off suddenly as a flare of light bursts from your Soul, shattering the wall that Gaster had hidden it behind. It throbs and flashes brightly, seeming to swell and twist under black strands of Gaster's hold. Your face twists with pain and a groan escapes you as your head shakes violently from side to side.

"S-Saaaans..." His name slips out in a terrified wail and that's your voice, just yours, crying out. "P-please...!"

His Soul leaps up his throat and he reaches out to you desperately. c'mon baby, fight him! But before he can speak, he feels a sharp tug on his Soul and he's slammed back up against the wall. He cries out at the harsh impact. His Soul is heavy, holding him firmly in place. Damn blue magic! But it only lasts for a second because your eyes flicker between black and color filled at a terrifying pace, all the while glowing with a dim blue light before you cry out again. Sans feels the magic holding him down ease slightly. He can move, but not enough to break free of the hold keeping him against the wall.

"ENOUGH!" Gaster howls the command and your body stops shaking. One hand comes up to cover part of your face. "Stay quiet! You made this deal!" He's no longer speaking to Sans. "You're only making this worse on yourself. Now shut up and stay down before you rip our Souls apart!"

A deep shudder runs through your body and then the quiet presence of the bond between the two of you that still beats in his Soul seems to fade slightly. Sans kicks out desperately, fear making his
bones cold. "damn it dings, stop! don't hurt her!"

Gaster's gaze snaps back to Sans. "Felt that did you? Fascinating. Simply fascinating."

"yeah, ok totally fascinating! you can study me all you want. just let her go. what happened in the past is between you and me. she's got nothing to do with this."

"Oh she has everything to do with this. It's because of her I finally managed to create a link to this timeline."

The blue magic holding him captive vanishes and Sans' knees give out at the unexpected release. His tailbone hits the floor, scattering broken glass. You're suddenly kneeling next to him and he jumps, fighting the urge to lash out.

Gaster grins again; this time it simply looks manic. "But I'll let her explain all that. My time is short. As loathe as I am to admit it, I am tired."

He holds out your hand; it's quivering violently.

"That simple use of blue magic nearly made this body collapse. I must rest or I will burn out of this body and take her with me. So I'll make this quick. I don't want to stay in here any longer than I must. After...well, everything, I'd rather think you owe it to me to assist me out of this situation."

Sans balks under that intense gaze. "and what exactly am i supposed to do?"

The crazy smile on your face fades, suddenly replaced by desperation. Gaster reaches out and grabs a handful of shirt, yanking Sans up. "You must create a vessel for me Sans. I must have a place for my Soul to reside. I cannot go back to that place. I can't...I will not be able to retain my sense of self, do you understand?" He's whispering now, voice hitching. "To be trapped in that place is worse than dying. But I cannot create a body in time by myself. At the moment only a fragment of my Soul resides with this girl. Staying awake, talking is eating away at what strength I have. By the time I gain enough strength to create a vessel myself, it will be too late."

Sans gapes at the ghost of his father. He'd known that Gaster had gone crazy a long time ago. But asking him to create an empty body is on a whole other level. "dings, i can't. it's not-

"Possible?" Gaster smiles a little sadly. "Of course it is Sans. I'm looking at the result of such a thing right now."

Well...yeah but.... "it took you literal years to make me. you almost dusted yourself making paps. if we're on such a tight time schedule i don't see how it is possible." There's more, far more excuses and reasons why he can't do this, he just can't but now Gaster is straightening, the desperate and almost hopeful look on your face fading away into something ice cold and emotionless.

"You don't have a choice," he states. "Do you want to know what will happen to her if you do not succeed? My Soul will grow stronger and the portion of what remains in the Void will be drawn into her body. And with it will come the energy and anti-magic of that place. It will corrupt her, burn her from the inside out even as it changes her into something that is neither human or monster. She will fight it, you know she will. But without fail, her body will reject me. Her Soul will shatter. But not until she has lost all sense of herself and you no longer recognize the being before you. And then, when she can no longer fight, she will die in agony, taking me with her."
Sans can feel his world shattering around him with those words. "no...you can't do this." The plea is broken but he can't stop himself. "please don't do this to her."

"You cannot stop it while I remain tied to her Soul." Gaster looks away. He's starting to sway slightly, eyelids blinking slowly. "This is not how I wanted my return to play out. But I will not let myself die. I did not endure the vastness of the Void to simply give up in order to save a single human's life. I will not leave her Soul unless I have a vessel of my own."

A vessel. A body that Gaster can inhabit. Sans' hands are shaking. He clenches his phalanges tightly together in an effort to silence the clattering bones. It doesn't work. He closes his sockets for a brief moment. An empty, hollow weight settles in on his Soul. "then take mine." He can barely get the words out. "i was made from your bone. my body won't reject you."

Gaster snorts, the motion something that he had never done before, but something that is so achingly you that it nearly breaks Sans right there. "Your weak body would not survive the transition. And even if it did, my Soul would bond instantly. Your very being would be gone, swallowed up by the essence of my Soul. Is that what you want?"

"i would do it for her." It's a terrified sob but it's the truth. He would give up his life for you. Because living without you is far too painful to even consider. He can't go through losing you again.

"How noble of you." Perhaps it's meant to be an insult, but the sting is not there. Gaster now just sounds tired. "Well, if that is the only solution you can find, we shall take it. But I suggest finding another way before time runs out."

"and how long is that exactly?"

Your shoulders lift briefly. "It is hard to say. Perhaps two months if we are lucky. And if I fight to keep the rest of my Soul from entering for as long as possible."

"two months?! dings, i can't-!"

"You must. We can do this." Gaster places your hand on his shoulder. He hesitates. "I regret that we were reunited under such circumstances. It was..." The train of thought fades away and Gaster shakes your head. "I shall speak with you again soon Sans." Your eyes close and a long breath hisses out from between your teeth. Your shoulders slump at the same moment he feels your Soul pulse suddenly in his rib cage.

"dings?" No, he has more questions! There's too much he doesn't understand!

A sudden shudder ripples through your entire body and your head is thrown back as you gasp harshly, clawing weakly at the air. Your eyes pop open; the blackness swirls and fades away, leaving them clear and filled with panic. Sans manages to catch you before you fall backwards onto the glass strewn floor. Your gaze locks on him and you grip his shirt with terrifying strength. Sans pulls you close, running his hand over your face as the bruise-like marks slowly begin to fade until they're barely there.

"Saaa-" It's little more than a gasp.

"hey, baby it's ok. i've got you." His voice cracks with relief.

You try to speak, your mouth moving silently for a brief moment before your eyes roll back and you go limp in his arms.
The subject is crying again. What a nuisance. He stands up, the bones of his spine creaking. There’s no point in trying to focus now. At first it had been quiet enough to ignore but now it’s boarding on the edge of full on wailing. He glances at the clock, noting with some surprise that almost seven hours had passed without him realizing it. Ah, it must be hungry. He pauses at the beat up mini-fridge humminagainst the wall; fixing the piece of junk had well been worth the headache that the stupid thing had given him while he tried to figure out how to get it running. Opening it, he peers inside. Damn it, there’s only half a cinnamon bunny and an old bottle of ketchup in there. He wonders if he’s got time to visit the shop before-

Another pointed cry interrupts that train of thought. He sighs and grabs the bottle and bunny, kicking the door closed with his foot. The ch-subject 1C is difficult enough to feed even when he did have a fridge full of food. It's picky and didn't seem to digest solids well. But considering it was only three months old, it had already made huge leaps in progressing. Most skeleton children would still be on a pure milk diet for at least a few more weeks. That is something he needs to pick up. Even though 1C isn’t a typical skeleton child, it still needs the calcium to strengthen it's bones while it's still young.

"Yes, I'm coming," he grumbles, opening the door to the adjourning room. The subject scampers under the low bed at his sudden appearance. He kneels and holds the cinnamon bunny out. "Come on then; if you didn't want me to come in you shouldn't have started crying."

There's no verbal response, as usual, but two small pinpricks of light stare at him from the shadows of the bed.

"You're hungry, right? Here." He fishes a folded up piece of paper out of one of his many pockets and sets it and the bunny down on the floor. He thinks twice about the ketchup; it's probably not suitable for a young...for the subject's still developing teeth. "I don't have time to sit and watch you eat. It's here if you want it." He stands up, brushing his pants off and starts to turn away.

"...n....n."

He stops short, barely daring to look back. "Yes?" he finally says, barely daring to hope. Is this it? Is C1 finally going to speak?

The subject slowly crawls out from under the bed, the bones of his small frame scraping against the stone floor. It looks up at him, then to the bunny. It's head tilts and it slowly reaches out and picks up the food. It looks back up at him, clearly struggling to form words. He feels his Soul pulse with an unusual sense of anticipation.

C1’s browbone narrows and it throws the bunny back. The food bounces off his leg, leaving a smear of icing on his pants. "no! no. no, no. no." C1 smiles and giggles, repeating the single word as the scientist takes several deep breaths. It's fine. It's fine! This is progress. All progress.

"nnnno!"

"Fine!" He finally snaps, making C1 jump. "You can have this then!" He pulls the ketchup out of his pocket and slams it on the floor. He’s very lucky that the cap doesn’t pop off. But he’s too irritated to appreciate the fact and storms out of the room.

Cheeky little snipe.
Ladies and gentleman and everyone in between, we have reached 50 chapters!
I am so thankful for all of your support and I offer an internet hug to each and every one of you. Thank you for every comment, every kudo, and thank you so much for reading my story!
I was going to make a cake and write Happy 50th on it and everything but...I have no eggs. Or cake mix. So cake may happen in the next day or two. And everyone gets a slice!
So, in celebration, I will take requests for scenes that you want to see over on my NinjaWrite tumblr page. Stuff like 'What if Sans and Reader went sledding' or whatever else you may like. I will also take questions aimed to the characters themselves on the same page.
Once again, thank you and happy reading!
NinjaWrites
Main Blog
Feed the comment monster!

For the first time in what feels like forever, you don't wake up with a pounding headache.

Of course that's because the freaking un-dead ghost, goopy scientist monster that helped you literally escape death had finally succeeded in pushing his way past all the barriers your mind and Soul unconsciously threw up to keep him out. No wonder your head had felt like someone had been smashing a hammer against it. You put your hands up over your face without opening your eyes and groan. Fan-freaking-tastic. You've really gone and done it this time. Well, at least this explains the nagging feeling of panic and dread. Of course that has all been replaced by the prickling feeling that someone is lingering just behind you as well as a heavy sensation in your Soul. You open your eyes and stare up at the ceiling, just trying to come to terms with what's happened. You wiggle your toes slightly just to reassure yourself that you're in control again. That moment when Gaster broke through, when your memories came flooding back, he took over and you could do nothing but watch your body move on it's own, threatening Sans and scaring both of you nearly to death. Yes, you had been present in a way, though it was like you were watching everything through a screen filled with static. Some words were lost and time seemed to skip slightly. It was like sleepwalking and being caught in sleep paralysis at the same time. You tremble a little, trying to push the memory of that sensation out of your head.

So, to sum up. Your skeleton boyfriend's dad, forgotten by nearly everyone and thought to be lost beyond reach forever somehow found you in that...that dark place that you ended up in after nearly dying, showed you the infinity of the timelines before shooting you back to your world, somehow hid those memories from you while the fragment of his Soul dug into you, making himself quite at home before finally taking over and threatening your skeleton boyfriend. Oh, and you have about two months before you body gives out from the strain of hosting such a powerful Soul.

To say again; fan-FREAKING-tastic.
You can feel a burning gaze on you so you finally sit up. Sans is seated in the corner, his left socket bright and steady as he stares at you. He's got the hood of his coat up over his skull. After a long moment of silent evaluation, his shoulders slump slightly and the blue pupil fades back into black. "it's you, isn't it?"

"Um...yes. It's me again." Your throat burns. Probably thanks to that grating language Gaster spoke earlier. It's weird; the entire time he had talked, you could understand everything he was saying, even as you fought to regain control of your body. You look over your shoulder, that prickling sensation pulsing briefly. As expected, you don't see anything but you can tell that Gaster is lingering there. Okay, that makes you feel marginally better. That means he's not exactly residing in your body in the obvious way. It's more like a strand of magic or something like it is connecting the two of you, Soul to Soul. Or Soul fragment? But at the same time, you can feel his presence in your Soul, like an slightly annoying itch. So he's in two places at once? Ugh! This doesn't make sense!

It's then you realize you're not in your own bed. You look around the messy room; books and papers are stacked everywhere and the desk is covered in anime figures. There's a glitterfied trashcan near the door. "Is this Alphy's office?"

"yeah." It's just the one word, clipped and almost growled. He starts and stops speaking several times before finally gesturing with his hands in a frustrated manner. "what the hell is going on here? you made a deal? with him? and now he's...god, he's right here, listening i assume?"

You feel rather than hear Gaster's affirmation in your head. Okay now that feels weird. "Yeah, he's listening."

Sans presses his face into his hands. "please tell me that he...god, i'm the one who's messed up for hoping this but please say he messed with your head or something and made you forget about whatever he did to you."

You're understandably on edge so you can't stop yourself from snapping, "Oh sure, I was just gonna keep my time in the Void with your dad a secret for kicks." You immediately feel bad so a little softer you add, "Sans, of course I didn't remember. I don't know if it was all him or my brain just trying to repress everything I saw."

A little of both, actually.

Ooookay, now you're actually hearing him in your head. He sounds tired, quiet and almost distant, like he's speaking from a room over. The words are accompanied with a wave of dizziness and a strange buzzing, like bees in your head. The terrified anger on Sans' face slips away and he stands quickly as you physically feel the color drain from your face.

"are you...oh crap, is he taking over-"

"No," you hiss, closing your eyes. "He's...he's talking. It feels weird."

His gaze goes to your head and he shifts like he's about to come closer. But he stays where he's at. "he's in your head?"

"Kinda," you mutter. You point briefly to your Soul and then jab a finger over your shoulder. "It's so weird. I can feel him in my Soul and hear him in my head but it feels like he's standing behind me."

It is my attempt to slow the absorbing process, Gaster chips in, making you flinch. The shard of my Soul within yours is keeping my essence tied to you and this world.
You snort, perhaps a little hysterically. "So what, you're like a balloon or something?"

He doesn't have to say anything for you to feel his disgust at the comparison. Sans however, is staring at you with deep concern. Ah, he can't hear what Gaster's saying. Oh this is going to get old really fast. "He said it's his way to slow down the 'process'. Only the shard I took is actually in my Soul. He's just kinda tied to me at this point. Like a balloon."

Sans clearly doesn't see the twisted humor in that. "and why exactly do you have a shard of his soul?"

You take a deep breath, pulling your knees closer to you. Slowly, you tell him about that dark place where you Soul had been trapped, caught between clinging to life and whatever it is that comes after death. You talk about how lost and scared you were, how Gaster found you and changed the dark world into an endless white space. Your voice drops to a whisper as you describe seeing the vast world of the timelines and the glimpses you caught of all the different versions of your world. Sans is quiet the whole time, moving closer step by step. Finally, he sits down on the couch next to you but keeps a few inches of distance.

"Sans, I can't...even describe what it was really like," you murmur. "It was everything and nothing all at the same time. I saw so much and it was horrible and...wonderful." Your breath hitches as your eyes flicker to the space between his hand and yours. You have to fight the urge to reach out and take his hand; he's clearly still spooked or maybe even disgusted by Gaster's presence in your body. You instead pick at a loose thread on the cushion. Talking about the timelines seems like another huge issue that your plate really doesn't need right now. "After that, Gaster told me that I had to use the power of his Soul to get back home. As long as I could find you, he could take me to my timeline. There wasn't time to think about it. I just...took it and followed the tugging in my Soul. I saw you in Frisk's room and I reached out and then I woke up back in my body."

"so you were there," Sans murmurs. He stares down at the floor for several long seconds. "ok. ok. so basically; my old man, who i thought was gone forever, managed to contact humans here and convince them to create a body, which they believed was a weapon for their cleansing war. then we ruined said plans and after you got shot, he decided to take advantage and use you like a tugboat to bring his soul directly to this timeline. and now he wants me to make him a new body, actually threatening me through the body of my girlfriend. that about right, dings?"

Yes, essentially. Gaster, who was quiet during your explanation, speaks up. Though the process to get here was far more complicated.

You relay the message and Sans scowls. "there had to be a better way! i could have done something!"

It is far too late for that, Gaster snaps. The sharp noise makes you wince. Do not forget that you ran away every time I tried to contact you after you broke your promise to never stop trying!

"he's blaming me for this mess isn't he?" Sans says before you can give a nicer version of the message. "i thought you were dead dings! i didn't know what to do!"

"Okay!" You say sharply, cutting them both off. "Let's share the family argument for a time when I'm not the only one who can hear one of the people involved. Sound good?" After a few tense seconds, Sans looks away, his shoulders hunching slightly. "Look...Gaster, is there a way you can give us a little privacy? Is that possible?"

He doesn't answer for a few seconds. Fine. I will return to sleep for a while. I won't be able to
hear what you are saying.

A shiver runs up your spine as a cold sensation briefly fills your chest and then the weight and the feeling of being watched eases up. You can still sense him there, but now it's like a wall has gone up. You breathe a sigh of relief. "Hey, he's gone back to sleep. He's gone. Sort of." You reach out for Sans' hand.

He jumps, his hand jerking away from your grip. You freeze as he looks at you with wide, pitch black sockets. After a moment, the raw fear is replaced by guilty panic. "shit, sorry. i'm sorry. that was just..."

"It's fine," you whisper. You look away before he can see your eyes tear up. His rejection hurts more than anything else yet. "It's to be expected right? I mean, I did come after you with a knife."

"no, that wasn't you. i know it wasn't." He hesitates then holds his hand out to you. "i'm sorry. i'm just...just trying not to freak out about all this."

You rub at your eyes before taking his hand; the bones of his palm are sweaty. "There's a lot to freak out about. Sans, what are we going to do?"

He pulls you close, almost clinging to you. His bones are clacking quietly. "there's no choice is there? i'm not gonna let you die because of him."

"So, what? You're going to make him a body? In two months? How?"

"...i don't know." The admission is just a whisper. "i don't know how i'm gonna do it. i just gotta. this whole thing is so messed up."

You bury your face in his jacket. "Tell me about it. The hits just keep coming and coming. I seriously thought we earned a break after the last disaster."

"i think the universe hates us."

"I think that's a universal fact."

He freezes. A loud snicker breaks from him. "oh my god. you did not."

You poke him gently in the ribs. "Oh ye of little faith. I'm naturally talented. Making a pun wasn't even part of my plan."

He fights back his laughter, to no avail. He hug s you tightly even as he laughs loudly. His cheekbone bumps against your face and you feel a trail of moisture running down his skull. You hold him back just as tightly. "We're gonna get through this. Just like everything else. In case you haven't noticed, I'm pretty stubborn about holding on to what I've got."

"heh. that's some pretty strong determination you got there."

"Is that what the kids are calling stubbornness these days?"

"something like that." He pulls away, wiping at his sockets quickly.

The two of you sit in silence for a few minutes, hands tightly clenched together. Finally, you say, "So. I think I can guess the reason as to why you brought me to Alphys' office."

"um, yeah." He shrugs. "i know you're against your soul being looked at, and rightly so, but i don't think this is something that can be ignored. plus, i think al might be able to help us."
"How so?"

He stands and pulls you to your feet, a small smile finally lifting his mouth. "who do we know that's had more than one body?"

～～～～～～

Alphys is still teaching her afternoon class so Sans gets the Soul reading machine set up while you very uncomfortably look at anything else. It's smaller than the one Nahn built but the similarities make it clear as to where she got her inspiration. There's a few students in the lab; most of them have headphones on as they work on various projects. There's one girl with an impressive mohawk who smiles at you when you happen to make eye contact.

"Hey! You must be _____." She stands and walks over, shaking your hand. The edge of her lab coat is smoking slightly.

You return her smile. "Yeah, that's me."

"It's nice to meetcha. I'm Courtney Queen. My friends call me CQ. My enemies call me awesome. Or they would if I had any." She snorts at her own wit. You feel some of your stress ease slightly by her cheerfulness.

"CQ, I like it. Um, your coat is...burning."

She glances down with more resignation than surprise. "Hmm. Looks like the third solution didn't work either." She pulls a rag out of her pocket, patting the edges until it stops smoking. "Self heating coats are the future my friend."

Self heating coat? "Sounds...comfy?"

"It will be once I get it working!" She bunches up the rag and tosses it across the room. It misses the trash can by several feet. "Anyway, what're you doing at the lab? I would've thought after everything you wouldn't want to go anywhere near a lab."

A low laugh escapes you. "Believe me, I wouldn't be here if I didn't have to be. There's some really complicated stuff going on."

"Ah, gotcha." She looks over at Sans. He's staring intensely at some figures; seems the machine hasn't been used since he created the bond between the two of you. There's a lot of resetting and calculations to be made. "You've got a good guy right there. I heard from Alphys that he didn't sleep a single moment while you were gone."

Well that's not surprising in the least. "Yeah that sounds about right," you mutter.

CQ shrugs. "For a lazy guy, he sure works hard when he cares about something."

Sans groans loudly and smacks his head on the desk at that exact moment. "i don't even care about that!" he whines loudly.

The two of you share a glance and snicker. "Sounds like he's having issues. I'm gonna go help him. With uh...moral support."

"Pretty sure he needs all the help he can get." She winks and heads back to her station.

He's groaning into the desk as you approach. You grab a free rollie chair and plop down in it. Setting
your elbows on the desk, you put your head in your hands and look over the various contraptions spread over the surface of the desk. "Problems?"

"it should be as simple as reversing what we did in the first place," he mumbles. "stupid machine."

Your skin prickles suddenly and your Soul pulses once as you feel Gaster's presence pushes at your mind. Oh no, not happening goop man! You grit your teeth and shake your head.

**It will be less painful for both of us if you just let it happen**, he says dryly.

"Or you know, you could just say what you've got to say and I'll translate."

Sans' head pops up off the desk.

That is a waste of time.

"Yeah, well the last time you were in control you almost stabbed my boyfriend. I'm not going to let that happen again."

Gaster sighs. **I was not going to stab him. If you weren't aware, I do need him to assist me with this.**

You snort. "Oh, so that's just how parental figures greet their children in the underground, is that it?"

"_____?" Sans' quiet voice makes you jump. Brought out of your one sided conversation, you notice some of the kids in the lab are staring. You slump down in the chair, face burning.

"Sorry Sans, but I really don't like your dad."

"i feel the same way babe."

Without a touch of remorse, Gaster drawls, **I'm almost offended.**

The door to the lab opens at that moment and Alphys stumbles through with a massive pile of books and papers. It's the distraction Gaster needs. You gasp and curl in on yourself as your stomach drops and you feel your mind growing fuzzy, stepping back while his alien presence takes the reins. Your sight grows fuzzy and it takes all you've got not to simply fall asleep in the darkness of your own mind. Oh this is almost worse than the first time; now you don't have shock to dull the panic of losing control.

"Sorry, class ran late!" Alphys huffs, setting the books down. "I know I uh, haven't had a chance to fix the um, machine. Things have just been piling-"

"al." Sans hasn't taken his gaze off you. And judging from the grim expression on his face, he can see that you're no longer in control. "i need everyone else out. please."

"Oh." She taken off guard, but she does as he asks, shooing the protesting students out of the lab. "Yes, yes, I know. You will have more time to work I promise. If there are issues just have your other professors email me."

The whole time she's doing this, Gaster is picking up various objects from the desk, examining them carefully. Sans doesn't say anything, but his mouth is very tight; almost no teeth are visible.

"**I would try putting three valves in place instead of two,**" he comments, setting the piece back down. "**And the flywheel is in desperate need of an oiling.**"
"don't need your help dings," Sans says coldly.

At the odd voice that comes from your mouth, Alphys stops short, her eyes nearly bugging out of her head. "W-what was that?!

Sans sighs. "um, try to stay calm. this is gonna sound crazy."

Gaster stands, turning your body to face Alphys. She reels back, almost knocking into the desk. You haven't yet seen your own face while Gaster is in control, but going by that reaction, there must be some pretty obvious signs that something is wrong. "What is happening?! O-oh God is this another s-side effect from the experiments?" She's terrified and obviously fighting to stay standing.

"not exactly. not that simple."

Gaster extends your hand out. "Hello Doctor Alphys. You don't remember me, I presume. I am Doctor W.D. Gaster, previous Royal Scientist. I am currently residing in the Soul of this human. My son believes you can help us with our little problem."

And with that, Alphys hits the floor.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was originally going to be longer but I have a test to study for and honestly the talk with Alphys and Gaster may take up quite a bit of space so that will happen next chapter!
Explaining things to Alphys once she recovers from fainting is, unsurprisingly, an interesting conversation. Sans in his oh so helpful way barely says a word and just watches Gaster closely. The lights of his eyes are barely visible. Gaster does most of the talking and after a few hazy minutes in which you try to adjust yourself to this strange sensation, you notice that he's moving your hands rapidly in time with his words. You recognize a lot of the signs from the lessons that Frisk has drilled into you. Alphys’ eyes flicker between your hands and face so fast her eyeballs look like they're in danger of spinning out of control. The look of anxious disbelief only grows as Gaster continues. You can tell an endless barrage of questions is dying to burst of her but she stays quiet, trying her best to process what's happening.

Gaster explains the situation, briefly touching on the resets and timelines, though you notice he doesn't say a word about Frisk. He simply calls the force behind the timelines an Anomaly. His explanation of what happened in that place with the branches of time and how he connected his Soul to yours is filled with far less emotion than yours was. But as he nears the end, he coughs harshly and pauses. Your throat burns and it takes him a moment to get his breath back. You can feel his confusion as he touches your throat. "That was...unexpected."

It's because he's speaking that weird language with your voice!

"Is that it? I suppose that makes sense; the human body was not made to speak in fonts after all."

Wait...did he hear you?

"Of course I did," he responds, clearly a little irritated. Alphys is watching the one sided conversation with absolute confusion while Sans just looks angry. "You can hear me when our positions are switched after all."

Ah. Right. You would feel embarrassed but all you feel is that same irritation. So he can read your mind too. Wonderful. It makes sense in it's own sick way.
Gaster sighs, closing your eyes briefly. "I cannot read your mind, as you so put it. Thoughts that are spoken with the intention to be heard and strong emotions are currently the only thing I can hear."

*And you know this because...?*

"I've been-" he breaks off into more coughing- "...testing my limits."

Sans stands up suddenly, his fragile composure nearly snapping. "that's enough. you've said your piece. now back off before you damage her throat."

Gaster turns slightly to look at Sans and you see a brief flash of something cross his face. Fear. Hesitation. It's a look that Gaster is familiar with and that feeling makes you sick. "**Very well. I have said what I needed to.**" His gaze turns back to Alphys, who squeaks quietly and jumps. "**It is much to absorb,**" he says to her. "**But truly...you of all people should understand what happens when barriers of science are broken. I simply hope that you do not repeat the mistakes made with the remains of the Prince.**"

Alphys tail smacks against the floor, betraying her shock. "H-how d-did you-?"

"**Like I said. I've seen many things.**" He smiles unpleasantly and she shrinks away slightly. "**There are many things I have seen you do in the name of science Doctor. Not all of them have occurred in this timeline, but believe me; you have the capability to perform feats thought to be impossible. You and I very similar in the aspect.**"

She looks like she may actually get sick.

Gaster looks around the room for a moment. He's hesitating. You can feel that he doesn't want to let go of control again and for a moment, you're terrified that he’s going to refuse. But then a feeling of resignation flows through you and then he loosens his hold on your Soul. The world spins slightly and once again a cold sensation runs up your spine as your consciousness snaps back into awareness and control. You blink several times, clearing your vision. You slump in the chair, gasping. Sans is instantly at your side, his hand on your arm.

"hey, you ok?"

You try to speak, find that you can't thanks to the burning in your throat, and just nod. You mouth 'water' and mime drinking. Sans vanishes without another word and you meet Alphys' wide eyed gaze. You offer her a weak smile.

She takes a deep breath, steepling her fingers together for a moment in front of her face. "W-what...thefellisgoingonhere?!" she bursts out. "This is j-just...oh my God!"

"Tell me about it," you croak out.

Sans pops back into view, a chilled water bottle in his hand. You take it and sip slowly while Alphys continues to quietly freak out.

"How could this have h-happened? A place like that shouldn't even exist! Let alone being able to m-make a door...and oh God, if it had enough f-force to remove memories...oh my God, the Core has always b-been there and I barely questioned it!"

You lower the bottle. "But you believe us, right?"
Alphys pushes her glasses up with such force you almost worry they'll snap. "Well...as c-crazy as it all s-sounds, the undeniable proof is right here and I mean you're my f-friends so of course I d-do. And even I s-saw something strange happening w-with our readings of the timelines even though that's n-not my strong suit. And then...." she trails off, her face twisting in confusion. "I...speaking to...h-him...felt familiar? I think I almost r-remember. It's right there b-but...."

"that's better than the last time i tried to tell you," Sans says, dropping back down into his seat. "i think i tried to anyway. i probably did. i don't remember. 's far as i know, i'm the only one who has actual memories of him. and a lot of those are kinda hazy. i think it's cause i was right in the immediate area of the accident. for whatever reason i wasn't sucked in like everyone else. that's something i still don't understand."

You feel a flicker of something from Gaster but he remains silent.

Sans grins wryly. "you were supposed to be there that day. working on a side project. you didn't show up because of some emergency. i was worried and went to check on you and that's when i came back to find paps...." His sockets tighten slightly and he shakes his head. "anyway, never did find out what the emergency was. guess that was some kinda fate at work. if you had come in that day...."

Alphys shivers and you frown at Sans. "Hey, don't pile things on. There's a lot to deal with without thinking about what might have happened." Sans looks away, having the decency to mumble sorry. You sigh and stand. "Okay, I'm going to go splash water on my face. Why don't you guys get the machine up and running so we can get this over with?"

You leave before they have a chance to say anything. You're rather proud of how steady you manage to walk despite your legs feeling a bit wobbly. The bathroom is just down the hall and you push the door open quickly. It's empty, thank goodness. You lean against the sink, letting out a slow breath of air. "Still here Gaster?"

Radio silence. He must have fallen asleep again, lucky jerk. You feel like you've run a mile uphill. Your eyelids are heavy. But at least you don't have that stupid headache anymore. You turn on the cold water, letting it gather in your hands before splashing your face. The brief sting as it hits your skin does the job of waking you up a little. You blindly reach for a paper towel and wipe your face. Okay. Just breathe. Your eyes flicker to your reflection in the mirror. Shock makes you freeze as you realize your face looks a little different. Two faint lines are traced on your skin, one set below and the other above your eyes. You lean in, touching the marks. Your skin doesn't feel any different, so there's that at least. The lines are faint, like some kind of bad tan line. Well, you might be able to cover these up with make-up. Irritation makes you scowl. Not enough that Gaster's taken up a spot in your already abused Soul, now your body is physically changing? It's only been a few hours! Hopefully this is the extent, although going by what he said, there's more to come if you don't hurry and get him out.

Sans had better work fast.

Okay, you do feel a little bad for having that thought as you head back to the lab after spending a few more minutes composing yourself. It's not Sans' fault. He's actually remaining remarkably calm, all things considered. It's probably for your sake but at some point you're going to have to really sit down and talk with him about this. You can't image what he must be feeling. He was always so conflicted when he talked about his dad; scared and angry and yet sad all at once. From the stories you heard, or rather coaxed out of Sans, Gaster started off as a sort of jerk, became a sort of good dad and then dissolved into a crazed maniac thanks to the Core's magic before the accident. You'd seen for yourself what he had done during that first reunion in the kitchen. Of course you'd nearly
been out of your mind with terror and confusion to really focus on anything other than the knife in your hand and the look of utter fear on Sans' face.

But since then, Gaster's acted almost...snidely polite about all this? You had felt yourself his hesitation in handing control back over and yet he did it without a word of actual complaint. He's not acting like the desperate monster from Sans' nightmares at all. Still, you don't trust him and you certainly don't want him lingering in your Soul for a moment longer than necessary. You push the lab door open.

"can't we at least try?"

"Sans, it's n-not the same thing. You know that. How you know is another question altogether."

"but can you be absolutely sure without trying?"

"Of course I'm sure, I made him two d-different forms. It's not the same thing as m-making a brand new living b-body."

Sans and Alphys look up as you enter; they're both standing at the machine, somehow fiddling with it and managed to argue at the same time. Geez, you weren't gone that long were you? "Hey guys," you say as cheerfully as you can, closing the door behind you. "How's the machine work going?"

Alphys ducks behind the machine quickly. "Just f-fine! We'll be ready to go soon."

After studying you for a second to make sure you're okay, Sans too turns back to the machine. You slip back into the rolling chair and push towards him. The chair slides over the floor, bringing you to a stop just short of bumping into him. "So, was Gaster right about the oiling part?"

"...does it matter?"

You snort and pull your legs up into the seat. "So what did I miss?"

He sighs, twiddling a dial. "well my oh so brilliant idea isn't going to work."

"And which idea is that? The idea to make hot dog ice cream a thing? Because as gross as that sounds, I think you might actually find some weirdos who would eat it."

"it's not gross, it's genius," he says with a smirk. It quickly fades. "nah, i was thinking we could make a metal body like that narcissistic robot's got."

Oh, now that is a good idea! You've seen Mettaton's square body, though since coming up to the surface he's said he prefers staying in the two legged version. Alphys built him, so she could build another one, right? "Why won't it work?"

Alphys pokes her head around, her face apologetic. "Mettaton isn't j-just a Soul in his metal body. Building another metal body wouldn't h-host a Soul just by itself."

"What is he then?"

She looks around nervously, like she's worried Mettaton might hear. "He d-doesn't like people to k-know this but...he's actually a ghost inhabiting his current form. His metal b-body is his, and only his but he wasn't j-just a Soul I put in there. Monster's Souls are t-too fragile for a s-solid body like that without something else protecting them."

Your heart sinks a bit. You'd be a little more interested in the fact that Mettaton is actually a ghost if it
didn't mean that the idea to make Gaster a metal body wouldn't work. "Okay, so that's a dead end then."

"yeah." His voice is a little bitter. "let's just get a look at what's going on first. is di-is gaster awake?"

"I don't think so. Talking for that long probably wore him out."

Sans grunts as he throws a switch. "that's fine. i want to get scans of when he's awake and asleep. see if anything's different. al, you good on your side?"

"Yes! We should be good to go!" She skips back over to a computer, clawed fingers flying over the keyboards. "______ if you would go ahead and sit d-down we'll get a quick scan."

A cold shiver runs up your spine. The chair in the machine sits there silently but in your head you can hear the whirl of machinery, the chattering of indifferent voices, the squeak of the restraints as they tightened around your wrists. Oh God, you can't do this. You can't get back in there. You can't stop yourself from looking desperately to Sans. His gaze softens.

"this isn't the same as back then," he says in a gentle voice, taking your hand. "we're just looking. it won't hurt. you can get up and leave at any moment."

"Sans, I just...." You swallow harshly, begging your knees to stop shaking. "I don't think I can do it."

He brings your hand up to his teeth, giving you hand a soft kiss. "please. i can't help you if i don't know exactly what's going on. i would go in there with you if i could but my soul might throw the readings off. but i will stand right in front of you. i won't leave your sight the whole time. i'll talk, sing, dance or whatever you want. alphys will get all the readings. ok?"

Sweat rolls down your back but you finally nod. "Okay. Just...tell me before you start, okay?"

"course." He leads you over to the chair, helping you sit. You're tense, immensely so, but he's right here with you. This isn't an experiment. There's no cold scientists standing by as you scream. This is Sans and it's clear that he doesn't want to put you through this either. His gaze drops down to your Soul. His mouth thins.

"Looks pretty bad, I'm guessing," you mumble, looking down too.

He shrugs. "well, it's not good but it's not the worst state i've seen your soul in."

"Worse than having a Gaster balloon attached to it?"

A small chuckle escapes him. "i imagine he's not happy with being called a balloon."

You grin a little. "Not at all. So I'm going to make a point to call him that as often as I can."

Sans hesitates, squeezing your hand. "nothing is worse than seeing your soul nearly at the point of shattering," he whispers. "it was...it was difficult to look at because i thought that even just staring at it would make it vanish. this is bad, but you're still bright. you're still here. that's what matters."

You pull him close and give him a quick kiss. "By the way, you are so dancing for me. You offered, no take backs."

He smiles widely, the lights of his eyes flashing brightly for a moment. "you got it." He checks a few more settings around you, his hand lingering on your shoulder. When he's satisfied, he takes a few
steps back, holding eye contact with you the whole time. "ready?"

You hesitate. Then nod. "Yeah. Let's get it over with."

There's a bit of beeping from the computer Alphys is at. She's just barely out of view but you're not going to look away from Sans to see what she's doing. He smiles widely at you, giving you a thumbs up.

"Okay, beginning scan in three...two...now!"

The machine whirls to life, humming loudly, making the seat under you vibrate a little. Your hands dig into your pants, your heart racing into overdrive. Pressure builds in your chest and though your Soul resists a little, it soon pops into view, draining the colors of the world with it. Sans is right; it is still glowing brightly but it's been changed drastically. You're used to seeing red cracks across it's surface; in fact, Sans had taught you to be proud of those bright lines of determination. But after your torture more and more cracks had appeared. When Sans first created the bond between you, those cracks had filled with the cyan blue of his Soul. You can feel, rather than see that the bond is still there, unshakable. Now those cracks are filled with something else, something darker and alien. Well, filled in isn't quite the word. It almost looks like a layer of strings hovering over the surface of your Soul, attached but not quite sunk in.

There's something else too. It's a lot harder to see but if you squint, you can just make out a glistening tendril of white energy glowing with a black hue that sticks out away from your Soul. It's clearer at the base, attached to the black lines in your Soul but it grows dimmer and fades away into nothingness a few inches out. That's got to be the string of the balloon isn't it? Which means at the other end is....

"_____." Sans calls your name, snapping your horrified gaze away from you Soul. He's got his hands up and the moment you look at him, he starts doing a terrible impression of the robot. A muffled snicker breaks from you. The colors of your Soul flare slightly, making the grin on Sans' face grow wider. He spins, his lab coat flaring out around him and slides into a moonwalk that is actually pretty good.

You can't help it. You laugh, your hand coming up over your mouth. He looks ridiculous and somehow completely handsome at the same time. "How do you mess up the robot? Usually it's the other way around."

"simple. i'm not a robot."

"So you're saying you're the moon?"

He smirks and turns around, doing the same move in the other direction. "nah, but i've been told i'm a star."

You dissolve into giggles at that, which only prompts him to do more and more ridiculous dancing until your eyes are watering from the force of your laughing. And then, just like that, the scan is over and your Soul lowers back into your chest and color flows back into your vision. You slump in your seat, wiping at your eyes. Sans is instantly by your side, his jovial grin replaced by concern. He presses his teeth against your forehead, gently rubbing your head. "there we go, we're done."

"For now," you whisper. You reach up and wrap your arms around him. Cautiously you reach towards that wall in your head. Yep, still sleeping. Or whatever it was he's doing in there. "Can't believe Gaster slept through all that."
"we'll worry about getting that scan later." Sans returns your embrace for several long moments before heading over to Alphys. She's staring at her computer intensely, gnawing on her lip.

You remain in the seat, putting a hand over your chest. You did it. In hindsight, it really wasn't that big of a deal, but still. Hopefully the next time will go just as smoothly. But then again, Gaster is supposedly going to be in control next time so it doesn't matter how you feel about it. You stand up and join the other two. You peek over their shoulders but all the numbers and stuff on the screen don't make sense to you.

"it's locked in, clearly but no absorption past a level...one i'd say," Sans mutters. "course that's with him retreated and not fighting for control. with this i'd predict a level three at least."

Alphys nods. "I don't like the readings at all but at least it's stable. The chance for further fracturing is slim. Has her HP always been at this level?"

You sit there for a while and listen to them talk, trying to understand. After all, this is the stuff that's happening to you. You need to help them in whatever way you can. But sleepiness tugs at your eyes and your head starts to bob. You feel a sudden touch on your shoulder and jump. Sans smiles apologetically.

"hey, let's get you home. you should rest."

You glance over at Alphys. She nods in agreement. "We've set up some analyzing that's going to take a while so you and Sans should both head home. There are things you should t-talk about."

Sans doesn't give you a chance to say anything else before pulling you to your feet. The world spins and rearranges itself into Toriel's living room. You blink and shake your head. The short cuts barely bother you now, unless you're super tired, which you are now. No one else is home yet, but they should be arriving soon. "Sans, what are going to tell everyone?"

"about?"

You gape at him for a second before gesturing at yourself. "Um, about your dad hanging on my Soul? Kind of a big deal."

Sans shrugs, looking away. "who says we have to tell them just yet? al needed to know cause she can help but the others-"

"You don't know that they can't help." You frown at him, putting your hand on his face and forcing him to look back at you. "This isn't something we can hide. Gaster kinda has the ability to take over my body, in case you forgot. What are we supposed to do, ask him nicely not to do that?" He remains silent, making you groan. "Sans, it's okay. Like Alphys said, the proof is right here. They're not gonna think we're crazy."

"that's not it," he finally mumbles.

"Then what is it?"

He looks down at his feet. "explaining him means explaining the timelines. the kid knows yeah but they're trying to put all of that behind them. there's a good reason they don't talk about it. bringing all of that up again is just...cruel." His sockets tighten. "even if we just skim over it, it's gonna lead to questions. questions i can't answer. how can i explain it? what am i supposed to say when find out that i just...." He takes a deep breath, shuddering. "stood by and let things happen?"

"But you didn't," you remind him gently. "You fought, even if you don't remember all of it. Those
"Nightmares you have of the hallway, that was your fight. That was your hope that maybe you could fix things."

"It wasn't hope." His gaze has lost his lights. "That was fear and hate. But I didn't even do that much till there was literally nothing left. I didn't even do a thing when paps..." His voice catches.

At the same moment, you feel Gaster stirring. The wall fades away and you feel his awareness in your mind again. **Papyrus**? The thought is hazy but under that you feel a desperate longing. Your eyes instinctively water, overcome by the feeling. You close your eyes, fighting to get your bearings back.

"Then we don't talk about that," you finally say. "This isn't about telling everyone what happened with Frisk and whatever it was controlling them. This is about Gaster." Your heart twists. You don't want to lie to them but you understand what Sans is saying. If they knew the truth, you know that they would forgive Frisk. But that knowledge, that burden would always be there. Throwing Gaster in on top of that might be too much. "I don't want to lie. If they press, they deserve to know the truth. But all we need to tell them is about the accident. I mean, we still don't really understand how he got to the Void or what it is, do we? There's no need to talk about the timelines."

Sans is still staring down at the ground.

You take his hand. "Sans, doesn't Papyrus deserve to know about his father? Gaster wants to see him too."

His gaze snaps up at that. His mouth thins again, sockets narrowing. "He wants to see paps? Why?"

You don't have to hear Gaster's response to answer. "Why do you think?"

"He doesn't deserve to talk to paps after what he did. After what he put my brother through, why should I give him that chance?"

Gaster flinches slightly and you feel a pang of something sharp in your heart. "Because you're family. And Papyrus deserves the truth from you. And from Gaster," you add, aiming that towards said monster.

You hear the door open and the tell tale boom of Papyrus' voice. He must have picked Frisk up from school today. Sans' skull turns sharply towards the door. Panic flits across his face. "God, babe I can't-"

"If I can get back into a Soul reading machine, you can do this." You squeeze his hand firmly. "We'll talk to him alone. I'll be right with you."

Papyrus ducks into the living room, carefully setting Frisk's backpack on the hook on the wall. "I CAN'T WAIT TO TELL-OH! YOU'RE RIGHT HERE!" Papyrus beams proudly as Frisk bounces into the room. "SANS! FRISK GOT AN A ON THEIR MATH TEST!"

"Congrats Frisk," you say cheerfully, letting go of Sans' hand and stepping out to give them a hug. They turn towards you and stop suddenly, their wide smile fading into confusion as they stare at you. They point to your face in a questioning manner. "Oh crap. You forgot about the marks on your face. You touch your skin, giving them the best reassuring smile you can. "Good eye. Um, this is uh...it's a long story."

Their eyes narrow and squint, suddenly flicking behind you. What is...?

Gaster hisses quietly in your mind. He had been focused on Papyrus but now his attention turns to...
Frisk. The anomaly vessel. They've seen me before. In different timelines. But that was never supposed to happen. They did something, messed with the files of the world....

Can Frisk see Gaster right now? "What are you looking at?" you ask nervously.

Frisk is terrifyingly silent for a moment before shrugging and rubbing at their eyes. Nothing, they sign. Just felt weird for a second.

You let out a sigh of relief and turn to Papyrus. Nerves flutter through you and you're not entirely sure that they're coming just from you. "Hey, Pap can Sans and I talk to you? There's um...something you need to know."

Papyrus, who was looking at the marks on your face curiously, snaps back to attention. "YES OF COURSE!" He removes his jacket, hanging it up on the wall next to Frisk's backpack. You decide to talk in Papyrus' room, which is still partially set up with Frisk's stuff. His racecar bed is here, moved from the apartment at his insistence. Sans follows you into the room, his feet shuffling slowly.

Papyrus closes the door. "$\text{IS THIS ABOUT THE STRANGE MARKS ON YOUR FACE? YOU AREN'T HURT ARE YOU?}"

"No, no I'm fine," you say quickly, glancing at Sans. He's made his way over to the bed and sits down on it heavily. "Well, I'm not totally fine and this is kinda about that."

Papyrus joins his brother on the bed, looking at him with concern. "$\text{HUMAN, WHAT IS GOING ON?}"

You take a deep breath and decide to plunge right in. "$\text{Papyrus, how much do you remember about your father?}"
Papyrus tilts his head in confusion. "I AM SORRY, DID YOU SAY 'FATHER'?'"

You nod, glancing at Sans; he's hunched over slightly, staring at his knees.

Papyrus smiles widely. "I DO NOT REMEMBER HIM BUT I DO KNOW MUCH ABOUT HIM!"

"You do?"

"OH YES! SANS HAS TOLD ME HE IS A PART OF A SECRETIVE SERVICE THAT WORKS DEEP WITHIN THE ROYAL GUARD!" Papyrus' voice has taken on an almost story-telling quality. "HE IS THE GREATEST WARRIOR THAT THE UNDERGROUND HAS EVEN SEEN! AND HE IS SO SECRET THAT NOBODY EVER EVEN SPEAKS ABOUT HIM, WHICH IS A LITTLE SAD BECAUSE I WOULD LIKE TO BE ABLE TO BRAG ABOUT SUCH A GREAT WARRIOR HAVING A SUCH A MAGNIFICENT SON! SANS HAD TOLD ME THAT HE HAD TO GO ON A SUPER ULTRA SECRET MISSION WHEN I WAS JUST A BABY BONES AND IT IS FOR THE SAKE OF ALL MONSTER KIND THAT HE HASN'T YET RETURNED BUT HE WILL SOMEDAY!"

Oh no. Sans.

He's curling in on himself with every word Papyrus speaks.

"IN FACT, IT IS BECAUSE OF HIM THAT-

"Papyrus, wait," you interrupt as gently as you can. "That's not...um, he's...."

"i lied." The words are a croak.

"....WHAT?"

Sans continues to stare downwards, refusing to look at his brother. "all those stories are just lies bro."

Papyrus goes completely still for several long moments before his shoulders finally slump. He looks down at his hands, almost perfectly mimicking Sans' hunched position without realizing it. "I KNEW THAT THEY WERE SANS."

Sans flinches but still doesn't look up. "you knew? for how long?"

He shrugs, fiddling with his gloves. "A WHILE NOW. I AM NOT A CHILD SANS. I DID BELIEVE YOU FOR A LONG TIME BUT...THERE WAS NOTHING THAT I COULD FIND TO SHOW THAT HE ACTUALLY EXISTED. I EVEN SPOKE WITH THE KING ONCE AND HE SAID HE DIDN'T KNOW WHO I WAS TALKING ABOUT. I THOUGHT MAYBE
HE WAS JUST PRETENDING BECAUSE OF THE SECRET BUT...." Papyrus takes a deep breath. "I CAN SEE IT WHEN YOU ARE LYING SANS. YOU MIGHT HAVE FOOLED OTHER PEOPLE, BUT YOU CAN'T FOOL ME. AND YOU ALWAYS SEEMED TO GET UPSET WHEN I BROUGHT UP OUR FATHER SO I STOPPED."

Your heart feels like it's being painfully squeezed. You shouldn't be here right now, intruding on this moment between the brothers but.... "Pap, Sans has only ever wanted to protect you," you offer weakly.

Papyrus looks at you, his smile softer than his usual big grin. "I KNOW THAT. SANS ISN'T THE KIND OF PERSON WHO WOULD HURT SOMEONE. LYING ISN'T GOOD BUT SOMETIMES IT IS WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO TO PROTECT SOMEONE, RIGHT?"

Sans lets out a small, broken noise at that. You have to fight not to immediately go to his side. "I think you're right Pap. But this isn't about what Sans did. This is about your father. It's true that he's been gone for a long but the night you rescued me from Tod and the others he um, he came back. When I got shot, he saved me."

Papyrus brightens for a moment before his sockets again narrow in confusion. "I'M NOT FOLLOWING. I THINK I WOULD HAVE SEEN IF A SKELETON I DIDN'T KNOW RESCUED YOU."

Your hands gesture to your chest. "I mean he rescued my Soul."

Sans snorts quietly. "funny way to save someone."

"I almost died Pap," you continue without answering his snide remark. "My...mind? Soul I guess, was in this strange place that was dark and...I don't know what it was or how i got there exactly. But your dad was there too. He's been there for a long time. We had to work together to get back to this time...here." You want to avoid the topic of timelines as much as you can for as long as possible. That's something that Sans needs to explain himself. "He got my Soul back here and kinda tagged along."

It takes him a moment to process this. He frowns heavily, brow bone creased. "SO THAT MEANS THAT...HE IS HERE?"

You nod.

This makes Papyrus' eye sockets glisten with joy. He claps his hands together. "CAN I FINALLY SEE HIM? I HAVE MANY STORIES TO SHARE! AND AFTER BEING ALONE FOR SO LONG I AM SURE HE IS IN NEED OF ONE OF MY POWERFUL HUGS! WHERE IS HE? IS HE NEARBY? WHY HASN'T HE COME TO SEE US?"

I am not hugging him, Gaster says gruffly just as Sans bursts out "no, don't do that."

"Come on guys." You shake your head, as if to clear it. "Yeah, Papyrus, he's close by and-"

Sans stands up suddenly, crossing over to you. He takes your wrist, staring at you with narrowed pinpricks of light. "i changed my mind. we can't do this, i can't let them talk," he mutters so quietly even you have trouble hearing it.

"Why?"

"i just...i can't." A soft rattling emits from his bones. "if gaster tells him anything about the timelines he'll-"
Oh enough. Gaster's patience snaps and you gasp harshly as his presence sweeps over your mind, shoving your consciousness into the back seat. It's faster this time, less painful but no less jarring.

Sans lets go of you like he's realized he's holding onto a snake. His socket flares. "don't do this dings," he growls. "let her go. this isn't your place."

"It is not your place to stop me," Gaster says stiffly. "If you had wanted to hide me from him, you shouldn't have let him near me."

"SANS? WHAT IS THAT?" Papyrus stands too, his face uncertain. "WHAT IS THAT VOICE?" Gaster pushes past Sans and Papyrus gets a good look at your face. His sockets widen with shock. "______? WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOUR EYES? IS THIS A PRANK? IF SO, I REALLY DO NOT LIKE THIS ONE."

"It is no prank Papyrus." Gaster looks at his second son; there's a spark of memory. a feeling that tells you he's not used to seeing Papyrus at a shorter angle like this. There's something else there too, something hesitant and almost...nervous. "My name is W.D. Gaster. Can you understand what I am saying?"

Poor Papyrus looks beyond confused. He frowns. "YES, I...I KNOW THIS LANGUAGE. IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME.... BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND, YOU ARE _____ NOT W.D. GASTER. I DO NOT EVEN KNOW WHO THAT IS."

Gaster lifts your arms slightly. You can feel your Soul responding, gently glowing within your chest. "She is still here. Currently we are sharing this body. Look and see for yourself."

Sans growls, his fist clenching. "now just wait-"

Your Soul pops out and Papyrus' gloved hands fly up over his mouth. It's different than what you saw before in the machine; it's darker, the glow of your Soul hidden under the light emitting from the binding strings wrapped around it. You can't see the 'string of the balloon' as it were. Probably because right now he's not hovering beside you. Gaster too is staring at it curiously. You feel utterly exposed, almost worse than when Nahn forced your Soul out into the open too. Were you in control of your limbs, you're positive that you would be shaking.

"Hmm, this is fascinating. I assume you've already done a scan of her Soul when-"

"enough!" Rage makes Sans tremble. The room is filled with the sound of rattling bones. "enough, put her soul away!"

Gaster looks over at Sans for a brief moment before allowing your Soul to sink back into your chest. After a moment his gaze goes back to Papyrus, whose sockets are so wide they're nearly perfect circles. Gaster bows your head slightly; it seems even he recognizes that he went overboard.

"Apologies. This was the fastest way to prove my existence to you. I currently do not have a body of my own. She is here and so am I. I am simply the one in control at the moment."

Papyrus slowly lowers his hands. "This is...." His voice is at that strange (for him) low level you're only heard a few times before. "this is not OKAY!" He takes a solid stance, pointing at you and Gaster. "MR. GASTER!"

"Doctor."

"DOCTOR GASTER!" The hand pointing at you is trembling slightly. "I AM VERY SORRY BUT I MUST INSIST THAT YOU LEAVE MY FRIEND'S SOUL AT ONCE!"
"YOU CANNOT STAY THERE! THIS BODY BELONGS TO ______ AND MY BROTHER IS VERY FOND OF IT AND HER. AND SO AM I!"

Sans flushes briefly, but he too looks a little stunned at Papyrus' outburst.

Gaster folds your arms, caught between amusement and irritation. "I'm your father, your creator, returned from a place beyond your comprehension and this is the first thing you think to say?"

"OF COURSE IT IS." Papyrus says firmly. "I'M SORRY BUT EVEN IF YOU ARE MY FATHER, I DON'T REMEMBER YOU. BUT I DO REMEMBER HER AND AS HER FRIEND AND ADOPTED BROTHER, I MUST PROTECT HER TO THE BEST OF MY ABILITIES, WHICH ARE REALLY GREAT IN NUMBER. I REALLY DON'T GET WHY YOU'RE THERE IN THE FIRST PLACE BUT THERE MUST BE SOMEWHERE ELSE YOU CAN GO. AH!" He snaps his fingers. It doesn't really work thanks to the glove. "WHERE IS YOUR BODY? IN FACT, WHY AREN'T YOU IN YOUR OWN BODY? DID SOMETHING HAPPEN TO IT?"

"In a manner of speaking," Gaster says dryly. Again, there's a flash of memory, something too fast for you to see but you can feel pain, a terrible, overwhelming pain and great anger with it. "Papyrus, the truth of the matter is only a sliver of my Soul is residing in this body. My own body is corrupted, lost in the Void. There is no where for me to go right now. Without a vessel for my Soul, I will simply vanish. That is why I need your brother's help. That is why I am here. The faster we can create a new body for my Soul the sooner I can leave this one and-" He stops, and his Soul lurches slightly. "I simply wanted to come back," he whispers. "I am not happy about this either. I had no choice."

"no choice?"Sans snarls. Even though the rage on his face is not directed at you, your heart still throbs painfully in your chest. "you had no choice but to let monsters and humans die, tortured and turned into creatures that should never have existed? you had no choice but to plan her death, one way or the other?"

Gaster slowly turns to face Sans. You feel your face twist in anger. "And who is the one who took my choices away? Who is the one who fought against me? Who nearly destroyed everything we worked for? Who is responsible for my fall into the Core?" He's close to yelling by the end and your throat closes up, protesting against the harsh language. Your body nearly doubles over in a harsh coughing fit.

Sans looks like he's been physically hit. His hand weakly lifts towards you but before he can move, Papyrus is at your side, putting a hand on your shoulder.

"ARE YOU ALRIGHT?" He asks in clear concern.

Gaster is frozen under Papyrus' touch. He straightens and takes a step away. "I am fine," he says shortly. "This human throat is simply not build to accommodate my language."

"IT IS A RATHER STRANGE LANGUAGE," Papyrus agrees. He hesitates, looking you or rather, Gaster, over. "SO YOU TRULY ARE MY...DAD?"

Gaster hesitates. "I am responsible for your creation, yes," he finally says in a murmur. "You used
called me father, a very long time ago."

"BUT WHY DON'T I REMEMBER?" Papyrus looks helplessly to Sans, who is still frozen. "I SHOULD REMEMBER YOU, SHOULDN'T I?"

"It is a very long and complicated story. But you do not need to feel guilty. My existence as been erased from almost everyone's minds." Gaster attempts to make eye contact with Sans. Sans won't look at you. "It might be better for your brother to fully explain, since he seems to have issues with me talking about it."

Papyrus' shoulders slump slightly. "I...I SEE. AND YOU TRULY HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO SHARE _____'S BODY?"

"Currently, yes."

Papyrus bends slightly, putting his face a few inches away from yours. He stares so intensely into your eyes that you almost feel like he can see you, trapped behind Gaster's mind. "AND HOW DOES SHE FEEL ABOUT THIS? DID SHE AGREE TO THIS?"

No, you most certainly did not. Gaster had failed to mention the fact that his act of propelling your Soul out of the Void would drag his Soul out too, latched tightly onto yours.

"Had you known, wouldn't you have done it anyway?" Gaster murmurs to you rather than Papyrus. "There really was no choice. Yes, I 'tagged along' as you put it, but it was the only way to return you to this timeline. Wouldn't you have agreed regardless if you knew the full extent?"

There's no question really. When he puts it like that, you know that he's right. As terrible as this situation is, it is far better than being dead. That doesn't mean you like it though.

Gaster sighs and addresses Papyrus again. "Whether she agreed or not is in the past. There is nothing that can be done about it now. There are no more resets in this world to fix past mistakes."

"RESETS?" Papyrus straightens, his brow bone furrowed in thought. "WELL, IF THAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION, THEN I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS SHALL DO EVERYTHING IN MY POWER TO ASSIST YOU IN THE TASK OF FINDING A NEW BODY!" His gloved hands shoot out, clasping your hands tightly. Gaster flinches at the contact and attempts to pull back but Papyrus' grip is too strong. "I WILL NOT REST UNTIL WE HAVE FIXED THIS PROBLEM! AND THEN WE SHALL CATCH UP ON ALL THE TIME THAT HAS BEEN MISSED!"

Easing your hands out of Papyrus' grip, Gaster takes a small step back. "Yes, I imagine there will be plenty of time for talking."

Papyrus looks like he's restraining himself from wrapping you in a hug. After a few moments of awkward silence, he smiles hesitantly and says "WELL, I STILL DON'T COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND WHAT IS GOING ON HERE BUT....AS LONG AS MY HUMAN FRIEND IS SAFE I AM GLAD YOU ARE BACK. D-DAD." It seems he can't hold back any longer and wraps his arms around you and Gaster, making your feet leave the ground.

Shock makes Gaster's hold loosen and for a split second your vision clears slightly. Your gaze darts to Sans. When you make eye contact, the three of you agree in a silent split second not to tell
Papyrus about the time limit. That is something that can be saved for another day.

You shiver as Gaster fully retreats, letting your mind sweep back into control. If your feet were on the ground, they would have given out from under you. A harsh gasp and coughing fit overtakes you and Papyrus quickly sets you back down.

"OH! IT IS YOU AGAIN!" There is no disappointment in his voice as he pats your head and looks closely at you. "AND YOUR EYES HAVE RETURNED TO NORMAL. I WILL ADMIT THAT DID STARTLE ME AT FIRST."

"My eyes?" you ask hoarsely.

"YES!" Papyrus points to his own sockets. "THEY WERE BLACK, SORT OF LIKE MINE!"

A shiver runs up your spine. No wonder Alphys had freaked out the moment she looked at you, or rather, Gaster. "Well, at least you never have to guess when it's him or me," you joke weakly before coughing again.

Papyrus puts a hand on your shoulder and steers you to the door. "YOU MUST GET SOMETHING TO SOOTHE YOUR THROAT HUMAN. YOUR VOICE IS VERY CROAKY. I WOULD ASSIST YOU IN MAKING A DRINK BUT I NEED TO SPEAK WITH MY BROTHER."

You plant your feet slightly when you get to the door, looking back at Sans. He's staring at you with a look of pure panic. "Papyrus-

"I AM SORRY BUT IT CANNOT WAIT." He opens the door and gives you another insistent push. "THERE ARE THINGS I MUST SPEAK TO HIM ABOUT." He stops and gives you another hug, a gentle one this time and doesn't lift you off the ground. "THANK YOU FOR HELPING MY DAD. I SURE IT MUST BE DIFFICULT."

You hug him back tightly, fighting the wave of emotion that makes your eyes sting. "It is Pap," you whisper. "But there's nothing we can do but fix it, right?"

He releases you and you see a glimmer of orange in his sockets. "THAT IS RIGHT! WE'LL TAKE CARE OF THIS PROBLEM IN NO TIME! NOW, GO GET SOME WATER OR SOMETHING!"

He steps back and shuts the door and you're left staring at the dark wood. You release a heavy breath. "Well, that went better than I thought it would."

He is remarkably calm and accepting about this, Gaster murmurs. He sounds tired. But then he always was foolishly optimistic about everything.

"It's not a bad thing to have hope." You step away from the door and rub at your face. You can hear the intones of Papyrus' voice, lowered and focused but you can't make out the words. You can't be sure as to what they're talking about, but you have a pretty good idea. And going by the look on his face, Sans did too. The pleading look in his sockets begging you not to leave him alone while facing his brother is burned into your mind. But this is something that is between them and as much as it twists your heart, you know it's not your place to stand between them. Before you ever came into his life, Papyrus was all Sans had. Maybe if Sans can just let himself tell the truth, if he can allow himself to honest about what happened with Gaster, he can finally let go of some of his guilt.

"Kinda weird to think that if you weren't here, they might never have spoken about all of this."
Well that makes this all better now doesn't it? he replies snidely.

You almost laugh at the tone of his 'voice'. "You're really sarcastic aren't you? Now I know where Sans gets it from." You turn and stop short.

Frisk is standing at the end of the hall. Their arms are crossed and they're frowning heavily. You stare at each other for a long moment before you lift your hands and smile widely.

"Okay, in my defense, people actually do talk to themselves all the time, they just don't admit it-"

It's the mystery man, isn't it? Frisk signs stubbornly. He's in your Soul.

You lower your hands. Mystery man? Right, didn't Gaster say Frisk had seen him before by messing with... 'files'? "Can you see him?"

They shake their head. I was...listening, they admit. But I couldn't hear much through the door. I recognized those marks on your face too. What happened?

"That's...well...it's-"

"Why is there a knife in the wall?!"

The shriek comes from the kitchen. Oh boy. Looks like Toriel's home. Both you and Gaster sigh. Time for round three of explanations then. You hope and yet seriously doubt it'll be the last time. You walk towards Frisk and take their hand, ignoring the hiss of displeasure that comes from Gaster at the contact. "Let's go into the kitchen so Toriel can hear too. And then I've got some questions for you."

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Sans wants to scream, fall on his knees and beg you to stay as Papyrus shoos you out. He sees in your eyes that you want to stay but the door is closed in your face. He holds a tiny flicker of hope that you'll come back in but the door remains shut. He shifts his gaze back to his knees as Papyrus sits down on the bed. "p-pap-"

"Are you okay brother?" Papyrus is keeping his voice down, watching Sans carefully. "When did this happen?"

"...i came home for lunch and she was...he was there." God, was it only today? "but i think he's been waiting in her soul since she woke up in the hospital."

"I see." Papyrus waits for several long moments before he asks the question Sans has dreaded for years. "Why did you lie about him? Who is he, really?"

It would be easy to keep lying; Papyrus was right, he did always know when Sans was lying but he never pushed him into telling the truth. It would be so easy to keep the full story of the accident to himself. Maybe Gaster would tell him, maybe he wouldn't.

But he's so sick and tired of lying.

"he was a scientist. the royal scientist before al was. before you and i were...made."

"What do you mean made?"

Sans shrugs helplessly. "we weren't made by the usual way pap. gaster made me from bone taken
out of his hand and other...stuff. 's complicated. anyway i was just an experiment. i was just an extra hand in the lab, a possible weapon that failed from the beginning. at first i was just a failed project but then he started to teach me. i wasn't really a son, not until...that doesn't matter. he uh, he changed after a while and we worked on the core together. it wasn't running properly back then; power went out all the time and lot of places didn't even have power. later, he made you and you helped us too."

Papyrus puts his head in his hands. "But I don't remember any of that!" He sounds frustrated. "Why can't I remember?"

Sans sighs and lays back on the bed. It creaks slightly under the weight of his bones. "there was an accident. gaster got really into his work. it started changing him. he started doing bad things again. there was a night we got into a fight. things went wrong, they went so wrong and i...i couldn't...."

"So...when he said that you were responsible for his fall...."

"that..." Sans' voice catches. He throws his arm up over his sockets.

"Sans?"

"it was an accident," he whispers as his bones start to tremble. The words start to pour from him because it's almost like he's lost the ability to stay quiet. The confession spills out even as a part of his Soul screams at him to stop because Paps will surely hate him after this. Once he knows there will be no going back to how they were before. "we fought but i didn't want to...i never meant to...no."

More lies, he can't stop lying.

"i wanted to hurt him that night. he did bad things pap. he wasn't the dad who raised us anymore. he was different and i was so angry. we fought and i almost fell into the core. he saved me but then he fell and everything went crazy. everything broke. and then no one could remember him. he was just erased from everyone's mind. maybe it was his magic mixing with the core that did. it might have been the energy we stole from the void during our experiments. i dunno. i was the only one who remembered. to everyone else, he was just a ghost of a memory of story told on a stormy night. he disappeared. it was my fault."

Papyrus gingerly scoots back on the bed until his spine hits the wall. He's staring down at Sans with a conflicted expression. "But it was accident. You couldn't have known such a thing would happen."

"doesn't matter. it led to so many bad things. that night might have been like pulling the trigger to all the crap that happened in that hellhole," he mumbles. "member when i spent all that time in the labs, before we moved to snowdin? i was trying to find him."

In the time immediately following the accident, Sans had poured every ounce of his being into trying to find a way bring Gaster back. Back then they had lived in a place in the capital, small but cozy and Papyrus was only just beginning to turn his interests into joining the Royal Guard. It was of course Sans had already known about various timelines from before Gaster vanished but it was during his frantic searching that he began to notice the strange patterns in the readings. It was after he had almost given up and moved out to Snowdin that he began to feel the effects of the resets. That had led to a brief surge in his determination to find an answer but-

"Sans?"

He starts; ah, there he goes getting lost in his own skull again. "anyway, it didn't work. i couldn't find him. i thought he was gone. but uh, heh turns out he was a just a gunshot away huh?" A dry chuckle
escapes him.

Paps doesn't laugh. "So you don't like him."

Sans sits up slowly. "it's complicated pap. he's done bad things."

"But look at what's he's done for blank blank. Papyrus gestures towards the door. "She could've been gone forever. He brought her back because he must have know how much she means to all of us."

Sans scoffs, knocking his foot against the side of the bed. "he did it for a ride out of that place."

"Hm. Still, he's come to us for help, which means he must be trying to be a better person. I want to help him. Surely I, the Great Papyrus, can show him that he can be our dad again. He can be good if he just tries."

Those words send a flash of memory through Sans' head; a memory of gold and red and screams from a small child wielding a knife. "heh, you really do think anyone can be a good person, huh?"

"Of course they can!" Papyrus puts his arm around Sans shoulders. "We just have to help people see that sometimes."

Sans is stiff under his brother's hug. "aren't you mad at me? i kept all of that from you for so long. i basically caused our father's disappearance. i'm a poor excuse of a monster."

"You were angry and probably scared," Papyrus says gently. "I know you Sans. You would never hurt someone on purpose. It was an accident. And you tried to fix things. I'd say you are a proper monster through and through."

But he's not. Sans knows that he's not. He's never been a good monster. But if his bro so completely believes in him and a bright eyed, astounding human like you could love him, then maybe one day he can be. But...

Sans lets himself slump against his brother as a small measure of relief floods his bones. It's overshadowed by the enormity of the task ahead. "i don't know how to do it paps," he says in a strangled voice. "i don't know how to make a body."

"That does seem like a bit of a tough problem," Papyrus admits. "But as lazy as you are, you are very smart. Dad must be too if he was the Royal Scientist. I believe that you can do it if you work together!" He gasps suddenly. "He already made us right?! He can do it again for himself!"

Oh that thought has already crossed his mind. Sans flexes his hand, staring down at the pure white bone of his palm. "maybe so pap. guess that makes you the smart one."

"NYEH HEH! WELL I AM ONE OF THE LUCKY FEW BLESSED WITH GOOD LOOKS AND A GREAT BRAIN!"

"that you are bro." Sans clenched his hand tightly, the tips of his phalanges digging into his palm. "thank you."
Dinner For Two

Chapter Notes

Okay, special treat for you guys, I have made an 'It's Not Too Late' music playlist! You can find that right HERE. I tried to order the songs in a way that makes sense with the story so feel free to check that out and if you have recommendations for songs that you feel are perfect for this story please leave a comment with the song title and I'll check it out!

A Halloween Frisk

I Write Here
Main Blog Here
Feed the comment monster!

Hardest to convince so far is definitely Toriel. She just silently watches you with concern when you try to explain what's happening before insisting that she take you to the hospital because clearly something's wrong and she of course doesn't mean any offense but how can any of that true-

Of course once Gaster actually makes an appearance, her concern turns into shock and considerable rage at Gaster for setting up shop in your Soul. Sans has told you before but you're finally starting to really understand what a private and personal thing your Soul is. But like everyone else, she finally seems to sort of accept that there is no choice in the matter right now. She winds up busying herself at the stove making dinner, moving at a frankly scary pace and muttering to herself while you attempt to pull the knife out of the wall. Once it's out you find a small can of wall spackle and patch up the hole as best as you can. Gaster is fairly quiet while you do this. He's probably worn out from all the talking he's had to do on his first day back in the real world.

Frisk is also pretty quiet though they're staring at you with an intensity that makes your skin crawl. "So, Gaster says you saw him back in the underground," you say lightly, smoothing out the spackle. "Something about messing with files?"

They shrug, looking down at the ground. They glance at Toriel to make sure she isn't looking before they answer. Sometimes things changed over different runs. Different calls in different places, new monsters that disappeared after I talked to them once. And then just one time, there was a door. They frowned and fiddle with the hem of their shirt. I went inside and there was a monster I'd never seen before in there. But it was like they weren't actually there. They were...fuzzy? Frisk seems to be struggling with the words and finally shrug again. When I tried talking, they made a face and disappeared.

That's the only time someone has seen me and tried to speak to me, Gaster says quietly. During your entire explanation to Toriel he had been distracted, too busy studying Frisk to pay attention. I will admit it startled me and made me lose my grip on the timeline. It was quite a setback.
You put the lid back on the spackle and stand. "But did you do anything to make that happen?"

Frisk shakes their head. **No. All I could do was reset, save and load. I didn't have anything to do with the other stuff.**

"Hmm. Probably a glitch in the Matrix then."

**In the what?** Gaster and Frisk ask at the same time.

You fight back a smile. "Nothing."

Once the wall is taken care of you wander back into the living room while Frisk stays in the kitchen to help with dinner. Plopping down on the couch, you pull your laptop to you and start it up.

**What are you doing?**

"Exactly what I was doing before you kicked in the door to my Soul," you mutter. You pull up a saved list of houses, looking over the options again. You have a feeling Sans will be okay with pretty much any of these as long as they have plenty of windows but you want to get Papyrus' opinion too. There is one in particular you really like that has deck that leads up to the roof. It'd be perfect for star gazing. It's within the price range Sans gave you but it is a bit of a fixer upper-

**This is not what we should be doing right now,** Gaster grumbles. **There are many tests that we need to take to determine-**

"Look, I don't know about you but I've had a pretty crappy day," you interrupt. "Dinner is going to be ready soon and Sans isn't even around to help with whatever tests you've got. Let me breathe for a minute." You slip on your headphones and start up your playlist, doing your best to ignore Gaster's continued muttering. In fact you get so into your ignoring that you don't notice when Sans and Papyrus enter the room until Sans actually flops down next to you. You squeak, taken by surprise.

Sans grins. "hey squeaky."

"Hey yourself," you say as you take your headphones off. You look closely at him. He doesn't appear visibly distressed but that doesn't exactly mean much when it comes to him. "How'd it go?"

He hesitates then nods. "um, good. i think?" he says softly. "he doesn't hate me so..."

You nudge him. "Of course he doesn't." You say this lightly but relief sweeps over you. You take his hand, squeezing tightly. The bone is warm. "I'm proud of you."

"heh, took all the guts i've got." He pats his belly, sockets glinting. "which is to say, none at all."

"Shush you, I'm trying to have a moment here," you grumble, poking his belly too. "You were very brave."

His easy smile fades a little. He glances at Papyrus, who is in the process of cleaning up the footprints tracked inside earlier. "i wasn't. i still didn't tell him everything. i didn't say anything about the resets."

Oh. "But you talked about Gaster and the accident, right?"

He nods.

"That's enough for now," you reassure him. "It's a step and you took it. That's something to be proud
of."

His head slumps onto your shoulder. "i guess it is," he whispers. He sounds surprised at himself.

You give his skull a quick smooch and angle the laptop slightly so he can see it. "So, I've picked out a few places and I really like this one-" you point to the house with the roof access- "But it needs some work, which I honestly don't mind doing since it's mostly painting. It's only a few blocks away so we could still see everyone all the time and...what?"

He's sat up and is staring at you with wide sockets. He gestures to the laptop. "you're still looking at houses? do you really think this is the best time?"

**For once I agree,** Gaster adds. **There is much work to be done as is. There's no time to be doing frivolous things.**

"It's not frivolous, it's my life," you snap to Gaster before turning to Sans. "Let's get one thing straight right here and now. Yeah, this thing with my Soul is serious and needs to be taken care of fast. But I'm not going to sit around and twiddle my thumbs in the meantime. We can't work on this twenty-four seven. You have work, that you just started by the way, and I'm supposed to start back at the station next week. If I only have..." You stop and start over because you won't let yourself even consider the possibility. "I'm not going to act like I've only got this short time left. My life was nearly taken from me once already. This time at least I can keep living."

Sans' sockets tighten. "but-"

You point to your head. "He wants to do tests and I'm all for that. But being in control wears him out. He can't do it for long periods of time I'm guessing. So how about this; I'll do my show in the mornings. You do whatever sciencey stuff the university hired you to do during that time and then in the afternoon we'll work on my problem. And in between I'll keep looking at houses because you gave me a freaking perfect vision of the future and I'm not gonna let it go!" You take a breath; you're getting worked up and you can't do that. You have to stay calm about this. "I'm not saying we should move immediately. But I like this house. I think we can make a home there. What harm is there in at least checking it out?"

For a few moments longer, Sans stares at you. Then he slaps his hand over his sockets and laughs quietly to himself. "you're really something, you know that?"

"Don't make fun of me," you mumble.

"I'm not." His hand falls away and now he's genuinely smiling. He scoots a little closer. "lemme see this dream house."

"Nope." You pout and turn the laptop away. "Hey Papyrus! Come look at this house for sale! I think it's perfect!"

Papyrus, whose cleaning had taken him out to the hallway by the door, pokes his head in excitedly. "OH, HAVE YOU FOUND THE PERFECT HOME?"

You gesture for him to come closer. "I think so Pap! What do you think?"

Papyrus leans in, looking at the pictures. "WOW! THIS HOUSE IS VERY BRIGHT!"

"It is, isn't it? And I really like this bit here."

"OH THAT DOES LOOK WONDERFUL!"
Sans leans forward. "hey, um..."

You push him back gently with your foot. "And oh my stars, what do you think about this?"

Papyrus nods sagely. "YES INDEED, THIS DOES LOOK PERFECT."

"now you're just being mean."

You smirk at Sans. "Me, mean? Never!"

Gaster sighs with great suffering.

******

Dinner is an...interesting affair. The moment your eyes see the food in front of you your stomach growls fiercely and suddenly you are ravenously hungry to the point of actual pain. You clear one plate, then two, all while everyone watches you with a measure of surprise and concern. It's on your fourth plate that your stomach suddenly cramps up and you run to the bathroom. You vomit up all the food you just inhaled while Sans sits on the floor next to you, rubbing your back.

When you finally stop and lean back against the wall, you hear Gaster groan in your head. That may have been one of the worst things I have ever experienced.

"Yeah, well I'm pretty sure it's your fault," you mumble. "What, skeletons don't puke?"

Take a moment and really think about that question.

Sans sighs and rubs his phalanges against his closed sockets. "ok, looks like we've got our first test. why exactly did that happen?"

You shrug helplessly. "I don't know. I was so hungry. I couldn't stop."

I believe that you are correct about me being the source of your hunger, Gaster says slowly. It has been a very, very long time since I ate anything. Or since I felt hunger for that matter. And now that I am tied to a being with the capability to feel hunger, it would appear that you feel that hunger as well.

"If that's the case, why didn't I feel anything until I actually sat down to eat? Years of not eating seems like something you can't just ignore."

I admit I let my guard down when I saw the food on the table. I did not need to eat in the Void, but I most certainly missed it. My desire to eat must have become a priority and forced it's way to the surface of both of our Souls.

"i guess that's one question answered," Sans says glumly once you relay that thought to him.

"Is this gonna happen every time I eat?" you moan.

Sans shakes his head. "just eat slowly. i think it just took you off guard this time. you might be a little hungrier than usual for a bit but if dings can keep a handle on it, then it shouldn't be too bad. i hope. there's no way to know for sure until it happens."

You groan again. "You are so helpful babe."

"that's what i'm here for. feel like giving dinner another go?"
"...Yes."

The second time around you manage to keep your food down, not that's there's much left after you ate almost everything. Toriel offers to make more food but you turn her down as gently as you can because you don't want to push it. As you're finishing up, Sans gets a call from Alphys. He puts it on speaker so the two (or rather, three) of you can hear.

"The initial r-readings pretty much confirm what you thought Sans."

"Which was what?" you ask as you snag a few more crumbs from your plate and lick your finger.

"It would appear that G-Gaster's Soul is occupying around ten point seven percent of your Soul's mass, but the number kept fluctuating during the scan, so it's n-not an exact number. The overall quality of your Soul is a lot more....um, flexible than normal. According to readings from other human Souls at least which admittedly isn't a lot because it's hard to find humans willing to let their Souls be scanned willingly and...sorry I got off t-track. But looking at readings from what remains of N-Nahn's research, this is a vast change from what your Soul surface quality was like before and during her experiments."

Oh that's right; Alphys was helping the police in decoding what was recovered of the data found in that lab. It makes your stomach twist to think that Nahn's sick experiments are helping in any way. "What was it like before? I never really understood what they were talking about at the time."

Alphys hesitates for a moment before answering. "From what I've seen humans, mostly adults, have an outer layer to their Soul, like a shell. Most of the t-time it's thin but in cases l-like yours, that shell is thicker. It's kind of like a protection for their Soul."

Right. It's fuzzy because you have so stubbornly blocked those memories from your mind but now you do vaguely remember Nahn and the others shouting 'surface damage' and 'give stats'. "So basically you're saying my Soul used to be super tough and now it's super soft?"

"Basically." Her voice is grim. "It's making your Soul very unstable. But according to the calculations, it's because your Soul is so malleable at the moment that you haven't absorbed the bit of Gaster's Soul that's in there. It's just kind of f-flowing around it as best as I can tell. I'm sorry but we'll uh, we'll have to do some more scans and get readings for when he's in control and during the actual switch."

"there is a visible difference," Sans adds, his gaze dropping down to your chest. "it's back to how it was during the scan now but earlier...well, you'll see soon enough."

"Yeah," she sighs. You can hear the tones of Undyne's voice in the background. "Look I've g-got to go. And um, I hope it's okay but I t-talked to Undyne about what's happened. She's kinda-"

There's a muffled thud and crash over the line.

"Upset about it," Alphys finishes glumly.

"don't think there's anyone happy about this," Sans says dryly. "thanks for letting us know al. we'll see you tomorrow." He hangs up the phone before tapping his phalanges against the table. It makes a click-click noise.

You set your head down on the table, watching his movements. "What do we do now?"

Gaster makes a little hmph noise. I believe Sans can see the obvious first step here.
Like Sans had actually heard him, he sighs and reaches out with his hand not tapping against the table. He rubs your head for a moment before speaking. "as far as we know the only one who has managed to make a body that could hold a monster's soul is right here. but clearly something is wrong because he hasn't immediately given me the answer. am i right?"

I created Sans and Papyrus yes, but there is a vast amount of work and calculations involved in such a task. I may be smart but even I cannot remember every detail from something so long ago, especially after the infinite knowledge of the Void was poured into my finite memory. That is what my notes and documentations were for but....

"most of those vanished when he did," Sans finishes your translation and sighs again. "yep. i looked everywhere for any trace of proof that he existed but most of his research was destroyed in the accident. or i'm assuming it was. anyway, i wrote down everything i could remember at the time but his formula for creating me and paps wasn't exactly on the top of my priority list. there might not be much there."

"But maybe there's still something we can use," you say hopefully. "You never know what you might have written down or what might be connected. This sounds like the only choice we have. So we'll start there! Where are your notes at?"

Sans suddenly smiles at you widely. "'fraid that's gonna have to wait until tomorrow morning."

You're very torn between chewing out 'Mr Impatient' for suddenly being okay with waiting and curiosity as to why you have to wait. The curiosity wins out. "And why, pray tell, is that?"

"it's a bit of a trip. looks like you're going to get the vip tour of the underground." He winks at you as your face brightens with realization. "well, it's about time that you see where the great papyrus grew up anyway."

You clap your hands excitedly. The underground! That was a bit of a trip! You've been curious, of course you have, but after Sans had woken up from numerous nightmares about being trapped there again, you didn't feel right pressing the idea of going to see it for yourself and it had simply become a passing wish. "I would be ten times happier if we weren't going there for such a serious reason but I'm still pretty freaking excited!"

He laughs. "i'll tell the university guys i won't be in til later tomorrow. before you start," he cuts off your protest, "they told me that given you're in the middle of a long and terrible recovery-"

You roll your eyes.

"if i needed to come later in the day for the first little while to deal with medical emergencies it's ok."

He grins smugly and lifts his hands. "i'd say this qualifies. unless you want to go right now and stay out in the underground all night."

"As tempting as that is, I think I'd like a early night." You give him a pleading look. "No more tests or experiments tonight. Please? I'm so tired."

But we really should-

"Shush."

*****

The subject is smart, overwhelming smart but there are far too many setbacks. For one, it won't stop...
asking questions. C1 follows him around whenever he allows it out of the room and while there is part of him that is far too happy to feed that desire for knowledge, there's a stirring of unease growing in him. C1 was far too inquisitive, questioning every fact given, twisting his answers just to get a rise out of him. It would seem that some of his own less desirable traits carried over into the subject. That could cause a problem in the future if the subject started questioning its obedience and loyalty.

The more immediate problem of course, is the subject's HP. He's never seen a monster with such a low number and he honestly didn't expect the subject to survive the transition from the immersion tank out into the open. But it did and shockingly, the subject is sturdy. Sturdy enough perhaps to handle boosts of DT extract. After all, at the current level, there's no way this subject will be suitable as a line of defense against humans if...when the barrier breaks.

He's pulled from his thoughts by a tugging at his leg. The subject, who always has a smile plastered on it's face, grins up at him. It's holding a book of astronomy. "read!" The tiny skeleton holds the book up. "what is this?"

Ah, another item to add to the list of skills to work on. The subject speaks far too much like a child. It isn't even a year old yet, considering it's speaking at all is very impressive. But hearing such a voice with such innocence is doing strange things to his Soul. It makes an odd, painful feeling grip his bones. Such a feeling threatens to make him weak.

"We shall read it later," he says gruffly, turning back to his current project.

Another tug, another smile. "please? now. i wanna know."

That feeling courses through him again and there's a part of him that knows exactly what it is. Somewhere in his Soul, he cares about this creature, as more than as a subject. But how could he not?! It looked like a child! A small, helpless child! He has to focus; this is not a child, this is a mere clone. It's a tool, a weapon. Not a creature meant to feel actual emotions. This is bad, this was not part of the plan.

"read, read!"

"I said no!" He lashes out, and he meant just to startle it, but the subject is closer than he thought. His hand smacks against it's face, knocking the subject back. It loses it's balance and lands heavily on the stone floor. The book falls out of it's hand and on the spine, bending the pages. C1's socket's are wide with shock as it stares up at him. The light of it's pupils fade as just a shimmer of color lines the edge of it's sockets. Tears? It can cry actual tears? He had heard it cry before of course, but never has he seen actual tears. His breath catches as that terrifying feeling of caring grows into a raging flame for just a moment and his hand is already extended out before he realizes what he's doing and snatches it back. He stands and C1 curls in on itself, ducking it's head into it's arms.

He picks the book up, smoothing out the bent pages. "Return to your room C1," he says quietly.

The subject nods and slowly gets to it's feet, giving the book in his hand one last longing look before shuffling away. He waits until he hears the door to the subject's room open and shut before setting the book down on the table. He can hear soft sobbing from behind the door and now it's no longer like the whine of a dog like he previously labeled the noise. The subject is crying, actually crying.

Like a child.

He grips the edge with both his whole and 'holey' hand. The pun comes without thought and he's almost mad at himself for it in this moment.
It cannot be denied. Without his permission, he was growing attached to the subject. Attachment is dangerous. Attachment means weakness. There can be no weakness in this fight. It was weakness that got all of monster kind stuck down here in the first place. Steps have to be taken to stop this. He pulls his hands to his chest, rubbing his thumb against the hole in his left palm. He had already given up so much. It would be for naught if he did not have the resolve to take the necessary steps now. There are things that must be done to ensure the future of all monsters.

Even if that means sacrificing his own compassion and love.

******

You wake up with your hands clenched together, your thumb pressed into your left palm. You blink slowly, disoriented. You were...there was a lab...and a child...no, was it a subject? No. It was a child. It was...

You shift slightly to look at Sans. He's still sleeping, face relaxed and open. Your heart swells with a painful emotion that makes you want to hold him tightly and physically shield him from the world and from anyone and anything that wants to hurt him.

The wall in your head is up, meaning Gaster is still sleeping too. After waiting for just a moment to make sure, you move closer to Sans and put your arm over him, pulling him close to you. The motion makes him stir slightly. He shifts, his arm draping over your waist. A sleepy sigh escapes him.

'wha' time's it?" he mumbles.


Perhaps there's a catch in your voice because he opens his sockets. "you ok?"

You put your head in the space between his skull and shoulder, taking a deep breath. Okay, he really needs to wash this shirt but that's not important right now. "I had a dream. I think it was a memory."

You feel his hand stroke the back of your hair. "bad one?"

"Yeah, but it wasn't mine. I saw you and...you were tiny. More than you are now."

"thanks babe."

You grin weakly for a moment. "I mean like you were a child. You were in a lab. I was there but...I wasn't me. I think I was him. I think it was his memory."

Sans is frozen under you.

"It happened before too," you continue in a whisper. "I saw a baby skeleton in a stone room with no windows. I forgot about that until just now."

"what did you see this time?" Sans asks in a low voice that is tight with dread.

"You had a book about the stars. You asked me...him to read it. He said no and accidentally hit you. It was the first time he saw you cry."

He releases a slow, shaky breath. "welp. this is probably not good."

You shake your head, pressing yourself even closer to him. His hip bones are digging into your stomach but you really don't care. "I'm so sorry baby."
Sans sits up with a groan, holding you so that you don't have to let go of him. "it was a long time ago," he says gently. "i'm not happy about you seeing that but it's not like i've really got more secrets to hide."

"I'm not upset about that!" You lean away from him slightly. "You were in pain! You were a little baby and he thought of you as a thing!" The wall in your head shudders slightly and you freeze; you really don't want Gaster to wake up right now. He stills and you release a breath. "Sans I just-"

He puts a single finger over your lips, silencing you. "it's a just a memory. remember what i said? i was just a test subject in the beginning. he changed. kind of. i'm sorry you had to see that. will you let me know if it happens again?"

You sigh and nod.

"ok." He presses his teeth against your cheek. "let's get going since we're both up. we've got quite a trip ahead of us."
Mount Ebott is about an hour drive out of the city but with that distance and carrying extra passengers, Sans is concerned a shortcut would burn him out before they even got to his old home in Snowdin so you decide to take the car. You don't mind; it's been a long time since you've driven your car and gone anywhere. Sans is pretty quiet during the trip. He mostly stares out the side window with his chin in his hand, occasionally giving you directions since you've never been up to the mountain. You've got the radio on, the music set to a soft beat.

A while after the scene outside changes from the glittering of the city to the still snow covered hills and woods, you turn the music down a little. Sans peeks over at you, moving only his pupils.

"You know what? When all this is over, I want to take a trip," you announce. "The beach is only a few hours away isn't it?"

"little cold to be going to the beach right now." He's smiling.

You shrug. "Hey, it'll warm up soon enough. Besides, you don't necessarily have to go swimming. There's shell collecting and romantic walks under the moonlight and all kind of shops and places with fresh seafood."

He hums in thought. "better not tell undyne then. what with the fish food and all."

Your heart sinks. "Oh crap I didn't even think!"

"geez, it's like you don't know her at all."

You frown and tap the wheel. "I guess it makes sense she wouldn't be comfortable with all the fish eating that humans do."

"yeah, try to be a little more-pffft-aware of the-" He can't hold it in and dissolves into giggles at the look on your face.

You smack his arm. "Oh ha ha!"

