To Love Yourself

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To Love Yourself

by undertailsoulsex

Summary

UF!Sans fights with his brother and doesn't know what to do with himself. He ends up traveling to the Undertale Universe where he meets the kindhearted Sans and Papyrus.

UF!Sans has to come to terms with his depression and his newfound feelings for the other skeletons.

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NOTE:
If you are choosing to marathon this fic, I recommend placing a stopping point at the end of Chapter 24. Yes, I am aware that you may want to continue past that, but it is where I've divided the fic in my head.
Part 2 (Chapter 25 and on) has increasingly dark themes. Please be advised.
If you are not aware, "Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings" is not the same as "No Archive Warnings Apply." Please read each chapter's notes sections for warnings specific to the chapter.
Thank you, and enjoy! :3
Some notes:

- I will be adding tags to each chapter in both the overall tags and in each chapter's note section. Please pay attention if you may triggered by anything!
- Please note that this chapter begins with fully consensual sex that goes very badly. As such, I am labeling this chapter as having a dubcon tag, but I do so with great hesitation. The sex is quite uncomfortable with Sans, but it was consensual.
- Note that the sex scenes will be more pleasurable to read in future chapters.
- If you're just looking for smut, you can start with Chapter 4.

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulssex.tumblr.com/. You can also find soul sex reblogs if that's your thing.

Tags for this chapter: Dubcon, BDSM gone wrong, no use of safe words, depression, angst, fetters
[This chapter begins in the Underfell universe.]

Sans was pissed.

He was suspended mid-air, held aloft by shackles that stretched his limbs to the limit. He could feel his entire body shaking badly, sending a rattling noise through the air. Between his legs he was still dripping from Papyrus’s release, even though his conjured opening had disappeared hours ago. His soul was pounding in anger, disappointment, and, above all else, fear.

How much longer is he going to leave me here?

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Sans had gotten home early that day, ready to skive off work to sleep in his bed. Really, all he really ever wanted to do these days was sleep.

But he hadn’t expected his brother to be home. Usually his brother was performing Royal Guardsman duties late into the night. He typically only came home to eat, sleep, and, on occasion, deal out “punishments” to Sans.

He supposed that’s what had ended up happening today. Punishment for shirking off his duties.

Papyrus had strode over to him, gripping Sans’s arms harshly. “YOU’RE SO LAZY, SANS. YOU NEED TO STOP MAKING ME LOOK BAD. HOW CAN I EVER HOPE TO BECOME CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD WHEN I HAVE YOU TO MAKE ME LOOK BAD?”

Sans had thought Papyrus was just faking his anger. After all, Papyrus often dealt out punishment to him, and why would he think this would be any different.

Papyrus had carried him to the shed, Sans flailing his limbs just to set the mood more. In hindsight, maybe that was why Papyrus had tied his limbs so tightly.

As soon as Papyrus had finished tying Sans up, the taller skeleton had pulled Sans’s shorts down to his knees. Papyrus had summoned his erect member, and had stared at Sans angrily for at least a full minute.

“god, boss, are you just gonna fuck me or are do you not know how to use that thing?”

Papyrus had rushed forward and stuck his length right into Sans’s pelvic inlet. Usually Papyrus would give Sans the chance to conjure some sort of opening by stimulating him before entry. It certainly had to be more enjoyable for Papyrus too—it was harder to get a pleasurable angle when shoving the length into the large gap in the pelvic bone.

But this time, Papyrus had slammed his dick upwards roughly. The speed and ferocity with which Papyrus had begun to fuck him caused Sans to scream out in pain. Usually Sans adored pain, but this had been different.

“fuck, wait, boss, slow down!”

Papyrus had ignored him and continued his pace. Eventually the stimulation had led Sans to subconsciously conjure an opening, but it didn’t take Sans long to realize that the genitalia was not
slick enough for Papyrus’s movement to be pleasurable. Each thrust upwards shot a tearing pain through Sans’s lower half. By the end, Sans had been gasping in agony.

Usually the pain was mixed with pleasure when Papyrus dealt a punishment. That had not been the case this time.

When Papyrus had finished, he had backed from Sans immediately.

“HA, YOU LOOK PATHETIC LIKE THAT,” he had said in a teasing voice.

Sans hadn’t wanted to let Papyrus know how much he had hurt him, to know just how pathetic he actually was. Could he not even take his punishments anymore? He felt himself trembling violently.

“SANS, ARE YOU CRYING?” the taller skeleton had asked in a demanding tone.

Sans had let out a choking sob. “n-no, boss.” God, he was so pathetic.

“You ARE! WHAT, WAS I TOO ROUGH FOR YOU?” Papyrus had crossed his arms and hadn’t waited for an answer. “HOW WRETCHED. I CAN’T BELIEVE YOU CAN’T EVEN ACCEPT YOUR PUNISHMENTS PROPERLY.”

Sans had squirmed and let out a blubbery “sorry” before his brother had walked to the door.

“w-w-wait! what are you doing?! let me down!” He had felt a panic rise up in his chest. Papyrus couldn’t leave him here. Not like this.

“YOUR PUNISHMENT IS NOT OVER YET. I’LL BE BACK WHEN YOU ARE READY TO PROPERLY APOLOGIZE.”

“no! boss, i’m serious! please, let me down!” The door had slammed but still Sans had screamed after him until his voice had given out.

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Sans was still hanging in the restraints hours later. God, his spine ached from the uncomfortable position.

This was why he wanted a safe word. He recalled asking Papyrus if they could establish one several years ago. But Papyrus had told him that it wasn’t necessary – Sans could handle any punishment he could hand out. At first Sans had beamed with pleasure at the compliment, but years later, Sans was craving the safety net more and more. He realized now how fucking stupid he was for not insisting.

Suddenly, the door flung open, causing Sans to jump. The movement brought more pain to his already aching body.

Papyrus marched over to Sans and crossed his arms across his chest. “WELL, SANS?” he asked tauntingly.

Sans cast his eyes down and rasped, “sorry, boss.”

“SORRY FOR WHAT?” the taller skeleton teased.

“sorry for not accepting your punishment correctly.”
“HMPH.” Papyrus unlocked the shorter skeleton from the shackles, the chains clinking as they fell to the ground. When all of his bounds were cast aside, Sans pushed Papyrus, causing him to stumble backwards. He could feel the tears forming in the corners of his eyesockets again.

“WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT FOR?”

“you asshole! i called for you to come back! what the fuck is wrong with you?”

“Oh, don’t pretend you didn’t like it, you shithead.” Sans choked out a sob and Papyrus’s face turned even angrier. “God, are you crying again? What, did you kill someone again or something?”

The last question caused the smaller skeleton to stumble, as if he had been physically pushed. Sans reached up to his soul, which was pounding with indescribable pain.

“You’re pathetic.” The younger brother stiffened his arms to his sides and stormed out of the shed, leaving Sans behind to choke on his bubbling sobs.

Sans dropped to the ground and curled in on himself. He was pathetic.

It wasn’t entirely his fault. Not that Papyrus would know that. He recalled being strapped to operating tables, trying to fight against the bonds, needles sticking into his soul, the pain enveloping the entire essence of his being.

Sans shuddered at the memories.

Whatever Gaster had done to him had left him able to perceive time differently. One day he woke up and life seemed to be on repeat. Sometimes only one day would repeat, other times it would reset after months of nothing. Sans couldn’t really recall which conversations had actually happened along this timeline – was this the timeline where that damn flower had tried to convince him that “kill or be killed” was toxic? Or was it the timeline where Grillby has tossed Sans out on his ass? Or maybe it was the timeline where –

Sans stopped himself. It didn’t matter anymore. None of the details mattered anymore. Three years ago, the resets had stopped. He didn’t know exactly what had caused them to stop, or even if they had completely stopped. He was always on the edge, waiting for everything to reset to that day in Snowdin when Papyrus wasn’t a Royal Guard. When he wasn’t as harsh. When he treated Sans with at least some form of respect.

But Sans realized that maybe Papyrus had always hated him. After all, Papyrus was obviously mocking him for something that happened before the resets.

Fuck, Sans hated everything. This was the last straw. He didn’t care what the fuck happened to him. He just wanted out. He just wanted to forget everything.

He lifted himself from the ground and teleported to his workshop under the house. He threw open the drawers and gathered the abandoned binders of files filled with walls of text and data. He was shaking so much that loose papers tumbled out of the heavy binders, falling gently to the ground.

He found the binder he was looking for – the heaviest one labeled “Procedures for Machine 53021X.” He turned to the last page and stared at his own handwriting.

The binder contained different combinations of procedures to start the time machine that stood in the corner of the basement. Sans knew the damn thing worked – Gaster had thrown him in the machine all those years ago and had forced him to travel ten minutes to the future. The problem
was that he couldn’t recall which sequence of procedures had lit the damn thing up. His memory was so fuzzy about the machine ever since Gaster had his accident and blown himself out of existence.

For the longest time, Sans hadn’t given a damn about the machine. He was happy to be rid of Gaster and his fucking experiments.

But after the resets started, he had come down to the basement and started to test out a new set of procedures. He had wanted to leave the time loop so badly, it had driven him to edges of insanity. Because the room was insulated from the time skips, all of his records were safe in here. He had tested procedure after procedure, attempting to find the correct sequence. But there were countless possible combinations, and Sans wasn’t sure if he would ever discover the right one.

Sans didn’t care about that right now. All he wanted was to get out. He tore out a piece of paper from the binder and started to write down a potential sequence. He didn’t bother to double check whether it had been done before – quite frankly, he didn’t care. When he was done, he walked over to the machine in the corner. He tore off the tarp, revealing the steel-plated cylindrical contraption. It was covered in a variety of buttons and mechanisms and inside the machine was a stiff, steel chair that faced an electronic interface.

He walked around the device and tuned the apparatuses to the specifications he had written down. When he was done, he set the procedures to the side before he entered the machine and went to the humming electronic interface. The screen was lit with bright green text against a solid black background.

//MACHINE 53021X, V.2.023
INPUT DATE AND TIME HERE: (YEAR) (MONTH) (DAY) (HOUR) (MINUTE) (SECOND)
//OR
INPUT TIME UNITS IN µS HERE: (TIME UNITS)

It didn’t matter what time he input. He just wanted to get away. He was determined to. But he knew the damn machine wasn’t going to work, and he didn’t really fucking care anyway. He punched in today’s date and typed in the time five minutes from now.

When he slammed his hand down on the return key, he had fully expected nothing to happen. So much so that he had already turned to leave the machine in order to get started on writing down the next sequence of procedures.

The door slammed shut and the machine began to vibrate, making a loud whirring noise. Sans tripped over his own feet, falling flat on his tailbone into the steel chair below him. Sans gasped as the vibrating became more violent, his mind struggling to grasp what was happening.

Holy shit, it’s actually fucking working.

The vibration grew even stronger and a bright blinding light filled the space. There was a violent tremor and he fell to the ground. Shit, he hadn’t even strapped himself into the chair. He shut his eyes completely as the light reached such an intensity that he felt like his head might burst. He could feel himself stretching, expanding beyond what he thought was capable. It felt like he was being pulled apart, molecule by molecule.

He could vaguely hear himself screaming as he lost all sense of himself.
When he came to, Sans was smashed against the steel door. His head was pounding. He grit his teeth from the intense pain that wound its way through his skull. He opened his eyes and found that everything seemed to be vibrating slightly. For a moment he thought the machine was still in motion, but then he realized he was violently shaking.

The steel door flew open and Sans tumbled through the threshold. His face hit the ground, sending a spiking pain through his already throbbing skull. His shaking bones clattered against the tile floor. He couldn’t stop the whimper that escaped his teeth.

“woah, are you okay?” said a deep voice.

Someone gently turned him over, making the world spin. There was a darkened figure against a backdrop of fluorescent lights. The silhouette slowly came into focus and he saw what looked like a double of himself staring down at him with widened eyes.

Sans blacked out.
Sans woke up slowly. His head was killing him, but he was so warm. He could hear distant conversation and he realized he must have fallen asleep on the couch. He shifted himself and felt a blanket wrapped around his body. He wondered vaguely if Papyrus had left it for him.

For some reason, the thought of Papyrus sent a stabbing pain through his soul. He lifted his hand to his chest and clenched at the spot where his soul lay beneath. Why did it hurt?

He suddenly recalled his fight with Papyrus and the subsequent events. He opened his eyes and sat up abruptly. He found himself in a strange version of his own house. Almost everything was the same – there was a pet rock on the living room table, a large television across from him, and stairs leading up to what looked like two bedrooms.

But there were small differences too. There was a picture of a cartoon femur that replaced the usual skull and crossbones painting that Papyrus had hung up years ago. Instead of blank white walls, the walls were painted a deep taupe color. Similarly, in place of dark black and red carpets, the floors were covered with squiggles of purple and light blue. The combination made his head hurt.

Or maybe his head hurt anyway.

He clutched his skull in his hands, trying to nurse the headache. He was fighting back tears. Where the fuck was he?

He heard chairs scraping in the kitchen and he jolted his head up as two skeletal figures entered the living room.

“what the hell?!”

They were like warped versions of him and his brother. His clone wore a blue jacket with a fur-trimmed hoodie. He was smiling broadly, but as far as Sans could tell, he didn’t have a gold tooth. Honestly, he and this other guy looked like they could be twins.

The other Papyrus was another story. He was just as tall as his own brother, but instead of the usual Royal Guard attire, this guy was wearing a form-fitting white torso piece with blue denim shorts that covered only his pelvic bone. He also wore a red cowl that trailed into what looked like a frayed scarf. This Papyrus looked less rough and jagged; his chin wasn’t as sharp and he certainly didn’t have his brother’s trademark scar on his right eye.

“heh. you’re no looker yourself, you know,” his double said, shrugging his arms.
The other Papyrus placed his hands on his hips and yelled, “SANS, DON’T BE RUDE!”

“don’t worry, paps. i’m sure he knows i’m just kidding.” He struck a pose. “after all, nobody can deny my good looks.”

“SANS!”

The other Sans relaxed his posture again and stared at the couch. “hey, bud, i was expecting at least a smile. i mean, it’s not often you get to look at yourself in all your glory. though to be fair, i think i might be the more attractive one.”

The gold-toothed Sans cracked a chuckle, but it died quickly and he felt awkward.

The other Sans’s smile twitched. “how about we get you some dinner and we have a nice little chat in the kitchen?”

Sans nodded and followed the brothers to the kitchen. He and the other Sans sat at a circular table, while Papyrus went to the refrigerator and started to pull out ingredients to make dinner.

“so, uh, how ’bout you explain what happened?”

Sans cast a look to the back of Papyrus’s head. If this Papyrus was anything like his own brother, he didn’t know about the resets or time travel or even Gaster.

The other Sans seemed to follow his train of thought. “don’t worry ’bout paps. he’s known all about the machine for a while now, so no holding back.”

Sans’s eyes widened. He starts to wring his hands. “i was just…well, i was just trying to fix the machine is all.”

Papyrus turned around from the stove and asked, “BUT WHY? AREN’T YOU HAPPY UP HERE?”

Sans stared at the taller skeleton in confusion before his lookalike waved a hand at Papyrus. “bro, he’s clearly not from this timeline. i’m not even sure he’s from the same universe as us.”

Sans nodded. That was for sure.

“in any case, it looks like something went wrong. if you were aiming for before the resets, you, uh, missed it by quite a bit.”

Sans cast his eyes downward. He nodded, but didn’t bother to correct the lookalike. He didn’t need to tell these guys that he hadn’t given a single shit where he ended up. Though he silently wondered what this Sans meant by “missing it quite a bit.”

Before he could pose the question, his double clapped a hand on his shoulder, startling him. “don’t worry, we won’t leave you hanging. we’ll get you home.”

Sans nodded and swallowed. He wasn’t even sure he wanted to go home.

Papyrus brought over bowls of tomato soup for each of them.

“oh, new recipe, bro?”

Papyrus sat in his chair and exclaimed, “YES, I AM GLAD YOU NOTICED, BROTHER! THE LAST SOUP TURNED OUT SO WELL AND IT IS SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE TO MAKE!”
“heh. that’s soup-erb, paps.”