He puts up his hands in defeat. "ok, i told a fibula. she doesn't eat fish but she's fine with other guys doing it. it's not like she's an actual fish. she just wishes-"

"Oh no."

"there were other dishes-"
"Stop."

"than fish- ah the turn!"

Crap! You slam your foot on the break and manage to swerve into the turn off, screaming shrilly as the car nearly spins from the force. You bump onto the dirt road leading up to the mountain, leaving a rather impressive black mark on the highway and a cloud of dust behind you. Fortunately, there's no one else around to witness your crazy maneuver. You catch your breath and look at Sans. He's holding on tightly to his seat belt, sockets wide. You lick your lips and grin.

"Sushi what happens when you distract me when I'm driving?"

His pupils flash into star shapes even as he breaks into loud guffaws of laughter. "i think i love you."

"I can sea that."

He shuts his sockets as little beads of tears build in the corners of his eyes. He's completely overtaken by giggles. The force shakes his entire frame and fills the car with the sound of rattling bones.

Almost there! "Sans, calm down! Your laughing is rocking the boat!"

His fist slams against the seat as he takes a deep gulp of air. "oh god, ok, you win this one!"

You shimmy your shoulders in a pleased manner as he fights to get his breath back. Laughter is bubbling right there in your chest, but there's one more you've got to get out before you lose it. "That's right. Bow before the MASTer!"

Surprisingly, your combined howls of uncontrolled laughter doesn't wake Gaster up, though you're pretty sure if anyone is within a mile of your car they'd be able to hear the two of you. You're still fighting to catch your breath as you pull up into a clearing next to a large sign. It reads 'Warning: Restricted Area'. You park and leave the car. It's a nice day out, a little chilly but bright. You pull your coat closer to you. "Should we be worried about that?" You point to the sign.

Sans shuts the car door, shuffling up next to you. "nah, that's just to keep people out who might mess around with stuff down there. monsters can come and go no problem. c'mon, it's up the trail here."

He takes your hand, leading you over to worn trail that disappears into the trees. It must have been a while since it last snowed because you can see a wide variety of footprints in the patches of snow on the ground. You walk for about ten minutes before you come across a wired fence that stretches out on either side of the trail and gate with a padlock and keypad. Sans types in a few numbers and it clicks open.

"More security measures?" you ask as you pass through.

"in a manner of speaking." The gate clangs shut with an odd sense of finality. "it was put here to keep us in right after the barrier fell. seems the government didn't want monsters wandering around until we were counted and processed and all that good stuff."

He's speaking casually but you stop short. A fence to keep them in?! Does this surprise you well...no. But it makes your stomach twist all the same. "That's horrible," you mutter, catching up to him.

He shrugs. "hey it went by pretty quickly and most of us were just happy to feel the outside air and see the sky."
There's really no point in grumbling about it, but you continue to do so anyway as you walk for another ten minutes or so. The path opens up into a clearing that a lot of monsters clearly spent a lot of time in. There's old fire pits, makeshift benches made from logs and even remains of tents that are collapsed under piles of snow. But that's not what catches your attention. Your jaw drops as you take in the massive hole in the side of the mountain. It's huge, probably at least thirty feet tall and half as wide. Chucks of rock litter the entrance, which is dimly lit by the sunlight but quickly fades into darkness. The two of you approach the archway. Your stomach twists with unease.

"That's uh...that's a big hole," you say dumbly.

Sans kicks at a small rock. "yep."

You continue to stare down into the darkness. "Should we go ahead and go?"

"i guess."

Neither of you move.

"Arrgh!" You slap your hands over your cheeks, making Sans jump. This isn't a horror film! This is where Sans and all other monsters used to live! Why do you feel so nervous all of a sudden? You steel yourself and take his hand; his palm is clammy. "Okay mister tour guide! I expect lots of random interesting facts as we go along!"

His phalanges squeeze your fingers tightly. "you got it boss."

You step into the broken barrier, the crunch of snow and frozen grass underfoot changing to soft taps against stone. Surprisingly, the temperature rises as you descend into the mountain. Your eyes adjust quickly, even thought at the moment there's not much to see. Just stone walls and a matching walkway.

"dings still sleeping?" Sans asks suddenly, his voice echoing slightly against the stone walls.

"Um, yeah, I think so." You're very conflicted on whether to be concerned or not. "Question: why do you call him Dings at times and Gaster at other times?"

He shrugs. "old habit i guess. when i was younger i saw his full name and thought dings was more fun to say than gaster. and since it clearly annoyed him, i kept using it."

"Of course you did."

"but he never really got super angry about it unless i said it in front of other monsters." He grins. "sometimes i did anyway. it was hilarious."

You chuckle, stepping over a pile of rocks. "Oh, speaking of other monsters, are there any still down here?"

"a few." Sans, instead of stepping over or around the pile of rocks, lets go of your hand, vanishes for a split second and then reappears on the other side and takes your hand again. You roll your eyes. If there was a lazy bones award, this guy would be the king. "some monsters decided they prefer the quiet of the underground or were too intimidated by the insane amount of people that are on the surface. then we've got guys that keep an eye on the core, doing matinence work, keeping it cool, stuff like that. they switch out every few days. al comes down here a lot to just make sure everything is running ok. we don't want it exploding cause that would be really bad for everyone, especially considering this thing is built above an semi-active magma line."
"Magma line?" you sputter. "As in a volcano kind of magma line?"

"just a little one. but the resulting explosion could very well level this whole mountain and that'd be pretty bad."

He's being way too calm about this! "Um, yeah that would be...oh...."

The tunnel you've been walking down has shifted into less of a natural formation and into a carved space. Before you is a stone archway. You step through and suddenly you're in a huge space filled with golden flowers. Vines creep down the walls, creating a sort of greenhouse effect to the entire room. A huge window set in one wall allows sunlight to filter in from an unknown source. Probably some kind of natural vent leading to the surface. There's a throne sitting in the middle of the flowers; it's massive. But that makes sense considering how big Asgore is. You approach it, admiring the detailed carvings on the wood. It's a little dusty but you can see the insignia of the royal family in several places. "I think I'd need a stool just to get into this thing," you joke.

"wanna lift?"

Before you can protest, you feel that gentle tugging of Sans magic on your Soul and your feet leave the ground. He spins you and plops you down right on the plush purple cushion of the throne. "Sans!" you hiss, looking around. "I shouldn't be sitting in this! It's a throne!"

He leans casually against the throne, a mischievous glint in his sockets. "yeah, an empty throne in a mostly empty kingdom. it's fine."

You frown at him but you can't help but get comfortable. Your feet dangle over the edge. "Okay, this is actually pretty cool. Is this your way of acknowledging my right to the crown of puns?"

"ha! you wish." He helps you down and you quickly move on from the throne room. The hallway beyond is gray and bleak and Sans tugs you to a stop pretty quickly. His sockets are tight. "hey, um. just down the path is the judgment hall and i'd rather not go through there. too many memories. shortcut ok?"

"Yeah, of course."

He smiles in relief and then the world spins. When you regain your balance you find yourself on another stone walkway overlook an entire city set within a cavern so large you can't see the other side. "Woah!" You walk over to the edge of the path, making sure to keep some distance. There's no safety rail and it just drops off into a cluster of buildings on the ground below. The city itself is fairly quiet but you can see lights on in some of the windows, scattered among the stone like diamonds. "I never realized how big it was!"

Sans joins you, looking out over the city too. "used to be a very lively place. it's kinda hard to keep track of day and night so there was always something going on." He nudges you again. "let's keep moving. there's a lot to see and not a ton of time."

He uses more shortcuts after that, taking you from place to place. You see glimpses of endless halls of machinery, what looks like the remains of a stage with bits of metal thrown around and you run into your first monster in the MTT resort (a slimy guy trying valiantly to mop up the mess created by his own body). Mettaton had told you about this place but to actually see it is something else entirely. Burgerpants used to work here as you recall. You do stop and Sans treats you to a Glamburger that you eat on the way. It's actually really good and you swear you can see your skin glowing lightly for a few minutes afterwards.
As you travel through Hotland you, naturally, have to shed your coat from the heat. You catch a glimpse of the Core after a few minutes of walking. Even from this distance you can see the gears churning away, spewing out energy to power the entire underground. Sans doesn't seem to want to look at it so you move on pretty quickly. The last stop in Hotland is a massive lab that almost oddly out of place. You head inside and the remains of glitter and ramen wrappers confirms that this is where Alphys used to work. There's a huge monitor set up against a wall but the screen is black.

Sans goes over to a set of drawers, quickly pawing through piles of old papers. You watch him for a moment before asking, "Is this the main lab?"

"one of the main ones. gaster's old place is closer to the core," he mumbles, a little distracted. "crap, i don't think it's here. i think we're gonna have to go downstairs into long term storage. most of what i think we'll need is at my place but there are some really old records from before alphys' time somewhere around here. i think. anyway, the original dt extractor is down there. nahn based hers off of alphys' and she recreated hers after this one." He looks up at you, concern in his eyes. "are you gonna be ok looking at it? the whole area is kinda creepy too. you can wait up here if you want."

"I think I'd feel better sticking with you," you tell him honestly. "Plus I can help look through everything so we can get going."

So with that, the two you walk walk to the elevator, which is next to a rather oddly shaped hole in the wall that Sans snickers at. The elevator makes a loud whirling noise as you drop down and you feel an odd sense of dread and nerves building in your chest. The door opens up into complete darkness. Sans' socket glows while he searches for the light switch; it throws a blue glow over the dark walls. You shiver.

"ah, got it," he finally announces. The lights overhead flicker on, not that they do much to relieve the gloom. "library's this way."

You stick to his side like glue as you walk down the hall. There are monitors on the wall that flash to life as you pass by. Sans moves quickly so you only catch a few lines.

ENTRY NUMBER 2: The barrier is locked by SOUL power... Unfortunately, this power cannot be recreated artificially.

believe this is what gives their SOULs the strength to persist after death.

The first golden flower

i want this to work.

"This is where the amalgamates were kept, isn't it?"

"yep." His voice is low. "not just them." The look on his face is wistful, almost sad.

It clicks in your head before he has a chance to say it. "You were born here?" In this dark, terrifying place?

He rubs his thumb over your hand. "it was different back then. still kinda dark but dings practically lived here before he moved everything over to the other lab. it was easier to keep me hidden away out here. this was my home for a long time. i didn't know anything else." He takes a breath and smiles at you. "don't look like that. it happened a long time ago."

You give him a kiss. "Let's just hurry and find what you're looking for. I want to see your real home in Snowdin."
"heh, sounds good. here's the library."

The library turns out to be a rather small room packed to the brim with books, folders and VHS tapes. The tv against the wall is ancient. You doubt that it still even works. Sans instructs you to look for anything regarding bone or Soul manipulation or anything with odd symbols on it and you get to work. There's years worth of data stored in here. Human scientists would go nuts if they could get their hands on this stuff. There's magical theory, how it ties in with science, historical recounts of the war and charts of numbers that make no sense to you. It's hard not to get wrapped up in all of the information. After an hour of digging through everything without much luck, you set down a book filled with core number settings and stretch. Your head is starting to hurt.

"I'm gonna walk for a second," you say, standing up.

Sans grunts, barely looks up from the book in his hands. He's almost completely surrounded by a huge pile of papers. "dt machine is to the left," he mumbles. "yell if you need me."

Clearly, he's warning you not to go to the left but as you leave the room, you find yourself heading towards it with a morbid curiosity. Maybe if you see the actual thing you can get over your fear of the one in Alphys' lab. At least a little. It's not far and soon you step into the room with the machine. If you thought Nahn's was big, this one is at least three times bigger. It very eerily resemble's Sans' Gaster Blaster. The dark socket like holes near the top almost seem to stare at you, freezing you in place. Thick wires hanging from the ceiling are draped over the device, sticking out in places like horns. If you look closely, you can see faded stains upon it's surface. Your heart starts to race and you lean against the wall. Bad idea, this was a very bad idea.

"Okay," you breathe shakily. "Calm down, just a machine. It's just a machine." You close your eyes; Gaster's still sleeping and now, despite yourself, you are getting a little worried. "Hey, not to bug you or anything, but maybe you should wake up? We could probably go a lot faster if you let me know exactly what it is we should be looking for."

"Gee, don't you know that talking to yourself is a sign of madness?"

You gasp, eyes shooting open at the unfamiliar voice. You look around wildly, but don't see anything.

"Down here!" The voice says cheerfully.

You look down towards the ground. There's a golden flower just a few inches away from you poking up through the cracks in the floor. It smiles at you, the leaves on it's stem twitching slightly in a wave. You scramble away, almost tripping over your own feet.

The smile turns into a concerned simper. "Golly, sorry to scare you like that! Bet you thought you were alone down here huh?"

"Um, yeah I did," you say, staring at the talking flower. Oh...oh crap this must be... "Are you Flowey?"

The flower freezes for a second before the expression on his face turns into a sneer. "Oh, you must know Frisk. That's right. I'm Flowey. Flowey the Flower. But you know it's rude to make assumptions without introducing yourself."

You introduce yourself carefully, looking the flower over. Oh yeah, Frisk has told you about Flowey. They claimed that he wasn't dangerous any more but there's a sensation creeping up your back that tells you otherwise. "What are you doing down here?"
"I can go where I like. What are you doing down here?" Before you have a chance to answer, Flowey sighs and says, "Actually, I don't care. You shouldn't be here. You humans think you can just stroll in wherever you like, don't you?"

"What? No, I'm here with Sans, we're just-"

The moment you mention Sans, Flowey scowls. "Oh I know you're with Smiley Trashbag. I watched the two of you come in here. It's surprising really, seeing the skeleton so motivated. It's weird." Flowey narrows his eyes at you. "It's weird that he would have a human with him, one that isn't Frisk. Why is that?"

Oh geez, are you really going to have to explain your relationship to a talking flower? You can feel yourself blushing slightly under his intense stare. "We're um, together."

He continues to stare at you in disbelief for several moments before he throws his head (?) back, laughing loudly. The sound makes you shiver. "You're with that Trashbag?" he says incredulously. "Oh what a timeline we are in! Sans with a human! I think I would cry if I had the ability."

He's still chuckling to himself as you start to ease back towards the door. "Yeah, it's kind of an interesting relationship I'll admit. Well, it was nice to meet you Flowey but-"

There's a crack beneath you and thick roots erupt from the floor, wrapping around your ankles tightly. You lose your balance and hit the floor. The roots climb up your body, pinning your legs together. Your heart shoots up your throat and you thrash, fighting to free yourself.

"Now hold on!" Flowey's petals are still shaking with mirth. "I haven't had a single person to talk to for a long time. Well, no one interesting anyway." "Sans!" You shout as loud as you can. The door leading to the hallway clangs shut, pushed by more roots crawling up the walls. "That won't keep him out!"

"Oh I don't want to keep him out," Flowey cackles. "Just stalling for a moment. You have no idea how much grief that stupid skeleton has given me. Over and over again and you know what? I don't think he even remembers resets from way back then. But still, I have some payback that's long overdue."

You're completely entangled in roots now, bound so tightly you can only squirm. You can hear Sans shouting beyond the door, looking for you. But your lungs are being squeezed too tightly. You can't scream for him. You can't even breathe.

Flowey's face twists into a gleeful expression that sends terror through you. "No matter how many monsters leave, the fact remains that down here, it's kill or be killed!"

You gasp as your Soul is tugged out and the world's colors fade away. But the moment your Soul pops into existence, the wall in your head shatters and you scream as Gaster flows into full control, shoving you into a deep dark corner of your mind. You can barely see what's happening, but you can hear it.

"Release me." Gaster's voice is a growl, burning out of your throat.

"What the-"

There's a pressure building up in your chest, a wild, burning sensation that makes you writhe silently in your own mind. It builds until something in the very air shatters and then you can feel the presence of something hovering next to you. Something growling and inhuman that is intricately
connected to your very being and yet is completely alien at the same time.

The roots around you tremble, loosing their hold. "What is this?" you hear Flowey shriek. "How can you use that thing?!"

"I created them! They are mine," Gaster pushes against the roots, burning them with a blue fire that emits from your palm. Flowey screams and the roots retreat, freeing you. You vision clears slightly as Gaster stands. The flower trembling, staring at you with a mixture of awe and terror.

"You're not the human anymore," he says, his mouth twisting into a manic grin. "I've never seen you before! Oh this is interesting!"

The thing beside you growls and you can feel the energy gathering in its mouth, so bright and hot that it should burn you but it doesn't. It's a familiar warmth, almost comforting. Gaster throws a hand out and the blast is released in a sharp beam of light that cuts through the air like a bullet. But Flowey is gone, popping up on the other side of the room.

"You've got two Souls in there!" he crows. He laughs wildly, his face expanding out past his petals. "Let me tell you a story! Once upon a time a monster and a human tried to share their Souls. And you know what happened to them? They died!"

The Blaster at your side releases another attack, so powerful it scorches the wall but once again, Flowey has moved. You feel the air shift and Sans pops into view, sockets pitch black. He takes in the scene in mere moments, his gaze snapping to Flowey as he reappears in a new spot on the floor. Flower waves at him with a leaf, smiling viciously.

"you!" Sans snarls as his left socket flashes to life.

"This is a far better blow than one I could give to you, Smiley Trashbag!" Flowey cackles as his roots retreat into the floor. "Enjoy your time with your human! I doubt there's much of it left!" He vanishes into the crack and he's gone.

Gaster continues to stare at the spot for several seconds before lowering your hand. He glances at the Blaster and you finally get a look at it. It's different Sans'; it's angles are sharper, and horns extend from the top of it's skull. "Hnn. Smaller than usual," Gaster murmurs. He reaches up, petting its snout. The skull creature rumbles under your touch, nuzzling into your hand. The bone of it's face is hot and rough. "But I suppose that is to...be...expected...." The Blaster chirps and vanishes as a sudden wave of vertigo crashes over you. Gaster sways, putting a hand against your face. You feel something creeping down over your lips. Your fingers comes away bloody. "Fascinating," Gaster murmurs. Your knees buckle and a flash of annoyance washes over you because you can't believe you're fainting again and then your head knocks against the cracked ground and you don't think anything.

*****

"what is that for?"

"This will make you stronger. Or it will kill you."

"oh...will it hurt?"

"...Probably."

"do i have to do this?"
"Yes. Be brave."

The machine roars to life and the subject begins to scream and thrash and he has to remind himself over and over again.

He has to do this. There is no choice.

There...is no....no....
You're woken very abruptly by the sensation of something cold and wet pressed under your nose. You shout and flail and Sans just manages to catch your hand before you smack him in the face.

"easy! it's just me," he says loudly, lowering your hand.

You blink at him for a second before you groan and put your free hand over your face. "Okay, I know it doesn't look like it, but I swear I never used to pass out this much."

His grip on your hand tightens for a moment before he releases it. "it's not your fault," he practically growls.

I had no idea that humans were so frail in the face of a little magic, Gaster pipes up in a very unhelpful manner. I wonder what happened to your kind that resulted in the clear erasure of mages?

"Will you shut up?" you mumble.

"oh. um, sorry i didn't mean-"

You know Sans well enough to recognize the very subtle trace of hurt in his voice and you want to just scream from frustration. "Not you; him," you say in a voice that is embarrassingly high pitched as you jab a finger at your head. Being the only one able to hear Gaster sucks.

Sans sighs. "i'm never gonna get used to that," he mumbles, shifting slightly. His movement breaks you out of your thoughts and you finally observe your surroundings. You're not in the lab anymore, that much is obvious. The area looks like a living room, albeit on that has been pretty much emptied of everything expect a few bits of garbage, an extremely lumpy couch (which you're currently sprawled on) and a single sock against the wall with several sticky notes on it.

"Is that the famous sock Papyrus has told me about?" you ask, trying to lighten the mood a bit.

Sans is still scowling, the lights of his sockets dim. But he does nod and smile tightly. "yep. that's it."
Meaning you're in his old home in Snowdin. Oh man, you'd wanted to insist he carry you bridal style through the door just to see him blush. Maybe you could convince him to do it when you bought your new place. Okay, nope. Not the time to be thinking about stuff like that.

"how do you feel?" he asks, unaware of the thoughts tumbling through your head.

You assess quietly for a moment before answering him. "I'm okay. My chest is kind of sore. And I feel really tired all of a sudden."

He nods then holds up a rag with a bit of red smeared on it. "here. you've still got some blood on your lip."

Blood? You put your fingers against your upper lip; your skin is slightly sticky and now that he's pointed it out, you can faintly smell the rust-like odor of blood. You take the rag from him and dab gently until it's cleaned up. Well, this explains the cold sensation from earlier. You can't even remember the last time your nose bled, if it ever has. You finish up quickly and put the rag to the side; the sight of your blood is making your stomach churn uneasily.

Sans, silently watching you, finally speaks up. "so, he's awake?" At your nod, he takes a deep breath and closes his eyes. When they open, his pupils are gone. "dings, you listen to me right now and don't you dare take over. i am not in the mood for it."

You start a little at his firm tone but it seems Gaster is not surprised.

"you don't use magic through her. ever. we have no idea what it could be doing to her, or your souls." Rage is bubbling beneath his falsely calm words. You can hear it. You can feel it in the bright spark of his Soul that has remained stubbornly glowing deep within yours. "i know what you're thinking right now; you want to test this, find the limits. we're not going to do that. clear?"

Please. If her body could not handle it, I wouldn't have been able to do it at all. Even as weak as she is, there is clearly an affinity for magic here.

An affinity? Oh that should not send a little prickle of excitement through you but it does.

Besides, is her using magic not the way that she freed herself from captivity before? He points out. You seemed grateful enough for monster magic flowing through her then.

You relay what Gaster said to Sans, dread making your voice soft.

Sans shakes his head, his jaw clenching so tightly you hear the bones scrape together. "that's not what this is about. what happened before was different."

Gaster seems to bristle. Oh it was, was it? A bond formed by a desperate act to escape a terrible situation. Yes, very different. This is just like you Sans, to let fear stop you from opening the gift set in front of you.

You're loathe to translate for that him, but it's better than him taking over again. As expected, the words make Sans nearly quake with anger. "a gift?" he snarls. "this is not a gift!"

Fine. If you insist on ignoring the possibilities, let's point out the obvious. I saved her. You should be thanking me.

"thanking you?" Sans sputters. "for what? making her nose bleed? for forcing blaster magic, that shouldn't even exist, through her soul? i was right there, i would have handled it."
Gaster scoffs. **I understand that your memory is perhaps a bit lacking when it comes to the prince, but believe me when I say that you do not want to fight that creature when you are trying to protect someone.** There it is again, a flash of a memory, a stab of painful emotions shooting through your heart that speak of times that even Gaster doesn't want to remember. **You should not have let her wander by herself in such a place. You are lucky that the flower chose to back away when I confronted him.**

"we wouldn't even be down here at all if it wasn't for you!"

Even in your head, Gaster's 'voice' is chilling. **Do you really want to go down that road right now? Here in the remains of your pathetic hovel of a home after you nearly lost your so called precious human again? That is an argument you will not win, son.**

You clench your jaw and shake your head. "No. I'm not saying that."

For a moment, Gaster doesn't say a word. Then: **Child, you do not want to push me right now.** It's a clear warning.

But you refuse to back down. "If you were going to take over, you would have done it already. This talk is finished. Okay?" Your heart pounds in your chest, betraying your bravado. You brace yourself for the sensation of being pushed away and you can feel him getting ready to do just that-

But he doesn't. The anger dies away as quickly as it rose. **Very well. There is no time for petty fights right now,** he says tiredly. **But tell him that this is a discussion he will have to face sooner or later.**

You slump slightly, more relief than you care to admit filling you. "Fine." You do relay that final message to Sans, who has watched your seemingly one sided conversation with the air gripping the cushions of the couch so tightly the already thin fabric had ripped. You try to put your hand over his, but he flinches away.

"sorry," he mumbles before you have a chance to say anything. He buries his face in his hands, breathing harshly. "just...just give me a second."

"Do you want me to leave?" And go where? You look around. "I can go into the kitchen, if you want."

He shakes his head furiously. "stay."

"Okay," you whisper, pulling your feet up under you. You look away from him. You're not sure if Gaster sees exactly what you see at all times or if that's only when he's behind the wheel, so to speak, but you're not going to take that chance. You know that it must be killing Sans to be breaking down where he can see so if you can give him even a false sense of privacy, you're okay with looking away. It's a question that probably needs to be answered but you're not going to vocalize it right now. You don't want to speak to Gaster.

And going by his silence, he's fine with not talking either. But he's there, that prickle in your mind that you are already getting used to. And that scares you.

After a few minutes, Sans finally lets out a long, frustrated sigh. When he lifts his head, the lights are back in his sockets. "babe-"

"How long was I out?" you ask quickly. "Didn't feel like long."
He's a little perplexed at your sudden change of topic, but says, "um, a few minutes. i grabbed what i
could from the lab and brought you straight here." He pats his coat pocket. "didn't really find what i
was looking for but there might be something i can get from this. i was in the middle of trying to
decode all this but...."

A Soul-less flower with maniacal tendencies attacked you. "Right. So what is here that you need?"

He gestures in a vague direction. "old blueprints, journals. my own theories i gave up on. it's all out
in the lab around back. but...um, just now. that was-

"Great. Let's go get it then." You stand up quickly and grab your coat, which Sans tossed on the
floor at some point. You're avoiding talking about what just happened. Like Gaster said, it's
something that's going to have to be talked about but you don't want that discussion to happen down
here. There are enough reminders of everything that went on in Sans' past and you want to focus on
the good ones. The heavy stuff can wait.

You open the front door, since that seems to be the only way in and out and the blast of cold air that
hits you makes you gasp. A landscape of white stretches before you, glistening dimly in the faint
light that seems to come from everywhere at once, like the surface at twilight. You can't stop yourself
from bending down and scooping up a handful of the snow below you; it's soft but packs well in
your hand. It feels, looks and (you very quickly give it a lick) tastes like normal snow. You let the
snow pile fall from your hand, looking up for any signs of clouds. You can't even see the ceiling of
the cavern, it's so high up. "That's wild," you mutter as Sans joins you, closing the door behind him.
"How can it snow down here?"

"magic clouds," he says in a complete deadpan. His poker face twitches at the look on your face.
"seriously."

"...Seriously?"

A weak laugh finally escapes him. "i guess technically, yeah. but the core is the real reason.
something about all the magic down here from generations of monsters and the core itself formed a
sort of atmosphere down here. water evaporates, collects, falls, the whole shebang. i mean,
atmospheric studies aren't my strong point but i did have basic schooling. and then some."

"So magic clouds. Got it." You grin at him, looking around some more. The outside of the house is
covered in Christmas lights, which are somehow still glowing brightly, though you can't see where
they could possibly be plugged in. There are two mailboxes and you don't have to look at the names
on the side to know which one is Sans. You can see more buildings off in the distance beyond the
mailboxes and you're dying to go check them out. But business first. "Where's your lab?"

Sans leads you back behind the house to a door that's been partially obscured by snow. After kicking
a good portion of it (you notice his seemingly random aim makes most of the snow land on you) and
shoves the door open. It smells musty inside and when the dim light flickers on, you see that a fine
layer of dust on everything. This lab is much smaller than the one in Hotland. It's more like a large
closet than a lab. Sans starts pulling out papers out of the drawers while you wander over to a large
something covered by a sheet. You push the fabric aside curiously. There's a dark panel of buttons
and switches attached to a large tube that extends up towards the ceiling. Wires and random nuts and
bolts cover the floor of the tube. "What's this?"

Sans doesn't have to look to know what you're talking about. "my attempt to open the void to find
dings myself," he mutters. "i couldn't get it to work no matter what i did. and just like everything
else, i gave up on that too."
You let the curtain fall back. "Sans-" "are we gonna ignore what happened upstairs and in hotland?" He straightens, setting a photograph in his hand down on the counter. "what did dings say that you didn't want to say?"

"There's a reason I didn't want to say it Sans," you point out, crossing your arms. "It was a low blow and I really don't enjoy being the telephone for your arguing. So yeah, I'm avoiding it because I wanted to see the place where you and Paps lived without having that cloud over my head. Can we still do that? Please?"

Sans stares down at the ground for a moment before nodding. "yeah. sorry."

"I'm not mad," you say gently because he looks so disheartened that you feel guilt eat at you. "Promise. If anything I'm mad at mister ghost here."

Thanks for that.

"You're welcome. Hey, once we've got what you need, I want to see that cave of stars you told me about." He told you that the glowing stones couldn't compare to the real stars, but you still want to see them. If it wasn't for your little tag-a-long, it might even be romantic. You're a little annoyed about that, but even so, it's a sight worth seeing.

Sans smiles gently at your enthusiasm. "sure thing. come...come over here for a second and since dings is actually up, he can tell me if there's anything here that will help. then we'll get going."

You join Sans over at the table and he quietly starts shuffling through the papers he's pulled out. Your eyes glance over at the photograph. It's Sans standing with a bunch of monsters smiling with pure joy. It takes you a moment because they look so different, but you realize that several of these monsters are the same as the sad, gray creatures you saw in Nahn's lab. They're full of life and color, vastly different from the shadowy creatures they became. Huh, you can remember them, which now that you think about it, is kind of strange. It's probably because of Gaster, though the why is still up in the air.

Beneath that, you see the edge of a paper sticking out. You pull on it, reveal a child-like drawing of three people. It's Sans, Papryus and a tall man in a dark suit. There are no cracks on his face but you recognize him nonetheless. Something catches in your throat as you read the words written in shaky handwriting.

don't forget.

Sans notices your attention has drifted and his gaze lands on the drawing. Without a word he gently takes it from your grasp and sets it back inside the drawer and continues talking about his notes like nothing happened. You go back to being the telephone for Gaster, who is being very coldly polite with his words and you discover that yes, Gaster can see things on his own without looking through your eyes. This is a huge relief, for many reasons. After a while, when it's clear that you don't have to be looking at each and every document and scribbled note, your mind wanders. Sans had been young when the accident happened. Young, scared and forced to take care of his younger brother in a world that didn't remember the one who brought them there in the first place. You think about your grandpa. He's gone, never to come back but at least people remember him. He had a place in the world and no matter what, that place would not be erased. But Gaster had lost even that. The thought of never knowing your grandpa, to the point where he did not exist at all, makes goosebumps rise on your skin. The thought is so chilling, so unbearably sad that you suddenly wrap Sans in a tight hug, cutting off his scientific musings.
"woah!" He stumbles a little under your sudden hug attack. His hand rests on your back, patting you gently. "you ok there?"

"Yeah," you sniffle, pressing your face into his hood. "Just thinking about stuff. You're such a cool guy."

He chuckles, bones clacking quietly. "i think you mean my brother. he's the coolest. i'm pretty pathetic compared to him."

You smack him lightly. "Paps is super cool, but that doesn't mean you're not." You smooch his check, earning a blush from him and the mental equivalent of an eye roll from Gaster. "Are we about ready to go? No offense but I'm ready to go see those stone stars."

"what are you, a kid?" His teasing is gentle as you release him. He looks back over the papers and sighs. "yeah, i think we've got about as much as we're going to. dings?"

I agree. Much work will need to be done from scratch.

"All right, let's go!" You nearly bounce over to the door, eager to get away from the lab setting. Sans, being the jerk that he is, sees your excitement and moves as slowly as he possibly can. He stacks the papers, before folding them over, causally slipping them in his coat pocket (how deep is that thing?!?) before gathering up the left over stuff and very very slowly, placing them back in the drawers. You groan loudly and step outside, leaving him to his antics. Snow crunches under your foot and you get a pure light bulb moment. You glance quickly to make sure he isn't watching before scooping up a handful of snow, small enough to hide in your hand. You shove your hand in your jacket pocket, trying not to flinch at the cold wetness just as he finally comes out and closes the door behind him.

"wanna see the rest of the town before we get going?" he asks brightly. The smug jerk.

You smile just as warmly. "Sure. Lead the way."

You wait until he's just a few steps ahead of you before pulling your hand out, which is now dripping slightly and sneak up on him, fully intent on shoving your handful of snow down his shirt. You reach out, just an inch more-

And he vanishes. Not a heartbeat later, you shriek as you feel him tug on the back of your shirt and ice cold snow hits your spine. You whirl furiously, your back arched as you fight to get the snow out of your shirt and he's gone again and then more snow hits the back of your head.

"you thought you could prank the prank master?" Sans cackles loudly as you turn, slowly this time. His sockets are scrunched with mirth. Then, right on cue, ten snowballs lift into the air, encased in blue light. "cute."

"Don't you dare!"

The snowballs fly at you and you dive to avoid the incoming storm as best as you can but he times them so that they fly at you at different angles, catching you at every turn. Each and every one hits home. You wipe the remains of the snowballs off as Sans laughs uproariously, arms over his stomach. Oh is that how he wants to play? You take a few steps towards him and deliberately trip, landing face-down in the snow. "Ow!"

"you ok?" Sans calls, still giggling.

You sit up, grabbing at your ankle with one hand while the other curls around a handful of snow. "I
think so. There must be a hole or something. But my ankle kind of hurts," you say as pathetically as you can. As expected, he starts walking to you, concern on his face. The moment he kneels, looking closely at your foot, you shove your handful of snow in his face, knocking him over. "Gotcha!" You leap for him, pinning him down in the snow and start piling it on while he struggles to free himself. "I am the prank master!"

"that wasn't a prank, that was mean!" he sputters around the snow on his face. But again he's laughing and you find yourself giggling so hard you can't move. Sans seizes his chance and sits up in a flurry of snow, knocking you on your back. "nice try bucko. a for effort. here's a gold sticker."

You snort, tears of laughter leaking from your eyes. This, for some unknown reason makes Sans laugh even harder and soon the two of you are lying side by side in the snow, your laughter filling the air. The entire time Gaster is quiet. Though he tries to hide it, you can't help but notice the flare of amusement and the warm sensation of something that just maybe, might be affection flowing through his Soul.

But that can't be it...can it?

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You're soaked to the-oh geez, it hurts your heart to even think it- bone. Once you and Sans finally manage to stop laughing, he pulls you to your feet and leads you into town, promising a warm drink. You pass a library (with it's sign spelled wrong) and come across Grillby's old bar. It looks nearly the same from the outside, though once you step in, you're sad to see that it doesn't hold the same warmth. Probably because the fireman himself is not here. But there is a small Snowdrake tending to bar who jumps to attention quickly, excited to finally have some customers. The drink Sans orders is indeed warm and tastes slightly of pine and mint. It warms your insides, though it doesn't do much for your wet clothes. You linger in the bar for a bit until you start to dry before heading back out. The rest of the town is almost eerily quiet. But if you let yourself picture monsters roaming the streets, you can see how this place used to be a charming place to live.

Once you've finished, Sans takes you on another shortcut and you wind up in a place that's so vastly different from where you've just come from, you find it hard to believe it's only (according to Sans) a 'i dunno, short distance?' away. Instead of snow, you find yourself in a place that's quite a bit darker and a lot more humid. You can hear the sound of running water and the walls glisten with moisture. Sans leads you through fields of grass so dark it's almost black and the only source of light comes from glowing mushrooms and similarly bright patches of grass. Further on, you come across the source of the running water. There's a waterfall (you can only assume that's how this area got it's name) and a low bridge built over the gently luminescent water. Sans plops down and pats the spot next to him. You join him and you can't resist taking your shoes off and dipping your feet in the water.

"It's warm!" you say with some surprise.

Sans uses blue magic to float his slippers off before placing his own feet in the water too. "that's the heat of the core. you can feel it even way up here. there's another river, back that ways a bit that leads directly to the machine. we found the most effective way to keep the core cool is to throw ice in it. then the cold water just constantly flows into core, helps keep it cool. but this one is nice to wade in." He lifts his foot, making ripples across the slow moving water. "paps and i came here a lot. before and after the accident. dings brought us here once and we just couldn't stay away."

If those two were missing, this was one of the first places I would look, Gaster says softly. This is a good place to think. Regain focus.
You swirl your foot, watching the streams of light in the water follow the motion. "Why didn't you stay here? After everything."

Sans shrugs. "too many memories. and too dark for paps. he never complained about spending time here but i could tell he got restless for light after a while. plus houses snowdin are cheaper than around here. were. anyway." He stands and shakes his foot next to you, sprinkling you with water. "the stars are just up ahead."

You follow him across the bridge and further into Waterfall. The walls grow more and more luminescent and you can see patches of gems stuck between the stones. When you come to a sudden archway, Sans moves behind you and places his hands over your eyes. "Really?" you say with a smile.

"shush, you'll thank me. now march." He presses against your back and you do as he says, carefully moving forward. You feel the ground under your feet change from stone back to squishy grass and you can tell just by instinct that the room you're in is big. "ready?" he asks.

"Been ready for a while ba-" He pulls his hands away and the sentence dies in your mouth. Your eyes are instantly drawn to the ground, rather than the ceiling. Large blue flowers cover the ground, their hue just a few shades darker than the glowing mushrooms and grass you've come across. Sans nudges you gently and points upwards. Your gaze follows and you let out a little noise of awe. The ceiling is so high that the stone is completely shrouded in darkness. And set within that darkness is hundreds of glittering lights. You spin slowly, taking in the whole view while Sans watches you with a wide grin.

"i know it's not as impressive as the actual sky, but they are still pretty cool, huh?"

"So cool!" you breathe, reaching upwards. Each 'star glistens so brightly you are immediately reminded of the old nursery rhyme. "Up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky," you murmur in a sing-song kind of way. "Are they actually diamonds?"

"dunno. too high to tell. why, you want a diamond?"

A diamond huh? Your mind instantly goes to diamond rings and that makes you blush like crazy. Oh come on, he didn't even say anything about a ring!

"what?" It seems Sans can see the color on your face despite the low light.

He doesn't know that diamonds are usually associated with marriage. Obviously. "Well, um, I mean, I guess maybe one day, yeah." To be honest you've never really thought about marriage. Given your past and everything, it was way, way low on your list of priorities. But now? In your heart you know that you can't see yourself spending the rest of your life with anyone but Sans. But marriage? Being Mrs. Snowdin?

Okay, that actually makes you laugh a little. Sans slides up to you, staring at you curiously. "what?" he asks again.

You lick your lips nervously before answering. "In human society, at least around here, diamond rings are a sign of...marriage. I mean, not always but I just immediately thought of that for some silly reason."

"oh." His own cheeks light up with color, matching the flowers around you. "right. i think i read about that somewhere. guess i forgot." Silence falls over the two of you for a while and you're just about to change the subject when he very quietly asks, "is it really so silly?"
You're actually struck speechless for a moment. "No, I guess not," you finally murmur. "It's just-okay, hold on for just a second. Gaster? Can you just...you know." Gaster sighs and without a word from him, you feel the wall in your mind go up and you breathe a quiet sigh of relief. Okay, that's better. But now you're stuck on what to say. Sans is watching you almost nervously. "Marriage is...I haven't thought about it much."

Sans kicks at the grass, looking down. "is it what you want?"

You swallow the butterflies very rapidly rising up your throat and take his hand. "What I want is to be with you. Marriage or not, it doesn't matter. I love you even without official documents or whatever." Legally-wise, you're not even sure if you can do it. The monster rights bill had passed yes, but there was nothing on monster-human marriage within it. It was still too soon and as far as you know, not many humans and monsters were at a point where it had become an issue.

"in monster tradition, marriage means promising your very soul to another monster." Sans looks up and meets your eyes. The lights of his pupils are bright and slightly fuzzy. "it's the ultimate sign of trust and love. monsters don't do it carelessly. it's not just words or a promise that can be broken. it is the most serious of vows."

Oh. You're taken aback slightly. "I guess monster and humans are hugely different in their traditions of marriage," you say with a wobbly smile. "Divorce happens all the time on the surface."

"yeah, that shook a lot of monsters," Sans says, squeezing your hand. He chuckles a little nervously. "but, uh, that aside, i want an answer. a real one. is getting married something you want?"

Your very Soul seems to shake as you stare deeply into his sockets, looking past the bones and the jokes and the dark, terrible guilt that still eats away at him to the man you love. He's asking you so earnestly but fear crawls in. How could you get married? "Sans, it's so soon," you whisper as you start to tremble. "I...I can't...."

"is it what you want?"

You look down, unable to bear that gaze. "Why would you want something so serious with me? marriage means so much and I'm just me. A goofy, stupid human who can't stop getting herself into trouble. I'm-"

"you are so much more than that," Sans whispers. He reaches out, tilting your head up. "you know that you are more than that. you are hope, and joy and sadness and love and i love you. i love you so much. if you want to just keep going on like this, you will make me the happiest soul on this earth." He takes a step closer, gently placing his skull against your head. He shakes slightly as he takes a deep breath. "but...if you want more, i can give you that. when i pull gaster out and we fix this, i will make you the happiest soul in this galaxy. i promise. and heh, you know i don't like making promises."

Tears are starting to build in your eyes.

He strokes the back of you head, his sockets filled with an unbearable hope. "is it what you want? it doesn't have to be right now. this isn't a p-proposal." His voice cracks slightly. "i just want to know if that's something you want. please."

You close your eyes and the tears start to fall. You try and fail to speak several times before you finally whisper, "Yes." Yes, you want that. You want to be bound to this beautiful, wonderful being in every way possible. You want him to belong to only you, and you only to him. If monsters promised their Souls to each other, then you would gladly give him yours. No, you gave your Soul
to him a long time ago. "I want to be with you Sans. For the rest of my life and beyond, I want to be yours."

The breathy laugh Sans releases sounds more like a sob and then he wraps his arms around you, pressing you so tightly to him you can feel the heat of magic coursing through his bones, smell the scent of mint and ketchup that is so undeniably him that you can't stop yourself from laughing with pure joy and for a moment, a wonderful, beautiful moment you forget about the pain that brought you here. You forget about the impending threat hanging over your head. You lose yourself in this perfect moment under the light of the stone stars and kiss the monster you love with every fiber of passion you have.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so even for me, the marriage talk was a bit unplanned but that's just how the story flows.
Again, it's not a proposal just yet, but a promise to each other. So whoop whoop?
In Which Gaster Has Questions

Chapter Notes

Guess who's got a 5 day break and plans to do a bunch of writing??
(It's the same chick who's birthday is in 9 days whoop whoop!)
That's the plan anyway
In Which Gaster TOTALLY Doesn't Feel Affection For His Son
Another Order Of Reader's Tears Please
You're Driving Like A Monster! (by the author)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Though you feel like you could spend countless hours in this place with the glowing flowers and the fake stars, eventually you do have to return to the surface. Sans lets out the softest breath of relief when you step past the rocky remains of the barrier. You're so proud of him, knowing that must have been hard for him to go back, even with you by his side. You hurry back to the car and start the drive to the city. Gaster is awake for this trip but he spends the majority of it looking out the window. How you know this is beyond you but occasionally his Soul flares up with curiosity or wonder. It must be different, being able to actually see the outside world without the shroud of the Void. For him, it's been countless lifetimes since he was one the surface. He even asks you questions a few times with thinly veiled excitement.

What is the road made out of?

"Um, asphalt I think. They usually are."

What is in asphalt?

"I don't know. I'm not an asphalt making...person."

Hmm. And this vehicle, how fast can you go?

"Well, this car's kinda old so I don't like to push past seventy, but there are some cars, like race cars that can reach over two hundred miles an hour." Thank you random bit of information stored in your head. "But you can't go that fast on a normal road or you'll get a ticket."

That is a bad thing I presume?

"Yeah, police officers, people like the royal guards, watch for drivers going over the speed limit because it's dangerous and give those people tickets. Then they have to pay a fee. It's not fun."

And so the questions go on. You don't mention this to Sans because you don't know how he would take it, but the resemblance between the two's curiosity and yearning for knowledge is nearly identical. It makes you smile and you have to fight not to laugh out loud.

When you reach the city you decide to head straight for the lab to run a few tests and get started on building the machine that supposedly will save you and Gaster. But as you come up across a Mexican fast food place, you make a sharp turn for the drive-thru. Once again, you're ravenously hungry. But this time at least you manage to pace yourself as you eat through a triple order of
burritos. "I swear Gaster," you mumble around a mouthful. "If I gain a bunch of weight because of you, I'm going to be very upset."

**Is weight gain not a desirable thing for humans?** Gaster sounds confused. **Before the barrier fell, it was a sign of wealth and good health.**

You swallow your bite. "Geez, how long ago was the war? And how old are you anyway?"

**I cannot remember such details. But the places humans lived certainly did not look like this.**

Sans, already done with his meal, steals a few chip from the bag. He skillful avoids your annoyed swat. "not that it really matters, but i think the reason you're so hungry is because your body is burning the energy of two people. so you probably don't have to worry about that. but even if you do, there's nothing wrong with a belly." He pats his tummy and your mouth quirks up in a smile.

"I don't think I'll ever be quite a big boned as you."

Gaster groans.

When you get to the university, Sans gets a call about something work related and has to pop out for a bit so you and Gaster decide to get started on organizing the notes and journals from the underground in Sans' new office. He shows you in, pecks your cheek and vanishes. The office itself is still pretty bare and small. But there's a desk with a few pictures on it. There's the one of the group right after they were liberated from underground, several of him and Papyrus and...oh geez, he's got that selfie from the space museum, the one where he made you laugh and mess the whole thing up, framed and set next to the old computer. Gaster notices the picture and his Soul sparks with amusement and recognition.

Ah, yes. I remember that night.

"You were watching?" You ask, slightly horrified. "Even back then?"

**I have been watching Sans for a long time.**

You moan. Fantastic. Not only did you have old green eyes and the rest of Tod's goons spying on you for who knows how long, Gaster the-not-so-friendly ghost was watching too.

**I did not spy on your every move, if that is what you are concerned about.** He actually sounds amused at your trauma, the jerk! **I could only watch for short periods of time and without much control. That night was simply a brief moment I managed to hold onto the timeline.**

You sigh and move around the desk, sweeping a few empty ketchup packets off the chair before plopping down. Good grief Sans has barely started working here and he's already making a mess. "Okay, question for you. You could see into tons of timelines while you were in the Void and yet the vibe I'm getting is that you really don't know much about humanity. Why is that?"

**Seeing is not the same as knowing,** Gaster answers softly. **I only observed and my observations were based very closely on what went on in my son's lives. I could not freely gander at the rest of the world. And even if I could, I wouldn't have.**

"Why not?"

Gaster laughs, the sound rather sad. **It wouldn't be right. To freely gaze at the world my kind so desperately longed to reach while they could only dream about it? Even I still hold some**
morals. But it doesn't matter because I couldn't see the rest of the world. I was tied to Mount Ebott and the world of the monsters. If there was a timeline in which they broke free, I could see a little but I did not linger in those or else I would risk losing myself.

You fiddle with some of the papers left by Sans, trying to decide what to say next. Gaster sounds so sad all of a sudden. You know how to comfort Sans but him? It's not like you can reach out and give him a hug and hugging yourself would just be weird. "Hey, look um. I'm not happy about this whole taking up space in my head thing but from what I remember from seeing the timelines myself is very overwhelming. I can't imagine being stuck there for years and years with no one but yourself. It must have been hard."

Gaster is quiet, perhaps taken aback slightly. Human...there is something.

The door opens at that moment and not for the first time, you silently curse one of the skeleton brothers for their insane timing. Sans strides in and he's donned his white coat, which is slightly too big for him and a ridiculous pair of red framed glasses that are taped to the sides of his skull. It's missing the lenses. You snicker. "Nice shades babe," you call.

"it's all part of the 'fake it til you make it' mindset," Sans says almost proudly. "oops, hold on we need another chair." He pops away, ruining his grand entrance.

"What something?" you say quickly to Gaster but he merely makes a hum of dismissal and the moment is lost. Sans reappears with another chair in hand and you buckle down to work.

For a while, the three of you go through the gathered notes, you translating for Gaster and Sans reading aloud certain passages. But as more time passes and you're getting frustratingly nowhere, you decide to let Gaster take over, even just to give your head a break. Sans agrees, somewhat begrudgingly, that this will speed up the process and it's probably a good idea to see how long Gaster can stay in control before he gets worn out. Gaster, in a rather odd move of consideration, sticks to signing with your hands to spare your throat.

Most of the process from that point is Gaster skimming over the remainder of the journals and tossing them aside. It seems that there really isn't much here that will help with building the...what is it they're trying to build exactly?

We need a machine in which to extract the magic needed to sustain a new form, the tools needed to fuse the bone, magic and Soul and a suspension tank of sorts in which the new form will grow, Gaster signs in answer to your question.

Oh boy. That's an awful lot that needs to be done. And there's nothing here that can help? you ask.

It would seem that...hold on. Gaster, who had been flipping through a book so faded and worn the pages looked in danger of crumbling, suddenly pauses, squinting at an entry written in symbols. Sans, do you remember writing this?

Sans looks at the book, brow bone furrowed. "i don't think so. my symbol writing is pretty sloppy but even for me this is...geez, what happened to it?"

Unlike Gaster, you can only see where he is looking so you too study the words. Even though you can't understand them, you can tell that the symbols are written frantically, almost to the point of being indecipherable. It actually hurts to stare at it for so long. Can you read it?

Gaster looks at it for several long moments, tapping your fingers against the desk. It will take some
time...but I believe this might be what we're looking for. It is...familiar though I do not remember writing it. A memory of his starts to surface, flashes of dark and white and pain and screaming and pure panic and then he shoves it away. No, perhaps I did write this. Before I was fully gone. However, it would seem that this is written in code as well. If I was the one responsible, I would very much like to think I can decipher it easily enough.

Sans slides the journal closer to him, lifting a few of the pages. "there's another five pages of this." He's brightened a bit. "ok, it's a start."

A start it is, but a very slow one. Gaster has to spend several minutes decoding each word, mumbling occasionally to himself while Sans writes everything down on a fresh notepad. About an hour after starting this Gaster very quickly starts to lose energy. He fights through the sudden exhaustion sweeping over both of you but your body simply won't have it. Your head starts to bob and Sans is immediately at your side, propping you up. He checks the clock. "that makes two hours and three minutes. time to switch dings."

He gives no protest and you shudder as your mind is suddenly put back in control. As you breathe through the dizziness, you can tell that Gaster immediately fell asleep in the back of your head. "He's out," you murmur, leaning heavily on Sans. "Oh that was not fun."

"how are you feeling?"

You smile as best as you can and sit up. He lets you, but hovers closely practically radiating concern. "I'm fine. It's getting easier, even with that long time." It certainly hadn't gotten worse at least, though losing complete control is maddening. It makes you feel helpless. "So, how much is left of this stuff? I kinda zoned out after a while."

"still got three pages to go," Sans says grimly. "a lot of what we're getting is really hard to understand even once it's been decoded. it's like a mad man wrote it. but there's definitely references to soul bondings and determination doses." He sounds hopeful which makes you feel better about the two hours being Gaster's puppet.

You look over at the clock. It's getting pretty late at this point and you haven't eaten dinner. Your stomach rumbles. "Food?" you implore pathetically.

He grins. "sure. let's head back to tori's." He takes off the fake glasses and lab coat before he pulls you to your feet. You sway a bit. "let's just take a shortcut. you look a little too wobbly to be driving."

You hum in agreement. Sans pulls you close but instead of immediately taking a shortcut, he lowers his skull to your chest. He breathes for several moments as your heart starts to race. "Whatcha doing?"

"listening," he breathes, closing his sockets. "gotta make sure it's still beating."

"If I'm walking and talking that's usually a pretty good sign my heart is beating," you tease gently. His hands tighten their grip on your back. "i have to hear it."

The rhythm of your heart pulses through you at his words, echoing the thrum of energy that fills Sans bones. You breathe together, the bond between your Souls sparking. You kiss the top of his skull. "It's yours to listen to as much as you want."
You don't have the energy to do much besides eat dinner and fall on the couch once you get home. Sans puts a movie on, Captain America, and continues to study the translated notes. You only make it halfway through the movie before falling asleep.

You dream of more memories but this time you only see flashes. Hear words that echo distantly.

"why do you call me c1?"
"That is your identification."
"oh. what do i call you?"
"You may call me Doctor."
"doctors help people. are you doing all this to help me?"
"...No."
"then why?"
"I do this because I must."

~~~~

A small body is strapped to a table. Wires and tubes are set in pitch black sockets. The subject is thrashing. Screaming.

"please, stop, it hurts. it hurts."
"Determination injections failings. Subject is...."
"h-help m-me...please....!"

Oh God....

The child is melting away.

~~~~

"hey dings, why don't we try putting extracted dt into the heart of the machine?"
"Where do you come up with these crazy ideas?"
"i learned from the craziest guy around. so, should we give it a shot?"
"...Fine. It's worth looking into at least. Where is your brother?"
"you know paps; still reading through that puzzle strategy manuscript."
"Ah yes. At least one of my sons knows how to work diligently."
"long hours means more breaks dings. it's the law."
"You keep telling yourself that."

~~~~
The subject is sentient. The subject is a true monster. The tests, the experiments have failed. It wasn't supposed to be this way.

There are no lights in C1's sockets. Anger radiates from it's gaze even as iridescent tears fall.

"i hate you! i hate you!"

"This is your brother."

"what's a brother?"

"It is someone who is family. You protect them. You fight for them. You love them. His name is Papyrus. And your name...your name is Sans."

You wake with these jumble of memories swirling around your head. This was more like a nightmare or crazy dream compared to the other memories. You don't mention them to Gaster and he doesn't say anything either, but you do notice he's almost sullen during breakfast.

As odd as it is, you fall into a bit of a routine over the next two days. You wake up, bits and flashes of memories from Gaster's past in your head, you eat more than your fair share of breakfast and head to the university with Sans to continue working. The guys finish deciphering the notes and it does look like there are some answers contained within. After that there are hours devoted to mere calculations and you try your best to keep up, you really do but it's hard to pay attention when you're not in control of your body. It's all too easy to drift off into your own thoughts and memories. You do in fact doze off once and wake up to Sans shaking you violently in a panic since you didn't immediately wake when Gaster returned control.

There are some answers that you get regarding the whole body possession, ghost balloon thing. After some more tests and scans done by Alphys' machine, you determine that there is a source of magical energy hovering just behind your left shoulder and that while Gaster is not in control, he can choose what he looks at and can move a short distance away. However he cannot affect anything physical unless he is in control of your body. The current amount of time he can spend in control is about two hours at a time but he only needs an hour to recover enough to do it again. You're pretty sure it's pure stubbornness that allows him to recover so quickly because you can feel his exhaustion by the third 'take over' without a good rest.

Gaster wants to do more testing with how much magic you can handle but Sans puts his foot down on that and will not budge on the matter. While you understand his concern, there is a part of you that is very disappointed. You've used magic several times now without really understanding why or how and honestly? You're thrilled at the thought that you can use magic. The geek in your that spent hours reading fairy tales is begging you to leap at the chance to learn more about this strange new ability.

Gaster, seeming to realize that arguing with Sans about it is pointless, quietly says to you, Once this ordeal is over, perhaps we can perform some tests to see what your potential is. Surely he will not object then.

You seriously doubt that but it does give you a bit of hope. But not is not the time to push it. Even
with the steps in calculations being made, the machines themselves have to be built which means ordering parts and putting them together. Sans waves off your concern about costs, saying that the school gave him a budget for items to be used by the students.

"and when we're done with all this, we'll take it apart and the school can do what it wants with the parts!" he tries to reason. Again, you're not sure about this but you're in no position to complain.

As the two monsters work (with Alphys occasionally popping in) you feel a warm sense of pride sweeping over you. Though at times their conversation is clipped and filled with tension, they are working together. Sans is still very clearly upset about your position in this mess but at times you see a spark of excitement in his gaze as he dives into the work of science. He clearly falls back on old habits, cracking jokes once in a while that Gaster either ignores or gives a quiet chuckle that can barely be heard.

Being at home is another matter entirely.

Papyrus is set on making up for lost time and the moment you step through the door he is rushing up to you, eager to share a dish of spaghetti with Gaster, or ask his opinion on a puzzle he's created or simply talk about his day. Gaster is surprisingly patient with Papyrus. You expected him to be rather short tempered or indifferent to Papyrus' antics given how much he pushed you and Sans to work as fast as possible. But he listens and gives proper responses, even if they are a little awkward and lacking in the fatherly love department. Of course it doesn't help that Sans doesn't take his eyes off you guys, barely hiding a protective glare. He's clearly worried about Gaster saying something hurtful or, heaven forbid, physically hurting him.

But even though most of the conversations between the two are mostly filled with Papyrus' chatter and Gaster's short, awkward responses, you don't feel any kind of threat coming from him at all. In fact, the times he speaks with Pap seem to be the moments when his Soul is as close to peace as you've ever felt it. You try explaining this to Sans but his memories and mistrust win out and so he continues to sit in the corner growing mushrooms while you're forced to play telephone between everyone.

Finally, finally the morning of your first day back at the station dawns and you leap out of the bed in your excitement. You take a quick shower while Gaster puts the wall up (he's explained that it's like closing his eyes only it shuts off his hearing as well as his sight) and dress in clothes fancier than what you've worn to the station in a while. When you head to the kitchen you find a full breakfast of eggs, bacon and sausage waiting for you, cooked lovingly by Toriel and Frisk. The goat monster gives you a tight hug.

"Be safe my child," she murmurs to you. "No one will blame you if you cannot handle being back there after everything that's happened."

You smile up at her. "Tod may have given me my job there but he's not the only that made that place a second home for me. Thank you, Toriel but I'm going to be okay. Besides, I'm not really gonna be alone, am I?"

She frowns and points a clawed finger at the space over your right shoulder. You clear your throat and tilt your head to the left. She fixes her pointing without hesitation. "Now listen to me, Doctor," she nearly growls. "You've caused more than enough trouble here as it is. _____ deserves a chance to regain her normal life. You will not interfere with her work for the day, understand?"

She hasn't lost that royal sense of ordering people I see, Gaster remarks dryly. Tell her there is no need to worry. We have made our bargain regarding your time spent at work.
You relay that message, in kinder words and after you eat your fill, give a round of hugs to Papyrus, Toriel and Frisk, you and Sans hop in your car and start for the station. Sans is silent the entire drive over and you hope it's not going to be a huge struggle just to get him to leave you alone, not that you'll blame him if it is. You pull up to the station and the sight of the studio and Grillby's next door makes your throat close up with emotion briefly. You stop Sans briefly out there on the sidewalk before heading in. "Baby, I know you're nervous about me being alone today but Tod and everyone he had on his payroll of doom is gone now. Abby's here, there's security now and like it or not, Gaster can keep an eye out for anything weird."

Sans nods several times, perhaps mostly to convince himself. "yeah, i know. besides, i get to listen to you all day on the radio. it'll be like you're right there."

"Exactly!" You boop his nasal cavity. "Now get to work, Professor."

He can't help but grin at the title. He gives you a final tight hug and peck on the cheek before vanishing. You take a deep breath, your heart fluttering with nervous excitement and push the door open. The familiar tinkle of the bell greets you but you only make it about three steps in before something squealing very loudly leaps at you in a whirl of colorful tattoos and nearly knocks you back into the door.

"Girl, you are never going to believe what I just scored for us!" Abby beams at you, her eyes practically glittering with joy.

Chapter End Notes

Just a FYI, these flashes of memories are not happening in linear order.
Anyways, feed the comment monster if you so like!
You pry Abby off as best as you can, grinning widely. "Hello to you too."

"Yeah, welcome back, all that stuff, but first!" She's practically bouncing. "Who's your best friend?"

You frown and tilt your head. "Hmm, I'll have to think about that...."

She huffs at you, turning her lips out in a pout. She sighs dramatically and brings up her hand in which she's holding four laminated cards. "I guess I'll just have to give these Fall Out Boy concert media passes to someone else then."

Your hands fly up over your mouth. "Excuse me, you've got what?"

She waves the passes, barely able to hold an indifferent expression. "Oh these silly things? Yeah, just took calling in some favors and pulling strings to get them. So, who's your best friend?"

You leap at her, smothering her in a hug. "You! You're my best friend!" Abby's control breaks and the two of you squeal and jump up and down a few times. "You can't be serious!" you finally gasp, letting her go. "I didn't even know there was a concert happening! When is it and how did I not hear about it?"

"Because one, you've been too busy cuddling with your skele-babe to come into work and two-" She smirks with a purely evil glint in her eye. "I may have been tampering with your email notifications and deleted every newsletter from the station that had any mention of the concert just so I could see the look on your face when I told you in person."

"Normally I would be rather upset about that but right now I'm too happy to care!" You press your hands to your face, your smile almost painfully wide. You're having a hard time forming words and just wind up hugging her again. "I love you so much! I can't believe this!"

"Believe it, the concert is this weekend!" Abby sweeps some hair out of her face before handing you two of the tickets. "There's for you and your boy. Now I just have to find a guy and it'll be the perfect double date for Valentine's!"

You're so busy ogling over the media passes that it takes you a second to realize what she just said.
"It's already Valentine's Day?"

She gasps dramatically. "It's your first Valentine's with Sans and you didn't even realize? For shame!"

You shrug. "In my defense things have been kind of...hectic," you mumble and Gaster snorts quietly in your head.

Abby's giddy grin fades a little and when she hugs you this time, it's warm and gentle. "I'm glad you're back. Things haven't been the same since...since that day. I'm so sorry. I should've-"

"I told you in the hospital, it wasn't your fault." You hold her tightly. "I'm back now. It's in the past."

She pulls away, wiping at her eyes. "Girl, if there is anything you need, anything, you tell me. Got it?"

You laugh lightly. "Um, you just got me Fall Out Boy tickets. Pretty sure that beats just about anything I could ask for."

"As far as welcome back presents go, I guess it'll do." She tugs on your hand, pulling you towards the recording room. "Now come on! You don't want to be late for your own show!"

You follow her up the stairs and you're greeted by sudden cheers and cake and a banner with your name on it prepared by the rest of the crew and so much for doing your make-up because you can't stop your eyes from watering. There are a few faces missing. Most notably Tod's. Your thoughts drift to him even as you accept hugs and congratulations from your coworkers. Tod had given this to you. Despite the hurt and the anger and the nearly unbearable sadness that always hits you whenever you think about him, there's a part of you that is almost expecting him to walk through that door with a cup of terrible coffee in his hand and a gentle smile on his face. But he's in prison now and you haven't seen him since the day of your rescue. You shouldn't miss him. Not after everything that he did.

But deep in your heart, you do miss him. You miss your friend who shared your love for music. But the guy who laughed with you, shared a show with you is never coming back.

You're approached by Sam, a non-binary person like Frisk with a dyed silver buzz cut that stands out brightly against their dark skin. They run one of the later evening shows and before you started hosting you had worked with them quite a few times. "Hey!" they say cheerfully, extending their hand out. "I'm sure you're tired of hearing it, but welcome back!"

"Thanks!" You shake their hand. "Trust me, I'm never going to get tired of being back."

"That's good to hear. So listen, I've been covering the morning show during your absence and the higher ups want me to partner with you until you get back into the swing of things. Is that okay with you?"

That makes sense and it really doesn't bother you. "Sure. That sounds fine."

Sam hesitates and then, almost cringing they add, "And they want me to ask you about what happened. A lot of our recent calls from listeners have been about that. People want to know. But if you're not comfortable with it, they'll just have to deal."

Oh. That stupid twist of anxiety immediately hits your chest. Of course people want to know. You've been avoiding the news as much as possible and only the threat of Asgore's anger had kept the press
away from Toriel's house. Your work email inbox was filled with letters that ranged from kind concern to sneering jeers that you had somehow deserved everything that had happened. Some had even managed to sneak into your personal email but you were quick to block those. But surprisingly, not much about what had actually happened has been released. Of course you can't talk about everything, not only because you know it will be too difficult but also because how on Earth could you even begin to explain Gaster? But maybe....

"It's okay," you find yourself saying. "Maybe it'll help me too. I can't talk about everything but...I'll say what I can. It's not going to be a full interview, is it?"

Sam shakes their head even as they sigh with relief. "No, just whatever you want to say. We might take some callers but you don't have to answer what you don't want to. But if you're sure, we'll put you on in five minutes. Sound good?"

You nod, perhaps a little woodenly and head into the actual booth to start setting up. Gaster observes the area curiously. I tried to recreate a radio system underground as a side project at one point, he says. It never really took off because I was focused on other things. Radio signals had a difficult time piercing through the stone anyway. It was Doctor Alphys who finally cracked that puzzle.

There's no one else in the sound booth at the moment so you quietly murmur, "Are you admitting that you don't know everything?"

I never said I did in the first place.

"Could've fooled me." You take a seat, adjusting your headphones and go over the song lineup. The familiarity of the actions helps you to feel a little more at ease and when Sam comes in you're almost calm again. You give them the signal that you're ready and when the song fades, they flip the recording switch and begin talking.

"That was Beyonce's newest hit for you this morning. Now, I know that many of you listeners have asked over and over again for information regarding our host _____ who has been absent from the station for a while. It is my great pleasure to announce that she is back with us and here in the studio at this very moment!"

You lean in to the mic. "Hey guys," you say as evenly as you can and thank heavens your voice doesn't crack. "Yeah, I'm...I'm back and this time hopefully here to stay." Your eyes flicker over to the call waiting; the light is already glowing. "I've really missed this."

"And we've missed you too," Sam says, giving you an encouraging smile. "Now, as long as you're okay with it, what can you tell us about what happened? After all, you are not the only loss this station has suffered."

Your heart clenches. "But my loss wasn't of my choosing. Tod...Tod made bad decisions regarding a matter that he felt strongly about. As I'm sure you and many of our listeners know, Tod was a strong advocate for monsters. But at the same time he was a man who had been severely hurt by people that he had trusted. So he took that passion of his and rather than continuing to be a voice for monsters when they could not speak for themselves, he partnered up with people who...." You swallow, your voice getting caught in your throat. "They believed that the problem was with the human race itself. They didn't believe that humans could change their views and those who viewed monsters as lesser beings would never change their minds and needed to be disposed of. They were trying to make a weapon that could, in their words, 'cleanse humanity'."

Sam blinks in surprise. "I was aware that some kind of experimentation was being carried on down
there but it's never been made clear as to the reason why."

"Yes. The experiments...they were..." Your voice trails off as your hands begin to shake. Talking about it without Sans at your side to keep you grounded is making those memories surface with a vengeance. You struggle to control yourself; you can't lose it live on the radio. Keep it together. Keep it together!

Suddenly you feel something warm easing through your chest. You jerk slightly at the strange sensation. There's a noise in your head, not painful or loud. It's soft, almost like a hum and it fills your head. The warmth travels up to your arms and down to your hands, easing the shaking.

**Calm down, Gaster says softly. Control your emotions.**

Is Gaster seriously telling you...helping you to calm down? Even though you feel like the thought should scare you, you are actually calming down. Then again, maybe it's just the shock of him interfering that's chasing away the traumatic memories.

"______?"

You jump, suddenly aware that you've been silent for several seconds, which on the radio is a big no-no. "Sorry. Um, the experiments involved monsters and humans. It resulted in many lives being lost. Mine would have been too but fortunately I have friends that moved fast and were able to track and shut down the whole operation before it was too late."

"And what exactly did those experiments entail?" Sam, getting caught up in the journalist excitement, asks the question with thinly veiled anticipation.

Now that you know you can't talk about because one, you're on the verge of losing it anyway and two, revealing the grim details to anyone that might be listening can't be a good idea. So you take a breath and simply say, "It was a lot of blood work and violations of my body. That's all I'm going to say about that."

"Is there anything else you want to say before we take a caller?"

You hadn't planned on saying anything else but you find the words pouring from you. "What Tod and his people did was disgusting and completely unacceptable. But I don't want this whole thing to be taken as fuel for those with anti-monster views. They hurt both monsters and humans for the sake of their goal of 'saving humanity'. But it was monsters who saved me and the others. It was humans who cared for me in the hospital. We as a species have a chance to come together with monsters to make sure that something like this never happens again. If my own suffering helps this city and people around the world see that monsters are beings just like us and put aside their differences, then perhaps it will be worth it." Your voice is starting to get choked up so you clear your throat and press the call button. "Alright, we'll go ahead and take a call. You're live."

After a brief pause, the voice of a young boy floats through the speakers. "Um, hi _____. I'm Brandon."

"Hi Brandon," you respond with a little surprise. He sounds like he can't be older than six. "Do you have a question?"

"Um...no. I just um, I wanted to say I missed you and I'm glad you're back on the show. My mom's girlfriend um, she's a monster and we were really worried about you. We-we listen to you every morning!"

Your hand is up over your mouth. "Thank you Brandon," you manage to speak, despite your
trembling lip. "I'm glad you enjoy listening."

A women's voice whispers indistinctly and Brandon cheerfully says, "We love you! Stay...what?"
More whispering. "Oh, stay strong! Okay bye!"

Sam has to take over from there because you can only put your head down on the desk and attempt to cry quietly.

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Aside from your little breakdown, the rest of the morning goes smoothly. Sans sends you an apologetic text saying he won't be able to make lunch thanks to the pile of work that's already built up because of his focus on your Gaster problem. You decide to head over to Grillby's by yourself regardless. Well, you're not really by yourself, are you? "What was that?" you mumble as you leave the station.

You don't have to clarify. **You were beginning to become unstable. I assisted.**

"That doesn't answer my question. How did you do it?"

**Our Souls are connected. There are certain aspects of your being that I can effect with my will. It was...what are you doing?**

You've stopped and turned towards the wall as you put your phone up to your ear. "Helping myself to not look crazy by talking to thin air. Are you saying that you can control my emotions?"

Clearly not, as you seem to be getting upset at this moment and I would honestly rather not deal with it.

"Clearly!"

Relax. It is merely influencing. Suggestions that your Soul can choose to accept or not, even if it isn't a conscious thing.

You take a deep breath. "Okay, if you can influence my emotions, I guess that does explain certain moments before you broke through. But you said certain *aspects*. What does that...." You trail off as you feel perhaps a flicker of guilt from him and it suddenly hits you. "You've been messing with my memories!" There are holes in your memories, like the time with falling off the swings, or the dreams about the door where you knew something was wrong but suddenly didn't seem to care about it. "You have, haven't you?"

Gaster takes his time in answering. **I couldn't have your mind's defenses grow stronger, which they would if you knew what was happening. Furthermore, if you had told Sans and he had attempted to stop it, permanent damage could have been done to both of us. It was too late to stop the process. I simply made it easier by making you forget.**

"You made me forget about the Void too!" you hiss. "How did you do that?"

**It is too difficult to explain. You wouldn't understand.**

You fight back a scream of frustration. "How about you try? Sum up. Something."

Gaster sighs. **The Void is made up of pure magical energy. I was able to...borrow some of that to get both our Souls here. There was not much left but what remains has given a little extra**
strength. I am able to use it to my will in ways my original magic could never achieve. From there it was just a matter of figuring out how to suppress the memories without causing permanent damage to your brain. Simple enough? When you don’t answer he says, You're clearly still agitated.

"Of course I am! I have had more than enough of my fair share of people messing around with my Soul and head, which-!" you add, "They were only able to do because you helped them do it!"

They would have found a way. I was stopping them! Gaster snaps, making you flinch at the noise in your head. I was not giving them the tools to make their weapon, it was to create a form for me. And then I would have stopped them myself once I was back in the timeline! Do you really think I would have let them rage war with my people as their front line?

You almost drop the phone in your surprise. "Gaster I thought...I thought you despised humans for what they did."

Of course I do. I may not have spent much time observing your kind but I have seen enough. You can't even stop from going to war with each other, as your Tod said. But his solution would have only led to unnecessary death.

"You want to talk about unnecessary death? What about all those people and monsters that died at Tod's hands? They died because of the tools and knowledge you gave them and that's the cold hard truth Doctor." You're being cruel but you're too angry to care. You have seen and felt how desperate he was but there is no excuse for what's been done.

Gaster is bristling with anger too. Stiffly he says, You do not have much time before you must return to work. I would suggest eating while you can."

"Fine." You shove your phone back into your purse and storm to Grillby’s. The warmth of the bar washes over you and a loud cheer rises up from the lunch crowd when you step in. You're pretty much a regular at this point but it's been several weeks since you've last come in. Lots of monsters greet you as you make your way up to the bar and you manage to clear away the frustration still plaguing you and give them genuine smiles. When you reach the counter and hop up on a stool, Grillby gives you a welcoming crackle.

"It is good to see you," he says softly, as his hands sign 'Welcome'.

"Good to...see you....too." Wait. Your eyes nearly bug out of your head. You heard him! Heard his actual voice!

He sees the shock on your face and tilts his head slightly. "Did you understand me just now?"

You nod wordlessly.

The flames on his head pop loudly, the only physical sign of his surprise. "Oh. I see. That is surprising and...wonderful." His voice is whisper soft and deep but you can hear a true note of wonder. He clears his throat with the sound of wood snapping and regains his professionalism. He doesn't ask you how this happened and you're glad because you're still trying to work that out yourself. "Would you like your usual then?"

"Um, yes. Please. Thanks." You watch Grillby as he walks away. Putting your arm up on the tabletop, you hide your mouth with your hand and whisper, "Okay I'm still mad at you, but did you do that?"
Gaster doesn't answer. He feels distracted, almost distant.

"Hello? Earth to balloon man."

He snaps back to attention at that. **Don't call me that.**

You grin a little behind your hand. "What's going on G? Any thoughts on me suddenly being able to understand fire elementals?"

I suppose...you do have a lot of monster energy connected to your Soul at the moment. It is possible that your senses are adapting to match mine and Sans. He's quiet, not nearly as interested in this new development as you thought he would be. When Grillby brings your plate of food, you feel a flicker from his Soul, something you've occasionally felt before. Like that moment in the snow with Sans. You smile at Grillby, chewing on a fry thoughtfully as he walks away.

"Going by your continued silence, I'm guessing you used to be close to Grillby?" you murmur.

Gaster sighs. **I suppose you could say that. But it was a very, very long time ago. Even before the accident we did not talk nearly as much as we used to.**

"But?" you press.

**Why the sudden interest?**

You take a large bite out of your burger, nearly moaning at the greasy goodness. "Because aside from what Sans has told me, which still isn't that much to be honest, I know nothing about you. And since you clearly know more about me than I would ever want you to know, it seems rather unfair. So spill."

He makes a small noise of amusement (you still have no clue how he does that without a throat of his own) and surprisingly, starts talking. **I met him at the end of the war. He was young, too young to fight but when monsters fled to the underground, he spent countless hours helping everyone adjust. He healed the injured, gave warmth to those who needed it and made food. His father used to be a well known cook but he was slain during the battle. But Grillby never let his grief stop him from helping others and took over his father's position. I used to watch him dart here and there; a bright flame in the dark of the underground. It was amusing.**

You try to picture the calm, composed Grillby running around like that and fail. At the same time a stab of sympathy goes through your heart. You know how hard it was to keep going after your grandfather died. You can't imagine putting it aside to care for others.

**I only spoke to him on occasion during those first few months but he was never boring like many of the others. Cooking is a lot like science so our minds thought in much the same way. I suppose we bonded over that. I too was young but old enough to fight so we were close in age. When my skills on the battlefield were no longer needed, I turned my full attention to science. He was the only one who sort of understood what I was talking about and certainly the only one who cared. Even after I was officially promoted to Royal Scientist and moved beyond his understanding, we still held many conversations on cold nights in Snowdin. He was relaxing to be around. I'm sure you understand that.**

That you do. Even with your phobia of fire, there's something about Grillby that just sets your heart at ease. "Do you want to talk with him?"
Gaster hesitates and you can feel his Soul swell with longing. But it vanishes quickly, squashed under the cold sting of logic. **There is no point at the moment,** he says dully. **He does not remember me and...even if he did, we did not part on good terms. Meeting him again in this condition would not be wise.**

"What do you mean?"

I got deeper into my research. It took all of my time. And he met a monster, had a child. Life carried on and our visits grew further and further apart. Then, just before I made Sans, we got together and talked for hours. I had kept all of my research regarding creating a life a secret, even from the King, but I couldn't keep it from Grillby. He grew angry with me, called my work unethical. Un-monsterlike. We fought and I told him that I would never set foot in his bar again. And I never did. Even after Sans became...after he became more than C1. I never went back. Not even when he lost his wife, when he needed a friend more than ever. Isn't it ironic, that he would become the closest thing my boys had to a guardian after I was erased? I'm sure he would appreciate the irony if he could remember.

It's the most he's ever talked in one go, at least about something other than making a vessel for his Soul. You realize you haven't touched the rest of your food and slowly start to eat before it gets cold. You finish off the burger in silence and you can tell that Gaster has gone back to watching Grillby work. "When we fix this, maybe you can start over with him. I know he doesn't remember but I'm sure if you explained-"

There would be no point. That time is lost. Those memories are gone.

"They aren't for you. If you were as close as you say then you know that he would understand. I don't know him that well but even I know that." You finish your plate and you see Grillby approaching. "If I were you, I'd jump at the chance to...rekindle his friendship."

He laughs, he actually laughs at that and it's a pleasant sound, not at all like the crazed grating noise he'd made before. **Wait,** he says as Grillby gathers up your plate. **Ask him for a fresh glass of Hope.**

Hope? Grillby's leaving so you don't have time to waste. "Oh, Grillby! Can I get a fresh glass of Hope?"

Grillby stops short, his flames crackling with surprise. Shoot, did Gaster just make you order something weird? "I have not made that for a long time," he says in that same calm voice. "Where did you hear about it?"

"Um...a friend?" You shrug, your face going a little red. "Sorry, I don't actually know what it is. They just said to order it. You don't have to if it's too much trouble."

"No," he says thoughtfully. "It is no trouble. Perhaps it is even just what you need. I will simply need a few minutes to prepare it."

He disappears into the back and true to his word, it only takes a few minutes. The glass he brings you is smaller than the usual size but still slightly bigger than a shot glass. The liquid inside swirls with shimmering colors of gold and orange. It almost looks like magic in a cup. You observe it curiously. "Is there alcohol in this?"

Grillby shakes his head.
Just drink it, Gaster encourages. It is safe.

Trusting Gaster feels weird but with Grillby watching as well, it seems like there is no choice. You take the glass; it's warm under your hands. You hesitate for just a moment longer before pressing the drink up to your lips. It's bubbly, like soda, but bursting with a far more powerful flavor. It's citrus and chocolate and sunshine and fire and ice combined into a liquid that burns and yet soothes your throat as you drink. It fills your veins with energy, makes your Soul quake and swell in your chest and it feels wonderful. It feels like you could simply start floating.

It feels like hope.

You barely notice the tears building in your eyes. "What is this?" you whisper.

Grillby inclines his head, his shoulders straightening slightly with pride. "My people had lost hope when we lost the war. I simply created something that could give that back to them, even if it was just for a short while."

You set the empty glass down, clutching your hands to your chest. "Thank you," you say to both Grillby and Gaster.

Perhaps Grillby is right. This may be just the boost you need because right now, you feel like you can accomplish anything. You head back to work, filled with a renewed sense of determination.

You're going to fix this. Together with Sans you will get Gaster a new form and reclaim your life. You can't fail! You won't fail!
Hey guys, I apologize for the lateness of this chapter, I had an insane birthday weekend and tons of holiday stuff going on.

Sam the DJ's a Cool Bean
A Space Selfie
Birthday Art For The Writer
I Write And Draw Here
Main Blog
The ask boxes are always open!

It's the night before the concert and holy crap has it been a long week. You're fighting not to doze off in your own head as Gaster and Sans talk about the final adjustments needed for the overly complicated laser thing they've been working on. It's a huge boxy thing with the actual laser sticking out of one side that hangs over a thick panel with leather cuffs attached to it.

"the resonator needs to be tightened up a little."

"Agreed. Let's try moving it to point three."

You think back over the week.

After the first day or so, Gaster wound up falling asleep for the majority of your shifts at the station (though he always seems to wake up just in time for lunch). He insisted on eating at Grillby's every day and it's not exactly a puzzle to figure out why. But since you greatly enjoy eating there anyway and it seems to put him in a slightly better mood, you've got no issue with it. Sans only joined you once and he was so frazzled while eating that he didn't even notice the unscrewed lid of the ketchup and dumped the whole thing on his plate of fries. He practically inhaled the food before kissing you quickly on the cheek and vanishing again. Well, that prank didn't go as well as you hoped.

"What is the output level?"

"sixty percent."

"Raise it to seventy two."

But you can't blame him for that. Poor Sans is working harder than you've ever seen him work. The university is merciless in piling on the responsibilities and though it's bringing in a huge paycheck for him, you're concerned that he's pushing himself too much with the Gaster project on top of everything. But even if he would listen to you about easing up, he can't just refuse the work the university's giving him, especially when it's the job that's giving him the tools and funding he needs for building Gaster's new body. Still, you're worried about him. He's clearly exhausted and it's only been a few days.

He's not the only one who's tired though. Going straight from the station to the university and working for several hours, during which Gaster takes over for huge chunks of time is like working a fifteen hour day. A physically and mentally draining fifteen hour day. Both you and Sans usually eat
dinner and head straight to bed when you get back to Toriel's. Perhaps the one good side of being so tired is that your ever present nightmares seem to be put on hold. Except for the occasional glimpse into Gaster's memories, your nights are blissfully free of dreams. Kind of ironic that it takes a monster invading the deepest parts of your Soul to give you a decent night's rest for once.

What is concerning however is that while you are struggling to keep your energy up, Gaster seems to be getting stronger. The length of time that he can spend in control of your body grows drastically over the course of just a few days from right at two hours to over three in one go. Your throat no longer burns when he speaks, which is somehow nice and terrifying at the same time. He still avoids speaking out loud when he can, thought at times his frustration will win over his control. You personally think the pace at which you're progressing is just fine but it seems like it's not fast enough for either Sans or Gaster. To your understanding they have first create a device to extract the needed materials to make the basic form and a place in which to keep it while it grows.

Growing life in a jar. You feel like you should be practicing your evil scientist laugh or something. The situation seems a little too serious to be making jokes like that so you keep your thoughts to yourself.

"hey dings, speaking of things that have a screw loose, i think i found a few of yours."

"Glad to see your sense of wit has not faded over the years."

The two of them can go from chattering freely about Soul theorems and mechanical terms to practically screaming at each other at the drop of a hat. Of course neither of them is prone to raising their voice so it's more like extremely uncomfortable hissing and insulting. Intervening only seems to make it worse so you opt to stay quiet when you can. Thankfully, the outbursts are over quickly as they both understand that fighting is only a waste of time and will quickly go back to working in an icy silence until one of them (usually Sans) causally asks a question or makes an observation and the work continues.

"I think we're ready. Let's put the steel in and run at full power."

You snap back to attention as Sans grunts and struggles to lift up a thick steel pipe and places it on the panel with the cuffs, tying it in place. Gaster cleans the googles he's got you wearing (at Sans' insistence since your eyes are easier to damage than empty sockets) before taking a few steps back behind a protective sheet of thick plastic. Sans joins you, still puffing a little and lifts the remote that will start the machine. "care to do the honors?"

Gaster rolls your eyes but takes the remote and presses the large red button at the top. The machine hums to life and after a few seconds of build up, the gun like part of it shifts and lowers down to the pipe. A bright burst of blue light, so bright it's almost white cuts through the metal. Sparks fly everywhere and the screeching noise of cutting metal assaults your ears. Gaster grins but it's a victory celebrated too soon because within seconds you notice that the strength and intensity of the laser is continuing to build and suddenly the pipe explodes from the force. Both you and Sans flinch, ducking down. Fortunately, the machine is set up in a space that's been cleared of other machines and other than leaving a few scorch marks on the wall and nearly stopping your heart, nothing is damaged. Aside from the steel pipe, which is in several smoking pieces scattered across the ground.

Sans peeks around the safety wall, a heavy sigh escaping him. "ok, gonna take a wild guess and say the electric energy levels are a bit too high."

Gaster pulls the goggles off, irritation barely contained. "Clearly."

Sans, ignoring the waves of frustration coming from Gaster, strides over to the machine. He groans
after a moment of examination. "crap. the pointer's been damaged. melted. gonna need to fix that before i stick my hand in there."

The force of your shock at those words makes Gaster lose his hold and you swan-dive back into control. "Excuse me, before you what?"

"hi babe," Sans says, poking at a piece of pipe with his foot and very pointedly not looking at you.

"Hi. Now, again, before you what?" You tap your foot, still waiting for an answer. "Gaster? Care to explain?"

Shockingly, Gaster seems just as surprised as you. He can't be serious about sticking his hand in there.

Well, finally a voice of reason from him.

I can't believe he's been under the impression that he can do it. It obviously has to be Papyrus.

"What?!" you yelp, loud enough to make Sans jump. "No, no, hold on. No one is sticking their hands in the machine that just blew up a steel pipe. Why is that necessary?"

We need bone and the marrow within. We've said this before.

It would have been impossible for you not to have heard that they planned on using bone as the basis of Gaster's body. But neither of them had spoken about where exactly that bone was supposed to come from. You suddenly remember that moment in the Void, when Gaster held out the sliver of his Soul to you in a hand with a hole punched right through it. It hits you like a hammer in the gut. "I thought...I thought it was just...oh. You've been messing with my questioning for that, haven't you? Making me think it's not a big deal. Admit it."

Gaster doesn't say anything, which is answer enough for you. Oh when he gets his own body again you're going to slap him hard enough to send his Soul right back to the Void!

Sans is watching you silently, shoulders tense. "we can't use any old bone we find. it won't grow without deep infusions of magic."

"So you're going to take it from your hand?" You gesture wildly towards the broken pipe pieces. "No way! Can't you try something else?"

Let me back in control, I need to reason with him, Gaster says urgently. It cannot be him.

"So you're saying it has to be Pap? Why?"

That gets Sans' attention. His skull whips towards you, the lights of his sockets vanishing. "i'm not making pap do it. forget about it."

Gaster is struggling to take back over but he's tired; it's fairly easy for you to keep him at bay because right now you are too angry and scared to lose control. "Talk Gaster. Why are you saying it's got to be Paps?"

Sans will not survive the process, he finally snaps, seeming to understand he can't take over right now. The HP loss will kill him.

You relay his words and Sans shakes his head firmly. "i'll sleep beforehand. get all the extra hp that i
It won't be enough. Any extra HP you will gain won't be enough, even if we did have the time to fine point the process to the point of perfection. The risk is still too great but Papyrus can handle the loss either way. Tell him he is being absurd. He's seen the results and the readings. damage will be done no matter what.

Sans rubs his hand over his skull like he always does when he gets agitated. "ok. ok, fine then...then we use my attacks. same bone, same material. no one loses their hands or hp. we just have to change the reader a bit. we can adjust the laser's output so that it won't make the attack vanish."

**Sans you know that won't work!** Your arms twitch from the force of Gaster's rising anger. Attacks made from magic and a body built from the Soul are not the same! This is a basic scientific fact!

He throws his hands up, his sockets black. "i am not going to ask my brother to slice a hole in his hand! i can't put him through that!"

**Do you think I would have punched holes in my own hands if bone taken from attacks would work?** Gaster's voice pounds through your head. Your body is starting to tremble from the force of his Soul's angry surging. **I tried that. I tried everything! Bone taken directly from the source is the only way.**

"you're wrong. we can do it. you were only working with scraps from the dump. we have the best tools available. we can make it work-!"

There's a sudden, sharp pop that echoes through both the air and your Soul, tugging at something deep within you. You blink and gape at the sudden appearance of two ghost like hands that have suddenly shimmered into existence. The hands are skeletal and both have a hole carved out of the palm. They're translucent, glowing dimly with a deep purple aura. As you and Sans gape at them, they start to move. The fingers flex, curling slowly into fists and back out before twisting back and forth.

A wild range of emotions flash from Gaster's Soul fragment; confusion, frustration dying into curiosity and most of all a joyous wonder at the sight of his very own (somewhat present) hands. Then the hands slowly start to sign.

"You see Sans? I told you her body can handle magic. If she couldn't then this wouldn't be possible-"

"dings, drop it." Sans says in a voice that's almost a shriek. He stares at Gaster's new hands with sockets that are perfectly round with shock. Shaking slightly, he reaches out to Gaster. He hesitates before very slowly placing his fingers against the edge of the ghostly hand. He gasps as his phalanges make a brief moment of contact and draws his hand back like he's been bitten. "oh. ooh. ok that's..." he clears his nonexistent throat. "well. haven't seen these guys for a long time."

You can't take your eyes off the floating limbs. "Um, could one of you tell me what's happening?"

Sans takes an unsteady step back. "dings i'm...i'm gonna let you handle this one. i gotta...i'm gonna get a drink." He teeters away and out the door of the lab, looking like he's barely managing to stay upright.

You turn your attention back to the floating hands. They're continuing to flex slightly. The one on
the left suddenly drops down to a nearby table. After a moment of hesitation, it reaches for an empty vial and picks it up. Gaster gasps quietly in your head and nearly drops it. **Extraordinary. It would seem that my own emotions led to the manifestation of my second pair of hands,** he murmurs, carefully setting the glass back down. **This was...is one of my magical abilities. Much like how Sans can use his magic to move objects, I can form an extra pair of hands to assist me when necessary. I used to use them all the time before I fell. I didn't think I would be able to form them at all in this state, let alone with any solidness to them.**

You reach up too and touch the hand that has remained hovering by your shoulder. The hand holds no warmth but it is undoubtedly solid despite it's ghost-like appearance. A shiver runs up your spine at the sensation of magic under your fingers and you quickly pull away. These are Gaster's hands. They're almost identical to Sans' except for the large holes cut out in each palm. You can feel that Gaster is a little shaken too, though he mostly seems thrilled at this new development. "Can you...feel anything with them? Like surfaces or whether something is hot and cold?" you ask curiously.

Not in the same way that you can or my true hands could. They do not register heat, which made them very useful when dealing with the burning temperatures of the Core, Gaster says. His ghostly hands are continuing to move around, touching things, picking up items before carefully setting them down. **I can feel the pressure of picking things up yes, but not with any of the usual textile results.**

"Huh." You watch the hands fly around for a moment. It seems like they can only go a few feet away from you before you feel the strain on your Soul. "I guess this means I'm not going to have to be the telephone for you any more, huh?"

We shall see. This too drains energy, even thought to me in the old days it was barely noticeable. For you, it would be wise to keep an eye on the state of your Soul. We still do not know the full extent of your own magical capabilities. Even this may burn you out.

Okay. Another new development in the crazy mess that is your life. You sigh and look towards the door. Sans hasn't come back. He was clearly freaked out by the hands. You should probably go check on him. You head out after him, the ghostly hands trailing behind you like puppies. You step out into the hall and see that he hasn't gone far. He's...oh boy. He's got his skull positioned over the drinking fountain and he's letting the water hit his face without even attempting to drink it. The top of his lab coat and shirt are soaked. You slowly approach, letting your feet tap loudly so as to not startle him. He lifts his head slightly, opening his sockets. Water runs down his face like tears as he grins weakly at you.

"heya. heh, i just...it's kinda different, actually seeing that he's here." His gaze flickers to the hands that are still hovering next to your head before lowering to the ground. "i mean, i knew he was. believe me, i didn't doubt that. but...it's always been through you which is terrible but....geez, he's...he's right there."

He's struggling to form clear words. You pat the area under his sockets with your sleeve, wiping up some of the water. "This is just another level of weird huh?"

Sans sighs and blinks slowly, making more water drop down from the edge of his sockets. "yeah."

You take his hand, pulling him back towards the lab. "It's getting late. We still need to talk about the whole bone situation but I think that can wait. Let's clean up and head home. Tomorrow is our first Valentine's together and I want to enjoy it as much as I can."

He just nods silently, following your lead. The two of your start collecting the broken bits of pipe
and Sans does insist on changing the melted bit of the laser before you leave. Gaster helps clean up too and all the while continues to marvel over his new expansion of freedom from your body. But as he predicted, your Soul starts to ache after a while and he makes them vanish. The relief is instant and almost heady. You slip into a seat, watching Sans as he fiddles with the part on the laser, chewing on your lip. You want to believe that Sans can make bone matter taken from his attacks work in place of cutting it out of his, or Papyrus' hands. But Gaster's certainty that it will fail is unwavering. You have this terrible sinking feeling in your gut that something is about to go wrong.

Your phone rings suddenly, cutting off those depressing thoughts. You fish it out of your purse and see that it's Abby calling. This comes as no surprise because she's called you every night this week to chatter about the concert and her hunt to find a guy to go with.

"I'm going to die alone!" she wails the second you pick up. "People are stupid and I'm going to die alone!"

"So I'm guessing no luck with the date hunt," you say, grinning a little despite yourself.

"No! Everyone who wants to go is already going and those aren't going don't want to! What am I supposed to do?"

"Well-"

"Okay, I'll be real, we're gonna have a wild time anyway, dates included or not. But what am I supposed to do with this extra ticket? I had to pull so many strings! I'm gonna get such a stink eye if only three of us show up!"

Well, it's not like Gaster needs an actual ticket so you don't mention the fact that four of you will be present anyway. You gnaw on your lip and think. Sans grumbles quietly to himself and pulls a huge section of the laser out of the machine; it's melted together from the heat. He carries it over to a cluttered desk and hops up on a stool. The sight of his feet dangling a few inches off the ground makes you snicker. In the same moment, a light bulb goes off in your head.

"Okay, I don't have a date for you. But I think I know someone who will love you forever if you gave that last ticket to them."

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Frisk nearly knocks you over with the force of their hug when you give them the news. You feel a little bad when you see Papyrus get equally excited for Frisk but he assures you that he's already got plans with Mettaton and besides 'I DON'T CARE MUCH FOR THOSE KINDS OF CONCERTS. THEY ARE TOO LOUD!' so that makes you feel better. Sans stiffens a little at the fact Papyrus is going on a date with the robot that he 'intensely dislikes' but you're quick to redirect the conversation to Gaster's new hands. Papyrus claps his own in unbridled delight. As he and Gaster talk, you find your eyes keep going to his gloved hands. It hits you that you've never seen him not wearing some kind of gloves. The idea of a hole being carved out of his hand makes you feel sick. Sans too has a slightly nauseated look on his face so you use that as an excuse to turn in a little early. Sans heads into your room while you do your bedtime routine. You expect him to already be asleep when you come in but he's still sitting up, staring at a summoned bone hovering above his hand. He bounces it a little as you crawl under the covers.

"he doesn't think it'll work, does he?" he asks softly.

You shake your head, snuggling up close to him. "That doesn't matter. He's been wrong before, right?"
Shut up, you think at him, not really caring if he hears it or not. The dim light emitting from the bone casts a shadow over Sans' face that makes him look a little spooky. He sighs and flicks the bone away. It spins through the air for a brief moment before vanishing. Without another word he slides down into the bed, wrapping you tightly in his arms. He wakes you up only once during the night, whimpering something about hands but a few strokes against his skull soon sends him back to sleep.

When you wake the next morning, it's like the nightmare and fear from last night has vanished. You don't even have time to get out of bed before he greets you with a waffle breakfast and a wide smile. They're a little burnt, which is a sure sign that he baked them himself. Still, you eat them with happy enthusiasm while he sits perched on the edge of the bed.

"So, what's the plan for today?" you ask around a mouthful of waffle. "Besides the concert which I am so totally not over excited for or anything."

He tilts his head, frowning a little. "I thought you had the day planned. I've never done Valentine's before. kidding!" he adds as you choke on your food. "Kidding! Geez, that must have been more waffle than I thought."

That does make you choke on your food and Gaster is quick to summon his extra hands to pat your back roughly. Once breakfast is done, Sans admits that he didn't know exactly what to do, especially since having a third wheel would make a lot of the romantic options kind of awkward. He hopefully asks if visiting the space museum again is okay. Given that it was the place you had your first official date, you think it's a wonderful idea.

Gaster is almost more taken away by wonder than Sans was when you step through the doors. You have to beg him not to summon his hands because the museum is oddly busy today and while you don't mind the stares, ghostly hands might cause an actual panic and that would just ruin everyone's day. He restrains himself, but barely. There's no doubt in your mind now where Sans got his fascination with space from. Still, you make a point to ignore Gaster's mutterings and focus on the time with Sans.

Sans, who is doing a very poor job of hiding his anxiety and dread over what's to come regarding the bone material problem. Though the space nerdiness is helping, he's still rather lackluster in his observations and comments. You can't help but feel the irony of the fact that the last time you were here, you had thought about how much you didn't understand him and couldn't read him. How much of a mystery he was to you was one reason why you hesitated in admitting your feelings at the start. Now, the slight tilts of his head, the way his phalanges drum lightly against his leg are all clear signs to you that his mind is elsewhere.

You nudge him with your hip. "You know what's funny?"

"Last time were where here I barely knew a thing about you. Neither of us had any idea what was going to happen or if it was even possible for us to be together. But we made it happen, despite everything."

He smiles a little, his hand taking yours. "With all this talk of timelines, I have to wonder; have we met in other timelines?" He gaze shifts back to the display. "There must be hundreds of worlds out there where we never met. A world where monsters were never freed. A world where our paths never crossed at all. Maybe even a timeline where our paths did cross but we kept walking. We moved on and lost something that we didn't even know we were missing." He closes his sockets for a brief
moment before leaning his head against you. "I'm so glad I'm in this timeline."

You've thought about that possibility too. Especially with the fact that Sans almost Reset everything in a desperate attempt to save your life. Gaster had said if that happened, the you as you are would never see him again. Even if events followed that same path again, who's to say that things would stay the same? You might have been late and never heard the fire alarm ring that brought you to him in the first place. You might have chosen a different city. You might not have survived the torture at Tod's hands.

There are too many ifs and possibilities for you to bear thinking about. You pull Sans in for a deep kiss, ignoring the few grumbles from the patrons around you. How could they possibly understand what it's like to have this monster in front of you? You want to believe that your meeting was inevitable but you know that simply cannot be the case. There cannot be a world exactly like the one you are in now. You are so unbelievably lucky. "Me too," you finally gasp. "I'm glad I'm in this world with you."

You spend a few more hours at the museum and view every film they have in the Imax theater section. When you leave, Sans has more of a spring in his step and his smile is no longer strained. He takes you to a little cafe run by a family of bunnies. They greet Sans with warm familiarity and can't seem to stop whispering excitedly to each other the entire time you eat. The food is delicious but just before you finish up the main dish and start pursuing the desert menu, a stampeding herd of tiny baby bunny monsters suddenly pour in from the back room. They circle your table, chanting 'Sansy's got a girlfriend!' and start pelting your table with paper hearts. Sans is calmly unperturbed, grinning slightly at them. He even lets them put a flower crown on his head. Then they start chanting 'SMOOSH HIM, SMOOSH HIM' and you simply can't miss this opportunity. You take his face and give him an over-exaggerated kiss that makes the entire cafe scream and hoot with approval. Even Gaster is watching the whole thing with great amusement. Bright blue, his head hits the table and you can hear a string of embarrassed mumbling from him. You're blushing too but it's totally worth it to see Sans like this.

Soon enough it's time to start getting ready for the concert. You have a hard time staying calm and when Abby shows up with an arsenal of make-up and outfits, all control goes out the window. You blast your Fall Out Boy playlist while the two of you kick poor Sans out of the room and start going over the options. You wind up wearing a black tank that has Fall Out Boy emblazoned on the side and a skeleton hand holding a bouquet of flowers. Not exactly what you would have pictured wearing for Valentine's day but then again, when has anything in your life gone exactly according to plan? You pair the shirt with a white sweater that has black angel wings printed on the back. Abby gives you a heart shaped hair clip to help offset the whole thing.

Frisk, drawn by the blasting music, peeks into your room while you're doing your makeup. Their eyes light up and you invite them in to get dolled up too. They're wearing a shirt with a large heart and the word 'LOVE' printed in curvy writing. Abby and Frisk have talked before but as she helps them with their make-up, she chatters like they're life long friends. She still struggles with sign language so you help out as much as you can but Frisk doesn't seem bothered by it. It warms your heart to see the two of them getting along.

When Abby, dressed in a overly long shirt with (of course) a skull and crossbones, leggings and shin high boots, deems you all ready, you grab the tickets and head out. Sans meets you in the living room. His simple white tee, black jeans and faux leather jacket provided by Papyrus makes your heart race. Seemingly on cue, both he and Frisk produce roses and present them to you and Abby. Abby laughs loudly at the proud look on Frisk's face and gives them a hug while you focus on not melting your make-up from the pleased blush that crosses your face.
The music party doesn't stop on the drive over and you have to shush Abby and Frisk a few times so you can focus on driving. But when you get to the arena for the concert and enter in through the media pass entryway, you can't help but squeal and grab on to Abby. The concert area is huge and it's filled to the brim with people and monsters. You can see them laughing, cheering, singing and you don't see a single person with hatred or disgust on their face at the fact that monsters are present. You find your place and oh heavens, you're right next to the stage. You've got a recording device with you, since the media passes are technically for the job and interview a few of the people around you.

But then the lights dim and you forget about the job. You feel your heart shoot up your throat and there they are. The band is on stage and everyone is screaming in joy. You're jumping up and down with Abby and Frisk clambers on to Sans' shoulders so they can see the stage and waves their hands, their eyes bright with delight. Sans sways a little but he's more concerned with watching you rather than the band and the smile on his face is one of pure bliss. The entire area pounds with life and music. You can feel the heartbeats of your friends and all the strangers beating as one as you belt out the songs along with the band, singing in unity. It's a pure, wonderful moment that shows it truly is possible for monsters and humans to join together in their enjoyment. That it's okay for guards to be dropped and friends to be made with the strangers dancing by your side.

There's only one Soul that isn't bright with the joy of music and unity.

Well, part of a Soul at least.

Gaster observes the dancing, singing crowd of mingled monsters and humans and the only thing he feels is conflicted confusion.
In Sickness And In Health

Chapter Notes

More Birthday Art!

A nice long chapter for you guys, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"C...Sans."

He still has some trouble referring to Sans by his new, proper name, especially when his mind is focused elsewhere. At the moment, it's focused on the smaller skeleton clinging to his leg. Papyrus looks up at him, his sockets practically sparkling. He makes a loud babbling noise, somehow managing to squeeze his arms even tighter.

"yeah?"

"He won't let go of my leg. What does he want?"

Sans snickers, peeking up over the edge of the worn couch. "you're smart dings, figure it out."

"I don't have time for this Sans. I must finish this report and bring it to the king. If I'm late he'll force me to stay for tea," the scientist says dryly. While he doesn't mind the tea itself, Asgore would keep him for hours trying to stay 'connected'. He enjoyed the King's company, but only in short doses.

"oh man, more time where i won't have you hanging over my shoulder. tragic."

"Sans."

The child skeleton groans loudly. "just pick him up."

He looks down at the smaller child, who is staring at him with hopeful eyes. Hesitantly, he leans down and hooks his hands under the child's arms. Papyrus releases his leg easily as the scientist lifts him up. A squeal of delight assaults his ears as Papyrus immediately latches himself to his chest, his arms squeezing tightly around his neck. He grumbles. This doesn't solve the problem at all! He's about to complain to Sans, who is snickering quietly when he feels a sudden warmth emitting from Papyrus. The child's Soul is glowing with happiness and what remains of his own Soul seems to expand in response.

He swallows the rising emotion as best as he can. Slowly, hesitantly, he places a holey hand on Papyrus' back, rubbing gently. He can feel the bumps of the child's spine under his fingers. It only takes a few minutes of soft patting before Papyrus falls asleep in his arms. He looks back to Sans, who isn't quite able to hide the sharp intensity of his gaze behind his lazy grin. He's poised like a cat, ready to leap and rescue his brother at the slightest sign of trouble. The scientist sighs. It's too soon to hope that the distrust Sans has for him would ease up so easily. He has to be honest with himself; it probably never will and for very good reason.

He steps around the couch slowly, so as not to wake Papyrus. "Think you can watch him while I finish up?"
Sans settles in the corner of the couch, holding his arms up. The scientist gently places Papyrus on Sans' lap. His fingers brush against the older brother's shoulder, who jerks back at the contact. A sharp sting of hurt goes through his chest and he quickly withdraws. Sans' gaze drops to his brother and the tension visibly leaves him as he pulls Papyrus close. Sans has always been small, but the sight of Papyrus, tiny and curled into a ball, makes him look big for once. Still, if his predictions are correct, Papyrus will wind up taller than his older brother. For now at least, Sans is enjoying not being the smallest one around.

"Do...do you need anything?" he asks awkwardly, fighting not to fiddle with the holes in his hands.

Sans shakes his head, smiling gently at his baby brother. "nah. think i'll catch a few winks too."

The scientist nods and steps away, feeling both relieved and a little sad at the loss of warmth in his arms. He gathers up his reports and heads to the door. He looks back, just once. The brothers are fast asleep, curled around each other in a way that it's difficult to tell where one ends and the other begins. Just for a moment, he allows himself to smile at the sight of the children.

His children.

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It's the cold that wakes you. You stir into alertness and when you see that you are not in your bed, panic immediately crawls up your throat. You try to move, thrash, anything, but your body remains hunched and still. Oh no, where are you? Have you been taken again? Sans! Sans-

Calm down, Gaster says quietly. We are simply in the backyard.

His voice in your head is soft but it enough of a surprise to shock you into stillness. He releases his hold on your body and you take a deep breath as you regain control. You look around, noticing that you are indeed in the back yard. You're seated on the edge of the small wooden porch, still in your pajamas. It's dark out and you can tell that is still very early in the morning. You put a hand over your racing heart. "Um, care to tell me why we're out here?"

I could not sleep.

You can feel his presence next to you, more strongly than you've ever felt it before. You squint at the air next to you in vain hope that you might see him. But there's nothing. "So you took over while I was sleeping and brought us out here for some fresh air?"

Something like that. He ignores your sarcastic tone. I wanted to see the stars.

Your own eyes travel upwards at those words. It's a clear night and though the city lights make it a little hard to see, Toriel's house is far enough out that there are still plenty of them visible in the sky. You've come out here with Sans quite a few times to stargaze. But never at this hour.

"Hey, just a warning for the future, taking over while I'm sleeping and going where you want is not okay. Not in the slightest."

I will try my best to remember that. He sounds distracted. The stars are different.

You tilt your head, looking closely at the shimmering lights. "They look the same to me."

The last time I saw the stars with my own eyes, they were in slightly different places. But that was a long time ago. The world has shifted. Stars have died and new ones have been born.
"How old are you anyway?"

He shrugs mentally. **Time ceased to mean anything to me in that place. I was eternal, I was young, I was everywhere and nowhere. Why bother keeping track of time when it was easier to simply not exist at all?**

You blink. That was a far deeper answer than what you expected from him.

He sighs. **I apologize. My thoughts got away from me. Suffice it to say I am old. Old even in monster terms.**

"It's okay. That happens sometimes," you say, shrugging a shoulder. "If anyone has a good excuse for getting their head jumbled up it's you."

Gaster is quiet for a moment. There's something else churning there, a confused frustration that is seeping from his Soul. Whatever it is, it's probably the reason he's sitting out here. You stay quiet, letting him stew. Sure enough, after a few minutes-

**I do not understand**, he finally says, frustration coloring his 'voice'. **All of those monsters and humans gathered together. Dancing. Frolicking. It doesn't make sense.**

"What about that doesn't make sense?" you ask, genuinely confused. "That's what you do at concerts. Surely you've at least seen some looking through the timelines. Mettaton's shows, Shyren, those all count as concerts."

**I understand what a concert is. I do not understand how monsters could so easily let their guard down. And the humans, they just...allowed my kind to stand with them. Like the atrocities done to monsters never happened.**

You shift a little, wrapping your arms around yourself. It's cold out. "That's because most of them haven't done a thing to monsters," you remind him. "Okay, yeah, I'll admit, I was a little surprised too. But isn't this a good thing? You should be happy, not confused."

He scoffs. **Happy? No, this is nothing to be happy about. It was a moment of happiness, caused by loud music and mob mentality. A pseudo peace. All it is going to do is trick monster kind into believing that they have been accepted.**

"They have been accepted!" You bite your lip, trying to keep your voice down. You don't want to wake anyone, especially Sans. He needs the sleep. "Acceptance and trust is something that has to be built. Yeah, emotions get swayed at stuff like that but doesn't mean it's not real. I mean, look at me. Look at Frisk. We've accepted monsters completely. There are others like us too. This isn't like the war. People are more understanding, more willing to learn."

The sigh he responds with is quiet, full of a deep sadness. **You have hope. A naive hope that I simply cannot accept. Your friend Tod might have been wrong about his methods, but he was correct in the fact that a war will happen. After all, as he said himself; your kind cannot even stop fighting among each other. It is simply a matter of time.**

You let out a sharp breath, a cloud billowing in front of your mouth. You don't like being reminded of Tod's words and the fact that there is a part of you, that part born during your torture that secretly agrees. You push the thought away because you know it's wrong. You've seen the great leaps and bounds humans and monsters have made for yourself. "Hey, can we maybe have a little more faith in humanity?" you say, only partially to yourself. "If monsters can accept humans as we are, I'd like to
think that we as humans can do the same."

Gaster doesn't respond to that and for another minute or so, you continue to sit there, staring up at the stars. You're wide awake now. There's an odd sense of ease that fills you while you watch the sky, helping you relax a bit. Rude awakening aside, it was actually nice to sit out here in the silence of the night. Just when you're about to stand up and escape back to the warmth of the house, he quietly says, **I saw that night. In your old home. Before you moved to this city.**

You freeze. "What are you talking about?" you whisper.

**I know you've been looking into my memories,** he continues. **I suspected and then...well, it appears that it's a two-way mirror.**

Dread and horror eat at your heart. "Are you saying that...you saw the night I-I almost..." 

**I already knew about it,** he says, as if that makes it better. **I heard you tell it to my son. Bits of it anyway. But it is another thing entirely to witness it.**

Your hands drop to your scars, as if you can physically hide them from him. You bow your head, shuddering. "You shouldn't have seen that," you whisper.

**I have no more control over it than you do. What I see is what I see.** For a brief moment, just a single split second, you swear you can feel a slight pressure on your shoulder. But it's gone as fast as a breath of wind. **I tried not to watch.**

But he still saw it. For some reason this, more than anything is too much. You trusted Sans with your scars and doing so had shaken you to your core. Gaster, an unwelcome ghost clinging to your Soul was never supposed to see that. But you know he's telling the truth when he says he has no control over it. You've seen things that you're sure he doesn't want you to either. An eye for an eye and all that.

You let out a humorless laugh. "Well this sucks."

He hums in agreement. **What did you see just now? I could tell that you were dreaming but I couldn't see what. It was like your mind was...humming. It was much more pleasant to hear than the noise it makes during your nightmares.**

You try to wrap your head around the idea that your mind makes noise when you're dreaming. "I um, I saw you with Sans and Pap. Pap was just a baby. You were holding him."

**Ah.**

You hesitate. "I don't understand you," you finally say. "The memories I'm seeing are so jumbled up. You called Sans a thing, a number. You've made him suffer through so much. Then in this memory it was like you were an awkward dad trying to fix things. You called them both your sons. And then...Sans said that you became someone else entirely before the accident. What happened? What changed?"

Gaster is quiet and you wonder if he's going to bother answering at all. **You can't understand the position I was in,** he finally responds. **I had an entire species depending on me for answers. For a way out. But even if we escaped, what then? Even our most powerful of warriors had been overcome by humanity. We needed something else. I needed someone who could help me, follow me without question. Sans was never meant to have emotions or...or be....**
"A real monster?"

He laughs softly, darkly. Yes, exactly. But he was. He was alive and full of life. My experiment worked too well. For a time I pushed any guilt or hesitation aside. I even thought that I could use this unexpected turn to my advantage. I tried to deny what he was for a very long time.

Yeah, you know. You've felt it in his memories. "When did it change? When did you realize that you had to stop?"

Stop? The chilliness in his voice sends shivers up your spine. You're mistaken. I did not stop.

But...but the memory you just saw, he smiled at them. Called them his children. "But you-"

I may have changed my mind set slightly. I may have called them my children for a time and tried to raise them. But the experiments did not stop. I simply found different means of justifying what I did.

He's lying. His Soul is trembling slightly with guilt and hurt and rage and an overwhelming self-loathing. "Gaster."

The sliding glass door behind you opens with a loud clatter and you jump, squeaking slightly. You turn, expecting to see Sans' panicked gaze but instead you find Papyrus standing there, night cap slightly askew and thick bunny slippers on his feet. He's got a fuzzy blanket thrown over one arm. "Hello ____! Hello dad!" he's keeping his voice down, which is surprising. "What are you doing out here so early in the morning?"

"Um, stargazing," you mumble, heart slowing. "What are you doing up?"

"I, the Great Papyrus, am I very light sleeper," he says almost proudly. "I heard the door open and I saw you come out here through my window! I was going to let you have some alone time but then I realized that it is very cold out here and you are not properly dressed!" He walks over and dramatically waves the blanket open before placing it around your shoulders. It's extra warm, you note with some surprise. "I placed it in the dryer because Toriel has informed me that warm blankets are something that humans greatly enjoy! Also, I knew that you would not protest to having the Great Papyrus join you!"

"Well, you are right about that." You smile at him. You hold the blanket open. "I know you don't mind the cold, but come join me anyway!" Papyrus beams at you, snuggling close. The blanket is thankfully big enough to cover the two of you. Mostly. You lean against his arm. "Thanks Pap."

"You are very welcome!" He pauses. "How are you doing dad?"

After a moment, Gaster's hands appear in front of you. "I am just fine Papyrus."

Papyrus looks back and forth between the ghostly hands and you several times, frowning heavily. "I do not believe you are being honest," he says stubbornly. "In my experience, sitting outside in the middle of the night is a pretty good sign that things are not fine. Did you have a nightmare?"

Gaster answers before you have a chance to. "No, I simply wished to see the stars."

"Oh!" He brightens. "You are just like Sans when it comes to all that space stuff. Did that place you were in not have stars?"

"Not like these." One hand points upwards. "There was...something that could be described as
star like, but it is very different compared to this."

You recall that brief glimpse you got of all the various timelines, each one sparkling like a star, vast and burning and caught between the nothingness of the Void. Star-like they certainly were, but not nearly as soothing.

"Are you cold?" Papyrus asks in concern, feeling you shiver. He adjusts the blanket and your eyes are drawn to his gloved hands. Another tremor goes through you as remember Gaster's insistence that the bone for his body must be taken from his youngest son. Please, don't ruin this moment by talking about that, you think at Gaster desperately.

Regardless of whether he hears you or not, Gaster doesn't bring the matter up.

Papyrus looks back up towards the sky. "When we fix your problem and give _____ her body back, I will show you the best star gazing spot in the whole area! Well, I have at least heard it is the best spot, I have not actually been there myself but I have heard many wonderful things about it!"

"That sounds nice," Gaster signs slowly and then his hands disappear and the wall goes back up in your mind.

It seems like he's done talking. Just when you were finally starting to get some answers. You sigh and close your eyes. So much for progress. At least you understand Gaster's thinking a little bit more. You just thank the stars above that it wasn't Sans who woke up to find you gone.

A distant, panicked yell from inside the house suddenly reaches your ear and you sigh again. Spoke too soon.

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Summoning endless bones is starting to take it's toll on Sans. Stamina has always been one of his many, many weak points. And the stupid machine, no matter how much he adjusts the settings or changes the beam intensity, always slices through his attacks like butter, making them vanish within seconds. If it can't survive even that, there's no way it will last long enough for body to be formed. It won't stand against the power of injected Determination and magic. It's infuriating.

But what's worse is knowing that if he can't make it work, someone is going to lose a chunk from their hand. No. Not someone. He will. He will not let Papyrus make that sacrifice. He just have to alter the machine so that the very minimum of damage occurs. It'll be fine. He won't let himself get dusted after everything that's happened.

But because of this delay, they've come to a near standstill after another two weeks of nonstop work. While he had focused entirely on the bone matter issue, Gaster had managed to complete the Soul container and growth chamber. It's sitting in the corner of the lab, filled with a viscous liquid that bubbles quietly, waiting for the bone matter to be put in it. Alphys had provided the substance, since she's worked with the Amalgamates and other such monsters and has experience with such things. As such, he's not entirely sure what is in it. All that matters is that once the bone matter, injected with magic diluted Determination is placed inside, growth is occur, fast and stable. Hopefully.

Finding the perfect amount of Determination is what Gaster is currently working on. Frisk, that wonderful kid, volunteered to donate some of theirs, since Sans used up all of Alphys stock in his crazy attempts to find you when you were taken away. You offered of course, but with Gaster's Soul tied so closely to yours, he worried that your own Determination would be tainted and throw the entire experiment off. That's the explanation he gave you anyway. The truth is, he could see that the
idea of having your Soul tampered with even more terrifies you. You shouldn't have to go through any more than you already are. Besides, while you have plenty of Determination, it isn't your core trait. Frisk's Soul however, is pure Determination. He's never seen anything like it. Neither has Gaster, going by his reaction to the readings.

Gaster. The monster who so clearly gets on edge every time Frisk is around because they were the vessel for the anomaly that he refuses to talk about. Gaster, who so often gets distracted by the strangest things, like the bright red surface of a sweater, or the clinking of your car keys or seemingly nothing at all. He'll stare at whatever the distraction is with a burning intensity and become nearly unresponsive for several minutes. Gaster, who he is still furious at for putting you in this situation and for nearly scaring the Soul out of him that night almost two weeks ago now.

He had been dreaming. Or rather, he had been caught in another one of his nightmares. This time he had stood on the very edge of one of the docks back in Waterfall. The river in front of him was black, darker than ink. And you were there, a glimmer of color in the darkness, sinking, drowning and screaming his name. He had reached for you, only to have his hands dissolve into dust. He had woken in a sweat, immediately clamping his hands over his mouth to mask his terrified whimpers because you needed to sleep, you shouldn't have to comfort him after every nightmare. Only to turn and find the space beside him empty. His Soul had nearly burst from behind his rib cage and a list of all the terrible possibilities raced through his skull in the thirty seconds it took you to run inside with his brother close behind. He'd been too relieved that you were safe to rage at Gaster for taking your sleeping form for a walk in the middle of the night but he certainly hasn't forgiven him for it.

He watches the two of you now. You're biting your lip in concentration and pouring out measurements of Determination while Gaster's ghostly hands circle around the table, recording notes in his symbolized writing. The bright red Determination looks entirely too much like blood in your hands. His Soul twists uncomfortably and he looks away. Alphys had assured him that taking Determination from Frisk wouldn't hurt them; much like the blood that ran through human veins, human Souls were constantly changing and shifting, producing more of whatever traits dominate their Souls. That's reason human Souls can change and develop difference traits as they grow and experience different things. That's Alphys' theory anyway. Still, the kid's brave. Frisk has always been brave.

Sans wipes at the sweat gathering on his skull as yet another attack bone disappears under the laser. A long, hissing sigh escapes him. His head is pounding. That makes thirty-two bones for today alone that have failed the test. He's not sure how much longer he can keep this up. After two weeks of non-stop working and producing attacks without a break, he's simply too tired. But he has no choice. You're holding on but already he's starting to see signs that your body is beginning to break down. You're dropping things, staring off at nothing, moving slower. Even your monstrous appetite born from Gaster's addition is shrinking. And Gaster himself is clearly growing stronger. The appearance of his ghostly hands along are proof enough of that. The signs of are small, but they're there. He's running out of time. Slowly he resets the machine, making microscopic adjustments. His bones ache, protesting against every movement.

"Sans?" Your voice, normal level though it is, sends a spike of pain through his skull. He hides his wince behind his usual grin before turning his head. "Are you doing okay? What attack number is this?"

"thirty-three," he calls, turning away because speaking is making him feel dizzy. Crap, he's pushing himself too far. He's seen these signs before.

"Should you call it a night?"
"nah, i'm good for a few more." His hand is shaking, making it nearly impossible to move the levers. Damn it, why is he so weak?

"Are you sure?" The stool scrapes loudly as you stand, sending a sharp shiver up his spine. "You're um, looking kinda pale."

"I'm always pale," he mumbles. The control panel swims in front of him. He has to blink several times to clear his fuzzy vision. "I'm fine babe. Just a few more."

You're hovering, the spark of your Soul residing in his pulsing with concern. Why are you concerned about him? You need to focus on yourself. He grits his teeth together so hard they make his jaw click loudly. He's sick of making you worry. Of course, the same could be said from your point of view. He knows he's going to far, pushing himself beyond what he can do. It's just frustrating to have his own limits so clearly visible, especially when so much is at stake.

He lifts his hand to summon another bone and there's a split second where everything feels normal. There's the slight drain in his magic, the tiny twitch in his left socket and the slight glow of the bone forming in the plate of the machine.

Then something in his Soul snaps.

You blink and nearly miss it. One moment Sans is standing there, calm, collected and completely faking every trace of composure and the next he's on the ground, crumpled into a ball of bone. Your heart drops to your stomach and you race to him, dropping down to your knees. "Sans!"

He's shaking, bones rattling with the force of his shivers. "c-c-crap...s-s-

"Shh, Sans don't talk." You strain to roll him onto his back. He's completely limp under your hands. What happened? He was exhausted that much was obvious but he's never collapsed like this! Okay, think, stay calm. You examine him quickly. His cheeks are flushed a very pale blue. A liquid something is dripping from his nasal cavity. It's a deep cyan color, running down his face like a nosebleed. "Gaster what's going on?" you ask desperately, looking at his still hovering hands.

Gaster is calm, his Soul remaining solid within your panicked fluttering one. One hand descends, turning Sans' face slightly. He groans at the motion, closing his sockets and Gaster lets go. He's sick, he says grimly.

Sick? But he's a skeleton! "I thought he couldn't get sick!"

It's not the same as human sickness. Monsters, especially skeleton monsters and others without flesh, get energy fevers. He's pushed himself too far and now his internal system is suffering for it. Given his recent emotional struggles on top of that, it's honestly surprising this didn't happen sooner. The hand sails away and snatches a rag from the table, dropping it next to you. We need to get him back to the queen's home. He'll be fine but he needs rest and medicine. Now.

You pick up the rag and wipe at Sans' face, wincing when he flinches slightly. "Sorry! Sorry, just...hold still for a second."

He mumbles something you can't make out. You can feel heat radiating from his bones as he continues to shiver. Oh crap. Gaster's right; you've got to get him home asap. You set the rag to the side and attempt to stand while still holding onto him. He helps as best as he can but he's clearly out of it. Still, with your encouragement, he manages to get to his feet, though he continues to lean
heavily against you. You feel absolutely awful. You should have insisted that he stop!

With Gaster helping (mostly by opening doors) you and Sans manage to stumble to your car. He wordlessly climbs in the passenger seat and slumps, his sockets barely cracked open. Your heart is in your throat the entire drive home and you switch between staring at the road and checking on him at a rather reckless pace. When you pull into the drive, it doesn't look like he's even awake. You run inside the house, shout that you need help and sprint back before getting a response. The passenger door is open and you gasp sharply as Sans slips from the seat to the ground. Fortunately, Gaster is faster than you are and manages to catch Sans before he hits the cement. One hand props his head while the other tugs sharply on his upper arm, leaving Sans in an awkward half dip position.

**Hurry, Gaster grunts. I'm reaching my limit.**

You quickly take Sans from the ghostly hands. They vanish the moment you get a good grip. You grunt under Sans' weight. He's still burning up.

"My child what...oh my goodness!" Toriel appears in the doorway, her hands flying up over her mouth in shock. "What's happened to Sans?"

"I think he used too much magic," you say, struggling to walk him up to the house. He's pure dead weight now. Toriel immediately comes to your side and the much large monster is easily able to pick Sans up and carry him inside. He looks so small in Toriel's arms and your heart twists painfully with worry. She sets him down on the couch and places a hand over his ribs. The frown on her face deepens as she examines his Soul briefly.

"His HP hasn't dropped but you are correct. There are serious signs of magical overuse. I shall prepare some medicinal tea." She rises quickly and disappears into the kitchen.

You slowly lower yourself to the floor. Sweat is beaded on Sans' forehead. You place a hand over your mouth, breathing deeply as you fight to stay calm. This is your fault. You should have paid attention. You shouldn't have let him push himself so far.

**He's going to be fine, calm down,** Gaster says almost gently. **He got sick often as a child. He's going to be fine.**

Yeah, probably because of all the experiments performed on him! You rub at your face. No, no you can't say that. Don't get mad at Gaster for this. Although it is technically his fault Sans pushed himself so much in the first place.

**Still, this is a problem. He will need at least two days to recover to the point where he can continue working.**

"Oh come on! Your son is sick to the point of collapsing and you're worried about his work?" you snarl, digging your fingers into the carpet. "I know you don't have a full heart at the moment but can you please use a little tact?"

Your sharp tone makes Sans suddenly sit bolt upright, gasping harshly. He hunches over, hands clutched to his chest. His left socket is flashing wildly. You scramble up, very gingerly putting a hand on his shoulder. He flinches, but doesn't move other than that.

"Hey, hey, it's okay," you say softly, rubbing his shoulder. "We're back at Toriel's. You fell down and Gaster said you...you overworked your magic. You're sick."

He continues to breathe harshly for several long moments before he closes his sockets. He falls back
down on the cushions, his hand finding yours. "sorry," he mumbles. "i'm sorry."

"Sans, it's okay. I'm not mad."

It's like he can't hear you. "i'm sorry, sorry, sorry," he continues to mumble, his voice hitching and growing louder with emotion. "i'm so pathetic, i can't do it, i just can't do it."

"Sans-"

He squeezes your hand like it's a lifeline but turns his head away into the cushions. "there's only a month left and i'm gonna lose you again. i'm gonna lose him again and i don't know how to stop it, i can't stop it, i'm too weak-!

You stroke his head, tears welling in your eyes from the raw pain and terror in his voice. "Sweetie, you're just sick. We haven't failed. We're not going to. You'll rest and get your strength back and then we're gonna figure this out. Okay? You're just sick right now. It's just a minor setback."

"i'm not supposed to get sick, i have to be strong, always had to be strong." He looks back to you, his sockets black and desperate. His nasal cavity is dripping again and this time there are tears gathering in his sockets. "i'm so sorry. all of this is my fault."

You shush him gently, rubbing his skull. "We're far past the point of blame Sans. Please, just try to sleep."

He closes his sockets, pushing the tears out. He sobs once, a broken, terrible sound. He curls in on himself but still holds on tightly to your hand. You continue to murmur gently to him, stroke him and try your best to calm him. But it's only when you start to sing softly that he finally relaxes enough to sleep. You slump against the couch; your legs are buzzing painfully from kneeling for so long. You turn tiredly at the sound of footsteps.

Toriel kneels next to you, a mug of steaming tea in one hand and a wet rag in the other. She sets the tea down carefully on the side table and hands you the rag. You thank her and as delicately as you can, wipe away the sweat and blue stuff dripping down Sans' face. He stirs briefly but doesn't fully wake up. His cheeks are still flushed with that dim blue color.

Toriel places a hand on your shoulder. "He's probably going to sleep for a while. You should drink the tea. I can make him a fresh cup when he wakes."

You nod and grab the cup, sipping slowly. It's warm and tastes slightly of buttercups. It does nothing to make you feel better. "Thanks," you murmur anyway, setting the cup down.

Toriel starts to say something and then stops. She glances at Sans before seeming to steel herself slightly. "Doctor, can you hear me?"

It takes a moment; Gaster is worn out from the day. But slowly his hands reappear. "Yes, your majesty?"

She scowls slightly; you know that she doesn't like being referred to by her old title but Gaster is very stubbornly doing it anyway. "I know that this is a very stressful and difficult time for you all. But mark my words, if you are making Sans or _____ suffer needlessly, there will be severe consequences for you when you regain your own form. Even if I have to deal out the punishment myself. Do you understand me?"

Her threat, though not aimed at you, makes you quake a little. You've seen traces of it before but Toriel's anger is truly terrifying when faced head on. Sometimes you forget because of her kind
words and at times goofy actions, but she is a boss monster. One of the few who remain from before
the war.

Gaster's Soul trembles, but not from fear. He's very lucky that his anger can't seep through the
motions of his summoned hands. "I understand" is all he signs before the hands vanish again.

Toriel sighs, the frightening demeanor changing into something sad and weary. She gives you a
weak smile. "I am sorry. I'm afraid that I am not very fond of him."

"Believe me, we're not exactly buddies either." You lean against the couch, your face nearly
touching Sans. He's still radiating warmth and you frown. "He's going to be okay, right?"

"I am admittedly not well versed in skeleton illnesses but I believe that this truly is just a fever." She
reaches over and gently removes his slippers, placing them neatly on the ground. "This should pass,
as long as he allows himself to recover. I'm just sorry there is not more I can do. My healing is aimed
more at physical ailments. Injuries involving the Soul are...more tricky."

You give her the best smile you can manage. "You don't have to be sorry. You're giving him a place
where he can recover. You've done so much for us already."

"You are family," she says warmly. "That is what family does for each other." She stands and pulls a
plush throw off the back of the couch, gently tucking it around Sans. "Let me know when he wakes
and I shall make some more tea."

You nod and watch her as she leaves before settling in. You're certainly not going anywhere until
Sans wakes up. Time passes and you almost nod off a couple of times yourself. Papyrus arrives
home with Frisk in tow about an hour after Sans fell asleep. They were out at some kind of art show
downtown. They're both alarmed at Sans' state but a quick 'Shh!' from you prevents them from
waking him up. Concerned but similarly tired, they head to bed before too long.

It would seem that, despite your efforts to keep them quiet while they get ready for bed, the noise is
enough to wake Sans. He stirs slowly, the lights of his eyes fuzzy. He calls your name softly and you
quickly sit up. He blinks a few times and reaches for you. You take his hand, a bit of relief sweeping
over you. "whaz' happ'in?"

You smile at his sleepy voice. "Hey champ. How are you feeling?"

"...terrible."

Well that's no surprise. He's barely slept at all. "Are you up for some tea? Toriel said it'll help you get
better." He nods slowly but doesn't release your hand. You have to gently ease your way out of his
grip. He whines quietly and you smooch his head. "I'll be right back, okay?"

You stand, groaning a little as your back pops. Man, you feel like an old person with the way your
body has been aching lately. Of course, that's probably because of Gaster. You don't want to think
about the fact that your body is slowly starting to give out under the influence of his Soul. And
speaking of Gaster-

There is no need to get Lady Toriel. He's been quiet the entire time you sat with Sans, awake but
depth in thought. I can prepare a drink for him. I have a recipe that I used often for him and
Papyrus when they were young.

You glance down the hall. It is very late. Papyrus and Frisk are both in bed and even if Toriel is still
up, you'd feel bad for bothering her. You can manage to make some tea on your own. You find
yourself nodding. "Okay. I just hope she's got what you need."

**I'm sure she does.**

You head into the kitchen. Oh! She's left everything out, including the kettle. "Well that makes it easy," you muse. "Looks like I don't need-urk!"

Gaster's sudden attack in your mind is completely unexpected and you are very forcibly thrown into the back of your mind. It hurts in a way that his take-overs haven't hurt since the first week he broke through the barriers in your mind. *Gaster?! What the hell are you doing?!*

**What must be done.** Gaster straightens from the crouch you had sunk into and then sets to work in the kitchen with grim determination. He gets the kettle going, gathering other ingredients from the cabinets, including a heavy duty cough syrup kept for the times when Frisk got sick. When the kettle boils he combines everything into a cup, steadfastly ignoring your attempts to regain control.

Terrified dread shoots through your Soul as he adds a far greater dose of the syrup than is possibly needed to the tea.

*Gaster!* Oh no. No, no, no! Is is trying to overdose Sans?!

**Surely you know by now that I have no intention of killing Sans,** Gaster says in response to your panicked thoughts. *I am saving his life.*

You scream wordlessly as Gaster finishes and returns to the living room. Sans is barely awake as it is. He smiles warmly at you, holding his hand out. Gaster keeps your head lowered, eyes nearly shut as he kneels and helps Sans sip from the mug. The light from the kitchen is the only one on and the darkness helps to hide the state of your eyes. Sans is too out of it to notice that you are not in control.

He eagerly sips at the drink, humming his thanks. He leans back on the pillow, shutting his sockets and you can do nothing to stop Gaster from gently patting Sans' head, helping him fall asleep even faster. "thank you," Sans murmurs as his face easily slips into a relaxed smile as the drugged up tea moves through his system.

*Gaster please! Too much medicine could kill him!*

**It will not kill him,** Gaster responds without stopping his soothing motions. *He is a monster. Human medicines don't work the same on us. But it will keep him asleep for long enough.*

*Enough for what?*

Gaster stands, staring down at Sans. His son has already slipped back to sleep, unaware that his girlfriend is screaming helplessly before him. Then he walks upstairs to Papyrus' room and knocks quietly on the door.

Pap opens the door quickly, dressed in his pajamas that hang loosely on his thin frame. "Hello _-" He cuts himself off as he notices your eyes, speaking in his designated 'nighttime level' voice. "I mean, hello dad! How is Sans doing?"

Gaster frowns and shakes your head. *He's going to be okay but not if he doesn't stop pushing himself. Papyrus, I...we need your help.*
We're starting to get close to the end folks! Probably another 8 or so chapters to go!
The tiny hope you have that Gaster won't be able to get to the university is crushed when he grabs your keys and starts up your car without hesitation. It shouldn't surprise you that he's been watching the way you drive. Papyrus sits down in the passenger seat without question, though he does worriedly watch the house until it's out of sight.

"WHAT IS IT YOU NEED MY HELP WITH?" he asks, back to his usual level of loudness. "IT MUST BE VERY IMPORTANT IF IT HAS TO BE DONE THIS LATE AT NIGHT."

"Yes, it is very important," Gaster says without taking your eyes off the road. "Sans is in danger of dusting himself. His foolish desire to protect you has put us behind schedule. I had hoped he would come to the realization himself before drastic measures had to be taken."

"WHAT MEASURE."

"The human and your brother haven't told you the full truth."

You slam against the barrier Gaster has thrown up around your mind. You left arm twitches slightly in response. Gaster, stop!

"I am running out of time. You understand that only a sliver of my Soul is currently in this body, correct?"

Papyrus nods, but he's frowning. "YES, THOUGH I DO NOT UNDERSTAND HOW THAT IS POSSIBLE."

Gaster makes a rather sharp turn onto the road that leads to the university. The motion makes Papyrus' skull clank against the window. "That doesn't matter right now. Because of the state of my Soul, we are on a severe time limit. Presently, we have about a month left before the influence of my presence in _____'s Soul will cause her body to change and very likely die, taking me with her."

Papyrus goes completely and utterly still, staring at you and Gaster with wide sockets. "IS...IS THIS SUPPOSED TO BE SOME KIND OF PRANK? IF IT IS, IT IS IN VERY POOR TASTE!"

Gaster looks over at Papyrus and the frown he's wearing is enough to make Papyrus shrink in the
seat slightly. "I would not joke about this."

It seems that Papyrus for once has been struck speechless. The broken expression on his face makes you want to cry. "I...I DON'T...."

Your hands on the steering wheel tighten. "They did not wish to alarm you. They haven't told anyone besides Alphys."

Papyrus doesn't respond to that. In fact, he doesn't say a single word until you pull into the mostly empty parking lot at the university. It's late enough now that the only people still around will most likely be the cleaning team and perhaps a security guard or two. But Gaster doesn't have to worry about that thanks to Sans' pass. You head up to the lab, Papyrus trailing silently behind you. The lab is completely empty and the dim light of the street lamps filtering in through the windows casts an eerie shadow over the various machines. Terror shoots through your already horrified Soul and your struggling increases. You can't let him do this!

"Stop it," Gaster murmurs as he flips the light on and heads over to the laser machine. "This has to be done now."

It doesn't have to be! We'll find a way!

He ignores your pleading, focusing on starting up the machine. Papyrus comes to stand next to you, uneasily looking around the lab. He frowns, like he's on the verge of remembering something but a loud clank from the laser breaks him out of it. "WHAT IS IT EXACTLY THAT YOU NEED ME TO DO?" he asks.

Gaster takes a seat and starts fiddling with the program controls on the computer that is directly hooked up with the laser. "In order to create a monster form that can hold a Soul, material has taken directly from a monster with similar characteristics. Your brother was attempting to gather the material from bone marrow within his summoned attacks to use. Hence his current state."

Papyrus nods sagely. "I HAVE TOLD HIM OVER AND OVER AGAIN THAT HE NEEDS TO WORK ON HIS STAMINA!"

"Yes, well be that as it may, it wouldn't have worked. When I created you and Sans, I took the material directly from myself." He summons one of his hands in demonstration. The hole set within it's palm seems bigger than you remember. Papyrus stares at the hand until it vanishes.

"OH. I THOUGHT THOSE HOLES WERE...SOME KIND OF DECORATION OR SOMETHING. I DIDN'T REALIZE-"

"I do not go around bragging about it." Gaster types in some final code and stands up. Again, you feel his slight annoyance at being so short compared to his son. "Do you understand what I am saying? We need bone material and we are running out of time. Sans tried to find another way and failed. If he attempts to take the material from himself, he will die. But you can handle the HP loss and recover."

Papyrus blinks slowly and looks at his gloved hands. "SO YOU...YOU NEED TO CUT A HOLE IN MY HAND?"

"Yes."
"WILL IT HURT?"

The words ring in your head with a terrible familiarity. A lifetime ago, a different voice but also spoken with timid hope. Gaster falters for just an instant. Your head jerks slightly as you again fight to regain control to no avail. "Of course it will," he answers Papyrus bluntly. "But it will be over in ten seconds and you will retain full use of your hand. In fact, thanks to those gloves you always wear, you may not even notice that much of a difference."

Papyrus continues to look at his hands. You want so desperately to talk, to tell him he doesn't have to do this because you can see in his face that he's steeling himself to do just that. Because he's Papyrus, you know that he won't say no.

"I WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK WITH _____," he says suddenly.

"I can't allow that right now. She can hear you, if you want to say something."

Pap only deflates for a moment before steeling himself. "OKAY THEN. _____! I UNDERSTAND WHY YOU AND MY BROTHER HID THIS FROM ME. THIS IS INDEED VERY...SHOCKING. BUT YOU DON'T NEED TO WORRY! THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS HERE NOW AND I WILL DO WHATEVER I CAN TO ASSIST YOU OUT OF THIS SITUATION! I WILL NOT ALLOW YOU OR MY FATHER TO...TO...." His sockets well up with moisture but his smile remains strong. "EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE FINE! YOU HAVE THE PROMISE OF THE GREAT PAPYRUS!" He claps one hand on your shoulder. "I WILL DO IT. IF IT WILL HELP YOU AND SAVE MY BROTHER FROM FURTHER INJURY, I CAN HANDLE IT. I-" He stops suddenly, tilting his head. "ARE YOU CRYING?"

Gaster reaches up to your cheek and you can feel the moisture against your fingers. Papyrus starts wrap his arms around you in a hug, but Gaster steps away and holds a hand up. He rubs at your eyes, wiping away the tears. "Get your emotions in check. He will be fine."

Please don't do this, you beg. Sans said he was close. He just needs to get better and we'll be back on track.

"It doesn't matter. Bone taken from attacks will not work. I have gone over every scenario, every setting. I let him run his tests in the hopes that maybe, maybe I was wrong. But now it doesn't matter. If he continues as he is, there will be no solution found in time. And I cannot allow him to extract the bone from himself. It will kill him. You know I'm right."

But what if this kills Papyrus? I can't...I can't live with myself if that happens.

Gaster motions Papyrus over to the laser, pulling up a chair for him to sit in. "Do you think I will allow that to happen?" he says softly.

"ALLOW WHAT?" Poor Papyrus, who can only hear Gaster's side of the conversation, is watching you curiously.

"Nothing. Choose a hand."

Papyrus holds up his right hand and pulls his glove off. It's the first time you've actually seen his hand. It looks nearly identical to Sans with fused carpels and slightly rounded phalanges. It's also quite a bit bigger than Sans'. At any other time you'd be thrilled at the sight but now it only makes you want to scream. Gaster gently but firmly latches his arm in place under the lasers. "The straps are to help keep your arm in place but you must hold still during the process," he warns.
"I CAN HOLD STILL, EVEN THOUGH SANS WILL TELL YOU OTHERWISE." He's speaking boldly but you can catch a slight tremor in his voice. He's scared and trying to hide it.

Once Papyrus is secured, Gaster retrieves a miniature version of the containment tube in the corner. It fits in your hands and is filled with the same green tinted liquid. He removes the lid because once the bone is taken it needs to be submerged quickly before it turns to dust and it will be stabilized until it's time for the Soul infusion. He sets it down next to the laser and starts the final preparations. He looks at Papyrus and after a moment of concentration, you see a flash of numbers in your head. HP 680/680. It's just like that time back in the warehouse when Sans was hyped up on that strange Determination mixture that allowed him to find you and boosted his HP past it's normal one point level. You can't help but wonder if the same thing could be achieved again but Gaster quickly shakes your head.

"The bond between you two has already been created. To inject more would mean slicing away more of his already weak Soul. And even with the boost it gave him, it would not be enough to secure survival against the machine. It's honestly shocking that such a rash move even worked." He blinks and Papyrus' numbers disappear. "Though it is something that I would like to explore in the future after our current situation is solved."

How can he be talking so casually about future experiments when his own son is sitting before him, strapped to a machine that's designed to slice through bone? His son, who is so bravely keeping the smile on his face even as he starts to shake. You're scum, you snarl at him. How can you do this?

"He's doing this of his own free will," Gaster says coldly. He steps away from the machine. The final adjustments have been made. His certainty that this will work does nothing to calm you. It's not free will if you're guilting him into this.

Papyrus calls your name and Gaster pauses in checking the restraints. "IT IS OKAY. I KNOW YOU MUST BE UPSET. BUT I WILL BE FINE. I PROMISE!"

You hit Gaster's defenses with all of your might and just for a brief second your vision clears. "Paps, don't-!"

A great tremor runs through your entire body, making you cry out and then you're thrown back, further than you've gone before into a deep place that wraps itself around your mind. You're completely immobile and utterly helpless as Gaster firmly takes control again. He hunches over slightly, groaning.

"______?" Papyrus' sockets go wide with alarm and he strains slightly against the restraints. "DAD? IS SHE OKAY?"

"She's fine," Gaster growls, a hand on your head. "Enough wasting time. This needs to be done now. Papyrus, are you still with me?"

Papyrus nods wordlessly.

Looking around for just a second, Gaster spots a strip of rubber, left over from some student's project and grabs it. "Put this between your jaw."

Papyrus does as Gaster says, carefully biting down on the rubber strip. He looks towards the machine just once before closing his sockets tightly. Gaster moves a slight distance away but keeps Papyrus' hand in sight. The laser is set to automatically shut down once the hole has been made but just in case something happens, he needs to see. He pulls the controller out, bouncing it lightly in
your hand. He holds your thumb above the activation switch and-

Hesitates. For the first time tonight he hesitates and he can't hide the guilt and the sorrow that is in his Soul.

Weakly, fighting against the darkness that is threatening to swallow you up, you say, *I hope you realize that Sans will never forgive you for this.*

His grip on the switch tightens with resolve. "**I gave up on receiving forgiveness a long time ago.**"

Then his hesitation is gone and the switch gives under your thumb. The laser whirls to life and the brightness of the beam hurts your eyes. But that pain is nothing compared to the agony that rips through you heart as Papyrus screams, dropping the rubber strip. His entire body jolts and spasms as the laser cuts through his hand. Your own hand starts to shake and you honestly can't tell if it's you or Gaster that is quivering.

Maybe it's both of you.

The ten seconds it takes to slice through Papyrus' hand is the longest of your life. But then it's done and Papyrus slips out of the chair. His knees hit the tile floor with a loud clang. Gaster runs to him, catching him as he sways heavily. "**Easy,**" he murmurs, steadying the skeleton. You feel the strain on your Soul as his extra hands appear once again. As gently as he can, he unlatches the restraints and lifts Papyrus' hand. Papyrus whimpers quietly as a near perfect circle of his palm is left behind on the slate. The new hole in his hand is dripping red marrow and orange liquid magic. Gaster reaches forward with one of your hands and and supports Papyrus' limp arm, freeing his ghostly hands to very carefully lift the bone and carry it to the container. He lets out a quiet sigh of relief once it's safely contained within the green liquid and turns his attention back to Papyrus. "**Papyrus? Talk to me. Are you still with us?**"

Papyrus gasps and nods as a few tears trail down his face. "O-ow," he moans quietly. "Is it-is it over?"

"**Yes, it's over. You did very well.**" Gaster quickly checks his HP. It's at 425/680 and dropping slowly. The ghostly hands bring over a first aid kit and a bottle of Sea Tea. "**Let's get you cleaned up and-**"

He's interrupted by a loud crash that makes all three of you jump. He looks towards the sound and curses under his breath.

There, picking himself up out of the pile of plastic measurement vials and bottles he teleported straight into is Sans. His movements are slow and sluggish and he looks like he can barely even keep his sockets open. He stumbles out of the mess and then freezes at the sight of you holding Papyrus' hand, which is continuing to slowly drip.

"p-papyrus?" His voice sounds broken, matching the look of horror on his face. His gaze snaps to the containment case and Gaster's floating hands before meeting your eyes. Then in a single instant that terrified stare turns into deadly rage. He storms towards you, sockets pitch black.

"**How did you-**"

"*let go of him.*" It's a snarl barely above a whisper.

"**Sans, he needs medical attention right now, I can.**"
"let go of my brother!" The scream breaks from him but you know it's not aimed at you. You know it but you're still terrified right now and you just want to shrink away from the hate in his sockets. Shrinking away is so easy, thanks to the gaping abyss that surrounds you.

Gaster releases Papyrus and backs away as Sans immediately grabs his brother and sinks to the ground. He mutters urgently to him in a low tone as Gaster continues walking back. You can feel confusion from him. It worked, didn't it? The experiment worked and yet he feels no joy or satisfaction from it. These thoughts hit you like they're your own. But you're too tired to say a thing about it. Now that Sans is here, now that everything is over, you're finding it harder and harder to stay awake.

"How did you know we were here? You should have been out for a long time." Gaster's voice, even coming from your own throat, sounds distant.

Sans turns his gaze back to you and Gaster, his sockets still light-less. "her soul woke me. it was screaming. your little drugs made-bzzzt- here very difficult. so thanks for that. now -bzzzt- her back."

Static?

"teleporting in your state is not a good idea Sans. You're -bzzzt- lucky you didn't end up -bzzzt- yourself."

Your head hurts.

"i'm done talking to you! let her go!"

"Fine. But you'd better tend to your brother. He's -bzzzt- HP. He needs attention."

Maybe you'll just sleep for a while.

"_____?"

Is that your name?

"Shit, she's not respond-bzzzt-.""}

It's too hard to tell.

So you just...

"_____!"

Fall.

~~~~~

This memory is different somehow. You can't quite place your finger on how just yet. But you know you've seen this place before. It's the basement of the old labs where Gaster worked. There's the squeaky couch and the tiny, patched together mini-fridge. Papers are spread everywhere in an organized chaos sort of manner. There's only one source of light, coming from the weak table top lamp in the corner. Most of the room is covered in shadows. It smells odd down here, like chemicals and dust mixed together. It's cold too.

You've never felt cold in his memories before.
There's a soft sobbing. You follow the sound, easily stepping around the piles of books and materials on the floor even though you've never had control over walking before. There's a chair in the corner and crouched behind it is a small figure, hunched over in the shadows. You kneel down, peering into darkness. "Hello?" you call.

The crying abruptly stops. Two glowing pinpricks of light suddenly appear, starring right at you. A scared whimper escapes the child and you put your hands up.

"It's okay," you say softly, scooting back a little. "I'm not going to hurt you. Can you come out here?"

It takes a moment but then, moving with the caution of a scared animal, the child crawls into the dim light. He's tiny, hunched over slightly and frightened, wearing a simple set of dark blue hospital scrubs. You know this child. You know this Soul better than you know your own.

Sans, the child version, blinks at you, tilting his head in confusion. "who are you?" he asks in a hoarse voice.

"I'm...." How do you explain this? How are you here? Why can he see you? "I'm a friend," you finally say. "You're Sans, right?"

His sockets narrow slightly. "sans?"

Oh. No, he isn't named Sans just yet. You shift a little, trying to think of what to say. "Um, nevermind. Are you alone?"

He nods, sniffing a little. The sight makes your heart ache. "how did you get in here? only the dark man can get in here."

"I don't know." You slump a little, the weight of what's happening hitting you all at once. This has to be some kind of bizarre dream. So there's no way you can act on your screaming need to scoop up this helpless skeleton child and take him away from this dark place. There's nothing you can do to help him. You cover your face and lean over a little. "I'm so sorry."

"sorry for what?" He crouches next to you, now staring at you with open curiosity.

You wipe at your eyes. "I don't know if you're even real," you whisper. "I don't know how it's possible for me to be here."

"what does real mean?"

You can't help a little smile at the question. You take a breath. "It means that you exist. You are someone who has a place in the world."

"are you real?"

"I think so." You look down at your hands. "I feel real."

Slowly, Sans reaches out to you, extending his tiny hand towards your face. He hesitates before placing it on your cheek. You can feel the smoothness of his bones against your skin. "you're...wa...warm," he says in surprise.

"You are too." You slowly reach up and he allows you to take his hand. It's so much smaller than what you're used to. You look into his sockets, meeting his gaze. "Listen, I don't know if this is a dream or what, but I'm going to promise you something."
"promise?"

You nod. "It means that what I'm about to say will absolutely come true. You're going to go through so much pain in the future. But one day you're going to have a brother by your side and friends who love and support you. And one day, you're going to be free. You'll see the stars and the sky and you'll drink way too much ketchup and annoy people with your corny jokes. And I'm going to be there too and I will love you with everything that I have. You just have to be strong and believe that all of this-" you gesture to the dark room- "is going to pass. I promise."

He's staring at you with wide sockets. "that's a promise?"

You smile at him. "Yeah. That's my promise to you."

Sans gives you a long, considering look. Then, his cautious expression changes and for a split second, he smiles back at you.

But a moment later, right under your hand, his body suddenly glitches like a t.v image and shifts wildly before vanishing. You get to your feet, looking around frantically. "Sans?" you call. The ground under you seems to shift and crack and you have to fight back a scream as everything before you begins to break and fall apart. A great ripping sound comes from behind you and you whirl to face whatever it is.

It's like a great tear has been ripped through the very air. There's nothing but blackness there, a darkness that is darker yet darker. You know that darkness. You've seen it...no, you've been there before. But now there's something else lingering just behind the rip. Something that is screaming and howling in agony. As you stare in terror you see a pair of hands, skeletal and cracked, grip the sides of the rip and fight to push it open. You see a flash of a face set in pure white. Eyes that are burning with violet fire and staring right at you and you can sense it's hunger and animalistic rage through that single glance. It continues to scream, a sound that shakes your very Soul and you know that if this thing pushes through, there will be no escaping it's wrath.

So you run, blindly and helplessly into the glitching world around you, begging and screaming for someone to save you because you are helpless in here. You have nothing and no one to help you.

There's a sharp ding and your Soul goes blue and then you're rising up, faster and faster until you leave that terrifying beast far behind and your world explodes into color.
Your panic is enough to wake him from the heavy sleep he slipped into. Terror jolts through his bones, burning like fire. He thrashes in the blanket tangled around him, only succeeding in throwing himself to the floor. The room tilts and spins, making his head throb with agony. He groans, hunching over and fights not to be sick. Another pulse of fear from your Soul has him staggering to his feet. He lurches, catching himself on the edge of the couch. What's going on? He can't...he can't focus. His limbs are heavy. His sockets feel like they've been glued shut and he struggles to keep them open. Something's wrong, something is-

Your Soul screams.

He runs as best as he can, which amounts to little more than a wild stagger through the house, looking for you, calling your name with a voice that is growing louder and more panicked.

"Sans, is everything all right?" Toriel, rubbing her eyes sleepily, nearly bumps into him. "What's-"

"where is she?"

Tori looks around in confusion. "She's not here? Have you-oh!" She's quick to reach out and steady him as his knees partially give out on him.

He shakes his skull violently, fighting against the waves of exhaustion sweeping over him. Damn it, he can't think! This isn't normal, even for being sick. This is...oh. No, no no, he knows what this is. That stupid, self-absorbed, narcissistic scientist drugged him! And if Gaster drugged him that could only mean-! He pushes away from Tori and scrambles up the stairs to Pap's room, falling on his face twice in the process. But as he suspected, the room is empty. He backs out of the room, his dread growing and crashes into Frisk, sending them both to the ground.

Frisk makes a protesting noise under him, slapping his face gently. Groaning, Sans rolls off the kid. "bud, d...did you..." It's hard for him to even speak. The words stick in his throat. "did you see paps leave with _____?"

They frown and shake their head. **But I think I heard her car. I was almost asleep though.**

If they took the car, there's only one place they would go. One place **Gaster** would go. Fighting against the dizziness in his skull, Sans pushes up and reaches for a shortcut. The painful strain on his magic makes him shiver violently and nearly pass out. He doesn't have the energy for this. But he grits his teeth and pushes through because you and his brother need him and he's not going to let some damn sickness get in the way.
He knows about a fraction of a second before he lands that he's missed his mark just slightly and crashes into the pile of cups and vials that some poor kid had spent all afternoon stacking up. Every inch of his bones feel like they're burning and vibrating apart from the force of the short cut. His Soul pounds slowly and painfully behind his rib cage and for a brief, terrifying moment, he's scared that he'll simply turn to dust right there. Wouldn't that just be the final kick in the teeth?

But he doesn't and he manages to stand only to find his brother curled in agony on the floor, supported by his possessed girlfriend's who blackened eyes widen with shock at the sight of him. An overwhelming protective rage roars throughout his Soul, the likes of which he never wanted to feel again. He's back in Snowdin, back to the countless times he watched a red-eyed child stand over the dissolving form of his brother, sometimes grinning, sometimes looking just as shocked and confused as you do now. The terror of those memories and hollow sense of loss claw at him, freezing him in place. But then it's gone, replaced with rage because this time it's not an unknown entity in working through a scared child. It's his father, once again subjecting his son to his experiments. But what's worse is this time, he's making you do this, putting you through a trauma you should have never had to deal with. The rage consumes him, makes his head buzz.

But what can he do? Blasting the source of his rage away, like he did back in that damned warehouse won't do a single damn thing because anything he tries to do to Gaster will only hurt you. He can't whisk Papyrus away because the damage has already been done and screaming and crying will do absolutely nothing.

He manages to hold himself back from shoving Gaster away from Papyrus and takes his brother in his arms, sinking to the floor. Papyrus whimpers, clutching at his dripping hand and Sans nearly loses it all over again. God, his hand! "bro, i'm here. i'm so sorry."

"I'm fine," Papyrus murmurs, giving him a weak smile. "It's fine. Please don't be mad."

Fine? Nothing about this is fine.

"How did you know we were here? You should have been out for a long time."

Sans can barely bring himself to look at Gaster because he can't hide the hate in his eyes and he doesn't want a single speck of that hate aimed towards you. "her soul woke me," he says shortly. "it was screaming. your little drugs made getting here very difficult. so thanks for that. now go away and bring her back."

"Teleporting in your state is not a good idea Sans. You're very lucky you didn't end up hurting yourself."

Is Gaster seriously lecturing him right now?! "i'm done talking to you! let her go!" he snaps.

Gaster sighs. "Fine. But you'd better tend to your brother. He's still losing HP. He needs attention."

Sans swallows his nausea, forcing himself to look back at his brother's hand. He checks Paps HP and the sight of such a large amount of damage makes his Soul sink. Thinking it makes him want to claw his own head, but Gaster was right. Paps lost over two hundred HP. There's no way that he could have given himself that much extra HP. The laser would have killed him. He takes a shuddering breath and reaches for the health kit, which fell to the floor in Gaster's shock. He grabs a rag and dabs at the hole in his brother's hand as gingerly as he possibly can. A sharp hiss of pain escapes Paps and he flinches. "sorry," he mumbles miserably.

Papyrus watches him, his expression hesitant. "Brother, I know you're probably mad at me but I just
wanted to help. Dad told me you would d-die and I couldn't let that happen!"

Sans takes a moment to simply breathe, closing his sockets. "I'm not mad at you paps."

"______?" Gaster says your name and Sans whips his head around. "Shit, she's not responding to me!"

"what?" Sans is on his feet with no memory of standing, and moves closer to you. "what are talking about?"

Gaster blinks slowly at him, confusion creasing your face. "She's just...she's here but...she's not? I can't reach her."

Sans' mind goes blank. He grabs your shoulders, shaking you a little. "______?" he calls your name desperately. "c'mon, bad time for hide 'n seek!"

Gaster wrestles his way out of Sans' increasingly tight grip. He grabs at your head, closing your eyes. "She's not hiding. She's somewhere else...oh." It's a sudden realization, but not a good one, going by the way Gaster tenses slightly. "I threw her too far. She's fallen into the connection to the Void."

"you threw her?" It's taking everything Sans has to not start screaming.

"She was fighting me. I had to subdue her."

"what do you mean she's in the void?"

Gaster points to the place where your Soul resides. "I'm still connected to that place. Most of my Soul is still there. But she's not in the Void, she's...I think her mind has fallen...somewhere in the timelines? I can't see!" He growls in frustration. "She's here but she's not. I can't explain it better than that."

Well, forget not screaming. "don't explain it! bring her back!"

"I'm trying!" Gaster shakes your head, fingers digging. "She's...dammit!"

"Sans?" Papyrus' timid voice makes Sans jump. "What's going on?"

Sans can't answer. He can't move. He can't even breathe. This can't be happening. No, no, no! Not after everything! You can't vanish like this! This...this has to be some sort of illness induced nightmare. His gaze, as it usually does when panic seizes him, drops to your Soul. But now your Soul is dim, almost completely swallowed up by the dark tendrils of Gaster's Soul. He can feel his own Soul twisting in agony and the room starts to swim around him as his mind threatens to give out. Sweat is starting to roll down your face. "It's too heavy," Gaster mumbles. "Can't get a grip on her..."

No, focus, you're still here. It's not too late. He just has to bring you back from wherever you've fallen. Even if he has to...physically grab you and pull you back.

He should have just enough magic left for this. "dings, brace yourself." It's the only warning he gives Gaster before he focuses his magic on the remaining light in your Soul, turns it blue and yanks as hard as he possibly can.
It's like breaking through the surface of water. Suddenly you can breathe and your body is your own and you scream because that thing is still after you, it's right there, you can feel it breathing down your neck, wrapping you in strong arms that allow no movement. You thrash and buck weakly but your limbs feel like lead.

"it's ok, it's ok, you're back, you're fine."

The words are murmured in your ear and you abruptly stop screaming, giving into wordless gasping as you clutch at Sans. Panic is in full control and it's making the room spin, it's closing in on you and making your chest collapse under the pressure. Sans rocks you, rubbing his hand over your head. His hand, which is still far too warm. His own breathing is erratic and uneven. He buries his head into your shoulder, continuing to mutter reassurances as much to himself as he is to you.

"S-Sans!" you finally gasp. "I'm s-sorry, I tried to s-stop him b-but I couldn't let you d-d-die-!"

"'s not your fault, ok?" He sniffs loudly against your shoulder, trembling. "paps is fine, he's gonna be ok."

"YES! SEE?" Papyrus, trying his very best to be helpful, only succeeds in making you bawl harder. "OH! I AM SORRY!" He throws his arms around the two of you, completely enveloping your in his grip. The three of you sit there for a long time until your breathing slows. It's only then, and after you insist several times that you're okay, that Paps releases you.

Sans however, does not. He continues to cling to you, barely allowing you to sit up. You wipe at your face before studying his. He's still flushed with that pale blue color and the shadows under his sockets are nearly purple. He looks even worse than he did when he collapsed earlier. But you know saying anything about him pushing himself is pointless and instead you look to Papyrus.

Papyrus looks nearly normal, except for his heavily bandaged hand. There are several crumpled up rags and paper towels lying on the floor behind him that are stained with red and orange. You reach for him and he places his injured hand in yours. Your eyes well as you very gently kiss the bandages; he's covered up the hole as best as he can with the wrappings but they're loose and already stained. "Pap I'm so sorry."

He pats your head with his other hand. "I MADE THE CHOICE. AND THE GREAT PAPYRUS WOULD DO IT AGAIN! YOU HAVE WHAT YOU NEED NOW, RIGHT?"

You look to Sans, who doesn't answer. "I think so Pap. Why don't I fix this up a little bit better?"

He smiles widely. "THANK YOU! IT WAS RATHER DIFFICULT TO WRAP WITH ONE HAND BUT SANS WAS TOO BUSY WAKING YOU UP AND I DIDN'T WANT TO DISTURB HIM."

You take the remaining bandages (fortunately the lab has a ton of them) and fix his hand up. He doesn't make a single noise of complaint or pain while you do this and you have to fight back your sobs because he if is staying strong, then you have to as well. It's only when you finish the wrapping that Sans finally speaks.

"is he awake?"

You pause, frowning. Is he? It's actually...difficult to tell. But after a moment you feel that tiny spark that tells you, yes, he is awake and listening but just barely. Whatever happened after Sans showed up clearly exhausted him. Your hand clenches, but just for a moment. You're furious and beyond the
point of accepting any sort of excuse from Gaster for what he's done. But you are just too tired right now. You're not sure exactly what happened to you, but you can guess it's because of him. "Gaster. Bring your hands out. I don't feel like talking to nothing."

Agonizingly slowly, his hands appear, tugging on the small remains of your energy. They hover in the air, limp and dim.

It's almost silly to scowl at the hands, but scowl you do. "You're a jackass and you better believe you're going to pay for this when you've got your own body."

**I did what I had to, he signs slowly. And it worked.**

"That's...ugh!" You slump against Sans, who tightens his hold on you. You don't want to fight and Sans, darn him, will get riled up if you do and he looks like he's on the verge of collapsing as it is. "You know what? I'm done talking to you. I don't want to hear you, I don't want to see your hands for the next twenty-four hours. We all need rest and I'm not going to get any unless you stay absolutely silent."

The hands stay still for several long moments. Then, they turn to Papyrus, who's sockets widen slightly. He signs, **I am sor...make sure you apply ointment to your hand. It will speed up recovery.** Then without another word, the hands vanish and the wall goes up in your head with such force it makes you wince. After several long seconds in which you all continue to stare at the place where Gaster's hands had been, Papyrus breaks into a wide smile.

"SEE! THERE IS GOOD IN HIM! HE ALMOST APOLOGIZED!"

Sans chokes and you gently pat his face. It's then that you notice more of the blue ooze is dripping from his nasal cavity.

Papyrus notices too and frowns. "I THINK MAYBE WE SHOULD GO BACK TO LADY TORIEL'S HOUSE. I...DO NOT LIKE TO ADMIT IT, BUT I THINK I MAY REQUIRE SOME MORE HEALING. I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT HEALING MAGIC CAN'T BE USED ON OURSELVES, ESPECIALLY AT TIMES LIKE THIS!"

Sans suddenly lurches away from you and heaves. More blue stuff mixed in with a little bit of yellow spews out from between his teeth and hits the floor. It reeks of ozone.

"Sans!"

He coughs and shudders. "'m fine. it's happened before, just a reaction."

Yep, definitely time to head home. So much for skeletons not being able to vomit. Of course it's not like any kind of vomit you've ever seen so it's clearly not the same. You grit your teeth and clean it up before getting up to put the container with Papyrus' bone in the storage fridge. The sight of the sliced up chunk of his hand nearly makes you puke too and you very quickly label it and put it away. It should take a day or two for it to stabilize to the point where it can be taken out and worked on but you're in no hurry. You groan internally as you turn back to the boys; Papyrus is doing his best to help Sans get up with one hand. The very last thing you feel like doing is driving. Your dread vanishes and is replaced with concern when Sans sniffles and sways in his attempt to stand. For the first half of the quick trip down to the car he insists on walking by himself but by the time you reach the parking lot, he's got a hand on your shoulder and is stumbling heavily. He tries his best to stay awake, holding onto your right hand while you steer with the left. Every bump makes him groan.

"Please don't puke in my car," you plead jokingly, trying to distract him.
"...k," he murmurs, breathing heavily. His fuzzy eyes stay trained on you. Weakly he taps a finger against his rib cage just above where you know his Soul resides. "where did you go?"

You take a shaky breath. "It was like a memory but...I think I was actually there. I could move, walk around...talk to people. I talked to you."

"me?"

"You were just a kid. Scared, alone in that basement lab. You asked me if I was real. You touched my face and I held your hand." You have no idea if you were actually there or not but...it felt real. The sights, the cold, the feeling of his hand in yours. How could that have been just a memory or dream? You glance at him to see if it's ringing any bells in his head. He just looks confused. "I made you a promise. Do you remember?"

His brow bones furrow. "i...don't...i don't remember a lot from back then," he slurs tiredly. "everything kinda blurs together. what did you say?"

You're not sure why, but you start to blush. "I told you that things were going to be painful for you. That you were going to have to endure so much. Then I made you a promise that one day everything would be okay. I told you that you would see the stars and have friends by your side who would never stop loving you. I promised you that I would always be there too. No matter what." You sigh. "It's more likely that it was just some kind of bizarre, super realistic dream thing. What do you think?"

He doesn't respond and you look over to see that he's fallen asleep. You squeeze his hand and lean over, giving his fever warm skull a kiss. Perhaps right now isn't the best time to push his memory. Besides, now that it's over, you're starting to look at what happened with a somewhat clear head. Your actual body clearly didn't go anywhere so being able to feel Sans' touch just doesn't make sense. And it would explain why he suddenly vanished and the world broke apart. Besides, if it was just a dream that means that the creature that ripped a hole through the air was just something your mind cooked up. Yeah, it must have been a dream.

The alternative is too scary to think about.

Frisk and Toriel are standing outside when you pull up and they can't hide their horror when they see Papyrus' hand. Fortunately, Toriel keeps her head after a brief moment of rage where you actually see fire start to lick at her hands. She quickly ushers Papyrus into the kitchen for more healing, Frisk right behind her while you take Sans into the bathroom to wash up some remaining sick and sweat on his face and help him change into some pajamas. When he's all clean you tuck him in bed and place a wet rag over his forehead, though you're not sure how much good it'll do.

"How can you puke anyway?" you mumble. "Gaster all but laughed at me for asking when I got sick before."

Sans cracks one eye open. "it's a magic thing, not a gross human stomach thing."

"Blue shiny magic vomit is still vomit and therefore, gross."

He gives one weak chuckle. "just happens sometimes. my body isn't supplying enough magic right now and it makes me dizzy and puts a big strain on me. sometimes i sleep for a long time, or i get sick and-"

"Throw up whatever you've got left?" You wrinkle your nose.

He smiles gently and boops your nose. "something like that."
"Poor baby." You rub his head and he closes his socket, humming in contentment. You stroke his skull for a few moments before whispering, "You shouldn't have pushed yourself like that. I don't like seeing you like this."

He tries to lift his head and you gently push him back down. He opens his eyes, frowning at you. "and i don't like holding you in my arms, wondering if you're going to wake up or be gone for good this time."

You set your head down next to his, sighing. "That is happening way too much lately."

He brings his hand up and starts rubbing your head too. "i hate that you have to see me like this," he whispers. "it's not enough i cry at you all the time apparently."

"You don't cry all the time. I'm the one who cries at the smallest thing. Like that video with the baby tigers who lost their mom, remember?"

He laughs but it turns into a cough. "that was pretty sad."

You lapse into silence after that for a bit. You should really let him sleep but...you still feel so bad about what's happened to Papyrus. This whole situation is infuriating, especially because at the middle of all the crap, Gaster was right about Papyrus being the only one who could donate the bone needed. And what's worse is that Sans knows it too. He had been so desperate to find something else that could work, poured all of his being into finding a different way. But in the end, it didn't matter. Gaster knew this. He knew that it wouldn't work and yet had allowed Sans to try. He had...oh.

It hits you all of a sudden. You lift to head to find that Sans is still awake, though barely. "Sans?"

"...hmm?"

"Did you...did you know that taking the bone from your attacks wouldn't work?"

He stiffens for a moment. "i..."

"You kept talking about taking it from your hand, even while you worked on taking it from your attacks. But surely you must have known the damage would have been too much. That's why you pushed yourself this far into making the attacks work, right? Because you couldn't bear the thought of putting Papyrus through it."

"so you're saying i was desperate not to cut a hole in my brother's hand? not exactly a hard puzzle to crack babe," he says, but his sockets are tight.

You stop rubbing his head and instead take his hand. "Yeah. I know. But I think even you knew that it would have to come to that. You were just trying to put it off. You were hoping that you could find a different answer. I think...Gaster might have been trying to save you from carrying the guilt of asking Papyrus to make such a sacrifice."

"what?"

"I'm not defending Gaster. At all," you say quickly. "He shouldn't have done what he did. Worse, he shouldn't have drugged you and force Paps through fear and guilt. But if it had been you who had to ask Papyrus to do this, if you were the one who hooked him up to the machine and pressed the button, you never would've forgiven yourself."

Sans stares at you in shock. "why would he do that? why would he give a single crap about me carrying that burden? more guilt, the better right? after what i did to him-"
"And he's done more terrible things to you than I'd like to think about. It's not a question of who's done worse things. Do you hate him?" He scowls and you put your hands up. "Okay bad time to ask that. Look, I'm the one who's been sharing head space with this guy and I'm still having a hard time figuring him out. But I can feel his guilt and regret, even when he tries to hide it. What I do know is that he's not a good guy. I fully understand that. And I think he does too. But he's not evil incarnate either. Bottom line is he's your family. And like it or not, he's Papyrus' too. He didn't want to do this either. He knew that your attacks wouldn't work but he still let you try instead of putting a stop to it sooner. I think even he was hoping that Papyrus could be spared. It's twisted, but he wanted to save your life. Even if that meant making you hate him. Or hate him even more."

Sans is silent for several moments, processing this. "I can't just forgive him for this because he felt bad and tried to take the blame for hurting pap," he whispers hoarsely. "His feelings don't erase what he did. It doesn't fix the crap he's putting you through."

You give him a long kiss on his forehead. "I'm not expecting you to forgive him. He's not either. I just wanted to help you understand." You pull the blanket up a little and flip the wet rag over to the cooler side. "You should sleep. We can't keep going if you're stuck in bed."

You change into your pajamas once he's tucked in and are getting ready to go check on Papyrus when he calls your name softly. "Is it ok if paps sleeps in here tonight? I wanna...I just wanna be near him right now. If he doesn't mind."

You smile at him. "Of course it's fine. I'll go ask him."

Papyrus, feeling much better now that Toriel's healed up the raw edges of the hole in his hand, immediately agrees to sleep with the two of you. You pull the couch cushions in to make a basic bed and when you come back from getting some extra blankets, you find that Papyrus has already curled up on the bed with his brother. The two are fast asleep. An almost painful wave of emotion washes over you at the sight, making your eyes water. Despite what you told Sans about Gaster carrying the burden of hurting Papyrus, you still feel a burning rage at the monster sleeping in your mind. But there's nothing to be done about it right now. You just want to sleep and pray that the purple eyed beast who rips the air doesn't visit you in your dreams. You finish putting the cushion bed together as quietly as you can and crawl under the thick blanket.

As terrible as it is, the worst part is over now. You've got the tools you need. The bone, the Soul, and the Determination. Once Sans gets better, you'll all get back to work. And hopefully, as long as there are no more setbacks, Gaster will have his new body soon and you'll be free to get on with your life. You snort quietly to yourself as you drift to sleep.

No setbacks? There's no way you'll be that lucky. But you're going to very stubbornly hold onto that hope regardless.
You've never seen Sans in such a state. Even his worst days, the days when he can't move from the bed or stares vacantly at the wall for hours can't compare to this. His fever spikes in the early morning and he can't even sleep because of the pain. He bites back his moans as best as he can but his sweaty thrashing soaks through the sheets and you finally can't take watching him fight to sleep on wet blankets. You enlist Toriel to lift him up while you strip the bed and she does so without complaint. Sans, curled up in a shivering ball, looks like a child in her arms. Papyrus lingers by closely, desperate to help but his hand is still very fragile and Toriel is absolutely adamant about him not carrying any weight with it. Still, you let him help you put the bed sheets into the wash because the poor guy looks like he just might explode if he doesn't have something to do. You carry the sweaty blankets and load them in while Pap measures out the proper amount of detergent.

"How are you holding up?" you ask him. You've barely been able to say a word to him this morning, thanks to your frantic focus on taking care of your sick boyfriend.

"I am doing okay," he says in a tired voice that clearly states otherwise. "Sans was rather...wiggly last night. Normally the Great Papyrus needs only a little bit of sleep to function! But the events from yesterday did admittedly make me rather tired and my sleep was not very restful. You don't look like you got much sleep either."

"Well, I usually need quite a bit more than an hour or two," you mumble miserably. You'd had a lot on your mind, making you restless enough as is and every little pained grunt and huff from him had snapped you into wakefulness. You're just praying that you don't wind up getting sick as well. There's no time for that. You finish loading the blankets and glance at his hand. It's too painful for him to wear his glove so he's got one glove off and one on. It would almost be funny if not for the reason behind it. "How's your hand?"

"It is much better!" He reassures you enthusiastically. "Lady Toriel is an excellent healer! Almost as good as I am!"

You smile tiredly at his cheer. "Well we've given her plenty of chances to practice, haven't we?"

"Practice makes perfect!" He studies your face for a second before clapping his good hand on your shoulder. "I can see that you are still upset. But you don't need to be! It's in the past now. We have to keep looking forward."

You give him a quick hug of thanks but don't say anything before heading back to the bedroom. It's not so easy to let go of your anger and sorrow at what's happened. This whole thing is completely
unfair. You rub Sans' hand as he sleeps, fighting off your own exhaustion. You finally grab your laptop and gingerly climb up into the bed next to Sans. He barely stirs as you settle in and plug your headphones in. You check on the realtor's website and you're relieved to see that the house with the roof deck and bad paint job is still available. You go ahead and schedule an appointment for a walk through before flipping through your iTunes movies. You're about two-thirds of the way through Mean Girls when the sound suddenly stops coming from your headphones and switches to your computer speaker. Sans snuggles up to you, tugging the earbuds out of your ears.

"Hey," you say softly. "Want me to start it over?"

He shakes his head wordlessly, eyes on the monitor. When the movie finishes you peel yourself away from him just long enough to heat up a can of soup. You ignore his groaning protests and insist that he eats something. It's been way too long since his last meal and he's not going to get better by watching comedy movies.

He only manages to swallow three spoonfuls before puking again.

After you clean him up and put the soup away for later, you simply crawl back into the bed with him and start up another movie. He dozes on and off for the rest of the day, barely saying a word unless he's apologizing for puking. Dinner time rolls around and now you're getting really worried, watching him hunched over a bowl. He heaves and nothing comes out. He hasn't eaten a thing and even drinking water seems to upset his system.

Papyrus pokes his head in, his sockets tight with concern. "Should I call Undyne?" he asks softly. "She is a master chef after all. Surely she could make something that Sans can stomach. It is concerning that even Lady Toriel's cooking isn't doing the trick."

You shake your head, rubbing Sans' back. "As much as I love Undyne, I think her level of intensity might not help in this situation." Not to mention, Alphys has told you that Undyne, perhaps almost as much as Sans, is enraged about Gaster being held up in your Soul. And given her tendency to snap in her rage, it was agreed by all that it might be best that she keep her distance for now. "Besides, I don't think the food quality itself is an issue."

Papyrus nods miserably. "I haven't seen Sans this sick for...for a very long time. I think it was when we first moved to Snowdin."

Sans shivers under your hand at those words.

"I guess...it must have been right after the accident," Papyrus continues, his gaze drifting slightly as if a memory is being recalled and yet is just slightly out of reach. After a moment, he snaps back to attention. "Speaking of that! Is my dad doing okay? I know you were quite angry with him."

"He's fine," you say shortly. The good old doctor, who has been sleeping for most of the day, starts slightly in your head but remains silent.

"That's good," Pap says a little too cheerfully. "I shall return to my room then! Just yell if you need me!" He ducks away and you turn your attention back to Sans. He heaves a few more times, sweat dripping down his skull.

"I'm sorry," he finally mumbles miserably.

You rub little circles on the nubs of his spine poking out from beneath his over-sized shirt. "I really wish there was something you could stand to eat. You need a little more meat on your bones."

He doesn't even respond to your joke and your heart sinks a little. "Toriel might bring Grillby over,"
you continue. "She's starting to run on empty too. But Papyrus' hand is looking better already."

You feel him tremble slightly.

"Sans? Are you okay?" You worriedly check to make sure the bowl is positioned under him in case he's about to puke again. "Are you going to throw up again?"

He shakes his head and you take the bowl away, setting it down on the dresser by the door gingerly. It's really not as bad as human vomit but it's still making your stomach turn. Sans pulls his knees up, burying his head.

"Are you feeling any different?"

Nothing.

"Do you want to watch another movie? Take your mind off things?" You sit back on the bed but give him space because even if he wasn't sick, you would recognize these signs. He's beating himself up over something and you've got a pretty good idea what it is. "Hey, maybe this is a good time to do a full Hobbit and Lord of the Rings marathon."

"I hate this."

You stop talking.

"I hate this, i hate this, I hate this." His phalanges dig into the fabric of his pajama pants. "I shouldn't be like this, why am i like this?"

"Sans, you're just sick. It's okay."

"It's not." His hand drops back to the bed, limp. After a moment he lies back down, facing away from you. "Everything i try to do to fix things just makes things worse. i try and people i care about get hurt. i make things worse. i'm just a burden."

Moving slowly, you reach out and touch his shoulder. "Sans, you're not a burden," you say firmly. "It's okay if people take care of you. That's what you told me, right?"

His shoulders jerk with a noiseless sob. "This shouldn't have happened to him. I should've just stuck my own damn hand in there from the start."

It's like your talk from last night didn't even happen. "Sans, you admitted that you knew that wouldn't work, remember?"

"Did i?" He lets out a harsh bark of laughter. "Time is stupid. Memories are all messed up. When is it anyway? How's long it's been since my dad cut a hole in my brother's hand?"

Crap. He's starting to talk like... "It was last night," you say slowly, a trickle of fear starting to creep down your spine. From the sound of things, he's not thinking straight.

"Paps is still alive, right?" A tremor of fear is in Sans' voice. "Where's paps? Where-where is he?"

"Hey, he's okay." You rub his arm reassuringly. "He was just in here. He asked if Undyne should come over."

"Sans!" you say sharply, cutting off his steadily rising voice. "No one is dead. We're all here."

He turns, meeting your eyes. His left socket is flickering weakly. He reaches up and traces a line on your face. "he's here too," he murmurs. "he's back. he's...my head hurts."

You take his hand and gently make him lie on his back. "You are talking a little crazy. I think the fever is messing with your skull."

"probably."

His matter of fact tone makes you snort. You tuck the blanket around his shoulders. "At least you can admit it. Try to go back to sleep. I think that's the only thing that's going to help right now."

He nods, sockets drooping. "gotta nap while i can. paps yells if i sleep too much."

"Well, he won't yell at you this time." You wipe at his sweaty skull before kissing him gently. "Just sleep."

"i don't wanna," he mumbles even as his eyes shut. "don't wanna wake up back there."

"You're not going anywhere," you whisper. "Neither am I. We're here for good and this whole mess is almost done."

"that sounds good. i gotta give my old man...a dunking...for...." His voice trails off and he's asleep.

You sigh, the air hissing through your teeth. That was frightening. It probably wasn't full on hallucinating but Sans had clearly not been completely present in the moment. You feel sick yourself at seeing him like this. But what can you do? Healing magic isn't working, he can't keep any kind of food down and his magic keeps getting spewed out the moment his body regenerates any. You don't know what to do.

But maybe Gaster does.

You linger for a moment, making sure Sans is deeply asleep before slipping off the bed. You head towards the bathroom, carrying the used puke bowl. Cleaning out the bowl only takes a moment. You set it down and brace yourself slightly against the sink. Technically it hasn't been twenty-four hours yet but... "Gaster?"

He doesn't respond.

"I know you're awake," you grumble, staring at your reflection in the mirror. "Don't sulk on me now."