“SANS! DO NOT MAKE PUNS ABOUT DINNER!”

“why not, broth-er?”

“SANS!” Sans noticed that Papyrus was straining to contain a smile.

“come on, i know you can take my stew-pid jokes!”

Papyrus yelled in fake anger and hit Sans’s shoulder playfully.

Sans silently ate as he watched the interaction between the brothers. He felt a pang of jealousy and sadness creep into his soul as he watched the casual friendship between the pair. He had never seen anything like that before.

The two seemed to realize that Sans had been staring at them because they turned to look at him and stopped laughing when they saw the look on his face. His clone coughed awkwardly and an uneasiness filled the room.

After a few moments of uneasy quiet, Papyrus abruptly snapped his fingers and exclaimed, “I KNOW WHAT WE CAN TALK ABOUT. SANS, WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR TOOTH?”

Sans’s soul seemed to drop in his chest. God, why did he bring that up?

The other Sans teasingly responded, “what do you mean, bro? my teeth are fine!”

“NOT YOU, SANS! ARGH, THIS IS TOO CONFUSING! I CANNOT CONTINUE TO CALL YOU BOTH SANS! NEW SANS, WHAT DO PEOPLE CALL YOU BACK HOME?”

“heh.” Sans laughed without any amusement in his voice. “well, my brother usually calls me ‘asshole.’”

“LANGUAGE!” Papyrus yells in a stern voice, but when Sans looked at the taller skeleton he could see concern etched in his face.

“heh, really? well, i don’t really got any nicknames. it’s usually just sans or ‘papyrus’s piece of shit brother,’ so i really got nothing.”

The worry didn’t leave Papyrus’s face, but the taller skeleton didn’t respond to his swearing again.

“PERHAPS WE SHOULD CALL YOU RED? IT SEEMS APPROPRIATE GIVEN YOUR ATTIRE. AND EARLIER WHEN WE PULLED YOU OUT OF THE BASEMENT, YOUR MAGIC WAS GLOWING RED.”

“i don’t know, bro. would you call me ‘blue’ if you knew nothing about me?”

“WELL, SANS, I DO NOT SEE YOU COMING UP WITH ANYTHING BETTER!”

“well, whatever. but don’t expect me to be impressed with it.”

Red wasn’t impressed either, but if he was going to be staying with these two, he might as well get used to it.

His double coughed and asked, “so, uh, what did happen to your tooth?”

Red looked down awkwardly at his bowl. “got knocked out.”
“WELL, OBVIOUSLY! BUT HOW? IT MUST BE A THRILLING TALE!”

Red stirred his spoon in the soup mindlessly. He really didn’t want to think about this right now. “lost it in a fight with someone,” he said shortly.

“WHAT?! WHO WERE YOU FIGHTING?”

“another monster.”

“BUT WHO? WHY? YOU MUST GIVE DETAILS!”

His lookalike cleared his throat and quietly said, “hey, bro, if he doesn’t want to talk about it, then–”

“BUT BROTHER, YOU HATE FIGHTING. IF HE IS YOU, THEN WHY WAS HE FIGHTING?”

“just because we look the same doesn’t mean we have the same personality, paps!”

“BUT –”

Red clenched the spoon in his hand. He felt the eyelights dimming in his sockets as he spoke. “someone was trying to kill my brother. drop it, assholes.”

The other two skeletons immediately went silent. Red felt a twinge of guilt in his soul.

Red sighed and dropped his spoon into his bowl, splashing bits of liquid everywhere. He stood up quickly. “i’m going to bed. mind if i crash on your couch?”

“woah, hey, you can sleep in my bed.”

“what, and you’re going to sleep on the couch?”

Sans shifted nervously in his seat. “uh, papyrus and i can stay in his room together, so don’t worry about us.”

Red looked between the two skeletons and realized they both seemed embarrassed. Red wondered why. He didn’t give a shit as long as they weren’t too loud. He was too tired to put up with that kind of shit tonight.

“i’ll show you where it is.”

“sit down and eat the rest of your dinner. i know where the fuck it is.”

“LANGUAGE!”

Red ignored him and walked upstairs. When he opened the door he could tell this Sans was much cleaner than him. There were no clothes or garbage scattered across the room. But he was pleased to feel the wind from the self-sustaining tornado in the corner. At least there was something familiar about it.

Red collapsed onto the bed, not bothering to take off his clothes or cover himself with blankets. He was just too tired. It was as if all the energy had been sapped from his body. He felt empty inside and he was ready to escape to his dreams. He just hoped they wouldn’t be plagued with his usual nightmares.
“RED, DO YOU WANT TO WAKE UP? IT IS QUITE LATE AND I THINK YOU SHOULD COME DOWNSTAIRS AND EAT.”

Red woke with a start. He realized that the voice didn’t belong to his brother; despite the loud volume, it was far too gentle. He wasn’t in his universe and it hadn’t been a dream. He recalled his fight with his own Papyrus and curled up. He didn’t want to get up.

“i’m going to stay in bed. i’m real tired.”

Papyrus made a small noise and closed the door quietly.

Red shifted to his side to get more comfortable. But when he turned an extraordinarily bright light shone directly on his face. What the hell?

The light was coming from behind the curtained window. He reached up to pull aside the blue fabric to get a better look at the snowy landscape outside and to see what the source of light was.

But when he drew back the curtains, he didn’t see the familiar snow, the neighboring homes, or even the distant, dim walls of the Underground. No, he saw towering trees and a blinding circular ball of light.

Red scrambled out of bed and flew out the bedroom door. He bounded down the stairs as fast as his legs could take him.

As he ran by the brothers, the pair threw loud questions at him, but he ignored them as he ran out the front door.

He took a few steps from the front porch and kneeled down to the ground. He gripped the ground and tore bunches of lush, green grass from the damp earth. He could feel tears cascading down his face as he took in the sights around him. There were tall, needled trees surrounding the wooden home. The sharp smell of fresh pine filled his nose and he heard the tinkling sound of a stream close by. To his right, a rolling valley dipped upwards to a jagged mountain, which cut at the sky like a blade. He realized it must be Mt. Ebott.

And he just couldn’t believe how bright it was out here.

He looked upwards to the bright blue sky and saw the dazzling ball of light – the sun, he realized – and he felt tiny and vulnerable.

Papyrus and Sans approached him.

“you okay there, red?” The voice was laced with concern.

Red let out a sob. “we’re not underground.”
As I hope was clear last chapter, UF!Sans is now referred to as Red, and Sans is called Sans in the narrative now.

Additional tags: Some fontcest fluff

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulsex.tumblr.com/. You can also find soul sex reblogs if that's your thing.

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Sans placed a hand on Red’s shoulder. “hey, hey, it’s okay, man.”

Papyrus fidgeted nervously beside him. “ARE YOU NOT ON THE SURFACE WHERE YOU ARE FROM?”

Red trembled beneath Sans as he shook his head.

Sans tensed. He wondered how many differences there were between this world and the universe that this other him had come from. Was he from a timeline where the human had killed everyone in the Underground? Sans recalled the other skeleton’s words last night – Red had been trying to protect his brother from someone trying to kill him. Had that been Chara? Had they succeeded?

He looked down at the quivering skeleton’s face. There were shadows underneath his eye sockets, as if he hadn’t gotten enough sleep. He looked worn out. Sans was familiar with that look; it hadn’t been that long ago that he greeted the same image in the mirror each morning. He had been so tired, and he still wasn’t sure how he had overcome that utter, absolute exhaustion.

Sans shuddered. He hoped he was misreading his duplicate. If Red was where Sans had been three years ago, he wasn’t sure how to help.

Red lifted the arm below Sans’s hand to his face and wiped his tears. “fuck. sorry. i just– i can’t believe it’s real. shit, i never thought i’d see the actual sky.”

Papyrus smiled softly and Sans tightened his grip on Red’s shoulder. There were a few moments of silence as Red continued to gaze at the sky.

Red shook his head and stood up. Sans backed away from his double and suggested that they go inside to have lunch.

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Papyrus placed the bowl of leftover soup in front of Sans. The shorter skeleton leaned up to his brother’s face and placed a tender skeleton kiss on his cheek.

“thanks, bro. glad we had some left. it’s a great recipe.”
Papyrus let out a small “nyeh heh” and smiled widely at the compliment. As Papyrus sat down at the table, Sans turned to Red and noticed that the other skeleton was staring at him, a bright red blush spread on his cheekbones. When Red noticed that Sans had detected his gaze, the blushing skeleton hurriedly turned his face downwards to his bowl.

Sans pondered if his clone was as close to his brother as Sans was with his own. That’s if he was even alive.

As they ate, Papyrus talked animatedly about his new soup recipe. Ever since they had come to the surface, he had tried out a new recipe at least once per week. And Sans had to admit, under Toriel’s guidance, his cooking skills had improved immensely. He hadn’t been lying when he had complimented his brother earlier – the soup was really tasty. It was almost like savory ketchup.

“I WOULD LOVE TO TRY A NEW RECIPE AGAIN THIS WEEK IF YOU DO NOT MIND, SANS?”

“why would i mind? everything you make is great, paps.”

Papyrus blushed a bright orange. “I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, AM SO HAPPY TO HEAR YOU SAY THAT, BROTHER. THIS MEANS I WILL NEED TO GET SOME GROCERIES FROM THE CITY.”

Sans looked at Red who continued to stare down at his bowl.

“if you’re going today, do you mind if i tag along? i wanted to talk to alphys about something about the latest test i ran.”

“OF COURSE, BROTHER!”

“red, you want to come along too? might be nice to get out of the house and see the city.”

Red shrugged, not looking up from his now-empty bowl. “yeah. sure. whatever.”

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Sans and Papyrus decided that they would walk to the main road. Sans could, of course, easily teleport them to Very New Home, the monsters’ aboveground capital city. But the brothers decided that it might be nice for the gold-toothed skeleton to see the sights along the way.

The trio strolled through the rolling valley. In the distance, Mt. Ebott glinted under the midday sun, blanketed in a densely packed forest of pines. The quiet valley was filled with the distinct smell of pine sap and the sweet scent of the golden flowers that speckled the grassy terrain. Birds filled the air with their enchanting chirps and trills. Here and there, the trees jostled slightly as unseen wildlife went about their midday routine.

It really was beautiful out here. It was one of the reasons the pair had chosen to build out here, about seven miles away from the monster metropolis.

That and the brothers enjoyed their isolation. Only the monsters that favored solitude had built their homes so far away from the new capital, and those that did purposefully built their homes far away from their neighbors. As the three skeletons walked through the quiet valley, they only saw two other homes nestled in the forest.

After an hour, they reached a gravel road that wound its way through the edge of the valley. The stretch was empty of any cars, but Sans knew that the next car to drive through would probably
Red let out a small gasp when he spotted a dark red pickup truck kicking up dirt as it navigated down the rocky lane. Sans stuck out his hand, and the vehicle slowed to a stop. A green lizard monster greeted Sans in recognition and offered the three skeletons a ride in the back of the truck.

Although the journey was bumpy, the vehicle sped up the journey considerably. As they approached the sprawling metropolis, the road became smoother and the ride more enjoyable. Red whipped his head every which way as houses and businesses zipped past the automobile. The closer they got to the capital, the higher the buildings seemed reach and the closer they crowded together.

The truck eventually slowed to a stop in the central district right in front of one of Sans’s favorite spots, Grillby’s. Sans thanked the driver for his help before the vehicle sped away.

The sidewalks were packed with monsters shopping amongst the imposing buildings that littered the cityscape. Street vendors lined the streets, selling anything from coffee to flowers to Very New Home-themed merchandise. A band of vagrants filled the air with out-of-tune MTT pop songs, dancing through the crowd in the hopes of a spare gold. Mixed throughout the mass of monsters were small clusters of humans who flashed their cameras when any sort of particularly interesting-looking monster walked past them.

Across the street was the Monster-Human Relations Embassy, which seemed to command everyone’s attention, despite its shorter stature. The stark white, marble building displayed authority and status in ways the surrounding buildings could not. Sans knew that the monsters and humans that worked inside the building were just as serious as the exterior hinted; after all, the fate of humans and monsters were at the hands of those who engaged in treaties and international agreements.

Sans sighed. He really hated the capital, especially this downtown area. It was too loud, too busy, and above all else, too much hassle. But unfortunately all of his friends lived here and according to Papyrus, the city had the best quality products any monster could dream of.

Sans glanced to Red to see how he was taking all this. He must have felt similarly to Sans because the skeleton was sweating profusely, his eyes darting between all the sights. He wrung his hands continuously, and Sans could hear a small scraping sound from the gesture.

“Hey, Sans!”

Sans turned and saw Punk Hamster leaning against the wall puffing on a cigarette. Sans waved, but the furred monster was distracted as he noticed Red nervously twitching his hands beside him.

“Hey, who is this guy?”

Red jumped when he realized that the slouching figure was talking about him.

“him? he’s, uh, our cousin. just visiting from the underground. his family didn’t really like the sun, y’know?”

“Yeah, he does look like he isn’t enjoying himself. Can’t say the hoodie helps a lot on a day like this though.”

“Oh, i think he’s just not used to the city. it’s his first time here.”

“Yeah, I hate this place too. Too many tourists.” He cast an angry glare at a nearby group of
humans who were awestruck by the Embassy. Punk Hamster released a puff of smoke into the air. “Well, Sans’s cousin, you got a name?”

“err...” Red glanced at Sans. He gave an encouraging nod, and Red continued, “i guess people call me red.”

“Well, welcome to Very New Home.” He drew in the cigarette for another drag. “You know, you look just like Sans here.”

Before Red could say anything, Sans teased, “well, yeah, all us skeletons must look alike to you.”

Punk Hamster puffed out clouds of smoke as he chuckled at the joke. He tossed the cigarette to the side and pushed himself away from the wall. “Well, you should come by later, Sans. Grillby has been asking about you. I think he’s wondering if you’ve forgotten about him.”

“aw, shut it. it’s been four days, the guy can wait.”

“I’ll be sure to pass that message along!” He walked inside the bar, leaving the three skeletons behind.

“BROTHER, CAN WE GO NOW?”

Sans nodded and the three walked a block to a giant building labeled “Ultra Mart.” According to Papyrus, it carried the best quality products. It sure did carry that price tag.

As the three were about to enter, a towering, white-furred monster exited through the automatic doors. Her arms were filled with brown paper bags stuffed with groceries. Her mouth spread into an open smile as she saw Sans and Papyrus.

Sans’s felt his soul beat in excitement chest as he saw Toriel grin, and in turn, his own smile grew.

“hey, tori! goat yourself some groceries, huh?”

“Now Sans, that isn’t very humerus,” she giggled.

Papyrus stamped his feet comically. “ARGH! NO MORE PUNS!”

Papyrus’s movement revealed Red, who had been hiding behind the taller skeleton.

Toriel stopped laughing, her smile dropping into a bewildered frown. “I do not believe we have met, have we?”

“oh, uh, this is my cousin, red.” Sans lowered his voice. “i’ll tell you about it later, tori.”

Toriel looked to Sans and nodded without comment. “Well, hello, Red. You have a rather unusual name for a skeleton.”

Red, on the other hand, started stammering. He wrung his hands nervously for a few moments until he burst out, “y-y-you guys know the queen?”

Toriel’s fur bristled slightly at the question. “Sorry, but I have not been known as the queen for quite some time now,” she said shortly.

Red jumped slightly. “shit, shit, sorry, i– fuck, don’t be mad.” The skeleton was sweating copiously now and looked like he might be sick. Sans stared in shock as his double kneeled to the ground and bowed in apology. He was shaking violently. “i-i-i shouldn’t have been so rude. i’m
sorry! i’m such a piece of shit!”

Toriel’s eyes widened in shock. “Oh, my dear, do not fret. I did not think that—Please, there is no need to apologize. You do not have to bow, please.”

Red pushed himself off the ground and hung his head, refusing to look at Toriel.

Sans wondered why Red was so scared. Were the differences between their universes even greater than he had originally thought?

Just then, Frisk walked out of the store carrying another bag of groceries. The teenager saw Papyrus and Sans and waved their free hand in greeting.