**So you're allowing me to break my silence?** His voice is gruff, on the edge of whiny. **How courteous of you.**

"It's not because I want to." You take a breath. "You've seen how sick Sans is. He wasn't this bad last night."

**A monster's health reflects a monster's Soul. Sans, unfortunately has a tendency to let things build until his Soul simply gives under the strain. His own thoughts about what happened to his brother is what's keeping him from recovering.** Gaster sighs. **He's always been fragile and that is because of my own failures in his upbringing. It was my mistakes that led to the the state of his HP.**
"What do you mean?"

**His HP has always been low. But when he was first created it wasn't a single point. It was at nine. At the time I was dismayed as is but he could still take damage without....** He mentally shakes his head. **That's not important. He needs help right now. That's what you're coming to me for, correct?**

You scowl. "Don't rub it in. You've seen him like this before. Right?"

Yes.

"So how do we get him better? There's got to be more we can do than letting him sleep."

**Well. You can create a mixture of Determination and-**

"No." It's practically a screech. One thing is certain, you are not letting Gaster put something that so strongly changes monsters into Sans while he's so weak.

**His body is adapted to it. It would only require-**

"I said no. Don't you have a like a secret family soup recipe or something? He needs food."

He huffs. **Fine. There is something I used to make for him. Let's go into the kitchen and see if the Queen has everything I need.**

As it turns out, no she doesn't. So that means a trip to the store. You peek back in at Sans who hasn't budged a single inch and decide you've got some time before he wakes up. You leave a note and quietly slip out; you know Papyrus would insist on going with you but you can't handle looking at his hand right now. You hop up into the seat of your car and pull out of the driveway. There's a shop just down the road and it's stocked with monster goods.

**Um, there is-**

"Not now Gaster. I'm still mad at you," you growl, turning your music up.

**But you really-**

You crank the volume up all the way and Gaster falls silent. You regret it almost instantly as ear popping bass thuds from the speakers. Ah, right you forgot Alphys slipped in one of her K-pop albums. This is...Big Bang if you're remembering correctly. You sway slightly, letting the music wash over you. A flicker of movement catches your eye; Frisk is in the backseat, hands pressed over their ears and a wide smile on their face. You shriek and nearly send the car off the road.

"Frisk!" You punch the music off and steady the car. "When did you get in here?!"

**When you were writing the note,** they sign sheepishly. **I figured you were going to the store.**

"And you decided to tag along?" Your heart is still racing from the scare.

**I tried to warn you,** Gaster pipes up smugly.

"Yeah well...warn me faster next time, 'kay?"

Frisk climbs up into the front seat when you reach a stoplight, quickly buckling their seat belt. **Are**
you mad?

You sigh and ruffle their hair, much in the same way that Sans does. "No. You just scared me. I thought there was a creep in the car. Oh, wait I guess there is."

It takes them a second but then they snicker, their eyes darting to the space behind your seat. They've always claimed they can't see Gaster but you're really starting to doubt that. They notice you watching and shift to stare out the front window.

Is Sans going to be okay? Their shoulders slump slightly as the mischievous glint fades from their eyes. Mom's really worried. I'm worried too.

"He's going to be fine," you murmur, perhaps trying to convince yourself. "Gaster's got some super special chicken soup that should get Sans back up on his feet in no time. Hence my trip to the store. And speaking of your mom, does she know you tagged along?"

The slight grin is enough of an answer. You threaten to keep the music off until Frisk texts Toriel to let her know. Soon enough you pull into the lot for the store and hop out. You give Frisk a list of stuff to find and they zoom away. You head into the medicinal side of the store, peering at the mixture of monster and human medicines. Following Gaster's instructions, you find a bottle of basil, lemon and ginger. Those are easy enough to find but then he starts listing a strange assortment of items, like arrow root and caraway seeds. Finally, he tells you to grab a container of oatmeal.

Watering it down will help everything stay in his system, he explains as you scan the shelves.

You finally spot it, naturally on the highest shelf. You glance around and, seeing that you're the only one in the aisle, steel yourself to climb up.

I do have floating hands, Gaster says dryly. In which to grab things that may be out of reach.

"Thanks, but I'm good," you grunt, reaching up for the box. Your fingers brush against it and-

"dings, I don't wanna eat it." The subject somehow manages to wrinkle the area above it's nasal cavity. It's staring at the bowl of admittedly discolored oatmeal with distaste.

He sighs. "If you do not eat, you will keep throwing up. You don't have much stamina as it is. Healing is unfortunately a skill I no longer possess so you're going to have to do this the old fashioned way." He holds the bowl insistently towards the ch-subject. "Eat. Or I will make you eat."

C1 grimaces but finally takes the offered food. There's another moment of hesitation and then it begins to eat. The twisting expression of disgust on it's face is one he honestly didn't think was possible to make with a face made of bone. He quickly turns away but he can't hide the laugh that breaks from him. He slowly looks back to C1, who is staring at him with a strange expression.

He clears his throat. "Eat," he says again and damn it, that laughter bubbles up again as C1 takes another bite and again makes a squinty-eyed expression of disgust. But now there's a mischievous glint in the subject's sockets and every bite brings a more exaggerated face until he finally can't take it and he-

"Ahhh!" You lose your grip, toppling backwards and you're certain you're going to hit the floor but then Gaster's summoned hands catch you, propping you upright. You stumble a little, very narrowly avoiding the box of oatmeal that falls too. It hits the ground and thank goodness, it doesn't explode. You put a hand on your head, blinking through the rush of dizziness.
"Wha-what the heck-"

**Is that?** Gaster finishes, for once sounding completely and utterly shocked. You can tell that he's not talking about what you just saw so you look up. Up above you, right in the spot your hand was reaching for the oatmeal, there's a thin black line simply hovering in the air. No, hovering isn't the right word. It's...ripping through the air itself. It's thin, barely the width of a pencil and just about as long as one. But your heart stops in your chest at the sight of the pure darkness beyond. It's a darkness that seems to pull at you, threatening to swallow you up.

There's a flash of purple fire. A burning rage that consumes all in it's path.

And it's staring at you.

**Close it, close it!** Gaster screams, snapping you out of your frozen terror.

"I-I-what?" you stutter, forcing your legs to move backwards. "What is that thing? I don't-" You slam up against the opposite set of shelves. You can't stop staring at it. You've seen this before. You've seen that purple eyed beast-!

There's a sharp tug on your Soul and suddenly Gaster's hands are encased in a similar purple flame. The hands shoot towards the dark rip and slam together, trapping the tear between them. You gasp as your Soul throbs. You feel a burning power rushing through you, drawn to the spot that should not be there. It eats at you, making your knees threaten to give. Gaster is straining, pushing against something that is shoving back with an unbearable force.

**Come on, come on, come on!** he mutters desperately, pouring more energy into his hands.

You cry out at the pulse of pain that rips through you and you finally do hit the ground as the tear starts to shrink. Reality is being forced to repair itself under Gaster's hands. The rip slowly disappears until with a great pop, it's gone like it was never there in the first place. You stare down at the ground, gasping harshly. Okay. What. Just. *Happened?* You feel something touch your shoulder and you scream, throwing yourself away from whatever it...oh.

Frisk stares at you with wide, scared eyes. **Are you okay?** they sign. **I heard you yell and...there was something wrong with the air.** They look up at the spot just the world had just ripped. So they saw it too.

You try to stand; it's made a little difficult by your shaking limbs. "Gaster? Any idea what the heck just happened?"

Gaster is...shaken. You can feel it in his Soul. Something you haven't felt from him before is bubbling up, perhaps made greater by your own fear and confusion. He's scared.

**That...I believe,** he says slowly. **Was the Void.**
You know what sucks?
Having to redo about 2 weeks worth of filming in 2 days. That sucks
Having a Ghoster attached to your Soul also sucks.

Annoying Ghoster fanart
I'll be honest and admit this fanart and a comment inspired the end of this chapter
Hey I did a whole bunch of terrible art check it out
Also I made a narration of chapter 1 because I do voice over stuff sometimes

Main Blog

Get the food and get out of here, Gaster snaps urgently. Your body is moving before you're completely aware of what's happening. Are you the one moving it? You honestly can't tell.

And that is terrifying.

You purchase the food, Frisk hovering anxiously at your hip. You curse under your breath as your own shaking hands make you drop your money all over the counter. Finally though, it's done and you speed back to Toriel's place. In the safety of your car you finally ask, "What do you mean, the Void?"

Have you seen that before? Gaster demands instead of answering you. While you were awake, dreams, anything.

You nod. "Just once. It happened last night when we were...after Sans showed up and I passed out." You tell him about what you saw in full detail, too shaken to care that Frisk is listening as well. You pull up to Toriel's just as you're finishing. "The air just...ripped open. It was bigger than what we just saw. I could see something in there. It was..." You shiver. "It was so angry."

Why did you not say anything? Gaster right now seems just as angry. That should have been the first thing out of your mouth when you woke up!

"Oh, sorry. I was a little busy," you snarl at his hands. "I guess with Paps' bleeding hand and Sans vomiting magic I just forgot to mention the weird dream to you."

You idiot, that was no dream! His hands gesture wildly, making Frisk duck.

"It has to have been!" you snap back. "I told Sans about it. He doesn't remember it happening. So, it has to have been a dream, right?"

His sigh is more of a groan. Just because he doesn't remember does mean it didn't happen.

Goosebumps rise up on your arm. "But...but then, that means I...."

You have no idea what's happened, do you?

"Do you?"
He goes quiet at that and you bite back a frustrated scream. "Okay, let's just... fix Sans his special oatmeal. We'll deal with this later." You get out of the car, nearly forgetting to grab the bag of ingredients. You're understandably jumpy and on edge. You've never slipped into Gaster's memories like that. Dozing, sleeping or spacing out led to it sometimes but you were completely awake, moving around even! What's worse is that thing that ripped open the air. Simply remembering it sends harsh chills down your spine. The black space is something that simply shouldn't have been there. Your instinct to run away is still making your heart race wildly.

You spread the food across the counter. "Gaster? What do I need to do here?"

He starts, caught in his own thoughts. Wordlessly, he summons his hands and starts mixing the ingredients together. He gives you the task of putting the oatmeal together, which Frisk helps you out with. You look back occasionally to see what he's doing, especially once a sharp almost tangy spell fills the kitchen. But he's not vocal about exactly what he's doing and there's no point in trying to push him. There's no danger of him drugging Sans again; what would be the point? So you leave him to it until he carries over the mixture and pours it into the watered down oatmeal. It changes the color of the food to a rather nauseating dark green shade.

"You're sure this is going to help him?" you ask, wrinkling your nose at it. **Who's the doctor here?** Gaster lifts his translucent hands over the food. You feel him strain slightly and then sigh. **Hold your hands up.**

It's a brief battle between your irritation at him and your desperate need for a distraction. You sigh and then does as he asks, positioning your hands just below his. "Do I need to chant or something?" you ask sarcastically.

**Something. You want Sans to recover, right?**

"Of course."

**Put that desire into your Soul. Let that become the priority.**

So, forget about the endless darkness that ripped open the air and the beast behind it that clearly isn't just a figment of your dreams? Oh, yeah, sure. Sounds easy. You roll your eyes but try your best to do what he says. You picture Sans as you want him to be; easily smiling, teasing you, making his usual dumb jokes. Blushing when you turn your eyes on him. Strong. Healthy. The way he's meant to be. He's not supposed to be so worn down. You need him to get better because...damn it, you're scared. You're scared of the rip and the force behind it and you're scared that you're never going to get your life back. You need him to stay strong yourself. You...

You feel stupid. What is this supposed to accomplish exactly?

**Concentrate.** The order is stern but spoken gently. **Picture your own feelings having the power to fix him.**

Fix him? Sans doesn't need to be fixed. He needs to heal. He needs to be loved. And the love you feel for him is nearly unbearable in its intensity. You let it sweep over you and you feel something deep inside of yourself responding in return. Something warm and gentle, lost in the blur of your own thoughts. Your own curiosity seems to make it slip away. It's strange. The sensation is completely new and yet entirely familiar at the same time. What is this?

Gaster lays his hands lightly on yours and your Soul suddenly flares slightly. That swirling warmth is tugged forward, caught in an alien guidance. A tingling sensation shoots from your chest all the way
down to your hands. Your mouth is filled with the tangy taste of oranges and the sweetness of vanilla ice cream and you feel the bubbling spark of magic light your fingertips. A dull green glow emits from your skin, casting a light over the oatmeal. You gasp in wonder while Frisk stares with wide eyes.

**As I thought.** He sounds a little smug.

The glow fades from your hands, dripping off like water into the oatmeal. It changes the shade slightly, making it look a little less like goop. Your breath catches and you pull your hands close.

"What was that?" you whisper.

**That, human, is what magic feels like. Your own magic. Not borrowed from Sans. Not mine channeled through you. Yours and yours alone.**

Your heart does a strange flip. **Your magic?**

**It is interesting to experience the sensation through human senses, Gaster says thoughtfully. It is oddly similar yet fundamentally different.** Gaster takes one of your hands; his ghostly limb still feels weird to the touch. Like cold marble. He twists your hand slightly, observing it. He would appear my theory was correct. Your healing magic is very weak. It would barely heal a cut on a monster. But it is enough to add a healing quality to food. Perhaps with time and training, the effect will grow stronger.

Your wonder is tainted by slight bitterness. Oh. Now you get it. You step away from the oatmeal, raising your eyebrows at the floating hands, which are still gripping your fingers. "How long have you been waiting to test this out?"

**Since the incident with the Prince.**

You shake your head, pulling your hand out of his grip. "I don't understand. I thought it was my bond with Sans that let me use magic at all. It's only been his gravity magic. Where did this...my magic come from?"

**Humans, for all their faults, are certainly capable of extraordinary things. You are capable of great things. I believe that Sans magic is only the tip of what you can do. It might be that the presence of his magic, as well as mine has only unlocked your own potential.** His tone grows a little darker. Back before the barrier fell, human mages, while still rare, were a strong force in human society. And what made them so powerful was their ability to multiple types of magic. Most monsters can only do one or two, plus a moderate healing ability. I've seen... He falter and you see a brief flash, not a full dip like before, but a recalled memory that is filled with anger and fear and death. Dust and screaming and a child, holding a weapon as tears stream down their face. He recomposes himself and it's gone. With the right conditions, humans may use an unknown number of abilities. Regardless of how many you can use, it would stand to reason that since you can use any amount of magic at all, healing magic would be an easy step up for you.

Almost all of the amazement of what you've just done is completely overshadowed by the fact that Gaster just freaking experimented on you! That guidance you felt before, which at the time was surprising, didn't hurt. But now your Soul is squirming at how invasive that action actually was. You turn to Frisk. "Thanks for helping. I'm gonna go give this to Sans."

Frisk gives you a long worried look before hugging you briefly and disappear towards their room. You pour some of the oatmeal mixture into a bowl and head back to your own room, trying very
hard not to fume. "Okay, now I get it. Why Sans is always so on edge with you. Besides the obvious reasons of course."

**What are you talking about?**

"It's something that's always confused me. The Gaster who experimented on Sans, the scientist who created life to turn it into an obedient partner and weapon isn't the image I've been getting from you. And Sans told me you changed. Tried to be better. At least for a while. Yet, you haven't actually changed at all, have you? I can't believe this."

**Why are you angry?** He sounds genuinely confused. I **helped you. Guided your magic. Most people would expect gratitude.**

"Gratitude?" You stop outside your door, lowering your voice to a hiss. "You want me to thank you for messing around with my magic?"

His irritation spikes with yours. **You were just as curious, and there is no point in lying about that.**

It stings, but it's true. Ever since that first moment in your cell back during your captivity, you've been aching to explore what else you can do. And upon feeling your very own magic, you had only felt curiosity and a sense of rightness. "The point is that you didn't ask," you grumble. "You didn't bring up what you were going to do. You just did it. Ignoring Sans' reasonable request to wait until after we get you out of my Soul by the way. Do you seriously not understand what's wrong with what you just did? What you did to Papyrus for that matter? What you've done to Sans, over and over again?" He's silent so you continue. "Gaster, I've felt your confusion and regret and pain. Sans has told me that before the Core started messing with you, you truly did try to be better. But your problem is that once you get an idea in your head, you carry it through without ever stopping to think about how it's going to effect people."

The ghost hands gesture widely. **Certain things must be done. That's the cold, hard truth. Do you think I wanted to hurt Papyrus like that? There was no choice.**

"But you didn't stop for even a moment to think about what would happen to Sans because of it. To me. It was you who pushed the button but you used my hands to do it. Don't you understand how sick that is?"

**You're being-**

"How many times did you experiment on Sans without telling him about what you were doing? How many times did Sans know, but you carried on regardless of how he felt about it? How many times did you guilt Papyrus into doing something he didn't want to do? How many times have you heard your own Soul tell you 'this is wrong' and you forged ahead anyway?" You sigh, tightening your grip on the bowl. "What you did to Papyrus was wrong. But I think the main reason you hid it from Sans and drugged him is because you wanted to save him from having to do it himself. Am I right?"

He doesn't answer.

"So that means you understand that it's wrong. And that almost makes it worse." You put your hand on the knob. "You know, sometimes just talking works. You don't have to act like you're the only one who knows best. Agreements can be made. Compromises."

**Sometimes compromises can't be reached.**
"Then, at the very least, you need to apologize."

You open the door. Sans is still curled up in the same position you left him in. You kneel down next to the bed, gently putting your hand on his forehead. He's still warm. His sockets twitch, cracking open slightly. The lights of his eyes are still a little faded, but not as fuzzy as they were before. He groans. "what is that smell?"

The offending smell, not made any better by your magic in the mix, is rather strong. "It's a special soup...oatmeal. Thing."

He stares at the bowl. He grunts quietly. "oh. i know what that is."

"Then you know that it's going to help you. Open up."

He buries his head under the blanket, making a whining noise of protest.

"Sans, don't be a baby."

A loud snore is his response.

You ready the spoon, bracing yourself. "Something really bad happened at the market just now."

His head reappears with almost comical speed. "what happened?"

You lift the spoon. "Food first. Then I'll tell you."

His sockets narrow slightly before he sighs. "fine." He takes the spoon from you, the edges his nasal cavity crinkling as he takes a tentative bite. The disgust on his face turns to confusion. "it's different. what's...oh." He looks at you with wonder. "is this your magic?"

"You can tell?"

"course i can. it's very...you." He smiles almost blissfully, sitting up a little. He takes the bowl from you and starts eating the rest. "i just don't understand how you did it."

You join him on the bed, half expecting Gaster to summon his hands to explain. But he remains oddly quiet. "Gaster seems to think that the potential to use magic of my own has always been there. It's just been unlocked now. Though apparently it's barely enough to even heal a cut."

Sans frowns into the bowl. "thought i told him to put that stuff on hold til after this build-a-body stuff is over."

"I already chewed him out about it," you say, shrugging. "Does my magic make it taste any better?"

"nope. still tastes like crap. but it's like...." He seems to be struggling to find the right words. "it just feels better. i feel better already."

Relief makes you smile and you give him a smooch on his cheek. "I'm glad to hear it."

"now then." He takes a large exaggerated bite. "i'm eating. so talk. what happened? are you okay?"

The fear and anxiety over what's happened comes crashing back. You struggle to find the right words because you really don't want Sans to freak out either. The added tension is really not what he needs right now. "Do you remember what we talked about in the car? The dream I had?"

He nods.
"There was more to it."

His brow-bone shoots up.

"When I was there, talking to small you, you just suddenly disappeared. And then everything started shaking and glitching. It was like being inside a bad t.v signal or something. And then it was like the air just ripped. Y you make a motion with your hand, like you're slicing the space in front of you. "It looked almost like some kind of portal. And in it was just an empty darkness. It was more than just darkness though, it was...it was..." Your voice is catching in your throat so you stop and just breathe for a moment. "I think it was the Void. And there was something there. I couldn't see what it was. But I could feel that it was angry. It was coming after me and nothing was going to stop it from devouring me. And then you pulled me out and I thought it was just some dream. But then in the shop I saw another memory, like when I'm dreaming but so vivid and bright it was like I was there and then the air just snapped and that thing was there again and I just-just couldn't move! And then Gaster used some kind of magic to force the rip shut and I have no idea what he did or why this is happening or what that thing it-!"

Sans hand rests on yours. "breathe," he says softly. "you're safe now."

You nod a little frantically. He sets the mostly empty bowl aside and stares down at your Soul. His sockets darken. You follow his gaze but as usual, you can't see anything without your Soul being brought out into the open. "Is it bad?"

"it's...it's visibly changed," he murmurs. "but only a little. i guess it's not surprising after what happened last night."

"Sans, what is going on?" you ask desperately. "I thought that was just a nightmare. If Frisk hadn't seen it too I might have thought I was just going crazy." You laugh humorlessly. "Maybe it'd be better if I was."

"don't say that." Sans leans back against the headboard, forehead furrowed in thought. "it's gotta be dings' connection to the void. he mentioned it last night. when you wouldn't wake up. he said that you fell somewhere else. between the timelines or something."

You stare at him with wide eyes. So he thinks you actually traveled through time? "But I didn't actually go anywhere," you say slowly. "My body was still right there."

"but you weren't," he reminds you. "it's like when you were in the hospital. your form was there but what makes you you wasn't. monster's forms are made from magic and soul energy. it's possible that something similar happened to you. your own mind provided a form for you. a sort of monster body of your own."

It's a little hard to understand and comprehend. But then again, the simple fact that magic and monsters exist in the world now certainly puts the possibility that's what happened on the table. "So the you I saw was actually you." You can't help but smile a little. It wasn't just a memory you had intruded in to.

His mouth quirks up a little. "i guess so. i just wish i could remember."

"Maybe it's better that you don't. Change the course of history and all that."

"the time space continuum is complicated," he agrees.

"Can you imagine what our first meeting would have been like?" You laugh but now he's staring at the wall, clearly thinking hard about something. "Sans? You okay?"
He looks back at you, the lights of his sockets soft. "Sorry, just thinking. But that's not what we should be focusing on."

Right. The rip. The purple-eyed beast within. You shiver and he pulls you close. "Got any ideas on what that thing was?"

"I have a few but..." He sighs and seems to brace himself. "Dings? I'm sure you've been stewing on some theories."

Slowly, Gaster's hands reappear, hovering before the two of you. You look up at Sans and his face is completely devoid of any kind of emotion. That wall is up around his Soul and it hurts to see.

Gaster hesitates for a moment before signing slowly. I believe it is as you said Sans. My Soul is still connected to the Void. It would seem that the connection is growing stronger, which is what allowed her to slip into the timelines. But if she can go in, that also means that what is on the other side can come out. A two-way door, as it were.

"What exactly is in there that can come out?" You ask in alarm. "I thought you were alone in there."

There are many ghosts in the Void, he says and you can tell he's not talking about the monster sort of ghosts, like Mettaton's cousin. But I never saw anything on this scale in there. It is possible that it is some entire new entity; the Void is infinite after all. Even I never saw every corner.

"But?" Sans prompts dryly.

Gaster sighs in your head. But I don't believe that it is some random force. I recognized it. That rage and magical energy. It was...me.

Sans stiffens under you as you sit up slightly. "You? But you're here."

Not all of me, he says grimly both in your head and with his hands. The part of my Soul that is anchored to you is but a sliver. When I fell my Soul and body was scattered across the Void. It took countless years to gather enough of myself back together to regain coherent thought at all. It took even longer to create a form for myself with what remained of my body. The rest remained spread into infinite space. But now that I am here, anchored to a certain point in time, it is possible that it is giving the remains of my Soul direction, gathering them together. Then somehow, the pieces rejoined, probably inhabiting the form that I left behind. That is my theory anyway.

Pretty intense theory! It's actually rather impressive he's put all that together just from getting a glimpse of the thing. "So, the remaining bits of your Soul have gathered together into an angry, raging mess. And what, just randomly started ripping holes in reality?"

Gaster is quiet for a minute, thinking. You cannot understand how it felt to be trapped there. The desperation. The loneliness. The madness that eats at you every moment of your existence. Before I latched on to your Soul, I could not touch reality. I could see it, at times wander in it. But I was merely a spectator. This chance to escape from that place was my only hope. But now, if the connection between us and the Void is stronger than I thought, it is possible that weak chinks in the armor of the timeline have appeared. If that being were me, which I guess it must be, I would throw everything I have to make the crack bigger. Escape is the only thing that mattered to me in that place.
"sure sounds like you've got a pretty good idea of what's going on." Sans' left socket is beginning to flicker weakly with growing emotion. "kinda funny how this starts happening right after you drilled a hole in my brother's hand. makes the whole thing seem less important, doesn't it?"

Sans, I know you are angry with me, but to accuse me of having knowledge that this would happen-

"'m not accusing you of anything doc. simply pointing out a fact."

You're being ridiculous.

"nah, being ridiculous is haunting the soul of the love of my life. oh, after causing the deaths of several monsters and humans of course. can't forget that."

Gaster's hands are starting to twitch with irritation. We don't need to go over all of this again. There are more important things that need to be discussed.

"right. how about we talk about what you did to paps." Sans hasn't moved a single inch and yet his entire frame seems to grow slightly larger with his rage. "or about how you drugged me so i wouldn't stop you."

You weren't thinking straight. I gave you your chance to find another way.

Oh this should not be happening right now. You can feel his bones trembling slightly and heat radiates from his frame. "Sans, please not now," you says as gently as you can. "You shouldn't be getting worked up. What if you puke again?"

He inhales sharply, almost like he forgot you were there. He shrinks back, looking away. "not gonna puke again," he says sullenly. But even he seems to realize he got carried away because he gives your hand a quick squeeze. "fine. if that thing you guys saw is another version of you, can't you do something to stop it? tearing holes in reality can't be a good thing."

Gaster's hands shrug. I didn't even know it was happening until I saw it. Attempting to reach out for it and establish a stronger connection would probably not only result in failure, it made make our state much worse. I believe for the moment it is better to work as fast as we can. Once I am established in my own body I should be able to find a way to sever that connection. Because, yes, holes in reality are a very bad thing.

"Should we be more concerned about this?" you ask in alarm. "You know, panicked screaming, running, the whole thing?"

You feel his mental head shake. No. It is concerning but that tear in reality was very weak. Given that it was much smaller than what you saw while in the past, I can assume that it takes great amounts of energy to do it. We should have some time before the next one. But we need to pick up the speed. Even if Sans isn't recovered by tomorrow, we should at least check on the condition of the bone sample.

"Alphys is taking care of that. I'm not going into that lab again without Sans," you pout stubbornly. Unless Gaster forcibly takes over again of course. You don't say that out loud but you can tell that he gets the idea.

Fine. Gaster's hands fade away but he adds in your head, Sans will probably be up and around by tomorrow night if he eats more of that food. See that he keeps eating.
You nod curtly then sigh as you feel the wall go up in your head. You slump against Sans, groaning loudly. "Dear universe; what the crap?" you mumble and Sans chuckles. "This sucks-oh crap!"

"what?"

"I forgot to ask him how he shut the rip. I mean, I did see it. He just kind of-" You clap your hands together and act like you're smashing something "smushed the air back in place. It was weird."

He snorts. "smushed?"

"Oh shush you." You study him and he gives you a weak smile. "How are you really feeling?"

He shrugs, shutting his sockets. "i'm not puking, so that's a step up."

"Indeed." You fight the urge to close your eyes too. Your head is starting to hurt and your stomach is aching uncomfortably. It would be so nice to just fall asleep here with Sans. But he's managing to keep the oatmeal down and just that one bowl has already helped the flushed color on his skull to fade a little. He should eat some more before falling asleep again. At least it's already made up; you and Gaster made plenty. You groan and start to roll out of bed.

"no," Sans whines, tugging on your arm. "stay and be lazy with me. you make me feel better."

"That's sweet but I gotta pee," you say, giving him a smooch. "And you need to eat some more of that yummy oatmeal."

"noooo."

His groaning protest follows you as you head towards the bathroom. What a freaking day. You're still terrified of that thing you saw, but hopefully Gaster is right and it won't show up again until after he's out of your Soul. But you have a dreadful feeling that won't be the case.

Your stomach gives another twist as you do your business and at first you're worried that you're getting sick too but then-

Oh. Great.

The universe has simply wonderful timing.
I will not allow this to happen.

"Gaster."

I will not be finished off by a human illness, not after all the work we've done! Gaster's hands zoom around in a state of agitation. Or...could my calculations be wrong? We should have more time, your body should not be experiencing full break down, not yet!

"Gaster."

Why are you simply sitting there? He demands in a tone that you would almost call panicky. He seizes your wrist, attempting to pull you up. After all your talk about fighting against death, are you really going to roll over when it approaches?

"snrk."

"Sans, I swear if you don't stop giggling, I won't pick up more ketchup on my way home tonight."

"aw, babe c'mon. you're cramping my style."

"Period jokes are banned." You pause for a second. "Period."

Gaster slowly releases your wrist, confusion clearing away the panic as you and Sans wheeze with laughter. What's going on here?

You catch your breath, adjusting the heating bag pressed against your lower tummy. You couldn't let that chance to beat Sans at a joke off slip away, but your stomach is not appreciating the laughing fit. "I'm not dying," you say to Gaster. "Thanks for the concern."

But...then what is-

"This sensation of knives in my gut?" you drawl. You know from past experiences that when Gaster isn't the one 'in charge' he merely feels a shadow of strong sensations. Intense hunger. Throwing up. Cramps.

The fact that he's feeling a less intense version of your pain is simply irritating. "This is a simply wonderful human thing that a portion of the population has to endure," you sigh, shifting slightly. You can already tell what he's about to ask so you decide to just get it over it and steamroll forward. "The female body prepares itself to have a baby every few weeks except, whoops, most of us don't get pregnant, so the uterus throws a fit and we bleed out all that preparation for about five to seven days and then a few weeks later we get to do it all over again! So yes, that feeling of something in
your stomach being torn apart is actually happening. Isn't it great?"

Gaster takes a moment to process this. **This happens every few weeks?** he finally manages. **For how long?**

"Depends on the person, but usually between thirty and forty years."

"kinda surprised you don't know about this," Sans pipes in as Gaster makes a small noise of horror. Like he's some kind of expert. Explaining this stuff to him a few months back had certainly been almost as awkward as this, but way easier. You had just said 'that time of the month' and gave a brief explanation of what exactly that means and he left it at that.

**Why on earth would I care about female human reproductive structures?** Gaster snaps.

It takes everything you have not to say 'Betcha care now!'. "The point is, this is normal," you say instead. "It's always bad at first. I just need some painkillers and-"

"I HAVE BROUGHT YOUR HUMAN MEDICINE!" Papyrus announces, striding in with a glass of water and a small pill bottle.

He passes it to you and you gratefully swallow down a few of the small tablets. You should have taken them first thing when you woke this morning but the temptation to see just how much of this normal, human thing would effect Gaster was too much to pass up. His near panic and confusion over cramps is almost enough to make you feel a little better. "Thanks Pap," you say after chugging down the rest of the water.

Papyrus sits down on the couch between you and Sans. The motion jostles you and makes you groan quietly from the resulting stab of pain. Gaster's Soul flinches like he's been hit.

Are you positive-

"Yes, I'm sure I'm not dying but someone may if someone doesn't stop asking."

Papyrus pats you gingerly on the head. His hand is still bandaged up but he said it had stopped hurting, which is a good thing. "I AM SORRY THAT YOUR HUMAN STOMACH IS ACTING UP," Papyrus says almost solemnly. He of course, doesn't fully understand what is happening, nor do you have any intention of explaining it. "DO YOU REALLY HAVE TO GO TO WORK TODAY? NORMALLY THE GREAT PAPYRUS BELIEVES IN STICKING TO YOUR WORK NO MATTER WHAT! BUT YOUR FACE IS RATHER PALE AND I AM WORRIED."

You lean against Papyrus. "I wish I didn't have to Paps. But I'll be okay once the pills sink in. And I've missed too much work as it is. Besides, we're out of ketchup and now that mister lazy bones is getting his appetite back, it would be cruel not to restock."

Sans gives you a wide-socket look. "babe, you know i would totally go and get it myself but..." He tries to gesture to himself and completely fails because this entire time he has been completely engulfed by several blankets, thanks to the efforts of Papyrus. Even the top of his skull is covered so you can only see from his sockets to the top of his mouth. You had asked Paps to watch Sans while you went to work and make sure that he didn't push himself now that he's got a bit of his energy back. You weren't expecting the blanket confinement but Sans seems content snuggled in the warmth so it works for everyone. This also give Sans the chance to watch Papyrus and make sure he doesn't start putting too much pressure on his hand.
Man, you would think the two were related or something with the way they both seemed to ignore their problems.

"I know. You're a little tied up." You allow yourself just one more minute on the couch before getting to your feet, tossing the heavenly warmth of the heating bag to the side. A brief wave of dizziness makes you grit your teeth. The pain from your cycle isn't enough to leave you confined to your bed, as it has in the past, but it still hurts like crazy. Sans' eyes follow you as you hobble over to the coat rack on the wall and slip on his black faux fur lined jacket. It's slightly too big on you, just the way you like it.

"you sure you're gonna be okay?" he asks in concern when you huff quietly to yourself. "yanno you could just...not go today."

You give him a wide smile. "I'll be fine, as long as Gaster stops whining. You two just worry about recovering today. And Paps?"

Papyrus snaps to attention.

"Make sure Sans has plenty of that special oatmeal, okay?"

The taller brother smiles widely and gives you a salute while Sans groans loudly. "do i have to?"

You walk back over and smooth the top of his head through the blanket. "Yes. If I have to work with these cramps, you can eat your oddly colored oatmeal." You give Paps a quick smooch on his cheek too before heading out to your car. Of course once you get in the car, Gaster starts a barrage of questions, most of which is just him whining about how obnoxious this whole thing is. You ignore him as best as you can up until you get to the station. He continues grumbling while you check your face in the mirror.

The two lines on your face, usually faded and barely noticeable when Gaster isn't in control are starting to get darker. Even with heavy make-up on you can see them, like scars. You frown and pinch at them. You just have to hope that even if people do notice, they won't say anything.

Surely there must be a way to prevent such an unpleasant thing. Gaster is still talking to himself about women's cycles and you're just about ready to snap.

"Hey, we're here so pipe down. It's going to be a rough day as it is without your jabbering."

But is there or is there not a way to prevent this from happening? Gaster pushes. You humans have your Determination. There must be-

"Oh my-yes! There is, okay? It's called birth control. But I'm not on it and I'm done talking about this!" You slam your car door a little harder than necessary and storm into the station. Abby, at her usual spot, raises her eyebrows at your entrance. You reach her desk and slump your head down on it's surface. She gives you a pat.

"Anyone I need to sic Rocko on?" Rocko being her pet snake, which she apparently has brought to work on several occasions without anyone noticing. You have no idea how she pulled this off, especially given her tendency to wear clothing that showed off as much of her tattooed skin as possible, even in winter.

"Is he here?"

"No, but I can go get him."

She makes a long 'ohhhh," of understanding and a moment later a handful of chocolates hits the table in front of your face. "I got you girl."

**Chocolate?** Gaster's confused again.

You pop one in your mouth and smile at Abby. "You're the best."

"I know." She looks back down at her work, fingers flying across the keyboard as she continues chatting. "I'm in the mood for something greasy later. Want to hit Grillby's at lunch?"

Now there's a question you haven't heard in a while. It almost makes you a little sad. When was the last time you ate at Grillby's with Sans? With his university work piling on top of solving your Ghoster problem, he's been taking lunches at the school and only pausing to eat at all because of your insistence. And that's after your huge break from work to recover after your kidnapping. You don't mind eating alone of course, and now that you can understand Grillby's speech without sign language, you've started to talking to him more during your lunch as well. Turns out he's a lot more talkative when he can actually be understood. But it'll be nice to eat with Abby too. She's been on a recent health kick and had started bringing her lunch instead of eating out. Grillby's food, as yummy as it is, is known for its greasiness.

"Why the change of pace?" you ask as you gather up the rest of the chocolates.

"Sometimes a girl just needs a burger," she says with a shrug, still typing away. "Also you look like you need to vent. And not just because Aunt Flo's in town." Her eyes drift up briefly away from the screen to look at you. "And I'm super curious about those things on your face. They're not like any kind of tattoo I've ever seen and I'm pretty much an expert when it comes to that."

Crap. You bring your hand up, covering the line on your cheek. "When did you notice?"

"The day you came back to work. Your make-up skills need a little work. Also, you're on in five minutes."

You start, looking at the clock. Shoot, she's right. "We'll talk at lunch," you promise, despite the sinking feeling in your gut. You rush up to the booth and Gaster it seems has finally shut up about the period stuff because now he's contemplating what will happen at lunch. He's so loud in his thoughts that you're distracted all morning and very nearly make a few huge mistakes on air. Fortunately Sam, your now semi-permanent co-host covers for you more than once.

You never told Abby about the Ghoster hanging on your Soul. Why? Well...you don't really have a good answer for that. Not one that doesn't make you feel like garbage anyway. To be honest, Abby is the only one who still makes you feel a little normal. Her energy at work is endless and it's so easy to slip back into that frame of mind that you don't have a monster's Soul attached to yours. You can almost forget that your boyfriend is working himself ragged to save you from a fate just as bad as what Tod had in store for you. Telling her would mean shattering that illusion. And Abby herself would feel like she had let you down.

Gaster seems to guess what you're thinking. **Not so easy to be honest now that it's you, is it?**

You try not to react, focusing on your work while Sam gives the traffic report.

**What will you do? Lie to preserve what you have? Or will you hurt her?**

Well if that doesn't make up your mind-! "Of course I'm going to tell her," you hiss under your
"What was that?" Sam peeks around their laptop, looking at you with slight concern.

"Sorry, just thinking out loud," you say quickly, a blush rising on your face. You scowl at your hands after Sam goes back to work. How could Gaster compare lying to Sans about experimenting to this? It's not even close to the same thing. But...but could that be it? Was he trying to tell you in his own way he did was he did because he was scared? Not that being scared excuses it of course but...

Well it's certainly something to think about.

You finish up your morning as best as you can despite the dread of lunch and your still twisting gut. Abby is waiting for you in the lobby and you walk over to Grillby's together. She's just as cheerful as always and it sets your heart slightly at ease. Upon entering the bar the two of you are greeted by a swell of noise by the various monsters and humans on their lunch break. You head towards the only free space at the bar top, claiming the seats.

"Man, I am sick of veggie food!" Abby exclaims as she looks over the menu. Her eyes glint with glee as she contemplates what to order.

You tap your fingers against the menu. You already know what you want but you're not sure you're going to be able to eat it anyway. Your cramps are still pretty bad and the last thing you want to do is get sick. Gaster's reflected nausea isn't helping either. Maybe you'll just stick with a drink or something.

Grillby soon comes over and his flames spark in greeting. "Hello to the both of you," his soft voice crackles as he signs for Abby's sake. "What can I get you?"

Abby rather proudly sets the menu down. "I'll have your biggest burger with all the works and a chocolate milkshake."

He nods and looks at you.

No, you really should eat something. You'll pay for it later if you don't. You sigh and say, "I'll just have some cheesy fries and some water. If you'll touch the stuff."

The very faint traces of a smile appear on his face. It's hard to see his mouth at all set among the flames. Ordering a glass of water and asking if he'll touch the stuff has become a bit of a personal joke between you. He collects the menus, flames crackling quietly with his amusement and moves away and suddenly Abby is all business.

"So first things first, what is going on with those?" She points to the faded lines on your face, not quite touching them. "Does it have something to do with what Tod and those messed up scientists did to you?"

You stare down at the table, fighting the urge to wring your hands together. "All of that led to it in a wayward," you whisper.

Abby hesitates then sighs. "Look, all I know is that you didn't have them in the hospital and then the first day you came back to the station they were there. And you were trying to hide them. That's why I didn't ask about them before. But you're starting to look really worn down. I would have expected you to get...better. At least a little bit. Or at least, I didn't expect you to start looking worse." She rubs your shoulder. "If you really don't want to talk about it you don't have to, but I'm worried. Because it's clearly not a fashion statement."
"It's..." You hesitate because for some weird reason, blurt out 'Sans' long lost dad is the one that saved me when I got shot and now his Soul is stuck to mine' seems a little too blunt. "It's really complicated Abby. Like, beyond weirdly complicated."

"You're dating a skeleton," she points out. "Which is super cool by the way, not weird. I think complicated just comes with the territory."

"You've got that right," you mumble.

**You're putting it off.**

*Shut up,* you snap back at him, actually managing to keep it in just your thoughts this time.

"Ah!" Abby suddenly exclaims, making you jump. "There's another thing!"

"Another what?" you ask, fighting back another groan as your stomach protests the sudden movement.

Abby points an accusing finger in your face. "You keep spacing out like you're listening to something only you can hear."

"Everyone spaces out."

She shakes her head stubbornly. "Not like you do. Recently at least. You make faces, like you did just now. Now that is weird."

A little laugh escapes you. Then again, maybe bluntness is the way to go with Abby. "Okay. Yeah, you're right. There is-"

You stop as Grillby approaches the two of you, a tray balanced on one bright hand. He starts setting your food down, looking at you. As it always does when Grillby stands in front of you, something stirs inside Gaster's Soul, filling your own with a terrible sadness and nostalgia. Your already tender emotions, thanks to the pain in your belly start to overwhelm you. You blink harshly, shaking your head a little.

"Are you all right?" Grillby pauses in setting down your glass of water. "You do not look like you feel well."

Both you and Gaster laugh in unison. **You have no idea.**

The flames on Grillby's head flash and crack loudly before you finish speaking and in the same moment the glass of water slips from his hand. It smashes against the counter, shattering. Water and glass shards go flying. Grillby flinches back as several drops land on his unprotected hand. A great hiss of pain escapes him as steam rises from the surface of his fiery skin. You stand in alarm, reaching out without thinking. "Grillby! Are you okay?"

He doesn't answer as his flames continue to flare brightly. His hand alone is a little dim, still smoking slightly. Instead he just stares at you, perfectly frozen but for his flames. You turn to Abby, **Abby! Call Sans we need....** You trail off as you realize she's staring at you too, eyes wide with shock.

"Abby?"

She visibly swallows and stutters, "Girl you...what are you saying?"

"What am I saying?" You gesture towards Grillby with confusion. **What are you saying? He's**
hurt!" The confusion only grows as you realize there is no comprehension in her face. It's almost like she literally doesn't...understand...

Oh no.

Your hands fly up to your throat. "I...what is..." Now that you're aware of it, it suddenly becomes clear. You're not speaking English. Gaster's strange language of sound is pouring from your mouth and you hadn't even realized it. But it's different somehow. Less harsh and it doesn't hurt your throat at all. Panic surges up your chest and it makes you choke. You start coughing harshly and Abby stands up next to you, bracing you and helping you to sit down. She pushes her milkshake towards you and you gratefully sip at the cold drink. It doesn't help much but eventually you stop coughing. As you get your breath back you become aware that the entire bar has gone silent. You look around and the other patrons sheepishly return to their food, speaking in hushed tones. You turn back to the bar, still too freaked out to be embarrassed at causing a scene. What on earth was that? You didn't even realize you had slipped into Gaster's langue. For that matter...

Gaster is silent but he too is clearly freaked out. His mind is racing, almost to the point of buzzing. You decide to let him figure out what just happened and focus on trying to breathe.

"Are you okay?" Abby asks, her eyes still perfectly round.

Your jaw trembles as you slowly force yourself to speak again. "I...I don't..." More of the same language comes out. You try desperately to speak like normal and it's there, there words are right there! But something in your throat or maybe your head simply won't let anything but the sharp sounds of Gaster's language pass. Your voice hitches. "N-no I don't think I am."

Grillby slowly lowers his hand. Composure regained, his flames calm. He gestures towards the door behind the bar with his uninjured hand. "Come to the back. I have a couch you can calm down on."

"Okay," you whisper. "I'm sorry."

"It was my own fault," Grillby says kindly.

You realize suddenly that Grillby seems to be responding directly to what you're saying, despite the inhuman words. "Grillby you...can understand me?"

He hesitates and then nods. "Elementals are beings that speak without words," he finally says. "There are many manners of speech I understand, even if I do not speak the same way."

You have a feeling that's not the only reason he can understand you right now. Papyrus had understood Gaster's strange way of talking, even without remembering who he was. If Gaster and Grillby were as close as you suspect, it would make sense that Grillby would hold on to that same knowledge, even if the memory of why he has it is gone.

Poor Abby on the other hand is completely lost. She looks between you and Grillby in bewilderment but she seems to get it when you stand back up and make your way around the bar top. The two of you follow Grillby into the back area, passing by a kitchen with two bunny monsters and a much smaller fire elemental (Heats Flamesman or something like that) and enter a smaller area that's more of a large closet turned break room. There's a worn couch with a few scorch marks on it and the several boxes stacked up around it. The whole room smells like a campfire.

Grillby excuses himself so he can clean up the broken glass and quickly heads back. You sit down on the couch with Abby, your heart still racing. The seriousness of what's happening is hitting you hard. What happened? Are you going to be stuck talking like this?
"I'm going to take a wild stab in the dark and guess this has something to do with the lines on your face?" Abby asks nervously. Her eyes narrow and then her frown deepens. "They're darker now."

Of course they are. You fish in your purse for a small pocket mirror and examine your skin. She's right. The lines have indeed grown darker, but not by too much. "Gaster?" you say out loud.

"Thoughts?"

To your complete horror, your own voice answers back but it's not you talking. It's still very much you in charge at the moment and never before has Gaster been able to speak without taking over. "I believe...oh." Gaster too is taken off guard and it takes him a moment to start talking again. "I think that moment of unity we had, when Grillby said we did not look well, triggered some sort of response in our Souls. They've...merged a little bit more."

"And how do we fix it?" You have to be able to fix this. How can you go back to work talking like this? You can't be...stuck like this, right?

"I don't...I don't know."

You can't stop a harsh gasp at that. You clutch at your shirt, fighting not to dive into a full panic attack. Abby says your name cautiously, still looking very concerned. You sign, 'I'm okay' before closing your eyes. Panicking won't help. You have to think. He said the Souls merged. You can almost feel it. That extra weight that you've been carrying in your chest is a little heavier, and not as painfully awkward as it's been since Gaster made the connection. You've always been able to feel the difference between your Souls. But now that rough edge is almost gone and it's difficult to tell where your Soul ends and his begins.

No. If you let your mind go blank, you can feel your Soul, just yours, pulsing with life. It's hidden...but it's still there.

It's still you.

You have to remember what makes you, you. You are not Gaster. You are not an experiment or a captive. You are the one Sans loves and the human who loves him back. You are a dance-in-the-kitchen girl who loves music. You are scarred and glued back together through your own determination. You are a survivor and so completely human in your passion.

But surrounding that spark that is you is something far older and filled with unbearable grief and pain. You've felt this before but never on such a level. This must be Gaster, woven among the sparks of your own Soul. He is so completely different from Sans and yet there is an undeniable connection between the two. They are the same on a level you can barely comprehend. That knowledge is seeped with both a great sorrow and an unspeakable joy.

You reach for it, very gently pulling that great presence away from your spark and it comes slowly but willingly. It doesn't let go completely but you can feel the weight in your chest easing, your breathing returning to normal. When you open your eyes, you find that Grillby has returned and both he and Abby are watching you. Abby looks like she's about to cry.

"Well...that was scary," you croak and thank heavens, it's just your voice speaking normally. You quickly look at Grillby's hand; it looks normal and bright once again. "Is your hand okay?"

There's that telltale pop from his flames that betrays when he finds something funny. "I am just fine," he says softly. "You should be more concerned about yourself."

You shrug, smiling weakly. "Yeah, I've been told that before."
It seems Abby finally can't take anymore. "Oh my God, girl, what just happened?" she shrieks. "That was beyond freaky!"

I would agree with that, Gaster adds tiredly.

Well, at least now you don't have to prove your story. You take a breath and look straight at Grillby. "Okay. The short version of it is, there's a monster hanging on my Soul right at this very moment. His name is W.D. Gaster."

Grillby makes no visible reaction to the name and you feel a heavy wave of disappointment from Gaster's Soul.

Well, you can't stop now. You tell them exactly what's going on. You tell them about Gaster saving your life and hitching a ride back on your Soul and the current problem of trying to build Gaster a body. Grillby's flames flare up slightly and darken when you talk about how Gaster is currently clinging to your Soul.

"I suppose that does explain what I felt before," he murmurs almost to himself. "There was something...off about your Soul during my healing. I couldn't place it."

Abby continues to stare at you in complete shock. "Oh. Okay. Okay. So you've had a ghost balloon-"

Oh not her too!

"-hanging onto your Soul for the past couple of weeks and you're just now bringing it up?"

You lift your hands helplessly. "There was so much going on, I just-"

"I would think this takes top priority!" she snaps back. Oh, she's upset, just like you thought she would be.

You fight not to shrink back but you do look down at your feet. "I'm sorry," you say pathetically. "I just...wanted things to go back to normal. So much of my life is crazy and it's not bad but...at work at least I could feel like I had some control over what's happening."

The scowl on Abby's face fades. She leans over and wraps you in a tight hug. "You're such a dummy. I wouldn't have treated you differently because you're being haunted."

Gaster sighs with great suffering.

"And I'm not going to treat you differently now," she adds, squeezing you. "I'm here for you, okay? I may not be a monster but I can still help."

You eyes are starting to water and you hug her back. "Thank you Abby," you whisper. After a few moments you pull away and wipe at your face before looking at Grillby. "There's something else," you say slowly. "Gaster wasn't always in that Void place. He used to be here, in the underground with all the other monsters."

What are you doing?

You press on. "He was the Royal Scientist. He fought in the war before the barrier went up. But nobody remembers him because of the accident that sent him to the Void in the first place."

Grillby has gone still again, the only sign of his unease the dimming flames on his head.
"You understood that strange language coming from me. Have you ever heard it before?"

Slowly, he shakes his head but his glowing eyes are tight.

**Stop it!** Gaster snaps, making you wince. **I told you I didn't want to speak to him like this.**

The cat's already out of the bag about Gaster being here. And you're sick of feeling Gaster's longing to talk to Grillby every time you come in here. If you have to push their reunion to get Gaster to finally let go of some of that regret, then that's what you'll do. "The two of you were friends," you say, raising your voice slightly over Gaster's protests. "He's told me about the time you spent together. He's wanted to talk to you for a long time, even though he's acting like a kid about the whole thing."

**I am not-!**

"We were friends?" Grillby's soft crackling voice unknowingly cuts off Gaster. He still hasn't moved but now he's frowning.

You falter. You weren't expecting jumping up and down joy, not from Grillby, but he doesn't sound even remotely happy or even confused. In fact, he almost sounds angry. Well, Grillby's version of angry anyway. You've never really seen him go above a stony silence and cold stare. There's no way you would want to see him angry beyond that. "I'm sorry, I know this is really weird," you mutter.

"This monster who is clearly causing you grief, was my friend?" He folds his arms and you can feel the heat radiating from his body increasing a little.

"Well...I mean...."

"Is there a way to speak with him?"

Gaster balks. **I...I can't speak with him,** he says almost desperately to you. **Not right now.**

Grillby is still staring you down and Abby is very awkwardly attempting to shift out of his line of sight. Okay, maybe this was a mistake. You fumble over your words, "There...I-"

Your phone suddenly rings loudly, making you and Abby jump. You quickly grab it and see that you've got a stream of texts from Alphys. You also see that you are supposed to be back on the air in about three minutes. "Oh crap! Abby, we've gotta go!" You take her arm and pull her out, calling over your shoulder. "I'm sorry Grillby! I'll make him talk to you later, I promise!"

Grillby watches you leave, his flames crackling loudly behind you.

You and Abby sprint back to the studio. You manage to make it just in the nick of time and you have to fight to hide your breathlessness. Of all the powers you could have gotten from Sans, why wasn't it teleportation? Then you wouldn't have to worry about this kind of stuff. Once things settle down, you allow yourself to think over what happened. This has to be one of the first major signs of your body breaking down. You're terrified that the next time this happens, you won't be able to reclaim your voice. You're running out of time. Which reminds you. You dig your phone out of your purse, realizing in your haste to get back to the studio you hadn't checked your messages.

Al: Hey, I know that Sans still isn't feeling well and you wanted him to rest but

Al: I checked out the bone sample

Al: sorry if you didn't want me to mess with it
Al: God, I should've asked

Al: But anyway I think it's ready for magic injections

Al: Just...just so you know.
Happy Holidays everyone! There probably won't be another update until after Christmas or possibly New Year's. So here's a nice long update for you guys!

I Write and Draw Here
Main Blog Here

Sans makes no verbal response when you get home and tell him about what happened. Instead, he simply buries his skull in the crook of your neck and breathes deeply for several long minutes. You rub his head, relieved to find that his bones are back to their semi-cool state.

"Did you eat your oatmeal?" you finally ask.

"too much of it."

"Did Alphys message you?"

He hums quietly in affirmation. "paps wouldn't let me go over there til you got back."

"Good. But I think we should give you one more night to recover. You're going to need your magic for the next step, right? We can go over in the morning."

"...fine." It's barely a breath against your skin.

You try to angle yourself to get a better look at him. "Are you okay?"

"am i ok?" He lets out a harsh bark of laughter and only clings to you tighter. "am i...babe you-you lost your voice, you nearly...i dunno, fused with the ghost of my dad today and you're asking if i'm ok?" His voice is light and hovering on the edge of full on laughter, but you don't have to see his face to know his sockets are pitch black. "how are you so calm?"

Where on earth is this coming from? "Sans-"

He shifts suddenly, stretching out over the rest of the couch. He nuzzles his head against your stomach, keeping his face angled away from you. "so grillbz and abby know now, huh?"

You frown at him because he's clearly trying to distract you. "Yeah, I couldn't really not explain after what happened."

"i guess so." His voice is muffled thanks to how hard he's pressing his face against your tummy. "i didn't think so many people would know about all this. it kinda goes against my secretive nature."

He's got a point; Paps, Frisk and Toriel knowing makes sense because living with them would have led to it be discovered anyway, Alphys is helping so it's a given that Undyne would know and you're pretty sure a few of the students at the university have put the pieces together but you're also sure that
Sans has paid each one of them a visit about keeping their mouth shut so you don't have to worry about that. You sigh. "Ha, yeah I guess just about everyone...oh!" You put your hand over your mouth as you suddenly realize there is one person that you never told. "Asgore! We never told him about all of this."

He snorts, finally relaxing a little. "so?"

You whack him gently. "So! Don't you think the king of monsters should be told his old Royal Scientist is back from the Void?"

"yeah, totally. i'll get right on that," he practically purrs without moving.

"...You have no intention of telling him, do you?"

He tilts his head and gives you a small grin. "are you going to?"

Yes! You try to say but...oh crap, you really don't want to either. The idea of talking to Asgore about all of this is hugely unappealing. Telling him about Gaster at this point will just lead to more complications. You blow a raspberry with your lips before slumping against the cushion. "Okay fine. I'd rather not tell him either."

Sans snickers, tickling your sides lightly. You fight back a squeal and pin his arms down. The lights have finally come back into his sockets and the smile he gives you is a little more genuine. "hey, maybe we should have a party when this is over. the gaster squad only. dings isn't invited."

What a tragedy, Gaster drawls.

You hum thoughtfully, tapping your fingers against Sans' skull. A party could be fun. "That house with the roof deck has a pretty decent backyard," you say, feeling excitement rising in your chest. "We could totally throw a house party when we move in! Grill some burgers, maybe get the others to help paint over that awful green paint job in the living room."

You haven't even visited the house in person. Gaster points out. You seem pretty confident that's the one you want.

"I'm trusting my instinct on this one. I think it's the place for us." As you start picturing a party at that house, you also start to wonder; what exactly does Gaster plan to do after all of this? Monster kind is free; all of his work on bringing down the barrier is now useless. You try to picture him in an apron flipping burgers on a grill and you nearly choke on your restrained laughter.

"what?" Sans asks curiously. "is he whining about not being invited to the party? cause i'll let him look at all the pictures of how much fun it was without him afterwards."

"You're terrible. No, I was just wondering what his plans are exactly. You know, what he's going to do after this is over. Hopefully not plan the downfall of humanity like Tod was. Or things are going to get really awkward. So Ghoster, care to enlighten us on what your future plans are?"

Gaster's hands slowly appear and Sans turns his head just enough to stare them down. Gaster's hesitating and that starts to make you nervous. He's not actually planning something like that, is he? You've already stopped one plan to start a war between monsters and humans. You'd really rather not have to go through something like that again.

No, no you can feel in his Soul that he actually is at a loss. I guess...I guess I will just try to reclaim my life, he signs slowly. Not that there is much to reclaim. All of my work is gone. Hopelessness
starts to seep from his presence in your mind. **My place in this world is gone. I...I don't know what I'm going to do.**

Sans doesn't say a thing. He doesn't seem to even be breathing. You're struggling to find something to say, because dammit, you shouldn't be feeling bad for Gaster, not after what he's done but you are. You can't help but feel for him when you've seen a glimpse of what the Void is like. Whatever he's done, whatever happened in the past, no one should have to endure living in such a place. Being erased from existence itself surely must be more punishment than what was deserved. Because at the end of the day, you can feel that Gaster knows he's made mistakes. He is sorry for them, even if he won't say it himself.

"You know," you say softly, praying that Sans doesn't get upset with what you're about to say. "Maybe a fresh start is what you need. Maybe you should step away from science for a while. The world has changed. You could take a walk, meet some new people. Build a new life."

He laughs dryly. **You say that like it's so easy.**

"Well it won't be with that attitude." You return with an equally snippy tone.

**Being erased from the world doesn't change what happened. There is no clean slate for me.**

You open your mouth to reply when you suddenly feel Sans shift against you. He turns his skull back into your stomach so that he isn't looking at Gaster's hands. "that...doesn't mean a new future isn't possible," he whispers and Gaster's Soul sparks with surprise. You too look at your boyfriend with open shock.

"i never thought a real future was possible for me," Sans continues, speaking into your stomach. "not after everything that i did. i let those mistakes and choices hang over me because i thought that was all there was to me. mistakes and failures. it took finding someone who acknowledging what i've done, everything i've done, and still somehow finding it in their soul to love me to finally forgive myself."

"Sans-"

"i'm not forgiving you," he mutters to Gaster. "not yet. but i forgave the kid after everything they did. maybe one day...." He voice trails off before he collects himself. "anyway. if someone like me can find happiness then maybe you can too. somewhere in there is the guy who raised me and pap. somewhere in there is the guy who truly wanted to help people. that guy is a monster who might be able to earn another chance."

You can feel your heart swelling with emotion but you don't say anything because you don't want to ruin this moment.

Sans sits up and keeps his face angled away. He slowly stands and starts shuffling towards your room. He pauses in the hallway and takes a breath so deep it sounds like he's trying to inhale all the air in the room. He releases the breath before looking back at you and Gaster. The lights of his eyes are small but bright. "heh, who knows. maybe i'll even change my mind about inviting you to the party."

Gaster's hands vanish from sight as Sans walks away. After a brief moment, you feel something wet creep down from you eye. You touch your fingers against the single tear on your face and smile because this one tear is a sign that the armor Gaster has kept around his emotions is finally starting to crack.
There's so much noise in his head. It makes it hard to think.

Endless noise.

Shut up, shut up, shut-!

"dings?"

The scientist jumps, caught off guard by the voice at his side. He rubs at his face, forcing himself to breath normally. "What is it Sans?"

The small skeleton observes him with infuriating concern. "i know you wanna see the stars but maybe now's not the best time to space out?"

His jokes, usually enough to at least lift his spirits a little only makes the scientist grit his teeth. He fixes his gaze back on the machine in front of him. The numbers listed on the board swim and blur as the noise continues to grow in his skull. He blinks several times to clear his vision. These numbers are still wrong, wrong, wrong!

Sans taps a pen against his teeth, frowning slightly. "the balance of elements in the core center are still unstable," he says grimly. "looks like the coolant tests are only making the power fluctuate."

"Obviously," the scientist snaps. His sharp tone, usually enough to make his regular assistants tense up and move away only makes Sans flash his usual blank smile. A sense of guilt grips him and he shakes his head. "i apologize," he mutters, putting a hand on his head. "I'm just...frustrated that we keep meeting the same dead ends over and over again."

"maybe you need to rest dings. though i know you think sleeping is a crime against nature."

"It is only a crime when one sleeps as much as you do," the scientist returns, forcing himself to smile a little.

Sans shrugs, his smile easing a little into a more genuine look. "the blaster tests are really taking it outta me. i'm not as adapted to calling them as you and paps are."

A shame really, that his first project struggles in such a way. Blue magic had come easily to him, after the melting incident of course. But maybe with more doses of DT and-

The scientist starts, alarmed at the direction his thoughts had drifted. No, he had given up on that. No more unethical experiments on his projects. On his children. No more of that.

No...more....but maybe....

"dings?"

The call sounds far away and dimly the scientist hears himself respond. "I shall rest after I take another look at the Core center."

"dings you spend way too much time in there as it is. the magic of the core can't be good for you. it's unstable. dangerous."

A laugh builds in his chest and he smiles widely, pushing aside the flash of alarm that is drowned out by the noise in his head. "science is dangerous sans. we can't let that stop us."
Sans reaches out, touches his arm and the scientist draws away because if he doesn't he knows that he will lash out and he swore he would never hit Sans again. He promised his child he wouldn't hurt him again.

Promises. What are promises but empty words that stand in the way of progress?

You head over to the university with Sans first thing in the morning, the dream from last night swirling in your head. Trying to make sense of it only makes you tense and welcomes in a headache so for now you put it aside. It's just a memory. And better still, there was no sign of the Void-Gaster ripping his way into the world. It was just a look into the past. So worrying about it is pointless. There are more important things to do right now. You and Sans head into the lab and Sans doesn't hesitate before striding over to the jar of gel-like liquid that contains the bone from Papyrus' hand. Seeing again makes your stomach twist.

"Are you okay?" you ask Sans as he stops and stares at the jar. "I can do it if you don't want to."

His left socket flickers briefly but then it's gone and he's steeled himself. "it's ok," he says, giving you a reassuring smile. "it's just bone now. it's not paps. just bone."

You take his hand, squeezing it tightly. "Sans, before we get started, I want to ask you about what you said last night."

He gives you a long look before shrugging. "didn't think i had it in me to even talk about forgiving him, huh?"

"It's not that...I mean, okay. You really did surprise me," you admit. "You have every right to be angry with him. I just thought healing those wounds would take...longer."

He laughs dryly. "they're not healed babe. not at all." He sighs and looks back at the jar. "it's just something paps said while you were at work. he was trying to get me to eat more of that nasty oatmeal and he was just going on about how happy he is that we're all back together as a family. i was getting kinda pissed off again because the whole time he's talking i couldn't stop staring at his hand and thinking about how i should've stopped it. then you know what he said when he saw me staring at it? 'all wounds heal with time'. and that got me thinking, even after all the crap he put me through when i was a baby bones, dings made an effort to make things better. he knew i might not forgive him and he still tried. he gave me paps. he taught me how to understand my magic, instead of forcing it on me. he told me jokes and pulled pranks on us. and after a while it was like that bad stuff happened to a different sans. all the experiments were performed by a different dings. at least...until...."

The dream memory from last night flashes through your head. "Until he changed again."

A brief flare from Gaster's Soul has you gritting you teeth but he remains silent.

"yeah," Sans continues, not noticing your flinch because he's still staring at the bone shard like he can make it disappear by the sheer force of his gaze. "and that's a whole other thing. point it, it ended because of me and the guilt of gaster falling into the core hung over me for years. everything that happened after that only made it worse. the only thing that was solid in the changing timeline is that it was because of me he no longer existed." Sans' voice is starting to sound strained so you wrap your arms around him.

"Some things were just out of your control," you say softly.
His bones tremble under your arms. "you know what made me finally start to forgive myself?"

"What?"

"you." He turns in your arms so that you're facing each other. His sockets are half closed in an almost sleepy way and he stares intensely at you, making you blush. "you taught me that time does heal wounds. you went through so much and came out strong. you never forgot or even forgave yourself for what happened to your grandpa. but you let yourself build a future regardless. i guess i forgot about that until paps reminded me." He places his forehead against yours and the cool touch of his bones feels heavenly against your hot skin. "i don't have to forgive dings. not yet and not for everything. but i can try and understand him. i can accept that he acted out of desperation from things he couldn't control. and the guy who brought paps to me does deserve some kind of future. i'm choosing to hope that that's the guy we're saving."

You can't hold yourself back from pressing a deep kiss against his teeth. You've missed this. You've missed him so much. He's been so stressed, so terrified of losing you and his father all over again that it's come close to consuming him. He's literally worked himself nearly to death and it's worn him down to raw emotions. You've never stopped loving him through all of this and he's never stopped loving you but you have missed his hope and the sparkle in his sockets that you're seeing right now. You kiss him until you run out of breath. Gasping, you meet his eyes again and whisper, "I am so proud of you."

He smiles widely before leaning back in to whisper in your ear. "but...there's still something i'm not changing my mind on."

"And what's that?"

"dings still isn't invited to our gaster-going-away party."

The snort that escapes you is highly undignified and you dissolve into giggles as Sans steps back, looking far too pleased with himself.

Yep, he's back all right.

Sans takes the jar and brings it over to the main desk and you trail after him, still laughing quietly to yourself, more out of relief than anything. He peers at it, slipping into scientist mode. Alphys has left some notes and he starts flipping through them. "density is holding, that's good. dust collections at five point six percent, we can work with that."

May I take over? Gaster asks softly and you step back because now you're going into unfamiliar scientific territory. You shiver as Gaster takes the reins and the world goes slightly fuzzy. "What is the concentration level of the containment fluid?"

Sans looks up, his sockets darting to your Soul as usual before answering Gaster. "it was at eighty three when al last checked but it's probably dropped since then. reader's in the cabinet."

Gaster nods and walks over to a cabinet filled with the various tools he and Sans have put together over the last little while. He grabs a thin stick like thing that rather remarkably looks like a sonic screwdriver. You laugh to yourself a little before asking, So, what happens now?

"We need to separate the bone into two pieces, in the event something goes wrong, and inject one with a DT and magic mixture. Of course, if something goes wrong there won't be time to fix it anyway." He gestures over to the larger tank. "The injections will make the bone grow and shape into a full skeletal body over a period of time. One injection a day with stronger doses."
How do we make sure that another consciousness doesn't form while the body grows? You press. That's how Sans and Papyrus were made, right? It kinda defeats the point of this whole thing if the body becomes an actual person.

Gaster sets the reader on the table and Sans unscrews the lid to the jar. He dips the instrument in and after a moment it beeps. "It's dropped to seventy-eight," he tells Sans before answering. "When I made Sans and Papyrus, I also injected slivers from my own Soul. It was a very messy, very complicated process and the one ray of light in this whole mess we're in is that I don't have to do that this time."

"so we grow the body and then drop him in it. like a rock in a well," Sans adds as he jots down a few more notes. "since the bone came from a living skeleton monster it should naturally want to go back to a similar state. it's kinda like mold."

Gaster snorts. "So first I'm a ghost balloon and now I'm a rock?"

You can already see what's coming as Sans' face splits into a massive grin. "look at yourself dings; i'd say you've hit rock bottom."

"Ha! You do your own silent cackling laugh in your head while Gaster presses your hand up against your mouth to hide his own grin. It's not that funny of a joke but you can't stop laughing and soon Gaster is caught in your own mirth. He starts laughing out loud and it's beyond bizarre to hear your own voice laughing in a way that isn't your own. Sans' sockets stretch wide.

Gaster suddenly catches himself and cuts off your laugh. You can feel your face growing a little warmer from his embarrassment as he clears your throat. "A-anyway, let's get started. We need to find the right saturation for the DT mixture."

Sans snickers pulling on some rubber gloves. "geez dings, looks like we're off to a rocky start."

"Oh don't you dare start!"

"you know sometimes i think you take me for granite. maybe you just need to relax. i think al has a rocking chair in her office."

Gaster folds your arms. "I think, perhaps that you are the one who should make like a mountain and get over it."

Sans' socket's gleam brightly and he presses his sleeve against his mouth to muffle his laughter. After a moment though you notice his gaze drifts and he suddenly stops giggling. He looks a little puzzled. "grillbz? what're you doing here?"

Gaster jumps and spins around. Grillby is standing in the doorway. Gaster had been laughing so hard you didn't hear him come in. He's not wearing his usual bartender outfit but rather fashionable jeans and a black sweater, making his flames seem even brighter. It's a look you've never seen on him before but he definitely pulls it off.

Gaster is standing in the doorway. Grillby had been laughing so hard you didn't hear him come in. He's not wearing his usual bartender outfit but rather fashionable jeans and a black sweater, making his flames seem even brighter. It's a look you've never seen on him before but he definitely pulls it off. But what is he doing here? Why would he come all the way...oh.

He's staring right you. Or rather, right at Gaster. Gaster's Soul is fluttering into a near panic. Sans looks back and forth between the two of you before giving Grillby a wide smile.

"hey grillbz. here to collect on my tab? cause i'll be honest i'm kinda tied up at the moment so if you could just-"

"I'm not here about that," Grillby crackles firmly. He steps further into the room, heading towards
you and Gaster. Gaster's frozen, his thoughts frantically searching for something to say, a solution to
get him out of this. Grillby's gaze is very intense and you find yourself almost shrinking away
yourself. "I assume you are the doctor."

"I-yes." Gaster clears your throat. "I am W.D Gaster."

"So I've been told." Oh he doesn't sound happy. "May I speak with you for a moment?"

Gaster looks almost helplessly back at Sans, who just grins and waves a hand. "go ahead. i'll start
prepping the dt."

So with no help from Sans, Gaster has no choice but to follow Grillby out into the hall. The hall itself
is empty since most of the classrooms are placed on the other side of the building, thanks to the
various noises that sometimes ring from the lab. Grillby makes sure the doors are shut before turning
back to you and Gaster. "Is she okay?" Grillby asks, his flames dimming slightly in concern.

Gaster nods, not quite able to keep eye contact with the fire elemental. "She is fine. She can still
hear us."

"I see. This is all...very strange." Grillby folds his arms and even though you can't see his mouth, you
can tell he's frowning. "I won't pretend to understand what's going on. But I need to know that my
favorite patron will be all right."

"We're working very hard to make sure that she will be," Gaster answers quickly. "Please rest
assured that is the top priority. Now, if you'll excuse me." Gaster turns to escape back into the lab
when-

"I'm supposed to know you, aren't I?"

Gaster stops in his tracks, his Soul clenching.

Grillby continues, the flames of his head a quiet murmur against his voice. "She told me I knew you.
That we were friends once. Is that true?"

Your hands are starting to shake. Gaster finally whispers, "Yes. We were...close once. It was a
very long time ago."

"Why didn't you talk to me earlier?"

Gaster barks out a laugh and finally turns around. "Talk to you while I am like this?" He gestures
to your body and you try not to be offended. "This is not the reunion I wanted. How could you
accept me while I am merely a parasite living inside of a human body? Besides we...we did not
part on good terms. I was...I was..."

Scared. The word echoes in your mind but Gaster can't seem to say it. He slumps a little.

"It doesn't matter anyway. You don't remember me. Just like everyone else." He starts to turn
away again. "I'm sorry I cannot give you more Grillby. Not right now. There is too much work
to be done."

"Wing Dings."

The shock that runs through you is like fire. "What...what did you say?"
Grillby finally unfolds his arms and his flames grow brighter. "I never knew where it came from. That name. And a terrible feeling that I had lost something. I felt it in the strangest places. Every time I looked at your sons I felt it too. A gesture Papyrus made or a certain phrase from Sans and that name was ringing in my head like it was demanding to be remembered. At times I thought I was going crazy."

Gaster can't speak but he's staring at Grillby as a desperate hope starts to rise in your chest.

"When my...when my partner fell down and passed, I felt no greater pain. But that night when I felt as if my very embers were about to be extinguished, I finally heard more than just the name." Grillby points to his throat. "When _____ spoke those inhuman words in the bar it wasn't the strangeness of them that startled me. It was the shock of hearing that language again. I only remember hearing them that night but back then, I could not understand them. It was like...the voice was coming from behind a wall. It was muffled and distorted. But I could tell it was trying to comfort me."

"You heard me." Gaster's voice breaks. "That night you...you heard me!"

"It was you," Grillby breathes, his flames snapping loudly. "I knew it couldn't be her, I could feel that it was something else. Someone else. I didn't remember you, but at the same time, I knew your voice. I think once...you were very important to me." Grillby steps forward and Gaster still can't move, he's frozen to the spot, watching as the fire elemental bathes you in the light from his flame.

"I'm sorry," Gaster finally manages to say. "Grillby, I didn't come to you when you wife passed. Not the first time. It was...is one of my biggest regrets. When I was...lost in that place, time didn't mean much. I went back to that night because my regrets would not allow me to rest and this whole time I thought my efforts were in vain." He stops, takes a breath and looks down at the floor. "I should have been there for you and I wasn't and I'm sorry."

Even if you had control of your own voice you would be speechless. Gaster is apologizing, really and truly apologizing!

Grillby is silent, watching Gaster as he struggles to keep his composure. "Doctor Gaster," he finally murmurs. "I may not remember our friendship or the way that we parted. I may be very cross with you about putting Sans and ____ into this situation. But if you promise me that you will fix this, and give them their lives back, I would be willing to start over. Does that sound all right to you?" He holds his hand out to you and Gaster, the skin shimmering like blinding embers of a fire.

Gaster chokes on something that just might be a sob. He straightens and lets a smile lift your face as he grasps Grillby's hand. The handshake is pleasantly warm and sends a wave of energy up your arm. "Yes. Yes that sounds agreeable."

"Well then." You see the briefest flash of a smile on Grillby's face. "I am Grillby. It is nice to meet you again, Doctor Gaster."

"You as well. Grillby."
In Which You Are Igor

Chapter Summary

I did some art over the holidays
A New Year Pupper
Ghoster Is Disgusted. And There's A Snake

Gaster is humming. Sans keeps his gaze focused on the DT mixture in front of him but he can't stop himself from listening to the quiet song. It's always the same one, that gentle melody that at times could be heard in the deep caverns of Waterfall. Of course he first heard it from Gaster long before he ever even ventured into Waterfall himself. The scientist would hum it without realizing it at times and as a child, Sans had been captivated with the sound. The labs weren't exactly a place filled with music so he didn't have much to compare it to, but it made him happy. It made his Soul flutter in his ribcage, tentatively dancing to the sound. But Dings didn't sing often and those came to a complete stop once the experiments and DT treatments started. The humming resumed after Paps came into their lives but only until...until....

Something catches in his throat and though he keeps the same smile pasted on his face, his Soul churns unhappily. He was being honest with you earlier, when he said that he was going to let hope drive him and not hatred. But it's one thing to say he was going to let go of those dark feelings and another to actually do it. And besides, deciding that he wasn't going to let despair consume him doesn't change the fact that time is running out for you and his father. He's not sure what's got him more scared; the incident with you merging with dings or the fact that dings doesn't seem terribly concerned about the other part of his Soul literally ripping through reality from the Void. It really doesn't seem like a 'ignore it until it goes away' kind of problem. How can he even be sure that the remaining shards of his Soul are behind it anyway? He wants to go to the market where you saw it happen, maybe see if there's any kind of lingering sign that something was wrong. Reality being shaped and altered is something he unfortunately has plenty of experience with and there were always consequences.

A loud thud and a muttered 'Ow' is enough to startle him out of his thoughts. Gaster's dropped the box of spare parts right on your fingers and he lets out a hiss of pain, shaking your hand slightly. There's that spark of irritation that Sans is quick to shove down; he hates that anything that happens while Gaster is control directly affects you but there's nothing he can do about it. But there's another concern on his plate. You've been trying to hide it, as well as Gaster, but he hasn't missed the fact that your strength is beginning to fade. You've been dropping things like crazy, or losing your balance randomly. Even your monstrous appetite is shrinking.

Maybe Dings is right about waiting to deal with unknown force trying to rip it's way out of the Void.

"you ok?" he calls, more for your sake than Dings'.

"Just fine," Dings answers almost absently, staring out towards the door as he rubs feeling back into your fingers.

Sans doesn't bother hiding his smirk. He hadn't bothered to eavesdrop on him and Grillbz but he
could guess what had happened. He can still remember the first time he met Grillby. It had been in that strange period of time where he had changed from experiment to a son and scientist. With that came absolute freedom to wander wherever he wanted to go. He had never been past the dump in Waterfall and once he joined the scientific team, work kept him running between the station there and the massive set up in New Home. But some of the monsters on the Core team had invited him out to drinks and food at a bar way out in Snowdin one night and he had gotten understandably excited about seeing more of the Underground.

Grillby had been quiet, as he usually is, but he had stared at Sans all night. At first, he had thought it was just cause he was a new face, and a skeleton at that. Skeleton monsters had been on the front line during the war and as such, there weren't many of them left. But Grillby had approached him just before he left, asking if he was related to the Royal Scientist. At Sans' cautious 'guess you could say that', the fire elemental had sparked almost sadly and said nothing more.

When Sans returned to the labs and mentioned the outing at Grillby's, Gaster had actually dropped the mug he was drinking from, spilling hot coffee all over the console. And THAT had been enough for Sans to do his own investigating because anything that could get that kind of reaction out of the scientist was worth looking into. It took a lot of late nights at the bar, coaxing answers out of Grillby and getting Dings drunk a few times to get most of the story. He had tried pushing Dings to go to the bar himself because good grief, the man needed to fix that burned bridge but he had stubbornly refused. And then...well everything else had happened. Gaster had vanished and Grillby forgot, like everyone else. But Grillbz was still the best friend he could have asked for during those years in the dark. He had spent more nights than he cares to admit curled around a bottle at the bar and Grillby had never judged him. Well...out loud at least.

So he's...glad that the reunion between the two had finally happened, even if it was odd to think about his old man getting flustered like a young flame in love. Heh, he'll have to tell you that one later.

But enough of that. He needs to focus, get this done. He picks up the smaller piece of bone, examining it closely. It hasn't melted from the DT injections he gave it while the two (or rather three) of you were out in the hall and that was over an hour ago. "i think we've got the right dt levels for the initial injection," he calls over to Gaster.

"What's the surface state of the bone?"

Sans takes the bone piece with two hands and bends it. It gives easily under the pressure of his hands and shows no sign of snapping. "malleable. but there's no sign of melting."

"Good." Gaster examines the larger containment tube, making a few adjustments on the panel attached to the side. The liquid levels are low at the moment but once the bone is placed inside it will fill up completely.

It is a little unnerving to be working so close to the thing that so closely resembles the tube he was 'born' in. He doesn't remember much from that time. Brief flashes of color, the sensations of liquid magic heating his bones as he simply floated in silence is all that he cares to remember. Sans shifts his attention to the small beaker of extracted magic. It had burned a little as he pulled it from his system, but that was to be expected after being bedridden as he was. He doesn't want to get himself sick again, so he is a little concerned about levels. "is this gonna be enough?"

Gaster strides over, picking up the beaker and stares at it closely. "It's a little low," he mumbles, swishing the bottle. "I'd like..." he drifts into silence as his eyes go distant, clearing listening you. "I suppose that is possible. You clearly have an affinity with his magic as it is. And I suppose
having the magic of two separate entities combining would increase our chances of success with the first try."

Even if he wasn't a scientist, Sans would be able to see where this is going. There's no way you could fully understand what you just suggested but from a scientific point of view, that is probably the best way to make sure this works the first time. Besides, it's not like you're going to be sharing Soul's, even though plenty of magic is involved in that as well. You're not intending to make a child of your own with him. But...oh, now his mind is instantly going places it should not be going, this is not the right time-

"Let's give it a try." Gaster says, cutting off Sans' racing thoughts. He closes your eyes and a moment later, you're back in control.

A wave of relief sweeps over him, as it always does when you come back from wherever it is you go when Gaster is at the wheel. His sockets drop to your Soul, giving it a quick check. It's still growing darker. He sets his jaw, throttling the panic building in his chest with sheer force of will. "you ok?" he asks, snapping his gaze back up to your face.

You nod a little breathlessly, swaying just a little. "Give me a second," you murmur. You blink a few times and set your hand over the beaker. You breath deeply and Sans can feel that scorch mark that your Soul made in his flare up. He can only stare in wonder as a magical energy begins to form in your hand. It's so bright, twisting and gleaming with life. It's healing magic, a light green that is laced with shades of other colors. Purple. Orange.

Red.

It's beautiful and he can't stop himself from leaning closer, wanting, needing to see it and there's a part of him that burns with a strange feeling as it drips down into the container. The soft green of your magic mixes with the blue of his and as the energies swirl and dance together his mind goes back to that night you first moved to Toriel's.

You had been scared, so terrified behind that strong mask you always wore after that worthless scum broke into your home and he just wanted to fix it. He wanted to make that pain and fear go away and show you just how much you meant to him.

How precious you are to him.

He had been worried...no, terrified that you would reject sharing your Soul with his. He had wanted to for so long and impossibly, you said yes. That night, peering into the culmination of your being, holding your very life in his hands was something he never dreamed he would have with another being. And when you have touched his Soul, he had fallen apart at the seams, completely surrendered himself to you. It was terrifying and thrilling and he wants to have a future of that with you, he wants to experience every inch of your Soul. He wants you to see every bit of him, open and vulnerable because he trusts more than anyone in this world.

Would it be possible? To make a family with you? For just a moment, a wonderful, blissful moment, he lets himself image that. A new Soul, born from you and him, bright and shining in this world where time actually moved as it should. He has no idea what a child of yours and his would look like with him, or if it there was even the slimmest chance that it could actually happen but... A wave of longing so deep it almost makes his knees buckle washes over him and he closes his sockets. He wants that future. A future with you. He wants it so badly.

He's not going to let his father or a mysterious Void monster or anything else take that away from him.
These thoughts race through his skull as the two magical energies slowly cease their wild movements, setting into a stunning shade of cyan. It actually rather matches the shade of blue his eye glows. Sans can still feel the heat of a blush on his face.

"Sans?" Your voice is a little strained, but filled with concern for him. "Are you okay? Is your fever back?"

"i'm fine." Thank God, his voice stays level.

Gaster's hands appear before him and though there is not voice to accompany it, Sans can swear he hears Gaster's smug voice as he signs, Is something wrong?

"nope." What is wrong with him? Maybe he's still got some of that nasty oatmeal in his system. He snatches the vial of mixed magic, bone shard and DT and takes it over to another table closer to the containment unit.

"Am I missing something?" he hears you ask.

"don't answer that dings," he growls without looking back to see Gaster's response. However the hands float in front of him anyway and he bites back a sigh.

How interesting. Are you getting distracted by-

"oh my god, stop!" he snaps.

My word. So you are serious about her.

"are you seriously going to tease me about this?"

"Why would he tease you?" you slide up next to him, your arm pressing against his and he shivers involuntarily.

"it's nothing," he says quickly, glaring at Gaster's hands. "i'll talk to you about it later." Because he really has no issues with talking to you about it; in fact, he's almost bursting with the desire to pour out all those feelings and just hold you tightly in his arms because he feels like he might just shake apart if he doesn't. But doing so while his father, who he is still extremely pissed at, is present is extremely unappealing. "let's just get this done."

You watch Sans as he measures out different amounts of the magical mixture into different vials, muttering to himself under his breath. You're pleased that your idea to combine the two magics worked, but you can't help but feel you're missing something. Especially given the fact that Gaster is still snickering quietly in your head. That, plus the fact that Sans' face is still a rather startling shade of blue, gives you an inkling of what's going on.

You decide to ignore it for the moment and lean around Sans, watching him measure out DT to put into each vial. "Are these the daily doses?"

He hums in affirmation, scribbling some equations down in near illegible handwriting. "a couple of days worth. we'll might have to do another extraction of dt by the end of the week so we don't run out but other than that we should be ok."

You leave him to it, moving a short distance away. You make sure he's completely absorbed in his calculations before you turn your attention to Gaster. You can still feel that light sense of joy in his
Soul that sparked to life after meeting with Grillby and you decide to press him about apologizing to Sans and Papyrus while he's in a good mood. "So, the meeting with Grillby wasn't so bad, was it?"

I suppose not, he answers lightly, though the increased fluttering of his Soul says otherwise.

"Apologizing wasn't so hard, huh?"

Gaster sighs. I know what you are getting at.

"So?" You gesture to Sans. "What are you waiting for?"

It's not that simple.

"That's what you said about Grillby."

I had an argument with Grillby that never got resolved because of my own stubbornness. I created Sans and then pumped him full of Determination, nearly killed him and performed experiments on him for years before forcing him to work as my assistant, Gaster snaps back, anger creeping into his tone. There is a difference. Don't lecture me.

You put your hands up, even though the motion is kind of pointless. "Okay, okay fine. It's more difficult than talking to Grillby. But I also think it's really freaking important that you do. We're almost at the end of this. You're going to get your life back. Don't you want Sans and Papyrus to be a part of it?"

Gaster is quiet, his Soul slowing down and growing dim. Sans is focused right now, he finally murmurs. Any apology I could give would only serve to throw him off course. When this...when this is over-

"dings, we're good to go," Sans calls.

These stupid, infuriating skeletons and their bad timing!

You groan and walk back over to Sans, who's measured out a dosage of the DT and magic mixture into a nastily sharp and thick syringe. Your stomach churns at the sight and your arms start to itch with the ghosts of memories. Sans gives you a look and you nod quickly, swallowing down the panic. You stand back a short distance as Sans picks up the bone shard and gingerly angles the needle, piercing the surface of the bone. The surface is almost spongy now and gives easily under the pressure. You watch with an almost detached fascination as Sans injects the entirety of the syringe into the bone. When it's done, he motions for you to stand over by the panel of the containment tube. You do as he asks, preparing to flip the switch that will fill up the rest of the tube with the gel-like liquid. Sans carefully carries the bone to a small panel near the top of the tube. He has to stand on a stool to reach it. A series of wires stick out from it with sticky pads on the end. He sticks two of them on before he nods and you press the switch. A loud gurgling rips from the machine as the liquid levels rise slowly. Sans sticks his arm in the tube and waits until the liquid is just an inch below his hand before gently releasing the bone. It sinks slowly into the liquid, coming to a stop midway through.

The electronic pad you're standing at beeps at you as some of the numbers and settings listed change. Sans quickly joins you, peering at the numbers. He smiles and nods, "everything looks good."

You look back at the bone in the gel. It looks green now, thanks to the liquid it's bobbing in. "That's it?"
"yep."

You both stare at the bone for a moment longer. It doesn't do anything but sit there.

"Kinda...anti-climatic, isn't it?"

Gaster's hands reappear with an almost audible pop. **What did you expect? A brand new, full grown skeleton to immediately burst out?**

Sans shrugs, grinning in a rather disappointed way. "i mean, that would've been the best set up for my evil scientist laugh. i practiced all day." He reaches into the pocket of his lab coat and pulls out what looks like two cut out pieces of paper with tape on the back. He separates them before slamming them up against his forehead, giving himself thick, angry eyebrows. "i even brought these. how am i supposed to be doctor frankenstein without a monster to show for it?"

The first laugh that bursts out of you is more like a shriek and soon you hit the floor, laughing so hard tears start rolling down your eyes. Meanwhile Sans (holding back strained snorts of his own) poses and wiggles his brow bone, making his fake eyebrows dance up and down. You gasp for air, reaching for him and he helps you up. You collapse against him, giggling uncontrollably and that finally breaks him. He snorts into your shoulder, quivering with laughter.

All the while, Gaster watches, shaking his ghostly head.

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It's going to take a few hours for any kind of result to show. Since there's not much else you can do for now, you all head back to Toriel's. Sans refuses to take the paper eyebrows off and you lose it every time you look at him on the drive home. When you finally get there, you notice that there's a car you don't recognize in the driveway. You look at Sans and (after a few, undignified snorts) ask him, "Do you know who's that is?"

He shrugs. "paps wants a red sports car. and that's just about as opposite as you can get."

That is true. It's a huge SUV and you're not sure if you're offended or impressed by the tacky shade of yellow that coats its surface. You pull up on the side of the road since the car is taking up most of the driveway and head inside. You immediately smell Toriel's signature pie, though oddly the smell actually makes your stomach turn rather than rumble. Probably thanks to Aunt May lingering. Still you head into the kitchen where you can hear several someone's gathered and then it makes sense.

King Asgore is sitting at the table, looked rather like a dad sitting a child's small play set. Frisk is hanging on his arm, though when you and Sans walk in, they grin and wave widely. You look to Sans in slight alarm. Weren't you just talking about the fact that Asgore is the only one who doesn't know about the Ghoster hanging on your Soul? Sans reaches up and takes his eyebrows off, shoving them back in his pocket. His pasted smile is on his face.

"hey, king fluffybuns. didn't expect to see you here."

Asgore smiles kindly, removing Frisk from his arm as he stands up. "Howdy Sans. ______." Somehow, you had forgotten how freaking tall he is. His horns nearly brush the ceiling as he gestures to the table. "Please sit. Tori-"

There's a loud sniff from behind Asgore and you spot Toriel removing a pie from the oven.

Asgore shrugs sheepishly. "I mean, Toriel is preparing a pie and some tea for us."
There's no reason to say no, so you uneasily sit down in one of the empty chairs. Gaster is tense, but doesn't say anything. Asgore lowers himself back down as well and the chair groans threateningly under his weight. He lets out a little huff of relief when it quiets down.

"is that your car out there?" Sans asks casually, sitting down and scooting his chair loudly closer to you.

Asgore brightens. "Yes! I received my license recently. It makes getting around to all these different meetings much easier."

"kinda bright, isn't it?"

Frisk pops back up, clambering up to Asgore's shoulder. They sign 'Dad says it reminds him of the flowers back in New Home!'

He nods. "Yes, I had a lovely garden there and I must admit I'm rather fond of the color of buttercups."

That bright yellow SUV is not the color you would associate with flowers, but to each his own. You smile weakly. "So, what brings you here?" you ask, your voice a little squeaky after laughing so hard in the car.

"Ah, tea first!" Asgore picks up the tea pot and one of the cups, pouring you a glass. He slides it over to you but the smell only serves to make your head spin. You take a sip any way to be polite and force yourself not to make a face at the nausea that rises up your throat. Asgore makes a cup for Sans and he takes it, but makes no move to drink from it. His free hand gently touches your knee under the table.

Asgore takes a long, slow drink from his own tea, exhaling happily when he lowers the cup. "Thank you," he says to Toriel. "It's delicious."

You spy the hint of a smile on Toriel's face as she sets the steaming pie on the table along with some plates and forks. "Be careful, it is still hot," she warns before a seat as well. She folds her hands together, setting them on the table and ignores cup Asgore sets in front of her. You try not to be obvious in your quick glance at her. You had never told her not to tell Asgore, but you got the feeling that she wouldn't call him up about something like this, since the only danger was really to yourself and not monster kind.

Asgore hums quietly and you squirm as you wait for him to cut himself a piece of pie. The entire kitchen is filled with a slight tension. Asgore seems oblivious to it. Finally, he looks up at you and says, "I apologize for dropping by without notice. It occurred to me that we have not had a chance to speak after your hospital stay."

Oh right. He had wanted you to come by for tea. You had completely forgotten. Understandable, given what's been going on. "I'm sorry," you say quickly. "Things have been...crazy."

Sans snorts quietly next to you and you nudge his leg with your foot.

Asgore puts his hand up in a placating manner. "Oh, please don't worry about it. I have been very busy myself. The monster rights bill is only the tip of the iceberg in things that must be worked out with the human government. The paperwork and meetings have been almost nonstop."

You almost find yourself relaxing a little bit. So he's not here about Gaster? You pick up your tea and take another sip. "That must suck," you mutter before remembering that you're talking to the
king of monsters. "Uh, I mean, that must...be hard."

He laughs, handing a piece of pie to Frisk, who very eagerly snatches it up. "It is part of my duties. Ah, but there we go talking about me." He leans forward, his large black eyes fixed rather intently on you. "How is your recovery going? Have you been able to return to your usual activities?"

Uh...well, no. Not really. "Things are...fine," you mumble, looking to Toriel, who is watching the whole exchange with a guard expression.

Asgore lets out a huff of air, his clawed hands tapping on the table. After a moment, he picks up the knife again, slicing up another piece of pie. You meekly take the plate when it's offered and he suddenly says, "I heard that there was some sort of incident at Grillby's a few days ago."

Crap.

"And, forgive me for saying so," he says with only a touch of shame, "You do not look like you are recovering well, especially with monster's magic to speed the healing process."

"Wow. and here i thought royalty was supposed to be masters of diplomacy," Sans drawls, his tone barely hiding a warning. "Kinda blunt there, don't you think?"

Asgore looks to Sans, frowning heavily. "There is a time for diplomacy and a time for honesty," he says before bringing his gaze back to you. "I have heard that there is something else going on and while I respect your privacy, I would like to be told if there is a matter I need to be aware of."

"Just a reminder," Sans cuts off the king and you shoot him a startled glance. "She's not one of your subjects."

"Sans," you say gently. "It's fine. He's just worried. Right?"

The giant goat monster nods solemnly. "I feel responsible for what happened regarding your abduction. If there is any lingering effects from that time, it is my duty to be aware of it."

Don't tell him, Gaster suddenly speaks up quietly. His soul is churning. He will complicate matters greatly.

But why? Why is it such a big deal? You've told just about everyone else you're close to, why not the king?

Explaining me would lead to explaining your sudden powers, Gaster presses. He fought in the war against your kind. Against human magic users. How do you think he will react to hearing that human magic is reappearing? I may want to test your powers but Asgore is far more likely to lock you away somewhere until answers are found.

You blink in surprise, trying to hide your expression by taking a large bite of pie. It makes your stomach clench. You glance back up at the king, who is watching you with concern. Looking at that kind face, you have a hard time believing that. But...then again...this is the monster who killed six human children for the sake of his people. It's hard to associate such a terrible act with such a kind looking monster but it is the cold hard truth. A monster who makes a decision like that probably wouldn't have a problem with locking someone up, especially if he thought it was for their own good.

Furthermore...there is a chance he will halt our process. Creating a living monster body technically breaks many of the ethical laws of monster kind.
What?

Gaster flinches from your shouted thought. **Well obviously it does. But...that doesn't matter right now. You need to give him some sort of response.**

Sans, Frisk and Toriel are all watching you closely as well. They're all aware that you must be speaking with Gaster and have chosen to remain silent until you come to a decision about what to say. You hesitate a moment longer because despite Gaster's reasoning, something feels wrong about not coming clean to him. Worse, three of the people will know that you lied to the king's face about all this.

But Gaster's right, you need to say something. "It's...well, there's um...I got kinda messed up that night," you whisper, unable to quite look him in the eyes. "They put stuff in me and it's just...taking longer than we thought to fix it. But um, we're fixing it so...I'm okay. Thank you."

Asgore considers you in silence for several seconds before sighing. "I understand," he says in his deep rumbling voice.

Sans takes your hand and squeezes it reassuringly but it doesn't make you feel better. In fact, you're feeling pretty awful. Dizzy almost. Now that you're thinking about it, you've been rather out of breath since you left the lab. You'd been laughing so hard you hadn't really noticed at the time but you can't quite seem to recover.

Gaster notices your sudden dip in energy. **You did give out a considerable amount of magic back at the lab, he says sluggishly. You should probably lie down and sleep. Recover your strength.**

That does sound like a marvelous idea. You slowly stand, giving everyone an apologetic smile. "Thank you for stopping by," you tell Asgore. "I'm gonna be fine."

"Very well. Per---can---another---"

You blink slowly. You can feel Sans' hand on your arm but the touch is cold.

"hey, you---? can----me?"

Everything sounds weird. You almost giggle, looking back at Sans face because he's got a strip of tape stuck to his forehead. You reach out to take it off and suddenly your legs buckle and-

"Your Majesty, you don't understand how important this research is!"

The large monster turns, the golden light of the throne room casting deep shadows over his face. **His eyes are sharp, stern. "I said no, Doctor. We have already lost three monsters to this. I will not allow more to die from this pointless cause!"**

"Pointless?" The scientist just barely manages to keep himself from raising his voice but the rage in Soul is howling, raging against his rib cage. **How dare this...this fool call all that sacrifice pointless? "I am doing this for our people! I am building a future for us!"**

"What kind of future is built on the deaths of our people?"

The noise is building, rising, crashing in his head.

"But the deaths of human children are a different matter I presume?" The words break from him and the rapidly shrinking rational part of his mind is horrified that he would allow such an accusation to be made.
Asgore freezes and in the next moment he seems to grow in his own anger. Magic crackles dangerously through the air, making his bones rattle from the intensity. The scientist takes an unconscious step backwards and the noise in his head rages at him for being such a coward.

"wake up!"

He could show this monster who the real coward is. He could rip this man apart.

"What's happening?"

All he has to do is summon them. The beasts waiting just beyond the lines of the world, pushing against the restraints of the Void. He has to call them, show this coward of a king that he is in the right here!

"Frisk, look out!"

The scream is enough to finally jolt you from the vision assaulting your head but the panic, the blinding rage has you wrapped in it's grip and you're burning with it, burning with the mindless anger and the noise.

The unbearable noise.

Make it stop!

You see Asgore shoving Frisk behind him, a blood red spear materializing in his hand. You can feel the very air rumbling, buzzing, howling with your matched rage and your eyes fall on the child. Their eyes are wide, scared. There's a flash, a strange static fill haze and suddenly they're grinning, eyes filled with dripping tar and what little is left of your control snaps.

The anomaly.

It must be stopped, it cannot be allowed to get away! Not again!

A howl of rage (fear?) rips out of your throat and your hand is lifting up into the air and the Blaster is there, growling, ready for your command. All you have to do is fire and it'll be gone and they all will be safe, his sons will be safe!

Bony arms suddenly wrap around you, pinning you against a solid, warm surface. "let's get some air," a voice huffs in your ear and you are yanked through the code of the world mere seconds before your summoned Blaster fires.
The noise in your head is like a million voices speaking all at once, whispering, crying, screaming, laughing and it rises to a head splitting screeching as the world twists and you fall deeper into the panic, the rage, the terror.

Danger.

Fight.

Make it go away.

These thoughts consume you as the world spins, reforms and then splits apart again with a air-shattering blast of light. It streaks out before you, making your eyes burn as it slices through the space in front of you and the crack of something massive snapping apart only makes the noise in your head louder.

"hey!"

The voice is loud, steady. You want to run to that voice, let it wash over the noise in your head. But your body won't move how you want it to. There's something else happening, something is wrong.

The Anomaly. "Where is it?" The demand rips from your throat. "Where is it?!"

The voice says a name.

You don't recognize it.

"you gotta calm down, you're okay." The owner of the voice drifts into view, holding up hands that are clean, white-
No, they're covered in blood!

You blink and they're back to stark white. Your eyes snap up to the face of the skeleton standing in front of you-

Static crackles and his expression changes from sharp concern to a manic grin hiding unbearable pain. His blue jacket is gone, replaced by a torn and stained lab coat. You're standing on a metal platform. The air is hot, burning with the reek of magma and machinery. He's standing there too, stained tracks on his face as he stares you down. The wide smile on his face does nothing to hide the anger and confusion and deep hurt battling for dominance in his Soul.

"This is the way things have to be," you say and the words ring with familiarity. You know that you (no, not you!) have spoken them before. "I have to stop the noise before it's too late!"

The vision in front of you flashes and for a brief moment, Sans is surrounded not by the harsh glow of the magma below the catwalk but the gentle light of the fading sun. His sockets widen and his pupils vanish. "dings?"

Another sharp flash and he's stepping towards you, quivering with rage. "how could you do this?" His voice is garbled, broken by snapping static. "dings, this is wrong!"

"This isn't a matter of right and wrong!" You gesture widely and the holes in your (his!) hands throbs painfully. How can he not see the answer? It's right here, right in front of their very eyes! Why is he standing against you? "We must secure our future!"

"by killing monsters?"

"They will die anyway!"

"no one's dying! _____!"

There's that voice again; the clear one calling the name you can't remember. The one that makes your Soul swell painfully in your chest.

But you continue speaking, caught in a track that you have no control over. "Their sacrifice will guarantee the future for our kind. Surely you understand the importance of that."

Light bursts from Sans' socket, bright and wild but you don't miss the tear that slips from his other darkened socket. "was paps worth this?" he screams. "you left him to die!"

"This will fix that! It will fix everything! All those hurts will be gone, like it never happened."

"it won't! this won't help monsterkind. you never should have tried to open the paths to that place! there's too much power for anyone to control! you're going to end up blowing up all of new home, or erasing everything altogether!"

"Do not speak to me as though I am simply a bumbling assistant," you hiss. "I have accounted for for every variable and every danger. It is worth the risk."

Sans throws his hand up and a Blaster materializes out of the air to hover just behind him. It snarls loudly, the white circles of it's sockets fixed on you. "it's not worth it if there is no one left to appreciate it."

The noise in your laughs coldly. "Are you going to stop me?"
"snap out of it!"

Sans' socket continues to blaze as his too wide smile shifts to a cocky grin. "someone's gotta. and it looks like i'm the only one who can."

The Blaster at your side growls. When did you summon it?

Well, it doesn't matter now.

You lift your hand and your Blaster, much larger and much stronger than the one facing you down, charges it's energy. It makes your skin (skin? Since when did he have skin?) tingle with the rapidly building magic. Sorrow rises in your Soul as you prepare yourself. You don't want this. Of course you don't, but there is no other option. Surely Sans would see, he would understand if he knew what lies just beyond your reach. The ability to shift time. Correct mistakes before they happen. And if he (YOU) can't gain control over that power-

Something else will. Then there really will be no going back.

"Do you really think you have the power to stop me? Sans, I gave you everything. And if you force me to, I WILL TAKE IT ALL AWAY."

"stop!"

The Blaster fires and Sans vanishes, using that trick that you taught him to step between the frames of the world, bending time just for those few seconds that he needs to dodge the Blaster. When he reappears, his slippered foot touches down on grass, not metal (why is there grass here? There is no grass in this hellish place) and he's shouting words that you can no longer hear. Your Soul burns with agonizing fire as the Blaster builds up another shot of energy. Sans snaps into view in a different spot and you release the shot and he's gone again and the blast slams into another tree.

Huge shards of wood fly through the air, cutting deeply into the earth when they land. One lands just a few inches left of you, narrowly missing impaling your leg.

Trees? Earth?

The deep haze that is controlling your movements starts to shift. The screaming noise in your head begins to soften. What's...what's going on?

"c'mon dings!" Sans reappears a short distance away, sweat beaded on his skull. "we're not down there anymore! we're out. it's over."

Your hand lifts to direct the Blaster but now you can't stop trembling. You shake your head violently, shutting your eyes.

"that's it." Relief floods Sans voice. "come on ______. you've got this. just stay here with me. you're safe."

Your eyes pop open, landing on him. He's huffing. He's still weak from being sick.

Sick? When was he sick?

You put your hand on your head, trying to hold on to the flashes of memories that are slipping out of your grip like sand. That's right; he was sick from working in the lab. Working to save you and...and....there's another person here. It's not just you. You and him are not the same being.

Gaster stirs weakly. His Soul pulses against your chest and it's like a hot iron is being pressed against
your ribs. You sway heavily, gasping through the pain. "S-Sans." His name is just a croak, barely escaping your burning throat. Your eyelids droop as you fight to shove down the continuing panic and anger. It's just another memory. You're caught in violent flashback, that's all. This panic is not born from you, but from him. "Gaster, s-stop. It's n-not real...!"

But something's still wrong.

**It's...it's coming.** It's a sharp gasp from Gaster and you sense it mere moments before it happens.

Sans lets out a hoarse shout as the air rips before you. It's much bigger this time, almost two feet tall and just over a foot wide. You only see a glimpse of the endless darkness within before the rip is filled with a stark white face and hollow sockets blazing with purple light. You're caught like a deer in that gaze and your scream matches the one the creature makes as a distorted hand grips the edge of the reality, shoving it open. The sound that results is worse than nails on a chalkboard. Every hair on your body stands on end as your spine convulses with a violent shiver. You can almost hear the air screaming as slowly this thing makes the hole bigger.

Sans pops into the air next to you, gripping your arm. His sockets are pitch black. He yanks you back just as the clawed hand of the beast suddenly shoots out and swipes at you. The arm is like it's hand; thick, rough bone, easily twice the size of your arm. Black goop oozes from it's surface, squirming like worms. It roars in frustration as it pulls it limb back into the Void and starts slamming up against the rip from the other side. You can see cracks forming out from the edges of the rip and what looks like chunks from the sky that crumble away and dissolve before it hits the ground.

"dings, ideas?" Sans asks desperately.

Gaster's Soul is sluggish, still caught in the memory. "**Close it,**" he slurs through your mouth. "**Shove it back. Close the gap.**"

"yeah, thanks. **how?**"

Close it. You lift your hands and this time, you're the one who pictures the ghostly skeletal hands shimmering into existence. With a sharp tug on your still burning Soul, they appear and they're wreathed in a bright orange flame. You can see the edges of the rip in clear detail. It's wrong, flickering weakly and you feel in your Soul that reality is trying to push back against the darkness because that place is not meant to touch this world. You just have to help it move. You slam your hands together and the skeletal limbs shoot towards the rip and pressing down it's glitching edges. The pressure of the beast immediately assaults you and your knees nearly give out against the force. It's pushing back and it's almost too strong for you to bear. You grit your teeth and set your feet against the ground in a steady stance. You *push* and the hands respond in kind and you can feel reality slipping closer together, back to the way it should be. Your orange magic won't allow the darkness to pass.

The beast screams again and gives one last shove against the rip before it seals shut with a great *snap*. The feeling of wrongness vanishes as the final cracks in the world are filled back in. But you can see where it was, like a thin film hovering in the air. You lower your hands and the summoned skeletal hands vanish. In the silence that follows you see with growing alarm that the area around you, some kind of clearing with trees dotted here and there, has been wrecked by the force of the Blaster you summoned. And speaking of that...

It's still hovering by your side. It nudges you before finally vanishing. In that same moment, you feel something creeping down your lips. When you put your fingers up you're expecting blood but what you find is an odd black substance dripping down from your nose.
Sans grips your shoulders, shaking you slightly. "hey! oh-oh god, ______? are you ok?"

Your gaze drops to his jacket. You can see a slight scorch mark just on the edge of his sleeve. You stare at it in confusion for a moment before horrifying realization hits you. You shot at him! You...you almost-

Your eyes roll up into the back of your head and you're aware of collapsing, you feel Sans catch you and yet you continue to fall down through the earth and through time and you're powerless to stop yourself from spiraling into dark nothingness. But this time, you're not falling alone.

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He stands over a cluttered desk dimly lit by a lamp with one of those bendable necks. It's angled down towards the large sheet spread before you and the flickering light from the quickly dying bulb throws shadows over the designs. The scientist barely looks up as he hear the door creak open though he makes a mental note to talk to someone about oiling the hinges.

"i've got good news and bad news."

"What is it?"

A steaming mug is placed on the edge of the desk. "al found some more coffee in the dump."

Oh excellent, they were running low. And while monsters can make their own version of coffee, it doesn't have the same kick that the human caffeine offered. "And what's the bad news?" he asks as he picks up the cup and takes a sip. He almost immediately spits it out as a harsh, bitter taste assaults him. By the Core, it's nasty!

He doesn't have to look to know that Sans is grinning. "it's the really crappy kind of coffee."

"Thanks for the warning."

He grimaces and considers setting the mug down but...coffee is coffee. He chugs the rest of it down and shivers.

Sans peers at the plans laid out on the table. Various drawings and equations are spread across it, some crossed out, some highlighted and expanded. In the middle is a rough sketch of a skull shaped vaguely like a goat or a dragon. "you're working on this thing?" he asks with some surprise.

"thought you gave up on it."

The scientist sighs and fixes Sans with a look. "I never give up on projects Sans. They simply get pushed aside at times for other things."

"does that include me?"

The question is asked with a lighthearted tone but in Sans' gaze is a wall hiding something deep. Something painful.

Something that the scientist is responsible for.

After a moment, he flicks a finger towards a spare rolling chair in the corner. It shimmers with his magic as it's tugged forward. It rolls to a stop next to Sans, who flops into it with a happy sigh. "You are not my project anymore Sans. But I have never given up on you."

Sans makes a small, thoughtful hum before scooting the chair closer to the table. "when you say stuff like that, it makes me actually want to work hard dings."
The scientist does what he so rarely allows himself to do and laughs. "You, seriously work? Now there's a real joke."

"hey, don't be mean. i work plenty hard when i want to."

The scientist looks down at his son and hesitates for just a moment before placing his hand on the top of Sans' skull, rubbing gently. The hole in his palm creates a small circle of light on his skull. "I know you do."

Sans tenses for just a fraction of a second before relaxing turning his head up to look at the scientist. His grin is wide and easy. "then let's get to it."

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It's a soft clicking that pulls you from your deep sleep. Your mind slowly starts to stir before the rest of you does. Your body feels like a pile of rocks; completely still and immovable. Everything hurts. Your Soul pulses painfully in your chest, slow and staggered. You don't have the energy to open your eyes, or even groan. So you just lie on whatever is is you're on and just try to wake up. After a while, you become aware of a quiet murmur. It's nearly drowned out by the continuing clicking. It takes some straining, but eventually you're able to make out the soft words being spoken somewhere in front of you.

"how's the kid? hm. yeah. heh, that doesn't surprise me. what? oh...yeah." A pause. "i get it. had to be done after what happened. how did he...ah."

Your eyes feel like they're coated in sand but you try to force them open regardless. Slowly your vision comes back and you find that you're in an unfamiliar room. It's small and the hideously green and yellow patterned wall is peeling slightly. The faded carpet is red and striped and there's a worn desk chair next to a small table. Sans is sitting in it, phalanges tapping quietly against the table top. So that's where the clicking noise is coming from. You watch him as he continues to speak quietly into his phone, staring at the wall as he does so.

"no, we're settled in. yeah. look tori, i don't think that's a good idea. he can't just-no i understand he has to consider that but the fact is we don't have time to waste. once this is over, he can do whatever he wants with my old man. but she's just a victim in this. he gets that, right?" He listens to Toriel speak, his expression twisting slightly. "well. it doesn't matter. we'll just stay here if we gotta. we're almost through tori and i'm not gonna-" His gaze shifts to you and he abruptly stops speaking when he sees you watching him. "i gotta go, she's up. tell paps to call me when he gets back from undyne's place, ok? thanks."

He's standing before he even hangs up, coming to your side. He kneels, his expression easing into one of concern. "hey. i didn't realize you were awake. need some water? i-"

You reach out with an unsteady hand, cutting him off. He's silent as you grab his arm and pull it up. He's taken his jacket off and he's wearing a t-shirt with a Mickey Mouse shape on it and it leaves his arm bare. You study the bone, rubbing your fingers over the spot where you know his jacket was singed. There's no sign of injury but... "Did I hit you?" you whisper, your voice a gravelly croak.

He puts his hand over yours, gently pulling your fingers away. "it just got my jacket. i'm fine. it's a good thing i wear those poofy ones, huh? beside uh, if it did...well. there's a reason i'm fast."

His stupid attempt at making you feel better starts the water works. There's no sob from you, no sound at all as the tears start to flow down from your eyes. Sans cringes, trying to backpedal. "babe, no shh, it's ok. please don't cry." He stands and crawls into the bed with you, cradling you to his
chest. He rubs his hand over your head as you bury your face into his shirt. His bones are buzzing with energy and warmth. It helps to keep you grounded, at least a little. You feel like you're crying from pure shock because you can't even focus on a single thought on what just happened at all.

When you finally slow down a little Sans makes a water bottle float over. He helps you sit up and you take a small sip. "Where are we?" you ask, looking around the room a little.

"hotel on the edge of the city," Sans answers, looking a little relieved that you've stopped crying for the moment. He pulls his legs up so he's sitting cross legged in front of you. "after...after what happened i thought it might be a good idea to spend a night or two away from everyone."

You stare down at the water bottle in your hands, trying to give some sort of order to your thoughts. You remember...you remember what happened from your side of things, but everything was just so fast and so filled with panic and noise that it's all jumbled in your head. "I attacked Frisk," you say slowly. "And then...then you...."

Sans rubs his skull, his sockets tight. "i had to get you out of there before you fired."

You let out a small breath of relief. So Toriel and Frisk and Asgore are okay. Your very Soul shudders to think of what might have happened if Sans hadn't pulled you away in time.

"i thought you were having some kind of anxiety attack or something," Sans continues. "but then you and dings started talking and your voice was...." His phalanges dig into his knees. "you started saying the exact things gaster said on the night of the accident. my memories might be kinda jumbled about all that stuff but i will never forget that night. the things he said."

"That's what I saw." you confirm. "I think that's what I saw anyway. Everything kept flashing back and forth. I was there and then I was back in that field with you. I kept hearing your voice but I couldn't stop carrying out what was happening in the memory."

"how much did you see?" he asks slowly. He looks a little shaken.

"I think just until the beginning of the actual fight you guys had. Once I fired the B-" your voice catches and you grip the blankets tightly, willing the horror of what you'd done to stay down. "The Blaster uh, I saw you again and all the trees and it didn't make sense and that's when the noise finally started to stop."

"noise?"

You point to your head. "It's been coming with the memories. The closer the memory is to the accident, the louder it is. It's like...like having a million people all whispering to you at once and screaming and laughing and then on top of it all there's empty wind and it's so loud-!"

Sans puts a hand on yours and you jump, realizing that your voice had started to rise. You swallow hard, shaking your head.

"dings mentioned the noise, a few times. back before," Sans' sockets are distant. "i should've paid more attention to it back then. at first he just complained about things being noisy and i thought he was just sensitive to all the machines or something. then he..." Sans trails off, letting out a sharp bark of laughter. "look at me talking about the past again. i think we need to be more worried about that thing."

Oh. Right, that happened too. You stare at Sans with wide eyes, conflicted on whether you should be terrified or impressed that you somehow used magic to force the rip to close. You, with your magic and not Gaster's. "Before you ask, I have no idea how I stopped it."
Sans gives you a weak smile before he grimaces. "again, i hate to say it, but maybe dings was right. we should've been paying more attention to the fact that you can use magic now. monster kids have a little more free reign because while their magic is developing it isn't strong enough to really hurt anyone, but you've clearly got more power than any kid would ever have. Not to mention your attacks seem to be more of a physical nature than most. like my blasters effect souls mostly. they don't leave much of a mark on solid things. but your blew apart trees. and that makes it really dangerous for you and-" He catches himself but you know what he was about to say.

You draw your knees up to your chest. "I could've hurt them. Frisk and Toriel. I could've killed you." A few more stray tears escape and you wipe at your dripping nose. The black stuff is gone at least; Sans must have cleaned you up while you were sleeping.

Sans scoots a little closer. "give me a little more credit," he says with a small smile. "i'm fast babe. hitting me is pretty much impossible. the only reason you even grazed me is cause i was trying to get close to you."

You sniff miserably. "That's not helping."

"sorry." He rubs the top of your bare foot gently. "we just have to be careful now. find ways to calm you down before you lose control again. and hurry it up with getting gaster out of your soul. i think once he's gone stuff like won't happen."

"Let's hope," you say dryly.

"but more importantly, we've got to figure out what to do about my dad's evil clone trying to rip the void open. if that's what that thing is." Sans' brow furrows and he changes his gentle rubs to thoughtful taps. "he said he thinks it's because his soul is still connected to the void that this is even possible. he seems to think that once his soul is put in his new body that tie will be cut but i dunno. it doesn't seem like it would be that easy."

You frown too. "It was stronger this time. The first time I saw it in this world and not a memory, the rip was tiny. Like the size of a pencil. This time was a little bit bigger."

He snorts. "yeah, just a bit." A breathy laugh escapes him and he leans forward until his skull taps against your knees. "god that thing was scary. and you just...shoved it back in like it was nothing. i mean, your soul has tons of orange in it, so i shouldn't be surprised but still! i couldn't do anything but stand there."

"I wasn't exactly thinking about what I was doing," you mumble, shifting your legs a little. You lean your head back against the headboard, staring up at the old popcorn ceiling. You weren't thinking at all. You had acted on pure instinct and you can't even be sure that the instinct was yours. You and Gaster had acted as one, so completely connected you hadn't felt his presence beside you at all. It wasn't until you fought to break free of the noise that he had even spoken words of his own.

You frown. Speaking of Gaster, he's being awfully quiet. Well, if he's sleeping, you're going to let him sleep. You need some time to readjust your self to just being yourself without his memories and feelings coursing powerfully through you. You came close to completely losing yourself at that time. What if you can't do it when it happens again? It's finally hitting you just how short on time you are and terror starts to rear it's ugly head.

Sans must hear your breathing starting to pick up. He rolls to the side slightly and taps on your knees until you straighten your legs out. He then lies back down, almost completely covering your lower body with his. He puts his head against your chest, closing his sockets as he listens to your heart beat. His arms circle your waist, holding you tightly but not painfully. His phalanges rub small circles
on your sides, gently massaging you. As the silence continues, his circling motions start to slow and his breathing begins to grow deeper with sleepiness. His shifts again and now he's lying entirely on you, his bare toes brushing against yours. The weight of his bones is almost too heavy to be comfortable, but right now you welcome his warmth and solidness. Your heart continues to pound but now it's starting to beat for a different reason.

How long has it been since you let yourself kiss him freely, let your hands wander over his body and explore the nicks and curves of his bones? When did Sans last kiss you until you could no longer breathe? The kidnapping, the healing process and then this mess with Gaster has kept your mind elsewhere. Lying here now with him, you feel a physical ache to press your body against his as close as you can and let the tingle of his magic against your skin wash away the pain and the fear. Even if just for a moment.

But Gaster is still here. Asleep or not, he's right here and could wake at any moment. You can't let yourself go with that hanging over your head. A small groan escapes you and Sans angles his head to look up at you.

"what's wrong?" he asks, all traces of sleepiness vanishing.

"I want to kiss you so much right now," you whine.

He blinks in slight confusion and angles himself up to press a gentle kiss against your lips. His magic buzzes against you and your heart picks up even more. But too soon, he's pulling away, a light blush on his face. Your hands instinctively tighten on his t-shirt and he freezes.

"That..." you take a deep breath, struggling to control the emotions flooding through you. "That was nice but...I want to kiss you."

Maybe it's your tone of voice, maybe it's the way you're starting to shake under him, but he gets it at once and the light blush on his cheek blooms into a deep shade of blue that fills his entire skull. Oh you've missed seeing that expression on his face. An expression of hesitant wonder and a gaze that never leaves you. You can feel the scorch of his magic in your Soul flutter with desperate longing and he presses another kiss to your lips without another word. This time it's deeper, the pleasant tingle of his magic is stronger. He shifts without breaking the kiss, angling himself so that his arms and legs are braced on either side of you. Your hands find his shoulder blades, pulling him closer to you. He exhales heavily, his breath spilling over your face and it smells of his magic, like mint and winter and your face warms.

"i've missed this," Sans murmurs. He nuzzles his face against your cheek, one hand bracing himself against the bed as the other cups the back of your neck. You and him have explored each other before, many times before all the crap with Tod happened but it was something you never tired of. And with him here, right now, feeling his touch against your skin, it's so familiar, so normal you can feel your heart swell with the depth of your love for him.

But with the rising emotion, your hold on your fear and horror at what you did, what you almost did to Sans starts to crash over you. Your shaking increases and Sans pauses, pulling away slightly. He says your name once, gently and filled with love and just like that you dissolve once again. You put your hands over your face, trying to hide your crumbling expression from him. "I'm sorry," you blubber, curling in on yourself. "I'm j-just...Sans I'm so scared."

Sans sit ups, still straddling you but now his weight is shifted to his legs. He cups your face gently. "sweetheart, please. you don't have to hide from me."

You slowly lower your hands, your lips trembling. "I don't want to lose this," you cry. "What if I
don't come back the next time this happens? What if I hurt you, or Paps, or Frisk or-"

"i'm not gonna let that happen," Sans says firmly. "i'm gonna be by your side for every moment of this thing. every time you go somewhere, i will be right there to bring you back. i promise you. ok?"

You blink more tears from your eyes, meeting Sans' steady gaze. His sockets are tight with determination, the lights of his eyes bright and strong. You trust him. With your very life and Soul you trust him. "Okay," you whisper. "I-I'm counting on you."

Sans smiles gently and presses one more kiss to your forehead.

And just like clockwork, you feel Gaster start to stir. Your face twists slightly in annoyance. Sans sees your expression and rolls off of you, but tightly holds your hand. You continue sitting there in silence as Gaster wakes up. You'll let him make the...first...

There's a flicker of movement out of the corner of your eye. You turn your head sharply towards the table and your jaw drops as something begins to form in the air. It fades in like a projection, flickering and partially see through. It only takes a moment and soon you're staring at a monster. A monster you recognize from your brief time in the Void. He's smaller now, closer to your size and a little less goopy but his head is significantly more skull shaped than what you saw before. Two dark cracks matching the marks on your face travel down the surface of his head. What looks like a turtleneck sweater and a dark coat makes up the top part of his body but it soon dissolves into a shifting mass of black that fades away into nothing at all, almost like smoke. And there in the center of his chest is a dim glow and a tendril of light that reaches all the way over to you, directly connected to your Soul.

You lock eyes with Gaster. His sockets narrow in confusion for just a moment before they widen into near circles. Well, the left one does. The right socket seems to have a permanent droop. One skeletal hand with a hole punched through the middle lifts briefly, pointing to himself. You...you see me!

Oh. Oh this can't be good.
"so...you can see him."

"Yep."

"he's right there."

"Yep. You don't see him?"

"...no."

"Oh. That-" Your voice catches in your throat. You mouth starts to quiver. "That's uh...huh."

Don't you dare.

"I-I just...!"

"um, maybe just try to breathe for a second?"

"But Sans! You don't understand. He-he's-!" You finally can't hold it back any longer and start giggling uncontrollably. "He's literally like a balloon! He's just-snrf/-floating there!" You know you shouldn't be laughing, this is probably a more frightening reaction than being scared or confused. But you can't get over him just hovering next to you! You've been calling him a balloon this whole time but you didn't expect him to actually look like one! To be fair, he looks more like a ghost but the connection of energy between the two of you reminds you too much of a balloon string to push the idea out of your head.

The force of your laughter soon leaves you wheezing while Sans watches you with an expression torn between confusion and concern. Gaster's now visible face however, twists sharply into a snarl of frustration.
Will you shut up? he snaps, his voice in your head loud enough to make you wince. This is not a laughing matter!

Sans notices the flash of pain that crosses your face and glares into the air above your shoulder, rather than where Gaster is actually standing about two feet away from the edge of the bed. "hey, knock it off dings."

This is ridiculous, this is absolutely insane! Now are you not the only one who can hear him, you're the only one who can see him! You slump a little, groaning as you rub at your head. The force of his shout has brought clarity though. Yeah, this is pretty much the worst time to be laughing. "Sorry," you mumble. "It's just...it's been a really long day." Your eyes drift over to Gaster once again and you can't help but stare. When you saw him in the Void before, his body had constantly shifted and changed yet held a frightening mass. Now, he's definitely closer to your size, though if the rest of his body was present, you're pretty sure he would tower above you, somewhere closer to Papyrus' height. The edges of his form now are oddly translucent and at times you can almost see sparks of glitches that makes him look like he's constantly moving. His holey hands are still oddly disconnected from the rest of his body; you can't really make out the shape of his arms. His face however...it's not quite the same as you remembered it. It's still stark white, still cracked and slightly oval shaped, but there's more here now. The edges of his jaw are a little more defined, his mouth is shaped more like...a mouth rather than a dark maw and overall he looks more like a skeleton in a dark suit rather than a white face on a pile of inky darkness.

He looks a little like Sans.

"Are you quite done?" Gaster drawls as his second pair of hands pop into existence. The small lights of his eyes flash a little.

You jump, just now realizing that your silent staring had stretched on for quite a while. "Sorry I...um, why do you look different?"

Gaster blinks, surprise crossing his face. (Geez it's so weird actually seeing him react and not just feeling the flickers in his Soul!) He looks down at himself. "Different?"

It's your turn to be confused. Does he not realize it? "Yeah? Before, when I was in a coma, you were a lot...goopier. Bigger and less...put together I guess?"

"I didn't realize there was such a drastic difference," he says, his hands signing slowly as he speaks. "Interesting. It's possible that having my Soul placed on a solid point in a fixed timeline has led to stability in my internal psyche and given that no physical traces of my corrupted body remains to taint that..." His gaze is distant but it quickly snaps back into focus. "That isn't important right now. We have a much larger problem on our hands."

Sans, who has been watching Gaster's hands sign, scoffs loudly and scowls. "yeah, i'd say we do. what happened dings? lashing out at the kid, firing at me, she-" he points to you- "would never do that. what. happened?"

Gaster looks at Sans and again, it's odd to see the flash of emotion on his face. It's anger, sadness, and a little bit of fear. "The clashing memories overwhelmed me. The final stage is beginning Sans," he both says and signs. "Our Souls are battling for control and the barriers that remain are falling apart. It is no longer a matter of if our Souls combine, but when. It's already happening."

It's like a physical blow to the chest, for both you and Sans. His hand scrambles to find yours and he
squeezes so tightly you feel the bones in your hand pop.

Gaster continues, his voice echoing dully in your head. *"The strength of my own Soul has grown enough that her Soul is recognizing it as a Soul, not merely a shard. Against her will, it is attempting to absorb it. But my own Soul, thanks to the effects of the Void is acting with enough strength to resist and fight absorb her Soul instead. Regardless of who's Soul wins, I doubt her body will survive the resulting transformation."*

"Transformation?" you croak, your own voice dead with horror. "I thought you...you just said my b-body would break down."

"Which it will, if my hypothesis is correct, thanks to the tainted state of my Soul. But monsters absorbing human Souls had always led to a transformation of the body thanks to the influx of power given to them so it would stand to reason that the same would be true in the reverse if the monster's Soul was powerful enough, which mine is but the physical restraints of your human body leads me to believe that-"

"dings. enough."

You feel like you might actually be sick. You close your eyes, fighting down the nausea. Your hands are starting to shake so you clasp them together. Sans hesitates before very gently placing his hand on your back.

"what-" his own voice catches and he takes several deep breaths. "what about that thing in the void, the alter you? cause, heh, you said that we would have more time. it's barely been two days since the last time and it came back with a vengeance. and maybe it was just me, but it didn't act like it was just trying to escape. seemed kinda angry in a murdery sort of way."

You keep your eyes shut as Gaster struggles to order his thoughts. You can feel his conflict and anger at simply not *knowing*. "At this point, all I can say for certain is that the being beyond the rip is me. In a way. And yes, it is very angry." One of his actual hands comes up to cup his chin as he frowns in thought. *"Both appearances have occurred right after.-"*

"Three."

"What?"

You open you eyes. Both Gaster and Sans are looking at you. You take Sans's hand again before continuing. "I saw it that night we...took the bone from Papyrus' hand, remember? When I fell into that memory or place or whatever that was. That was the first time I saw it and that time it was like the world around me was falling apart because of how large the rip was." A shiver goes up your spine at the memory of that night.

Gaster's frown deepens. *"I forgot about that. It's possible that your Soul dropping into the space of the timelines allowed the other pieces of my Soul to pinpoint where I am and that made the connection stronger."*

"But you said you're connected anyway," you remind him. "How would my memory dream make that stronger?"

Gaster starts to pace, but without legs he just sort of drifts side to side like a balloon in the wind. You shake your head at yourself a little; you really need to stop thinking of him as a balloon.
"It's just speculation but think of it like a small hole in a paper cup. The water inside is what remains of my Soul in the Void but bits of it are dripping out, escaping to this reality. Over time as the water eats at the edges of the hole, the leak grows bigger. Which is still happening. But when you fell into the memory, your Soul made the hole twice as big, speeding up the process. Every time we flashback into one of my memories, like in the market and earlier today, it's another rip in the cup. And now the entire thing is snowballing out of control."

There's a rather odd buzzing in your ears as you process what Gaster is saying. It doesn't explain everything, like how it's even possible for your Soul to have fallen back in time, or why the dreams you've had of his memories before didn't trigger the rips but...well it's something. But it does nothing to dull the horror eating at you. "So how much time do we have?" you hear yourself ask numbly.

Gaster's Soul flickers with his own worry. "Days. Three, maybe four if we're lucky."

You don't move a muscle while a strained noise that borders on the edge of a pained whine escapes Sans. He puts his skull in his free hand, breathing sharply. "God, it never ends," he mumbles. "Down there I had too much time. And now we don't have enough. I'm freaking sick of irony not pulling it's punches."

You stand without saying a word and Sans lets your hand slip out of his as he watches you walk over to your phone on the table. It's the only thing of yours here; it must have been in your pocket during your breakdown. You find Abby's number and after three rings she picks up.

"Hey girl! What's-"

"Abby, I um..." You have to clear your voice a few times. "I'm not gonna make it into work for the next few days. Can you let the managers know?"

"What's going on?" Her cheerful tone is gone, replaced with worry. "Is this about the monster on your Soul thing?"

"...Yeah."

You hear the sound of something metal clinking. Probably keys. "I'm gonna come over, I'll be there in just a few minutes, okay?"

"No, no, I'm not at Toriel's right now," you say quickly. "Look...everything's fine. It's going to be fine. I'll call you soon, okay?"

"Wait-!"

You hang up, unable to bear the fear rising up your throat. Okay, that's one thing down. You turn back to Sans and Gaster. "Okay. Let's get back to the lab."

Sans stands up, unknowingly brushing against Gaster, who flinches a little at the contact even though you know he can't actually feel it. "Can you handle a shortcut right now?"

An empty smile stretches across your face. "Does it matter? We don't have time for me to take another nap. We still have to figure out how to actually get him out of my Soul, right?"

Sans nods unhappily. He digs in his coat pocket for his own phone, phalanges whipping across the keys as he types out a quick message. "I'm gonna ask Al to come over," he explains once the message is sent. "We're gonna have to re-calibrate the soul reader again and she's the best at that."
You step into his open arms and you notice just before the world spins away, Gaster seems to melt into invisibility once again, a sad expression twisting his face. The thought is driven out of your mind thanks to the churning in your stomach and you groan loudly. The unmistakable tang of chemicals and cleaner filled lab doesn't help as you try to regain your balance after the short cut. You cast your eyes around, looking for Gaster and after a few seconds of half-hearted hope, he reappears. The sad expression is gone, replaced by a mask of controlled calm. Something about his composure calms you too, though it might just be bravado. Whatever. It if keeps you focused on getting stuff done, you'll happily ignore the unbearable terror building in your heart.

**Well, don't you look excited to see me,** he says, his mouth twisting up into a smirk.

"Nah, still just a little weirded out that you don't have legs," you say, lifting your eyebrow in a challenging way. "I know you hate being called a balloon but my dude, you are a ghost balloon."

Gaster looks down at said missing limbs. **I could probably muster the energy needed to form them,** he says in a rather thoughtful tone. **But that might trigger another rip so for the moment I shall simply ignore your taunts. Besides, I have been without true legs for a long time. I'm used to it.**

"I did notice your lack of legs in the Void too."

Sans nudges your arm. "hey uh, not to interrupt your conversation with ghoster-"

Gaster sighs.

"but i'm gonna order a pizza. you cool with that?"

You're honestly not sure if you have the stomach to eat right now. What time is it anyway? Pulling your phone out again reveals it's almost ten at night. "Kinda late, isn't it?"

Sans shrugs, his gaze already going back to the tube with the bone shard in it. "it's gonna be a long night. better to start out with energy."

You follow him as he walks over to the tube. The bone inside doesn't appear any different than it did earlier that day, other than perhaps looking a tad bumpy on the surface. "What are we going to do about this?" you ask, placing one hand on the glass. "There's no way that we can get a full grown body out of this in three days."

**It was never going to be full grown.**

You look back at Gaster in surprise. Sans follows your gaze and Gaster brings out his second pair of hands, gesturing to Sans as he begins to sign.

"Do you think I would have made children for my original plan of making weapons? I learned very quickly that a monster body will only grow so much without a Soul to provide the necessary energy and magic. Furthermore, a child's form is still soft, in terms of body structure. It can change, accept a Soul shard and Determination without melting away like an adult's would."

"So...wait, are you saying what I think you're saying?" A giggle is starting to bubble in your throat and you try very hard to keep a straight face. Going by Sans' growing smirk, you're not succeeding. "You're going to be a kid?"

He scowls at you, trying his best to remain dignified as he sullenly replies, **"It will be a child's**
form, yes but I will not revert to the mindset of a child."

"so he hopes anyway."

"So I know," Gaster snaps and imagining the monster before you as a small child is too much and you start laughing. Sans covers his mouth, hiding his own snickers and Gaster huffs, turning back to the bone in the jar. But just before he does, you catch the slight upwards curve of his mouth.

Sans wipes away nonexistent tears dramatically before his expression settles into a more serious stare. "problem is, even with not needing to wait until the body grew to adulthood, we made our dt calculations based on the assumption that we would have at least a week. so now all that's gotta be redone." He sighs and looks to you. "i'm gonna get started on that. al should be here soon but maybe you and dings can start sorting through her notes for re-calibrating the scanner? we'll do another read once she gets here. we need to see just how bad the absorption levels are."

You nod and Sans plops down in a desk chair, pulling piles of papers towards him. Simply looking at the complicated equations written in his sloppy handwriting is almost enough to make your head hurt again. There have been a few times when Gaster had been in control when he had worked out staggering amounts of math and it had bored you to tears. You much prefer the hands on work. You head over to the Soul reader, which at this point has been through so many different changes you can't even really call it that anymore. You find Alphys' notes she wrote down when she and Sans had converted the machine into an extractor to save you from your kidnappers. A lot more delicate workings are going to need to be put in place but for the basic changes, everything you and Gaster need is here. Thankfully, Alphys' handwriting is a little easier to read. It's very bubbly and cute and there are a couple of little drawings of cat girl faces and fishes with big anime eyes in the margins. Gaster pointedly ignores those and starts looking over the actual settings.

Alphys herself shows up not too long after and she's got the box of pizza in her hands. But that's not the only thing she brought with her.

You hear Undyne a good distance down the hall so you and Gaster have a moment to brace for the incoming storm.

**Why is she here?** Gaster groans, continuing to write down equations with his solid pair of hands.

You're honestly just surprised that she's managed to hold off from knocking down the door for this long. "Look, she's probably just worried. And that usually comes out in the form of yelling. But she won't suplex us."

You hope.

Alphys nervous chatter soon joins Undyne's booming voice and then the doors to the lab burst open. Undyne storms in, her red ponytail frazzled and hurriedly tied and looks around. Her eye lands on you, squints sharply before shifting to Sans. "Yo nerd!" she calls, snatching the pizza box from Alphys. "Catch!"

She throws the entire box like a frisbee and it sails across the room right at Sans' head. He puts up a single finger, barely glancing up and the pizza box glows blue before coming to a short stop a few inches away from his face. It drops gently into his hand. Absently he clears some papers and sets the box on the table. "thanks pal."

"You owe us twelve bucks plus change!"

He flips the lid of the box open and snags a piece; gooey cheese spills over the side of the box and
hits the floor. Alphys winces. "put it on my tab."

Undyne scowls but she's too preoccupied with looking back at you to complain. She stomps over with such force you can actually hear some empty vials on the counters shaking. She leans into your personal bubble, her single yellow eye staring you down with the intensity of a raging fire. You lean away a little without even realizing it. "So!" she suddenly barks, the volume of her voice making you jump. "Who's driving?"

"Huh?"

She pokes at your forehead sharply and you yelp at the sting of pain from her sharp nail. "Who's in charge right now, dummy! Is it you or that freaking scientist?"

You rub at the spot on your head, trying to subtly check and see if you're bleeding. You're not, thank goodness. "It's me," you grumble.

Undyne breaks into a wide toothy grin. "Thought so. I had a hunch."

"Um I d-did say it w-would be obvious," Alphys mumbles quietly. Her eyes are darting between you and Sans, who continues to dribble cheese on the floor. His left hand is still flying over the papers but you notice his gaze is watching Undyne carefully. He's probably poised to short cut over to you and snatch you away if need be.

Undyne flicks a strand of stray hair out of her face impatiently. "I'm gonna call it the power of friendship," she sniffs before placing her hands heavily on your shoulder. "It feels like I haven't seen you in forever!" she says in an oddly cheerful voice.

"Um, yeah, I guess it has," you say cautiously.

She nods once. "So. I just gotta ask you something." Her hands suddenly slip from your shoulders to under your arms and you yelp as she lifts you up into the air. Your feet instinctively jerk but she's got a solid grip on you. The casual smile is gone, replaced by a furious snarl. "What the hell happened at Toriel's place?!"

There's a flash of color and Sans is standing next to Undyne, his left socket glinting dangerously. The effect is lessened slightly by the spot of pizza cheese stuck to his cheek. "put her down." His voice is a threatening growl. "she's had a really bad day and so i have. 'm not in the mood for your antics."

"Yeah? Well, I'm not in the mood to sit back and do nothing while this freak uses my friend's body to attack the kid!" she snarls back.

"Undyne!" You squirm, trying to free yourself from her increasingly painful hold. "Calm down, let me-PUT ME DOWN."

The transition of Gaster taking over is so smooth it shocks everyone in the room, including Undyne who drops you to the ground. It's not a huge drop but your legs buckle and you wind up on your butt. Gaster glares up at Undyne, who stares back. You've never seen her look so unsettled. He gets up, brushing your legs off. "You're just as hotheaded as your mother," Gaster mutters. "Letting your emotions control your actions. I would have expected better of the ex-captain of the Royal Guard."

Undyne gapes at you but at Gaster's words, her jaw snaps shut and her eye narrows. "So, you're the doc? Alphys has told me all about you and I've got a bone to pick with you."
It's a sign of just how angry Sans is that he doesn't react in the slightest to the pun opportunity. "There's no time for this," he says to both Gaster and Undyne. "You two can butt heads later."

Alphys puts her hand on Undyne's arm. "S-Sans is right. He s-said there w-was something urgent we h-have to do."

Gaster nods. "I'm afraid our time has been greatly reduced Doctor Alphys."

"R-reduced?"

"We need to complete the body growth and Soul transfusion in three days."

Her eyes pop wide with shock, her jaw dropping. "Three d-days?!" she squeaks shrilly. "Why? What happened?"

"The incident at the queen's home earlier, that's what happened," he says dryly, waving a hand a little dismissively. You notice as he does that the limb is trembling slightly. Huh. When did that start?

Undyne crosses her arms. "And speaking of that, do you get how upset Asgore is? I thought you had already told him about all this crap, which is why I didn't bring it up to him myself! He's pissed!"

"Yeah, I bet he is," Sans mutters. He doesn't look all that surprised. Oh. That's what that phone call must have been about. Toriel probably had to explain what was going on to Asgore after your freakout in the kitchen. So much for keeping things quiet.

Undyne whirls on Sans and he stares back unflinchingly against her fury. "It's his job to know about stuff like this! Can you imagine what might have happened if she lost control in a public place? What if it happens again?"

You can taste bile in your throat. She's right. God... what if you had been out somewhere? At the station? Or at the store? That time in the market could have been ten times worse. You... you could've killed someone! You want to curl in on yourself but Gaster is still in control and he's standing firm.

"Well if you let us get back to work, all of that will be solved in three days. One way or another."

"What do you mean by that?"

"We're dying."

Alphys' hands fly up over her mouth, eyes wide with horror. The rage radiating off of Undyne vanishes. Sans turns his head sharply. "Dings!"

"There's no time to sugar coat it," Gaster returns with just as much force. "Besides, there's only one reason why the captain would suddenly show up after keeping her distance for so long. Asgore has been made aware of the situation and now he wants to contain it. Isn't that right?"

Undyne stands stiffly as everyone's eyes land on her. Gaster's words suddenly come back to you: Asgore is far more likely to lock you away somewhere until answers are found. No, she can't be here to take you back. Is she? Your heart starts to race with fear as the memories of being in that tiny room with no windows threatens to swallow you up. No, you can't go back to being a prisoner! You won't!
She clears her throat and Gaster can't stop your body from flinching. "The king has asked me to...to find you. And I did. But...I'm technically not the captain anymore. And besides, she's still human. Mostly I guess. I don't have any kind of authority to take her anywhere." She glares at Gaster. "I'm pissed as hell at you, but even I know that you're the only chance that nerd's got. So I'm gonna keep quiet about this for now but you better fix this! Also prepare yourself because as soon as you're outta there, I'm gonna haul your ass in, got that?!

Gaster chooses to say nothing, instead giving control back to you. Again, it's so smooth that it actually takes you a second to realize you are back in control. You blink rapidly a few times. You try to focus on something else, anything to distract yourself from the thought of the room and the tortures you endured there. Thankfully Sans gently takes your chin in his hand. You focus on his face as he studies you for a moment. He barely moves as you woodenly wipe the bit of cheese off his cheek.

"you ok?"

"No. "I'm fine," you whisper instead.

The look on his face tells you he knows you're lying but he doesn't push it. He gives you a gentle nudge towards the pizza. "try to eat something. you're looking a little too much like me. al, help me get the scanner set up yeah?"

You nod numbly. Before you start moving however, your eyes dart around. Gaster's gone invisible again, which must mean he decided to nap or whatever it is he does when the wall in your head goes up. Funny though, the wall is a little tougher to notice it this time. You walk over to the pizza box as Alphys scurries over to Sans. You can hear them whispering and when she gasps sharply, you're pretty sure that Sans is telling her about the rip and the evil Gaster inside it. You sit down in the chair, your nose wrinkling as you look at the greasy pizza. You really don't feel like eating anything but you can feel that your body is famished. You pick up the smallest slice and nibble at it. Undyne awkwardly joins you, sitting on the edge of the table. She too grabs a piece of pizza, shoves the whole thing in her mouth and chews it loudly.

"So...you're dying, huh?"

You almost choke on the small bite you just took. You cough and without looking at her mumble, "That's what it looks like. It's...pretty gruesome so I'll spare you the details."

Her booted feet swing back and forth a few times before she answers. "Sorry nerd but I can't accept that." You look up at her. She's frowning but now there's no anger there. She looks sad and it's an expression that doesn't suit her in the slightest. "You've come too far to just...just let that jerk be the end of you!"

You put the pizza back in the box, too queasy to finish it. "I haven't accepted it either. It's just...this times things are extremely out of my control."

"Yeah, but the kidnapping wasn't either and you survived that." Her fist gently taps against your shoulder. "Besides, when is anything really ever in our control? You gotta take what gets thrown at you and make it work. It's like that saying! Um, what was it....when life gives you limes, throw them back! Get mad!"

A small grin tugs at your mouth. Looks like someone's been playing Portal. "It's lemons but...yeah I get what you're saying."

She matches your weak smile with a wide one of her own. "That's the spirit! And um...." Her ear fins droop slightly. "You know I wasn't gonna actually take you to Asgore, right? I know the guy's scared and really, he'd probably just make you some tea while he tried to figure stuff out but...I know
he's not the best at coming up with solutions."

"I know," you whisper and she slumps a little in relief.

You look down at your hands. You can't voice just how scared you got at the idea that she had come to try and take you away. You know Sans wouldn't have allowed that but still. The thought is terrifying. You never want to be made to go somewhere against your will ever again. But that does bring to mind another thought; what if you survived? You had thought the worst case would be dying, but what if that didn't happen? What if your body changed into something that isn't you, what if you truly became dangerous to everyone around you? What choice would the others have but to lock you away somewhere for the safety of everyone else? If that ends up being the case, then....

You would rather die.

"Hey, I think they're ready," Undyne says, tapping your head. She stands and holds her hand out to help you up.

You accept her hand because honestly you're not sure if your legs will fully support you without her help. You can't let yourself think like this! You have to keep fighting! Undyne's right; you survived the torture in the warehouse. You lived on after your grandfather died. You stopped yourself from letting that blade open your veins all those years ago. You found the one Soul in this world that completes you. You're not going to let that go without a fight.

"Gaster?" you call. It takes a moment, but then you feel his Soul flicker as he fades back into sight. You can't help but notice less of his body is glitching.

Are they ready for the scan?

"Yep." You take a deep breath. "Let's get this done."
In Which There's A Little More Talking Before The Storm Hits

Chapter Notes

Hey, did you guys know that if you search Sans/Reader and arrange it by Word Count, INTL is at #4? There's a lot of words in this story.

Also, another note, this is an important chapter and things do happen but the next update is when things are really going to get intense. I was planning on ending this chapter a little differently but it was just getting too long. So the next chapter is going to open with a bang.

After spending so much time having your Soul looked at, you would think that you would've become numb and used to it by now. But as it always does, fear eats at your insides as you approach the machine and sit down. Gaster doesn't have to remind you to stay calm. From what you've seen, the Void version him appears when you get swept up in memories from the past and you can feel the sharp flashback to your torture lingering on the edge of your mind. Still, you have to wonder; would that thing appear if it was your memories that you fell back into? So far it's only been Gaster's. Which in a way, you suppose you can be at least a little thankful for. You have no desire to see those dark nights any more than you already do in your dreams.

Sans stays by your side as Undyne and Alphys hover over the computer. He makes a few adjustments on the panel on the reader as you settle into the seat. "Hopefully this will be the last time we'll have to scan my Soul," you try to say brightly. Your voice cracks and you mentally slap yourself.

"yeah," Sans agrees, his voice also falsely cheerful. "though when it's all over we'll probably need to check it again to make sure there aren't any lingering bits of monster soul. but once we get this done we're gonna have to revamp the functions for extraction. so yeah, it will actually be the last time we scan you."

You look up at the mechanical bits around you. Extraction. That sounds like it's going to hurt.

"Keep going! We need extraction!"

Your limbs jerk wildly as the voice of the woman who took far too much pleasure in torturing you rings through your head like she's standing next to you. Immediately a cold sweat runs down your back. Your body shakes violently and you're barely aware of Sans standing in front of you, gingerly taking your trembling hands in his.

"Extraction failure! Surface cracks detected."

"Subject HP is fifteen and dropping!"

You shake your head, as if that can banish the memories. "S-s-stop," you whisper desperately.
"ok, ok we're stopping." Sans rubs his thumbs over the tops of your hands, his sockets steady and focused. "it's ok. you're safe."

**Stay in the moment.** Gaster's voice makes you jump but he too is speaking softly. *You can't get swept up again.*

No, no this isn't the same as before. This isn't falling into the space between Gaster's connection to the Void. This is just a good old PTSD flashback or something. This happened a lot after the accident with the fire and you find yourself falling into the old grounding habits you built up. You tap your finger against Sans' fused metacarpal bones in a steady beat. Focus on the beat. Slow your heart to match it.

It works, after a few minutes. And thankfully there's no air shattering rip to disturb the tense silence in the lab. You slowly relax back into the seat. You meet Sans' solid gaze. "Don't....don't say extr-" You voice catches. "That word."

He nods unquestioningly. "ok. i'm sorry."

"No, it's not you, I didn't....it's fine."

"do you need to sit down somewhere else?"

You can feel Gaster's flicker of anxiety at that, though his face stays passive and you slowly shake your head. "I'm okay. Let's just get the scan done."

Sans frowns, clearly unhappy but you know he understands there's no time to argue about it. "ok, i'm gonna be right here." He reluctantly lets go of your hand and goes back to checking the panel.

You put your head back against the seat and close your eyes. You keep them closed, focusing on breathing while listening to Alphys' gentle mutterings to Undyne as she makes some final adjustments. Their voices are soothing, helping your tense muscles to relax slightly. Well, it's certainly been a while since a flashback to your torture popped up in your head. It must have been because you were wondering about all of that earlier. Stupid thing to do.

Gaster says your name. Your eyes slide open in surprise. He's barely called you by name this entire time, simply referring to you as 'human' or the like. His expression is pained. He's probably feeling the effects of your still settling panic. "What?"

*I'm sorry.*

You feel yourself actually freeze up with shock. *What?*

He continues before you have a chance to say anything. *I understand that this, all of this, is my fault. You never should have had to endure what you did. I was...wrong to encourage Tod and Nahn. I was desperate but...that doesn't excuse what I did.* His shoulders slump and a large glitch flickers across his face. *I've never properly apologized to you for what I've put you through. Humans are resilient. I've always known this but I never thought about the consequences of enduring such a trauma. Or...maybe I just didn't care. But seeing it for myself, feeling it-!* He takes an unnecessary breath and bows his head. *I am sorry for what I've done to you and my son. Both of them.*

You gape at him. Well now! That's not what you expected. Yes, he had finally taken steps with Grillby and you had felt your determination to help him do that same with Sans and Papyrus rise powerfully but you didn't even think about him apologizing to you. Something warm blooms in your
chest and it wrestles with a dark voice in your head that seems to snarl at the idea that Gaster is actually daring to ask for forgiveness after all of this. After experimenting on Sans, threatening to sacrifice the lives of monsters both before the fall into the Core and after. *Slicing a hole in Papyrus' hand!*

But he hasn't actually asked for forgiveness, has he? Not once has he ever expected forgiveness for what he's done. And that was the problem. He knew that he had made mistakes but refused to apologize for them. But now he's standing...er, floating before you, looking just as miserable as you feel. He made that step with Grillby and now he's acknowledging that you are in pain because of his actions. It seems that finally he understands that the wounds are more than skin deep.

Gaster continues to silently stare at the floor while your thoughts race through your head. "G-"

"Hey, we're um, r-ready!" Alphys calls. "Are you s-still okay with d-doing this?"

Sans watches your expression carefully as you call, "Uh, yeah. I'm good." He nods a little and presses a button out of your sight.

As the machine whirls to life, you look at Gaster. You'd almost forgotten; this entire time you've been looking into his memories, he's been forced to look into yours. He hasn't talked about it much, aside from telling you that he saw the night you almost ended everything. You've been pushing him to try and understand what he did, how he acted without considering the emotional and mental impacts it would have on those around him. But maybe him actually seeing it and feeling it for himself is what has finally helped it to click.

Understanding brings clarity. That's something you've struggled to believe ever since your grandfather died. But you know it now to be more true than ever. For even as Gaster starts to understand your pain, you've been given a clear look into his. That fear of failure to free his people, the terror of the Void and the despair that comes every time Sans flinches away from him is helping you to understand him, even if you want to or not.

Forgiveness is hard. It took you meeting Sans to finally forgive yourself for what happened to your grandfather. Sans still struggles with forgiving himself for failing to save his father before Gaster was driven to this. But it doesn't have to come all at once, does it? Taking baby steps, you might be able to reach that unburdened future. You feel pressure building in your chest as your Soul is called out and Gaster lifts his gaze. You lock eyes with him and offer him a small smile. You don't need to say anything. He can feel it in your combined Souls. You can both see it in the way the colors of you Soul brightens a little even under the lays of black that nearly covers the entirety of it's surface.

It's not a smile of forgiveness, not yet. But it is one of understanding and hope.

It's barely visible but his sockets widen just slightly with shock. And then slowly, hesitantly, he returns your smile with one of his own.

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The Soul readings are pretty much as bad as Sans expected them to be. The visual change alone is confirmation enough for that. He joins Alphys and Undyne over at the computer; the ex-captain looks like she might be a little sick. God knows he feels like it. He almost expected you to be sick yourself when you had suddenly flipped into a near panic attack. He hadn't been sure what caused it until you tried to say 'extraction'. Then he had wanted to kick himself in the teeth. He's been so careful about using certain terms around you after he noticed that simple scientific phrases could trigger a memory that has no business being in your head. But at least that thing in the Void hadn't used your panic to break through whatever walls stood between it and this timeline. He still doesn't
understand how it's doing that, or why but there's nothing he can do except worry about it and there's no time to worry about things he can't change.

"how're the absorption levels holding?" he asks Alphys in a low voice.

Alphys wipes at her face; it's getting late and she's had a full day of classes on top of doing what she can to help them out. He feels bad but there's no way they're going to be able to get this done without her. "It's increased by ten point five percent but holding." She taps a claw against the readings on the screen. "But the balance levels are starting to even out. More of Gaster's Soul is present. The capacity of her Soul is being strained to a dangerous point. It's honestly amazing that she's still holding back from complete absorption."

"i'm sure dings has something to do with that," Sans says grimly, jotting down some of the more prominent numbers. This is going to help him with calculating the amount of DT that the body is going to need to be able to hold Gaster's Soul. He's got to put over a week's worth of DT and magic extract into this thing in just three days. Less if he can manage it. He'd really rather not push this deadline. "thanks al. i'm gonna finish these calculations and give the sample another dosage. think you can handle getting started on the ex-" He shoots you a quick glance; you're staring off into space, most likely at Gaster. He lowers his voice even more. "extraction settings? just don't say the actual word around her, ok?"

Alphys nods before hesitating. "Sans, you do know that given the extreme time limit, I uh, I won't be...it's not going to be a pretty process." She gives a nervous grin that looks more like a pained grimace. "I don't think I'd be able to make it painless even if I had months. So...um...."

It's going to hurt you, is what she's trying to say. Oh he knows. He figured that out pretty early on actually. His own Soul twinges painfully at the memory that surfaces of when he ripped out a slice of his own essence to create the mixture to increase the bond on your Soul. That small amount was enough to make him pass out for several hours. Ripping out an entire being... The thought of how much it will hurt you makes him want to cry.

You look over at him suddenly, perhaps sensing the turmoil in his Soul. The fact that despite everything his Soul's mark on yours has remained is enough to calm him slightly. He gives you a reassuring smile being turning back to Alphys. "yeah, i know it will. but there's no choice. as long as she survives it. that's what matters."

Her expression is sad as she once again nods and Sans heads back to the desk with all his calculations on it. He pauses when he passes you and, after making sure his dad isn't at the wheel, taps his teeth against your head in a gentle kiss. "al's ready to go when you are. but if you need to sleep then sleep, ok?"

You give him a soft smile, one of the ones that never fail to make his Soul flip in his chest. "I'm okay. I think that single bite of pizza gave me my energy back!"

He fights the urge to frown because really he's the worst person to get after someone for not eating given his own bad habits about skipping meals. But he does see that the light in your eyes is bright and focused. You're rather...composed considering your near panic attack. Gaster must have said something. He noticed of course when your attention had snapped to the man he still can't see right before the scan started. What puzzles him though is the smile that crossed your face soon after. The sight, normally something he would treasure, only made him once again painfully aware of the fact that Gaster can say whatever he wants to you and he can't do a thing about it. But he also knows that you're not the kind of person to put up with anyone's crap. You've gotten angry before, yelling at the seemingly empty space. It would almost be funny if it wasn't such a grave situation. So if his fa...if Dings said something that made you smile like that, then he should be happy.
But he still feels unsettled.

Undyne follows him back to his table. She can't help in the mechanical side of things and it's clear she's got no intention of going anywhere. Thankfully, she stays quiet for the most part as he dives back into work and completely tunes her out. It doesn't take too long to determine that another shot of DT isn't going to hurt the bone so he gathers up the materials to do that. The Determination extract and magical solution are in two separate containers and he very carefully measures out a balance of both of them into a syringe. The last thing he wants to do is overdose the bone and make it melt away. The horror of that possibility keeps him steadily focused even as Undyne's nails start tapping on the table with irritating volume. He ignores her, finishes the prep and heads over to the containment unit. He gingerly tugs the bone up out of the thick liquid and places it in his palm. A shiver runs up his spine at the texture. It's bone, there's no doubt about that but it's...squishy. It almost feels like it's pulsing. One shot of DT was enough to do this?

He quickly but methodically injects the mixture into the bone and lowers it back into the jar. Surely it's just a trick of the light, but he's almost certain he sees the surface of the bone stretch out and jerk for just a brief moment. Then again, going by Undyne's face, maybe it wasn't.

He almost laughs at the look of fascinated horror and disgust twisting her face. But then she says, "That's from Papyrus' hand?"

And just like that, even the tiny urge to laugh is extinguished. He doesn't need to answer.

"That's...that's sick!" Undyne snarls, her hands curling into fists. "Alphys told me it had to happen but-but God!"

Well she certainly has a way with words. "yeah. it's sick."

She looks at him, mouth open to perhaps drill into him what he already knows. He should've done something else, he should've tried harder to save Papyrus from having to do this. But at the expression on his face must speak to her sense of mercy so instead she just throws herself into an empty chair, groaning loudly. "I told your brother his big, stupid soft heart was gonna get him in trouble one day."

Sans snorts. Doesn't he know it. He may not remember it clearly but he knows his brother would have tried to stop the murderous child (or the force controlling them anyway) with a hug and that never ended well. He taps a finger against his skull; there's not point in thinking about that stuff. It's in the past and for once, it can't be changed. "my brother's big soft heart is the best thing about him," he mutters, not quite willing to have this conversation with the ex-captain.

She sighs and lifts her eye patch up, rubbing at the scarred tissue behind it. Sans doesn't stare but he does wonder what the actual truth is behind the accident. He's heard so many different variations that at this point he's given up on ever knowing what really happened. "You know, I used to wonder where Paps got his soft heart from. I certainly didn't think it was from you." She taps his shoulder lightly with her fist and he gives her a rueful grin.

"you'd be right about that."

"Ha! Well, that's what I thought." She leans forward in the chair. "But I think you've been hiding a pretty big heart yourself tough guy."

He just grunts in response, turning his attention back to his equations.

She continues despite his obvious attempt at dropping the subject. "C'mon, admit it; you're a big old
softie, just like he is."

"my head has been compared to a stale marshmallow in the past."

She snorts at that before frowning. "He wanted to come with us you know. He's kinda pissed at you for just running off after what happened with Frisk and Asgore."

Sans' grip on his pencil tightens noticeably. "i was trying to keep them safe," he says curtly. "if something happened, she never would've forgiven herself. and paps has been hurt enough as it is. since i still don't know what triggered the attack, we're gonna keep our distance. i can deal with paps being mad later." His shoulders hunch and his voice drops into a pathetic whisper. "i've had plenty of chances to get used to him being pissed at me."

"He's only mad cause he's worried dummy." Her words are harsh but her tone is understanding. "Look, your brother's strong. A lot stronger than I think you give him credit for."

"i know exactly how strong he is!" His snap makes Alphys and you look over. You start to come over in concern but he quickly motions for you to keep going. He sighs and rubs his hand over his face. He knows how strong his brother is. Everything thing Papyrus does, every action, every choice, is made with the full power and kindness his Soul possesses. Sans loves him for it but....

It makes his own weaknesses so much more glaringly apparent.

"sorry," he mutters. This isn't the time to get caught up in the 'should haves' and 'if only'. "look, i gotta get these done ok? there's a bench over there if you want to lie down. or. you know. generally stay out of the way."

Undyne studies him for a few moments more. Finally, she stands and stretches. Her sharp toothed mouth opens wide in noisy yawn. "You know what, I think I'm gonna do that. Get this nerd stuff figured out so you can save her, okay?"

"that's the plan."

She starts to turn away but suddenly pinches his cheeks, painfully stretching the bone out as far as it can go, which admittedly, isn't far at all. "ow, ow, ow!"

The smirk on her face rivals even the all tooth smiles of Papyrus. "Look at that! You are like a stale marshmallow!"

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Hours pass and you work. Occasionally Sans or Alphys will hand you some water and you'll gulp it down in one go before starting back in again. You and Gaster switch control so seamlessly now that it doesn't hurt anymore. There are a few times when your voice once again gets stuck speaking that strange half wingdings half english language and it takes several minutes to pull your Souls apart. Every time it gets harder to do so. Every time Sans stands by your side, his expression increasingly scared.

Still, in an odd sort of way, you're almost at peace for the first time since this happened. Because of the new understanding between you and Gaster, you find that a little bit of the panic has been muted. The urgency is still there, absolutely, but you and Gaster are completely working together now. There's no internal resistance or struggle. For the first time, he doesn't have to give you detailed instructions on what you do when it comes to putting the complicated machinery together. You still don't fully understand it and if anyone asked you what the individual pieces are called you wouldn't have a clue how to answer them. But now it's like putting a puzzle together. As Gaster figures out
equations and settings, you automatically move to make the resulting adjustments. You see Alphys staring in awe at times, though she blushes heavily and stammers every time you catch her. As you work by her side a powerful feeling of deja vu is almost enough to make you smile. Gaster's thoughts go back to those times when Alphys was younger, a timid yet promising assistant working by his side while Sans, the more than capable scientist snoozed at the worst possible times. He would make Alphys wake him up and though she seemed hesitant, he clearly remembers seeing a satisfied smirk on her face when he gave her permission to dump cold water over the napping skeleton once or twice.

You blink and shake your head a little. His thoughts and yours keep getting jumbled up. It's disorienting. In any case, Sans isn't sleeping now (Undyne is though; she passed out on the bench ages ago). He finished up his DT calculations around three in the morning and joined you with making the extrac....the Soul transfer tools after giving the bone another dose. You blearily glance at the clock. It's almost eight a.m. The students will be coming in soon. Poor Alphys. She waved off your concerns earlier, saying that at this point all the students have various projects they're working on anyway so she's answering questions as they come and not preparing lessons. Still, the bags under her eyes are dark. You're sure you look no better, if not worse. Sans of course, is avoiding answering your questions about skipping out on work for this. You decide not to push it.

"hey." Sans taps your shoulder.

"Hmmm?"

"come look at this." He's smiling, tiredly, but smiling all the same. "c'mon, get up."

"I don't wanna hear that line from Mr. Lazybones," you grumble. You groan as you stand up, your bones popping loudly after sitting stiffly for so long.

Alphys tiredly lifts her head. Her hands are stained with oil from working at the machine. "I'm...I'm gonna go lie down," she slurs as she gets to her feet too. "Few minutes."

"that's fine al," Sans says, coming over to lend you a shoulder to lean on because you're more than a little wobbly. "i'm gonna take her back to the hotel too for a bit."

"What?" Your protest is a sad croak and Sans just puts a finger over your mouth.

"you're gonna get burned out. we just need a little sleep."

He's right, stupid caring Boyfriend. You walk slowly with Sans as he leads you over to the machine as the ghostly image of Gaster follows close behind. His face is drawn with exhaustion too. You hear Undyne wake up ("YOU'VE BEEN AWAKE ALL NIGHT?!") and the door to the lab open and shut loudly before asking, "What is it you want to show me?"

Sans, the constant bags under his sockets also dark, smiles and gestures to the growth tube. "look."

So you look and your breath catches in the same moment that Gaster gasps.

Inside the tube, where just a few hours ago a chunk of bone floated, there is now a small body. It's a skeleton, a tiny, still forming skeleton. It's body perhaps the size of your forearm, though it's currently curled in a fetal position so it might be slightly longer. The skull is larger than the rest of it and its sockets are closed. There's no mouth yet or individual ribs and it's legs are just tiny undeveloped stubs. The spine and the coccyx is formed however and it's curled up around the upper half of the body like a tail. It actually almost looks like an unfinished doll. You can feel your eyes bugging as you approach the tank and put your hand on the glass.
"Whoa," you whisper, completely at a loss for words.

Gaster too is staring at his new body with utter fascination. "When did the formation start?" he asks Sans, his renewed energy zapping through you.

Sans shrugs a little sheepishly. "Well, uh, there was visible bumps when i checked it at four this morning, then i uh, kinda got wrapped up in the soul transfer equations. i just noticed this a few minutes ago."

Gaster steeples his hands, pressing them against his mouth as he visibly takes a frustrated breath. "Tell me you at least checked the vitals."

course i did." Sans snags a clipboard covered in various notes on a nearby stool. "everything looks fine so far. not gonna lie, i was a little worried all that extra dt was gonna melt the bone. but the energy and magic readings are...steady, if not a little on the high end."

Gaster takes the clipboard with his summoned hands, flipping through the sheets. He relaxes and starts nodding as his gaze darts over the readings. You snicker at Sans' bemused face; to him it must look like the clipboard is just hovering in the air pointed at nothing. The two of them start discussing the results and you turn your attention back to the small skeleton. Besides drifting a little in the gelatinous liquid, it's not moving at all. But simply looking at it, you can almost see a flow of energy within it's semi-translucent bones. Something inside of you, something strange and new and warm seems to respond to the spark of magic in the small body that came from you.

"so, i'd say keeping up this pace, we should be good to give it another dose before we leave and come back in a few hours-"

"Hey Sans."

Sans stops, his surprised expression easing into a warm smile at the obvious happiness on your face. "Yeah?"

You grin widely at him. "We're doing this. It's working." You bounce into his arms, startling him with the force of your hug. A delighted giggle escapes you as you squeeze him. "Sans, we did it!"

His arms wrap tightly around you and he presses his body flush against yours. "We're not quite there yet but...yeah. it's alive. it's...we made a monster."

You snort and pull back a little. "So, how's it feel to be a dad?"

As expected, a deep blush lights his face and you grin deviously. "W-well, you...oh you are such a brat sometimes," he mumbles, covering his sockets.

"Aw, but you love me for it, right?"

His smile quirks upwards. "It's one of the reasons."

Gaster sighs loudly, interrupting your moment. "It's a little early for celebrating, don't you think?"

You wave a hand carelessly at him. "Oh come on. We're like practically parents now. Let us have a moment."

Gaster's face twists. "You are not like parents. This is-"
"What should we name him?" You say to Sans, who's blush somehow manages to get brighter. "I was thinking something like Goop McGoopster."

There's a glint in his socket and your grin only gets wider as he pretends to ponder for a second, unable to resist the chance to mess with Gaster. "What about dingbat?"

"I love it."

"Must you carry on like this? There's still work to do." Gaster looks visibly flustered and embarrassed and you've never felt so smug.

"I won't, but you might have to be carried around if your body doesn't get much bigger!"

Sans chokes on a shocked laugh as you dissolve into giggles. He adjusts his hold on you because now you're leaning on him rather heavily. "Ok, I think someone needs to sleep a little."

You almost make the 'I'll sleep when I'm dead' joke but fortunately you've got enough sense to realize that would be in really bad taste. Instead you just sigh and put your head on his shoulder. "Yeah, I think I do."

Sans nods and without further conversation, takes you back to the hotel. It's at that point you realize that you're still wearing the same clothes you were back in Toriel's place and you haven't showered or really taken care of your humans needs since then either. It takes some convincing, but Sans finally agrees to run home and grab you some extra clothes and basic essentials while you take a shower. Another perk of being able to see Gaster is that you now know for certain that he turns away while you strip out of your rather smelly clothes and step into the small tub. It's nothing fancy but the hot water does feel utterly amazing and you get hit with another wave of exhaustion. You fight the urge to simply fall asleep in the tub and finish up. Sans hands you some pajamas through the door and once you're dressed you pretty much collapse into the bed.

"How long can I sleep?" you mumble into the pillow as Sans crawls in next to you. It feels a little strange to be going to bed while the morning sun shines through the cracks in the blinds but you're too tired to care.

"Couple of hours. I'll set an alarm." Sans runs his hand over your head and you lean into his touch. "If you need to sleep longer and I can keep working."

You shake your head, the fog of sleep already slurring your words. "I'll be fine. Just...just wake me if...the memories....

You fall asleep before you finish the thought.
The small skeleton child's face is flush with fever. The scientist gingerly applies a wet rag to Papyrus' skull. It's odd; Sans has so far shown more tenancies to get sick than his younger brother. He had worked his calculations over and over to assure that Papyrus would have a better constitution when he created him. Perhaps it's just an ordinary childhood magic strain?

"Sans, what happened?"

The older child is distraught. A small glimmer of unshed tears line his sockets. "he wanted to be like me, i tried showing him bone attacks and i was showing off and he made this huge attack and he fell over and he-he-"

"Take a breath," the scientist says firmly. "You're going to make yourself sick too at this rate."

Sans does as he says, nodding and wiping at his face. "sorry," he whispers miserably, shrinking away.

He sighs. "It's okay Sans. It's just a magic strain flu. You got these all the time, remember?"

The child nods but this only seems to make him feel worse, judging from the way his face scrunches in misery.

What is he supposed to say in situations like this? He fights for a moment and decides to instead turn his attention back to Papyrus. He lays a hand on the child's ribs, focusing his gaze on the Soul within. It's warm with fever, but his HP is holding strong and steady. Papyrus is in no danger.

Papyrus stirs a little, opening his sockets blearily. "WHAT'S...GOING ON?"

Even sick, he's somehow managing to shout. The scientist feels a smile tugging at his mouth. "You tried to use a pretty big attack today, huh?"

The child blinks in confusion for a moment before smiling widely. "IT WAS BIG! ALMOST AS BIG AS SANS!"

Sans sniffs.

"CAN I SHOW YOU?"

The scientist leans over, grabbing the bottle of medicine and a spoon on the bedside table. "You may, after you take your medicine and rest. Is that agreeable?"
Sans stiffens at the word 'medicine', as he always does, but it's a barely noticeable twitch.

Papyrus makes face. "IS IT THE YUCKY KIND?"

"isn't all medicine yucky?" Sans mumbles.

He can't stop a small chuckle at that. "That may be true but you still have to take it."

Papyrus pouts, but opens his mouth and allows the scientist to spoon in a generous amount. After it's done, he pushes down on Papyrus' skull gently. "Sleep. The fever should be broken by the time you wake up."

The child nods, his sockets already drooping once again. "OKAY. THANK YOU PAPA."

His Soul lurches. Papa? Where did...where did he even hear that? He looks to Sans, who's gaze is fixed on his brother.

"he's gonna be ok, right?" he asks in a trembling voice. A single tear has left a faint trail on his cheek.

The scientist hesitates before very slowly placing a hand on his child's skull. Sans doesn't pull away, like he expected him too. Nor does he freeze, he simply...sits there. Allowing the contact. He fights the urge to smile, his Soul leaping in his ribs. He never thought this would be possible, not after everything he did to the small child.

"Yes Sans," he says softly, rubbing the bone under his palm. "Papyrus i s   g o i n g   t o   b e.....

"-completely blown away!"

The girl, young, impatient and overflowing with excitement bounces around her grandfather as he slowly trudges up the hill. A flashlight in his hand illuminates the path but she doesn't need it to know where she was going. She's been up this trail more times than she can even remember! "Why're you so slow?" she demands. "We're gonna miss it!"

"We are not going to miss it. The stars aren't going anywhere." He chuckles, the sound deep and rough and comforting, allowing the girl to take his hand and tug him along. It takes longer than she would like but finally they approach the top of the hill. The gentle summer wind makes the surrounding trees sing softly and the light of the stars casts a silvery glow upon the wild grass. The girl lets go of her grandfather's hand, an excited giggle filling the quiet night.

"Here!" she proclaims after a moment of wild running. She points to the perfect spot. She stombs down on the grass to flatten it before darting back to her grandpa and snatching the blanket thrown over his shoulder. She shakes it out, lays it down and fixes the bumps all by the time he joins her. With a loud groan, he lowers himself to the ground, flopping onto his back.

"Ahh, yes. This is indeed the perfect spot. In fact, it's so comfy, I might just fall asleep."

"Nooo!" She slaps his cheek gently, knowing that he's just teasing. "You gotta tell me a new story tonight! You promised!"

He grins, the laugh lines on his face scrunching. "I suppose I did, didn't I? And I can't break a promise to my favorite space gal."
Satisfied, the girl curled up by his side, her eyes drifting to the night sky above. The stars glisten and twinkle, holding the stories that she loves with all her heart. She presses her cheek against her grandpa's chest, letting the rumble of his voice soothe her.

"Let's see now. How about I tell you about the Gemini brothers? You won't believe..."

"-how much trouble he is in!" The scientist storms up the stairwell, the sharp tap of his shoes matched with the scurrying clicks of the new intern struggling to keep up. What's her name? He should remember, he hired her after all. But it's lost in the noise in his head. The infuriating never ending noise!

"Um sir you did put Sans in charge of the project."

"He's acted in direct defiance of the values of this facility!" He reaches the door he's storming towards and throws it open. At the loud noise, several of the scientists jump in alarm, guiltily shrinking away from the rage emitting from him. But his gaze finds the one monster that maintains his composure with a calm smile.

"'sup dings?" Sans continues to scribble in a notebook, barely looking up. "You're kinda late."

"What have you done?" His voice is even, betraying none of the anger boiling in his bones. "Sans, I asked you to find a way to stabilize the time-space readings and instead you've closed them!"

"No, you specifically said to find a way to stabilize the core's power inputs and I've made a judgement call that using the energy from an infinite space we have no hope in gaining control over isn't the way to do it."

The noise explodes in his head and he reaches....

And places a shaking finger on the blood slowly creeping down her arm. It hurts. It hurts, of course it hurts. But the sting of the cut is sharper than she thought it would be. That's what she wanted though, right? To feel something, anything to drown out the noise. It never stops, it never quiets down. It pounds in his head, screaming, laughing, crying and chattering endlessly. It calls him to that dark place and he can't stop himself from being drawn in further and further into the dark.

Darker yet darker.

The darkness keeps growing, the shadows cutting deeper.

How

Very

Interesting.

He reaches out for the dark and he's falling.
White. Blinding, endless white.

You're falling down into the dark and then-
female laugh fills the air around you. You know that voice. You whirl but there's still nothing but white.

"Well look at you now!" The voice is gleeful and bright. "Abandoned by your friends and so called family. Betrayed and left behind by the one who claimed to love you. What a shame."

"Shut up!" you scream. You spin so fast trying to find the source of the voice you lose your balance and slam against one of the glass walls. "He wouldn't leave me! He wouldn't!"

"But he just did." Nahn, the twisted scientist who so happily tortured you with her sick experiments shimmers into view. She's smiling, like she's just received a present she's waited years for. "He's locked you away because you're dangerous."

"I'm not!"

She starts to walk around the confines of the cage. She's holding a syringe in one hand and she twirls it like a pencil. "Oh but you are. You're out of control. You've killed people."

Your body freezes. "I haven't killed anyone," you whisper.

"Oh haven't you?" She taps on the glass with a syringe and the faded image of a boy appears. He's strapped on a table. Before you eyes his body spasms and he screams as his flesh begins to melt into a pile of goop. Then he's gone and there's a small monster writhing as they crumble into dust. More and more monsters and humans you've never seen appear on the glass, screaming and pleading with you to save them as their bodies are forced to become one quivering wailing pile of goop.

You cringe away, shoving your hands against your ears to try and block out the agonized wailing. "It wasn't me!" you whimper. "It wasn't me!"

"It might as well have been." The cursed images fade away and Nahn is suddenly there in the cage with you. You flinch away as she grips your face. Her nails dig into your skin painfully. "Wouldn't it have been better if you just let me work? Wouldn't it have been better for you if you had faded away in my lab? You've had nothing but pain since then and it could have been avoided if you had just DIED." She lifts the syringe and it glints with a sickening black liquid. She jabs it into your neck and you scream at the resulting fire that courses through your body. Your arms and legs twitch with agony, too heavy to thrash out. Your Soul cries out as it's swallowed up in the fire, burning away under the never-ending pain.

Smiling sadly, Nahn pulls the needle out of your neck with a sicking squelch. Your blood coats the syringe, dripping heavily onto the pristine white floor. "Yet you insisted on fighting back anyway. And for what? You've ended up far worse than any of my little pets."

She releases you and vanishes. With a loud bang, the glass walls suddenly turn into mirrors and surrounding you, repeating endlessly is the image of a monster. Twisted, deformed and falling apart. Parts of it's skin continuously drip from it's elongated limps like black tar. It has no hair nor a clear point in which its legs and torso begin. It's melting into a pile, bits of charred bone peeking through. And it's face...the left half of your face is yours, a single eye wide with horror. The other side is a melting skull, several cracks running across the surface of the bone. Black, tar-like tears pour of the right socket, deformed and shaped like a tilted crescent moon.

And in the midst of it all are the remains of two shattered Souls, twisted into something that is neither human or monster.

Bile rises up your throat. Slowly, unable to stop yourself, you look down at your own hands. Your
normal, human hands crack and split as your skin hardens and crumbles away to dust. A cascade of blood pours from your disintegrating muscle tissue, pooling around your feet until nothing but bone remains. The bones of your skeletal hands are clawed and twisted and both palms have been punched through, leaving a great gaping hole filled with endless darkness. An animalistic wail breaks from you as you grip your deformed head. All thought, all sense of self is gone, eaten away by the heart wrenching disgust and fear. You fall to what remains of your knees, sobbing and howling with pure horror at what you've become as your own blood soaks into your new deformed body.

Sans is gone. He couldn't save you. It's better that you stay locked away where no one can see you. Where you can't hurt anyone.

There's no point in fighting.