Sans’s first reaction was to wave back, but then a sudden realization gripped him: If Red hasn’t talked to his version of Frisk about Chara, then–

He snapped his head to Red. His lookalike was facing Frisk, trembling violently. His eyelights had disappeared from his sockets, giving the skeleton a haunting look.

Sans wrapped his arms around Red’s shoulder and whispered, “don’t.”


Sans darted his eyes upwards and saw that Frisk, Toriel, and Papyrus were staring at them with concern. He couldn’t afford for Red to lose it here. “we’ll be right back, okay?” he announced.

Sans gripped Red by his jacket and pulled him into an alley beside the store. The stench of the dumpsters permeated the air. Sans turned Red around to face him, gripping both of his shoulders. Red’s eyelights returned and he looked to the side. His brow was lined upwards, and Sans realized that he didn’t look angry; his face with lined with anxiety and maybe even a tinge of guilt. Red once again started to wring his hands together.

Sans spoke sternly, “look, red, i don’t know what you know about that human, but –”

“i thought they were dead.” His counterpart’s voice was raspy. He cleared his throat and continued, “i mean – i saw them die. y-your human is older, but it’s definitely them. shit.”

“listen, we both did some things we aren’t proud of. those resets would make anyone lose their mind. and if your human was going around killing everyone, then –”

“what?!?” Red sputtered. “kill everyone?! t-that’s not what happened! my human didn’t kill anyone. shit, the human I saw was a little kid. wouldn’t hurt a fly. or even a moldsmol.”

Sans stared at the skeleton. Did that mean this guy had killed Frisk without provocation?

Red continued to wring his hands. “p-papyrus really wanted to make it to the royal guard, y’know? s-so when he heard there was a human in the area, he, uh, intercepted the human.”

Sans’s breath hitched in his throat. What?

Red shuffled his feet. “it didn’t even matter. papyrus delivered the soul to the king and q-queen. but just when the shithead handed the damn thing over, that fucking flower stole the damn thing. everyone was pissed, but they decided to make him a royal guard anyway. they obviously want anyone that can kill a human so easily, even if it was just a little pipsqueak.”

Sans gripped Red’s shoulder tighter. What the hell? What kind of world did this guy come from?
Papyrus – sweet, kind-hearted Papyrus – killed a human to get into the Royal Guard? The thought was incomprehensible.

He tried to gather himself. He closed his eyes, reached his right hand to his face, and pinched the bridge of his nose between his thumb and forefinger. “okay, listen. our human is alive and they got us out of the underground. they’re kind of a national hero, actually. so don’t let them know any of this, okay?”

Red nodded quickly.

“and, just to be clear, your human never reset after they died?”

“what? no. that was the only time i ever saw the human. i’m pretty sure that stupid, friendly flower was the cause of the resets where i’m from.”

Friendly? Sans knew that Flowey had faked friendship with a lot of monsters when he had the ability to reset, including his own brother. But he always thought it was pretty obvious when the flower had been lying to him. If it wasn’t obvious to Red, then it was pretty clear that the two skeletons really were completely different. Or the universes were nothing alike.

“come on, let’s get back to them before they worry.”

They returned to the group. Papyrus had apparently asked Toriel for cooking advice because the two were engaged in a heated discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of non-stick pans when Sans and Red approached.

Toriel looked at a digital clock that hung in a bank across the street. “Oh my, is it really already this late? I am sorry to cut our conversation short, Papyrus, but Frisk and I really must go if we are to complete our butterscotch-cinnamon pie in time.” She turned to Sans, winked, and said flirtatiously, “I hope we can speak later, Sans?”

Sans gave a thumbs up to the goat monster.

“And it was a pleasure to meet you, Red. I hope to get to know you better!” She waved and she and her adopted human child left.

Sans sighed in equal amounts of exasperation and relief at the sight of the pair leaving. He turned to Papyrus and asked, “you guys have got this, right? i really want to talk to alphys before she clocks off for the night.”

“Yes, of course, Sans. will you be home in time for dinner?”

“thinkin’ about headin’ to grillbz, so don’t hold dinner for me.”

“Okay! Have fun, brother!”

Sans headed towards the lab. He really hoped Alphys was there. He wanted to discuss a result he had found in his examination of one of the human souls from the Underground.

As he turned a corner, he sensed that he was being followed. He turned his head to the side and saw a pair of humans adorned in Mettaton-themed apparel not too far behind him. Although they were holding cameras, they didn’t seem to be interested in taking any photos unlike the rest of the humans in the area.

Sans ignored them. If these humans were after a photograph of him, they weren’t going to get one.
But Sans had a feeling these humans weren’t really interested in his unusual appearance. He turned the corner sharply into an alleyway and teleported to outside the laboratory.

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It was nearly midnight when Sans returned home. He had met up with Alphys and discussed the test results of the soul examination, had gotten some dinner at Grillby’s, and then finally had a wonderful “conversation” with the bartender. After the long day, he was utterly spent.

He walked up to his and Papyrus’s shared room, cast off his clothes, and gently crawled into the car-shaped bed with Papyrus, trying not to wake the taller skeleton. Sans must have moved too quickly because his brother gave a start. Sans reached his left arm around Papyrus and hugged his brother.

“Sans?” his brother asked in an unusually quiet voice. “Is everything alright?”

Heh. His brother never missed a thing.

Sans nodded against his brother’s shoulder. “there were some humans following me earlier. i don’t think they were tourists.”

“Did you scare them away?”

“nah, just lost them. no need to cause a panic. they really might’ve just been lost or something.”

Papyrus nuzzled Sans’s arm. “why are you so tense then? what happened?”

Sans stroked his younger brother’s face and paused for a moment. “i’m so lucky, y’know?”

“What do you mean, brother?”

“you’re just so perfect.”

Papyrus let out a soft “nyeh heh” and placed a skeleton kiss on Sans’s hand. When the tension didn’t leave the smaller skeleton, Papyrus turned to face him. He reached up and took Sans by the chin to make him look into his eyes. “Please, Sans, tell me what is wrong.”

Sans quivered slightly. He told Papyrus about what had happened after Red had seen Frisk. How worried Sans had been when he thought his duplicate was going to attack them. How horrified he had been to hear that Red’s brother had killed the human. In divulging to his brother, Sans felt his shoulders slack and the tautness in his soul diminish.

When Sans finished, Papyrus embraced his brother with one arm. He was silent for a few moments before whispering, “I’m starting to wonder if we should not help him get back to his universe after all, Sans. It sounds like it might not be… the happiest of places.”

Sans nodded, but replied, “that’s his choice, paps. but if you haven’t noticed, he doesn’t seem too eager to get the machine working again.” Sans snuggled against Papyrus. “i think we should try to talk to him a bit more before we bring it up again, but if he wants to leave, we don’t have the right to stop him.”

Papyrus grunted in assent and yawned sleepily.

Sans felt the weariness in his bones. He nestled his head into Papyrus’s shoulder before closing his eyes and drifting to sleep.
[Red POV]

“SANS, HELP ME! PLEASE, I DON’T WANT TO DIE! PLEASE GOD, HELP M– AAAAH!”

Red woke with a start. The warm morning light stretched over his torso. His soul was pounding frantically in his chest. He swallowed dryly. It was just a nightmare. Just a nightmare. Nothing was happening to Papyrus. He was alive. He was fine. Red may be in another universe from him, but his brother could take care of himself. Papyrus was okay. Red breathed deeply, trying to will his soul to calm.

Red rolled over to face the wall. It had been five days since he had first arrived here. After the trip to the capital, Red had come home and collapsed on the bed. He wasn’t sure why, but the trip had drained the last vestiges of energy from him. For the last four days, all he had done was sleep until the afternoon hours, eaten dinner with the pair of skeletons, and then returned to bed. He just couldn’t seem to keep his eyes open. If it hadn’t been for this world’s version of Papyrus, he was sure he would just sleep through meals.

He closed his eyes and tried to will himself back into the welcoming void of sleep. He swallowed again and realized how thirsty he was. He couldn’t really recall the last time he had gotten anything to drink.

He tried to ignore the dryness, but once the thought had settled into his mind, he couldn’t stop thinking about it. He climbed out of bed and walked downstairs to get a glass of water to bring back to his room.

He looked at the clock on the stove and saw that it was a quarter before nine. Usually the brothers were up by now. He could vaguely recall Papyrus telling him one night that he usually had breakfast ready by eight thirty every morning if Red wanted to join them.

He wondered why the skeletons weren’t here. The pair usually lingered over their dinner, taking the time to chat amicably about their day. He wondered if it was any different in the mornings.

He climbed the stairs and paused at the brothers’ bedroom door. If the two had accidentally slept in, it would be rude not to wake them up. And as much as he found their boundless energy a bit overwhelming, he appreciated that the two were letting him stay here. Well, that was, if the two didn’t have ulterior motives. He suspected that the two probably did. After all, it was kill or be killed, and no one was nice just to be nice.

Red shook his head and quietly pushed open the door. He turned towards the bed, his mouth open...
to call softly to the pair, but his voice died in his throat.

Papyrus sat on the bed, leaning his weight onto his right arm. His left hand covered his eyes and mouth. He was making small whining noises that were muffled behind his hand. His legs were splayed open, held open by Sans’s hands. In between the limbs lay the smaller skeleton’s skull, which bobbed up and down. His body blocked the view of Papyrus’s pelvic region, though Red could see the faint orange glow on the blankets. The room was filled with small sucking noises as Sans continued to nod his head.

Papyrus seemed to have a difficult time containing himself; his whines were increasing in volume. Sans brought one of his hands from Papyrus’s leg to his pelvis.

Whatever Sans did, it elicited an immediate response from the taller skeleton.

“NYEH! Saaaans.” The last syllable trailed into a long whine.

There was a loud popping noise and Sans backed his head away from Papyrus slightly. “shhh, bro. red’s still asleep.”

Papyrus smashed his hand harder into his face as Sans returned to his ministrations. His voice was muffled as he whined, “Mmm, Sans, it feels so good! Don’t stop! You’re too good, too good, too good!”

Red clutched his empty hand to his chest where his soul lay beneath. It fluttered violently in pain with a tinge of happiness from a distant memory.

He backed up slowly before sprinting to his own room, closing the door silently behind him. He leaned against the door and didn’t realize he was shaking until he felt water spill onto his hand from the glass he was still carrying.

He gulped down the remainder of the liquid sloppily, causing water to spill down his chin and onto his clothes. He hastily set the glass down on the nightstand next to the bed and climbed onto the mattress, slipping himself under the covers.

A choked sob escaped his mouth. He smashed his face into the pillow so the brothers wouldn’t hear him as he began to weep harshly. His soul beat painfully.

He knew why he was feeling this way. Hearing Papyrus call out his name – his real name, not some shitty pseudonym – reminded him of his own Papyrus. He used to praise him during sex. Sure, his brother would deal him “punishments.” But when Red had obeyed Papyrus’s commands, or had performed some particularly pleasurable act for him, his brother would applaud him, compliment him, make him feel so good.

Well, until he had made it into the Guard.

Red sobbed himself back to sleep, trying not to think about his brother.

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There was a light knock on the door. Red jumped slightly, but didn’t respond. The door opened gently, revealing his lookalike.

“hey.” His face was scrunched with concern. “it’s pretty late. don’t want to pressure you or anything, but paps and i have been a bit worried about you sleeping in every day.”
“sorry.” His voice was hoarse from crying earlier. “been real tired.”

Sans stared at Red for a few moments and strolled to the foot of the bed and sat down.

“listen, i wanted to say – well,” he smiled nervously and continued, “i know you saw paps and i this morning. the door was open and i know it was closed when we started.”

“fuck.” Red curled into the blanket. “fuck, fuck, fuck, sorry.” He felt himself blushing furiously. “i didn’t mean to. i was just going to wake you up. it was late for you guys, and, well, fuck! i’m such a fuckup!” He could feel tears beginning in the corner of his sockets.

Sans gripped Red’s foot reassuringly through the blanket. The gesture sent a shiver through Red’s soul, though he couldn’t place why. “hey, hey, chill. i’m not upset. i just wanted to say sorry if i upset you.”

“upset me?” he rasped.

“yeah, can’t help but notice that you’ve, uh, been crying.” He grinned apologetically and hurried on, “plus, i don’t know what it’s like back where you’re from. i mean…monsters are okay with the thought of paps and i together, but humans don’t really like it.”

Red blinked, bewildered. “why would humans care about you and papyrus?” It seemed bizarre that humans would care about any monsters’ relationship.

Sans’s face tinged with a blue glow. “well, um…because we’re bros, y’know?” He rubbed his left arm with his right hand in nervousness. “humans don’t think siblings should love each other that way.”

Red gaped at Sans in confusion, and then he felt an anger rise up from his chest. “well, fuck them then! who the fuck cares what the humans think?” he shouted defensively. “they don’t fucking know us, and if they can’t accept that sort of this, then they can get the fuck out of here.” He grit his teeth together for a moment and continued, “and why the fuck are you monsters letting them take photos of us anyway? you all just let them! they treat us like we’re fucking freaks or something!”

Sans eyelights darkened slightly. “don’t let anyone hear you say that.”

“or what? humans will come and get me?”

“They might.”

Red jumped back slightly at that. What?

Sans cleared his throat and shifted his weight on the bed. “humans aren’t exactly…happy we’re up here on the surface. when we got up here, we were able to take the old aboveground capital and change it to what you saw the other day. it wasn’t easy – the place had been abandoned a long time ago, and apparently the humans didn’t want it after we went underground. so we took the old crumbling buildings and built on ‘em.

“well, apparently we were supposed to ask permission first. the humans that rule here got real pissed when they got word that monsters were back on the surface. sure, they told the world that they were so pleased to be able to ‘right the wrongs of their past’ or whatever, but they haven’t been treating us all that well. we’re not even supposed to leave the mt. ebott region without special clearance from their immigration office.”
“but why? is it because of the war?” Red asked.

Sans nodded. “i think that’s one reason, yeah. old prejudices are hard to kill. i know a lot of monsters at grillby’s that would love to punch a few humans in the face for no real good reason. but it seems like a lot of humans hate us. i don’t think it’s helped that our population has tripled over the last three years. i think it scares them that we’re going to attack them or something. all i know is that there have been reports of humans beating the crap out of monsters in other cities. even the ones with clearance.

“but it’s not just that. apparently the human nation is worried we’re helping some other group of humans out with trying to overthrow their government. like any of us give a shit about something like that. but yeah, they’ve issued statements about how they suspect ‘members of our community’ have been handing over secrets about our magic to terrorists. like they haven’t been asking us about magic every day since they found us.”

Red couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “and you just let them do all of this?”

Sans shrugged. “for the most part they leave us alone, and king asgore is desperate not to start another war. the last one nearly wiped us all out.”

Red seethed. These monsters were a bunch of weaklings. Where he was from, monsters wouldn’t stand for this shit. They’d slaughter any human that stood in their way.

He recalled the words of the flower monster from a reset long ago. *Isn’t that why we’re still stuck in the Underground? Because we couldn’t hold back? You’re a smart skeleton, you know that we’re on the verge of extinction!*

Red shivered at the memory. He knew the flower had been right. And maybe this was the proof to show it.

“red? can you do me a favor?”

“What?”

“don’t talk about papyrus and me being together. as far as the public knows, i’m dating toriel and grillby. humans can’t even wrap their minds around me dating two monsters. i don’t want to know how they’d treat paps if they knew we were in love.”

“p-papyrus is okay with you dating other monsters?”

Sans smiled. “yeah, of course. he loves me and i love him. he knows that won’t change even if i love tori and grillbz too.”

“But –” Red paused, unsure how to articulate what he was feeling. “doesn’t he get upset?”

“believe me, i’d know if he were upset. it’s not an issue.”

Red didn’t really believe that. His own Papyrus certainly wouldn’t be okay with him sleeping with Grillby or even the goddamn queen. Hell, he wasn’t even sure he wanted anyone other than Papyrus.

His thoughts were interrupted when Sans squeezed his leg. Again, it sent a pleasurable quiver through Red’s soul. Red shook his head. What the fuck was wrong with him? Was he really so starving for attention? He put the thoughts out of his mind.
Sans moved from the bed. “I’m going to go heat up some leftovers for lunch if you want to join me.” He grinned broadly.