It's too late.

~~~~~~

You're still screaming as the terrifying nightmare finally releases you. You keep screaming and thrashing as a pair of hands grips your shoulders. You fight the touch, scrambling to free yourself. You're going to be taken away, you're going to be locked up again!

"breathe! calm down!"

You flinch away from the voice, finally breaking free of the tight grip. Your wild movements throw you off the bed. You hit the floor hard, probably bruising something and pull yourself to the wall. You curl in on yourself, hyperventilating. "Don't!" you scream, covering your head. "Don't lock me away, don't leave me, I'm sorry, I'm sorry sorry sorry, please don't g-go!"

"i'm right here, please you need to calm down." You can sense Sans kneeling in front of you but he doesn't try to touch you again. His voice is scared, pleading. "baby please, try to breathe."

You're shaking violently. Sans swims into view as you peak through a slit in your fingers. "Sans, please don't put me in there," you whimper. "I can't be locked away again, I'll die. I'll just die."

"what are you talking about?"

"The glass box, the whiteness, you walked away! You left me alone!"

You see something behind Sans. Gaster, his sockets pitch black and wide with panic stare at you as his own hands clutch at his chest. Y-You need to relax. We can't let the rip open again. His voice rings in your head, your own terror reflected in his face. It was just a dream.

All reason leaves you once again. It's because of him! His Soul, his actions are going to turn you into that thing! Your head jerks down to stare at the current of energy linking your Souls together. Get him out, you need to get him out now! "Get out of my head!" you shriek as your hands wildly claw at your chest. You'll rip it out by force if you have to! You'll pull him out with your bare hands! "Out, out, out!"

"hey! hey stop that!" Sans quickly grabs your wrists, pulling your hands down. You struggle against him, your own fingers tearing your shirt a little in the scuffle. "you're gonna hurt yourself!"

"I don't care! I won't be locked up again, I won't! Let go of me!"

"no." Sans tightens his grip. "i'm not gonna let you hurt yourself."
"Why?!"

"because i care!"

You struggle for a moment but his hold is too strong and your limbs too weak with fear to do much. He waits until you stop moving, very slowly releasing your wrists. "no one is going to lock you up," he says firmly. "i'm not gonna let that happen. and i will never leave you alone. i promise."

You dissolve at his words, wailing into your hands. Somehow you manage to curl into more of a ball, your body locking into a stiff knot. Sans carefully takes you in his arms and you let him hold you as you shiver and gasp. You let yourself go completely, screaming and sobbing into his chest until your voice is raw. You can't control the outflow of emotions. He rocks you, gently humming and whispering to you even as he himself trembles at the force of your terrified crying. His Soul pulses in his rib cage like a heartbeat and you can feel it both against your cheek and in your own Soul. Slowly, you uncurl from your locked position, letting yourself rest against him. He holds you firmly, a hand gently stroking your head.

Your eyes sting and your throat burns but eventually the tears stop. Eventually the panic and overwhelming fear subsides as you start to return to your senses. You keep your head pressed against Sans' ribs and he makes no move to do anything besides continuing to rock slowly. "I....am so damn sick of crying," you croak quietly.

Sans doesn't respond, though you feel him sigh deeply. Your gaze, fuzzy from crying, drifts over to Gaster. He's still visible, pulled as far away from you as he can get. But you can't help but notice that distance has grown shorter than it was before. He's barely three feet away now. He's nearly level with the floor, bent over and clutching at his skull. His entire form is glitching wildly. You can hear him breathing heavily, his own Soul still reeling from the force of your emotions. He slowly looks up when he feels your eyes on him. His sockets are still pitch black. He's not crying but his expression betrays that he's close to doing just that.

"Are you okay?" you ask softly.

He slowly sits up, hovering an inch or two above the carpet. Why...why would you ask me that?

"Because you look nearly as bad as I feel." Your eyes drop down to the connecting line between you. Your stomach twists at how crazy you acted. The sick act of trying to physically rip your chest open to pull out his Soul must have shaken him to his core. "I'm sorry," you whisper. You don't have to say what for.

Gaster slowly shakes his head. The glitches marring his edges start to subside. You were disoriented, he says numbly. Acting out of fear. It is understandable.

"Doesn't make it right." You reach out to Gaster intending to give him a touch of comfort and freeze when you see the back of your hand.

Sans stiffens under you. "oh shit," he breathes.

On the back of your hand, shaped in a near perfect circle is a deep black bruise like mark. You slowly turn your hand; there's a matching bruise on your palm. A quick look at your other hand shows that the strange marks are on both of your hands. Very gingerly, you touch the mark with a finger. It doesn't...hurt but a strange tingle of energy or something crawls across your skin.

Sans takes your hand, carefully examining the marks. He too touches it and you shiver at the contact. "well...at least it's not an actual hole," he says in a strained voice.
Doesn't mean it won't end up that way. You pull your hands into your chest, shuddering. "It was bad Sans," you whisper, turning your face into his chest again. "The things I saw the...thing I became. I was...."

"shhh." He presses his teeth your head. "you don't have to talk about it."

A little bit of tension bleeds out of you. Part of you wants to spill everything you saw but if you do that you'll probably end up crying again and there's no way you want to deal with that. You're honestly shocked you even have tears left to cry. "What if it was a look into the future? I saw flashes of the past before...Sans, what if that's my future?"

"there won't be a future where you get locked up. i told you i won't let that happen. we're gonna make this work, ok?" He eases your hands out of the death grip you've got them in and takes your hand in his. "we're almost there. what you saw was just a bad dream."

You want to believe him. And you do believe that he would never leave you behind. But if that is your future, if you...become that grotesque thing-!

Sans pokes your forehead gently. "you're thinking about it anyway, aren't you? don't do that." he chastises gently.

Sans is right. The lights have come back into Gaster's sockets. What we saw was just a manifestation of fears and memories. That will not happen to us. I won't allow it.

You narrow your eyes at Gaster. Something in his tone sounds off...but you can't put your finger on what it is. Your head hurts too much from crying to try and focus on it. "We should get back to lab," you mutter. "We're wasting time."

You sit up, still holding on to Sans' hand. His grip tightens. "do you need to sleep more?"

"No," you say, a little sharper than you mean to. "Sorry. I'm fine. Let's just go. Please."

You don't want to sleep. If it means seeing stuff like that, you'd be perfectly fine with never sleeping again. And in your heart, you know one way or another, you won't be sleeping until this is over.

Chapter End Notes

I've noticed the R key on my keyboard is a little sticky so if you notice typos like 'you' instead of 'your' that's probably why. I keep an eye out for them but some things get missed.

Feed the comment monster!
Breaking

Chapter Notes

Special thanks to curlywillow and kamui-dragonprincess on tumblr for being betas for this chapter!

Trigger Warnings: some body horror
Writing Blog
Main Blog

The comment monster waits for cookies

Turns out washing up, sleeping and recovering from the violent panic attack took less than four hours. It feels like so much longer than that. Sans checks on the body as soon as you pop back into the lab; there's visible growth but it's still not fully formed and it's skull remains oddly blank. Gaster tells you that Sans and Papyrus' bodies did that too until their Souls were actually put inside. Then the faces adjusted to match the magical energies and became the faces you know and love.

"So once we actually get your Soul to detach from mine, all we have to do is press it to your new body?" you ask a little dubiously. "That's it?"

It's like fitting in the final piece of a puzzle, Gaster explains. He's remained steady and calm after regaining composure but you can't help but notice an odd sort of hesitation and caution in the way he speaks to you. Like he's trying very hard not to set you off again. It's a little weird, especially considering that it's honestly too late for it to mean much but you appreciate his effort. The body knows it's supposed to have a Soul and a Soul is supposed to have a body. We just have to make sure my Soul doesn't shatter in the process of shifting it from your body to mine.

So that's the easy part. Even the actual process of pulling his Soul out is fairly easy to set up. The problem is making sure it's just his Soul that gets removed. The readings of your Soul's energies and his are now so merged and similar that it's going to take an exact set of equations and settings to make sure this is done right. And while monster's Soul's can stand to lose a little bit of their essence (since that's how monster children are born) and Sans and Gaster have no idea if human Souls can do the same. And even if they can, there's a big difference between willingly giving up essence to form a new life and having it forcibly sliced away.

Sans is working on those equations now. He mumbles under his breath as his marker darts back and forth across the huge whiteboard he dragged over. He writes down complicated equations only to slash through them a moment later and hops from one cluster of numbers to another with no visible correlation. You and Gaster are focusing on finishing the additional parts needed for the actual extr-...removal as well as finding a safe way to move Gaster's Soul and giving the body it's semi-hourly injections.

But you keep running into setbacks. You have to start over on the actual building of certain parts every time Sans makes a little bit of headway into his calculations. Worse still are the numerous flashbacks that leave you immobile for several minutes. There's no traumatic memories at least; it's mostly flashes of Gaster's life in the lab or looks into the various hi-jinks Sans and Papyrus got into.
You do see one of Grillby building his first bar and you can't help but grin at the warm flash that fills your heart thanks to Gaster's flicker of joy.

Thankfully none of them are enough to call to the Void Gaster. The air remains still and undisturbed. It's a relief but you know in your heart you haven't seen the last of it yet. Gaster is hopeful that once he gets established in his new body and doesn't have to hold back from taking over, his connection to the Void will be severed. You're not holding your breath. Luck hasn't exactly been on your side for a while.

Alphys scrambles through the doors a few hours after you and Sans get back to work, mumbling under her breath about sleeping through her alarm. Sans doesn't mention what happened at the hotel and neither does Gaster and you're grateful for that. Not every moment of your strange life needs to be talked about like a science project. The truth is, you are still shaken from the nightmare earlier. You've never fallen into your own memories, not like that. Maybe it's because the distance between your Soul and Gaster's is getting so much shorter now? You might be looking through his eyes as well as his memories.

You try not to dwell on it and pour your energy into working. Not too many people come into the lab during school hours, which you're grateful for. The noise of their chatter and pointless experiments will only serve as distractions.

Oh boy, there's a line of thought that most certainly did not come from you. Gaster might be doing better but he's not quite halo-worthy yet.

Eventually though the school empties and it's just the four of you in the lab. Alphys turned on some catchy J-pop type music a while ago and you convince Gaster not to make a fuss about it because having music in the background helps you to relax and focus a little bit better. In fact, you focus so well that you don't notice the lab doors open nor the two figures that come in until you hear Sans yelp "what the he-!...um, heck are you two doing here?"

You look down from the top of the Soul machine, where you climbed up probably a good two hours ago to mess with internal wiring. Gaster floats by your side, quiet but watching Frisk intensely. Frisk and Papyrus look around the lab for a moment, confused before Frisk notices you up there and tugs on Papyrus' arm. He's tall enough that you're barely above his eye level even on top of this thing.

"OH! THERE YOU ARE! I AM NOT USED TO LOOKING UP WHEN TRYING TO FIND YOU!"

"Uh, yeah I'm not usually this high up." You close the panel and work on screwing it shut so you can come down. "What are you guys doing here?"

"yeah, pretty sure i asked you two to stay away while we finish this?" Sans says dryly, setting down his own tools. His gaze darts up to you, probably checking to make sure Frisk standing in front of you isn't going to trigger another violent flashback.

"YOUR ACTUAL WORDS WERE 'KEEP THE KID SAFE'," Papyrus says loudly, flashing his phone as evidence. "AND THE GREAT PAPYRUS HAS NO DOUBT THAT HE CAN KEEP ANYONE SAFE, EVEN IF WE GO TO THE PLACE YOU DON'T WANT US TO GO. BESIDES, ______ IS NOT DANGEROUS! SHE DIDN'T MEAN TO ATTACK FRISK, RIGHT?"

You lose your grip on the screwdriver. It clangs loudly against the floor and Papyrus is quick to swoop down, pick it up and hand it back. "Thanks," you whisper, guilt making your voice quiet. You tighten the last screw and move to climb back down.
Papyrus reaches up and gently grabs you before you move more than an inch or two. You squeak as you slide over the edge of the machine and land securely princess style in his arms. "ALLOW ME TO ASSIST YOU! YOU ARE LOOKING A LITTLE WOBBLY. YOU SHOULDN'T EVEN BE UP SO HIGH IN YOUR CONDITION!"

"Probably not," you agree, your head spinning from the sudden movement. Papyrus sets you down and only a moment later, Frisk runs up to you and throws their arms around your waist. You freeze for a second, scared that the memories will swallow you up again, afraid that this time you won't be able to stop Void Gaster from ripping into this world. But nothing happens. You sigh with relief, hearing Gaster do the same and hug Frisk just as tightly.

"I'm so sorry Frisk. I didn't want to you hurt you, I just-"

Frisk taps your back a few times before pulling away far enough to sign. **I know that you didn't mean to. I'm...I'm the last person who's going to judge you for actions out of your control.**

A little tension leaves your shoulders. You didn't really expect Frisk to be angry with you, but it's reassuring to hear it all the same. "Thanks kiddo."

They smile and nod and then their gaze moves directly to Gaster. They squint and Gaster squints right back.

"HI DAD!" Papyrus waves to a spot about five feet to the left of where Gaster is actually standing. "HOW ARE YOU DOING?"

"Hello Papyrus. I'm doing just as well as can be expected."

Gaster signs back. Frisk is still staring directly at him.

"Can you see him?"

They frown and hold their fingers up close together. **It's hard to see...but I think so. It's like static and fog all at the same time. It's getting clearer.**

That is so weird. You being able to see him at least makes a little sense. But why can Frisk do it too? Not to mention that you've had a sneaking suspicion that they've been able to at least see something for a while now. "Clearer than before?"

Frisk scuffs their feet a little sheepishly. **I couldn't really see him. It was like...a sixth sense? I just knew where he was.**

**It's probably because of their connection to the Anomaly,** Gaster mutters just to you. **I still don't understand how they were able to break free of that thing.**

You want to press him about that, but with Frisk and Papyrus watching you hopefully and Sans scowling quietly behind his work (Alphys is trying her best to blend into the machine), it doesn't seem like the time. "That's weird," you say instead. "More questions we can figure out later, huh?"

"yeah. for now, we need to get back to work," Sans says, coming over to stand next to you. He ruffles Frisk's hair, smiling a little. "we must've worried ya, huh?"

They pout and nod as Papyrus puts a finger in his brother's face. "THAT'S RIGHT WE WERE WORRIED! HIS MAJESTY ALMOST EVEN PUT OUT A PATROL FOR YOU! BUT LADY TORIEL CONVINCED HIM NOT TO!"
You and Sans share a glance; yours is a little more panicked but he doesn't seem surprised. "well, tell old fluffybuns we're fine. and he can talk to dings for as long as he wants once this is done. but uh, maybe don't mention to him we're at the university, ok paps?"

Papyrus frowns but nods solemnly. "COME ON FRISK. WE SHOULD LEAVE THEM TO THEIR SCIENCING!" He puts a hand on Frisk's shoulder and starts to steer them away.

You feel a sudden surge of fear and dread rising in your throat that comes from both you and Gaster. "Wait!"

"NYEH?" Papyrus turns and you crash into him, hugging him tightly. Frisk joins in too after a second, their face turned towards the floor. "YOU ACT LIKE THIS IS THE LAST TIME YOU'LL GET TO HUG THE GREAT PAPYRUS! BUT THAT IS A VERY SILLY AND UNREASONABLE FEAR BECAUSE YOU AND MY DAD ARE BOTH GOING TO BE JUST FINE!"

"Yeah." Your voice quivers. "You're totally right. I just...I love you Paps. You too Frisk. Just...stay safe, okay? Getting home I mean."

"OF COURSE WE WILL! OH!" Papyrus gestures with one hand. "BROTHER! ALPHYS! GET OVER HERE AND JOIN OUR HUG CIRCLE!"

Alphys pokes her head up out of the pile of machinery she had been hiding behind. "Um okay, if y-you want me t-too." She scurries out and Papyrus pulls her in.

You look back over your shoulder: Sans' face is scrunched up, like he's holding back either a laugh or a sob. Probably both. You give him an encouraging smile and after a moment, he shrugs with a quiet 'heh' and takes his time strolling over. You open your arm and pull him close between you and Frisk. Then, you look to Gaster. He's hovering at his now two feet limit, his eyes soft with fondness. They widen when you hold our your other arm. "Well come on then," you say. "We might not be able to touch you, but it's the thought that counts, right?"

No, that's...I... Gaster hesitates.

"C'MON DAD!" Papyrus steps out slightly so there's a spot between you and him. "YOU HAVE TO COMPLETE THE CIRCLE!"

Slowly, looking only a little uncomfortable but mostly disbelieving, Gaster floats into the open spot. You put your hand on his back. It sinks right through and though a small shock of energy shoots up through your fingers, you can't feel anything else. Papyrus places his other hand on top of yours, beaming down at the spot he knows his father is standing.

A couple of seconds pass.

"so uh, what now paps?" Sans grins up at his brother. "you got us all here. you got like a team chant in mind or something?"

Papyrus starts. "OH! WELL I....I DIDN'T THINK THAT FAR."

Frisk waves their hand, smiling widely. "How about; stay determined?"

Everyone in the group takes a second to process this before smiling at Frisk. "sounds good to me kiddo," Sans says with a shrug, his hand tightening slightly on your waist.

Papyrus very enthusiastically takes over leading the group in the cheer, though his enthusiasm is only
matched by Frisk. You lock eyes with Sans as Paps counts down.

"THREE!"

Sans' brow bones narrow just for a moment, a flash of worry clear on his face.

"TWO!"

Then it's gone, replaced by his usual grin and calm demeanor. He gives you a slow wink.

"ONE!"

You smile back at him, refusing to believe that this is the last time you'll stand next to your friends hugging your friends, engaging in silly, pointless cheers. It won't be.

Papyrus' booming voice drowns out Alphys' weak 'S-stay determined!' as Frisk throws their hands up into the air. You and Sans don't break eye contact as you quietly, but firmly whisper "Stay determined."

Gaster doesn't say anything.

    
    7:21 PM

Sans has asked me to take over writing down progress entries. I didn't even know he was doing them. Gaster seems to think he hasn't been at all and is just trying to find another way to keep our minds too busy to worry about failing. I think so too but I'm actually grateful for it.

Paps and Frisk left about an hour ago. Turns out Frisk didn't tell Toriel they were coming here and don't want her to know. I think they don't give Toriel enough credit for figuring things out. I'm just glad Asgore hasn't shown up.

Ghoster's grumbling at me for writing unprofessional notes. Too bad I'm not a professional scientist. Honestly I want science to stay far away from me when this done.

Anyway. Turns out the monster body has to reach a certain point in formation before it can take Gaster's Soul, otherwise there's a chance that his consciousness will be erased and a brand new monster will be born and he understandably doesn't want that. Body's 72% formed so far. Skull is still blank. It's about two feet in diameter, or thereabouts. It's still curled up in a fetal position. Gaster and Alphys are having issues with reestablishing the reader for the scanner. It keeps blacking out. Can't have that happen during the Soul removal or everything will fail and worse case, it pulls out both our Souls completely.

You don't bother writing down that Papyrus gave you another tight hug before he left and that he was trembling a little.

Nor do you mention that Frisk was clearly holding back miserable tears.

    
    10:58 PM

Alphys' current project caught fire. Not sure how. She's okay but the gears are melted. They're going
to have to be replaced. That's another two hours of work added on top of everything.

Body at 79%

3:45 AM

Sans is still working on double checking his equations. The body is developing faster than he thought, which is good news? But he's stressed because that means his numbers are off somewhere. Not starting from scratch but pretty freaking close. His socket keeps flickering. He's started telling really bad jokes, even for him. Usually a sign that he's trying not to let his anxiety show.

Body is 85%

6:00 AM

Flashbacks happening every hour now. Still just flashes of memories. Not sign of the rip. Sans wants me to sleep. I almost laughed at him. Or did I? I can't remember.

Body at 87%

11:13 AM

The body started to disintegrate. Too much DT in its system too fast. Sans shoved all of the back up bone into the body as it melted to even out the DT and monster material. It worked but now it's misshapen and barely recognizable. Gaster freaked out. Triggered a bad flashback. Memories of the war before the barrier went up. Bad. Lots of blood. I think I summoned a Blaster but Sans put headphones over my head, turned on some music. Calmed me down. When did he bring the ipod over?

No rip. What is that thing waiting for?

Alphys has officially closed the lab until further notice. She won't say it, but I think she's scared her students will get hurt. She's probably right.

I'm dangerous.

Body at 58%

3:23 PM

Keep dropping things. Telling Sans it's just cause I've been up for at least 30 hours. Not counting that sad excuse of a nap. But my hands are going numb. Almost sliced a finger off a while back. Ghoster managed to pull my hand away in time. He's not looking good either, ghostly constitution aside. Voices keep molding. It's getting too hard to try and pull apart. No energy for it.

Almost forgot to write body development.

Body at 30 63%. It's slowed down after nearly melting. Sans is worried.
Head hurts. Starting to see echos of memories without falling into full flashbacks. Skin feels weird and stretched. My bones are on fire.

I'm scared.

I think I'm dying.

I don't want to die.

7:21 PM

This is Doctor W.D. Gaster, writing in place of the human host. She has become nearly unresponsive. My own concentration is wavering and threatening to give out completely. Her Soul has faded greatly. Visually it has almost disappeared under the black substance created by my own connection to the Void. I can feel her Determination holding on but there is only so much strain it can take, especially after the trauma it has endured at the hands of the human scientists.

Sans has gone nearly silent. He is angry with me, but too focused to fully realize it. His stubbornness is pushing us forward. Doctor Alphys has been of great assistance as well but she is showing signs of fatigue.

I can feel the remains of my Soul waiting just beyond the reality of this world. They are gathering strength. If another rip is made before the Soul transfer, I am not sure if I can stop it. I can only hope that my hypothesis that the connection will be severed once my Soul is given a solid form will hold true. The world is not meant to touch that place and I worry that the consequences will be irreversible.

This has become more of a journal than a record of progress. She took comfort in it so I did not stop her thoughts. In truth, I cannot stop reflecting on my regrets as well. The point of no return is quickly approaching. I had hoped to have more options than this but...I cannot go through with my plans over take over the forms of my sons. I cannot bring myself to do it. Even at the cost of my own demise, I cannot be responsible for theirs. Perhaps the emotions of the human have effected my own mind more than I thought. Perhaps it was my own emotions after all. She merely reminded me that I am still capable of it. Feeling pity and regret. Having empathy and fondness for others.

Being capable of loving.

There was none of that in the Void. Only rage and loneliness and fear.

I don't want to go back to that. I want to feel these painful, wonderful emotions again. I want to stay in this world, despite the pain it has brought me. Can I be allowed to stay, despite the pain I have caused?

It doesn't matter. If I give up, I will die.

She will die.

I must

stay

DETERMINED.
She can no longer see me. I can no longer manifest myself outside of her mind.

The body's formation time has vastly sped up. Completion at 92%
We just might make it.

The world around you is fuzzy. It's been that way for a while now. You blink and the ghostly images of worlds beyond this one float in front of your eyes. The memories have become hallucinations and you can't fight against them anymore. You so let them be, watching them as they fly by. Occasionally the visions clear and you do what you can to help. They need your help, you can't just lie on a chair doing nothing. You just can't. You have to stay busy so the memories and growing heat in your blood don't overwhelm you. The distractions help, just a little.

But now there are no more distractions. There's nothing left to do with the body. It's almost at the point where Gaster is certain it can take his Soul and won't reform it into a new monster. The settings on the machine have finally come together but Sans is still worried. To make sure that everything goes as planned, Alphys created a simulation but it's a very complicated thing to get set up. It's going to take some time for it to work through all the variables so there is nothing left to do but wait.

It's driving you crazy.

"did you hear me?"

You start a little, blinking blearily up at Sans. He's standing next to you, hand cautiously placed on your shoulder. You hadn't even noticed. "Sorry, what did you say?"

He no longer flinches at the sound of your fused voice but the flicker in his lights betray how much it still freaks him out. "al wants to take a walk while the program runs through the simulation. she's gonna get some food for us. does anything sound good?"

"No. Your stomach twists painfully at the mere thought. You shake your head.

"you need to eat something," Sans insists quietly. "it's been hours since you ate anything at all. i'll just tell her to get something light, ok?"

"Okay," you whisper. He leaves your line of sight and you hear him murmuring to Alphys. Your eyes drift over to the machine. The set up of the whole thing has changed so drastically that you barely even recognize it as the thing Nahn based her torture device off of. The chair is still there but there are far more tubes and wires and now there's glass covering around the open spaces. Working with Sans you, or rather, Gaster was able to make an gaseous version of the liquid containing his new body. Sans will be in the machine with you and the gas will help keep Gaster's Soul stable while it's transferred into a specialized containment unit. Then it'll be hooked up to the larger tank and pumped directly into the rib cage of the new body via a complicated system of wires. He'll wake up in the tank hopefully within a few hours after his Soul adjusts.
The body itself is very near completion. It's still small, about the size of a five year old child. Seeing it melt, hearing the alarms blare as you very nearly lost everything had triggered an attack almost as bad as the one back at Toriel's place. But this time you had seen something that you've never once heard Gaster talk about; his time during the war. It was...terrible, to say the least. Bodies everywhere, monster dust coating the forms of the ones who had not had time to dissolve among the remains of their fallen kind. You saw a human child with white hair died red with blood raising a shovel and pain had exploded across your eye as the makeshift weapon hit Gaster squarely on his left eye socket. Gaster himself had retreated as far as he could into your mind after the attack, refusing to speak for nearly an hour.

But he didn't need to for you to continue to hear his thoughts as they raced through both of your minds.

You shake your head. "What time is it?" you croak out once Alphys has left.

"late," Sans says with a weak smile. He squints at the clock on the wall. "um, almost eleven. you probably don't want to sleep i'm guessing?"

"You guess right." You rub the back of your neck, the bones popping almost painfully in your hand. "I think I could use some water though. Stretching my legs is probably a good idea." Slowly, you haul yourself up out of the seat. Your legs threaten to buckle but hold steady. An odd sort of buzzing feeling, like pins and needles but far worse shoots through your limbs. You gasp and grit your teeth.

Sans starts to move towards you but a sudden shrill beep from the computer running the simulation stops him in his tracks. He darts over to it and curses under his breath.

"What's wrong?"

"it's the final sequence that keeps giving us trouble," he grumbles, his fingers typing in a few numbers. "basically the point at which it stops pulling out the essence it's latched onto. it keeps going too far. it's that stupid void connection that's doing this. i'm gonna have to start this over."

He hunches over the computer and you decide to get that drink of water by yourself. Surely you can at least manage that. You continue slowly towards the door, your head spinning at every step brings intense waves of painful magical energy. It pulses through your body and it's like trying to hold back a avalanche. Still you keep moving because that's what you have to do, right? Keep holding on, keep fighting, keep-

Something snaps.

The wall inside your own mind breaks without warning and without mercy. A howling storm courses through your veins, burning you with icy fire as every atom of your body is pounded into dust and remade into iron. The cup analogy was wrong, it was so wrong. This is the dam breaking, not a stupid paper cup. And now you, as the tiny bowl beneath the cup are being filled with an entire ocean and you can't take it. Your back arches as a shrill primal scream rips out of your throat and you collapse to the floor. You thrash and flail, images of memories and different timelines moving in front of you eyes at a sickening speed and you can hear the voices of the beings within, all of them screaming, crying, laughing, talking at all once and it's a million voices in your head rising into a thundering cataclysm of NOISE AND GOD IT HURTS, IT HURTS, IT HURTS!

One voice cuts through the storm. Calling your names desperately.

Names?
No, you have just one name.

What is it?

Your hand claws at Sans as he drops down next to you, his socket flashing wildly as he struggles to find something he can do. "IT'S BEEN BROKEN." Your voice sounds wrong, it's not your voice but it's the only voice you've ever known. "THE SOULS ARE MELTING. NO TIME LEFT."

"it's not ready!" Sans cries. "gaster, the tests aren't complete!"

"NO TIME," you and Gaster repeat. Another strike of lightning in your chest makes you wail, losing your grip on Sans' arm. Tears of pain prick at your eyes. "SANS PLEASE. HURRY!"

You feel yourself being lifted into the air. Your limbs drop uselessly, hanging as dead weight. You can't breath and darkness hovers at the edge of your vision. Sans runs to the machine and then you blackout for a few seconds and wake to Sans strapping you down, his hands shaking.

"NO!" You scream and it's your voice, YOUR voice begging as you thrash against the restraints. "DON'T LOCK ME UP, NO NO NO!"

"you have to stay still!" Sans' voice breaks. "i'm so sorry, you can't move!"

Your voice chokes into a terrified whimper. "Help me!"

Sans pushes your hair back, his bones cool and comforting against your burning forehead. "i'm gonna fix this, you're going to be ok, i promise. you just have to hold on for a few more minutes, ok? don't give in."

The tears spill down your face. "It hurts."

"i know." The wobbly smile on his face threatens to dissolve. "it's gonna hurt just a little bit more. but it will be over as fast as i can make it go."

His hand leaves your head and he's gone and you scream again as you feel your Soul pulse with the last of it's energy. You struggle against the black waves threatening to drown you but it's so hard and the darkness is warm and welcoming. It would be so easy to sink back into that darkness. You were there before, weren't you? Maybe that's where you are supposed to be. You fall into the black, letting the world fade away.

NO.

The stubborn refusal comes from somewhere inside you. Your fingers dig into the arms of the seat. No you will not go back to that lonely place! You WILL NOT let this thing destroy you! You've made it this far without giving into it. It's just pain. The pain will end and your life will be yours once again.

You can feel Gaster's Soul fighting to pull away from yours. You can see him in your own mind, the light of his broken Soul a single spark in the darkness. He's fighting with everything he has. But he too is crushed under the unbearable weight of the energy eating away at your mind and body. Alone, he will be swallowed up, just the same as you. You reach out to him and he flinches away.

"What are you doing?!"

We can't hold this back alone! You struggle through the thick darkness, taking his hand. This is my body! You have to help me fight back!
Gaster looks at your human hand clutching his stark white limb and after an infinite moment where you can hear your own heart beating, he grins viciously. "**Human determination certainly is something else,**" he says as his sockets glint.

His hand tightens on yours. You feel a sharp jolt and you gasp as the darkness breaks and you return to the lab. For a brief heavenly moment, you are on top of the pain, pinning it down with a surge of energy born from your Determination and Gaster's life force.

Sans is yelling your name, his voice trembling like his heart is on the verge of shattering. "damn it, someone answer me!"

"Here!" you gasp. You twist your head until you see him furiously typing at the computer. "We're here!"

His breath of relief is a sob. "that's my girl, you've got this, just hold on." Sweat pours down his skull as a great shudder goes through him in the same moment another wave of fire threatens to pull you down again. Oh no, he must be feeling an echo of your pain! He pushes through it and slams a button and you hear the machine roar to life.

As the chair under you starts to rumble, another sharp stab of pain makes you face forward, slamming your head against the seat. It feels like iron nails are being raked over the surface of your arms. With watering eyes, you look down to see that the dark marks on your hands seem to be bleeding outwards. Blackness creep up your arms, turning your hands completely dark. The bones pop and crack sickeningly as your nails start to grow out and extend. About halfway up your forearm the blackness breaks into tendrils and you scream again as you feel symbols forming on your skin like a brand. It's the same style of writing that Gaster uses. Each mark pulses and burns and you fight back another whimper as the strange symbols form the same word repeated over and over. **SURVIVE.**

"**Don't look at it,**" Gaster orders, his voice bleeding through your mouth. "**Focus.**"

You nod, closing your eyes. Your teeth clack together. You can't hold on much longer, even with Gaster's help. You hear the door to the lab slam open. Oh thank God, Alphys is back, she can help Sans-

An impossibly loud crack splits the air. Not the sound of the world ripping apart. No, this is a sound that you've heard in your nightmares over and over again. A sound that brings agony and blood and death.

A gunshot.

"Looks like we got here just in the nick of time!"

**Oh God.** No. No, no, she can't be here, she can't be!

You force your eyes open, your vision obscured by tears. You blink them away and freeze in mortified terror.

Nahn steps into the room, a small pistol in her hand and a incredulous smile on her face as she takes in the sight of you trapped inside the machine. A large man flanks her. You vaguely recognize him as one of the ones who originally chased you and Frisk down the alley. He's holding a gun too, one that is still smoking slightly. He fired! **Sans!** You force yourself to twist, frantically looking back towards where Sans was standing. He's about two feet down from where he was just a moment ago,
his sockets black. On the wall behind where he was just standing is a bullet hole.

"It's certainly something else to see your teleporting abilities in person. Truly remarkable," Nahn says, nodding sagely. "Now then, going by the visual state of your little friend, I'd say we don't have much time. So let's get to it." She aims her gun towards you and fires.
Revenge Is Best Served Cold

Chapter Notes

Are you mad at Nahn?? Do you want to laugh at her expense?!
Click HERE first then CHECK THIS OUT You're welcome
Sans influencing my purchasing choices
A really nice piece from Mary, thanks!
Special thanks to Inuyasha9lover on tumblr for being my beta for this chapter!
Content Warning: Graphic body horror
Writing Blog
Main Blog

You're strapped down, you can't move but the moment the gun fires, your vision is suddenly blocked by a large wall of snarling bone. The Blasters jaw snaps open and you have to shut your eyes against the blinding light building in the space between it's teeth. But the growing growl of energy is suddenly cut off by another gunshot and the beast dissolves before it has a chance to fire.

You feel hands at your wrists, scrambling to release the straps holding you down. "hold on, we're getting out of here," you hear Sans' desperately mutter. There's another shot and you cry out in terror, expecting Sans to crumble away into dust before you. He too flinches, moving to block your body with his own. But instead sparks rain down from the DT machine. Confusion clears out for terror as you realize Nahn is purposefully shooting bullet after bullet into the one thing that can save you.

"no!" Sans whirls around, his socket blazing and another two Blasters appear. The man at Nahn's side steps in front of her and in quick succession, fires at both of the Blasters. But in the split second it takes him to do that, Sans summons a third one and time does that strange skip that you've felt before. You blink and the Blaster is already firing; the goon can't step out of the way in time. He's enveloped in the blazing magic. You can actually feel the heat from the intensity of Sans' rage channeled into the magic. If the man is screaming, you can't hear it over the roar of the Blaster. With such energy, you doubt there will be a man left standing at it's end.

But then the blinding light fades and what remains is something far worse than the man's prone figure or a bloody heap. Instead there's something huge, groaning, shifting and wrong. There's enough of the man's features left to recognize him but a great portion of his body looks like it's melted together and inflated. His clothes hang like oily goop on his frame, molding directly with what skin you can see. His arms are distended and right before your eyes four bulges form on his sides and explode into an additional four arms. The additional arms are thinner than his human limbs and look more like spider legs with taloned hands. Two horn nubs stick out from under his dark hair and his face, oh God his face has twisted into something utterly unrecognizable. His mouth has ripped up into a wide, pained grin that stretches from ear to ear and his eyes, while at their center are still human, have sunken into their sockets and are far too big.

You and Gaster both pull back in utter revulsion. You feel your gaze drop to the creature's chest where his Soul should be and Gaster's vision takes over. You should see numbers, you should see life but there's...there's nothing there. Nothing but an empty hole that makes your eyes burn and bile rise in your throat. The horror of what you're seeing is enough to numb the pain, but only for a moment.
You groan as another wave of agony threatens to pull you under and Sans' hand on the partially released restraint twitches. He's gone rigid, sockets wide with disgust as he stares at the transformed man. "what the hell is this?" he asks in a dangerously flat voice.

Nahn steps out from behind the creature. Her grin is rather manic and her eyes glint. "Isn't it amazing what one can do with revenge as a motivator? Especially when all other resources have been ripped away. You know...desperate times call for desperate measures and all that."

The beast lifts up three of it's hands, one still holding the gun and fires out a new round of terrifyingly solid bullets and a new wave of magical attacks that are shaped disturbingly like hearts, real human hearts not the cartoony shape of your Souls. Sans snarls and the furious sound barely hides his horror as he summons more Blasters but each one is struck with the shower of bullets and vanishes before a shot can fire off. You struggle weakly to free yourself because how can Sans stand against this and not be hit by a single bullet? He needs to move, he needs to just leave you before he gets himself killed but you know that he won't do that.

He grabs your hand, ripping away the restraints. You feel energy building around you, the hair raising tingle of magic that means he's about to teleport. Your Soul flinches, there's something wrong but you can't warn him before he takes the leap. You and Gaster scream in unison as you feel yourself being torn apart from the inside out, every inch of skin, every molecule stubbornly refusing to let go of your place in the world even as an unbearable force fights to pull you away. Your Soul is a terrible weight that holds you down as everything else is ripped apart. The world is spinning, like you're caught in a dryer and the jagged pain is everything, it's everywhere, it won't-!

It stops and you haven't moved a single inch and Sans is trembling just as hard as you and Gaster are. You meet his horrified gaze and in the same instant you realize your last safeguard won't work, your Soul is too unstable to move!

"damn it-!"

The transformed man shoots forward, his body moving far faster than you would have though possible straight towards Sans. One taloned hand swipes at him and Sans is gone, reappearing on the other side of the room with a sharp pop. You shrink back into the seat, left to stare down the mutated man. But there's no rage in those human eyes staring at you. There's no sorrow either there's just...nothing. The emptiness you saw in place of a Soul fills those eyes even as it starts to raise the hand with the gun-

"hey!" Sans waves his hand and a line of bones fires at the creature, turning it's head away from you and towards him. It doesn't move as the bones slam into it's body, leaving not so much as a single mark. It snarls, the sound grating and far too similar to the cries of the failed human/monster amalgamates in the lab. It falls to the floor, the extra limbs carrying it like a mammoth spider as it scuttles across the floor, knocking over desks and chairs with no regard to the damage it's causing. Sans curses and vanishes again but there are only so many places he can go while staying in this damn lab. Sooner or later, that thing is going to catch him.

You struggle to lift yourself out of the chair but your legs give out the moment you put weight on them and you crumple to the ground. You heave, spit trailing down from your mouth as the fire continues to burn your body and mind. Gaster's thoughts are matched almost completely with yours and you feel his own helplessness reflected in your mind. There must be something you can do! But you can barely move through the pain and it's taking every bit of your energy to hold off the impending storm that's beating down the defenses of your Soul.

You hear the clack of Nahn's shoes approaching over the hissing and groaning of the ruined machine. You fight to prop yourself up on your blackened arms, refusing to lay down like a dog
Nahn stops, staring down at you with a cold, calculating gaze. "How fascinating," she whispers. You feel Gaster flinch because how many times has he said the exact same thing? "Oh this is truly extraordinary!"

"What...what did you do to him?" you hiss, your eyes darting over to the man still chasing Sans around the room. You see him try and fail several times to grab hold of it's Soul because...well it has no Soul to grab onto. There's nothing he can do but continue to teleport away from him. You just pray he's coming up with some kind of answer to get you out of this. "What do you want?"

"Oh it's your work here that led me to the answer," she says smugly. She taps her ear. "You really should've checked for bugs."

Bugs? Gaster's confusion only lasts a moment as you realize she means recording devices. "When did you-?"

"Since before you were a mark on Tod's list!" She says brightly, finally kneeling down. "I couldn't be around Alphys all the time, I would've snapped after listening to her b-b-babbling for more than a few hours. But there was no knowing when she might offhandedly say something that would help in our research. Fortunately for me, I was still able to access those devices and get them running again after you and your monster destroyed everything. I will say, listening on the process of a monster possession and creating a body has been absolutely fascinating. You gave us everything we needed to know about the exact moment to make our move. Also gave me the final answers I needed to finished the work that Tod started."

Her hand not holding the gun suddenly snakes out, snatching your face. Her nails dig into your skin, again making you and Gaster yelp in pain. "As it turns out, the issue was all to do with the Souls themselves. Remove them, keep them safe so the host doesn't die and then inject a fusion of magic and Determination. And I did all of that in a hidden garage with nothing but my own men and reject monsters to use! Just imagine what I could have accomplished if you hadn't ruined everything," she hisses. "The world needs my mind working to make it a better place and what gratitude have I been shown? I'm being hunted down like a criminal when I should be receiving awards and praise for my work."

"Praise for your work? You've killed people!" you snarl around her grip. "How many monsters died because of your experiments? How many humans have you killed for the sake of science?"

"Everyone who has died has played their role in bettering this world. Well. Almost everyone." She releases your face, only to grab your arm and haul you back up into the chair. The motion makes every muscle in your body scream and you can't stop yourself from whimpering as the world threatens to fade out. You shake your head, using Gaster as a mental crutch to keep you focused.

"So you're here to kill me then?" you whisper, refusing to take your eyes away from Nahn.

Nahn presses close to your face. She reeks of sweat and something else you can't quite put your finger on. Up close like this, you can see the heavy bags under her eyes and the pale sunken state of her skin. She looks like someone who hasn't slept in weeks. "As much as I would love to take you apart piece by piece and see this Gaster person's Soul for myself, I'm aware that you won't last much longer. So I'm going to do everything in my power to make it hurt as much as-"

She suddenly stops, staring down at her chest. You can faintly see the outline of her Soul, turned blue by Sans' magic. He's reappeared a few feet away, sweat pouring down his skull. His sockets are thin with rage and focus, cyan light pouring from his left socket. He closes his fist, clearly intending
to throw Nahn away from you but you can see the Amalgamate leaping for him. You try to scream but it's Gaster's voice that cries "Sans! Move!"

Sans' skull snaps to the side and he vanishes again. Nahn laughs manically as her Soul fades back into her chest. "Before we get to that, there is another loose end to clean up." She jams the gun against your knee, taking hold of your hair and yanking your head back. You barely feel the force of her pulling your hair thanks to another wave of fire in your Soul.

"Enough playing around!" she calls out, her gaze darting about as she tries to locate Sans. "Come out here and stand still or I swear to God I will blow her kneecap off!"

You silently beg him not to even as he reappears right before you without hesitation. His gaze darts to the gun but before he can do a thing, the Amalgamate is on him. It's four spider like hands grab his arms and yanks them back with enough force you hear the bones pop. The creature kicks at the back of his knees, making Sans cry out and drop to the ground. The sound makes your heart stop.

"Don't hurt him!" you beg, struggling weakly under Nahn's hold. "Please, please just let him go. You're right, I'm dying, I'm not gonna make it but he doesn't have to die!"

Nahn laughs again, shifting the gun pressing against your leg. "And what, leave him to come after me for revenge? I've been on that side, he won't simply let things be."

The transformed goon presses his gun to Sans' skull. Sans flinches under the weapon but doesn't move otherwise. "i'm the one that destroyed everything," he whispers in a hollow voice. "i came for her. you don't have to kill her for your revenge. just me. that's all you need to do."

"Oh I won't be killing her," Nahn says and Sans' head jerks up. "Like she said, she's dying anyway. But I figured, why not let the thing that should have killed her all those years ago do the job? Why not make her face her greatest fear one last time? After all, brats like you..." She lifts her gun and lets all of her hatred shine in her eyes. "Deserve to burn in hell."

And suddenly you realize just what it was you smelled on her.

*Lighter fluid.*

*Oh God!*

Sans' sockets widen and he struggles against the Amalgamate but he can't teleport away while it's got such a tight grip on him. His eyes meets yours and in that split second you see that he has no plan. He has no miraculous answer. What can he do? Even if you both somehow survive this, the machine is broken. You're down to your last minutes. And you can see in the stubborn set of his jaw that he has no intention of saving himself. For a moment, the world seems to fade away and you desperately try to show him with your eyes just how much you love him, how thankful you are that you met him and that you would give anything for more time, you would sacrifice anything to save him. Anything....

Nahn's eyes go hauntingly empty as she leans close to you again. "We've soaked the entire floor and disabled all the alarms and cameras. Seriously, the university should put more funding into their security systems," she whispers almost joyfully. "Now, you're going to watch the monster you love die and then you will burn while lying on his dust. And I hope you know that you deserve every single moment of pain."

Her voice is distant. Your head is spinning. The waves of unbearable pain, of overwhelming power continues to slam against your Soul. Against Gaster's Soul, who has gone numb with horror at the
scene unfolding before him. You fight to reach for Sans but your limbs are now completely numb. You can't move.

"i'm sorry, i'm so sorry," Sans whispers, his face crumbling into heartbreaking agony. "i love you so much."

You would do anything to stop this.

Nahn nods at the Amalgamate. Sans' breathing quickens and his bones start to rattle but he still holds firm eye contact with you.

**ANYTHING.**

Gaster's horror fades into resolve. You don't have to say a word to him. He doesn't have to say a word in return. You simply feel his agreement in what has to happen.

**I am...truly sorry.** His voice is choked.

"I'm sorry too," you whisper to both of them.

And then you let go. You let that power in and it swarms over you, engulfing you in the force of it's energy. A terrible scream rips its way out of your throat and the pain, it's breaking you into a million pieces, burning you with ice and fire and slicing away every bit of your mind. You're falling apart and distantly, you can feel your body convulsing wildly but it's almost like you're standing slightly to the side as it happens. Your Soul pulses wildly within your chest and you can feel it growing, filling up with power, too much power for it to bear. It lifts you higher and higher until you realize you're left the seat entirely, held up by the mere force of energy overflowing from your Soul.

There's no more resistance. You feel Gaster's Soul molding into the cracks of your mind and Soul and the remaining memories all come flooding in, a thousand years of life and pain and happiness all fill your head at once and you see all his mistakes and regrets and pride and it's all moving too fast to process and the urge to simply sink down into the simple darkness of unconsciousness tugs at you.

But you hear his voice screaming your name and you know you can't do that just yet. You have to protect him!

So you and Gaster, working in complete tandem, push the memories away with ease. You let them flow over you and move on and now you find that even as the jagged edges of magic rip at your Soul, the pain is slowly turning into something else. Something that makes you feel *strong.*

Oh. This is *power.* There's too much of it, far too much and you can feel the individual molecules of your body straining to contain it. But...this feels...not good exactly, but it's so strange and overwhelming you can't stop yourself from laughing loudly even as tears run down your face.

Or is Gaster the one laughing?

Maybe it's both of you.

"What the hell?" Nahn, having stepped away when you started convulsing is staring at you with undisguised fascination. But when you turn your gaze on her, something flickers in her dark eyes, a true glimmer of fear that you've never seen in her.

You want to see *more.*

Your laugh turns into a scream but this time, it's not a scream of fear. You're done being scared.
You're done with cowering and hoping that someone else will save you. No, you are *furious*. You and Gaster scream out your rage, your voices combining in a monstrous howl that has Nahn throwing her hands up over her ears as she stumbles away from you.

"Holy sh-do something!" She shrieks to the Amalgamate, turning away to run.

*Oh hell no.* Your hands lift up and you feel a rush of wind as you summon a Blaster of such mammoth size the horns on it's head brush the ceiling. The skull is so large it completely knocks the now useless extractor over and when it hits the ground part of it explodes. You don't even flinch when bits of burning metal hit your arms. You don't even feel it.

You can't feel anything but power.

Your Blaster snarls and the sound is so loud and deep you can feel bones shaking from the force. But then your target is blocked by the transformed man and the grin upon it's face is somehow wider, nearly splitting it's head in two as it darts in front of you. There's no Soul there for you to attack but it doesn't matter. You'll burn it to ash, you'll destroy it's body so completely that it will never move again!

You take only a fraction of a second to look for Sans, to make sure the one person you can save is safely out of the way. His sockets are wide with horror, pitch black and wracked with grief. He's alive. That's all that matters.

You feel something bounce against you with a sharp sting and your eyes snap back to the Amalgamate. It's throwing magical bullets at you but in your current state, they might as well be mosquito bites. Your mouth curls up into a pained smirk and with a mere thought of command, the Blaster pulls on the overflowing energy contained in your Soul and releases a blast so powerful that it pushes your hair back with force of wind that accompanies it. The man is engulfed and this time you can hear screaming as the creature's body writhes in agony.

Something inside your Soul twists with a different kind of pain. A guilt and sorrow that threatens to overtake you with a flurry of panic and the new logical side of you, of Gaster, pushes that away with more anger. This thing could not be saved. This thing was going to kill Sans. And this thing is standing in the way of your true target.

Nahn has paused at the door, her eyes wide with terror and yet she seems frozen to the spot, watching you release the Blaster release your combined fury and hate onto her project. A new surge of anger threatens to overtake you and your Soul lurches into action. The Blaster's beam cuts off, you barely glance at the Amalgamate to see that it has somehow survived though it's barely moving and brace yourself to release all of your magic on the woman who stole away your last chance for a happy life with Sans and the others when-

*THE WORLD BREAKS.*

You sense it mere moments before it happens. The air shatters and screams as it is ripped apart with a force that you can barely comprehend. This rip is so much bigger than anything you've seen before. It cuts through the ceiling and passes through the floor. The ground shakes and debris falls from the ceiling as computers and other scientific devices are thrown wildly through the air, some of them exploding thanks to the various chemicals upon their surfaces. You look up as a chunk of broken tile threatens to fall on your head but before you even think about moving, it's engulfed in blue light and shoots away from you. Sans stands on shaky legs, his socket flickering wildly.

He screams your name. You don't have time to answer before great skeletal hands grasp at the edges of the rip and *shove*. Every hair on your body stands on edge and you nearly curl into a ball at the
sensation of feeling the world being forcibly pushed to the side. It's worse than a thousand nails on a chalkboard, worse then having a knife dragged down your spine. Nahn has slid to the ground, her mouth open in a soundless scream as she trembles before the monster forcing it's way into the lab.

It's huge. It's far bigger than you could have ever imagined. Before you had only seen glimpses of it's burning eyes, a flash of hands as they swiped at you. Even now, you can't see all of it; it's too big and most of it's body is shrouded in the bleak darkness of the Void. But what you can see has your heart and Soul freezing in your chest.

It might have been skeletal once. Parts of it still are. The hands, easily large enough to pick you up like a doll if it so chose are stark white bone, though they are sharply clawed at the ends and instead of a hole in the palm, like Gaster's hands, there is a dark circled mass, much like the marks that appeared on your hands. But where the hands end, there is nothing but a shifting, oily substance that seems to draw in any and all light. A strange sort of energy seems to shimmer on the edges of it's form and that's the only way you can see where it's body ends and the blackness of the void begins. Parts of the strange substance drip off its arms and when it hits the ground it instantly dissolves with a loud hiss and you can smell something foul rising from the mess, like burning rubber and tar.

The hands are grasped at either side of the rip and again it pushes outwards and it's head comes into full view. It's Gaster, it's most certainly Gaster but this one is closer to the man you saw during your coma. But now, rather than holding more of a skull shape, like the Gaster hanging on your Soul, this one looks like it's partially melting into a shapeless mass. His face is utterly featureless except for two misshapen sockets with matching cracks running up and down it's face and a toothless mouth that is stretched up so far the edges almost reach his sockets.

You're frozen in place as the gaze of the Void Gaster falls on you and his sockets flash with a bright violet light. Somehow, the mouth grows bigger and he begins to speak. <AT LAST> His voice is the sound of a thousand voices all at once, clicking and screeching in unison and it makes you want to curl into a ball and hide away from him but you can't move. You can't even breathe under the force of his gaze.

<AND JUST IN TIME IT SEEMS> His eyes finally move from you to Sans, who is similarly frozen and staring with utter shock. Gaster's Soul jolts with the realization that this is the first time Sans has seen any form of him in what feels like a lifetime. You can feel his rage at this and it helps to keep your head level. Your summoned Blaster is still behind you, still charged and ready to fire so you lift your hand and-

A shrill scream cuts you off as Void Gaster's head turns slightly to stare down Nahn. She's lost all reason and she scrambles up to reach the door handle. Void Gaster laughs and the sound filled with harsh clicking, like a million bones knocking together. From within the rip a third skeletal hand appears while the first two continue to hold on to the very edge of the rip. Nahn tries to bolt but he's too fast and her screams new levels, pitching harshly as the hand wraps around her waist and starts dragging her back to the darkness of the Void.

"NO! NO! HELP ME!" Her wild eyes fix on the remains of her companion and she manages to pull out one arm reaching for the Amalgamate in desperation. The poor creature stirs, fighting to get up but then a fourth hand snatches it up as well. Void Gaster doesn't hesitate and quickly pulls the man into the Void. The moment it's body touches the surface of the darkness within, it jerks wildly and screams. Before your very eyes it disintegrates into a thousand drifting pieces that are quickly swallowed up by the Void.

Nahn's screaming stops only for a moment as she stares at the spot where the creature vanished. Then, howling with the desperation of a wild animal, she pounds her fist against the bone holding
her, her eyes bloodshot and running with tears. "Don't! SPARE ME!"

Void Gaster lifts her up to his eye and she cowers beneath the rage in his violet light. **<PERHAPS YOU SHOULD HAVE CONSIDERED THE CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR ACTIONS>**

Then he pulls her in and your entire being quakes as you watch Nahn melt against the energy of the Void. Her skin goes first, melting away like candle wax before the bones and muscles underneath follow suit and oh dear God, she's alive the entire time, shrieking with a pitch that pierces your ears, making them ring with her screams before finally she vanishes into dust and her voice is silenced forever.

Void Gaster turns back to you, the white bone of his head turned orange in the light of flames rising from the debris of ruined machinery and chemicals. His hand, the one that dragged a living human into the Void reaches for you and you lurch into action. The Blaster releases it's full power upon the monster but it's not doing anything, not a thing! A scream of fear and frustration escapes you and Gaster, your Gaster pulls on the power within you and summons another two Blasters. You have to push that thing back in before it reaches you!

Sans too is spurred into action. You hear him shout over the roar of your own Blasters and two of his own join the fray, their beams mingling with the blasts from yours and the light is too bright, you can't bear to keep looking at it. You pour everything into this shot, feeling the waves of your energy being sapped away. Surely this is enough to at least knock it back!

It's not. It's not nearly enough. The magical energy fades away and he's still there, still grinning with eyes blazing. **<DID YOU REALLY THINK THAT WOULD WORK?>** A strange hissing accompanies the words, sending goosebumps up your blackened arms. **<ENOUGH PLAYING AROUND>**

The massive hand smacks into the Blasters and you cry out, feeling the impact in your Soul. The Blasters vanish, taking your power with them. A harsh gasp escapes you as you suddenly hit the floor. Your limbs are shaking uncontrollably. Your stomach churns and you heave; a stream of blackened blood hits the ground in front of you. You stare at it in horror, realizing that underneath the incredible power, your body has finally given out. Your ears are ringing and darkness starts to cover your vision.

"_____! Dings!"

You can't move away as the large skeletal hand cups you in its grip. Your head goes limp, lolling against the cold bone holding you. You dimly see Sans appear before you, physically fighting to pry the large fingers away before he's suddenly scooped up by a hand as well. He struggles uselessly, his feet kicking out.

"damn it you bastard, let go!"

You struggle to lift your head but it won't move. You can't move, you can't even cry as the shifting darkness of the Void grows closer and closer. You want to sob against the unfairness of it all but you're just too tired. You want to sleep and wake safe in Sans' arms, listening to the sound of Papyrus helping Toriel in the kitchen, see the beam of Frisk's face as they burst in your room to tell you breakfast is ready. You want to go to work, hug Abby and listen to her tell you stories about her latest dating adventure. You want to grow old with Sans, move into a house of your own, exchange stupid jokes and whispered promises of love. You want to see him in the light of the stars, his sockets bright with happiness as he pulls you in for a kiss.

You want to LIVE.
Just before the overwhelming darkness hits your body, you close your eyes and feel yourself sink into one last memory.

~~~~~

He stares down at the figure of the failure-

No, his son!-

-struggling to rise. It had been a challenge to finally knock him down without killing him. One hit, one misdirected, miscalculated hit would've killed him and the scientist can't understand why he didn't just do it. Finish him. It's not like it's going to matter in a few minutes. In a few minutes it will be over. Everything will be RESET. No war, no barrier. No more screaming in the night, cowering from the tidal wave of nightmares assaulting him. No more memories of monsters turning to dust before his eyes on a blood soaked battlefield.

The answer was so simple. He can't believe it eluded him for so long. He turns away from Sans, ignoring the soft sounds of frustrated weeping and moves back towards the panel overlooking the very heart of the CORE. For endless years he poured all of his effort into finding a way to harness the power of that place just beyond this world, a place made entirely of magical energy.

The Void. But as voids do, it merely swallowed up everything he threw at it. No complicated machinery worked, no formulas of magical spells could do more than contain a portion of it's power, barely enough to give electrical power to the Underground. But it finally came to him. The one thing that could match that power, build a bridge for better access lay not in objects that would simply be created. No, it would take something pure, something he had used to create life.

Souls. Unaltered, pure monster Souls. Using the energy contained within a monster's Soul would give him the chance to truly make the connection between this world and the Void. From there, it was only a matter of exerting his will to reshape the world. Science, magic, math, time travel. It was all one and the same. The calculations had taken months, but finally, finally it is ready. Finally he will be able to save his people by erasing the thing that trapped them in the first place. All those monsters that died will be back. All those who had suffered without parents or guardians will have a new life filled with the safety and comfort they deserved.

And for that to happen, monsters had to die.

There are four Souls within range. He glances back behind him, making a dull note of Sans getting to his feet. Five Souls. Just enough to bridge the final gap.

Sans will be gone anyway. But it doesn't matter. He can recreate him. Sans and Papyrus, he will make them again, fix Sans' fragile health, give Papyrus more grounding. They will be made once again and...and then they can...

Be...a...

The word escapes him, drowned out by the rising chatter in his head. He knows now what it is. Working so near to the Void held it's dangers, this he knew. But he never could have predicted that the Void itself held a consciousness. A mind that reached out to his Soul, whispering the answers, telling him what he needed to do. It had taken time and like a coward he had trembled under the onslaught of voices, believing it to be a curse until he finally learned to listen and see it for the gift it was.
A gift. Not a curse.

NOT a curse....

The catwalk shakes under his feet and he frowns, staring down at the readings on the containment unit. The fight damaged the outer workings. Even now he can see bones stuck in it's surface, slowly dissolving away under the force of the heat rising from the magma below. He can fix this, it's not too late-

He hears the sound of the bone mere moments before impact and he quickly steps out of the way. He watches the attack sail past him, slower than usual before turning his eyes back to Sans. "Are you still fighting? You surprise me Sans."

Sans can't hide his labored breathing as he struggles to stay standing. "kinda out of options dings," he wheezes. "i'm not gonna let you do this."

"Let me? Sans, it is time to give up. It will be easier for you that way."

Sans shakes his head. The scientist can see the marks of fallen tears on his skull. "can't do it this time. you're gonna kill everyone."

"I've run the numbers more than enough-"

"The numbers are wrong!" Sans screams, his voice breaking. "They're wrong! It. Won't. Work!"

"So what if it doesn't!?" He finally snaps, whirling back to face his son as the catwalk beneath them continues to rumble. "So what! I cannot take the noise Sans! I cannot take living in the dark!"

The rage in Sans' face falters slightly. "it doesn't have to be dark dings," he says desperately. "it's not that bad down here. we're alive. there are people who are happy here. they go to work, laugh at dumb jokes, eat junk food and go home to people who care about them. yeah, it kinda sucks sometimes. and i wanna see the stars so bad it almost hurts. but is it really so bad down that you would rather risk wiping out everything?"

He doesn't answer. He can't.

Sans takes another step. "you have a home here dings. with me, and paps. you just...gotta actually come home once in a while, ya know?"

"You don't understand," the scientist whispers. "You weren't there. You didn't live through the death and the pain and the horror of seeing your entire world shrink to a fraction of it's size. How can you know what you're missing if you've never even seen it?"

He can see the emotion flashing on Sans' face, something he usually keeps hidden behind that constant smile of his. "i know because you've told me. i've seen it through your stories and your words so many times it feels like my own memories."

Memories. The words spark something in the scientist's mind, a feeling that he hasn't felt for...god, he can't remember. When was the last time he sat on the faded couch in his home, the ever growing form of his youngest pressed eagerly against him as his summoned hands created images to match his stories, the calm presence of his eldest spread out on the cushions, the glint in his eyes betraying his lazy facade.

When was the last time he went home?
Something in his head spikes with pain and he hisses, doubling over as the chatter of voices changes from excitement to rage. No, he can't let them down, he has to make them happy. Because when the voices get angry, that's when the unbearable noise and pain blocks out any and all thought.

"dings?"

The scientist snarls, his phalanges digging into his skull. He must stay focused! Emotions cloud judgement and only hinder progress! Something inside of him continues to cry and scream, struggling against the noise but he shoves it down with cold logic. He's made his choice. There's no turning back. The haze of noise resettles in his mind. There is no changing what has happened unless he does this. He straightens and Sans' sockets go dark.

"This is happening, whether you like it or not Sans," he says coldly. He starts to turn away; he must release the safety holdings and configure the containment field to include the entirety of the lab. Keep it contained so he can control it.

"so that's it?" Sans' voice is as equally icy. "you're ok with letting countless monsters die if you're wrong? you're ok with killing the monsters here if it means you're right? you're ok with murdering paps? murdering me?"

There it is again, that ridiculous spark of emotion. He crushes it down, buries it deep under the noise. But it hurts, it burns him like a fire in his Soul. He takes a deep breath and the words that come from his mouth don't match the voice in his Soul. "Yes I am."

He reaches forward to the panel and this time, the bone in his back catches him off guard. He stumble, landing heavily against the control panels. He grunts, feeling the sting of the attack and he lets his anger bloom because that is so much easier to feel than the guilt and the sorrow that he can't quite bury. He whirls around, an attack already at his fingertips and it flies straight towards Sans. Sans has no time to move, too blinded by rage to dodge and he cries out as the bullets snag the very edge of his clothes, knocking him onto his back. The scientist is moving, propelled by the voices screaming at him to finish the failure off, stop him before he interferes any further. He stamps down on Sans' rib cage, making the younger skeleton cry out in pain.

"You do not see the greater purpose of your existence!" the scientist hisses. "This is what must happen! I will save our people! I will-"

He's cut off by another harsh tremor, this one far worse than any he's felt before. He looks to the panel, his Soul twisting in outrage as he realizes his fall against the controls seem to have started some kind of reaction. He takes his foot off of Sans, desperate to fix the problem when the entire catwalk suddenly groans loudly. He flails and almost loses his balance as the floor beneath him heaves, throwing him forward into the panel. His skull smacks against the metal machine and he crashes to the floor.

What's happening? Gritting his teeth, fighting against the rush of dizziness he pulls himself up. The readings on the containment meters are spiking wildly. Something's...something's wrong, it shouldn't be doing this, not yet! The preparations aren't done! He fights to regain control, punching the coolant release. Instead of calming the raging energy below him, the coolant seems to make it worse and the screech of metal bending under the intense heat rings in his skull.

A terrified scream rings out behind him and for a moment, a blessed moment, the raging voices are silenced and he whirls around, his Soul clenching in fear at the sound he hasn't heard in years.

The catwalk is giving out. Sans, still pinned down by his attacks is struggling to free himself without actually touching the deadly bone. The ground beneath him is warping, peeling away. It's already
partially given out and Sans' feet are dangling over the empty air above the CORE. The section of catwalk still intact is quickly giving out.

Something in his Soul screams above the voices, moves him forward without thinking. He reaches out for his son just another tremor shakes the entire area. Sans cries out as the catwalk breaks away and he starts to fall. The scientist lunges forward, manages to grab his son's outstretched hand. A groan of pain escapes him as for just a moment he is forced to carry the weight of both his son and the broken metal. But with a loud rip, Sans' coat tears away and the catwalk disappears into the darkness of the CORE's center. Sans is gasping wildly, terrified tears trailing down his face.

"Hold on!" the scientist cries, fighting to keep his grip. He strains and manages to pull Sans up but just as Sans' fingertips brush the safety of the remaining catwalk, an explosion rocks the entire CORE. The scientist loses his grip and Sans scrambles to regain his hold and manages to smack his skull against the scientists' head. Stars bloom in his vision and he can feel himself slipping over the edge.

"dings!"

Desperate hands grab for him but it's too late, he's already-!

**FALLING**

Gaster cries out, watching the horrified face of his son grow smaller and he screams "PROMISE ME YOU'LL FIND A WAY! SAVE OUR PEOPLE!"

And then he hits the pure energy of the CORE and his body is ripped apart. In an instant he sees EVERYTHING. The pure energy of the universe, the infinite possibilities of time and it's all too much, it's eating him alive! But finally, finally the voices are SILENT and he reaches out, his Soul screaming for everything to STOP!

And it stops. For a moment, for a lifetime, he can see everything. He can see the Souls of the monster's he's doomed, unaware that their death is mere moments away. He sees his son, his hand still reaching out for him, his face frozen in desperation and terror at the sight of the expanding Void. Oh god, what has he done?! He can't let this happen!

**He has only moments. He can't save them all.**

But he can save his son.

He reaches through time and space, his body disintegrating into nothing but specks in the Void. His fingers fly over the containment panels, throwing up what fail safes he can. It won't save the lab, but the city and the monsters within should be safe. He turns to his son as his mind begins to fade away and with the last ounce of his energy, he grabs Sans' Soul and throws him as far as he can, ignoring the now irrelevant laws of physics. Away from the lab, away from the explosions and away from the remains of Gaster's body as it continues to break apart. He doesn't know where Sans will land. He doesn't know what will happen to this timeline.

**All he knows is**

**PAIN.**
Sans has known fear. He's known mind eating terror, and paralyzing horror. He knows it so well in fact, that it almost became meaningless to him over the years. He learned to ignore it, to hide it with a pasted smile and a lazy demeanor and eventually, it quieted down and he learned to live with it. Then when you came into his life and shook his entire world free of the foundation he built around himself, that fear too was set loose. He felt it that night on the rooftop when he could no longer hold his feelings inside. He felt it when he found you lying on your floor surrounded by blood. It ate at him when you were taken away and threatened to shatter him completely when he thought that there was no choice but to force a Reset. Then the first time those damn marks appeared on your face and the words of his creator flowed from you mouth, the fear had planted it's roots deep within his Soul and never went away. He's been scared this whole time that the unthinkable would happen even after everything you survived.

But he never thought something like this would happen. The terror has a vice grip around his mind. It screams and rakes at the inside of his skull and he feels like his Soul may burst from his rib cage as he struggles in the unyielding hand dragging him closer and closer to the darkness within the rip. He tries to keep watching you until the last moment but he can't, he can't watch you melt in agony like Nahn. A small noise escapes him as his sockets shut and he braces himself to feel that same pain. To be ripped apart by the place Gaster spent lifetimes wandering, trapped and unable to escape. Is that what will happen to him now? Are you already breaking apart, your Soul scattering to the whims of the Void? Maybe he can find you, put you back together-

Then he feels the air around him change, sucked away and replaced with burning cold, like he's been doused in a ocean's worth of freezing water. He gasps, sockets flying open to be met only with a darkness that presses down on him, smothering him and steals away any semblance of composure. His voice gets caught in his throat and he can only gasp as his bones shake. The darkness nips and bites at him but instead of melting away or shattering, he feels an odd sort of pressure blanketing him. Something that stops his Soul from shattering from the mere shock of the great nothingness around him.

He's not sure how long it takes, but eventually the sensation of being bitten, being drowned in cold water fades away and then there's nothing. Absolutely nothing. No sound, no ground he can see or an end to the darkness. No sign of the world he's been pulled away from. There's nothing but his own form, and the two hands holding him and you. Even Gaster's face, melting and glitching has vanished, along with the rest of his body. Just that and strange, tiny spots of lights hovering in his sight. Probably another sign of shock. He rubs at his sockets, trying to clear them but slowly he realizes that he's not seeing things. This place isn't completely empty. Hundreds...no, there must be thousands of them. Tiny specks of color, hovering, drifting along in the darkness on a breeze that he
cannot feel. Slowly, phalanges shaking, he reaches out towards one right in front of him, but when he tries to touch it, his fingers touch nothing. They don't even pass through. It must be further away than he thought. He can't make any sort of judgment on distance.

A soft moan jolts him out of his shocked stupor. Your body is slumped over the hand holding you, your eyes shut but fluttering slightly. You're alive! Sans twists desperately but the huge skeletal fingers holding him won't budge. Straining, he reaches as far as he can. He calls your name desperately and the sound of his voice is strange, like it's being sucked up by the vacuum of space around him. You don't respond but something else does.

<NOW ISN'T THAT A SHAME?>

Sans jerks with shock, skull twisting to try and pinpoint the source of the voice. It sounds even worse in this place than it did in the real world. The words are harsh, echoing endlessly with itself and rings with a deep sated anger that chills him to his core. The mere sound of it hurts and Sans has to fight not to press his hands up over his skull. This voice, the condescending tone is far too familiar, as warped as it is. But isn't the same Gaster that's been hanging on your Soul this whole time. It's not the same man who raised him and Paps.

"so uh, i'm guessing dings' hypothesis that the remainder of his soul started thinking for itself was right. is that what you are?"

<BROKEN PIECES. ONE AND THE SAME. COMPLETELY SEPARATE>

Well that doesn't really answer his question. "then who are you?"

The voice doesn't answer him. The hand holding you shifts slightly. <SHE TRULY HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS. WRONG TIME, WRONG PLACE. POOR CHOICES IN COMPANY>

Sans continues to struggle against bones, even as they start to tighten painfully around him. "why have you brought us here?" he calls, his mind desperately searching for some kind of answer. "i mean uh, thanks for getting rid of the evil scientist and her pet but we didn't need the trip into the void."

<DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH ENERGY IT TAKES JUST TO TALK? DO YOU HAVE ANY CLUE HOW PAINFUL IT IS TO BE SPREAD APART SO THINLY YOU CAN FEEL EVERY ATOM OF YOUR BEING BURNING AND BREAKING? DO YOU UNDERSTAND HOW LONG ETERNITY IS?>

"i might have a notion," he says, hoping his dry tone will mask his growing fear. "ya know, with the repeating timelines and all that."

The voice scoffs loudly and Sans can't stop himself from shuddering. <A SINGLE TIMELINE REPEATING MEANS NOTHING HERE. AND YOU, BLISSFULLY UNAWARE OF EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED. HOW MANY TIMES TIME REPEATED. I WOULD ALMOST BE INSULTED>

The hand holding you suddenly starts to glitch, disappearing into nothingness. But instead of falling down onto whatever passes as a floor here, you start to rise up, slowly turning until you're upright, head tilted back slightly. Your hair and limbs gently bob, like you're floating in a deep pool of water. Your hands are still black, still covered in Wingding symbols and clawed.
"what are you doing?"

<HOW IRRITATING. A HUMAN. A SIMPLE HUMAN> More hands appear, smaller, more like normal sized hands but each one of them has a hole punched through the palm. They twitch, flicker in and out of focus. Four of the hands grab you by the wrists and face, steadying your body. You groan again, your eyelids cracking open. Your eyes are still black, ringed with pupils of purple flame.

Sans had wanted to scream when he first saw them, back in the lab, when nothing but sheer power held you in the air, eyes blazing with a terrifying rage he had never before seen on your face.

<ALL OF OUR WORK. ALL OF MY PLANS> The voice has risen to a sharp hiss. <HE NEARLY DESTROYED EVERYTHING>

Sans is fighting to wrap his head around all of this but he can't focus on anything aside from the hands holding you in the place, the fifth hand appearing just above your chest. The hand closes into a fist and you jerk as your Soul is pulled out in front of you. Sans feels his own Soul plummet; your Soul is nearly unrecognizable. Your Soul has broken apart and where the lines of Determination used to line its surface now there is bright pulsating cracks of white and sharp violet, so different from the gentle tones of purple and orange that makes you so unique in his eyes. Tendrils of black ooze from each crack, glowing with a sickly purple light.

"what are you doing?!"

<RECOVER. BELONGS TO ME>

The inhuman lights in your eyes flash. "D-don't..." Your voice is little more than a whimper. Sans can't tell if it's really you speaking or Dings. It might be both of you.

The hand uncurls and then it starts to glow with a much deeper purple, so dark it's almost black. The hands holding you in place to glow similarly. You struggle weakly and Sans can see the space directly behind you start to shimmer as the faint outline of a Blaster starts to appear and he fights to summon his too, he has to stop whatever's about to happen-

Ding.

He stops short, his breath catching at the sudden weight in his chest. Slowly, he looks down to see a green glow emitting from his chest. He can't move at all, other than to slowly lift his shaking hands to his chest. Green magic? Gaster's never been able to use green magic before. The only monster he knows of who can is Undyne. What is this?!

<TOO MUCH INTERFERENCE> Void Gaster's voice growls.

With a snap blinding tendrils of light snake out from the tips of the floating hands, latching onto your arms, your face and directly on your Soul. Your eyes shoot open and the building Blaster vanishes as a terrible scream rips through the deafening silence of this place. Your entire body goes rigid save for your hands, which are shaking violently. The skeletal hands and the strings of energy attached to them move away from you slowly, bit by bit pulling at the foreign energy latched to your body. Like peeling away a scab, the darkness starts to lift. The words on your arms, the crack-like marks on your face are being removed, leaving your skin unmarked. Your Soul is going through a similar cleansing, the darkness of Gaster's essence draining out of you like venom. But with every speck that leaves you, your screams increase, rising to unbearable levels. Your voice is doubled over itself, echoing in
that strange what that means the Gaster in your Soul is wailing with agony as well.

Sans wants to claw his way free, throw himself to the mercy of the monstrosity doing this, surrender anything to stop your pain. His Soul throbs painfully, fighting against the heavy weight keeping it down. He can feel himself heaving, fingers clawing at his temples. "stop!" His voice hitches over the desperate plea. "please stop, you're going to kill them!"

The hand around him tightens painfully, making his bones creak threateningly. <WAIT. YOUR. TURN>

The hands continue to pull and you and Gaster continue to scream. As soon as the dark material leaves your body, it dissolves into a gray cloud of what looks like dust, gathering together into a twisting mass. Then, among the oil-like substance and the dust, Sans can see slivers of blinding white leaving your Soul. And as it does, the colors of your Soul start to return. They're faded and dim, but slowly, your Soul starts to return to normal. At the same time, your voice starts to change, even as you continue to scream. It's becoming a singular voice, fading into strained gasps and whimpers. You blink and suddenly your eyes are yours again. Not a trace of black remains.

The summoned hands and the strings of energy suddenly release you. Your body goes limp and falls like a lifeless puppet, hitting some sort of ground. For a single, heart wrenching moment, Sans feels his Soul stop because you're not moving, you're not-

You moan softly, you eyelids fluttering open and Sans nearly weeps. You're alive. You're you again, and you're alive! But what about Dings? He tears his gaze away from you and to the collected shards of white. There's seven of them, all of them shimmering with a faint aura of purple and red. The swirling dust like matter gathers around the shards and like magnets coming together, the slivers snap together to form a larger shard of a Soul. It's not a whole Soul. It can barely even be called half of one. But as Sans watches, the dust like energy starts to solidify, congealing into the shape of a monster that just weeks ago, Sans thought he would never see again.

Wing Dings Gaster.

His body and face is translucent, glitching and warping on the edges like a bad projection. His face has lost some of the sharpness that it held before, melting into a more circular shape, his nasal cavity is gone and his right socket droops heavily. The edges of his lab coat are frayed and disappear into nothingness. Because of his translucent nature, Sans can see right through him to the shard of this Soul. It's pulsing weakly.

He's changed but Sans knows in his Soul that this is the man who raised him and Paps. This is the scientist who wanted to make a better future for his people. This is the monster who fell into the Core because Sans could not save him from the voices in his head.

Gaster's eye lights are dim. His holey hands are clutched to his chest. Slowly, gasping heavily, he raises his head until he meets Sans' shocked stare. His pupils shrink even further, his face twisting with a painful emotion. "S-Sans...."

Before he can say another word, one of the summoned, solid hands of Void Gaster suddenly shoots straight through Dings' rib cage, closing tightly around the Soul shard. Gaster's sockets go wide with shock.

"dings!"

Gaster's mouth opens and shuts soundlessly several times before his sockets close and his hands drop to his sides. His entire form flickers once...twice....and vanishes completely. The space around Sans
shudders and if he had skin, it would be covered in goosebumps.

<MUCH BETTER> The echoing voice around him sounds clearer, less strained and angry but no less terrifying.

Sans probably wouldn't be able to force himself to move even without the restraint on his Soul. An odd numbness has overtaken him. His creator, his mentor and fath...Dings was right there. He's been talking to him this whole time but to actually see him is something he had vastly unprepared for. But how could he have prepared for this? "where is he?" Sans asks in a hoarse whisper. "what did you do?"

<WHAT MUST BE->

Void Gaster is cut off by a sound so strange that for a moment, Sans is sure he's snapped and lost his mind entirely. It sounds like...laughter. A child's laugh that rings through his skull almost painfully. The skeletal hand holding him suddenly vanishes and he falls (up? Down? He can't tell) but it's like moving through sludge. He doesn't hit any sort of ground but just stops moving. The voice continues to laugh and a strange chill goes through his bones.

He knows that laugh.

He's faced that laugh before. Even if the memory is faded, warped by time resetting over and over again, he knows that laugh. His sockets flash with a rage so unbearable it hurts. That demon who took everything from him, forced the poor kid to carry out unspeakable actions is here too?

Well, isn't it his lucky day.

The chilling stillness of the Void is shattered as blinding tendrils of bright red burst out of the space around your body. The remaining skeletal hands whip and dart around the thrashing energy but in a matter of moments each one is struck by the whips of deep red and shatter into dust. Then, the energy turns to you, wrapping you up like a doll. Sans snarls, putting every bit of his rage into fighting back against the green spell keeping him down. He can feel his Soul straining and screaming under the pressure. He ignores it. That thing is going to take you away if he doesn't do something!

"sorry pal," he hisses through gritted teeth as sweat runs down his face. Agonizingly slowly, he creeps forward. "not gonna let you-

A sudden weight crashes into his back and he slams down into the not-floor of this place. Concentration broken, the pressure in his chest multiples, making him feel like a boulder has taken up residence in his ribs. "no!" He thrashes but it amounts to little more than weak flailing. "damn it!"

You've almost completely vanished under the red tendrils. Your head turns to face him; you're clearly struggling to stay awake. Your lips form his name. He can't hear you speak. Then your head is covered too and the red cocoon surrounding you starts to sink into the nothingness, like a stone in quicksand. Sans screams your name but then you're gone. Just like Dings, you've vanished into the Void.

<MEDDLING ABOMINATION> Void Gaster's voice grumbles. Sans just stares at the place where you vanished as the weight on his Soul lifts, releasing him from the unbearable pressure.

"where...where is she?" he finally croaks.

<NOWHERE. EVERYWHERE. WHEREVER THE ABOMINATION WANTS HER TO BE>
Sans doesn't move, doesn't speak or breathe. Is there even air in this place? Probably not.

"BUT PERHAPS IT WILL BE DISTRACTED BY ITS NEW TOY FOR A FEW CENTURIES. GIVE US TIME TO FIND A WAY"

"toy?" Sans voice sounds hollow, even to him. "you think she's...a toy?"

"THE HUMAN IS GOOD FOR NOTHING ELSE NOW"

Something inside Sans snaps. He can't stand, there's no ground to stand on but he somehow finds himself upright. The force of his magic burns as he lets his rage and pain call up his attacks. But the bones don't follow his commands. They spike up out of the nothingness in places that make no sense, warping, twisting and pull painfully at his magical reserves. But he doesn't care, he needs to hurt this goddamn place! He has to do something before he loses his mind.

"we are not your toys, you goddamn bastard!"

"IS THAT ANY WAY TO SPEAK TO YOUR FATHER?"

"bring her back!" He lashes out and the resulting attack appears before him, shooting towards him with blinding speed. It nearly clips his face. He barely registers it. "give them both back!"

"IF YOU ARE GOING TO INSIST ON THROWING A TANTRUM LIKE A CHILD, PERHAPS WE SHOULD MOVE TO A MORE APPROPRIATE SETTING"

Sans gasps harshly as an icy cold feeling grips his limbs. The sensation of falling makes his head spin and the glowing spots of color whirl into a tunnel of light, flashing and blinding him. He throws his arms up over his face in a desperate attempt to block it out. But his arms won't move. He blinks and suddenly the world around him snaps into an actual place. Chest heaving, he looks around. A dark green aura gives just him just enough light to see. It's a medical room of some sort. Devices hang on the wall, dead monitors sit silently on the shelves and counter tops. And in the center of it all is an angled medical table. Which he is currently strapped to.

Sans slowly flexes his hands; thick straps around his wrists and ankles allow hardly any movement. He notes with a dull shock that his clothes (lab coat, tee shirt and shorts) are gone, replaced with just a pair of dark blue medical pants. His upper half is bare. His bones gleam a sickly green color in the dim light. He stares blankly at his new attire for a moment before he jolts with the realization of where he is.

"Ah, so your memory hasn't failed you this time I see."

Sans whips his head towards the voice. There's a figure standing in the corner, mostly obscured by shadows. How did he not see him? "not exactly fond of remembering the times I spent in medical rooms," he responds shortly.

"And your temper has subsided. Excellent."

Sans scowls. He may have his emotions back in check thanks to the shock of suddenly being brought here, but he's still pissed. He's tempted to snap back but remains silent. Something bad is about to happen. He needs to keep his cool as best as he can. "what are we doing here? is this...real?"

The figure steps out of the shadows. His head is obscured by large squares of glitching static and the name tag on his faded lab coat is hidden under what looks like desperate claw marks. But there's no
mistaking the slim figure, the proud set shoulders and calm voice of the good doctor Gaster. "We could spend many years discussing what is real or not and come to no true conclusion. Perhaps there will be time for that later."

Sans narrows his sockets. Gaster's voice is still warped but it sounds closer to how he used to speak. It's not the same grating boom from before anyway. "and who's at the wheel right now? dings the ghost balloon? or the freak who's been ripping the world apart? or hey, maybe some kind of twisted combination of the two."

"Are you sure those are the questions you want to be asking?" Gaster's feet tap loudly against the ground as he approaches the wall of tools. It's hard to tell without being able to see his face, but it sounds like he might be smiling in amusement. "I would consider your options wisely."

"why? is my time limited?" Sans tries to keep his voice casual as he very gingerly reaches for his magic. "you gonna kill me?"

"No. That is not my intention at the moment. I thought perhaps we could talk. Catch up. I certainly haven't talked to you face to face in a very long time."

Sans frowns; where is his magic? He can feel it but...it's like it's behind some kind of wall. He strains, fighting to regain control. He needs to get out of here, wherever this place is and find you. If he can summon even a single attack he might have some kind of chance!

"You won't be able to use that here," Gaster says without turning around. "Real or not, I control this domain. Here, I create the laws."

The phalanges of Sans' left hand cracks loudly as some unseen force snaps them backwards, crumpling his bones into a tangled mess. There's just a heartbeat of shock before the pain hits him and Sans barely manages to hold back a scream. His broken hand shakes uncontrollably. The bones of his hands are cracked and oozing marrow. Sans stares at his hand, horror and shock fighting for control. He can see the very edges of his hand beginning to crumble away, dissolve into dust. Panic seizes him, makes every thought in his head flee.

He's dying.

After everything that's happened he's...!

The dust, dripping down like water suddenly freezes. Sans blinks and the dust returns to his hand, filling in the holes in the bones it had created. His hand is still mangled, still broken, but he's not turning to dust.

"Now, rethink your questions," Gaster says, speaking calmly over Sans' pained gasps.

"my...my hp...what's-the dust-?"

"Ah, now there we go. Yes, you've always been fragile, haven't you?" He turns away from the wall, walking closer to Sans. Sans fights the urge to shrink away. Gaster stops, his glitching head tilted down towards Sans' broken hand. "Weak, but strong enough to take an attack, maybe two. Well, at least until that day so long ago when my attempt to make you stronger failed. Now you're barely tough enough to survive small accidents, maybe a bone or two broken unintentionally. But one stray attack, one intentional hit and you will die."

The words bring back a flash of memory. He remembers screaming, his bones burning from the
inside out as he begged Gaster to just end it. He survived, but his already weak HP was damaged forever. A bead of sweat drips into his socket. "so, you gonna explain this, or do i have to guess?"

Gaster grips his broken fingers and Sans whimpers quietly. "Reality is relative Sans. You know this. And in my reality, I can do the things that my weak side never had the stomach for. Things not possible when a single mistake could be fatal. Things like this."

He suddenly releases Sans' mangled fingers and grabs one of his exposed ribs. With a sharp yank, he pulls the rib up with enough strength to snap it completely away. This time Sans can't stop himself from screaming. Black spots appear in his vision as he thrashes in the restraints. This time, this time he can feel himself dissolving and it hurts. But the pain only lasts for three seconds, three unending seconds of agony and then a relief so sweet it makes his head spin washes away the pain. His scream chokes off into harsh gasping as he fights to regain any measure of composure. Blinking harshly, he looks down to see that the rib is back where it should be. No cracks, no dripping marrow. His body is solid. What the hell is happening?!

He jolts at the sudden touch on his mangled hand. Gaster's hand is solid; no see-through summoned limbs, no glitching half-there body parts. Gaster's fingers very lightly brush over his broken bones. Sans blinks and his hand is back to normal as well. His mind whirls, trying to come up with some kind of explanation. Time manipulation maybe? Direct matter control? If so, it's on a scale he never could have imagined to be possible, even back in his lab days.

Gaster pulls his hand up in front of his own glitching face. Sans gets the feeling he's grinning viciously. "Wonderful," he whispers.

Sans lets his emotionless grin spread across his face, sockets void of light. "i'm getting the feeling you weren't exactly sure what was gonna happen there doc."

The air around him shifts and Gaster is suddenly standing on the other side of the table. Sans jerks, knitting his skull against the metal surface. "One does not spend countless lifetimes spread across the Void without learning a few tricks," he whispers. "But yes, I have not been able to use it until now. It would seem that your uh...Dings returned with exactly what I needed to finally put my new abilities to use." He extends a hand and from the hole in his palm, a new energy starts to form in the shape of gently flowing light. It's the same bright red as the thing that took you. Pure human Determination.

"I underestimated how much was needed," Gaster continues almost reverently. "Costly mistakes. And I have long suffered for them." He closes his fist and the DT vanishes. "It is ironic, isn't it? My weaker side tried to flee this place. In doing so he brought back the one thing that we needed to finally right the wrongs of all timelines. It's just a shame that it is not your human's main trait. It is strong but...well. I have seen far stronger."

All timelines? "doc, look, i dunno what you're planning to do with it, but that determination isn't yours." His voice is shaking damn it, but he has to try something. "there's no way dings could've known that the rest of him...of you would start thinking for itself. but since you are, i'm sure you wanna get outta here too right? we can help. you just gotta get her back and let dings go and-"

"Out of here?" The room around them suddenly shudders violently. The light flickers, growing darker. "Oh Sans, Don't you see?" Gaster stretches his arms out, gesturing widely to the space around him. "I have finally gained control! All of my pain, all of my suffering is worth it. After
all of that, why would I want to limit myself in one, pathetic timeline?"

Bright flashes of color appear in Gaster's hands. It's more of the same strange lights Sans saw before. Up close like this, they're much bigger. Inside, he can almost see something. Millions of faces moving too fast to focus on. It makes his head hurt.

"For far too long I have only been an observer. Stretched too thin to touch, too weak to influence anything around me." Gaster flicks his hands and the lights...the alternate timelines vanish. "After I fell...after we fell, that pathetic whelp kept enough of his own mind together to form a shard of our Soul strong enough to break free. But in doing so, he made a marker for the rest of us to travel back to. It took lifetimes but now I have the form I need. I have the direct influence of the Void. And now, I have the Determination necessary to control it. All that remains...is someone to test my limits on. And who better than the same worthless failure who put me here? What goes around, comes around after all."

For a brief moment, the glitches on Gaster's face vanish. What Sans sees beneath sends terror shooting through his body. A face that's twisted by power and ruthlessness. A face melting into a broken skull. Multiple sockets cover the surface of his head and each one has a blood red pupil. The cracks extending from the two main sockets are so wide they resemble actual holes rather than cracks and there is nothing but darkness within. That's not Gaster! Not the Gaster that raised him. Not the Gaster that taught him to love the stars. No, this is the Gaster who was born from the energy of the core pumping voices into his head. This is the monster who was willing to sacrifice lives for the very place putting the idea in his mind.

And Sans is trembling with fear.

The glitches return and the thing wearing Gaster's body advances. There's no where for Sans to go, nothing he can do to protect himself. "d-doc, you said you...you wanted to talk, so let's talk. ok? let's talk."

There's a glint of a needle in one of Gaster's hands (where did he get that?) and this time, Sans catches the wide smile on Gaster's face through the fog of glitches. "Oh, there will be time for that Sans. We have all of eternity. Now, prepare yourself. This is going to hurt."
A terrible feeling of loss.

The sensation of something being ripped away.

You sit bolt upright, your mouth open in loud scream.

Someone jolts next to you, scrambling to sit up as well. "what the hell-! hey, take it easy!"

Shock at the voice more than anything stops your panicked yell. You turn, staring with bugged eyes at the sight of Sans beside you. "Sans!" You lunge for him, wrapping him in a tight hug. He's okay, he's alive! You're alive! "You're here!"

"um, yeah?" He pats you cautiously. "where else would I be?"

You pull away from him in confusion, your words dying on your lips as your eyes land on your surroundings. It's a bedroom...but one you've never been in before. The walls are covered in various framed prints, including a map of constellations, several signed band posters and a plain white picture with the image of a bone and the words 'It's Going Tibia Okay'. Clothes are hanging on the back of a computer chair next to a desk with a laptop and several more framed pictures. Looking down, you cautiously run your hand over the soft dark blue blanket covering yours and Sans' legs. You're in...a bed?

"What's going on?" you whisper.

Sans rubs at his socket with one hand, yawning loudly. "i think you had a nightmare or something. you ok?"

A nightmare? Your hand goes up to your chest. Your head is fuzzy and your thoughts scatter apart like roaches. You can't...you can't remember. Something...something's wrong, something is horribly, devastingly wrong but-!

You jump when you feel Sans' hand gently touch your back. "hey space cadet?" he asks worryingly. "you're looking like you've seen a ghost. and heh, blooky's not working today, right?"

"Blooky?" You blink at him.
"yeah. napstablook. started at the station two weeks ago?" Sans frowns, his brow bone creasing a little. "wow, you're really out of it, huh? do you wanna go back to sleep?"

Instead of answering, you touch his face. You let your hands run gingerly over his skull. Every nick and bump in the bone is solid under your fingers. He feels solid and warm with life. For some reason the sight of him watching you with confused concern and the mere presence of him beside you makes your throat close with emotion. You pull him back into another hug, scrunching your eyes tightly. "I...no," you find yourself saying. "I'm okay. I think."

"you sure?" Sans holds you tightly, rubbing your back gently. "waking up screaming says otherwise."

You let out a strained chuckled. "I...I can't remember. I'm...everything feels weird."

Sans gently eases out of your hug, which is very quickly turning into a painful vise grip. He holds onto your hand, it feels so solid and real (but why wouldn't it?) and smiles at you. "let's get some food in you then. that should help you feel better. and if i'm not mistaken-"

You hear the sound of a door opening and closing the distant clatter of someone moving around in the kitchen.

Sans glances at the clock on the bedside table. "right on time. you know, if he wasn't human, i'd think he could teleport too."

Who? Teleport? The questions ring dimly in your head but Sans is already standing and he's gently tugging on your hand so you stand too and follow him out of the room. Your limbs are heavy and as you look around the hallway, your chest seems to twist with a hollow, empty feelings. There are pictures on the walls but when you squint at them, you see nothing but blurred figures of color. Everything feels...wrong. You should know this place, you feel in your heart that you should, but you...you don't. Your feet carry you after Sans as he heads down a set of stairs. You keep your hand tightly clasped around his because in your heart, you're afraid that if you let go, you'll fall straight through the floor and into the center of the earth.

Wait...Your hand. Something's different about it. It looks the way it should but...it wasn't like this just a few minutes ago, right?

Your foot misses a step and you lurch forward. Sans turns and quickly saves you from tumbling down the rest of the stairs. "oof! careful there."

"Sorry."

He studies you for a moment, perhaps trying to decide if you should go back to bed when a sudden clang echos from the kitchen to your left. It's quickly followed by a soft grumbling. The voice is clearly male and deep and for some reason a sharp pang goes through your heart in response.

"ah, forgot to tell him paps broke the oven door," Sans says, a sheepish grin spreading over his face. He tugs you forward and you numbly follow him into the kitchen. There's a man standing at the stove in a kitchen that you don't recognize but feel that you should. His back is towards you and he's struggling to lift the door of the oven back into place. Sans lets go of your hand and makes a quick gesture. The door glows blue and gently moves back into place, locking with a quiet click.

"sorry old man, paps kinda got carried away with making spaghetti cake last week. it uh...it wasn't pretty."

"Well, I suppose I can understand that, but forgetting to tell me that you two are out of eggs?"
Completely unforgivable."

You can't move, or even breathe as your grandpa turns around, putting his hands on his hips in mock anger, sticking his lip out in a pout. "I'm lucky to have escaped unscathed after fighting off that grumpy old broad at the market this morning. She was eyeing the box of eggs that I clearly called dibs on. But how am I supposed to make my world famous banana bread without a working —"

You don't recall moving. You just feel yourself fly forward and embrace your grandpa with enough force to make him stagger back a little. He makes a small 'oof' of surprise as you bury your face into his scratchy green sweater. The familiar spicy scent of his cologne fills your nose and makes your eyes water.