Red nodded, dazed. He wasn’t particularly hungry, but his lookalike’s smile was so inviting, he just couldn’t turn him down.

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“Where’s Papyrus anyway?” Red asked in between bites of leftover lasagna.

Sans swallowed his own mouthful before answering. “Heh. Guess you have been asleep for the last few days. He’s on guard duty right now.”

“Really? He’s in the royal guard?” As far as Red knew, this universe’s Papyrus didn’t really seem like Royal Guard material. He seemed much too kind-hearted for the rigorous demands of the job.

“Eh, the royal guard isn’t really about guarding much anymore. At least not the division Paps works in. He mostly poses for the tourists that come in, shows them around sometimes. He loves to show off his puzzles. Says that some traditions are worth preserving. Heh.”

Red stayed silent, but he was fuming. The Royal Guard reduced to acting as a tour guide to humans? These monsters shouldn’t be putting up with this shit.

Sans seemed to notice his anger. “Hey, Paps is doing an amazing thing for us monsters, red. It’s kind of hard to hate someone that makes you smile, and no one can resist around him.” He paused a moment before adding, “Plus, it pays pretty well.”

Red reluctantly nodded. He had done shit for money that he hadn’t liked either. But still, he had his limits.

As Red lifted his fork up for another bite, the lasagna tumbled off and spilled onto his shirt. He sighed loudly.

Sans got up from the table. “Don’t worry, man. I’ll go get some of my spare clothes. Besides, your clothes are pretty dirty anyway. It’s been a few days.”

Closer to a few weeks if Red were to be honest with himself, but Red nodded nonetheless. Sans left to get the clothing from his room and Red took off his shirt and jacket, revealing his ribcage.

Sans returned with a white t-shirt and a pair of black gym shorts. As he reached his hand out to give the clothing to Red, he paused partway. His eyes widened as he looked at Red’s torso.

“Hey, you mind?” Red said nervously, feeling himself blush slightly. Why the fuck was Sans looking at him like that? An involuntary shiver ran up his spine and he berated himself silently. What the fuck was wrong with him?

“Are those…from the fight where you lost your tooth?”

Red looked down at his bones and realized that Sans was looking at the deep scars blanketing his body. The heat in his face intensified. “No.”

“Have you been in a lot of fights?” Sans looked deeply troubled.

“No. To be honest, I hate fighting.” Red felt uneasy admitting it, but he wanted to reassure the other skeleton so that he’d calm down. His anxiety was infectious.
“then how?”

Red hesitated. He supposed that since Sans had shared his relationship with his brother, he could do the same for him. “well, y’know how it is. my brother, um, got a little excited.” He tried to grin, but he only felt the corner of his mouth twitch for a second before falling immediately.

“wait, wait. your bro does this to you?”

Red didn’t think it was possible, but his face burned even more. He was sure he was lighting up the entire room by now with its glow. “well, yeah?” Didn’t he do the same to his brother? He figured that Papyrus probably didn’t really have the backbone to inflict any pain on Sans, though he might be wrong.

Sans’s eyes widened in horror and a slight pain crept into his voice. “oh my god. he abuses you?”

“what? no! he doesn’t abuse me. it’s not like that!” Red fidgeted, trying to come up with an explanation, but his mind came up blank. Sans’s brow was raised upwards in a look of pity.

Red huffed in frustration, snatched the clothes out of his hands, and stomped up the stairs to his room. He slammed the door behind him, feeling rage bubble up in his soul.

Sans was judging him. It was pretty fucking obvious. And for what? Because his brother liked to play rough? Red loved that shit! It made him so happy when Papyrus would come home and delve out his punishment.

Well, until recently.

Red couldn’t help but think back to this morning when Papyrus had praised his brother, his own name tumbling out of the taller skeleton’s mouth. He realized how much he missed his own Papyrus, or at least the old version of him before he became a Guard. He missed the chains, but he also missed the sweet compliments. He missed that unique feeling of pain mixed with pleasure. The feeling of Papyrus kissing him.

God, when was the last time they had kissed? Had it been months? Years? He couldn’t remember.

Red put his hands to his head and shook it from side to side. That didn’t mean Papyrus abused him! He liked the torture. Boss was just the one who made the rules, and Red was okay with that!

Sure, there were times when Red had asked for the two to create a safe word. But his brother had been right – it was pointless! Red could take it! He loved the punishment!

Except for last time.

But what the fuck did Sans know? He’d never even met his brother! Fuck him!

He put on the fresh clothes and marched down the stairs in a huff. He was going to tell Sans where he could shove it.

That was, until he saw Sans’s face. He was sitting on the couch and staring at Red, and Red could see tears forming in his eyes. His face and posture conveyed an overwhelming sense of nervousness. He stood up and walked over to the bottom of the stairs where Red stood.

“red, i’m real sorry. i was out of line. i shouldn’t have said that.”
Red gawked for a moment, but he felt the traces of anger leave his soul. He nodded, accepting the apology.

Sans reached his arms out and embraced Red, whispering to the side of his skull, “believe me when i say this: paps and i will never hurt you. you’re free to stay here as long as you want.”

Red tensed against the hug. What the fuck? He couldn’t even remember the last time he had received a hug. That shit was way too personal, and who the fuck just went around hugging other monsters like that?

But it felt good. He didn’t want it to end. He reached his arms around Sans and squeezed his hand against his shoulder blade.

Sans turned his head and delivered a small skeleton kiss to Red’s cheek.

“woah!” Red backed up, tripped over his own feet, and fell onto the stairs. “what the fuck, man?!”

Sans blushed a bright blue. “sorry, red. i guess i misread the situation.”

Red felt his soul prickle with excitement. Sans had misread the situation, but Red couldn’t help but think how handsome the skeleton looked as he – no wait, what the fuck was he thinking? He was looking at himself. The fuck was wrong with him?

But as Sans started to walk away, Red called out, “wait!” Red hesitated when Sans stopped and turned to face him. Red swallowed dryly. “i d-didn’t mind.” He fidgeted nervously. “i l-liked it.” God, what the fuck was he thinking?

Sans smiled widely and strolled over to Red. He kneeled down next to Red’s face and planted a small skeleton kiss against his cheekbone. Red shivered and against his better judgment, he clanked his own mouth against Sans’s. Sans pulled back and looked at Red, a lustful look in his eyes. He bent down again and planted a trail of skeleton kisses from Red’s cheek to his neck. Red groaned a little as his double nuzzled at the sensitive vertebrae.

Sans reached out his hand to Red’s chin, and a sharp tingle of magic burst through the air as Sans manifested a cyan tongue in his mouth. Red’s breath hitched as Sans pressed the tongue along Red’s teeth, begging for entry.

Red groaned as his soul gave a small quiver, and Sans’s tongue pushed its way inside at the opportunity. Red conjured his own red tongue and felt Sans’s tongue grasp at the magic. Sans’s magic tasted so unlike his brother’s – it was smoothly sweet with a hint of sour that prickled at his own tongue. Red pushed his tongue back to get a better taste.

Sans backed up and removed his tongue from Red’s mouth, much to the gold-toothed skeleton’s displeasure. His annoyance must have shown because Sans held a finger up to Red’s mouth and whispered “shh” teasingly.

The blue-tongued skeleton moved downwards to the bottom stair and maneuvered himself in between Red’s legs. He reached up and tenderly pulled down Red’s shorts, revealing his pelvic bones. Red suddenly felt exposed. What the fuck was he doing?! Red placed his hands in between his legs, trying to hide his body.

Sans looked up from between his legs and frowned. “you want me to stop?”

He looked so concerned.
Red shook his head and shakily removed his hands. “n-no. just nervous.”

Sans chuckled and licked the inside of his femur, inciting a tingle of pleasure to move through his body. Red trembled at the sensation. Sans pulled his face away from the bone and murmured quietly, “don’t worry, i won’t do anything you don’t want me to do.” He reached a hand up to Red’s pubic arch and began to rub gently. Red squirmed and gasped. “just let me know if you don’t like anything.”

Don’t like anything? Red’s mind couldn’t fathom anything like that at the moment. He didn’t want Sans to stop.

Sans rubbed his finger more vigorously against the arch and inched his face closer to Red’s pelvis. He slowly stroked his tongue along the ilium and Red sat up at the sensation. Red could feel himself starting to lose control as Sans slowly trailed his tongue downwards along the bone, dipping into and teasing every crevice, until he reached the pubis.

Red could feel the involuntary magic swirling and pulsing around Sans’s ministrations. Red tried to fight it – it was bad enough he was letting the other skeleton touch his sensitive bones – but he failed. When the magic fully formed, he released a deep breath that he had been unknowingly holding back.

Sans stopped his movements and pulled his head back from the glowing red opening. He gave a gentle smile to Red. “may i?”

Why the fuck was he asking for permission? He knew it was wrong, and he knew if Papyrus ever found out, he’d kill him, but Red loved this. Despite his misgivings, Red enthusiastically nodded.

Sans dipped his head down and flicked his tongue softly across the slit. “ngh!” Red sprung forward automatically, sliding himself closer to Sans. The change of position allowed Red to have a better view of the other skeleton. Not that it mattered. Sans, encouraged by the movement, dipped his tongue inside the folds and began to thrust with the drooling magic. Red moaned and tightened his eyes to a close.

Sans lapped eagerly at the slickening magic. Red could feel him exploring his depths, licking thoroughly in every spot before pushing further in to search the next section. Red gasped and moaned. He was starting to feel dizzy from the attention; he couldn’t quite catch his breath.

“AAAH!” Red screamed as Sans found a particularly sensitive spot at the back of his genitalia. Red felt himself clench slightly around the tongue and he pushed his right hand to the back of Sans’s head out of reflex. He pushed Sans’s skull forward before he realized what he was doing.

Shit, shit. Was Sans going to stop? Red hadn’t asked for permission to do that. He wondered what punishment the other skeleton would give him.

Red almost whined when Sans pulled his tongue out with a small squelching noise. The blue-tongued skeleton was gasping, fluids dripping off his conjured tongue.

“knew i’d find your spot.”

Red gazed at him, bewildered. Sans leaned back into the red organ and immediately pushed his tongue to the same spot.

“aah, aah! oh god!”
Sans thrust his tongue repeatedly and Red threw his head back, unable to contain himself. Fuck, fuck, he was so close. The fire in his soul was reaching a peak and he knew he wouldn’t be able to contain himself for much longer.

Sans pressed his hand to Red’s clit and began to rub forcefully in tiny circles. Red jammed his pelvis forward, nearly slipping off the staircase. His conjured genitalia tightened around Sans’s tongue and he curled his toes as he came. He knew he was wailing obscenities, but his mind couldn’t comprehend what he was saying.

As he reached the end of his release, Sans drank from within Red’s folds, making loud slurping noises as he brought the liquid to his mouth. Every time the skeleton returned his tongue to the opening, Red would clench. He was oversensitive after his orgasm, and the movements were leaving him lightheaded.

When Sans drank his fill, he leaned over Red and pressed his lower half against the gold-toothed skeleton’s groin. Red shivered as Sans moved his face close to his own.

“here, have a taste.”

Sans pushed his tongue against Red’s teeth, and this time Red allowed him inside immediately. The tongue pressed against his and Red tasted Sans’s sweet and sour tongue mixed with a sickly sweet syrupy taste. The combination was intoxicating.

Sans pulled back, a thin dribble of red-and-blue drool trailing from his mouth to Red’s. Red quivered slightly. God, that felt good.

Sans stood up, towering over Red. He closed his eyes and stretched his arms upwards, his bones cracking and popping as he extended his limbs. “mmm, that was fun. you want anything to drink?”

Red ogled at him. “y-you don’t…” he coughed. “want anything in return?”

“heh. nah, not in the mood.”

Red eyed the other skeleton. Was he fucking with him? How the fuck could someone not be in the mood after that?

Sans opened his eyes and looked down at Red. “ah, shit, stay there a second.”

He walked into the kitchen and returned a moment later with a small kitchen towel. He tossed it to Red. “sorry about the mess. thought i’d gotten it all before it fell.” He nodded his head to the stair underneath Red’s pelvis. There were droplets of Red’s clear liquid, which glowed a slight red color. “sorry, could you clean that up? papyrus will kill us if it stains.”

Red nodded, blushing slightly. He wiped the stair, the inside of his femurs, and the outside of his still-summoned genitalia that continued to drip from his release.

Sans got water for both of them, and invited Red to sit on the couch with him and watch television. Red joined him and Sans flipped to some shitty game show.

Red hardly paid attention to the television. His soul just wouldn’t stop fluttering in his chest.

He was seriously fucked in the head.
Papyrus squinted as the flash of light shone in his eyes.

“Aww, one more, Mr. Skeleton Man! That last one you were blinking!”

“WOOPSIE! I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, APOLOGIZE FOR THE MISTAKE. TAKE AS MANY PHOTOS AS YOU WISH!”

The young human child next to Papyrus giggled and leaned in closer to the tall skeleton. Papyrus summoned his magic to lift the red cape so that its end billowed in an imaginary wind. The child’s father made a noise of surprise and took another photo this time with the flash turned off.

The father strode forward and shook Papyrus’s hand animatedly. “That was wonderful! Thank you so much!”

“NYEH HEH HEH! THINK NOTHING OF IT, HUMAN! AND DO NOT FORGET TO TRY MY PUZZLES BEFORE YOU LEAVE! IT IS A MONSTER TRADITION!”

As the pair left, the crowd of humans pressed in further to take photos of him. Papyrus placed his hands on his hips, strut out his chest, and posed as the tourists’ cameras clicked and flashed.

Papyrus loved his job. He had always wanted to be a Royal Guard ever since he was a young bundle of bones. The honor! The popularity! The chance to truly put his puzzle-making skills to the test! He, the Great Papyrus, had always known that the job was perfectly suited to a skeleton of his caliber!

Papyrus had been so pleased when Undyne had approached him one day and told him the great news. She had let him know just how important it was to show the integrity and strength of the Royal Guard to any human visitors to Very New Home.

Papyrus knew he would not let Undyne down, and he most certainly hadn’t! Every day scores of humans lined up to take photos with him, participate in his most complex of puzzles, and on occasion, listen to him as he described every important monster and building in the capital, as well as the rich history of the Underground.

The crowd began to thin, moving on to the next puzzle that he had set up. Papyrus began to move forward alongside the group – he had to keep up or he wouldn’t have a chance to recalibrate his puzzles in a timely manner!

He placed one foot forward and was suddenly overcome by a very strange feeling. He turned to his left and noticed that one human had not moved with the crowd. He was staring at him, dark shadows lingering under his eyes. Papyrus couldn’t be sure why, but this human unnerved him.
Perhaps it was the way his visibly dilated eyes stared disconcertingly at the skeleton or maybe it was how stiffly the human held himself. Whatever the reasoning, his soul gave a small pang of fear and a shiver ran up his spine.

The human noticed that Papyrus was looking back at him and gave a wide smile. He lifted his hand – the rigid way he moved was just so unnatural – and revealed a camera. He tilted his head to the side slightly, as if asking for a picture.

Papyrus nodded and grinned broadly. Perhaps this human was just shy! Papyrus could understand that. The skeleton posed for the camera, but blinked when the flash went off. When he opened his eyes again, the human was gone. Papyrus looked around wildly but caught no sign of the human.

He must have gone on to the next puzzle with the rest of the humans.

Just as Papyrus was about to move on to the next puzzle again, he felt a buzzing in his pocket. He pulled out his cell phone and saw one new message from Frisk.

* Mom and I were wondering if you, Sans, and your cousin wanted to have dinner with us sometime this week. I didn’t really get a chance to talk to him and Mom really wants to meet him.

Papyrus beamed in excitement and almost responded with an enthusiastic “OF COURSE!” But just as he was about to send the message he realized that perhaps he was being too presumptuous. Red clearly hadn’t been feeling well and it would be rude to promise his presence if he didn’t want to go.

* I NEED TO ASK RED IF HE IS ABLE TO GO. HE HAS BEEN FEELING QUITE UNWELL LATELY.

He hoped that Red would go. If he were to be honest, he was very worried about the state the skeleton was in. Sleeping until the afternoon hours every day, hardly doing anything – it reminded Papyrus of how Sans used to act.

Papyrus sighed. With a start, he realized that he had stood still for far too long! He ran after the group of humans in a flash. He certainly hoped that no one had tinkered with the mechanisms of his puzzles too much.

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Red stared blankly at the television. His knees were pulled up to his chest and he wrapped his arms around his legs as he sat on the lumpy couch. He could hear Sans shuffling around the kitchen, preparing dinner.

Red couldn’t stop thinking about earlier. What the hell had he done? He had actually let his other self do that to him! His soul couldn’t stop fluttering at the thought of Sans touching him. And it wasn’t like Red couldn’t have stopped him. Fuck, the other skeleton had kept asking for permission the entire time. Was he really so pathetic that he couldn’t just say no? Why the fuck hadn’t he refused?

He pressed his skull into his knees. He had wanted it, that was why. But how could he just give in like that? And why did he have that temptation in the first place? He knew he missed his brother, but this was too much.

God, his brother. Red pushed his head more firmly into his knees. He had cheated on Papyrus. There was no excuse. He had done it without any real hesitation. He hadn’t even thought about how it might affect him. Red felt guilt surge through his soul. The pain was so intense that it
rushed throughout the rest of his body. His bones gave a small rattle before he suppressed the feeling.

Plus, who knew what this Sans was really planning? If there was one thing that his universe had taught him, it was that no one could be trusted. Red had been harboring doubts before — thanks to that fucking flower — but once his brother had insulted him, all misgivings were washed away. The world was “kill or be killed,” and he was sure this universe was no exception to that rule.

Red sighed. He realized he was still angry with Papyrus for the words he had thrown at him before he had left his universe. Maybe that’s why he had allowed Sans to do that to him. An act of revenge. Sure, he may not have been thinking it like that at the time, but his subconscious knew he was pissed off at his brother. There really was no other explanation for his behavior.

The front door suddenly flung open, hitting the wall loudly. Red jumped and looked to his right. Papyrus marched in. His boundless energy was unmistakable.

“GREETINGS, RED! I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, AM HAPPY TO SEE YOU UP AND ABOUT!”

Red nodded slowly and turned towards the kitchen. Sans walked out, an oversized pink and frilly apron covering his front.

“hey, bro. dinner’s just about ready, so come on in, you two.”

Papyrus all but skipped into the kitchen. “WOWIE, SANS! YOU MADE DINNER? I COULD NOT BE PROUDER OF YOU!”

“heh. well, i got to stay home today and you had to work, so i thought it was fair if i gave it a shot.”

Red pushed himself off the couch and slowly followed the brothers into the kitchen. The smell of fried meat filled the room. He sat down at the table next to Papyrus.

“What did you make, brother? It smells… distinct.” Papyrus had a pinched expression on his face.

Sans carried a pan to the table and plopped a hot dog onto Papyrus’s plate with a pair of tongs.

“SANS! HOT DOGS?” The look of disgust on his face was evident.

“hey, no complaining. it’s cheap and delicious.”

“But hot dogs? you know how much i hate grease!”

“zip it, bro. just because you learned how to cook doesn’t mean i did. this is one of the only things i know how to cook. i’ve got to master the basics. besides,” he cracked a grin as he served the other two plates, “i relish the opportunity to get you to like one of my favorite meals.”

Papyrus howled loudly. “SANS, YOU COULD HAVE TRIED MAKING SPAGHETTI. THAT IS A CLASSIC! I WOULD HAVE BEEN HAPPY TO TEACH YOU!”

“frankly, that would defeat the purpose of me cooking, paps.”

Papyrus groaned in reaction to the second pun. He then cut off a piece of his hot dog with a fork and knife and took a careful bite, his face scrunching up in revulsion.

Red looked at his own plate. Sans hadn’t even served the hot dog with a bun. Or mustard. He cast
his eyes around the table and saw that his duplicate was squeezing a heavy helping of ketchup on top of his meal. Red knew he would be doing the same with mustard if he had the chance, but the sickly sweet smell of the red condiment was making him feel sick. Or perhaps that was the guilt from earlier. He sighed and picked the hot dog up in his hand and ate the food without tasting it.

“SO HOW DID THE TWO OF YOU SPEND YOUR DAY?”

Red glanced at Papyrus and saw that the taller skeleton was staring intently at him. He averted his gaze to his plate and muttered a barely audible “nothing.” He could feel himself blushing and he hated himself for it.

Sans chuckled. “red and I here had some fun earlier.” Red pulled his head up to stare at Sans in horror. “there were no weiners involved,” Sans said as he waved his hot dog in Red's direction, “but i think red can agree it was fun nonetheless.” Sans winked in Red’s direction.

“WOWIE!” Papyrus shouted, genuinely excited. “I AM GLAD YOU DID NOT SLEEP THE WHOLE DAY, RED. I HAVE BEEN QUITE CONCERNED!”

“heh. well, he tried, but who can stay asleep when i’m around??”

Red dropped the hot dog from his hand and stood up abruptly. “what the hell did you tell him that for??”

Sans gave a weak smile to Red. “heh. i told you already. i am completely honest with paps about everything. you’re no exception.”

Red glanced to Papyrus, who was beaming at Sans. Seeing the skeleton’s bright smile really pissed Red off.

Red slammed his hands on the table, causing the other two skeletons to jump. “okay, what the fuck is wrong with everyone here?”

“What do you mean?” Papyrus’s voice dropped in volume considerably.

“why the fuck is everyone so nice here? am i missing something? why the fuck do you think it’s okay to just tell your brother everything?”

Papyrus’s eyes were wide. In the same hushed voice, he asked, “Is – Is it not nice where you are from?”

“fuck no!” Papyrus winced at the ferocity of Red’s declaration. “it’s ‘kill or be killed,’ and no one’s got time to be nice to each other.”

Papyrus looked like he was on the edge of tears.

“so what the fuck do you two want from me? because no one is this fucking nice, and i won’t be fucking used anymore without knowing what the fuck you two want from me!”

“we don’t want anything from you. it’s not like that here.” Sans’s voice had none of the usual joviality.

“bullshit.”

Papyrus pulled nervously at his cape and quietly muttered, “Language.”

Red let out a roaring laugh. He couldn’t help himself – it was just too funny. He could feel the
hysteria building up in his chest. These fuckers couldn’t even be honest with him. They were just going to keep jerking him around. He wasn’t going to fall for it. He refused.

Because no one was that nice.

His laughter turned into choked sobs. He was shaking so hard that he could hear his bones rattling.

Papyrus rose from his chair, walked over to Red, and wrapped his arms around him. Red sobbed into the taller skeleton’s chest. What was he doing? Why was he letting Papyrus do this to him?

“it’s not fair,” he mumbled into Papyrus’s chest.

“you don’t have to leave,” Sans said from across the table. “you can stay for as long as you want.”

“it just isn’t fair,” Red repeated. His sobbing intensified.

Papyrus pulled him closer to his chest and muttered something consoling, though Red couldn’t make out the words. He smashed his face into Papyrus’s chest and let himself fall apart.

He didn’t know how long he lost himself, but when he pulled himself away he felt drained. He took a step backwards from the tall skeleton and saw the concern etched into his face. Red’s soul gave a lurch of guilt at the gaze.

He turned to face the stairs and muttered, “i’m going to bed.”

Papyrus lightly grabbed his hand, but Red shrugged it away and stumbled forward. He staggered up the stairs and to his bedroom. He immediately collapsed on the mattress and lay there, uncaring.

All he wanted to do was sleep. Anything to get rid of the guilt and pain emanating from his soul.
Papyrus paced the living room. It was Saturday and he had the day off. Usually Papyrus and Sans spent the weekend together. They would play games or visit friends. One weekend they had even snuck to a car show across the human border. Every weekend with Sans was an adventure and he was so happy to spend time with his older brother.

But today, Papyrus couldn’t relax. Anxiety filled his soul and he just couldn’t make himself sit down.

He knew Sans felt similarly. He was sitting on the couch staring at the television. Sans wasn’t really watching it – he had turned off the sound and had a distant look on his face. Occasionally he’d cast a glance to his old bedroom and dart his eyes back to the screen when he confirmed that Red hadn’t emerged.

Papyrus stopped pacing and looked at the clock. It was noon. That was late enough.

He went to the kitchen, quickly made a cheese sandwich, and poured a glass of water. It wasn’t his best meal, but he was sure it would suffice. He carried the items into the living room and cast a glance at his brother who was staring at him puzzlingly.

“I WILL RETURN SOON, BROTHER.”

Papyrus marched up the stairs, filled with a sense of purpose. He was not going to let Red sleep anymore. It was time for them to talk.

He pushed open the door slowly and spotted the smaller skeleton, his face smashed into his pillow. He was still fully clothed. The covers sprawled from the foot of the bed to the ground and the sheets were detached from the bed. Papyrus wondered when the linens had last been changed.

“Red?” He lowered his voice. He knew the skeleton was somewhat jumpy and nervous, and although Papyrus loved to project himself, he knew it could intimidate even the calmest of monsters.

Red lay there, unresponsive.

“Red, wake up. It is late.”

Still, the skeleton did not respond. Papyrus started to grumble under his breath, but stopped himself. He needed to be kind to Red. This wasn’t his fault.
He cleared his throat loudly and called out uncertainly, “Sans?”

The smaller skeleton gave a small start. He lifted his head from the pillow, eyes shut. “what’s up, boss?” His voice was groggy, but it lilted slightly as he spoke.

“Boss?” That was bizarre. Did Red think that Papyrus was in charge? He supposed that was a safe assumption. After all, between him and his brother it was usually he, the Great Papyrus, that took charge. Still, it was strange to be addressed in such a way.

Red snapped his head to the side and saw Papyrus hovering over him. Papyrus could see sweat forming on the other skeleton’s brow. So much for not intimidating him.

“oh. uh, heh. sorry, thought you were –” Red trailed off. He cast his eyes to the food in Papyrus’s hand. “is that for me?”

Papyrus nodded and offered the plate to him. “It’s quite late. You should eat.”

“i’m not hungry. you can have it.” Red rolled over to stare at the wall. “i’m pretty tired. i’ll get up for dinner.”

Papyrus felt unease prickle at his soul. He sighed and placed the food and water on the nightstand. He knew Red was being honest – he looked utterly exhausted – but Papyrus knew he had to stop him from falling asleep again. Red was too much like his own brother and this much sleep had not been good for him either.

“Red, I need to speak with you.”

The smaller skeleton heaved a giant sigh. “can’t it wait?”

“No. I think you need my help.” Red scoffed, but Papyrus pressed on, “If you are anything like my Sans, then I know how you are feeling right now and I wish to help you!”

Red turned back to face him. He was still sweating profusely, but his brow was furrowed in a scowl. “why would i feel anything like your sans? we’re not even the same monster.”

“But you are acting like he used to.” Papyrus kneeled on the ground next to the bed and sighed. “He used to sleep all day and did not care about the world around him.” He reached a hand out to Red’s shoulder and all but whispered, “I almost lost him.”

Red blinked. “what do you mean?”

Papyrus pulled his arm back and placed his hands in his lap. He did not like to dwell on the past. Who needed the past when today was so bright and the future even brighter?

But he knew Sans was not like him; even now, years later, there were moments when his brother would stare into space, unblinkingly, lost in his thoughts. He could always tell when Sans was visiting some troubling memory because he would grip himself harshly as he stared into the distance. On particularly bad days, Sans’s eyelights would disappear and he would tremble violently. When that happened, Papyrus would shake him out of his stupor, insistent that his older brother come back to reality. Sans used to apologize and continue like nothing had happened. But recently Sans would divulge his memories to Papyrus. Every time he did so Sans would remark about how much better he had felt after sharing his burden. Sans had made so much progress, especially over this last year.

And Red needed that now. But the only way to get him to open up was to delve into the past
himself.

“He almost fell down because I refused to see how unhappy he was.” Papyrus gripped his femur bones tightly. “I was so excited to be up here. We were going to start a new life aboveground. I was so happy to have a new home! But…” His voice constricted. “I did not realize just how upset Sans was. I know now that he was waiting for a reset, but at the time I thought he was being lazy. All he did was laze about while the rest of monsterkind remade Very New Home into the city it is today. He did not offer to help; all he did was sleep!

“So I had to take charge. I put our name down for an apartment in the capital and we moved as soon as King Asgore opened migration for all monsters. I thought that once Sans saw how wonderful it was up here that he would be just as excited as me!

“But he only got worse. He would wake up screaming from nightmares. He would go days without eating. At one point he refused to leave his bed for two weeks straight.”

Papyrus could feel tears forming at the corners of his eyes at the memories, and his voice shook as he continued, “One day Sans told me that he was going to go away for a while, but that he would come back as soon as there was a reset. I think he thought that would be reassuring, but I was so scared. I didn’t know what he meant, but I knew whatever he was saying wasn’t good news like he pretended it was.” Papyrus reached his hand to his eyes to wipe away his tears.

“What happened?” Red’s voice was barely audible.

“Before he could leave, I kissed him.”

Red’s eyes widened.

“Nyeh heh,” Papyrus laughed tearfully. “He had a similar reaction. I suspect that he thought I didn’t love him as he loved me.” He remembered how Sans had stumbled when Papyrus had pressed his mouth against his brother’s. When Papyrus had pulled away, they had both had tears streaming down their cheekbones.

“It wasn’t until I begged him to stay that he shared everything with me. He told me about how he had lived through so many timelines. And that we had both been subjects to experimentation by Gaster. And… he told me how much he loved me.”

He had used more than words to tell him that. Papyrus blushed at the memory.

“Well, isn’t he lucky?” There was no mistaking the jealousy in Red’s voice.

Papyrus looked directly into his eyes. “It took him a long time to get better. It’s only been a year since he’s felt comfortable talking to me about everything and he still has his bad days. He was on his own for so many years and he went through countless resets. I came so close to losing him forever.” He swallowed. “I know you don’t trust us, but I don’t want you to go through the same thing.”

Red silently stared at Papyrus, his face unreadable.

“Please, Red, I know you are a good person, and we care about you. I know that is hard to believe, but it is true.”

“You don’t know anything about me.” Red had a vacant look, as if he wasn’t truly looking at Papyrus. It was the same face Sans had when he was stuck in a bad memory.
“So tell me. Tell me about the resets. Tell me about your Gaster. Tell me everything. But please, just talk.”

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Just talk. That was easier said than done. And about what? About how shitty he was? About how his brother hated him? And if this version of Papyrus was as nice as he acted, if it all wasn’t just an act, then he wouldn’t forgive someone like him. He was such an asshole.

“have you ever killed anyone before?”

Papyrus shook his head slowly, his brow lifted in shock at the question.

“i have.”

They stared at each other for a few moments before Papyrus said, “Well? Are you going to explain?”

Red brought his knees to his chest and breathed in deeply. “well i meant what i said last night. in my universe, it’s ‘kill or be killed.’ we fight each other all the time. it could be for fun or for honor or just because you’re pissed off, but everyone fights.

“my bro used to talk a lot of shit back when he was younger. he would tell everyone that would listen that he was going to be a royal guard because he could kick anyone’s ass. heh. he used to be so… excited about life. i guess he was just a kid though. we both were, really. maybe that’s why most monsters let it go for so long.

“i guess it was only a matter of time until someone got pissed enough that they challenged him. heh. by the time i heard him screaming for me, he had gotten the shit kicked out of him.”

Red could still remember running in the direction of his brother’s desperate screams. He had sent a spray of snow flying into the air as he had skidded to a stop at the scene. One of the local wolf monsters had towered over Papyrus, who had clutched his skull, still frantically calling for help. The wolf monster had blood matted in his grey fur along his shoulder, obviously injured by one of Papyrus’s bone attacks. Red had seen the rage stretched across the monster’s face. The wolf’s claws had been raised to the air, ready to strike the cowering bag of bones below him.

Red had felt a boiling wrath burst from his soul at the sight. He had called upon his magic and slammed the monster into the ground as hard as he could. He had held the monster there and had rushed forward to look at Papyrus, who had continued to grab at his head in pain. Red had lifted his brother’s shaking hands away from his face and had seen the elongated crack that stretched across his brother’s eye.