"Well good morning to you too, my little star," he says with a deep chuckle that rumbles through his chest. "It's been a whole eight hours and...twenty-two minutes since I last saw you."

A strangled laugh breaks from you. "Y-yeah that's...that's far too long." Eight hours? Has it only been eight hours?

It feels like so much longer.

"Are you okay?" His wrinkled hand strokes your head and for some reason, the familiar motion makes you want to cry.

"she had a pretty bad nightmare," Sans pipes in. "i think it shook her up."

"Ah," he hums in understanding. "Well, you just sit down at the table there and I'll make you two some hot chocolate to chase away the nightmare demons." He gives you a push towards the table but you don't want to let go. Your head is telling you that you're acting weird and clingy but your heart is screaming otherwise. Finally though, you do let go and join Sans at the table. You watch your grandpa as he busies himself pulling out mugs and milk and try to make sense of the storm of emotions in your chest.

Something still feels wrong and off but at the same time, an almost bittersweet warmth is filling your heart. Your thoughts slowly start to form but they feel almost detached and foreign. Almost like they're just memorized lines.

This is your home. So why don't you fully recognize it?

Sans is by your side. Then why do you feel so uneasy?

Your grandpa is here on a visit to the city. But your heart is hurting like you've lost something precious.

"How exactly does one make spaghetti cake?" your grandpa asks as he fills a pot with water and sets it on the stove.

You fight to look past the flat answers.

"you don't," Sans answers with a laugh. "but paps somehow managed it, broken stove and all."

Something's not right. Your hand goes to your arm, scratching absently at your bare skin as you always did when feeling anxious.

"I'm sorry I missed it." Grandpa shuffles over and slowly lowers himself into the seat with a groan.

"No, what I miss is the clean air of the country. How can you even breathe in this city? Nothing but
smog and-" He suddenly squints his eyes and stares at Sans. "Do you even need to breathe?"

There's someone missing. Not just that...

Where are your scars?

Sans shrugs. "it's just something i do. i don't think i have to exactly but i haven't ever really had the desire to test it."

You stare down at your unblemished skin. There's not a single scar marring your arm. The scars that you've lived with for years because of your stupid choices, because of... You slowly look up at your grandfather, alive and healthy, talking animatedly with your skeletal boyfriend.

"Gaster?" The question breaks free of your cloudy haze and Sans and your grandpa fall silent. Sans stares at you for several moments before saying:

"who?"

It feels like a hole has been punched through your chest. "Sans your...your dad. Remember? Doctor Gaster."

Sans slowly shakes his head. "babe i don't...i don't know who my dad is. i've told you that before."

"Are you feeling okay?" Your grandpa reaches out and places a hand on your forehead. The rough texture of his work worn hands is so achingly familiar. "No fever but...maybe you should get a little more sleep."

You close your eyes with despair. It takes you a moment to fight past the lump in your throat. "This isn't real, is it?"

"Sweetie?"

You open your eyes, meeting the concerned gazes of Sans and your dead grandpa as finally, your head clears. You stare at your grandpa's face, desperately trying to burn every wrinkle, every laugh line and the shape of his face into your mind. Because.... "This isn't real. I don't know what this is but...I'd like it to be over now."

There's the sound of shattering glass. Cracks spread across the table and walls, snap through the ceiling and spread across the faces of two of the men closest to your heart. You can feel your heart breaking with them as piece by piece, the illusion falls away and you're left in overwhelming nothingness. Wiping at your eyes, you fight to get your bearings.

You're in the Void. You were dragged in by some twisted version of Gaster. Or rather, the pieces of Gaster left behind when he escaped to your timeline. You put your hand on your chest; there's a strange, hollow feeling inside of you. The memory is dim, marred by agonizing pain but...you remember now. He's been pulled out. For the first time in weeks...you're completely alone.

Well, not completely alone.

"Aw, you're no fun! I didn't even get to the finale! It was going to be a real tear-jerker."

You fight to try and turn but there's no ground for you to move on. There's nothing but black in every direction. Still, you turn your head back and forth. "What the hell was that?" Anger bleeds into your voice. "Who are you?"
"Take a guess." Suddenly, there's a child standing right in front of you, eyes closed. You jerk back with shock, your own eyes bugging as you take in the being in front of you. Short brown hair cut in a sharp bob, a striped sweater and a gentle smile on their face.

"F-Frisk?"

A small chuckle escapes them. Slowly, their eyes open, revealing blood red pupils. Their gaze is sharp; it cuts straight through you like a knife. A harsh shiver runs up your spine. "Guess again."

"....Chara." This has to be Chara, right? Frisk described them to you, that night so long ago when Sans had walked in on the two of you making soup. He had freaked out because of the knife in Frisk's hand and Frisk had chosen to trust you with the full tale of what happened in the underground. The similarity between the two is freakishly amazing. "You're Chara, aren't you?"

The child claps gleefully. "Very good! Well...close enough at least. I'm what remains of Chara. Still, I'm little surprised; it didn't take you long at all to see through my game. A shame, but I guess that's okay. You're more of a get down to business kind of person anyway, aren't you ______?"

A spike of fear jolts through you. "How do you know me?"

"I've been watching. There's not much else to do here. Especially since that cracked eggman doesn't want to play with me anymore."

Cracked eggman? Your confusion must show on your face because Chara sighs. They suddenly rise up a little and their body angles like they're reclining on an invisible chair. "Doctor Gaster. Mystery man. The man who speaks in hands. Whatever you want to call him. I don't really care."

You're not sure what to say, or even how to react. You cautiously look around again; there's odd specks of light, like wisps of dust that are hard to see dancing in your vision. "What....I don't...."

Chara sighs again loudly. "You're going to be boring too, aren't you? Fine, you can ask your questions. Then we can play a bit."

The child's tone, light and innocent, only sends chills down your spine. "What was that...dream place I just saw?"

"Uh uh." Chara waggles a finger, clicking their tongue. "Let's not talk about that just yet. Unless you don't have more questions?" A sickly sweet grin starts to lift their face. "If that's the case-"

"No! I uh..." Your mind races and you snatch the first question that rises in your mind. "What...what is this place?"

Chara giggles. "The Void, silly. The place between all places. Nowhere. Everywhere. The Loading Screen. It has thousands and thousands of names. You've been here before, but not all of you."

The time you almost died. You barely remember it. At least until Gaster found you and...put you back together', in his words. "But things looked different then. There was...a lot of white and-"

"This place is nothing," Chara says like that explains everything. When you don't respond they scowl and whine through an explanation. "Nothing means once you put something there is becomes something. It's easy to make it look what whatever you want, if you've learned how to do it. Eggman probably made things a little more solid for you so your Soul didn't shatter from the shock when he woke you up. Plus, you were just a Soul back then, refusing to move on to the next place. Right now you and your meat suit are unconsciously stopping you from seeing things that would probably melt your brain."
Well there's a pleasant image. But speaking of that- "How am I still alive? I was dying and...I saw what happened to Nahn the moment she touched this place." You lift your hands, staring down at them. All traces of black are gone. They look completely normal. But even if you hadn't died from your body giving out from all the excess magic, how could you survive entering the Void when another human clearly didn't? "Or...am I dead?"

"Nope! You're still very much alive." Chara puts a finger on their lip, tugging at it thoughtfully. "It's probably because you've still got that eggman's Soul in you." You frown quizzically so they continue. "It's all connected. You, him and the smiling freak. You've all got his stain in your Souls and he's been here for a long time. It's certainly not because of your Determination. You don't have nearly enough for that." Their sharp eyes stare you down. "Or maybe it's because you're not human anymore. The doctor might be out of you, but he changed you on deep level. I can see it. And you're just like me."

Chara breaks into giggles at the expression on your face. The sound vibrates around you, making your teeth shake. You want to protest, insist you're nothing like Chara but...why bother? Furthermore...antagonizing them probably isn't a good idea. You shake your head. Okay this is something that can be dealt with later. The important thing is, you're alive. So now, you've got to find out if the others are too. "Where are Sans and Gaster? Are they still alive?"

"Sure, the smiling freak's alive. So are the two halves of Gaster. If you can call it that."

"What do you mean by two halves?"

Chara suddenly rolls onto their stomach, lifting their feet up slightly into the air. They put their head in their hands, smiling widely. "Gaster was so desperate to find a way to save the monsters. He was so determined. He stared into the Void, looking for answers. And the Void answered him. But it wasn't exactly the solution he was looking for."

"What do you mean?"

Chara reaches out with one hand. Rising in their open palm is a steadily growing ball of light. You can't help but stare at it; you can see images inside, moving too fast to really comprehend. Around the surface of the orb like object, tiny glittering spots of white light flicker brightly, like fireflies. "There was a time when there weren't so many timelines. Making new timelines takes energy. A lot of it. Can you guess where that energy comes from?" Chara doesn't give you a chance to answer. "Souls. Lots and lots of Souls gathered from people who have died. Mostly monster Souls though. Human Souls are a little tougher to grab. It's like that saying 'a light at the end of the tunnel'. This-" They gesture widely. "is the tunnel! A place most Souls just pass through before moving on. Most of the time, they move on too fast. Just a blip and then it's gone. But if a monster is say...killed unexpectedly, their Soul slows down in the tunnel. Sometimes they even try to go back. And the Void snatches them up."

Horror twists in your gut. "Are you saying the Void itself is...alive?"

"Course not! But that doesn't mean it can't think for itself." Chara rolls over a few times, finally stopping on their back. Their head hangs loosely upside down as they stare unblinkingly at you. They continue to hold what you have to assume is a timeline, clutching it like a child holding onto a toy. "It takes a lot of monster Souls to create a new timeline though. Monster Souls are weak, especially compared when compared to a human's. Human Souls are harder to catch. Pretty much impossible in fact."

You have to fight to keep holding eye contact. "So what does this have to do with Gaster?"
Chara tosses the ball of light up and down a few times without looking at it. "The good old doctor did something that's never been done before; he found a hole in his reality and peeked into the Void. Reality and this place aren't supposed to touch but in every timeline there are places where something went wrong. Places of power and danger, where reality and nothingness converge. And instead of leaving it alone, he decided to mess with things he shouldn't. He thought that if he could control the Void, he could reset time. Go back and stop the barrier from ever being put up in the first place. And the Void watched him poking his stupid hand into hole, trying to make it bigger thought, 'Hey, let's use this idiot to make more Souls head our way'. Well, that was my idea actually. The Void and I talk sometimes."

They say it so casually, like the incomprehensible consciousness of infinity is a friend of theirs. A small noise escapes you. Chara notices of course and for a moment, they stop tossing the timeline up and down and go perfectly still. You blink and they're sudden right in front of your face. You shriek and automatically try to shove them away but Chara catches your arm. Their touch is like burning ice and you writhe with pain under their grip.

"We couldn't fully cross into the timeline but thanks to Gaster breathing in the energy seeping from the hole, we could whisper to him," Chara says. Their voice is hollow and the fact that it's coming out of a child makes it far more frightening. "We talked to him, let the voices of the all the worlds into his head. We put the thought in his head that if he sacrificed just a few Souls, he would get the power he wanted. And the good doctor didn't like that, he didn't want to hurt people. So the Void pushed his reason and poor doctor Gaster started to lose his grip on his reality. His experiment would give us hundreds of monster Souls, enough to create a brand new world. But then Humpty Dumpty took a great fall inside and broke that final wall between us. He did what he meant to do; he created the power to RESET. Bu he didn't have the Determination to control it. So in his final act before he broke apart, he saved that smiling freak and sealed the hole he had created. The timeline shattered into infinite pieces, spreading new timelines across the Void. And every new world held the power of RESET but now, we couldn't touch it. It was locked away. And without direction, that power latched onto the being with the most Determination."


Chara nods and finally releases you. You pull your arm in close, half expecting it to be completely encased in ice. But your skin looks normal, aside from all the goosebumps.

"I was pretty mad until I discovered something...interesting." Chara lifts up the timeline again, staring deep into it's depths. "There were timelines that suddenly spit out monster Souls by the dozens. Worlds where monsters were being cut down in waves. And then I found out, that if I took the Souls for myself, I couldn't create new timelines...but I could do something else. One hundred monster Souls isn't enough to make a new world but is enough to extinguish the reality where they come."

You realize what they're about to do mere moments before it happens. You cry out, reaching forward as the timeline suddenly shatters in their hand, breaking into thousands of tiny pieces. Every shard gleams brightly for just a moment. And then Chara takes a deep breath and every shard flies directly towards them, sinking into their chest. They sigh happily, closing their eyes for just a moment while you stare in horrified silence.

"I've learned a lot of things since I woke up here after dying," Chara hums conversationally. "And I've learned even more since I discovered that destroying worlds is a lot more satisfying than creating them."

"Why?" you croak. "How could you-"

"How can those pointless people go about their pointless lives and live like their world isn't twisted
and broken?" Chara suddenly snarls. "It's all just a \textit{game}. Besides, I'm not the one who makes the first kill. Or the second or the twenty-ninth, or the eighty-first. I don't interfere, I \textit{can't} interfere until the ninety-ninth kill. With every Soul offered, I can reach further and further into the world, latching onto a Soul with the same amount Determination that mine holds. Frisk and I are...well, you could almost call us 'Soul Mates.' Their face breaks into a wide, twisted smile. "You know, I've killed your boyfriend thousands and \textit{thousands} of times. I've watched him stagger away and crumble into \textit{dust} as he snivels for his forgettable brother. And this whole time, his useless creator has been fighting to find a way back after causing all of this in the first place. Like he deserves a second chance."

You're aware of the fact that you're trembling. But now it's not fear making you shake. "Gaster didn't want this! I've seen it for myself! He just wanted to save his people! It was you and this place that drove him to what he did! You're sick!"

"No. I'm \textit{bored}." Chara shrugs, only grinning at your anger. "Even with infinite worlds to see, you'd be shocked at how similar they all are. Happiness and contentment is boring. Fear and hate! Now that's interesting."

"Interesting!?" You shriek. "How many Souls have you...\textit{eaten}? How many families have been ripped apart because of your game? Sans..." True, burning rage tears at your heart. "Sans has suffered so much because of this timeline crap. He's endured far more than anyone should have to go through! And Gaster...he's done bad things, but he doesn't deserve to be trapped here. He's been trying to fix his mistakes."

"Oh sure, by acting like a leech sucking on your Soul's energy. Not that I would know anything about that," they say with a sly smile that screams otherwise.

You try to reign in the desire to leap at this demon and smash that smirk right off their face. You take several deep breaths. "So...what? You just played God with countless timelines while Gaster tried to pull himself back together and escape?"

"Well he did escape," Chara points out. "Some of him anyway. It took him a long time, but the Gaster you know gathered himself back into a sort of solid shape. The bit of his Soul that remained purely his, untainted by the Void's influence crawled back to each other, became one person again. Then he found you and hitched a ride out of here thanks to you still being connected to your timeline. The 'Alpha Timeline' as he calls it. The bits Gaster left behind...well. They're not really him anymore. Those Soul shards barely had any sort of consciousness at all. So...I might have given them a little extra...\textit{Soul} to fill in the gaps? Angry Souls who died before their time to help him get back up on his feet. If he has feet. I'm not really sure, he doesn't like me very much so I give him his space. Ungrateful jerk."

"But why would the other Gaster pull us back in? I thought he wanted to escape, not drag us in here to join him-"

Chara taps at your chest. You flinch. "If you were missing part of your Soul, wouldn't you want it back?"

Oh. Oh God, it's all starting to make sense now. In a very confusing, twisted kind of way.

Chara giggles again and claps their hands together. "Okay! I think that's enough of the questions. Let's get back to what you saw just now. You haven't forgotten, right?"

Of course not. The memory of seeing of your grandpa and Sans sitting together, talking freely like friends makes your heart swell painfully with longing, even if it wasn't real. "Yeah, pretty sure I'm not going to forget about that so easily. What was that? Just something to torture me with?"
"Oh no, nothing like that," Chara says innocently, putting their hands up. "Just wanted to give you a little taste before I make my offer."

"What exactly are you offering?"

Chara grins again. "A way out of here."

Chapter End Notes

Whoo okay that was confusing even at times for me to write. I hope things have become a little more clear now. If there are things you still don't quite understand, feel free to comment and I'll try to explain unless it's something that will be addressed in the future.
Deal Or No Deal

Chapter Notes

Holy cow we are now just 5 days away from the 1 year anniversary of It's Not Too Late! I honestly never imagined I would spend this much time on this fic, and I know I keep saying 'Oh, there's about 4 chapters left' with every update but I promise we are getting very very close to the end :) Thank you guys so much for sticking with me for so long and enjoy the chapter!

Content warning: brief graphic body horror

So I may have hinted that I would set a drink on fire if I could
May I offer you a Fresh Glass of Hope in these trying times (please look at this I'm still sobbing)
Support me or come say hi!
Also I updated It's A Little Early

The comment monster awaits your comments

You resist the temptation to dig at your ears for blockage because there's no way you heard them right. "You...want to give me a way out?"

"Yep!" Chara confirms cheerfully. "Well, not give exactly. It's more like an exchange. I have something you want, and you have something I want. That's how deals work. You can't get something for nothing."

Their condescending tone as they explain the concept of an exchange to you is rather irritating, especially considering their childlike appearance (God-like powers non-withstanding). You struggle for a moment to come up with a clever response before simply asking, "Why?"

"Like I said, you have something I want. And this-!"

They gesture widely and suddenly the bleak nothingness around you bursts with color, twisting and bulging before forming into a landscape. Once again, you find yourself standing in the familiar kitchen in the house that you feel you should know but don't. But this time, you can see yourself as well. You're sitting at the table between Sans and your grandpa; the three of you are talking, laughing with muted voices that you can't quite make out. The you at the table is smirking, fighting to keep a frown on your face while your eyes sparkle with mirth as Sans gleefully snickers at a bad joke your grandpa proudly cracked.

Chara, now standing next to you, leans forward slightly, giving you a sympathetic smile. "This is what you want, isn't it?"

You can't take your eyes off the scene in front of you. Slowly, you step forward and move closer to your grandpa. He makes no acknowledgement of your presence. You raise a hand, reaching out to touch his shoulder. It goes right through him. His entire head and most of his arm flickers and
glitches wildly for a few seconds after you pull your hand away before fading back to what looks like a solid state.

"How are you doing this?" you whisper in a hushed voice.

You jump as Chara appears in front of you. They're standing right in the middle of the table. It glitches and warps around them as they stare down at Sans. He's still laughing, socket scrunched up in mirth. Chara points to Sans and slowly traces a slanted line starting from his right shoulder and across his ribs. His form glitches, rapidly changing from laughing to clutching at his chest as it bleeds and back to smiling several times. Chara lets their finger linger for a moment before stepping away. "I told you; Souls are power. All I have to do is imagine what I want and change the code around me. But this time, I simply looked into your Soul. It made the coding a lot easier."

You drag your eyes away from Sans and your grandpa, who are peering at your phone. You can't help but wonder what they're looking at. Your hands cover your chest. "How did you-"

Chara laughs but the sound is hollow. "You're like a beacon in a open field at night in this place. I can't not see it. Every desire of your heart, every dark secret is right there. All I have to do is look. But it's not just that." They glitch out of existence for a moment and then they're standing in front of you again. You're too numb with shock at the scene before you to even flinch. Chara is staring at the place your Soul resides and their eyes flash a bright red for just a moment.

"The moment you chose to investigate the fire alarm at your apartment instead of minding your own business the alpha timeline shifted. Not nearly as powerfully as it did when Frisk broke the barrier for the first and final time in your world, but enough to catch our attention. Why you? You're nothing special. You don't have nearly as much Determination as Frisk. You don't even have a high LOVE! Why?!

You want to back away from the rising venom in their voice but you can't move. You're at a loss. What do they mean, the world shifted? Your world, certainly but the entire timeline? "I...I don't know," you whisper. "I...I just...."

Chara folds their arms, taking a deep breath. "Whatever. It doesn't matter now. The point is, this is what you want, isn't it." It's not a question. "You want a life with them, with the smiling freak and your grandpa. You want to erase your mistakes. I can give you the power to do that."

They hold open their left hand and you can sense more than see a power gathering. The scene in the kitchen around you fades and flickers but doesn't disappear entirely. Chara's brow furrows in concentration and then lines of white light appear in the air, forming a box shape and two words: TRUE RESET

"I can rewrite the coding, create the image thanks to my own, hmm borrowed power from the Void. I can make it look and sound real through the power of monster Souls. But even a hundred monster Souls isn't enough to make it truly real. A hundred monster Souls, a thousand, it's not enough. Not for the Void, not for me. It takes tens of thousands of monster Souls to really create a world. Do you understand how boring and tedious it is waiting to gather enough Souls? It's worse than watching grass grow. Which is why it's far more interesting to destroy timelines. But..." They grin widely and point right at you and your heart skips a beat.

Over and over again, you've been told how powerful human Souls are compared to monsters. Sans has told you, Frisk mentioned the importance when they told you their story and Nahn made it perfectly clear that the difference in strength was why her earlier experiments didn't work. But having the power to create an entire world? You'd call it crazy but then again, you are standing
before a demon child in the vast nothingness of the Void after partially transforming thanks to Gaster's Soul molding with yours. Crazy has kind of lost any and all impact.

"You need my Soul," you say, surprising yourself with your calm tone.

"You catch on quick!" Chara lowers their hand but the harshly glowing words stay where they are. "So here's my deal, you give me your Soul and I will recreate your perfect world. Well, it will be more of a reset of the timeline you already came from. So you don't have to feel bad about leaving your precious Sans to an eternity of torture-"

"Torture?!"

Chara ignores your panicked outburst. "You'll go back to that night and the fire will never happen. Your grandpa will be alive!"

A short bark of laughter escapes you. You can't help it. "Yeah, the last time I made a deal involving Souls, I wound up with a monster ghost hanging on me and almost killing me. I'm not exactly eager to do that again."

"Wha-...wouldn't that, you know, kill me?" you sputter. "Kind of defeats the whole purpose of making a new timeline, don't you think?"

"Please, you don't need your Soul with you to technically be alive. Just look at me." They spread their arms out and your gaze drops to the space where their Soul should reside. You don't know if it's because you learned the skill from Gaster being inside you or because of this place but something in Soul shifts and your eyes are able to see that instead of a Soul, there's nothing inside of Chara but a terrible gaping space of nothing. No...no that's not quite right. There's something in there, something dark, twisted and pulsing. It makes your eyes burn and you can't bear to look for more than a few seconds. The gaping space in their chest looks almost the same as the creature Nahn brought with her in the lab but this is far more disturbing and your very blood seems to freeze in revulsion.

The child only laughs at the look of disgusted horror that crosses your face. "Okay, I might have some Void stuff to make up for not having a Soul, but you get my point. You'll leave your Soul with me."

"Wha-...wouldn't that, you know, kill me?" you sputter. "Kind of defeats the whole purpose of making a new timeline, don't you think?"

"Please, you don't need your Soul with you to technically be alive. Just look at me." They spread their arms out and your gaze drops to the space where their Soul should reside. You don't know if it's because you learned the skill from Gaster being inside you or because of this place but something in Soul shifts and your eyes are able to see that instead of a Soul, there's nothing inside of Chara but a terrible gaping space of nothing. No...no that's not quite right. There's something in there, something dark, twisted and pulsing. It makes your eyes burn and you can't bear to look for more than a few seconds. The gaping space in their chest looks almost the same as the creature Nahn brought with her in the lab but this is far more disturbing and your very blood seems to freeze in revulsion.

The child only laughs at the look of disgusted horror that crosses your face. "Okay, I might have some Void stuff to make up for not having a Soul, but you get my point. You'll be able to live your life without your Soul. Sure, you might notice it missing from time to time but I think considering the alternative, it won't be so bad, right?"

There it is again, that gleam in their eyes that makes goosebumps rise on your skin. You grip your right arm with your left hand. "Even if I were to accept, it was because of everything that happened that night that I even moved to the city. If he doesn't...if I have no reason to go, I'll never meet Sans and all the others."

Chara taps your forehead and the touch burns. You flinch. "But here's the best part of it all! You'll remember everything! No one else will know time has reset. No one but you. And you'll be able to shape your life the way you wanted it to be. You'll be able to stop the fire before it happens, you can move to the city when the time is right and run to the rescue of your precious skeleton. Yeah, you'll have to wait a few years before you see him again, but won't that make your reunion all the more sweet? And then, you'll get to fall in love all over again and this time, your grandfather will be part of it."

The projected world around you changes. You see yourself with Sans, standing outside in the light of the illuminated space museum, both of you hesitating but slowly sharing a kiss. You see the two of you dancing closely at the fall festival's bonfire, safe thanks to your knowledge of the planned
attacked. You see him holding your hand tightly, his nerves at meeting your grandpa easing into a true smile as the two of them instantly bond over their love of the night sky.

Tod is stopped when the first monster goes missing and not a single life is lost. The nights are easier and the faded memories from your previous life are nothing more than a whisper in the back of your mind. There are still trials, there always will be, but this time, you are prepared for them with Sans by your side.

Chara watches the world changing around the two of you. "Unfortunately for you, you won't keep the power of Reset once I send you back. That power is tied very exclusively to the world of the underground. Something about the barrier keeps it trapped within unless an outside force acts upon the one who has it. So Frisk was telling the truth when they said they couldn't Reset to save you from being shot. But if you hadn't stopped Sans, that death would've been enough to trigger a brand new timeline. So I suppose you do have your lucky stars to thank for that."

The words make your throat close with emotion.

"But hey!" They look up at you with a childish smirk. "I think you'll remember enough to get it right the first time."

Finally, the world around you changes to a grassy hillside. The night is clear and you can see every star in the sky. Everyone is there. Frisk, Undyne and Alphys, Papyrus, Toriel and even Mettaton and Grillby with his daughter, their fire dim but warm. You, Sans and your grandpa are huddled around a telescope and Sans is excitedly pointing upwards while you press your eye to the lens. You're all happy, safe and content.

The only one missing is....

"What would happen to Gaster?"

Chara shrugs and puts their hands up behind their head in a careless manner, staring upwards. "As long as you don't get shot again, I'd imagine he'd stay right here. Probably in a much lesser form of himself than he is right now I think. After all, if he never attaches himself to you and escapes, the remaining parts of him won't form together. The Void will keep doing what it does and he'll still be spread across time and space. All of his progress will be erased. The one timeline this place seems bound to is the alpha timeline. His original world. Your world. If it changes, this place changes."

Chara's eyes shift back to you. "The monster that pulled you in here will be erased and split apart. Gaster will go back to seeing all worlds but never touching them. And you'll be safe."

You frown and slowly shake your head. "Gaster doesn't...I can't just let that happen to him-

"Why not?" Chara hasn't lowered their arms but you can see them growing stiff with tension. "What has that guy ever done for you? Those times that he 'saved' you never would've happened if he hadn't attached himself to your Soul like a leech. Don't forget about all those monsters and humans who died because he helped Nahn and Tod. And," they add, almost as an afterthought, "there is this as well."

They lower their arms, snap their fingers and the world around you changes again. You can see Sans. He's strapped down on a medical table, his bare ribs covered in a seeping red substance. He's screaming, thrashing in agony as a figure clad in a white lab coat with a head covered by static slowly and methodically breaks the bones of his legs with his bare hands. One by one, he snaps off pieces of bone and tosses them to the side. Sans' left leg is already mostly gone; only the torn remains of his femur is left and the edge is bleeding heavily. Several tubes and wires have been shoved inside his sockets and you can see a sickly red and black liquid being pumped into his head. Tears ooze out
between the wires and you can see that he's fighting as hard as he can to regain control, to stop screaming, but with every snap of his bones, a sharp cry escapes him.

You gasp sharply, your hands flying to your mouth. At the sound, the figure turns his head towards you. For a moment, the static clears and it's Gaster, but it's not Gaster at the same time. His skull is covered in nearly a dozen sockets and each one except for his main two hold a glowing pupil of bright red. His main eyes are deep purple and they are fixed on you. He reaches out-

"Whoops." Chara steps in front of you, their fingers spread out and the scene disappears.

Part of you wants to hope that what you just saw was another illusion. But the lurch in your Soul, way Sans' screams cut down to your core leave no doubt in your mind that in this place where reality means little, what you just saw is really happening.

"Take me to him," you demand, your voice cracking a little. "Right now."

"And what will you do?" Chara is back to floating in the 'air'. They pull their legs up into a crossed legged sitting and rest their elbows on their knees. "I've given you your answer. I only showed you that to remind you that every moment you waste deciding is another bone broken and another endless moment of agony for the smiling freak. Also to remind you that what Gaster is doing right now is nothing new; you've seen what he's done to Sans in the past."

You have seen it. You've seen far too much of Gaster's memories. They rise in your mind unbidden, carrying with them all of Gaster's regret and sorrow over treating Sans like an experiment for so long. You've seen far too much of the pain that Gaster has caused but you've also felt his desire to make it right. "Gaster's made mistakes. Some really big ones and he has to answer for them," you say coolly. "But what he became, the monster doing those things to Sans right now is because of you and this place. It's not him, it's that...that Voidster version of him. I know Gaster. And he would not do that to Sans. Not now."

Chara doesn't react the way you hope. They don't really react at all. They continue to stare at you, frowning slightly, almost like they expected a different reaction from you. Finally, they straighten out of their sitting pose but continue to hover at a height that makes them taller than you. "You need to make your choice. Because right now your skeleton is screaming, praying for someone to put him out of his misery. You're the only one that can do that. Now, give me your Soul, and I will make everything right again."

The glowing True Reset box comes towards you, hovering right in front of you. It's pulsing slightly and seems to draw on the space around it, warping it slightly. You feel your Soul flutter slightly in the face of such a powerful opportunity. A chance for the life of your dreams. A chance to erase the biggest regret of your life so that it never happened. A perfect happy ending.

All it will cost is your Soul.

And Gaster's life.

You continue to stare at the words as you softly begin to speak. "You said that from the moment I chose to help my unknown neighbors with their fire alarm, you've been watching. You said that you've seen into my heart and Soul. That you know me."

"I do know you." Chara draws slightly closer, their gaze almost hungry. "It's all written right there in your heart."

You lift your gaze to meet the blood red eyes of the child hovering in front of you. "Bullshit."
Chara blinks, very slowly tilting their head. "What?"

"If you were watching the whole time, you would've seen the night I woke up in the hospital. You would know that I meant what I said. If I were to turn around and do the exact same thing to him, to force him to endure years back under the mountain, do you think he would forgive me? Do you think I would forgive myself?" You draw yourself up as high as you can, placing your hands on your hips. "Do you think he would love me in the same way if he knew that I was just acting out a prewritten story? The Sans who held me when my arms were bleeding, the Sans who wiped away my tears when I woke up screaming after seeing my grandpa burn in my nightmares and the Sans I fell in love with because he trusted me is right here. And I'm not going to give that up."

You've moved closer without realizing it, your voice dropping to a deadly snarl. You're mere inches away from Chara, staring up at them without bothering to mask your anger that they would even dare suggest you would do such a thing. "If you think I would do that to Sans, and leave Gaster alone in this hellish place after everything we went through, then you don't know me at all. And besides." You step back just slightly, smirking. "Go through puberty again? No way. So thanks for the offer, but no thanks. I don't want your perfect world. I want mine."

Chara has gone completely and inhumanly still. The True Reset sign flickers once, twice and vanishes. The sudden absence of its light makes you feel like you've been doused in ice water and you shiver involuntarily. The empty space around you suddenly seems to crackle with a dangerous energy.

"No?"

Their voice is deadly soft and incredulous. Every survival instinct you have is screaming at you to run, curl into a ball, do something to get away from the rising force of danger standing before you. But you hold your ground, you have to! "Did you not hear me? My answer is no."

Chara's head slowly starts to move, tilting slightly to one side before abruptly jerking sharply to the other side. You blink and they're right in front of your face, you should be able to feel them breathing but there's nothing there, no sign of life or substance. You can't stop yourself from crying out in terror as you realize their eyes are gone, replaced by two melting pits of dark tar that oozes down their face and drips from the wide smile split across their face.

"YOU THINK YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR FATE SIMPLY BECAUSE YOU WANT TO? YOU THINK THAT THERE IS ANOTHER CHOICE HERE?" Their voice has changed from the soft but chilling innocence of a child to a thick, grating rasp that cuts through to your Soul.

You tremble under the force of the demon's piercing gaze but something in you stands firm. Your heart is beating so fast you're almost scared that it might just burst from your chest. "There has to be another way! I won't accept that throwing everything away and erasing it all is the true path here! People aren't supposed to be able to change the past and that's just a fact. We are meant to be accountable for our actions!"

Chara eyes somehow, impossibly get even wider and the tar like substance gushes out with renewed vigor. "WHY WOULD YOU THROW THIS CHANCE AWAY? I SEE YOUR HEART, I KNOW WHAT IT WANTS!"

You place your hand over your chest. "You might see what I desperately wish was true. But it's not true, and I've accepted that. I am who I am because of what's happened in my life. I've accepted my scars Chara. I might not have your Determination and there are many things I don't know. But I know one thing with absolute certainty."
"AND WHAT IS THAT?"

God, it's cheesy, it's so cheesy but you let yourself smile even in the face of darkness and rage. "I have hope and love. And that gives me just as much human determination as you. So I'm going to tell you why I'm throwing away your offer. I have all the hope and determination I need to find Sans and Gaster." You reach up and poke them in the chest. They back away just slightly. "I have the determination to face down the Void and all of those angry Souls you gave to it. And I have HOPE that together with Sans and Gaster, we will find our own way out of here and go back to the life we've made for ourselves. So here it is one more time for the people in the back.

"I don't want your way out."

Chara has gone absolutely still again and the sound of your own heart racing seems to roar in the silence that follows your proclamation. Then they start laughing and somehow it's even worse than the harsh overlapping voice they just spoke with. Their head goes back and they seem to be actually shaking with the force of their child like laughter. Then, just as suddenly, they stop.

"And what if I just take your Soul and do it anyway?" Their voice has dropped in volume and returned to that sickly sweet innocent tone from before.

You swallow past the fear in your throat. "I think if you could, you would've already."

They continue to study you for a few moments more, their blank and goopy stare making your skin crawl. Then, with a small flash of glitches, they've moved away and returned to 'normal'. Their arms are folded and their mouth is curved downwards in a pout. "You are very, very lucky you haven't gained any L.O.V.E," they grumble. "Fine then. If you're so determined, what exactly do you plan to do?"

"That's...well...I..." You try to come up with something and...oh God, you sure talk a big game, but you actually have no idea what to do now. "I'm gonna figure it out. That's what I do."

"Well, I hope you realize that once evil Gast...actually, I like your name for it, Voidster. I'm gonna use that from now on." They smile gleefully for a moment before the grin drops and they examine their nails. "Once Voidster is done taking out a few millenniums worth of anger on your dear boy, it's gonna realize it let me take the one thing it actually needs to finish what Gaster started."

"What...me?"

Chara huffs. "Even with all of that power and your stolen Determination, it still doesn't have the power of a human Soul. It can't Reset a timeline without one. And it was never as good at catching human Souls as I am. Once it realizes it needs you to reset all timelines, it's going to come after you. And you won't be able to stop it."

"Why does the Void...er, Voidster want to reset time?" It suddenly hits you what Chara just said. "All timelines? How is it going to do that?"

"It's simple time theory, duh," they drawl. "If it gets it's hands on the alpha timeline, which you and you dear Gaster marked very clearly and has the power of your Soul, it can go back to before the barrier went up. And with that kind of power, it will easily be able to stop the human mages. And if no barrier goes up, monsters won't be trapped which means no Gaster desperately trying to find a way out, which means no accident of him falling into the Core and no shattering timelines. "But Chara!" they say, mimicking your voice. "'How does that work if all the millions of timelines already exist?'"
"Answer!" they said, pointing upwards. "Paradox! Big bang! Everything goes BOOM." They smush their hands together dramatically, making noises with their mouth.

The idea of...well everything imploding and being erased is terrifyingly jarring. But why would it do that? "Wouldn't the Void just be hurting itself?"

"If the Void manages to actually do it, wipe out all of those timelines that were created when Gaster fell into the Core, it's going to have a feast. All of those Souls with nowhere to go but right into the belly of the beast. And that entire idea is all thanks to the bits of Gaster it swallowed and took control of. If it works, all of your history, the shape of your entire timeline will be rewritten. You might not even exist at all. And me? I'll be right back where I was. Back with all of those filthy people in the village." Their lip curls up in a snarl. "So. Wanna rethink your answer?"

The hopelessness of the situation hits you and if you were standing on a solid ground, your knees might have buckled. "I...no, no there has to be something else we can do." You rack your brain, trying to come up with a solution. Voidster is doing this because of Gaster's original plan. But...but maybe if Gaster, the real Gaster was back in charge, he could use that power to instead just open another rip back to your world. Voidster was doing that before anyway, right?

"What if I could separate Gaster and Voidster again?" you speak out loud, not really expecting Chara to give you an answer. "Or at least put the rational, not-angry part of his mind back in control?"

"With what? The power of love?" they sneer.

"If I have to," you snap. But now, their offer does make a little more sense. If taking the Reset would've caused Gaster to split apart again, they would be in no danger of going back to their time before they fell into the underground. "You want him out of here just as much as I do," you whisper, the revelation making your eyes wide. "Or at least, spread so thin the Void can't use him."

Chara doesn't react besides narrowing their eyes slightly.

"Why don't you help me?" you ask hopefully. "Help me figure this out. You're the one who put all those angry Souls into the pieces of Gaster's essence. You're the one who basically helped the Void make a body to hold it's consciousness."

"So what if it is my fault? At least things were interesting for a while." They shrug and lean back on nothing in a picture of laziness. "Seeing everything implode on itself will be interesting too at least. Until it ends."

"Are you seriously going to let this happen?" you ask incredulously. "Just a minute ago you were practically spitting in my face!"

"You pissed me off."

"Yeah, and now you're pissing me off," you snarl. "Look, I don't like this situation at all but I'm not going to just Reset or give up!" Chara won't look at you now and you sigh. "I'm going to try. And if you truly aren't a heartless demon like Frisk believes, you'll help too."

You attempt to turn and slowly, painfully slowly, start to move forward in your best guess as to where the image of Sans being tortured was coming from. Every step feels like fighting to walk through waist high sand.

"Genius." You feel a hand on your shoulder and you jump. Chara turns you slightly to the left. You
twist your head but they're already gone, leaving only a lingering laugh and a sarcastic 'Good luck' that rattles your bones and you're left alone in the Void.
Find A Way

Chapter Notes

I painted a little thing for the 1 year anniversary
Main Blog
Writing Blog

I am terrible when it comes to guessing how many chapters are left. But I did decide to divide this one up into two chapters because holy moly the next one is going to be long enough as it is.

Cold.

Dark.

Alone.

Well, perhaps not really alone. He can sense many Souls surrounding him. Their voices, faded and overlapping are filled with unbearable spitting rage and hatred. It makes his very Soul quake with revulsion. Monster Souls are not meant to feel like this. Monster Souls are made of love, mercy and compassion but these poor beings have been so twisted and warped they can barely even be called Souls anymore.

The weight of them is so heavy it forms a physical mass that threatens to smother him even as their voices bite and tear into him. He's aware of every magical atom of his body being slowly being strangled. It presses down on him, keeps him pinned and immobile. It seeps into every joint like oil and if he had the presence of mind to look down at himself, he would be alarmed to see that his form has fused together with the darkness. But his mind can barely form a coherent thought, let alone summon up the energy for fear thanks to the thick tendrils of black crawling over his face, reaching into his sockets and filling his head with a wordless static. It burns him, freezes his core and slowly rips him apart from the inside. It threatens to consume him, driving deeper and deeper into his rapidly fading consciousness.

He knows this sensation. The voices ate at him before too. Back when he was still someone. Someone who mattered, who had a purpose and a place in the world.

But how important could he have been? His life and all of his struggles meant nothing in the end. The world carried out without him. So what point was there in fighting to return to it? Simply existing is painful. Returning to the dark, letting the last of his light flicker out and fade away would be so easy. Maybe then, this unbearable ache in his chest would release him and go away. Maybe then he would stop feeling anything at all.

His Soul throbs painfully and for a brief moment, the static in his skull eases. Some part of him stubbornly refuses to die, even as the surrounding mass of darkness continues to wrap him in burning
layers of pain. A bitter resolve that is fighting back, screaming at him that he needs to wake up because something is terribly wrong, something horrible is happening to someone he cares about. But it's just a spark of flame hovering dangerously above an ocean. One tall wave, one splash of water and he will be extinguished. He almost wants to be angry at himself for refusing to die and end his pain but...

He's tired. He's so tired of fighting, struggling to escape this. He's tired of the memories and the guilt and the helplessness and the voices of all the Souls he's damned by continuing a helpless fight.

He's

Too

Tired.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Attempting to walk through the Void is like combining every scary video game set in the woods at night and wrapping it up in a hundred horror films under a thick layer of tar. There's nothing here, no sound, no sight of anything aside from the very occasion spark of a timeline that might be right next to you or might be miles away. There's no sensation of even moving despite dragging your feet in a walking motion. Every hair on your body stands on end. You can't tell if it's fear or static or your own imagination. Nausea plagues you with every motion. Nothing is moving, nothing at all. Yet you feel like you're walking across the deck of a violently lurching ship threatening to capsize at any moment. All sense of balance is gone but you don't fall to your knees because there's nothing to fall on.

But worst of all is the silence. Chara's voice had terrified you, grated against your ears at times but at least it was something. The only sound now is that of your own breathing, harsh and jarring in the otherwise empty place. But as you walk, you slowly become aware of a far more chilling sound. It starts off as a quiet thumping noise, one that you sense more than hear. But as it grows louder and picks up speed it become a thing you can actually hear and you look around wildly, trying to place it. It takes you a while to realize exactly what it is.

It's the sound of your own pulse, so loud it seems to actually echo around you. It picks up speed with your realization and you put your hands over your ears in a useless attempt to block out the noise. Unsurprisingly, it doesn't work. You grit your teeth, trying to force your heart to slow. Now that you think about it, you remember reading an article somewhere about a room that was made to absorb any and all sound. A true room of silence. You also remember reading that people who stayed in the room for more than a few minutes started hallucinating and going crazy after thirty minutes of sitting in the absolute silence. You have no idea how long it's been since Chara pointed you in the right direction and left you but it really doesn't matter. You can't afford to go crazy right now.

You come to a stop, letting out a loud groan just so you can hear something. "Okay. This is not going to work," you say out loud. The Void swallows the sound, makes it sound like you're talking into a pillow but at least it's something beside your own pulse. You swallow your steadily rising panic.

What exactly are you supposed to do now? Walking off into the Void clearly isn't going to get you anywhere. You can't even be sure you haven't wandered away from the direction that Chara pointed you in. Stupid brat could offer to make you a brand new world sure but they couldn't be bothered to do more than give you a 'hey, the love of your life is being tortured by the consciousness of the Void, who happens to be inhabiting the body of his dad, head that way, good luck'?
You scowl and throw your arms 'upwards'. "You couldn't have taken me to them at least? Drop me off a little closer?"

There's no answer from Chara but you have no doubt they're watching.

You run your hands through you hair, closing your eyes. You need to think. There's got to be some way to find Sans and Gaster. As to what you'll actually do then....well like you told Chara. You'll figure it out.

When you were here before, after getting shot, Gaster had said that he needed to use your connection to Sans to throw the two of you back into the timeline. Couldn't you do that now? Even just to give you a sense of direction. You look down at your chest, squinting. If you concentrate, you can still feel his mark in your Soul. But...something's wrong. The connection is dim and muted, like the spark of his Soul is behind a wall or something. It offers no sense of where to go. Maybe if you pull it out and get a visual look at it the connection will be clearer?

You've never been able to summon your own Soul before, not without Gaster's help. But just like when your eyes shifted to look at Chara's Soul, you can feel that the ability is there now even without the monster's aid. You mirror the motions that you've seen Sans use, lifting your hand to your chest and focus your mind on your Soul. You can feel it inside your chest, pulsing with life and all you have to you is coax it out and-

"That's not a good idea."

Never in your life have you jumped so high. You scream and manage to throw yourself away from the voice but only wind up spinning slowly in the not air of the Void until you're almost upside down. You fight to right yourself and shriek again when you feel something press gently against your shoulders, helping you to regain some sort of balance.

"There is no need to scream," another voice says just as softly as the first one. "Though this is far worse than a bad dream."

Once you are in a sort of upright position, you look around you in shock. Where mere moments ago there was nothing, there are now four monsters standing before you. You know these monsters. They were there in the lab, Gaster's voice to the humans. They spoke little then and when they disappeared, you had forgotten about them. But now you've got Gaster's memories in your head. You've seen them as they were before the accident. They were alive, bright and colorful. Their names....

What are their names?

The first one who spoke, a large misshapen creature with a mouth that splits their head almost in half with it's wide smile regards you with a blank eye. "Our names cannot be recalled," it says, somehow knowing exactly what you were struggling to remember. "They have been erased. They cannot be found."

You gape at them all not sure if you should be bracing yourself for a fight or not. They're a little more solid here than they were in the real world but their eyes hold nothing except a sharp, almost painfully bright white light (except for the cat like one behind you who helped to steady you who has no eyes at all). But as you meet their silent and almost sad stares, you realize that you can't feel a single spark of fighting intent. Whatever they want, they're not here to hurt you. A sudden wave of sadness and guilt sweeps over you. This whole time you've been so focused on saving Gaster from this place and not once did you stop to think about the other monsters who were sucked in here that night too. "I'm...I'm so sorry."
The one who was behind you slowly moves forward, joining the other three. "You have nothing to be sorry for. It was no fault of yours that we fell into the Core."

You know the monster is right but that doesn't stop your heart from twisting with pity. "But...but it's not right. You shouldn't be stuck in here either. There has to be something."

The third monster speaks, one that is smaller than the first two and stares at you with wide unblinking eyes. "We were not as strong as the Doctor. There is not enough of us left to save. There is nothing you can do for us besides what you are already doing."

"What I'm already doing?"

"You are searching for Doctor Gaster," the misshapen one says. "You want to save him."

You blink, suddenly reminded of what you were doing before being scared to death by the unnerving creatures. "Yeah, I um...why is pulling my Soul out a bad idea?"

"This place is not meant for the living," the first monster continues softly, the single eye you can see dropping slightly to stare at where your Soul resides. "It is especially not meant for human Souls who have not passed on. Revealing yourself to this place will taint you, far more than it already has."

Taint you? "Is this place like...poisoning me or something?"

The cat creature shrugs. "In a way. Protecting your Soul will keep the effects at bay. Unlike monsters, you are not made of magic. Staying here for long will be tragic."

Well great! You look at the four gray monster, fighting not to let your helplessness show. "What am I supposed to do then? I can't...I can't keep walking forever. Sans is being tortured right now and Gaster...I don't even know if he's really gone or not." Your heart stutters painfully as the memory of Sans screaming crashes over you. A sharp stab of fear cuts through you. You can't stand by chatting while Sans is suffering. Desperately, you take a step towards them. They don't move.

"I don't know what all you know about what's happened. I do know that you guys have absolutely no reason to want to help Gaster after the accident. But please, I need help. I need to find them. I need to stop this place from destroying the person that Gaster truly is. And I can't..." Your voice catches in your throat. "Sans is in so much pain. I can't bear knowing that he's suffering because he got dragged in here with me."

The monsters regard you quietly and for a moment, your heart starts to sink with despair because if they don't help you, you have no idea what you're going to do.

"Doctor Gaster told us something a very long time ago." The fourth monster finally speaks. This one looks eerily like a kid that you've seen Frisk hang out with. Their face holds a little more expression than the others. The downcast gaze and the tone of their voice betrays a deep pain and sadness. "He said; 'monsters may not have human Determination. But our passion and our hope will one day save monster kind'."

You can feel your heart twisting with pity. You've seen the pain of being forgotten through Gaster's eyes. But seeing it is not the same as experiencing it. And furthermore, Gaster had the strength to fight back. These poor monsters are worse than ghosts. There's barely enough left of them to even take on faded forms. You can barely imagine what it must be like for them. "Gaster didn't mean for this to happen," you say, trying your best to keep your voice strong. "This place spoke to him, changed him. But...I'm sure you already know that, right?"

They don't answer.
"Look, I don't have time to give another big speech. This Voidster guy is going to do a lot worse if I don't stop him. End of the world kind of bad. So...if you think about it, if you help me, you will be saving the world. A whole bunch of them."

The monster kid clone finally blinks. Then, a tiny smile lifts their face. "Better late than never I guess."

You can't stop yourself from breaking into a relieved smile. If gravity was working, you might have jumped up and down.

"We know why you are here and what has happened to Doctor Gaster," the rhyming monster says, glancing at the others. "But there is no more time for explaining, we must move faster."

The first monster stares you down intensely. You shiver a little under their gaze. "The doctor is sleeping now, trapped in the darkness of his own mind. You have to wake him up before he is consumed. If you don't save him before he vanishes, you will not be able to stop the creature born from the Void from breaking the very nature of time."

"How?"

"He must face his demons," the wide eyed monster pipes up. You blink and the monsters have all moved closer. They start speaking all at once, their voices blending together in a terrifying chorus.

"He must face his-"

"Regrets."

"Sadness."

"Hate."

"Pain."

"Save them both."

The back of your neck prickles from a sense of growing energy. Their eyes seem to get brighter too and your Soul trembles in your chest. You feel pressure on your arms, like hands gripping you tightly yet the monsters now standing in a tight circle around you have made no move to actually touch you. You barely have a moment to brace yourself before you are whipped forward. The lights of the countless timelines have changed from dim and distant spots to sharp lines of color that speed past you. It reminds you of that old computer saver screen meant to imitate flying through space. But while you can feel yourself moving at an incredible speed, your entire body is completely locked into complete stillness. There's no wind pushing your hair, no gravity tugging your stomach along for the ride. You can do nothing but stare as you hurtle along through a tunnel like kaleidoscope of light and pray that you won't be sick when you finally stop.

The gray monsters are still standing in a half circle around you and they too show no signs that they are hurtling through the vastness of the Void. But all of them have turned their empty eyes to stare straight ahead at something you can't see.

"So...uh, any tips on what to do when we get there?" you ask hopefully, your voice echoing strangely around you. "Or you know, a general idea of what to expect?"

"The consciousness inhabiting the Doctor has many defenses in place." The wide eyed monster doesn't look at you as they speak. "The space they are inhabiting is behind a powerful barrier of
"Is that why Sans' Soul feels so strange?" That would explain why his spark is faded. You can still feel him but the connection is weak. "How do we break it?"

"You will need to figure that out on your own."

"I have to what-ah!"

The lights hurtling past you suddenly and without warning come to a complete standstill, fading away into tiny specks in the inky darkness around you. The shift is so sudden that your head spins for a moment. You groan, thankful that your stomach is too empty to puke anything up. You straighten once the feeling fades and realize that there is something different about the space in front of you. Instead of pure nothingness, you can see what looks like a black wall. The only reason you can even tell it's something different is because it's surface is slowly shifting and swirling like water. Within the dark water like substance you can see vein like tendrils of red. It's spread out thinly over the wall, in some places so dim it looks like smoke. The red lines are pulsing and you're horribly reminded of human blood.

This has to be the barrier the monster mentioned. You look back at them. They're all still standing with you but offer no help or direction on what to do now. Looking back at the wall, you summon up every ounce of bravery you have and reach out to touch it. Your finger barely brushes the surface and immediately the veins of red flare up. You jerk back and they fade again. You look at your hand; nothing seems to have happened so you gingerly reach out again.

This time, when the red light flares up, you keep your fingers pressed against the wall, watching closely for any other sign that something has happened. Nothing else moves though, so you turn your attention to the sensation under your hand. It feels sort of like water but there's no temperature to it and it's far too dense to be normal water. It slides around and over your hand when you push at it. However your hand only sinks a few inches before stopping against something solid.

There's something else in here though. Some other sensation that tugs softly at your mind. You close your eyes, trying to focus on what it is. There's energy here, a whole lot of of it. That much is clear. But there's emotion too. Anger. Pain. Confusion and a bitter sadness. You briefly let these emotions wash over you before pulling your hand away. Sans is on the other side of this thing. Gaster too. The two of them are in so much pain it's become tangible in this barrier thrown up by the Void.

They're hurt. And it only takes you a moment to realize what you have to do.

Over the course of the past few weeks, you had acted as a sort of conductor to Gaster's magic and while the feeling was both strange and frightening, your body had not rejected it. It was not your magic, but it was still magic and Soul had accepted it. When you finally used your own magic, Gaster said it was barely enough to heal a single wound on a monster. There had been no time to explore it any further than that.

But when your Soul's final walls had broken down and Gaster's Soul flooded yours, an unbelievable, burning power had filled every inch of your body. In that moment, you had felt like you could do anything. Everything had happened so fast and you were too overwhelmed by the sensation of magic that you had acted simply on instinct, even though there was no time to do anything besides summon Gaster's blasters.

All of that power is gone now. What you are left with is your own strength and magic, barely touched and wild. But memory of feeling pure magic crawl down your hands and bleed out from your Soul is still vivid in your mind. Something deep within you embraced that power and knew
how to bend it to your will. In the same way that your body simply knew how to breathe the moment you were born, your Soul knows how to reach into the magic simmering just under your skin.

You call out to it and feel it race down your arms, gathering into your hands. Your skin grows warm. This magic doesn't burn you like the power that your combined Souls had created, nor does it feel out of place and strange like Gaster's magic had. This is the same magic that you felt that day in the kitchen when Sans was sick. This magic is completely and utterly yours but now there is so much more of it. Unlocked by the power that had coursed through you before, or maybe because of this place. You're not sure. And right now, you don't care.

"I really, really hope this works," you mutter and plunge your hands back into the shifting wall. Immediately the red light sparks and recoils and this time, oh this time you can feel the energy in the wall reacting to you. The liquid covering your hands grows hot and you wince at the increasingly painful sensation. The emotions contained within turn to a raging fury and you can feel it thrashing against your mind, screaming at you to let go. But you hold on. You keep your hands firmly in place and let your magic seep into the barrier. You let your hope fill you up and it gives you the strength to keep fighting against the overwhelming energy. You let your heart open to this thing but refuse to be swept up in the despair it's so desperately throwing at you.

Sans and Gaster are just beyond this wall. You will not let this thing stand in your way! You grit your teeth and push with your mind. For every spark of hate, you respond with kindness. You welcome every nip of sorrow with understanding. As if responding to your forceful push, the red veins surrounding your hands start to change. A bright green color bleeds into the deep red, washing it away as it creeps up the wall. As more and more of the veins change color, you can feel the resistance of the barrier beginning to fade.

And then, the wall cracks.
Sans long ago got used to cycles. He had to, back then. It was the only thing that kept even a small amount of sanity in his Soul during the endless years spent repeating the same stretch of days over and over and over again. No matter how hard he tried to fix it, no matter how many times he came close to possibly finding an answer, everything would Reset. His own memories were blanketed and hidden away, leaving just enough to fuel his nightmares and give him glimpses of horrifying possibilities. But in it's own way, the cycle was comforting after a time. No matter what happened, everything would go back. Deaths would be reversed. Fights and arguments forgotten. The same cycle. Over and over again. He could let himself be swept along. No point in fighting it. And on the bad days, the really bad ones when he couldn't bear to even pull himself out from his worn mattress, he could bury himself deep inside his own head and just shut it all out.

But this cycle of pain and burning agony is something that he can't shut out. He can't just lie in bed, covering his head until the world Reset around him. He can't escape this. The sharp pain won't let his mind fall into a dark and separate place. He tries to fight back at first, holding off the overwhelming urge to sink into hopelessness because deep in his Soul he can feel that you're still out there. Your spark is dim and distant but steady and that means he has to find a way out of this, he has to escape so he can find you. All he needs is a second of release, a breath of a distraction and then he can at least try something! Summon an attack, risk a shortcut, anything!

But the terrible weight in his chest won't let him fight back. As the torture continues his Soul remains firmly green; it doesn't flicker or fade even as his body dissolves around it. He would almost be fascinated by the pure power needed for such a thing if it wasn't for...well, everything else. Every thought of escape or desperate planning is snatched up by the never ending pain. He's aware of every snap, every gorge dug into the surface of his bones, every drop of magic that bleeds from his wounds until there's nothing left that he can give. He must be dust by now. He can feel it coating his throat and trickling into his skull. He can feel himself spread apart in ways that he was never meant to be. His legs jerk and kick out weakly and he can feel the motion, he can feel the pain it brings but they're no longer attached to him. They've been broken off and tossed away like garbage.

But even with the green magic holding him firmly in place, Sans can't stop his own magic from rearing up, fighting to escape and defend himself. But there's no where for it to go, there's no chance to use the energy. So it builds and builds until his body has no choice but to expel it in any way possible. He vomits, excess magic dribbling down his face. It burns and stings and is almost enough to drown out the agony of feeling his bones break piece by piece.

He's aware of screaming but it's a sound that's completely out of his control. It rips from his throat and he barely even recognizes this animalistic wail as his own voice. He's taken apart, piece by piece and each section of his body broken away brings fresh waves of agony that builds up and devours him until Sans is gone. He is made of nothing but pain. And when his body starts to give out entirely, Gaster shoves two rubber pipe like tubes into his sockets. The liquid that pours out of them
and into his skull sets his bones on fire from the inside out. It gives him a terrible energy, a sickening hyper-awareness of what's happening and keeps the blessed relief of passing out far out of reach.

He feels what remains of his broken body shifting, warping into something strange, something \textit{wrong}. Terror makes his screams pitch until his throat closes up and he can only whimper as he watches his own body change into forms that he was never meant to be. Bestial, twisted, deformed, melting...there's too much for him to even comprehend and the moments of transformation race by in a deep haze of pain.

And then, it stops. His body is whole and normal once again and for a single blessed moment he can breathe, gasping wildly as he continues to heave from the shock of being ripped into tiny pieces and so drastically changed. Then it starts again. A single finger or toe, a short and quick break and then the rest of his body follows.

It's a cycle. An unending cycle. How long will it go on? How long will it take before his bones simply refuse to reform? Will it ever happen? Or will he be wrapped in utter agony for eternity? But he stubbornly keeps holding on. He doesn't beg, he doesn't let himself sink completely into despair. He keeps holding on, even as the pain starts to eat away at his reason why. Why is he fighting so hard to keep surviving? Why does his Soul scream at him to stay determined?

What is he fighting for?

The only thing that changes during the torture is the one doing it. Sometimes it's Not-Gaster, his face obstructed by a thick cloud that allows only brief flashes of red light to shine through. Then it's Toriel, her sharp eyes narrow with rage. Alphys shows up, as does Undyne (those cycles are especially harsh). Even Asgore takes part too, the large monster towering over him as fire burns in his eyes. It's no surprise that eventually Papyrus shows up too. Sans watches with watering eyes as the image of his own brother snaps his bones with cold and precise movements.

"paps...."

"How many times did you watch me die Sans?" Papyrus' voice holds a hostility that Sans has only heard in the very worst of his nightmares. "How many times did you stand by and do nothing while my body turned to dust?"

Sans bites back the heartrending wail threatening to crumple his face. This isn't real. The real Papyrus, his true brother is nowhere near this place. But the words bite and tear at him and he finds himself responding, pleading for the fake monster breaking him to understand. "papyrus." Sans voice cracks. "i didn't..."

Papyrus melts away and Asgore takes his place. "Our people were helpless. You could've warned them so much earlier. You could've saved so many lives."

"i-"

Asgore shifts back to Undyne. "You filthy coward! You knew and you did nothing!"

"i tried-"

"Tried?" Her hand wraps around his spine and yanks with enough force to snap it in two. A terrible, mindless scream rips from his throat. He dissolves into dust. He reforms, panting and pleading.

"i tried, i promise i tried-!"

"Promise?" Toriel sneers at him. Her hands are wreathed in flame and the enraged heat of her hate
melts him into a twitching pile. "Your promises mean nothing. The dirt of the underground is worth more."

Alphys drives cables into his sockets, making his renewed limbs quiver as a burning liquid seeps into his marrow. "You promised to help me bear the burden of finding a way out. But when I needed someone to help me understand, to stop me before I ruined those monsters lives, you ran away."

And on and on it goes. Over and over they come and go, tearing him apart with their hands, spitting harsh truths and lies so thick and deep that he can't tell one from the other. They speak of things he can't remember, things he's only seen in his nightmares. But even if the memories aren't completely there, the guilt is. The heavy burden of knowing that what they're saying must have happened during one timeline or another. Trying to explain or plead that he can't remember is useless. Eventually, he stops talking completely. He can't do this. He can't respond to them like they're actually here. They're not real. None of this is. All of this, the torture and the sight of his loved ones must be leading to something. It has to be. Not-Gaster is trying to break him.

Of course, knowing that's what's happening and being able to stop it are two completely different things.

"That's what you do best isn't it?" Papyrus says and now, oh God now the harsh anger is replaced by something much, much worse. Complete indifference. Paps always was more expressive than he ever was, even lacking the lights that fill Sans sockets. But now there is nothing but utter darkness in his gaze. "You run away from everything."

Sans fixes his own gaze on the ceiling. Yeah, yeah that's exactly what he does. He runs and he ignores and stands to the side. He watches.

Something in his pinned down Soul flickers, whispering a wordless protest. It's warm and achingly comforting but it's gone within the span of a breath.

"Why?" Alphys whispers. "Why did you do that to us?"

*Snap!* There goes his left hand again.

"Why did you forsake our people?" Asgore roars. His hand is large enough to crush Sans' ribs with one devastating push.

Sans dissolves, he reforms.

"Why?" Toriel pleads. "Why didn't you keep your promise?"

*Crack!*

"Why didn't you save them?!" Undyne snarls.

Why? Isn't that always the question?

But he doesn't answer them.

It takes days. Months. Years? Hell, he doesn't know. But finally the pain

*STOPS.*

The only sound is Sans' harsh breathing. He's still locked in place by metal cuffs, his renewed body held down by the unwavering weight in his Soul. His magic churns painfully throughout his body.
There's so much pent up energy that even the physical liquid dripping from his sockets and mouth isn't enough to put even a dent in the pressure in his sternum. Every bone in his body aches. He feels...fragile and tender, like a single touch would shatter him into dust once and for all. He tries to close his eyes but there are still thick wires shoved into the back of his head preventing him from moving at all. They're heavy and leave a metallic tang in his mouth. So he senses more than sees Gaster standing silently next to him.

"s-so," Sans pants. His voice scrapes painfully against his raw throat. "ready to talk now?"

"Why?" His voice is a ringing demand. It sends sharps stabs of lightning through Sans' skull.

"gotta be a little more specific there doc," he rasps. "there's a lot of 'why's to answer to."

"Why did you let the Anomaly pass by? Why did you wait? Why did you abandon monster kind? Why did you stop searching for a way to find me?" As Gaster speaks his voice shifts in pitch and volume, rising and falling with no clear pattern. It makes Sans' skull ring.

So those are the big 'why's huh? A gurgling laugh forces it's way out of his throat. He laughs because that's what he does. He always smiles, always puts on an act. "why? why? do you know how many times i asked myself that? over and over again. every damn day i asked myself why." Sans finally brings his gaze back down to glare at Not-Gaster, his face caught in a manic grin. It's hard to focus, thanks to the tubes still jammed into his skull. "and the answer is 'i gave up'. but you know that already, don't you?"

Gaster's response is silence.

At the complete lack of an answer, something else starts to boil in Sans' Soul. Rage fills him and he desperately clings to the burning energy it gives him because he can't let himself sink into despair. He won't do it again. His hands clench into fists, pulling against the restraints holding him down. They creak loudly as the sharp edge digs into the fragile bones of his wrist. "do you think asking me why is gonna change what happened? i'm not proud of giving up! i didn't want to! but it gets kinda hard to keep going when all of your progress gets erased every time you make any kind of headway. asking me why i let things happen is pointless! and speaking of pointless, i think i'm gonna throw that why right back at you. why are you doing this? you never struck me as the type of guy for mindless torture. you're trying to break me, but why?"

Gaster's only movement is the flickering of glitches around his head.

"why?" Sans snarls. He yanks against the cuff and sharp pain races up his arm. But it's nothing compared to the suffering he's already endured. "why was i given the responsibility of cleaning up your mess? why was i the only one who remembered what you did? why did you save me from falling in with you?!"

Suddenly the pressure against his wrists vanishes. Not only that, the table beneath him and the entire room vanishes as well. A sharp gasp of surprise escapes him as Sans feels himself plummet downwards. Instinctively, he closes his eyes, bracing to hit...something. And hit something he does. But it's less of an impact and more of a solid presence suddenly materializing underneath him. So. A change of scenery huh? He doesn't have to check to know that his Soul is still firmly held in place by green magic. It's different though; it keeps his Soul frozen, his magic stifled under it's pressure but the same limiting feeling in body is gone. He could probably move if it wanted to. From what he can tell, he's in one piece again. The agony of the torture is still fresh in his mind though. It takes him a moment to collect himself to a point where he feels like he can look around. Cautiously, he opens his sockets.
It's mostly dark around him. If he squints he can just make out what looks like two thick faded golden pillars a few yards apart. There's another pair behind him, mostly concealed in shadow. He's back in his hoodie and shorts at least. He looks down to see exactly what it is he's landed on.

Flowers. A massive pile of golden flowers. It stretches out in wide circle, easily twice the amount of flowers that the throne room back in the underground held. With shaking fingers, Sans runs his hands over the petals; at his touch, they dissolve. And as each speck of dust touches another flower, that one melts into dust as well. Within a few moments, the entire circle of flowers has melted into a thick coating of dust. But not just any dust. Monster dust. Enough dust to have come from thousands of monsters.

And he's sitting in it.

Sans lurches to his feet, desperate to get out of the remains of dead monsters. He tries anyway. His legs, weak and trembling from so much abuse simply give out under him and he winds up lurching forward, landing face down. His sharp gasp of pain only serves to make him inhale the dust now covering his face. He can feel it coating his throat, feels each tiny particle of dust as it falls into his skull. God, he can taste it! The sharp tang of death makes him gag. Desperately he swipes at his face, fighting to get it off of him, but there's so much and his hands are coated as well and all it's doing it smearing the dust around. A hiccup of a wail builds in his throat and Sans bends in half, trying to stop the panic rising in his chest. It's not real monster dust, it can't be. Nothing here is real, nothing-!

"Why did he save you that night?"

His head jerks up at the voice floating out from the darkness between the dim pillar shapes. His Soul sinks. The one mercy Gaster had given him during the endless torture is that while so many of the people he cares about took turns ripping him into pieces, you were never one of them. But of course, that couldn't last. He's not that damn lucky.

You step closer, your bare feet making no sound against the stone floor. Your clothes have changed from the simple top and jeans you wore in the lab. Now you're in your favorite pajama pants and a plain white t-shirt. Your eyes are fixed on him, blank and empty. A sharp pang goes through him; how long as it been since he's seen you? It feels like a lifetime. He can't stop himself from quickly looking at where your Soul should be.

There's nothing there. It's not you. He's not sure if he should be thankful for that or not.

"Out of all the monsters he could've saved, why did he save you?" Your voice is so achingly familiar. It sends a stab of pain through his sternum. "You've asked yourself that over and over again. Why you?"

"that's what i want to know doc," Sans says slowly, refusing to even address this fake version of you by your name. "why? what happened that night?"

"He put his faith in the wrong monster." This time, your voice is coming from the left. Another you steps out of the shadows. This version of you is wearing the dress that everyone gave you for Christmas. Your skin is glowing slightly just like it was that night and your face is adorned with makeup. But your eyes hold none of the shy love and warmth that he so dearly cherishes. It's blank, just like the other fake you. "He saved the monster he believed could save everyone. Who could undo his mistakes and save monster kind. What a mistake that turned out to be huh? You've never been able to save anyone."

Sans slowly stands up, praying that his legs don't give out on him this time. Dust trails off him in thin rivulets and he suppresses a shudder. "i didn't ask for that. i didn't want it."
"But you did want it," the pajama clad you reminds him. "You chose to stay with the doctor, didn't you? The poor failed weapon turned adopted child had nothing else going for him after all. No other point to your life besides coming up with some way to actually be useful to him. At least, you tell yourself it's because it's all you had but truly you enjoyed it. You liked being in control for once, you liked learning how to make things tick. You wanted to be the savior of monsters. After all, that's what you were made to be, right?"

"But instead," the second image of you chimes in almost cheerfully, "you messed everything up. Just like you always do. You've never done anything right. And even after all of that, all your failures and your pathetic excuses as to why it was all so pointless, you actually thought you deserved a happy ending? You thought you were allowed to love? That you deserved to be loved back?"

The words cut right into his Soul. It's the same thoughts he's had over and over and over again. Everything that's happened, to him and to you seemed to be the universe's way of saying that he couldn't get his happy ending. Against his will, his bones start to rattle.

Your lips curl up into a disgusted snarl. "How pathetic."

The second version of you folds your arms and shakes your head. "Sans, Sans you know better. You know what happens to people when they get close to you."

Suddenly, a third voice speaks from the darkness directly in front of him. "You should've let me go."

There's the sound of something dragging across a stone floor and somehow, he knows what he's going to see even before the third clone staggers into sight. It's you from that night you were shot. Dressed in a ripped and stained hospital smock, bruises and burns covering your face and arms. Blood drips down your fingers from cuts in your skin. This version of you stares at him with desperation and pain. "Why did you let this happen to me?"

It's a fight to stay quiet. It's just a game, it's not you. But...oh it hurts, it hurts to see you like this again, far more than being psychically torn apart.

"Why won't you talk to me?" you plead desperately. Before his very eyes a great pool of blood spreads out over the front of your shirt. The vivid red is bright against the dim light of this place. It drips down from your mouth too, hitting the floor silently. But you simply stand there, as if you can't feel the pain of the bullet in your body. "I went through this because of you and you can't even talk to me?"

There's a pressure growing in his sockets and Sans swallows harshly. "stop it," he whispers. "doc that's enough."

"Enough of what?" Pajama you asks innocently. "Pointing out what you've done to me?"

"If you wanted to avoid this, you should've shut the door in my face that very first day." The second says, glaring at him.

"There were plenty of chances."

"You should've backed off. You should've run away. Because that's what you're good at."

"You should've known that a relationship with a human would only bring pain."

"You should've-"
"Enough!" The scream rips out of him, silencing the first two clones. His hands are still shaking but now it's with anger. "that's enough of your shit doc! yeah, i'm pretty messed up. i've made some really big mistakes. but falling in love with her was not one of them! letting her into my life was the best choice i've ever made!" He slaps his hand over his sternum, his Soul pulsing under the hold of the green magic. "no matter what you do to me, i will never regret falling in love with her!"

The three versions of you stare at him for a moment before throwing their heads back and...laughing. They laugh and it's a far more chilling sound than hearing Gaster's voice echo around him. Suddenly, their eyes flash with a sickly purple light and the edges of their forms start to glitch. Slowly, the first two start to melt away into a pile of black goop. The moment it hits the ground, it rushes back towards the third clone, who is glitching wildly. Your eyes change to pitch black as the goop starts to crawl up your body. You suddenly lurch, screaming and clawing at your own head. Sans takes a step back as a sudden wave of sharp intent and power pours out of the fake you. It's strong enough to blow away the massive collection of dust at his feet. Within a few moments you straighten and suddenly he's staring at the creature you became in the lab when your Soul fused with Gaster's. The you standing before him might be fake, but the insane amount of energy threatening to overwhelm him certainly isn't.

"SO YOU DON'T REGRET IT?" the fake you asks, gesturing widely with hands stained black. Your voice is barely recognizable now, echoing and doubling over itself harshly in Gaster's distorted language. Your eyes, glowing purple flash at him and Sans shivers. "NOT EVEN WHEN SHE BECAME THIS?"

"that was all your fault, not mine" Sans replies, doing his best to keep his voice steady. "whatever the hell you are, you are the one behind this." His teeth clench, another wave of anger sweeping over him. "we were so close to finally being done with all this crap, why couldn't you just leave us be?!"

"DON'T YOU REMEMBER? YOU DON'T GET A HAPPY ENDING." The fake you lunges forward and though Sans tries to dodge your outstretched hand, his legs are still too weak to carry him out of the way. Your clawed hand grabs his skull, nails digging into the bone. A small terrified noise manages to escape him as he struggles under the iron grip. Your touch burns, sending waves of sharp and dangerous intent flooding through his bones.

"OH BUT THAT'S RIGHT, YOU DON'T REMEMBER." You grin sharply, a black blood like substance oozing out from between your teeth. "WELL THEN; HERE'S ONE MORE QUESTION FOR YOU. IS THE JUDGE READY TO BE JUDGED FOR HIS OWN SINS?"

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You watch the cracks splinter up the strange wall and light shines out from whatever is behind it. As pieces begin to break off and fall, you quickly pull your hands away. You're not sure if it would actually hurt if any were to land on you but they look too much like glass shards for you to risk it. As what lies beyond slowly starts to come into focus, you feel a terrible wave of energy wash over you. As strange as it is, you can feel the hatred and rage contained within it. Goosebumps rise up your arms at the sensation.

But you don't let it deter you. Stepping carefully, you cross over the remains of the wall, squinting against the harsh light. You stumble a little as the surface beneath you suddenly changes to an actual floor. Stone, going by the sound your feet make as you regain your footing. Your vision clears and you blink harshly. You're in what looks like...a hallway of some kind? It's dark here, it's a little hard to tell.

"Hurry." The whisper blows by you like wind, physically propelling you forward.
You start to run, your steps echoing down the long hallway. On either side of you is a seemingly endless row of pillars. They might be golden but the color is faded, the paint cracked. You've seen this before, though it wasn't nearly this long. This must be some sort of twisted Judgment Hall. Your chest tightens with dread. The last place Sans wanted to be in reality and now-

You nearly stumble and fall when a sudden scream rips through the air. Oh God, it's Sans! His voice is filled with agony and it echos sharply off the stone pillars around you, doubling the intensity. It makes your ears ring and your heart stop. Somehow, you find the strength move even faster and you feel like your feet are barely touching the ground as you race towards him. As the screams near you can make out words among the wailing.

"Stop! Please, please stop! Gaster!"

And then, like a spotlight flickering to life, you see them. Or more accurately, you see you. A terrible, twisted version of you, changed into a monstrous shape. Oh God..is that what you looked like before? No wonder Sans had stared at you with such terror. More importantly however, standing before the fake you, shaking so violently you're shocked his body hasn't fallen apart, you see Sans himself. His skull is thrown back, mouth open in a agonized wail. Strange glitch like markings cover part of his face and you can see a glow building around his ribs. His Soul shimmers into view, shuddering just as violently as the rest of him is and your own Soul gives a sharp twist of pain in response. The fake you has one clawed hand gripped tightly on Sans' skull. The other one is reaching for the exposed Soul and you act without stopping to think.

"Hey!" You sweep your arm out, letting your furious rage at the sight fuel your magic. You feel the strain on your Soul as several objects appear before you. They're shaped like oval rounds of pure energy, gleaming with a bright orange light. They head straight towards the creature standing over Sans. It's head turns sharply, black and purple eyes widening with shock. It doesn't have time to react before your magic slams into it. But instead of sending it flying, it vanishes into nothingness.

You don't take the time to wonder about it. You run to Sans just as his screams cut off sharply. His knees hit the ground but you manage to catch him before he collapses completely. He's utterly limp in your arms, his sockets covered by that strange white fog.

"Sans? Sans!" you call desperately. You wave your hands through the glitches, hoping to dispel them but it's no good. Your hand passes right through. Instead, you place your palm on the side of his head; his bones are fever hot and between the glitches you can see the remains of magic discharge on his face. But he's breathing, though it is strained. Your Soul leaps in your chest, reaching for his in such overwhelming joy that it almost makes tears come to your eyes. You can't stop yourself from holding him close for just a moment. Panic over the state he's in and pure relief that he's back in your arms wrestle with each other for just a moment. But there's no time to waste. You hook your hands under his arms and struggle to stand.

<WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?>

Voidster's voice rings out around you. It scrapes at the inside of your head and you cry out, fighting the reflex to cover your ears. The force of the anger behind the voice makes your knees buckle and you fall back to the ground. You hunch over Sans, pulling him protectively into your chest.

<WHAT HAVE YOU DONE? HOW ARE YOU HERE?>

"I'm a little tough to get rid of," you call out, you eyes darting around for any sight of Voidster showing himself. "Plus I had a little help."

<WHAT?>
At the sound of your voice, Sans trembles suddenly in your arms. He mumbles weakly, the words too soft and strained to make out. Again, rage fills you and your grip on him tightens. "What the hell did you do to-ah!"

You're suddenly cut off as an insanely strong gust of wind propels you up off the ground. You clutch Sans to you as you suddenly shoot off back down the hallway you came from. But now instead of the darkened but clear walkway, you soar down a twisted mess of stone and broken pillars. The edges of what you can see are broken and wrong. Glitches cover almost every surface, flickering wildly as you shoot past them. You fight to desperately regain some control over your terrifying speed. But there's nothing you can do but hold on tightly to Sans.

You feel a presence next to you. Turning your head sharply, you see the ghost like image of the armless monster floating alongside you. It's strange though; they're keeping level with you but they show no sign that they're actually moving.

"We can hide you only for a short time," they say, their bright eyes fixed on Sans. "You have to save him. You will need his help."

"How?" you ask desperately.

The smallest hint of a sad smile lifts one corner of their mouth. "You already know."

You suddenly come to a sharp stop, tumbling across the ground. You lose your grip on Sans, rolling a short distance away from him. You gasp at the harsh landing. Oh come on, they couldn't have gently set you down like before? Well, you can't complain. At least you're away from Voidster, at least for a moment. Groaning, you sit up. Where on Earth...er, rather the Void are you now?

Immediately, you can see that there's something wrong with this place. Somehow, it looks like parts of different places have fused together in a twisted and broken cavern of sorts. There's a section of the throne room in the underground but halfway through, a waterfall of shimmering luminescent water spills into a pool of broken stone. There's a massive purple door with the royal symbol painted upon it's surface but the door itself is broken and cracked, like lightning struck it. Then, you see something that doesn't make sense at all; it's the stairs at the radio station. The front desk is there too but it's covered in thick green vines. The area you're in is right in the middle. It looks like a cave floor and withered yellow flowers cover a good portion of it. It's all meshed together and at the edges where one scene suddenly switches, you can see flickering squares of black. It hurts your eyes to look at them.

You're pulled out of your staring by a low moan. Sans! You scramble to your feet, rushing back over to him. He's sitting up, his hands limp beside him. The glitches look like they've spread. You can only see the edge of his mouth now. He's smiling widely but it's one of those strained empty smiles that hold nothing but pain.

"Sans!" You reach out, touching his shoulder. "Hey, can you hear me?"

"...s'all gonna fall down," he mumbles quietly. "it doesn't matter. nothing...i...i tried, i promise i did, i tried." His voice is hollow and utterly empty. It sounds so wrong coming from him. He's not meant to sound like this.

Desperately, you take his hands; his fingers twitch slightly. You don't know what he's seeing, or what he's been through. But if there's one thing you do know, he that he's never stopped trying. "I know you did. Sans please, I need you to wake up."

"i was right to give up." He's trembling a little now. "i couldn't save them. i've been a failure since
the beginning. there's...there's no point."

"Of course there's a point," you say as gently as you can even though something inside you screams that you're running out of time.

"it's better to give up. easier. it doesn't...it hurts." His voice breaks and behind the glitches you can see the glimmer of a tear streaking down his face. "it hurts. it hurts."

"I know it does." The pressure building behind your eyes threatens tears of your own but you have to stay strong right now. "Sans, I know it's hurts. But we're almost there. It's all gonna be worth it I promise."

"it's not. it's all just gonna slip away. it always does. it's not worth the trouble. it's not worth the p-

"It is!" you say firmly, squeezing his hands. "It's all gonna be worth it. But I need you to wake up now. There's a fight coming and I can't do it on my own. I need you."

"i'm never gonna see them again. i've lost you too."

You take his face in your hands. "I'm right here! You just need to look at me. Sans, look at me!"

He doesn't respond and the glitches don't fade.

The area around you suddenly shudders. Sharp cracks spread over the surface of the ruined door and across the golden floor of the throne room. It's coming. You're out of time and Sans is still hunched over, shoulders drawn in like a great weight has settled over him. You can feel the miserable pain in his Soul reflected in yours. Your words aren't enough to break through it.

But maybe your raw feelings will be.

You don't waste another moment. You lift your hand, gesturing to your chest and your Soul within. Making it manifest is easy, far easier than you would have thought. But the moment it materializes into the space of the Void a terrible feeling of vulnerability hits you like a hammer to the face. It stings and burns and almost immediately you can feel the space around you focus in on your Soul. It wants to smother you, devour you. Already it starts to slowly eat at you. So this is what those monsters meant when they said this place was poisoning you. You grit your teeth and push past the feeling. It hurts, but it's not unbearable.

You brings Sans' hands together and hold them just under your Soul. Then you focus your gaze on his Soul, hidden away in his chest. It's dim, pulsing weakly behind a thick cloud of pain. Placing your hand just above his ribs, you breathe deeply for just a second, bracing yourself for the rush of emotions you know he must be feeling. You gesture to his Soul, reaching out for it, calling to him. It struggles against you but doesn't have the energy to resist for long. It slowly appears in front of him and your heart sinks.

He's always had hairline cracks in his Soul. Numerous but small, hidden away deep within him. But now those cracks have surfaced and they snake across his Soul, cutting through the cyan aura emitting from it.

"Oh Sans," you whisper. "Guess we're a matching set now, huh?"

Turning your own attention back to your Soul, you gently cup Sans' hands around it. Your breath hitches at the sensation and the echo of pain you can already feel from him. Then you very gently wrap your hands around his Soul. Instantly, a great flood of agony hits you, threatening to drag you
down with the force of the pain coursing through him. It floods over into your Soul and you tremble in the face of it.

You see flashes of what he's endured, the time spent being broken apart by the ones he loves, forced to endure a pain you can barely comprehend. You can taste the bitter grit of monster dust on your tongue and smell the sharp tang of suppressed magic. It's too much, there's too much there for any one Soul to handle. So you carry it with him. You let the pain and the fear and the self hatred he's held on to for all this time slam into you. You welcome it because it is his. He's scared and so alone right now. He wants you by his side but something dark and vile has been planted inside him that screams at you to stay away.

You take those feelings and the pain and return it with the full force of your hope and love. "I'm right here," you whisper furiously, blinking back the liquid that has formed in your eyes. "I'm not going anywhere Sans. We promised each other that we'd fight for our happy ending. This is the fight. Right here, right now. Don't you dare give up me."

His fingers twitch, tightening slightly around your Soul. He's stirring. Under the fog of pain, he's starting to wake up.

You lean forward until you press your lips against his teeth. You kiss him over and over, pleading as you do so. "Sans I'm scared and I know you're scared too. But we've fought too hard to just give up. I don't know what you're seeing right now. But whatever it is, I'm going to help you see past it. I love you Sans and no force in the Void is going to change that."

He gasps sharply and suddenly the thick cloud in his Soul snaps back. It's not gone, not entirely but he's back in control and suddenly he's placing desperate kisses on your face. His hands release your Soul and you return his. They both sink back to where they belong and suddenly you can breathe again and the pain is swept away by pure heady relief and love. He latches onto you, hands clinging desperately to your shirt.

"Welcome back," you say, a wobbly smile on your face.

He's whispering your name, his voice catching on unshed tears. "you're okay, you're alive."

"Like I said, I'm pretty tough to get rid of."

He laughs, though it's more of a strangled choke. His gaze drops to your chest where your Soul resides for a moment before darting back up. He stares desperately at your face, his hand touching your cheek like he can't believe you're really in front of him. He's shaking. "you were...i...i...saw it...i remembered...."

There's another rumble through the room, making both of you jump. Sans curls into you, sockets wide as he looks around the distorted space. He's in bad shape, really bad shape. You want nothing more than to keep holding him and let him rest but you've got another problem to deal with. "Sans, look I know...I know you're hurting and there's a lot going on but Voidster is on his way here now and honestly I don't know what to do about-"

"v-voidster?"

Ah, right. Okay, you've got to very quickly sum this up for him. You pull back, smiling weakly. "It is...a very long story and we've got almost no time. Okay, the consciousness of the Void infected Gaster when he started his work with the Core, that's why he changed so drastically, it wasn't him, not really though I guess it kind of was, the Void just took the very angry parts of him and put that in control so the guy who raised you had to retreat into his own mind until the night of the accident and
then he broke free of the Void's control and put together his whole plan. Only, turns out that once he crossed into our timeline he made a beacon for the rest of him, mostly the bits created by the Void so the Void gathered them up and Chara gave it a bunch of angry monster souls because they told me—"

"told you?! as in that demon talked to you?" He's still shaky but it lifts your heart a little to see the flash of protective anger in his sockets.

"Yeah, I met Chara, more on that later," you say, waving an impatient hand. "Anyway, there's basically two Gasters. The one you know, who created you and Paps and wanted the best for monster kind. Then there's the Gaster who was born after the Void infected his mind and was directly influenced by this place. That version is now inhabiting the original body which has been corrupted by a lot of angry monster Souls. I call him Voidster just to avoid confusion. The real Gaster is sleeping somewhere inside and we've got to find a way to wake him up if we want to have a chance at getting back home."

Sans blinks at you.

"So uh...any ideas?"

He's not given a chance to answer. You feel a prickle rise up your spine moments before more violent shaking overtakes the cavern. The pure magical energy filling the air makes your skin feel like spiders are crawling over it. Amid the dead flowers something is starting to take shape. Black tar like puddles ooze out of the ground very quickly gaining mass and taking shape. You get to your feet, hauling Sans away from the massive form gathering in the center of the room.

<HOW VERY HUMAN OF YOU. ARROGANT. ANNOYINGLY TENACIOUS>  

Voidster's voice snarls out from within the pitching mass and you hear Sans whisper, "oh shit."

Two white hands, clawed and cracked, bleed out from the writhing black mass which is now so tall it towers above you. A moment later, Gaster's head appears as well and it's been horribly mutilated. The cracks extending from his eye sockets have expanded and tar like goop squirms like a living thing inside. All over his skull several new sockets have been carved out and each one holds a glaringly bright red pupil of light. The lights of his main eyes however are the same deep and sickly purple you've seen peering out at you from the rips in reality. A wide snarling grin cracks over the entire bottom half of his skull and you can see purple tainted smoke oozing out of his mouth.

Your legs miraculously don't give out from under you. It's...it's so big! And the dark intent of hate rolling off it is almost visible, like sparking flashes of color. You can taste the sheer power; it's metallic, sharp and bitter. The force of it crashes over you, threatening to shatter you right where you stand. This is the power of the Void. Panic flares in your chest. How the hell are you supposed to stand against this?! You're just a single human with magic you barely know how to use and-

Sans presses against you. You catch your breath, looking over at him. He meets your eyes and despite the shadows under his sockets and the shakiness of his stance, he gives you a slow calm nod. That's right. You're not alone here. There's no giving up now. This is the fight to get your life back. You squeeze his hand and turn back to the monstrosity standing before you. Gaster is in there somewhere. You just have to wake him up.

You've saved one monster. Now it's time to SAVE the other.
Hey guys! I'm sorry that this chapter took so long to come out! Final projects and school and just general life craziness got the best of me for a while. So, This is almost it! There will be one more chapter after this one! I'll save all of the super sappy author stuff until then. But I can't tell you how much it means to me that you've stuck with this story for so long. Thank you. And please, Feed the comment monster

Content warnings: Blood, body horror

At long last, It's Not Too Late Playlist Part 2! This has also been updated for my tumblr followers who have already seen this

Oh Dear Gracious at it again with the ART <3
Stars in his eyes
Hugs and tickles

The great and horrifying being standing before you stares you down. You're painfully aware of just how small you are, like an insect under a magnifying glass. And just like a bug, you are also completely vulnerable and very squishable. It's not a good feeling.

<A HUMAN AND A MONSTER STANDING SIDE BY SIDE. I WOULD SAY IT'S FIRST. BUT THEN AGAIN, I HAVE SEEN EVERYTHING.> Voidster leans forward slightly and the entire area around you shifts in response, glitching and warping slightly against the massive presence. <SO WHY DIDN'T I SEE THIS? HOW HAVE YOU DONE THIS?>

The snarled question is directed at you. "Does it really matter how?" Your voice is more than a little shaky. "I'm here now!"

Voidster's mouth somehow stretches further into a manic smile. <INDEED YOU ARE. AND WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU PLAN TO DO NOW YOU ARE HERE? FIGHT AGAINST ME? RECLAIM YOUR TIMELINE?>

Well, that's certainly the plan. But you can't beat the Void by sheer force, that you know with despairing certainty.

The giant being in front of you regards the two of you for a moment, eye lights flashing brightly. Then, chillingly, it starts to laugh. Sans shudders and you can feel your very Soul curling in disgust and horror at the scratching, ticking sound. The edges of it's form flare suddenly. Large chunks of black mass peel away from the squirming body. The oily surface drips away and reveals several large skeletal hands. There's eight of them in total, each one easily the size of a small car. They look nearly identical to the translucent hands Gaster could summon but these are no mere tools. Instead of a mere hole however, each palm is filled with a pulsating glow of power in various colors.


Red.
And pure white.

The hands arrange themselves into a half circle around Voidster. The power pulsing from them is visible. Sparks of pure magical energy snaps and crackles from each one. You thought the suffocating power around you couldn't get any heavier but it does. It rips into you, makes your legs quake with the need to bolt. Your own Soul flares in response to the power and helps you to stay grounded.

Sans makes a small sound, slowly lowering to his knees. You tug him back up, gripping his arm tightly. Or maybe you're leaning on him so you don't fall down yourself.

"g-gast...er..." He's trembling a little, gaze fixed on the pulsing green light of one of the hands. Your heart twists because even if you hadn't just seen the flashes of what he's been through, you would recognize the all too clear signs of trauma on face.

"It's not him," you whisper furiously. "This thing isn't your father. You've got to keep standing, just for a little while longer."

He takes a shallow breath. Then he nods shortly. "what now?"