Red had lost control. He had lifted the wolf monster into the air and smashed him down into the ground repeatedly. His opponent had tried to use employ his own magic against Red, but he had easily dodged the projectiles.

“i kicked the guy’s ass. it wasn’t hard. i knew how to take care of myself.”

Red paused, recalling the look of sheer terror on the wolf monster’s face. The guy had known he had lost, had known that he was at the skeleton’s mercy.

“i could’ve killed him right there, but i decided to let him go. he wouldn’t mess with us again. well, that’s what i had thought anyway.” Red squeezed his legs tighter to his chest. “i went to go carry my brother home and while my back was turned the jerk attacked me again. even though i had
shown him mercy. He shot my tooth right out.”

Red remembered how he had bent down to look at his brother’s face. He had needed to make sure he was safe to move. His brother’s shrill scream hadn’t warned him in time of the incoming magic attack. He had been knocked off his feet when it had hit him full force in the mouth.

“so i killed him.”

Red hadn’t even summoned his magic intentionally. It had just been instinct hardwired into his soul. He could still remember the drain on his reserves as he had summoned the Gaster Blaster. His subconscious hadn’t held back. The beam of super-concentrated magic had poured out of his Blaster’s maw, blowing his opponent away.

“i still remember all that dust.” His voice faltered. “it was everywhere.” Even after the monster had been dead, he hadn’t stopped his attack. It had poured from him so easily. The force of the magic attack had scattered the dust every which way.

When his attack had finally abated, he hadn’t been able to stop crying. It had been his fault. He had never wanted to kill anyone. He had known that went against everything he had ever been taught, but that had been the truth. He had always found killing to be so repugnant. He had been no better than any of the other shitty monsters in the Underground.

He still remembered the glares of judgment from the onlookers. After all, who cried after killing? And now he realized that Boss had been judging him for those tears too. His brother had said as much before Red had come to this universe. Red had thought for so long that Papyrus was the only one that hadn’t judged him that day. The only one that had appreciated his actions. Guess not. Tears were for the weak after all and Boss couldn’t stand weakness.

Red realized that he was crying now. Great. More proof that he was absolutely pathetic.

Papyrus leaned up from the ground and embraced the smaller skeleton. Red wrapped his arms around Papyrus’s back, clutching him like a lifeline. God, he never knew how much he enjoyed hugging. It just wasn’t something you did back home. Red melted into the embrace, sobs shaking his bones. He was gasping, on the edge of hysterics, but he felt the taller skeleton’s chest heave slowly in calm, deep breaths. Red focused on the motion and tried to match his breathing.


Gradually Red’s breath slowed. When he finally stilled, Papyrus gave a final squeeze and backed away from him, staring into his eyes.

“Please eat.”

Red guessed he owed Papyrus that much for letting him cry all over him two days in a row. He nodded and sat up. Papyrus handed the sandwich over and Red accepted it with slightly shaking hands. He took a heaping bite of the sandwich, not really tasting the food. The first bite awakened a hunger in his soul that he hadn’t realized had been present. He ravenously tore into the meal, his sharp teeth ripping the bread and cheese apart.

Between bites, Red asked, mouth bulging, “sans got better just from talking?” He sniffed. “it wasn’t even that helpful. i don’t know how the hell he’s so happy now.”

Papyrus shifted on the ground. “It took a lot of work. He didn’t stop with just that conversation. He continued to talk to me. I made him promise to be completely honest with me. It took a long time
for him to open up completely to me. I think he only opened up to Grillby and Toriel a few months ago after extensive discussion with his doctor.”

“he went to a doctor?”

Papyrus nodded ecstatically. “Yes! There are quite a few humans living in Very New Home and one of them treats Sans! Apparently there are doctors that get paid to listen to others talk. If I did not have my duties as a Royal Guard, I would love to pursue that career! I, the Great Papyrus am a wonderful listener!”

Red scrunched his face. A human doctor? He just couldn’t understand how these two could just trust one so easily. The assholes had exiled them Underground for how long? And now that they were back on the surface they were still under their watchful eyes. He wondered if this doctor was just a spy for those jackasses. He had half a mind to go tear this human up for preying on a vulnerable monster like Sans.

Papyrus reached a hand to Red’s cheek and grazed it. Red’s thoughts stilled. “I know you don’t trust them, but don’t judge humans on your experiences so far. One of the kindest people I know is a human. They have shown me that humans have the capacity for good just like anyone else.”

Red turned away from the touch and finished his sandwich. Red thought he knew who Papyrus was talking about and he didn’t want to think about them. It was so much easier to think of these humans as the enemy. He certainly didn’t want to talk to one about his feelings.

Besides, he couldn’t imagine spilling everything to another monster, never mind a fucking human. He couldn’t believe he had told Papyrus as much as he had already.

“I think you would also benefit from regular sleep. If you are worried about preoccupying your mind during the day, I am sure that Sans will let you work with him in Dr. Alphys’s lab.”

“you guys are okay with working with that mad scientist?”

“Dr. Alphys is quite sane in our universe, Red. Though she does have an unhealthy taste for instant noodles that I just cannot understand.”

Red wondered what work Gaster’s successor did in this universe. He had only met the doctor briefly back when Gaster had decided to turn his focus to experimenting with determination. He remembered with a shiver the injections burning through his body and was glad that Dr. Alphys hadn’t been there. She had merely provided the theory to Gaster, though Red was sure she would have jumped at the opportunity to join him.

Once everyone had forgotten about the skeleton monster after his accident, Red hadn’t bothered to keep in touch with Dr. Alphys. He knew of the rumors surrounding the lizard monster though. He wondered if she had really kidnapped as many monsters as the stories claimed.

If the rest of this world was any indicator, the Dr. Alphys here probably adopted orphans, fed the hungry, and cured the world of illness.

“heh. i guess i can check it out.”

“All I ask is that you try.” Papyrus pushed himself off the ground and exclaimed loudly, “HOW ABOUT YOU GET DRESSED AND COME DOWNSTAIRS? IT WOULD BE LOVELY TO SPEND THE DAY TOGETHER.”

Red wiped his face on his arm and nodded slowly. As he made the movement, Papyrus leaned
down and planted a gentle skeleton kiss on the top of Red’s skull. The taller skeleton hummed brightly. Red froze at the touch and felt his face warm. When Papyrus pulled away, he smiled radiantly at Red.

“Thank you very much,” he said softly.

Red nodded briskly, averting his gaze from Papyrus. Despite his reservations, Red felt the tension in his soul uncurl a little.
Red crawled down the stairs wearing a fresh set of Sans’s clothes. Papyrus’s face was stretched into a soft smile, though the grin didn’t quite reach his eyes. Sans sat next to him on the couch, staring into open space. He didn’t seem to notice either of the other skeletons. Dark shadows underlined his eyesockets. Red’s soul twisted uncomfortably and he wondered if his duplicate had gotten any sleep last night. It certainly didn’t look like it, and there was no one but Red to blame for that.

Red continued downwards and the final stair gave a loud creak. Sans’s head snapped to where he stood, drawing him out of his trance. A smile slowly spread across his face. His expression screamed utter relief.

“hey, red.” His voice cracked, as if he hadn’t spoken in days. “you’re up early.”

Red reached his hands up to stuff into his hoodie pockets before he realized he wasn’t wearing it. He settled on crossing his arms across his chest, feeling awkward. He nodded stiffly, not quite sure how to respond to the other skeleton.

Papyrus placed an arm around his brother’s shoulder and drew him close. He looked relieved too, but Red wasn’t sure the relief was aimed at his appearance. Papyrus nuzzled his brother’s head and Sans leaned into the gesture.

“heh. well, now that you’re up, you want to do anything?”

Red shrugged. He didn’t really care what they did. This was mostly a favor to Papyrus. He longed to go back to bed.

“I THINK RED WANTED TO SEE THE LAB. WE COULD ALL VISIT IF YOU WOULD LIKE?”

Sans’s eyelights flickered momentarily. “sorry, bro, can i take a raincheck? not sure i’m up to visiting the city today.” His shoulders tensed slightly against his brother’s embrace.

Papyrus gave a gentle skeleton kiss to Sans’s skull. “THAT IS PERFECTLY FINE, BROTHER. HOW ABOUT A CARD GAME?”

Sans nodded and he relaxed slightly. “that sounds good, bro.”
Papyrus left to get the cards from his room and Red took Papyrus’s spot on the couch. Sans rubbed his eyesockets roughly.

“sorry if you wanted to go to the city today. i’m just not up for the noise and crowds at the moment.”

“don’t worry about it. i’m not too fond of them either.” Red wrung his hands nervously. “s-sorry about last night.”

Sans removed his hands from his face and cast a glance over to Red. “you know i meant what i said yesterday, right? paps and i will never hurt you and you never have to go back where you came from. it doesn’t sound like… the best place.”

Red nodded, but continued to squeeze his hands together. Sans let out a heavy sigh and reached an arm around Red’s shoulder and pulled him close. Red’s hands stilled at the contact, though he began to sweat anxiously. His soul twisted uncomfortably at the close proximity to his counterpart.

“and please don’t do what i did. don’t isolate yourself.”

Red’s shoulders slumped. If he had any tears left to shed, he’d be blubbering right now. But he had cried himself out upstairs. Instead, he leaned his head against Sans’s and sighed deeply. He wished his soul would stop pulsating with guilt. He wasn’t sure why he felt so bad about causing these skeletons such grief anyway. He’d only just met the two.

And yet they clearly cared so much for him.

He wondered if connections were immediate here. The only monster he’d ever been close to was his brother and if he hadn’t spent nearly his entire life with him, he doubted that he’d even have that relationship. Besides his brother, and Gaster, who of course didn’t count, he spent his entire life alone.

But as he sat there huddled with Sans, he realized that in the few shorts days he had stayed with the brothers that he might even consider them friends.

*don’t isolate yourself.* Maybe it was true – maybe he had been doing that to himself. It was his habit after all. No one should get too close to someone that you might have to kill one day. Maybe that’s why he had reacted so violently last night. Trust wasn’t something given willingly in his world.

But in this world, maybe he could.

Red was dragged from his thoughts as a delicate skeletal hand was waved in front of his face. “RED, ARE YOU OKAY?”

Red shook his head in surprise. God, he had really spaced out. He felt Sans rubbing his back gently as Red leaned his weight into him. Papyrus was hovering over him, drawing back the hand he had been flailing in his face. The lanky skeleton’s face was once again furrowed in concern.

Red realized he was shivering slightly. Embarrassed, he disentangled himself from Sans’s embrace. “s-sorry, zoned out for a second.” He shakily raised his t-shirt to his forehead and wiped away the sweat that had gathered at his brow. “y-you got the cards, papyrus?”

Papyrus nodded hesitantly. “YES, BUT….” He paused. “IF YOU DO NOT WISH TO PLAY, I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, WOULD DEFINITELY UNDERSTAND THAT.”
“nah, it sounds like fun.” Red wasn’t sure “fun” was the right word, but he definitely wanted to distract himself. If he couldn’t sleep, he sure as hell didn’t want to be lost in his thoughts.

Papyrus continued to hesitate, but Sans took charge. “let’s play crazy eights, paps. you know that one, red?”

Red shook his head and Papyrus motioned for them to move to the kitchen. The three sat at the table and Papyrus excitedly explained the rules as he dealt the cards. It was pretty simple and there wasn’t much strategy to it. It certainly wasn’t as fun as any poker game he had ever watched at Grillby’s. Granted, he was usually drunk off his ass when he watched the poker games, and he had bet more than his fair share of gold, so that might’ve helped. But still, Crazy Eights seemed remarkably easy.

It certainly didn’t take long for him to start winning every hand. With every win, Red felt his confidence grow. After his fifteenth win a row, Papyrus shouted, “ARGH! EVEN WITH A THIRD PLAYER, I NEVER WIN!”

Sans’s face split into a wide grin. “guess that just proves we sanses are the best.”

Red smirked. “heh. asshole, i won, not you.”

“LANGUAGE!”

Red couldn’t stop himself from laughing at that. It was hilarious how this Papyrus got so upset when he swore. “sorry, papyrus. old fucking habits die hard.”

“old fucking habits, huh? you’ll have to tell us all about those,” Sans teased.

Red went hot in the face. “sh-shut up, you know what i meant.”

The other two skeletons snickered at him. Despite his discomfort, he couldn’t help but laugh alongside the two.

“ONE MORE HAND. I KNOW I CAN WIN THIS ONE!”

They played another hand and, of course, Red won again. Papyrus threw the remainder of his hand up in the air, letting loose a loud “NYEH!”

Red burst into uproarious laughter. He pictured his own brother doing the exact same thing if he had lost the game. Red supposed that some things spanned across universal lines.

Sans pat him on the back as the two smaller skeletons laughed at Papyrus’s behavior.

“oh man, bro. you really let this game get out of hand!”

“AAARGH! SANS!”

Red relapsed into another fit of laughter. He couldn’t believe there was someone else that loved to hassle others with pun as much as he did.

“bro, i know puns don’t suit your style, but it’s nothing to get upset about!”

“SANS!” Papyrus was trying his hardest not to smile, but the twitch at the edge of his mouth was obvious.

Red was laughing so hard that he felt dizzy. He leaned forward to try to steady himself against the
table and somehow ended up on the floor. He felt his head heat up in a deep blush, but laughed even harder at his own fall. Papyrus and Sans got up from their chairs and stared at amazement at him. Both of them had wide grins stretched across their faces.

“red, did my jokes get you royally flushed?”

Red could feel tears forming in the corners of his eyesockets as he doubled over on the floor. Papyrus groaned loudly as Sans joined Red in his hysterics.

As his laughing fit subsided, Papyrus walked over to Red and scooped him off the ground and placed him in the chair carefully. Red continued to chuckle weakly as Papyrus placed his hands on his hips. The tall skeleton didn’t bother to hide his grin as he looked down at him.

“I THINK IT IS TIME FOR ME TO MAKE DINNER. YOU TWO CAN CONTINUE TO PLAY IF YOU WANT.”

Red wanted to. Despite his initial reservations, he had really enjoyed himself. Sans collected the fallen cards from the ground, shuffled the deck, and dealt a new hand. It didn’t take long for Red to realize that his clone had been losing on purpose before.

As the smells of oregano, basil, and garlic permeated the air, the two smaller skeletons went head-to-head over an intense series of games. Neither held back. The two were evenly matched – the games usually boiled down to luck. Sans won and then Red and then back and forth for several games.

To make things more challenging, halfway through their third hand, Red challenged Sans to a pun-off. Whoever could make the most puns on a particular topic would win a round, and then they would move onto the next topic. Whoever won the most rounds would be declared the Pun Champion. Papyrus groaned in the background at the jokes, but the brothers ignored him.

By the time Papyrus had announced that dinner was ready, the two were tied in wins for both the card game and the pun-off. Sans put the cards away as Papyrus served each skeleton a plate of spaghetti.

“mmm, now that’s a classic!” Sans said, beaming at his brother.

“oh, of all the pastabilities.”

Sans and Red chuckled together as Papyrus smashed his hand into his face. “NO MORE PUNS AT THE DINNER TABLE!”

“heh. does that mean i win?”

“oh, i don’t think so. that joke wasn’t even oregano-l.”

“SAAAANS!”

They ate the spaghetti, cracking jokes in between bites, much to Papyrus’s displeasure. After they finished, Red felt lighter than he had felt in a long time. His soul felt empty of the usual pain that afflicted it. It was amazing – he didn’t feel like such a piece of shit.

He decided he’d help the brothers out by doing the dishes. He gathered the plates and brought them to sink. He turned on the water and began to thoroughly scrub the dishes. Man, he couldn’t believe he hadn’t bothered to help out with this before. The brothers had been so kind to him and all he had done was sleep away.
As he cleaned up, he could hear the pair muttering behind him. He couldn’t make out the words over the rush of the water, but he could tell they were trying not to be overheard. He felt his soul give a small twist. Why were they talking about him? Had he done something wrong? He supposed he hadn’t asked to do the dishes. Maybe he had been wrong not to say anything before starting.

He finished the last dish and turned around, wiping his hands on his shorts. His soul heavy, he looked up at the two brothers, mentally preparing himself for whatever they had to say to him. The brothers beamed brightly at him from the table.

“So, uh, what were your plans for the evening?” Red looked at the clock on the wall and saw it was only six o’clock. He wondered if that was too early for bed or if the brothers were expecting him to stay up later.

“Well, about that….” Sans looked to Papyrus.

“I WAS WONDERING – OR, RATHER, WE WERE WONDERING… ERR, IF YOU WANTED TO JOIN US… ERR, IN A FUN GAME?”

Red blinked as Sans hid his face behind his hand, a giant grin stretched across his face. “huh? you mean like more cards? i guess i could teach you poker. i mean, they play it all the time in –”

“No, no. bro, you’re going to have to be more direct than that.” Sans chuckled. “he wants to know if you want to join us upstairs. he just hates using the word ‘sex,’ heh.”

Red blushed furiously. He wrung his hands and stared at the ground. “uh, well, uh… god, uh….”

Red wasn’t expecting that. What was up with these two just asking for sex? Is that how it worked here? It didn’t seem very romantic.

And now that the question had been posed to him, he wasn’t exactly sure what he wanted. He remembered the guilt he felt from yesterday. If he accepted the brothers’ offer, he’d be cheating on Boss again. Was he really that shitty?

Red continued to stammer. God, he just couldn’t make up his mind.

“PLEASE DO NOT FEEL PRESSURE, RED. SANS TOLD ME HOW MUCH YOU ENJOYED YOURSELF YESTERDAY, AND WE JUST WANTED TO OFFER. WE CAN PLAY THIS – WHAT DID YOU CALL IT – ‘POCKER?’ I AM SURE IT IS JUST AS FUN!”

“n-no.” He smashed his hands together violently to stop himself from wringing them. “i’ll do it.”

“Well don’t sound so excited about it,” Sans remarked sarcastically. “look, you don’t have to if you don’t want to. we’d rather you do what you honestly want to do.”

“W-well i really do.” Red looked up from the ground and looked directly at Sans. Making sure he sounded more certain than he was, he said, “really.”

Sans smiled brightly in response and nodded to Papyrus. The lanky skeleton got up from the table, strolled over to Red, and lifted him up into his arms. Red quickly clutched at Papyrus, legs instinctually wrapping around the other’s waist. As he was carried up the stairs, Sans trailed behind the pair, grinning at Red.

They reached the brothers’ bedroom. The room was dark; the only source of light came from the steady beam of moonlight from the window. Even now, Red couldn’t help but feel a sense of awe
at the thought that he was looking at light from the actual moon.

Papyrus carefully set Red down on the edge of the racecar-shaped bed. He leaned forward and gently pressed his teeth to the top of Red’s skull. The taller skeleton pulled back and began to disrobe. Behind him, Red saw Sans do the same. Red sat frozen, staring in wonder as the other two exposed their bones under the faint light. Papyrus was much like his own brother under his battle body, though this skeleton’s slender bones were not marred with scars that had come with the years of intense Royal Guard training exercises.

Sans, on the other hand, was embarrassing to look at. Not because he didn’t have a beautiful form. In fact, it was because he was so good-looking that Red felt his face warm. If they were identical, did Red look that good? He couldn’t help but allow his gaze to linger on the slim rib bones. He seemed so much more delicate than Red. The gold-toothed skeleton had always viewed himself as ugly, and yet Sans had a body identical to his own. Was his view of himself that skewed?

Sans dropped his clothes to the ground and walked over to Red. “why aren’t you getting undressed? are you really going to make us do all the work?”

Red stammered and hurriedly tried to take off his shorts. In his rush, the left side of the waistband got stuck to hipbone. God, he was embarrassing himself. He couldn’t get these damn things off fast enough. What the hell was he –

Papyrus pressed his hand to Red’s shaking arms. In a low, gentle voice he said, “Sans was teasing you.” He reached forward and slowly dragged the shorts from Red’s legs, while Sans softly lifted Red’s shirt from behind.

When his body was revealed, Papyrus let out a small gasp. Red realized that his gaze lingered on the numerous scars that littered his bones and Red reflexively covered his torso. Papyrus was staring at him with the same intensity that Sans had yesterday when he had accused his brother of abusing him. With a slight twist in his soul, Red realized that these brothers were far too tender to understand Boss’s type of love. God, he just wanted to hide from these skeletons’ judging eyes. He reached below him to bunch up the blankets so he could pull them over his blemished body.

Papyrus placed his hand on Red’s to still him. The taller skeleton leaned forward and touched his forehead to Red’s with a clank. Though the motion caught him off guard, he pressed into the skeleton kiss. He supposed that this was Papyrus’s way of apologizing for his mistake, and Red could accept that.

Red jerked backwards as he felt a finger trail along his spine from his neck to his coccyx. He snapped his head around to see Sans reaching towards Red’s bottom half. He shivered as his duplicate made small circular motions along his delicate tailbone. He couldn’t believe something so gentle could make him feel so good.

Papyrus climbed onto the bed, causing the mattress to dip slightly from the combined weight of the three. As Red turned his head to once again face Papyrus, the taller skeleton gently grasped Red’s femur bones and carefully revolved the gold-toothed skeleton’s body to face him. Red felt Sans shift his position and a moment later could feel his clone’s hot breath on his neck. The familiar hum of magic filled in the air and a second later Red felt something wet trail along the slender chinks between his vertebrae. Red moaned softly as his soul gave a pang of pleasure.

As Sans lingered his summoned tongue along his spine, Papyrus dipped his head between Red’s outstretched legs. Red had neither felt nor heard the lanky skeleton conjure his tongue, so when the brightly glowing orange appendage gave a long lick over his pelvic bone, Red couldn’t stop his voice from cracking on a languid moan. Red shot his hands forward, gripping Papyrus’s ribs,
trying to get a firm grip to steady himself. He clenched and unclenched his fingers around the taller skeleton’s sensitive bones, causing Papyrus to moan and lick more fiercely at his pelvis.

Red softly gyrated his hips into Papyrus’s ministrations as Sans dipped his hands along Red’s sacrum. Red let loose a quaking moan. The moment Red opened his mouth, he felt Sans lean his mouth against his own. Red felt Sans’s tongue pressed inside, and in response conjured his own to taste the familiar sweet and sour flavors. As the two were pressed together, Papyrus quickened the tempo of his licking, which sent tremors of pleasure throughout Red’s body. He moaned into Sans’s mouth as Sans accelerated the pace of his touches below. Red lost himself and felt his soul throb as he reflexively formed a dripping opening of pure magic.

Sans pulled away from the kiss and returned to lick and suck along Red’s neck, as Papyrus continued to deliver long licks along Red’s slit. At the same time, Sans also moved his right hand from Red’s sacrum to the ball of sensitive magic above the opening and began to press gently back and forth. Red’s ribcage jolted as he gasped from the increased sensation. Red brought his fumbling hands from Papyrus’s ribs and pressed his skull deeper into his folds. The taller skeleton’s pace only increased, and – oh shit – Red realized with a start that Papyrus’s tongue was much longer than Sans’s. The appendage licked along the deepest parts of his inside walls with ease. There was no buildup as there had been yesterday and Papyrus was twirling his tongue expertly.

“f-f-fuck, this is –! i can’t –! holy shit, papyrus!” Red thrust his hips roughly against the taller skeleton’s skull. Sans increased the pressure of his fingers against Red’s clitoris and with his free hand, jerked his hand forcefully up and down Red’s exposed spine. The combination of the licking, touching, and tugging sent Red over the edge. His mind went blank and he felt his walls convulse around Papyrus’s tongue.

As Red regained his senses, he saw Papyrus pull his head away from his opening. There was a smattering of faintly glowing red stickiness smeared on his cheekbones and chin. Holy shit, that was hot. Papyrus swirled his tongue around his face and wiped the stray liquid from his face. Red couldn’t believe how long this Papyrus’s tongue was. He trembled against Sans, whose arm still wrapped around his torso to his genitalia.

“You really are,” Papyrus said between licks, “very sweet-tasting.”

Red breathed heavily, trying to regain his head. Sans pressed his body forward and clanked his head to the side of Red’s. “heh. do i look that good when i come, paps?”

Papyrus nodded and “nyeh”ed softly. As Sans’s frame pressed against him, Red felt a warm spot push against the back of his pelvis. Although he still hadn’t caught his breath completely, and he felt a bit lightheaded, Red turned his body to face Sans’s. As he expected, he saw the intensely glowing cyan member extruding from his counterpart’s pelvic bone.

Sans followed Red’s glance and a glowing blue blush crawled onto his face. “heh. don’t worry about it, red. paps can take care of it.” Behind him, Papyrus shifted himself and Red felt the taller skeleton hover over his shoulder to get a better look at what Red was staring at.

“no, please, m-more,” Red said between breaths.

Sans gawked at Red as Papyrus wrapped his arms around the gold-toothed skeleton. “wait, are you sure? no need to push yourself for our sakes.”

“please,” Red whined, “i want to.”
Sans’s eyes half-lidded, as if the mere suggestion of doing more with Red turned him on. God, Red loved that face. Did he make that face? Shit, if he did, it was no wonder these skeletons wanted tofuck him.

“okay.” He heard Sans swallow nervously. “what do you want?”

“everything, god damn.”

Papyrus placed his hands firmly along the top of Red’s hip bones and then tugged the skeleton, ever so gently, backwards into Papyrus’s lap. Red felt his lower half pressed against another core of warmth, and he knew that the taller skeleton had summoned his own throbbing member. And from the way it compressed against his back from his coccyx to halfway up his spine, it had to be huge.

Papyrus whispered into the side of his head, “Can we…you know?”

Red cackled at how much Papyrus tried to avoid “inappropriate” language. He responded to the skeleton’s inquiry by rubbing himself against Papyrus’s length, and he heard the taller skeleton’s breath catch in his throat.

“stop asking and just do it already.”

Sans wrapped his hands around Red’s femur bones and lifted him up slightly. Red felt Papyrus maneuver himself so that his length brushed against his slit tenderly for a few moments before he pressed it inside the folds. Red let out a low, lazy moan as Papyrus entered. Damn, this guy was thick.

And then Sans lowered Red onto Papyrus so that he slowly fell down on the length. Holy shit. This version of Papyrus was way bigger than his own. He looked down between his legs and saw the red translucent genitalia filled with glowing orange light. Shit, Papyrus hadn’t even gone in all the way and he was already so full. Fuck, it felt good.

He looked up at Sans who was staring lustfully at where they connected. He was softly stroking his own glowing blue genitalia. Red saw the look of uncertainty flash across his face as he saw Red looking into his eyes.

Fuck, Red might regret this, but he just had to offer.

“aren’t you going to join him?”

Sans stopped caressing himself immediately and gulped. He scooted forward and draped Red’s right leg onto his shoulder. He gripped his member firmly and drove it inside Red.

“AAAHH!” Red felt himself stretch to the limit. He clawed at the blankets below him violently. Fuck, it was painful, and holy shit, he loved it. God, he wanted them to ravage him, tear him apart, make him cry. This was the shit he craved. The pain that felt so good. He panted roughly as he tried to soak in how it felt. This was what he had been waiting for.

But neither of the skeletons moved any further. “red, god, are you alright?” Terror gripped Sans’s voice.

“Oh my goodness! I am so sorry, Red!” Red felt Papyrus start to pull out of him.

“fuck, what are you doing? stop! don’t fucking take it out!” God, what the fuck were these two doing?
Papyrus stilled his movement and remained halfway inside Red. Sans lifted a hand to Red’s face and wiped below his eyesockets. “red, you’re crying. this was way too much, i’m so sorry.”

Red twisted his hands deeper into the blanket, trying not to scream at the stupidity of the other two. “fuck! i like it! don’t just sit there! fuck me!” He thrust his hips downwards harshly, feeling Papyrus’s length hit the back of his genitalia forcefully. Red let out a guttural shriek at how painfully full he was. The other two skeletons moaned loudly at the movement, and he could feel Papyrus begin to lose control as the bigger skeleton began to plunge slowly in and out.

Sans, however, remained still, though Red could tell it was taking every inch of willpower inside him not to move. “red, please, i don’t want to hurt you.” The blue-tongued skeleton let loose a low whine as Papyrus started to thrust somewhat faster.

“sans if you don’t fucking move i’m going to kill you!” Red screeched loudly. He gasped as Papyrus slid upwards to the sensitive spot deep within him. “fuck, papyrus, harder!”

Sans finally gave in and began to thrust, his length running alongside Papyrus’s inside of Red. The taller skeleton, in turn, began to move in earnest.

Red grabbed at the covers even more tightly and stretched his spine straighter at the intense feeling of pain and pleasure. Now this was what he had missed. The perfect mixture of love and punishment. Fuck, he had never felt this full before. This was too fucking much. The brothers were pounding him with such force, he could hear his bones rattle in between the sounds of their moans and the slick noises their genitalia made as they met. Red threw his head back, his eyes shut tight, at the overwhelming sensation of being fucked senseless.

“paps, let me feel it all. please,” Sans cried out. The brothers’ movement slowed slightly. Red opened his eyes and saw Sans stretching his hand out to Papyrus. In it, there was something small and white glowing with Sans’s bright blue cyan magic. Red did a double take – was that Sans’s soul?

Papyrus grabbed the dripping mess from Sans and replaced it with a glowing orange organ. Red saw Sans give a slight squeeze to the sopping replacement and Papyrus moaned loudly behind him, redoubling the intensity of his thrusts.

“NNNN! SANS!”

He wondered if Papyrus did the same thing to Sans because his duplicate began to pound even further into Red just a moment later.

“paps, squeeze tighter! i wanna feel it all!”

The force behind the brothers’ thrusts was too much. His eyelights flickered out as the two plunged in and out with all of their strength. For the second time that night, he felt himself tighten below, and as he did so, Papyrus and Sans’s movements became more desperate and uneven.

“haaaaaaa! fuck, i’m there! nnn!”

With a few more sharp thrusts, the other two fell over the edge as well, gasping and moaning incoherent words. As they came, the two stabbed inside Red as far as they could, sending shivers of pleasure throughout Red’s body. The warmth of the brothers’ release spread throughout the cavity and Red could hardly handle how good it felt.

The three stayed like that, stuck together, for a few moments, gasping and trying to catch their breath. Sans pulled out first, letting Red’s leg drop from his shoulder as he backed away from his
Red looked down and, as Sans removed himself, saw a mixture of blue, orange, and red liquid spill out onto Papyrus’s pelvis and the blankets beneath them.

Sans held out his hand to Papyrus, and in it, Red saw a dripping white mess charged with orange magic. Red confirmed that it was a soul. He couldn’t figure out why these two would suddenly pull out their souls in the middle of fucking him.

The two exchanged their souls with each other once again, and Sans saw Red staring in wonder. “heh. it feels really good to use your soul like that.”

Red had to wonder what “like that” meant, but he certainly wasn’t in the right state of mind to ask right now. He felt woozy after the pounding he had taken and he could hardly stay awake after releasing twice in such quick succession.

Papyrus carefully lifted Red from his lap, and with a small squishing noise, he felt Papyrus leave him. After the lanky skeleton set him back down, Red rolled over to his side and curled in the bed, still panting from the exertions.

Sans lay down on his left side and looked at Red lovingly. He felt Papyrus snuggle into his right side, and felt the happiness flow from the taller skeleton.

“mmm, now that felt good,” Sans said, his voice filled with pure contentment.

“Yes, brother, I agree. Did you like it, Red?”

Did he like it? God, yes. But for some reason, his soul gave a painful lurch at the question. Why was that? He was happy, so why would his soul react that way. In fact, he was happier than he had been in a long time. When was the last time he felt this good?

He realized with a start that he hadn’t been this happy since the last time Boss had told him that he had loved him. When was that? Red searched his memories quickly, but he knew – it had been over three years ago before the human had been killed.

“red?”

Red felt Sans shift himself to look at his face. Red tried to hide himself, but he knew the other two had seen him. He was crying again, the pathetic loser that he was.

“Red, oh no, we did hurt you. I, the Great Papyrus, am so sorry! We should have –“

“n-no!” he blubered. “i loved it. i really, really did.” His body shook with sobs as he doubled over in tears.