"I....we...."

You don't know. You have no clue how to fight this thing. First things first, you've got to know exactly what you're dealing with. Your gaze shifts and the extent of the vile nature of Voidster's corrupted and stolen Soul becomes clear. It's hard to see, buried beneath a thick layer of black angry energy. The shattered remains of countless monster Souls flash before you, broken, twisted and screaming in utter agony. Staring at such pain makes your eyes water. Those poor Souls are trapped by a terrible force, bound to a being they have no hope of escaping.

Beneath that, buried so deep it's nothing but a faint glimmer, is Gaster's Soul. You can sense more than see that it's in pieces, held together by an immense force of will and determination.

Your Determination.

You've felt off since you woke up in the image of your perfect world set by Chara. Of course, you had just thought it was the shock of being in the Void and every other freaking thing that's happened since then. But now that you can see it, feel in the air, taste it in the sharp waves of intent rolling off of Voidster's body, your Soul screams for it to come back. It belongs to you! You're not like Frisk with an overwhelming well of it. You need it back.

Sans' fingers twitch in your hand. It seems he's looking too. "there's a piece missing," he murmurs to you.

You squint and realize he's right. The Soul might be ripped apart but it's still holding close to the same upside down heart shape as Sans. But on the edge there's a chunk missing, like it was ripped away. That has to be Gaster's sliver! The piece he tore away and gave to you so long ago. So where is that piece?

"it pulled a shard from you before," Sans explains quickly, guessing your thoughts. "without some kind of body to protect it, the soul piece would've shattered. so that piece...dings has got to be deeper inside somewhere. it's probably keeping the shards separate to stop dings from taking over."

You strain to find the missing shard deep within the mess of darkness and angry energy but it's no good. There's too much there. The sickly rage and pain is so thick it makes finding the essence of the real Gaster impossible. But you can't stop staring at it. The sheer pain and rage oozing from the
monster in front you makes you sick. You can feel something inside your Soul twitching, straining to reach out like before with Sans and heal that pain and just...

Make it better.

You've got to make it better.

"Sans," you murmur tightly. "I've got to get closer."

"what?"

<MAKING A BATTLE PLAN ARE YOU?> The smile on Voidster's face hasn't changed but it's voice oozes with contempt. <THIS IS BEEN INTERESTING, I WILL ADMIT THAT> The hand with the green light emitting from it starts to flash even brighter. <BUT I WAS IN THE MIDDLE OF A RATHER DELICATE PROCESS AND YOU'VE GONE AND NEARLY RUINED ALL THAT PROGRESS. SO I'M AFRAID I WON'T BE PLAYING YOUR GAME>

You feel a terrible, clenching grip on your Soul without warning and you cry out as your entire body locks up. Similarly Sans goes stiff and from the corner of your eye you catch a bright green glow shooting out from under his tee-shirt. He's gasping harshly, fingers frozen in your grip.

You strain and push against the sensation in your chest but it's like a boulder has been dropped on top of you. You can't move and trying only sends sharp waves of pain lacing through your body. It's like Undyne's magic, which you've felt only a few times before when she was showing off her skills to you. But this is worse, it's a thousand times worse and you never felt in danger while caught in Undyne's grip. But Voidster's hold is tight, unforgiving and powerful. Even more staggering is the fact that it's holding both of you down. Undyne made it clear that she could only hold one Soul at a time and even then just for a few minutes at a time. The sheer energy needed to do this-!

It's terrifying.

Voidster moves closer, the edges of it's body rolling forward. It's moving and yet with each motion it seems to already be filling the space in front of it and the rest of it's form is simply catching up. It doesn't make any sense and further increases the sick feeling in your head.

<YOU SEE, SOUL EXTRACTION IS ACTUALLY A VERY TEDIOUS AND DELICATE PROCESS. AND YES, I MIGHT HAVE DRAWN OUT THE VARIOUS METHODS OF BREAKING DOWN THE SOUL FOR MY OWN SATISFACTION> Voidster laughs again and you let out a strangled scream of rage. <BUT STILL. IT WAS NECESSARY. SANS HAS SOMETHING THAT BELONGS TO ME. >

It's hands flash with movement, almost too fast to see. There's a sharp pulse of light. Sans' Soul, shrouded green pops out from his rib cage. It's shaking and glowing faintly. Your stained breathing catches sharply as the connection becomes clear; Sans' Soul was created from a tiny shard taken from Gaster's Soul. Voidster broke apart reality itself to get back the part of Gaster that escaped. And Sans, with his own Soul and body formed around a smaller yet similar piece was standing right there, ripe for the taking.

Gaster told you about the fragile nature of Souls. How the reason your Soul adapted to his was because the trauma you went through made it soft and malleable. That was Nahn's goal when you were kidnapped. After all, a tender Soul is much easier to manipulate without risking it falling apart completely.
One of the non-glowing hands starts to reach for Sans, ready to pluck his fragile Soul away.

You won't let it happen!

"Don't!" You snarl and shove back against the green hold in your Soul. Your burning rage gives you strength and your magic slams into the alien power with every ounce of force you can muster. You feel something snap painfully with a short flash of bright orange light, but you can move, just a little, Voidster's eye sockets go wide as it's hand flinches-

And it's whole body suddenly reels back like it's been hit with a hammer. The remaining stiffness in your Soul vanishes and you crash into Sans, nearly sending you both to the ground. A terrible noise, like a nails on a chalkboard rips from Voidster. You steady yourself and realize that the hand with green magic has been sliced nearly in half. Black ooze drips like blood from the wound and the energy inside flickers weakly and fades to a dim glow.

You see a flash of something moving; a wide smile, red eyes wide with childlike glee.

<**DAMN CHILD!**> Voidster roars, making the cavern-like space glitch wildly. The injured hand makes a motion, like it's trying to close it into a fist. It hisses sharply as more of the tar like fluid gushes out. <**WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!**>

Chara's laughter echos around you. Sans shivers violently and his socket flashes blue for a moment. You look around for any sign of where they are but once again, they seem to be everywhere and nowhere all at once. What are they doing here?!

"What, you can't tell?" Chara calls cheerfully.

Voidster purple sockets flash and suddenly and several stark white bullets in the shape of twisted and broken bones shoot into the space right in front of the pool in the throne room. A large square of static flashes over the spot the attacks land and Chara themselves flickers into view, very narrowly dodging the bones.

"Oops!" They dance out of the way. They've got a long bright red knife clenched in one hand; it's covered in the same black goop dripping from the skeletal hand. "Aw, don't be like that! I'm just making things a little more fair! It'll be boring if the fight is over before it even starts, don't you think?"

<**ENOUGH OF YOUR MEDDLING!**> Voidster snarls. <**I HAVE NO INTEREST IN PLAYING YOUR GAMES. SOON ENOUGH YOU WILL BE NOTHING MORE THAN A FORGOTTEN FRAGMENT. BROKEN. ALONE.**> It's melted skull glitches, the movement so fast you almost miss it.

"Is that so."

<**YOU CANNOT STOP ME. THEY CANNOT.**>

"Huh, you think you've actually got enough power to pull off that Reset?" Chara simpers. "You really think that a thousand monster Souls alone is enough?" Their gaze flicks over to you.

*Oh no.*

Chara throws their arms out. Black blood flicks to the ground and dissolves into small white glitches. "Go ahead! If you've already got the power you need, what are you waiting for? One tiny shard from that bag of bones isn't going to make a difference once you Reset, right?"
That thing is going to realize it needs your Soul! "Sans, you've got to stop them," you whisper urgently.

Before you even finish speaking, Sans is lifting his free hand. Bones erupt from the ground and crash into Voidster in a thick wave. Most of the bones sink slightly into the thick surface of it's body and simply vanish. Voidster doesn't even react to the attack. It simply continues to stare at Chara. It's mains hands lift suddenly, quickly moving in oddly familiar motions. You see something start to flicker in front of it, a dim outline of code and words warping the space before it.

Then it vanishes with a crackle of static.

Chara's grin only grows as Voidster very slowly turns it's gaze away from them.

And lands on you.

<MORE> It almost murmurs. <IT'S NOT ENOUGH>

Chara laughs as a chilling shiver grips your spine. "Have fun!" they call out with a wink before vanishing. They reappear right in front of you and flick Sans on his forehead. He flinches, expression twisting into a snarl of rage. "Good to see you smiley freak. Make sure you win here so we can play again."

Then they're just gone and you're left standing before Voidster. It's clearly injured but no less dangerous. The torn hand continues to drip even as the other seven continue to pulse with power.

<VERY WELL> It says in a rather resigned tone. <LOOKS LIKE YOU GET YOUR FIGHT AFTER ALL>

It's non glowing hands clap together. As they part, they again flash with motion. This time, you catch a word.

PIERCE

You shove Sans as hard as you can just as a massive bone shaped attack shimmers into existence above your head and slams into the ground where you were just standing. You keep running, feeling attack after attack smash behind you, nipping at your heels. Each hit shakes the ground, threatening to overthrow your balance. When it stops you whirl around, heart clenching painfully. But Sans is fine, he's still on his feet and another rush of his own bones follows the motion of his hand. They slam into Voidster, sticking out like pin needles.

Voidster simply rolls it's body with a shrug-like motion and the attacks dislodge and vanish. His hands sign again-

RISE

Jagged bones erupt from the ground in front of Sans. He jumps back, throwing up a wall of blue shimmering bones that meet the attack. They collide and shatter.

He's signing his attacks! Consciously or not, it's a warning!

"Hands!" you yell to Sans. You wave desperately, hoping he gets it. "Watch the-ah!"

A yelp cuts off your own words as your Soul suddenly turns blue and you shoot upwards. Your body flips over as your stomach drops out of your skull and you slam against the ceiling hard enough to make your knees buckle. You shake your head, a low moan escaping you as you stare up at what
appears to the be the rest of the room above your head. It makes a harsh wave of dizziness sweep over you. Stupid! Looking away from the very thing you were warning Sans about!

"jump!"

You follow Sans' scream without thinking and push off hard against the ground (ceiling? everything is flipped around, you can't make sense of it). Mere moments later a row of bones erupt from the stone beneath you, brushing the bottom of your feet. You cry out at the sharp sting that shoots through your Soul when the bones touch you but it's a minor wound, you're okay, you moved away in time-

And suddenly you're tugged into the air once again and your body falls up, no wait now you're falling down and through your watering eyes, you see more bones rise up out of the ground, the ends broken and sharp.

Sans shouts something you can't make out and the breath is knocked out of you when solid slams into your side. Instinctively you grab onto it and realize it's a Blaster. You somehow manage to hold on to it, wincing against the sharp edges digging into your stomach. It vanishes in a cloud of glitches just as you reach the ground and you land painfully on your butt a few feet away from the deadly spikes.

"not happening, voidster." Sans is sweating heavily but a stubborn strength is keeping him standing firm. He lifts his hand and two more Blasters shimmer into existence. But there's something strange about them. They're broken on the edges, almost like they're not completely formed. Sans grimaces at them before looking back at Voidster. "dings, if you're in there, you gotta wake up!"

<Voidster turns it's head towards Sans, the red lights in it's multiple sockets flashing. <WE ARE ONE AND THE SAME>

Sans grins humorlessly. "the last few weeks say otherwise. besides, now that i know what you really are, a whole lot of stuff suddenly makes sense."

It starts to move towards him and Sans releases a blinding attack from his Blasters. They hit Voidster dead on and yet it keeps moving like it can't even feel it.

You get to your feet, wheezing as you fight to breathe around the pain in your ribs. You shake it off and reach for your own magic while Voidster's attention is on Sans. You've got to keep it still somehow, just long enough for you to get close. You breathe deeply, reaching for that same power you used before when you fired at the fake you standing over Sans. But this time, you don't need the orange power. You don't want Voidster to move.

You feel the magic building under your skin and picture a row of bars encircling the creature still bearing down on Sans as he releases blast after blast at the twisted remains of his father. Cage it in, trap it. You throw your hands out, releasing the pent up energy. Your hands glow a light blue for a moment before the magic whips out in the form of two separate light saber type beams and shoot towards Voidster. The two beams split into countless smaller rods of light and pierce the ground around Voidster, creating a cage of sorts. It's pathetically small, barely reaching up to half it's body size, but that shouldn't matter right? It shouldn't be able to move past it, right?

Voidster stops it's advancement, turning it's skull to stare at you. <A MAGE THEN? NO...THIS IS MAGIC BORN FROM CIRCUMSTANCE. NO TALENT. NO INNATE ABILITY.>
With a single motion, it's hands sweep across your attack and each and every one shatters. You feel the effect in your Soul as your magic breaks apart under the force. You cry out, clutching at your chest. Sans starts running to you, his Blasters trailing after him with a cloud of glitches.

**<YOU WOULD STOP ME WITH SUCH UNCONTROLLED MAGIC? HOW...CUTE>**

The hand glowing purple lifts up and the power within grows.

"stop!"

It's main hands sign MEMORY and a terribly cold sensation grips your Soul. A foreign power slams into you, knocking you back several steps. It's heavy and engulfs you, muting your senses as it digs into your heart.

**FREAK**

*What kind of inhuman monster cuts themselves?*

You're aware of sinking to your knees as thousands of echoing voices assault your mind.

**WORTHLESS**

*You should've died that night*

There's a sharp stinging sensation across your skin. Blood starts to pour down your arms in streams, soaking the ground around you. You stare at it numbly. After a moment, you lift your eyes to Sans. He's still standing but he's gone completely still. The lights of his eyes have shrunk to tiny dots and you can see a sickly purple glow emitting from under his shirt. As you watch it spreads out into thread like tendrils that creep around him, twisting around his arms and neck. You don't have to look to know you've become similarly entangled.

**WEAK**

Voidster spells out another attack and a ring of floating bones shimmer into existence. Each one is jagged, sharp and aimed right for you.

**YOU CAN'T SAVE ANYONE**

It's a fight to speak, but you lift your head to stare Voidster right in it's purple eyes. "You know, reminding me of the past is kinda getting old. I'm done clinging to it."

The bones start to twist and glow but Voidster itself stops, an almost confused expression crossing over it's face.

You stare down the impending attack and raise your voice. "Saving people...that's what you wanted to do too, right? You wanted to save your people. You wanted to save them from their fate of being stuck in a world without the sky. Without fresh air and sunlight and the chance to see beyond their small world. Do you really think this is the answer? You can't save them by erasing what happened!"

There's a flicker in the left socket. Sans too is staring at you, his panicked expression slowly easing into something a little more hopeful.

You pull yourself up. The twisting web-like tendrils cling to you still but the blood on your arms flickers and vanishes. "And you should stop trying to fix what doesn't need to be fixed! Gaster, there's a beautiful, crazy world that's filled with all kinds of problems and magic waiting for us.
If you Reset this timeline, you won't only kill us, you'll destroy that world and countless others. Will you really be okay with that? The Gaster who lived in my Soul—" you jab a finger at yourself, flicking your gaze over to Sans. You pray that he can feel your intent through your bond as you point back at Voidster. "That guy wouldn't do that. That guy made a lot of mistakes but he wouldn't make one that stupid. He's pretty smart, for a dummy who let the Void into his head."

Voidster still doesn't move and again, the light of it's left socket flickers. For a moment, the harsh purple light fades to white. Got him!

"You can do the right thing here, Gaster," you say softly and the skeletal hands in front of you flinch. "But you've got to wake up and start fighting back. We've already got one lazybones after all. We don't need you sleeping on the job too." You extend your arms, like you're offering a hug. "Fight back! It's time to wake up and take responsibility!"

The summoned attack of bones vanish and as it's hands come up to clutch at it's skull, the purple effect on your Soul fades. You waste no time and dart towards Voidster. You jump and feel Sans' magic turn your body light, helping you fly upwards and your feet land right into the chest area of the massive monster. You ignore the sensation of sinking into goop and plunge your hands into the mess in front of you. Immediately, the rage and sorrow of the thousand monster Souls trapped within assault you and your scream matches Voidster's as it thrashes violently, nearly bucking you off.

God, it burns! The essence of all those Souls rips into you, far worse than anything you've felt thus far. They dig into you with the force of a million needles, piercing, ripping, tearing you apart because how dare you be whole and complete while they drift in a bleak world of pain and darkness? How dare you fight to blind them with your life and the light of your complete Soul? But at the same time you feel their ravenous hunger for it and fight the instinct to curl away. You instead let that same desire to heal fill you. You give it to them, pouring it into the endless chasm of pain you've stuck your hands into. And at the same time, you call for the broken Soul at the center of it all. You feel it responding, dragging itself up from the depths. It's just as hungry for your power and you use that to coax it closer and closer.

Then your hand curls around it and for a moment, the thousand angry Souls completely fade away. It's just you and the pure consciousnesses of the Void. In that moment, you can see all of eternity stretched out before you. Everything that was and could be, or couldn't possibly be imagined stands before you and you, you're not even a speck of dust in comparison to it. You can barely comprehend it what you see, so you focus on what you know.

The Void is not meant to be this angry and hurting being. It is simply meant to be. Not angry. Not filled with hope. It simply is. It is the place in between and all over and nowhere all at once. But it's been corrupted by Gaster's pain and old anger and Chara's influence and the wailing of all the Souls trapped inside. That's what you need to fix. You need to pull these raging Souls away and release them. They are not meant to linger here.

So you give them what they want. You give them soft words of peace and hope. Promises that the emptiness is not where they are meant to stay. And the monster Souls, the blessed, broken and suffering Souls listen because at their core, they are made of hope, compassion and love. Something in what you offer speaks to them and slowly, they begin to listen. The voices slow down and grow silent. And finally, as the Souls part, you feel it. The broken shard that is purely Gaster. He's curled up in the center of it all, flickering weakly but steadily. His own pain grows stronger as the way to him parts. You reach out, your magic straining to reach him-

Something wraps around your middle. Still howling, Voidster pulls at you, ripping your hands out of it's goopy body. The connection to Gaster threatens to shatter so you grip the broken Soul as tightly
as you can. It resists you but you manage to pull it completely free of the mass before it slips out of your grasp. You cry out as Voidster flings you away. Weightless and flailing you see the wall fast approaching. But instead of crashing against the stone, you feel a slightly less hard surface appear behind you as bony arms wrap around your stomach. With the added weight you suddenly plunge down, landing in (naturally) the broken pool of water in the throne room area of the cavern. You sputter, sitting up out of the water. But...you're not wet? The water rolls off of you in large droplets but not a single inch of you is actually dampened by it.

There's a splash, a loud groan.

"Sans!" You get to your feet, helping the poor skeleton out of the water. He too is completely dry, aside from the gleaming sweat on his skull. He falls the his knees the moment you pull him out of the pool. You drop beside him, putting a hand on his shoulder. "Are you okay?"

Sans wheezes for a moment before giving you a very shaky smile. "'m fine. h-heh, shortcuts d-don't work so well here. g-go figure."

He doesn't look fine. You shift your gaze to look at his health but something's wrong. It's warped, flickering between one and two and zero over and over again at a rapid pace.

Sans groans again, his hand clutching at your arm.

"Sans-!"

<HOW DARE YOU!>

Voidster's roar is deafening and your body locks up in response. It's somehow grown even larger and the pure, unmasked hate on it's skull seems to physically burn you. The edges of it's body are warping wildly, bits and pieces breaking off and drifting upwards like some kind of twisted lava lamp. The eye in the left socket has vanished completely but the remaining one is fixed on you. And there, hovering right above it's chest, is the broken pieces of Gaster's Soul. It's partially obscured by tendrils of black but you can see a strong white light pulsing beneath the writhing mass.

Sans shifts slightly, attempting to push you behind him but his arm only manages to weakly tug at you.

<YOU THINK THAT YOU CAN SET THESE SOULS FREE WITH YOUR COMPASSION?> Voidster moves towards you but instead of the unnerving not-walk from before, it seems to be struggling, like it's own body has suddenly grown too heavy for it to bear. <I WILL BE THE ONE TO SET THEM FREE! TIME WILL FINALLY BE UNDER MY CONTROL. AND...NO ONE WILL SUFFER. NO MORE PAIN. NO MORE LOSS>

You gently pry Sans' hand off of your arm and stand. "It's not right! And you know it!"

Voidster's head warps, light flickering back to life in the left socket. <I MUST...I MUST SAVE MY PEOPLE...MY FRIENDS>

It's voice has started to warble, sounding more familiar. "They are saved Gaster. Maybe not in every timeline. But in our world, your world, everyone is safe. They're free. And they're waiting for us to come back."

<NO ONE IS WAITING. NO ONE REMEMBERS>

"i waited."
Sans' voice is quiet, filled with a deep pain as he struggles to stand. You help him and he leans on you heavily. "dings, i waited. i remembered. and i will never forgive myself for giving up on you. i'm sorry. i'm so sorry." He sounds like he's on the verge of tears. "all the crap that's happened to us...i wanna move past it. i want a future. and...and i want you there. even after everything that's happened."

Voidster stares at Sans. No...no now, this is Gaster. Finally peering through the haze of the Void.

**THERE IS NO FORGIVING WHAT HAPPENED. WHAT I'VE DONE. TO YOU. YOUR BROTHER. MY PEOPLE. I...I CANNOT BE.**

Sans takes a deep breath, almost choking on the emotion making his bones shake. "yeah well...i do. i forgive you."

The being in front of you jolts like it's been hit, it's sockets growing wide as it starts to gasp harshly. Gaster's Soul pulses strongly with light and the dark tendrils clinging to it whip wildly. The summoned hands jerk, convulsing and twisting as it's main hands rise up to clutch at it's face. The sharp tips of it's phalanges dig into it's face, leaving deep grooves in the bone. **NO** It's voice is nearly impossible to understand, warping and layered over with harsh sounds. **NO I WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN AGAIN. JUSTICE I MUST HAVE JUSTICE!**

There's another wave of power, so strong in it's intensity it knocks you and Sans over. The space right above Voidster is rippling and an animalistic growl rips through the air. A Blaster forms and this thing is far more terrifying than anything you've seen so far. Sans' Blasters, as unsettling as they are when they are first summoned, still hold resemblance to him and are nothing more than tools. Even Gaster's, larger and slightly pointer ones pale in comparison to this thing. This Blaster looks like it's risen from hell, it's sockets filled with a blood red light. It's all angles, sharp, broken, and deadly. It's bared teeth are rotted and drip black blood. Your bones rattle with the mere force of it’s presence. **THESE SOULS ARE MINE! HIS SOUL BELONGS TO ME!** Voidster snarls, lifting one hand to gesture at the monstrous Blaster. A dark energy gathers together in it's maw, a unyielding orb of black that reminds you of a black hole. **I WILL CLAIM YOUR SOUL AND FIX THIS DISTORTED REALITY ONCE AND FOR ALL!**

You scramble to your feet, your mind blank save for the single thought of putting yourself between Sans and this thing. You throw your arms out protectively, skidding to a stop in front of Sans, who is staring up at the Blaster with terror. Something within your Soul throbs and you let the sensation sweep over you. Your Soul shimmers into existence, glowing brightly as it lifts up in front of you like some kind of shield. It's blazing with light, the orange tones of your Soul outshining any other. Bravery. Sans told you your Soul was composed mainly of bravery and integrity. It fills you, keeps you standing firm as you stand before the Void itself. You lift your hand and your Soul follows. Flame like light washes over Voidster's skull as it stares hungrily at it. Something prickles at your mind, a desperate last attempt to snap Gaster back in control.

"Here it is then!" you scream. "Do what you have to do Gaster! But remember if you do this, you'll be letting down everyone who believes in you! Do you think you'll be able to face the ones who remain in your new world? Will Grillby ever forgive you if he knew what you had done?"

Voidster freezes.

You raise your voice. "Grillby may have forgotten some of the memories you shared. But he wants to start new ones with you! We all do Gaster! Come home! You don't need to stay here any longer!"
Like a star exploding, Gaster's Soul flashes with light and a deep purple color and then, the broken and cracked pieces begin to merge. And Gaster screams.

His hands smack against his face, digging in, desperately pulling. The surface of Voidster's skull, rather than cracking, almost seems to melt, the extra sockets closing and fusing back into smooth bone. Gaster pulls at the mess like it's some kind of sick, sticky mask. Underneath, you can see another skull, still obscured by the thick tendrils clinging to it. It holds on like it's alive, struggling to wrap itself back around Gaster's true face.

You hear the familiar hum of Blaster energy behind you and you duck out of the way as a beam of light cuts through the air. It's aimed at the thinning tendrils between Gaster's head and the white mass clutched in his hands. Sans' aim is dead on and the tendrils snap under the force of the attack. Gaster convulses and the white goop that made up Voidster's head goes slack. The Blaster summoned by Voidster vanishes in a thick cloud of glitches. The floating hands shudder violently for a moment before growing still and melting away into dust. Then Gaster himself collapses, his body caving in on itself, shrinking until it's a much smaller huddled mess black on the stone ground. As it falls, you can see thousands of glistening shards of white light rising away, dancing with freedom. They rush to you, brush against your skin and you feel the gratitude of the monsters who were caught in agony for so long before they vanish.

You turn around and catch Sans before he topples over. His eye lights are flickering weakly but his gaze is fixed on the slowly shifting form of his creator. He staggers forward and you half carry and half drag him over. As you approach a shape starts to rise out of the black mess. It's still tall, easily close to Papyrus' size and seemingly cloaked in the same oozing goop that made up Voidster's body. But you can make out the shifting outline of a coat and a turtle neck sweater that at one point might have been pristine white. Gaster's more solid than he was when he was attached to your Soul but he still looks unstable. The edges of his form are frayed and the lower half of his body is meshed into a single limb that pools out into a puddle. It's a little strange to see him so solid and so...real after getting used to his ghost like appearance in your world.

His skull is downcast and you can see that his hands are shaking. Slowly, his gaze rises to you and Sans. He gasps softly. "You...you did it."

Sans lets go of you, unsteadily stepping closer to Gaster. He doesn't say a word.

Gaster cringes a little, the lights of his eyes jittery. "S-Sans I'm...I'm..."

Sans stops just short of Gaster and stares up at him. Gaster's at least a good two feet taller than him. Then, with a world weary sigh, Sans reaches out and wraps his arms around him as best as he can. Gaster's sockets go wide as he stares down at his son, hands lifting helplessly.

"can we go home now?" Sans whispers.

The expression on Gaster's face crumbles. After a few hesitant motions he returns Sans' embrace, enveloping the smaller skeleton in the semi-fluid state of his arms. His sockets close, a translucent purple glimmer in the corners of his eyes. "I'm so sorry."

Sans just nods, his grip tightening as he starts to shake.

Your shoulders slump in relief and you find yourself aching to join them, but hesitant to intrude on their moment. So you look away, immediately tensing when you see Chara. They're just standing there quietly, an almost indifferent expression on their face. When your eyes meet, a small smile creeps over their face and they place a single finger on their mouth. They wink and they vanish. As they do so, the distorted area around you vanishes as well. You jump, your body reacting to the
suddenly lack of floor under you, but you don't drop into the nothingness. You just float there and so do the other two.

"There's no more time," Gaster whispers, pulling your attention back to them. Sans pulls away from the embrace, seemingly numb to the sudden lack of anything around the three of you. "You must leave. Now."

"How do we do that?"

Gaster lifts a hand, the bones of his brow furrowing. Your skin prickles as a shimmering line of light suddenly bursts into being. It's a short distance away (you think, without something solid to compare it to, distance seems relative) and seems to pull in the space around it. It's not very big, probably only a foot wide and just over three feet tall.

"What is that?" you ask, inching closer to Sans.

Gaster stares at the beam of light wearily. "It's the rip back to your timeline. Such a breach in time space would leave a mark fairly easy to find for someone who's used to looking for such things. It's closed right now and the Void, the uh, place not the-" 

His mouth twitches upwards slightly "Voidster being, is repairing it. A rip like that is not meant to exist."

"What happened to that thing?" The last thing you want is Voidster to pop back up again. You know that you didn't kill it, it's not possible. After all, the Void is this place. And it's something that cannot be destroyed.

"It's gone back to what it should be. I think." Gaster looks down at his hands. "The Souls have been released and...I think it finally let go. I'm...not sure what happened."

Sans takes your hand. "hey, let's uh, save the figuring out what happened til we're back, ok? i dunno about you guys but i need to take a nap for a couple of months."

You squeeze his hand, but frown at the narrow strip of light. "It's gonna be a tight fit."

"As it is right now, I'll have just enough energy to open it and keep it open long enough for you to slip through. But not for much longer. If it vanishes completely your timeline will disappear among all the others. It might be impossible to find again."

"let's get going then." Sans' voice is hoarse. He starts to tug you forward but you stay put, staring at Gaster. You really don't like the way he just said that.

"You mean long enough for us to slip through, right?"

Gaster meets your gaze. He opens his mouth for a moment before closing it. Something painful and sharp grips your heart.

Sans looks between the two of you, then at the closed rip and back to Gaster. "no."

"Sans-"

"no!" His voice cracks. "dings, you don't get to do that! not after everything we've been through. all of this-" he gestures wildly around himself and at you- "it can't have been for nothing!"

"It won't be."
"what?"

Gaster's hands fidget for a moment. "I only have enough magic left to open the rip one more time," he whispers. "Holding it open long enough for you to escape will drain what is left of me."

"But your Soul repaired itself!" Horror is threatening to make tears fall. "We saw it! You're back together!"

Slowly, he shakes his skull. He gestures to his chest and his Soul grows visible. While it has reshaped into something like the regular monster Soul shape, it is far dimmer than it should be and laced with deep thick cracks. But worse, there are still dark tendrils clinging to it. The white light pulsing from it is dim. "Expelling the influence of the Void, it...it damaged something. In my Soul and this body. It won't sustain me for much longer. My life is draining away as we speak."

The dull, matter of fact tone of his voice slams into you just how certain he is that it's happening. That saving you will kill him. "But that's not fair!"

A small grin tugs at Gaster's mouth. "Sadly, that is how life works it seems."

"Okay, so we'll just attach you to my Soul again. Same as last time," you say desperately. "The new body is ready, we've just got to get you there!"

He shakes his head. "No. I nearly killed you before and that was just a sliver of my essence. I won't risk it."

Sans is frozen, sockets black and empty. "so what, you're gonna open it up and just...fade away?"

Gaster looks at his son, an almost sadly peaceful expression on his face. "Fading away is something that should've happened to me a long time ago."

"but...." Sans hands clench into fists as tears begin to build in his sockets. "we just won. we won. this isn't...you're supposed to come back with us."

Slowly, Gaster pulls Sans back into another embrace. Sans seems to struggle with the desire to fight against the hold but lacks the energy to do so. He slumps, his hands covering his face.

"I want you to come with us," Sans chokes out. "i-i've got so many questions and...i gotta get you back for putting her through this, i can't do that if you're dead and stuck here after everything and paps wants to drive you around in his car once he gets his license-!"

Gaster's threatening to break down himself as he gently runs his hand over Sans' skull. "I'm sorry," he whispers.

"dings...dad, please."

It might be Sans finally calling him dad, it might be the gravity of the situation hitting him. But finally, Gaster breaks. A single sob escapes him and then tears course down his face and suddenly he's holding Sans just as tightly as his emotions overwhelm him. He cries heavily, his tears tinged with the purple hue of his magic. "I-I want to go," he sobs quietly. "I don't want to fade away."

"Then let's find a way!" you say strongly, fighting past your own tears. "There's got to be something-"
"There isn't." Gaster takes a slow, deep breath. He releases Sans and crosses over to you. You have to crane your neck slightly to keep eye contact with him. He shocks you by pulling you in for a hug as well. He's oddly solid, despite his constantly shifting body and warm with life. Then you feel something else. It's a sensation of power flowing into you and you take a sharp breath as you realize Gaster's returning your Determination.

"I believe that belongs to you. I'm sorry for taking it."

A strangled noise escapes you. This is the monster you shared minds with for weeks. You've seen his darkest moments, his happiest memories. Felt his regrets and his hope. Just as he's seen and felt all of yours. The circumstances that forced your bond might not have been something you wanted, but a bond was created nonetheless.

"I'm sorry for everything I've put you through," Gaster whispers in your ear. "Please, take care of my boys. And...keep an eye on Grillby for me, won't you?"

"Gaster-"

"Please."

"No!" You shake your head stubbornly. "No, you've got to come and do that yourself! Didn't I already give you a big lecture on taking responsibility? I'm not gonna let you off the hook that easily!"

Gaster laughs quietly, or it might be another sob. "I'm afraid that this time, you must." He places his hands on your shoulders, giving you and Sans a long, deep look. "Goodbye."

Suddenly, he pushes you and you feel yourself falling.

Sans cries out your name and then he's falling too. You instinctively reach out and take his hand before craning your neck to see the line of the rip growing closer. It strains and yawns open and beyond you can see the lab, wreathed in a bright light. Wait, no this can't be it! You try to dig your heels in, slow down a little, but there's nothing to stand on, you're just falling-!

Falling. You're falling down and Gaster is staying still, like the gravity isn't effecting him.

"Sans!" You scream, jabbing your finger back to Gaster. "Gravity!"

Sans' sockets narrow in confusion for just a moment before popping wide with understanding. He yells hoarsely, throwing his hand out as Gaster grows smaller and smaller. Sans suddenly jerks to a stop and you manage to hold on to him. Your feet lift upwards until you're parallel with Sans. The rip is mere inches away.

You can still see Gaster and he doesn't seem to be moving but there's a bright blue light emitting from his chest. His sockets are wide, confused.

"What's happening?" you scream to Sans.

Sans grunts, straining. "he's stuck! the void's not letting him go!"

Suddenly, shapes appear behind Gaster. Three gray shapes to be exact. And the fourth-

You turn your head to meet the white eyes of the arm-less monster. Sans follows your gaze, breath catching in shock. "you-!"
"Thank you. Both of you," the monster says with a gentle smile. "Take care of the doctor. And please, remember us."

The three other monsters shove Gaster. But instead of simply falling forward, Gaster's body begins to disintegrate. You almost scream until you realize that as his body disappears, his Soul grows brighter. Then, all wearing the same grateful smiles, the Forgotten Followers crumble into dust and the white particles fly towards Gaster's now exposed Soul. It pulses with life and suddenly shoots towards you, caught in the blue magic of Sans' power. The force keeping Sans in place snaps and both of you scream as you plunge through the rip back into your timeline. Gaster's Soul follows, very narrowly shooting out before the tear in space snaps close. The jolt of regular gravity slams into the two of you and you hit the floor hard. You groan as Sans curls into a ball, clutching the magic surrounding the Soul of his father.

Thanks to the shock of leaving the Void and somehow actually managing to bring Gaster's Soul with you, it takes you a moment to realize the danger isn't over yet. What you didn't realize is that the rip was linked to a specific time and place within your timeline. To be precise, it dumped you right back to nearly the same moment you were taken away. Somehow, in the confusion and rush of the moment, you had forgotten that Nahn had soaked the floor in gasoline. The light you saw when the rip first opened was the light of flames engulfing the room.

You've literally moved out of the frying pan and into the fire.
A Leap of Faith

Chapter Notes

Here we go! This is the final chapter. I'll save my mushy thoughts and feelings until the end but there is one last thing I would like you guys to do for me. When you've reached the end, please leave a comment telling me your thoughts, or a scene you loved (or hated). Tell me what I should work on, or your favorite pun. Anything you feel like saying, please don't hold back!

And if you want more of my writing, I will keep adding chapters to *It's A Little Early* which I actually just updated! This will have more adventures taking place during, before and after *It's Not Too Late* and I do take requests!

I've also started a brand new GrillbyxReader fic called *Ocean On Fire*. This is a brand new fic, unrelated to *It's Not Too Late* (though there will be some INTL easter eggs thrown in)

You can also keep up to date with original writings on my tumblr pages!

[Main Blog](#)
[Writing Blog](#)

So, one last time, enjoy and please, Feed the Comment Monster

See the end of the chapter for more notes

21:45

The little shop on the corner is one of the twenty-four hour, extended menu take-out places, thanks to the large community of college students in this area. As such, there is a constant line, no matter what hour of the night it is. Alphys fights the urge to fidget as she looks over the menu on the wall. She's visited this place so many times by this point the staff knows her by name. Then again, as much as she would prefer to be able to slip in and out, she stands out a little more than the average patron. But she's not looking for herself, she already knows what she wants. Sans asked her to get you something that would be easy to eat and light on your stomach. There are several soup options, so maybe that would be the best.

20:12

She runs her hand over her face, vainly attempting to wake herself up. She's exhausted. You all are. But this time, finally, it's almost over. She's kept quiet about her own fears about this working though. Seeing how close to panicking Sans has grown and how quickly your state has deteriorated is a horrifying reminder of her past mistakes. It's terrifying but voicing her own panic won't help. Still, that doesn't stop it from eating at her. What if this doesn't work? Sans had nearly killed himself trying to get you back when you were taken from him. If you were to d-die...

"Hey Doc." The bleary eyed student behind the counter breaks her out of her thoughts. "Usual?"

She nods. "A-and a cup of the pho ginger and lime soup and a s-side of fries please."
He doesn't comment on the odd assortment and she's soon balancing three takeout boxes in her hands.

18:34

She attempts and fails to open the door with her hip and another student is quick to hold it open for her. The warm air hits her exposed skin, pleasant after the cool air of the shop. "T-thanks."

"No prob...oh my God!"

At the student's sudden cry, Alphys leans around the take-boxes and promptly drops them. Food splatters across her feet and lab coat but she doesn't notice. Her hands fly to her mouth as she stares in horror at the sight of the burning science building. No! O-oh God no! She's not aware of the exact moment she starts running, focusing solely on plunging her hand inside her pocket. She fumbles with her phone, hands shaking. She can't take her eyes off the sight before her and automatically hits the speed dial for Undyne. Oh God, pick up, pick up!

Undyne's voice, gruff with sleepiness, is still warm with affection. "Hey! How's-

"The b-b-building! Y-you-! I've got to-! It's on fire!"

~~~

15:52

Grillby is proud of his bar. Keeping a clean, welcoming atmosphere is a top priority. Down in the Underground his bar was created to be a source of light and comfort to the creatures who desperately needed it. A safe haven where any monster was welcome. It is no different here on the surface, save for the expansion of his customers. He takes care to make a note of every face that comes in. He studies their motions, their expressions and uses what he sees to give them what they need, be that a simple meal, a warming drink or a listening ear. But above all, he keeps his cool no matter what.

Rather ironic for a being made of fire.

But it's what he wants. After being a symbol of destruction for so long, all Grillby wanted was to be a being who brought hope to others, even if it was just in some small way. So he trained himself to be in control at all times. To be someone who listens, watches and acts only when needed. He created this place to give himself a purpose, a reason to exist beyond the war that tore so many apart.

14:21

His control is slipping. His attention wanders even as his hands keep busy polishing glasses that need no cleaning. But how can he stay focused? How can he stay calm when the life of one of his friends is on the line? How can he remain still when is Soul is flaring and burning in his core, screaming at him that this strange being who brought this peril on you is someone dear to him? How can he pay attention when his mind is scrambling for memories just out of reach? He knows that voice, he knows that Soul clinging to the life of the one human he genuinely cares for. He can't shake the fear and anxiety that something big is happening, something that logic can't explain.

He rubs harder, the glass warping under the rising heat of his hands.

He doesn't notice.

13:37
Whispers start to rise into loud chatter and the horrified tones snap him out of his thoughts.

"Is this really happening?"

"The live report just came in."

"Which building is it?"

"The T. Fox Science Hall, over at the university down the road."

The university?

"I hope no one's inside."

His Soul lurches.

"Oh my God, the entire building is burning!"

The glass slips from his hands and for only the third time in his entire existence, Grillby drops and breaks a glass. But he doesn't bother to clean it up, he's already out the door, calling on the energy slumbering within his core to push him into a sprint far faster than any mere human or most monsters could reach. He races down the walkway, following the tugging sensation in his Soul. He's a mere streak of bright flame racing towards the university and he can only pray to whatever gods may exist that he won't be too late.

~ ~ ~ ~

3:59

"Alphys!" Undyne's fingers grip her phone so hard it creaks, threatening to shatter under her grip. "C'mon you gotta keep talking to me!"

"I...the whole thing...S-Sans..." Her voice is strained and cracking.

Undyne swears under her breath. "Papyrus you gotta drive faster!"

Papyrus, sitting in the driver's seat of the totally-not-stolen-merely-borrowed car belonging to his sister, stares ahead with wide sockets as his foot presses down harder on the pedal. Slowly, the speedometer creeps up and above the speed limit. "I NORMALLY DO NOT APPROVE OF BREAKING THE LAW BUT IN THIS CASE I THINK IT IS NECESSARY! I JUST HOPE WE DO NOT COME ACROSS ANY OFFICERS BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE MY LICENSE YET." Though his voice is shaking a little, his hands remain steady on the wheel.

"Don't worry about that and keep going." Toriel, shaken but firm holds on to Frisk in the backseat. She barely fits, the nubs of her horns grazing the ceiling.

"Turn here!" Undyne instructs suddenly. Papyrus yanks on the wheel, leaving behind dark skid marks on the road. The motion makes Undyne smack her head against the window. She groans, her eye flicking to the window instinctively. Her pain is quickly forgotten as she realizes that something very bright and moving very fast is quickly gaining on them. She just manages to make out the shape of Grillby as he shoots past them, a trail of flames flickering behind him like fireflies. Her jaw drops. "What the hell?!!"

"Language!"

"WAS THAT GRILLBY?"
"I-"

Her phone, still pressed up against her ear fin crackles suddenly with the sound of an explosion, masked slightly by Alphy's horrified cry. Her Soul sinks. "Pap, faster!"

Papyrus goes faster.

~~~~~~~~

2:37

Fire.

Fire, it's everywhere, it's burning, raging, growing, devouring!

You hear his voice, the voice of your grandpa calling your name in desperation, screaming as his flesh burns and blackens even as he wraps himself around your body, protecting you from the flames eating him alive.

You can't breathe, you can't see-!

The fire is everywhere, you can't escape it, you can't move, please, please someone-!

Again, he calls your name, desperate and scared.

No...it's not his voice. You know this voice.

"______!

You slowly lift your head. When did you curl into a ball? "S-Sans?"

Sans, his bones already covered in ash, struggles to his knees. His hands are clenched tightly around something, something pulsing with a very quickly dimming light. The upside down cracked heart shape encased in blue shifts up and down, like it can't decide which way gravity is pulling at it. Gaster's Soul! It made it out! You all made it out! You scramble over to Sans, barely noticing the sharps of broken metal and cement digging into your legs. Fire continues to rage around you, melting and warping the remains of the Soul extraction machine and all the other instruments in the lab.

Sans groans, hunching over the Soul. The light of his blue magic flickers and the edges of Gaster's Soul begins to crumble. "hurry! t-the body-i can't-!" He takes a deep shuddering breath. "get the body."

You try to stand, you try but the fire is still burning and every breath you take sends searing heat into your throat and your eyes want to water but it's too hot, the liquid has evaporated and you're back in that house, small and terrified as you scream for someone to save you-!

Sans calls your name again and you flinch violently. "I-I can't, I can't-!"

Huffing with effort, Sans scoots over on his knees, closing the distance between you. Unable to release his hands, he leans forward and taps his skull against your forehead. "you can do this," he whispers hoarsely. "you've got to. please."

You take another gasping breath, almost choking on the smoke around you. He's right, there's no choice. If you don't move, he'll die. You'll die. You haul yourself to your feet and stumble over to the container holding Gaster's body. Somehow it survived the fight and the fire, but the panel controlling it is sparking. It looks like it might blow at any moment. Desperately you look around and grab the
first large metal object you see. It's heavy and your arms tremble as you pick it up and throw it at the glass. It smacks against the tube and cracks spiderweb over the surface. The liquid within squirts out in thin sprays, hitting you in the face. One more! You grab it again and yell as you lift it above your head and bring it down on the broken glass with all your might.

It shatters under the second hit and the green liquid inside spills out, dousing you in the smelly stuff. Gaster's body, still so small and fragile, crumples to the floor of the tube. You reach in and yank away the wires still attached to it before lifting the body out. It's so light.

:45

The bond in your Soul flinches with pain at the same moment Sans cries out and you whirl around to see magical discharge dribbling from his nasal cavity. Sweat is rolling down his skull in streams. He's running out of magic. "hurry," he pleads and you run to him, gently cradling the small skeleton in your arms.

:25

You lay Gaster's body out on the ground and Sans lifts his hands, stares at the quivering Soul within for just a moment and then presses it down against the rib cage of the prone skeleton. "c'mon, c'mon," he whispers forcefully.

Something's wrong, the Soul is still hovering above the body, breaking apart at the edges.

:10

You cup your hands around the Soul and call on the very last of your magical energy. Green magic encases your hands and tendrils of it reach out to the Soul. "It's okay," you whisper. "It's going to be okay."

:3

The Soul trembles under the influence of you magic and slowly, so slowly, begins to lower into the body.

:2

Sans sighs, releasing his hold and you gently guide it down, using your healing energy to ease it's passage.

:1

The Soul sinks into the skeletal frame and the entire body jolts like it's been hit with an electric current.

And though you can't see it, the entire world shifts.

Papyrus shouts, his sockets flaring with color as his arms go stiff. Only Frisk, quickly wriggling out of Toriel's suddenly rigid grip saves the car from crashing by pulling hard on the steering wheel.

Asgore, rushing over to the scene in his own vehicle cries out, instinctively slamming on the brakes.

Monsters who are sleeping suddenly jerk awake, clutching at their heads. Monsters who are still up stumble and gasp. The few who aren't effected grab at their friends and family in a panic, not understanding the sudden wave taking over the ones who remember.
Alphys falls to her knees, mouth open. It's all coming back, all the memories and the time spent with the one called W.D Gaster. She barely notices the monster who runs past her into the burning building, the monster who falters for only a moment as the flames on his head erupt into sparking whites and blues.

You don't see any of that.

You only see the small but steady rise and fall of Gaster's ribs.

You only see the fire creeping closer.

"We've got to go," you whisper. You pull Gaster close, struggling to your feet. "Sans, we've got go."

"yeah." His voice is a ghost of a whisper. Shaking, he starts to stand. Then he collapses to the ground with a heavy sigh.

"Sans!" You drop to your knees, grabbing his arm. His sockets are black and empty and slowly they close. "Sans!"

He doesn't dissolve in your grip, he's still here and solid but passed out, expelled magic leaking from his now closed sockets.

"You've got to be kidding me!" you scream. "This is not the time for a nap! Wake up, damn it!"

He doesn't move, he's out for the count. What the hell are you supposed to do?! Carry both of them out of here?!

You've got no choice. You look around desperately, spot a lab coat that's only mildly singed and grab it. You quickly lay it out and place Gaster inside. You pick him up, tying the sleeves around your neck and the ends of the coat around your waist, making a makeshift carrier for him. He barely fits; his head sticks out and presses against your shoulder. It's awkward, but it will work. Then you grab Sans' arm and haul him up. Your knees nearly buckle under the weight of both skeletons but you grit your teeth and force yourself to move.

"I swear," you pant to the unconscious Sans, "You are so treating me to the vacation of a lifetime for this."

You reach the door and remember just in time not to grab the handle, which is probably too hot to touch. You're in the process of awkwardly wrapping part of the lab coat around your hand when you suddenly hear something over the roar of the fire. You almost don't recognize the voice because you've never heard it at such a volume.

Grillby calls your name, the sound muffled through the door. "Sans! Gaster! Where are you?"

You almost fall down right there with relief. "Grillby!" you scream, slamming your foot against the door. "In here! We're in here!"

The handle of the door wiggles but otherwise doesn't move. You hear a loud thud and the door trembles under the force but still doesn't open. "Stand back!"

You hobble away as fast as you can. There's a massive crack and Grillby knocks the door clean of it's hinges with a large burst of fire. It hits the ground in front of you, scattering sparks. His clothes are rumpled, untidy and his chest is moving like he's panting. You've never been so happy to see him. Your lip wobbles as he runs to you, steadying you as you stumble forward.
"Are you okay?" he asks urgently.

"Y-yeah."

The lighter orbs of his eyes dart to Sans and then to Gaster's head against your shoulder. Without another word, he takes Sans from you, lifting him in easily. "Follow me."

You do as he says, your own hands lifting to steady Gaster as you race as Grillby as best as you can. You notice that the flames around you seem to suddenly stop as if they've slammed up against an invisible wall as you make your way to the closer set of stairs and clear away a few paces in front of Grillby. It's almost like the parting of the seas but with fire. Still, even though Grillby is somehow pushing the flames in your path away, the floor under your feet is burned and dotted with holes. You keep your eyes down, watching where your feet land.

So you don't notice that the distance between you and Grillby has grown.

You don't look up until it's almost too late.

The groan of something very large and very heavy bending under pressure reaches your ears and both you and Grillby's heads snap up to see enormous cracks spreading across the ceiling. Plaster and dust rains down on you as the ceiling snaps and gives way. In the split second before you get crushed under broken ceiling you meet Grillby's eyes and both of you realize you're too far apart for him to grab you. He throws his hand out, a small ball of fire breaking away from his palm. It hits you square in the chest, harmless in it's heat but strong enough to knock you completely off your feet. You sail backwards and hit the ground hard as the floor behind you shudders with the force of the collapsing ceiling. Something cracks next to your ear. Gasping painfully, you realize that Gaster's head had smacked against the ground as well. The edge of his right socket is chipped and a small crack crawls up his skull.

You don't have the breath needed to swear. Heaving and choking on the smoke around you, you pull yourself up. Right where you were standing is a pile of broken ceiling, the remains of several computers and what looks like broken desks. Your way is completely blocked and there is no sign of Grillby and Sans. You get to your feet, clutching Gaster. Oh God, please, please don't let them be crushed, let them be okay!

"Gr-!" You cough violently. "G-Grillby! Are you okay?"

It takes a heart rending moment but you manage to make out his voice from behind the rubble. "We're fine! We're both okay! Are you hurt?"

"I'm fine!" you manage to call, though your voice burns painfully. You attempt to step closer, there's a space right at the top, maybe you can climb over but the floor groans threateningly under your feet the moment you take a step. It's a miracle it hasn't given out under the weight of all the rubble on top of it. "Grillby, get Sans out! I'll find another way!"

You don't have to see his face to know Grillby must be wrestling with abandoning you. "Can't...can't we-"

There's a snap and the pile of rubble shifts. You take a few steps away. "There's no time! We'll get out, I promise! Just go!"

Grillby lets out a yell of frustration. "I'll come back! Just get somewhere safe!"

You nod, unable to speak again and turn. Your mind races, trying to come up with options. There's no going back, the flames have reclaimed the path you took. But there is a classroom with a slightly
cracked door just to your left. You run to it, slamming your shoulder against it. It opens easily and you close it as quickly as you can. The room itself is still on fire, thanks to holes in the floor and ceiling but you can breathe a little easier in here. You step around the holes and make your way to the window. It takes a lot of effort but you manage to open one wide enough to stick your head out. The fresh air absolutely heavenly and you drink it in as best as you can with your smoke damaged throat. Looking down, you see the parking lot in front of the building is crawling with people and monsters. It seems someone notices you in the window because the roar of voices suddenly grows and heads turn to look up at you.

This distance between you and them is dizzying. You're up on the fourth floor, about fifty feet up from the ground. The window has a small ledge under it, sticking out just far enough for your feet to fit. Beneath that is another window and ledge at the top. If you lower yourself down carefully, you might be able to hang from the first ledge, and drop the few inches to the next one. You look back into the room behind you. It's not going to be long before this room is engulfed in flames as well. There's no time to wait for Grillby to come back and clear a path. Oh this is stupid, this is stupid! Steeling yourself, you shove the window open a little bit more and, moving slowly, crawl outside. Heart in your throat, you gingerly lower your feet against the ledge. It holds, thank God but you can't bring yourself to let go of the window pane.

The people down there are screaming now, you can hear sirens approaching but the noise doesn't help your legs to stop shaking. What are you doing, this is crazy, you're going to die!

You freeze as you feel Gaster stir. He doesn't wake, but he's alive.

Which means you need to suck it up and do this. Just go step by step. Turn around. Make sure your hands have a good grip. Slowly lower yourself. Remember to breathe.

Your arms shake as you fight to slowly lower yourself to the next ledge. The stone of the wall does give you a little traction so you're able to 'walk' your feet down until you're hanging from the ledge. You can feel the next one right under your toes so you take a breath and let go. It takes less than a second for your feet to hit the stone but you still feel like your heart nearly gives out. But you did it. Only a few more to go. You do the same thing again, but this time your feet scramble for purchase against the window rather than the wall. But the distance is shorter so you manage to get yourself steadied easily enough.

You glance back over your shoulder at the people below. The fire truck has arrived and you can see the firefighters darting around, clearing people away so they can bring the truck closer and send the ladder up. A small laugh of desperate relief bubbles in your chest. Okay, okay, you've just got to hold on until they reach you. That's all. Your eyes catch more movement and you see Grillby run to the edge of the crowd and...oh everyone's here. Papyrus, Frisk, Toriel and Undyne run to meet them, Alphys crashing against her girlfriend. And...

There's Sans, he's clearly awake now, clearly shouting though you can't make out his words. Grillby sets him down and turns to go back in. Sans immediately tries to run after him too, only to have his knees buckle under him. He must be terrified, he doesn't know you're right here!

"Sans!"

He must hear you, he must because he looks up and you meet his gaze and the distance between you seems to shrink. His sockets are wide with terror but you feel the bond of his Soul flare with hope. It's going to be okay, you're going to be....

The sudden flare of light from inside the room you're standing outside of draws your attention. Inside, you see the remains of a mechanical shop and something has just exploded. There's a wall of
fire racing towards you, it's going to blow the window out, you don't have a chance of surviving it. So you do the only thing you can.

You let go of the ledge and jump. You feel the sudden rush of heat at your back, pushing you out further as you plummet to the ground. You see Sans throw his hand out, feel the tug on your Soul fizzle away just as quickly as it grabs you, that's right, he's out of magic he can't catch you and you can only curl around Gaster and hope that maybe your body will cushion his, that he'll survive-

**DING**

The world slows down. You blink. Is this your life flashing before your eyes? No, you can still see Sans, utterly frozen, hand still reaching towards you. But...there's a pressure in your chest, your Soul is blue, how is he...?

"THAT WAS VERY CLOSE!" Papyrus, his scarf flapping in the wind created by the flames of the burning building holds his arms out to catch you as you very gently float the rest of the distance down. A great cheer erupts from the crowd as your Soul flashes back to it's regular color and you land in his arms, safe and secure. Papyrus smiles at you but it doesn't quite hide the anxious rattling of his bones. "NEXT TIME YOU DECIDE TO JUMP OFF OF A BURNING BUILDING, PLEASE GIVE ME A LITTLE MORE WARNING OKAY? IT IS LUCKY THAT I HAVE FANTASTIC REFLEXES!"

You stare at him for a moment, the shock keeping you still as you fight to process what just happened. "P-Pap...you..."

"Shhh," he says, his voice lowered. He taps his teeth against your forehead as he carries you away from the fire. "You're safe now."

A giggle builds in your chest as you hug him as best as you can with Gaster still tied to your chest. "That was...Papyrus you are so cool!"

"NYEH HEH! YOU ARE THE ONE WHO JUST BRAVELY LEAPT FROM A BUILDING!"

"pap!"

You turn your head to see Sans stumbling towards you. Papyrus gently sets you down and you run to Sans, scarcely able to believe it. He looks like he's barely managing to stop himself from crashing into you as his hands touch your face, run over your arms and tightly grasps your fingers. After a moment, his eyes drop to the filthy lab coat still tied to you. Carefully, he helps you untangle yourself from the cloth and lowers Gaster to the ground. You tuck the coat around him as best as you can to give him a small measure of privacy. You can hear Undyne and Toriel asking people to stay back and Papyrus joins the two of you on the ground, his sockets tight with concern.

"dings?" Sans calls out. He presses his hands against Gaster's head, gingerly examining the new crack on his skull. "dings, c'mon you gotta wake up."

Your heart clenches painfully in your chest. "Gaster, I literally just jumped from a burning building to save us. I'm gonna be really mad if you..."

You can't bring yourself to say it.

Papyrus startles you by leaning over and taking one of Gaster's limp hands. His new body is tiny compared to Papyrus. "Dad I...I remembered."

You and Sans jerk in shock.
He continues, speaking softly to Gaster. "I think everyone else did too. I don't know what happened or why, but I remember. That's what you wanted, right? You wanted us to remember and we did. So now...I want you to wake up. Please."

Gaster's hand twitches and then...his sockets slide open. His spine arches slightly as he gasps, like a drowning man breaking above water, you instinctively reach out, helping him as he struggles to sit up. He looks around wildly at the three of you. You don't know if it's because his Soul is finally inside the body but...it looks like him. The shape of his face, the set of his teeth and slightly angled cheekbones and even the accidental crack above his socket. He look just like he did before the accident, albeit smaller than he was before.

You're smiling widely without realizing it as Gaster's gaze falls on you. "Hey. Welcome back to the world Gaster."

Sockets wide, Gaster stares down at his new hands, opening and closing them several times. His mouth opens and quietly, he speaks. His voice cracks and warbles but it's undoubtedly his. "I...how..."

"I think it was your assistants." You realize with a jolt that you never learned their names. At this point, you probably never will. "They helped us, right up until the end."

Slowly, Gaster nods. His hands, now whole and in one pieces very gingerly touches the space where his Soul vanished into his body. "They...they gave what was left of their Souls to me. They pulled my Soul together and..." He hunches over slightly, his shoulders heaving. "After everything I did to them-!"

You gently tap his shoulder and he looks back up. "They asked me to save you," you say softly. "They don't blame you for what happened to them."

"I...k-know." Gaster takes a deep shuddering breath and looks at Sans and Papyrus. His expression crumbles all over again. "Boys, I'm so sorry. I'm sorry for everything I've d-done. I know it's taken me far too long to say it. But I'm so proud of you and the monsters you became."

Papyrus beams, his own tears spilling from his sockets. "I'VE MISSED YOU SO MUCH," he says, barely managing to stop himself from sobbing. "EVEN WITH MY MEMORIES GONE I MISSED YOU. BUT NOW THEY'RE BACK!"

"You...remember?"

"YES! I DID JUST TELL YOU BUT I GUESS YOU WOULDN'T HAVE HEARD ME SINCE YOU WERE PASSED OUT." Papyrus gestures around. "THERE WAS THIS WEIRD MOMENT WHEN MY BONES FELT ALL TINGLY AND THEN EVERYTHING CAME BACK! THE SAME THING HAPPENED TO UNDYNE AND THE QUEEN AND-"

Gaster looks stunned. "But...but how? I don't..."

Sans lets out a tired chuckle. "hey, how about we figure that out later?"

You nod and take his hand. "Yeah, the why isn't important right now. We did it."

He squeezes your fingers, his tired smile wobbling. "we did it," he repeats. "we...we did..." His face starts to scrunch up and then, like he can't hold it back anymore, large tears start to roll down his face and a loud sob breaks from him and that starts your water works too and then he's holding you and you're holding Gaster and Papyrus has his arms wrapped around all three of you and you're all
crying with sheer relief and happiness.

"Thank you," Gaster whispers in your ear.

You nod, unable to speak but then you catch a glimmer of light in the corner of your eye. You lift your head to see Grillby standing there so you untangle yourself from the hug pile and throw yourself at him. He reels back at little at the force of your hug.

"You came for us," you whisper, squeezing him tightly. You can feel the heat of his flames through his clothes and it soothes you, helps your tears to slow slightly.

Grillby gently returns your hug. "Of course I did," he murmurs. "I'm just sorry that I didn't do more."

You shake your head, pulling away. "You saved our lives Grillby. I wouldn't have gotten out with them both on my own."

"Grillby?"

You release Grillby and step aside. Gaster has stood up, clutching the coat around him. It's far too big and makes him look even smaller than he actually is. Hesitantly, he approaches Grillby; his head only reaches to the fire elemental's waist. A weak grin lifts his mouth. "So...do you remember too?"

Grillby stands perfectly still for just a moment and you wonder if maybe he doesn't, maybe it was just Papyrus who got his memories back. But then you realize his shoulders are shaking, just barely and his voice is choked as he says, "It's good to see you, my old friend."

Gaster nods and nods again as he brings his hand up to wipe away the tears falling down his face. "I've m-missed you."

"I've missed you too." Grillby kneels down so they are at eye level and pulls the skeleton in for a tight embrace that speaks of a deep friendship and love so dear it brings fresh tears to your eyes.

You feel Sans' hand wrap around your waist. He pulls you close and you lean your head against his shoulder. He smells of smoke and sweat and every inch of him is coated in ash save for the trails his tears made on his face. You're sure you look no better.

"I want a bath," you announce quietly.

"same."

"Then I want to sleep for a couple of days."

"me too."

"Then I want to buy that house with the terrible paint job and spend every night looking out at the stars with you."

"sounds like a plan."

"...hey Sans, guess what?"

"what?"
You lift your head, meeting his gaze. "We're still here."

His smile, finally free of stress and worry and pain, is nearly blinding. "we're still here."

3 Months Later

"hey, kiddo, what's blue and smells like red paint?"

"SANS STOP."

Frisk snorts and shrugs, lifting their eyebrows in challenge.

"blue paint!" Sans snickers loudly, not even a little bit sorry for the corny joke.

"Sans that was just hue-miliating," you say seriously.

"aw buddy you cut white into my soul."

Undyne screeches and throws her arms up, splattering light blue paint from her brush all over the place. Fortunately, you had taken the precaution of covering absolutely everything with protective tarps when Sans suggested bringing everyone over to help with painting the house. There's already quite an array of colors all over the ground. It's actually kind of pretty.

"Are you nerds taking this seriously or not?" She waves the brush threateningly in your face.

You meet Sans' gaze and shrug. "I'm sorry you're bristling at our puns!"

"I'M DISOWNING YOU BOTH!" Papyrus stomps his feet, upending the remaining paint still in the bucket. "ARGH!"

Sans laughs loudly and as such, is caught off guard when Frisk slaps their hand on his cheek, leaving a blue handprint on a good portion of his face.

Sans you look a little blue! they sign, an utterly evil grin on their face.

The look of indignation wrestling with pride on his face makes Frisk and the others howl with laughter. Only you see the flash of panic that widens his sockets for less than a moment.

You quickly catch his eye and he nods. Your shoulders slump in relief.

"Hey! We s-should leave our hand prints on the wall in remembrance of our teamwork!" Alphys says brightly, looking up from filling in one of the Echo flowers painted on the wall.

Papyrus brightens too, dropping the paper towel he had been using to attempt to clean his paint spattered boot. "THAT IS AN EXCELLENT IDEA!"

"We'll have to wait until the paint dries, but..." You look around, finally deciding next to the door would be best. "Let's do it there after everyone eats."

"Speaking of eating, Grillby's got the fire pit set up." Gaster leans his head in through the open
sliding glass door. "So as soon as you're done we'll..." he trails off, brow bones lifting as he takes in the mess of paint on the floor and on all of you. "After you wash up, we can start" he amends. He looks to you as he carefully steps around the spreading paint puddle. "You've got napkins in the pantry, correct?"

"Yep, brand new package."

Gaster heads into the kitchen and you take a look around the living room. Mess aside, it really does look much nicer than it did before. The hideous green color is gone and in it's place is a mural of the various places in the underground. You, Papyrus and Frisk spent a good two weeks carefully drawing out the shapes to represent Snowdin, Waterfall and Hotland spread across the four walls. Or rather, Papyrus drew it out and you and Frisk just tried to keep up. His skill is truly impressive and you are blown away with how it looks so far. There's still a bit of work to go but you decide to call it good for now. Besides, the mention of food has your stomach rumbling.

"Come on, let's clean up," you say to Sans. "If you guys want to finish what you're working on, we'll call it a day."

Sans follows you into the kitchen right as Gaster emerges from the pantry with a handful of napkins.

"aw, you're not wearing the sweater i sent you," Sans says with a wide grin.

Gaster scowls lightly. "You mean the striped sweater for children that you forced Papyrus to go out and buy and even sign for you?"

"yeah that's the one."

He just huffs. He is indeed not wearing the sweater Sans sent him but a plain dark red turtleneck and jeans. He's already grown like crazy since that first night. He's already just an inch or so from passing you in height. He's got a theory that it's because his Soul is already matured and is forcing his body to catch up. At the rate he's going, he's told you that he expects to be back to 'normal' in as little as another six months. As such, his wardrobe changes constantly to accommodate his quickly changing size. Sans had mentioned wanting to help out with that. Sending a sweater meant for children is pretty much what you expected from him.

When you first bought the house, it was pretty much unanimously decided that Gaster wouldn't be staying with you. After everything that's happened, it would be better if Sans and Gaster got used to being around each other slowly. Sans may have forgiven Gaster for everything and understands that a lot of what traumatized him wasn't caused by Gaster himself but...well.

It's better to take it slow. So for now, Gaster is staying at Grillby's place which seems to make everyone happy. Especially Gaster, going by the constant smile on his face whenever he's around Grillby. He's spending his days going between helping Grillby at the bar with Fuku and working with Alphys to restore her lab. The two of them are still trying to work out why exactly everyone's memories of him returned the moment his Soul latched onto his new body. The running theory is that it's exactly because his Soul was finally given a place back into the alpha timeline.

You keep up to date on their findings, but you don't concern yourself too much. You've had more than enough sciencing to last you for the rest of your life.

Gaster shifts his hold on the napkins and heads back out to the yard. Sans walks to the sink and starts running the water.

"It's almost scary how fast he's growing," you say lightly. "But Alphys said he should be fine,
Sans nods absently, rubbing his hands under the water. "everything is normal, just super accelerated," he murmurs. "it's still kinda weird though, huh?"

"Super weird." You pull a towel out of the drawer, slowly realizing that Sans has gone stiff. The water from the faucet pours over his still hands so you gently pull them back and wet the towel. "I'm gonna touch you now, okay?"

He nods slowly and you gingerly wipe away the paint. His gaze is distant.

It's been a rough three months. For both of you. Sans still hasn't told you everything that happened to him in the time Voidster spent torturing him. But the nightmares, the panic attacks, the way that he sometimes flinches away from contact from others speaks for itself. He wakes screaming more often than not these days and you have to hold him, assure him that he's still here in the real world and not back in the hell that Voidster put him through. It's been hard for you too and at times you feel like some part of you will never fully heal from what happened.

But you've been broken for a long time. You've learned to take those broken pieces and make them work. This will be the same. You both just need time.

Once you finish cleaning his cheek, you set the towel aside and slowly place your arms around his waist. His head turns to nuzzle your cheek. "You good?" you ask gently.

He heaves a deep sigh. "yeah. just...heh, caught off guard."

"I can tell them not to do that-"

"nah." He shakes his head. "i don't want to be treated like piece of glass yanno? it just reminds me of...well everything. i want things to keep going as they are." He turns slightly until your chest is pressed against his ribs. "this place is good," he murmurs. "being here with everyone is good."

You kiss him tenderly. You understand what he means. "It's very good," you murmur, your lips ghosting above his mouth. You feel his hands slowly rub circles into your back, warm and comforting.

And just like that your stomach rumbles. You flush and Sans chuckles. "let's get some food in you. grillbz said he brought his best 'dogs and burgers for this."

He takes your hand and leads you out into the backyard. Everyone has already started in. Grillby is at the grill, working on a batch of burgers. Gaster is at his side, laughing warmly at something Grillby just said. Papyrus and Undyne have hot dogs speared on sticks and seem to be competing to see who can cook theirs faster without it catching on fire over the open pit (Papyrus wins and Undyne is stuck with a blackened 'dog). Alphys watches them warmly and Frisk and Toriel work on putting the final touches on the table of dressings and chips.

"Hey, I'll be right back," you tell Sans. You duck back inside heading towards your shared room. Unpacking is taking forever and you have to step around half emptied boxes. But you know what you're looking for and it only takes you a minute to find it. You grip the black taped up box tightly in your hands, studying it's surface for a moment. You release your held breath and after years of fighting against the urge, you peel back the tape. Inside are the box of matches, the broken and faded razor and the wrinkled picture of your grandpa. You set the picture aside on the desk and take the rest with you back into the yard.

Sans watches you as you walk over to him. His gaze falls questioningly to the box in your hands.
You smile at him easily. The others seem to sense that you want to say something and fall silent, looking at you expectantly.

"I...I've made a lot of mistakes in my past," you say softly. "Things that helped to shape who I am. Last year, I never could've imagined that I would have a family like this. You guys accepted me when I didn't accept myself and I love you all for that. You guys have seen me at my worst and my best and..." You're starting to get choked up and feel Sans touch your back lightly. "I love you all so much. You've helped me to accept the worst parts of myself and change into a better person."

And with that, you toss the black box into the fire pit and watch it burn. And then you find yourself smothered in a massive group hug with Sans, Papyrus, Frisk, Uyndyne, Alphys, and Toriel. Gaster drags Grillby over and they join in as well.

"We love you you big nerd!"

"THE GREAT PAPYRUS COULDN'T ASK FOR A BETTER SISTER!"

"I'm s-so happy you chose to stay with us."

"My child, you are family, always and forever," Toriel says warmly, sounding a little choked up.

You laugh, wiping away the tears building in your eyes. Sans squeezes your hand, his own happiness sparking in your bond. Surrounded by such love and warmth, you have no doubt in your mind that this is where you belong. This crazy, wonderful life is yours.

It's finally yours.

Chapter End Notes

Holy cow. So...that's it! I can't tell you guys how much it means to me that you've joined me on this crazy journey.

When I first started It's Not Too Late, I never imagined that it would grow and become the story that it is today. I've learned so much as a writer and a story teller and I will be forever grateful to you guys. My entire life has changed drastically since I first sat down and decided to join the hype of writing a story about falling in love with a fictional skeleton. I've struggled and cried and at times, I wanted to give up on this story. I've had days where the only thing that kept me from making a terrible choice was you guys telling me how much you loved my writing. I struggle with intense depression and anxiety and I have many, many faults but I can easily say I am proud of what I've managed to accomplish here.

I hope that in some way my story touched your heart. I hope that I made you smile, or brightened your day, even just a little. That makes the struggle worth it. That makes me want to continue telling stories and creating worlds that people can get lost in. To everyone who has sent me fanart, or talked to me on tumblr or left comments here, you have my undying gratitude and love. Thank you. Thank you for sharing your thoughts with me.

I'll leave you guys with this. No matter what has happened in your life, it is NEVER too late to take a single step in a new direction.
Thank you to each and every one of you.
After Story Part 1: Hey, Don't You Owe Me A Vacation?

Chapter Notes

Why hello there! It's been a while! I've received some requests for little one shot pieces and when I started working on them, I realized that they would be better off tacked onto the main story. So this is combining some of those and adding onto some more ideas I've had. This after story will contain 2 parts so check back soon for the second half! I hope you enjoy!

Also! If you haven't yet, be sure to check out my other Undertale work, 'Ocean on Fire' which has 5 chapters so far!

Woooooh boy we've got a bunch of fanart! Check them out!
A lovely INTL moodboard!
A Group Hug
We're Still Here
Goodbye and Thank You
In Which Gaster is Simba

Your skin itches with the tickling sensation of sweat creeping down your back. Every breath brings a fresh stab of fire in your throat. You attempt to shift your stance and your legs threaten to give out with the slight motion. But you grit your teeth, calling on whatever reserves of strength you have left. You faced off against the physical manifestation of the Void! You saved the world! You will not be defeated by this thing! A ragged yell rips from your throat as you thrust your arm out, supporting the limb with your right hand. Your fingertips feel icy, tingling with power and the particles of light lifting from your hand are starting to gather together and form into something solid, something tangible that you can use...yes, yes this time-!

You hiss with pain at the sharp tug in your Soul and you know it's not going to work. The bright spark of magic sputters and fades. The enemy before you exactly what it's been doing every time you stand in front of it.

Absolutely nothing. As most dummy's do, it simply sits there and though it has no way of mocking you, you can't help but feel like the blank face is holding contempt for you.

This time, the noise you make is one of frustration as you let yourself drop to the thick grassy ground in your backyard as Undyne tries to hide her disappointment. Considering how long she's been working with you, it's actually surprising that she's been as patient as she has been. Of course, that might have something to do with Sans lingering just a few feet away every time you have a sparring session with her. He never protested you doing this, but you can tell he's a little concerned and never exactly happy about it. Of course, his mood probably has more to with-

"Here, drink."

You look up and accept the bottle of water from Gaster, chugging the cold liquid desperately. You gasp quietly as you drain the bottle and toss it aside. The skeleton kneels next to you and takes your hand, carefully observing your fingertips. Though his hands no longer contain the holes his old body used to, you can't help but picture them there every time you see his hands.
"Did it burn this time?"

You nod, still trying to get your breath back. "A little. Cold."

"Pain in your Soul?"

Another nod.

Gaster frowns and releases your hand. He digs a small notebook out of his over-sized coat pocket and flips through a few pages. "That's odd. Going by my records, your magic should've recovered after the last...." His sockets narrow at you. "Have you been practicing on your own?"

There's no point in lying to him. After spending all that time in your Soul, Gaster knows you well enough to know when you are lying, even if no one else does. So you keep quiet and his expression tightens further.

"I told you not to practice without me or Undyne present," he says sternly as he stands. "We are in uncharted territory and if you push yourself, you might permanently damage yourself. You're close to a burnout, which is exactly why I told you to keep to my schedule."

Call you crazy, but getting lectured by someone who (physically at least) appears to be a young teenage skeleton is a little humiliating and discouraging. You're too worn out to give him more than a withering look. "Look, it's not...I just practiced a little. I was feeling fine-"

Gaster cuts you off and he actually has the nerve to wag a finger at you. "Oh sure, you're fine until your Soul decides it's had enough and gives out after everything you've been through because you weren't patient and pushed too far."

You scowl as you look down at your hands. He's right but you can't help it! You just don't understand. It was so...well, not exactly easy but it was certainly easier to call on your magic while you were in the Void. It was hard to control but it was there and it came to life when you called for it. But ever since you came back to the real world and Gaster approached you about testing to see exactly what you could do, it's like your hold on it has slipped. Instead of trying to control a beam of energy, you're fighting desperately to catch a gust of wind with your bare hands.

When you first started training with Undyne, about a month after you moved into your new house with Sans, the weakness in your magic wasn't surprising. You had been spending all that time just trying to recover. After all, in the grand scheme of things, four months wasn't a long time to have to recover after nearly being devoured by something that wasn't supposed to exist. But as time went on and you made no progress, your own frustration had started to grow. At first, Gaster thought that maybe it was his presence that gave you the power in the first place and you had used up everything you had while you were in the Void. But deep down, you know that's not the case. It's still there, you know it is.

"I just don't get it," you huff, letting yourself flop onto your back. The grass is slightly damp thanks to the rain last night and you can feel it soaking into your shirt. "Why is it so hard now?"

Undyne plops down next to you. "Are you even trying to picture your attacks as shapes?"

That was one of the first things they suggested you try. Most monsters learned from an early age that giving their magic some sort of shape and solid form made it easier to control. Before there was no need to practice that and Alphys has a theory that because of the fluid state of your Soul, you were
able to grasp and use the raw state of your magic when you really needed it. So, now that your Soul has gone more or less back to normal, you need to actually practice picturing your magic as a tool. Much like how Undyne uses spears and Sans, Paps and even Gaster use bones. But nothing you've tried so far has stuck. Daggers, arrows, a spear, heck, you'd even tried to form bones like the skeletons in hopes that your ties to Sans' Soul would help it to stick. By now, you've become desperate enough to try simple shapes like squares and ovals.

"Nothing feels right," you grumble to Undyne. "Everything I try to picture just feels...off."

Undyne huffs and lies down over your stomach, pinning you against the wet grass. "Well duh, it's not going to feel right if it's not the right form. You gotta feel it in your gut!"

"I can't feel anything in my gut right now," you choke, squirming to free yourself. "Am I really just supposed to know?"

Ignoring your flailing legs, Undyne huffs loudly. "I can't teach you how to shape it. It's something that monsters just feel inside."

Just feel it, huh? You look to Gaster, who's tapping a phalange against his chin in thought. Your question dies away and you resign yourself to your fate pinned under a fish monster. Your view of the heavens is suddenly obstructed by a large white skull.

"so uh, are you planning on just lying there?" Sans asks, his brow bones lifted slightly. "i'm all for sleeping on the ground but there are considerably drier places to nap."

"I just want to engrave my essence in the Earth," you deadpan. "Become one with the soil and all that."

"oh. shame, guess that means you won't be going on the beach trip with us tomorrow."

"Now, now, I never said that," you reply, quickly enough that Sans grins.

The last few months have been rough, to say the least. Not only did you have to deal with the aftermath of escaping the Void (which brought on all kinds of night terrors and heart stopping anxiety), you had to deal with the police investigation as to why the university building caught on fire. Telling the full truth was out of the question; how could you even begin to explain the presence of the Void? Not to mention...it's really none of their business. You and Sans were able to quickly come up with a very basic explanation: The two of you had been working on healing the damage done to your Soul thanks to Tod's work and were caught off guard when Nahn showed up with crazy ideas of revenge. There was a fight, Sans defended you and Nahn accidentally set the fire before she and her goon could escape. Fortunately, there was a street camera that just barely caught Nahn and her partner sneaking into the building and the lack of body remains was blamed on the extreme heat of the fire. As for the strange small skeleton covered in ash? Why, that's just a shy monster who agreed to help with healing you and got caught up in everything. It took work, but you were eventually put in the clear.

Not that the press was done talking about it. First you survived an abduction, torture and even helped to free the other captives and then you escaped mostly unscathed (in their eyes) from another attack by Tod's crazed partner? The internet is eating it up. They've also taken a great interest in your relationship with Sans and while you've never really hidden it, you aren't comfortable with having your private life picked apart. There's been a lot of quick shortcuts and narrow escapes from getting cornered by reporters and Sans is equally on edge about the whole thing.

Add all of that to moving, setting up your new house and finding that your so called magic powers
seemed to have all but vanished, you and Sans both agreed it was time to step away for a bit. After swapping ideas, you both decided to take a trip down to the shoreline. And by the two of you, you of course mean all of you. While you are privately hoping for some along time with Sans, you know how much the others would enjoy a trip too. You brought the idea up to Toriel and she was more than happy to help you plan it out. She's told you that she's taken care of all the hotel reservations and to put all other charges in her name. You feel a little guilty, but she's insistent and it is a huge weight off of your shoulders.

Sans pokes Undyne with his slippered foot until she rolls off of you and presses her face into the wet ground. She seems content there so you take Sans' offered hand and get to your feet. He helps you brush off the bits of grass clinging to your back.

"your butt is covered in dirt," he informs you cheerfully.

"Thanks."

Gaster, snapped out of his train of thought, puts his notebook away before pulling out his phone. "We'll call it good for today," he says, digits tapping over the keys. "I'm serious: no more practicing without one of us present."

"don't worry dings, i'm gonna make sure she takes it easy during the trip." Sans pulls you close and you don't miss the quick glance he gives your Soul.

It seems Gaster saw it too because his own mouth pulls back into a small smile. "Well, I'll be able to make sure of that myself."

You perk up. "I thought you weren't going?"

As it stands now, you'll be traveling with Sans, Papyrus, Frisk, Toriel, Alphys and Undyne and (to your slight surprise) Asgore down to a private hotel near the beach. You had extended the invite to Gaster, Grillby and Fuka as well but Fuka was already going out of town with friends and Grillby wasn't sure he'd be able to get the time off away from the restaurant. Gaster had also bowed out due to 'reasons' he hadn't specified.

Gaster scratches at his face, a small hint of purple coloring his cheeks, lifting his phone slightly. "Grillby just talked Heats into running the bar for a few days. So since he's going...." he trails off, shrugging.

"Oh! Well that's good to know." You smile sincerely. Aside from coming over to work on figuring out why you can't use your magic, Gaster hasn't been spending a lot of time around the rest of you. You see him at Grillby's sometimes, sitting alone and seemingly content with just watching his close friend work. He's giving you all space, which you appreciate but...there's a part of you that actually kinda misses the guy. Sans won't say it, but you can tell that he feels the same way. This might be a good chance for the skeleton family to spend some more time together and get used to actually being around each other again.

Gaster steps over Undyne, who's finally lifted her head. "I'll get going then," he says. He stops in front of you, giving you a serious look. "Get some rest tonight. I understand that you're frustrated but it really hasn't been that long since everything happened. There's no rush."

You lower your eyes away from Gaster. You feel something in your chest twist a little and Sans squeezes your hand. "Yeah, I guess you're right," you mumble.

After a moment, Gaster puts a hand on your shoulder. His hand, still smaller than normal, squeezes
gently. "We'll figure this out," he says quietly. "I promise." Then his hand is gone and he's vanished inside the house, probably headed right back to Grillby's.

Undyne pulls herself up as well. She's got a streak of mud on her face. "I'll get going too," she says as she stretches. "Al probably still hasn't picked out her bathing suit."

You nod. "See you in the morning."

She flashes you a sharp toothed smile and leaves, tracking mud into the house. You sigh internally but at least it's wood flooring and not carpet. Another perk of buying this place. You look to Sans who is again staring at your Soul. "Guess we better finish packing too, huh?"

His gaze drifts upwards and he gives you a sheepish smile.

"Or...maybe start packing?"

"heh."

You laugh quietly and head inside yourself. The painted walls, the warm feeling that fills your heart helps to soothe what remains of your frustrations. Gaster's right; there is no hurry. Not really. You turn to Sans. "I'm going to take a shower before Papyrus gets home from work. Why don't you at least pretend to start packing?"

He groans. "if i gotta."

You hum thoughtfully as you start down the hall towards the master bathroom. "Or...I guess you could join me, if you want to."

A smug grin crosses your face at the quick sound of his feet against the wood floor as he hurries to catch up.

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In order to avoid any of the press lingering around, you've all agreed to leave bright and early and take different cars. Frisk and Toriel will be in Asgore's large bright yellow car, Undyne and Alphys are hitching a ride with you and the boys and Gaster and Grillby said they had transportation and would catch up on the way. Sans is actually the one who wakes you up; you always feel super drained after training with your magic and trying to wake up feels like wrestling with several tons of weight piled on you. His sockets are bright and eager as he and Paps load up the suitcases into your trunk. You fix the boys a quick breakfast while they're doing that and then you're off to pick up the other two. Undyne practically leaps out of the door, with Alphys trailing behind sleepily. She climbs into the back with you and Sans while Undyne claims the front seat. Papyrus got his license recently and he is very proud of that. You agreed to let him drive, at least part of the way because despite his boisterous attitude about it, he's actually a very careful and alert driver. Three hours is a long trip for someone not used to driving though and you made a compromise to let him drive until the first gas stop. Sans of course, is more than happy to snuggle up against you in the back until then. Between him and Alphys, it's a snug fit and you feel your eyes drooping thanks to the warmth on either side of you.

"Are you excited?" you murmur to Sans as you put your head down on his shoulder. Thanks to his jacket, it's a fairly comfortable headrest.

He hums quietly, not that you really need him to answer. You can feel it in your bond; the way his Soul flutters and dances at the thought of finally seeing the ocean warms your own heart. You and Frisk are the only ones who have been before. Everyone else had planned to but with everything that
happened so soon after settling into the city, there just hadn't been a chance.

"No sleeping!" Undyne roars, making you jump. "We've gotta get pumped up!" She pulls out a handful of CDs and, after some quick intervention by you, manages to put one in the player without breaking it. The Beach Boys begin to blare from your stereo and soon, you're all singing along even though you don't know half of the words. It helps the time pass quickly and soon you find yourself back up in the front seat with Papyrus. Given his size, it makes more sense to put the smaller ones in the back. You occasionally meet Sans' gaze in the rear view mirror to make sure he's not uncomfortable with the lack of space.

He's actually the happiest you've seen him in a while. His smile is genuine as he chats with Alphys about whether panda bears should be classified as bears or not (he's for, she's against). The sight is good to see. The poor guy has been struggling even more than you.

"LOOK!" Papyrus shouts suddenly, pointing out the window. "I SAW IT! IT'S JUST BEYOND THE TREES!"

The other three clamber over each other to get a look out of the window, hoping to catch a glance at the ocean. You look over too, excited butterflies dancing in your stomach. It's then that you hear the dull roar of a vehicle approaching. You peek in your side mirror and you laugh in sheer delight at what you see.

Very quickly gaining on you is a motorcycle carrying two familiar monsters. Grillby, wearing a black biker jacket steps on the gas and pulls up along side your car. The bike itself is painted with streaks of fire, mirroring the wild flames on his head. Seated behind him is Gaster who's got his arms wrapped around Grillby's stomach. A delighted smile is clear upon his face, the lights of his eyes wide. Unlike Grillby, he's got a skull patterned helmet on his head, which makes sense considering his skull is probably a little more fragile than actual fire.

Undyne cackles loudly, leaning over Alphys to wave at them. Gaster returns the greeting with a short wave of his own as he leans forward slightly to shout something you can't hear to Grillby. Grillby turns his head slightly towards you, his normal glasses replaced by a pair of sleek black sunglasses. You catch the quick flash of a smile on his face and then he revs his engine, pulling ahead of you slightly. Oh you shouldn't. You really, really-

Grillby takes off, sparks trailing after him as he zooms ahead. You see Gaster whoop, throwing an arm up into the air.

"Step on it, nerd!" Undyne shrieks.

You step on it.

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It's not long after your race (which you lost only because you didn't want to be caught speeding!) that you pull up to the villa where Toriel made your reservations. It's a gorgeous place, all white and light blue and various plants in wicker baskets cover a good portion of...well everything. The whole place radiates the feeling of a 'beach house'. Asgore's offensively yellow SUV is already there and Grillby and Gaster are pulling their bags out of a small black box hooked on the back of his bike as you park. Undyne and Papyrus burst out of the car, racing each other to the entrance of the hotel, whooping and hollering. You follow after a little slower, taking a moment to actually grab your bag.

"Nice wheels!" you compliment Grillby, walking over to the two of them while Sans and Alphys gather up the remaining bags.
Grillby offers you a pleased smile, patting the bike once. It's huge and even fancier up close. If Gaster was his normal size, you're pretty sure he'd still easily fit in the second seat. "I haven't had many chances to use it. This was fun." Grillby says as he removes his jacket. Before he folds it up you catch a glimpse of a deep red rose embossed on the back. It's kind of fitting, actually.

"How long have you had it?"

"About a month. Someone encouraged me to finally give in after staring at it for weeks." He looks to Gaster, holding his hand out for the helmet.

Gaster hands it over, smirking. "I was getting sick of that sad puppy look on your face."

He shrugs unapologetically, his flame flashing brightly.

"who would've thought. biker by day, bartender by night." Sans brushes up against you as he too comes over to admire the bike. "can we get one?"

"Would you even ride it?" you ask skeptically.

"no, but it'll look really cool in the driveway."

"HEY! Papyrus' voice carries over to you. He's hopping from foot to foot so fast it looks more like a dance. "QUIT YOUR BOONDOGGLING AND HURRY UP! I WANT TO SEE THE OCEAN!"

You all quickly head inside at Papyrus' urging and find Toriel, Asgore and Frisk waiting in the lobby. The inside is clean to the point of sparkling and several large windows fill the room with natural light. Through these windows you can see a large pool and some of the cabin like rooms as well as a walkway that you're sure leads down to the beach. The floor of the lobby has been inlaid with countless shells, which most of the monsters are staring at with unbridled glee.

Toriel moves to greet you, wrapping you in a warm hug. "Hello my child! I hope your trip was pleasant!"

"Yeah it was good! I hope you guys weren't waiting long."

She shakes her head as she releases you. "Not long at all. The lovely gentleman behind the desk is still getting our keys ready."

You look over to the simplistic front desk to see a man typing away at a computer. He gives you a brief smile before returning to his work. Sans told you on the way up that it's actually thanks to Asgore that you were able to come here and, since the villa is fairly small, he went ahead and booked the entire place just for your group for the weekend. Knowing that, it makes sense that he would come along as well, not that you're complaining.

"Thank you for helping us with this," you tell him sincerely.

Perhaps it's the bright floral top he's wearing, or the large hat with holes poked through for his horns, but you feel none of your quiet nervousness that you usually do when you see him. He looks utterly harmless and you notice that even Toriel is giving him warm glances. He laughs brightly, putting one massive paw gently on the top of your head. "Think nothing of it! I was happy I could help. Stars know you all deserve a vacation."

"Excuse me."
A well dressed woman walks up to you all, smiling widely. Her name tag says Tina in golden lettering. She holds out several key cards. "If you all would follow me, I'll be happy to show you to your rooms."

You all follow her out towards the line of miniature cabins. Each has a small walkway lined with either shells or flowers and match the main building's white and blue painting. Undyne and Alphys take one, Toriel and Frisk another. Papyrus and Asgore each have their own room and you of course, will be with Sans. You note with some surprise that although Gaster accepts the key card given to him, he follows Grillby into his cabin rather than going into the one assigned to him.

You don't say anything about it though and press your card up against the door. Entering you find a wide open room with a massive king sized bed covered with pillows so thick and fluffy without even laying on it, you know you'll sink several feet into the mattress. The headboard is rick dark wood and it matches the elegant lamps set on bedside tables on either side of the bed. The walls are blue, painted with various sea creatures and ships that are done so well it actually manages not to be tacky. The lush carpet under your feet is a darker shade of blue and you immediately kick your shoes off as you set your bag down and dig your toes in.

"Sans, this carpet-!" you call to him gleefully but he's not interested in the carpet in the slightest. He's already moved to the window that takes up a majority of the far wall. Gossamer white curtains are pulled back to reveal a perfect view of the ocean. Sans presses his hands against the glass, staring with wide sockets out at the view.

"there it is," he whispers in a hushed voice. "it's...it's right there."

You come up behind him, wrapping your arms around his rib cage. It really is a beautiful sight, the stone of the villa soon giving away to sand. The water glistens in the distance, tantalizingly close. "Let's change into our suits and go down," you urge, giving him a quick kiss on his cheek. "I'm sure the others are doing the same."

He nods, the lights of his eyes shining. "okay."

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