And he did. This was so much better than the way his brother had treated him over these last three years. The realization was making him feel sick.

He felt the two brothers wrap theirs arms around him, rubbing him gently in an effort to comfort him.

“i’m s-sorry. i’m s-so…s-s-sorry. it’s not you, i promise. it felt s-so good.” His voice cracked on the last syllable. He knew every sob was destroying these two. Who cried after something like this? They must think he hated them.

“shhhhh….d” Sans whispered, rubbing Red’s shoulder softly. “it’s okay.”
It wasn’t okay. None of this was okay. He had cheated on his brother and liked it. He had felt so good.

He gazed at the brothers through his misty eyes and his soul gave a powerful heave as an even greater realization gripped him.

He didn’t know how to describe the fluttering in his soul as he looked at the pair. All he knew was that his soul tingled with the same feeling he got when he looked at his own brother.
Red was so warm. The blankets that covered him were soft and inviting. He curled into their comfort and breathed deeply. He didn’t want to wake up right now. It was just too cozy and sleep felt so good.

He felt something scraping against his back, and he heard Sans sharply whisper, “careful, don’t wake him up.”

Red snapped his eyes open and saw Sans staring directly into his face. Red turned onto his back, feeling the other skeletons’ limbs below him. As he turned, he saw that Papyrus was half leaning over him, trying to extract himself from underneath Red.

In a low voice, Papyrus said, “Sorry, Red, go back to sleep. It’s still very early.” The guilt on Papyrus’s face was apparent, and Red knew it wasn’t just because he had woken him up. Red felt his soul squirm in his chest. God, why had he cried last night? Had he seriously fallen asleep sobbing in the arms of the other skeletons? What was wrong with him?

Red leaned up and pulled Papyrus back down to the bed to plant a quick skeleton kiss to his mouth. As he fell back, he could see shock spread across Papyrus’s face. Red turned to look at Sans and saw that he was surprised as well. For good measure, Red delivered a small kiss to his duplicate’s face also.

“sorry for last night,” Red whispered.

Sans reached a hand out and rubbed Red’s skull. “nothing to be sorry about.” Papyrus nodded quickly in agreement.

Still, Red knew he had fucked up. He strongly suspected that these two just had sex for fun – they didn’t need a connection to enjoy themselves like Red did. After all, how had Papyrus posed the offer last night? Hadn’t he called it a “fun game?” Well it certainly hadn’t been much fun for the other two if Red had been sobbing afterwards.

Red reached his arms around the two skeletons and pulled them closer. He nuzzled his head against Papyrus’ s. He knew he was being pathetic, but it was just so nice to cuddle with these two. And he knew that, unlike his brother, these two wouldn’t mind allowing him this small pleasure. These two were just too nice.

Papyrus gave him a small squeeze and hummed softly. “Red, it is not that I do not enjoy this, but I really need to take a shower.”

Red could believe that. He also needed to clean himself. Although his genitalia had disappeared
several hours ago, he could still feel the combined release of the three skeletons stuck to his pelvic bone and legs.

Red sighed and rolled over to face Sans, allowing Papyrus to shimmy himself away. He felt the mattress move beneath him as Papyrus got off the bed.

“You two can sleep for a bit. I will wake you before I make breakfast.”

Red nodded, wrapping his other arm around Sans. Sleep sounded nice. He heard the sound of air whistling and realized that Sans was already way ahead of him. Red closed his eyes and felt his soul flutter in contentment.

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The three skeletons sat at the kitchen table, eagerly eating the leftover spaghetti. Red was starving. The exertions from last night left his magic drained and he needed to replenish his reserves. Sleep just hadn’t cut it for him. The other two must’ve felt similarly because they were shoveling the food in their mouths, acting as if they hadn’t eaten in days.

The three finished eating around the same time, and as soon as they did, Sans leaned back in his chair and rubbed at his abdomen. “mmm, nothing like leftover spaghetti for breakfast.”

Red looked towards the clock. It was only ten o’clock. He couldn’t believe he was up so early. Red really had to wonder what he was going to do with his day.

“do you two work today?”

Papyrus shook his head. “NO, I GET TO TAKE EVERY OTHER SUNDAY OFF. I USUALLY SPEND THE DAY TRAINING WITH UNDYNE.”

“i was thinking that we’d head into the city and check out the lab today, red.”

Red nodded. He was curious what this lab was like. He wondered if any of the facilities were upgraded from when he had last been in his universe’s version. After all, these monsters must have access to far more resources than they had ever had in the Underground.

“OH, AND FRISK MESSEDGE ME A COUPLE OF DAYS AGO. THEY WANTED US TO COME OVER FOR DINNER ONE NIGHT. WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO OVER TO TORIEL’S TONIGHT?”

Sans beamed. “yeah, bro, that sounds like fun.” He turned to Red. “you’ll love tori, red. she’s got the best sense of humor and, boy, can she cook. heh. now that i think about it, i’m in a relationship with three great chefs.”

Papyrus absolutely radiated at the compliment. “WELL, IF THERE’S ANYTHING I KNOW ABOUT YOU, SANS, IT’S THAT YOU LOVE FOOD!”

“heh. you got that right, bro.”

“uh, so does she know that i’m not from around here?” Red asked quietly.

Sans nodded. “yeah, i told her. but don’t let frisk know about it. tori’s kinda protective of them, and i don’t think she wants them to know.”

Red could understand that. It wasn’t exactly easy to explain time travel or universe hopping to a
The brothers agreed that they would meet at Toriel’s place at around three o’clock so that they could help Toriel cook. They got up to leave, and just as they were about to teleport, Red realized he wasn’t wearing his hoodie. He felt naked without it and insisted that he put it on before he left. He fished it out of the dryer and put it on. God, it hadn’t been this clean in months. It smelled fresh and similar to the borrowed clothes he had on. Papyrus must insist on using a floral detergent because it just didn’t seem like the sort of fragrance that Sans would choose.

He ran back to the brothers and Sans grabbed hold of both their hands as he called upon his magic. The three were pressed into the familiar black vacuum of the void before landing softly on their feet at their destination.

They landed in front of a large cube-shaped building. Windows lined the building and gave the building a bright, airy impression. Red was shocked at the number of people gathered around the building. There were monsters scurrying about, many of them wearing pristine white lab coats and chatting enthusiastically amongst themselves. There was a chorus of loud shrieks that pierced Red’s head. Apparently the three had landed close to a group of human tourists who had not expected their sudden appearance. Their fear was obviously short-lived; the group turned their cameras towards the three and began to take photographs of the three skeletons. The flashing lights dazed Red, and he began to sweat profusely. God, he wished these humans would stop doing that.

“UNDYNE IS CLOSE BY, SO I WILL WALK FROM HERE. I WILL SEE YOU AT TORIEL’S LATER!”

Red and Sans waved goodbye to the lanky skeleton. As Papyrus walked away, another group of humans began to follow him, taking several photographs. Sans sighed and stepped towards the building. “well, let’s head up to alphys’s office so you can meet her.”

Red nodded and followed closely behind Sans. He really didn’t like how crowded it was here. No wonder the brothers had moved out to the country; he couldn’t imagine being forced to live in the center of all this activity.

As they neared the entrance, Red had the distinct feeling he was being watched. He whipped around, convinced he would see a group of humans flashing their cameras in his direction. But none of the humans were focused on him now. Still, Red couldn’t shake off the feeling. He turned his head, trying to stay close to Sans while doing so. He definitely didn’t want to be separated from Sans here – he wasn’t sure his soul could take the stress of it.

That’s when he saw him. Standing close to the laboratory’s entrance stood an adult human with long, messy, black hair who stared unflinchingly at Red. He wore a completely black outfit and stood unnaturally straight against the wall. Red couldn’t help but notice how the human had dark bags under his eyes. But the thing that creeped him out the most was how wide this human’s pupils were. He wondered if that was common with humans. Sans hadn’t seen many, but most of the humans that he had encountered so far didn’t seem to have such frightening eyes.

As the two skeletons passed the human, he stiffly raised a camera and took a photo of them. Red continued to stare even after the flash of light had subsided. Their eyes met and Red was overcome with the distinct feeling of eerie familiarity. It was bizarre. Red had only met one human before, and it certainly wasn’t this guy.

The skeletons walked into the building and the automatic doors closed and blocked his vision. Red turned to face forward, suppressing a shiver. Between the crowds and that human, Red felt sick already, and they had just left the house.
The lobby was huge. The windows that lined the walls allowed the spacious room to breathe with light. There were strange, brightly colored sculptures that hung from the tall ceiling. It was bustling with monsters and humans. Apparently this was a tourist destination – Red could see a tall fish monster giving a detailed history of the building to an excited group of humans.

“…which is how the building has become a center of innovation for both monsters and humans alike. With Dr. Alphys’s groundbreaking research, monsters have –”

Sans pulled at Red’s sleeve. “hey, come on, we’ll take the staff elevator.”

The two rushed forward and entered the lift just as the doors were about to close. Red was thankful that they didn’t have to take the elevator with the large groups of humans. He wasn’t sure he could handle the humans getting in his face with those cameras. Still, the staff elevator was packed with monsters donning lab coats, their hands filled takeout food and papers.

A young, brown-furred rabbit monster recognized Sans. “Hey Sans! It’s been a while! How is it up there on the illustrious 20th floor?” The monster was so full of energy, and Red got the impression that he was trying to impress Sans.

“heh. it’s going well, pal. we’ve always got a lot of work going on.”

“I hear you! We’ve just started a new project on the applications of magic to fruit-bearing trees and I can’t believe the amount of hours I’ve already put in,” the rabbit bragged. “Between the press calling at all hours of the day and actually getting work done, I hardly get any sleep! I don’t know how you and Dr. Alphys deal with this all the time.”

Sans shrugged. “tibia honest, it doesn’t even bother me anymore.”

The rabbit monster laughed loudly at Sans’s pun. The noise grated Red. He wondered if all the monsters that worked here were such brown nosers. “Sans, you’re always great for a laugh.” The elevator dinged and the large group of monsters got off at the 14th floor. “This is my floor! We’ll have to meet up for drinks sometime! It’s good to see other monsters from Snowdin!”

Sans waved and nodded. When the doors closed, the two skeletons were finally alone. Red rolled his shoulders, sighing. He couldn’t shake off the panic that was gripping his soul.

“yeah, now you see why i didn’t want to come yesterday. it takes a lot out of you.”

“why don’t we just teleport directly to the 20th floor? it seems like it would be easier than dealing with all of this.”

“We’ve got a lot of delicate experiments going on. we can’t afford magical interference to screw up months of work.”

The elevator slowed to a halt and the two skeletons stepped into a small, dark hall. Opposite the elevator was a metal door that had several warnings plastered across the front:

DO NOT ENTER WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION
VIOLATORS SUBJECT TO ROYAL ARREST

SENSITIVE EXPERIMENTS IN PROGRESS
DO NOT USE MAGIC WITHOUT WRITTEN AUTHORIZATION FROM DR. ALPHYS OR A MEMBER OF HER TEAM

VISITORS AND PATIENTS, PLEASE GO TO THE 15TH FLOOR
Sans reached out his hand to a flat, black sensor next to the door. When he pressed against it, a flickering green light illuminated the bone. There was a small clicking noise and Sans walked forward to the unlocked door.

“heh. sorry about all the theatrics. this place used to be low security, but some humans broke in a few months back and stole some information from us.”

That was odd. Red wondered what would have the humans so interested.

They walked forward and entered a brightly lit room. Numerous power tools lined the walls and there were several boxes filled to the brim with mechanical parts. Red saw and heard large, whirring power generators that were scattered throughout the room. In the center of the room was a yellow lizard monster in a stained lab coat, sitting at a desk covered with opened food wrappers and dishes.

Not looking up from her computer monitor, she waved her hand over her shoulder and called out, “Hey Sans! Room 2010 is still off-limits, but I’ve got the new magic interlocking mechanism up and running in 2011.”

“hey alphys. i’ve actually got a visitor here with me i’d like you to meet.”

The lizard jumped violently into the air and swiveled her chair around hastily. “O-oh. Uh, i-i-it’s nice to meet you.”

Dr. Alphys was so similar and yet so unlike his own universe’s version of the lizard monster. Unlike the sharp-toothed, crazed-looking lizard he was used to, this Dr. Alphys had flat buckteeth and blushed nervously at the sight of Red. Her features, along with the way the lizard anxiously bunched the front of her lab jacket between her hands, gave Red the impression that she was a particularly shy and fretful monster.

Her eyes were wide as she looked Red up and down. She looked like she wanted to pose a question to him, but couldn’t quite make herself.

“uh, lemme explain. this is red.” Sans quickly explained how Red had gotten here. As he described the situation, Alphys jumped from her chair and circled Red. He felt her observing eyes search him, and he knew she was fueled by scientific curiosity. In that, this monster was identical to his own Dr. Alphys.

“W-wow!” the doctor exclaimed when Sans finished his explanation. “S-so are you here to try to figure out how to get him back?”

Sans shook his head. “nah, i just wanted to show him around. maybe have him help with some work. after all, he is me and we could use another me around here.” Alphys laughed at that and nodded. “besides, i don’t think red wants to go home right now. isn’t that right, red?”

Red shrugged. Truth be told, he didn’t want to go home. This place was way nicer. But he couldn’t help the pang of pain that shot through him as he thought of his brother. He really missed him and he wished Papyrus could come here and share these experiences with him. He was still mad at his brother, but he didn’t deserve to live in that hellhole.

Sans frowned at Red’s non-committal response, but continued, “well, alphys, you want to show him around?”
Alphys nervously clutched at her coat again, but nodded. “S-sure! This is the main room. I-it’s where I work on my blueprints,” she motioned to the computer screen behind her, which was currently displaying some strange cartoon with subtitles, and continued “a-and it’s also where we, um, store extra supplies.” She cast a glance around the room. She looked like she had just realized how messy it was.

“So, uh, what do you do exactly?” Red glanced around the room, trying to find a common theme. It looked like she dealt with a lot of mechanical objects, but he couldn’t imagine why. “are you still working on the determination projects?”

His words had an immediate effect on the lizard monster. She started to sweat liberally and she shifted her eyes back and forth, refusing to make eye contact with Red. “Um! No! I d-d-don’t do that sort of stuff anymore! At least not directly!”

Sans cleared his throat. “i’m the one that works with determination, red. well, sorta. i know they’re running some experiments downstairs on floor 5, but they’re pretty minor. they don’t have access to the human souls like i do.”

Red stared at Sans. He worked on human souls? And he did determination experiments? Shit, had this version of him stuck around in the labs even after Gaster had disappeared? Red realized he hadn’t really asked about any of this, and it sure as hell seemed important now. He hoped that Sans hadn’t picked up where Gaster had left off.

“But since you’re curious,” Dr. Alphys continued, “I mostly work with robotics. I don’t know if you know Mettaton?” Red bobbed his head. “yes, of course. Who could miss the MTT-branded shows? He was sure the killer robot ran a nicer program in this universe, but the concept was the same – a robot monster with a lot of spunk. “W-well, I designed his frame! A-a-and I also transplanted his soul to the robot.

“W-well, after he got so popular, it turns out there were lots of monsters that wanted to transfer bodies as well. A-at first it was m-mostly ghost monsters. There were quite a few of them down in the R-Ruins that moved up to the surface with us. B-but a lot of them can’t interact with the world like the rest of us can. They’ve got to attach themselves to physical objects, but even then, they can’t do everything the rest of us monsters can.”

Alphys spun her chair to face the computer screen and pulled open a slideshow of pictures that flashed on the screen. There were photos of a variety of different monsters – rabbit, flame, snake, cat – that were followed up with photos of differently shaped and colored robot builds.

“S-soon I got calls from a bunch of monsters that wanted to get new bodies! I can’t believe how h-happy some of the monsters were when I agreed to it.” She blushed brightly, and Red could tell she was proud. “It’s been so surreal!”

“huh. i didn’t know you built mettaton’s body. i wonder if it’s the same back where i’m from.” Alphys mouth gave a nervous smile.

“yeah, alphs here has really pioneered soul transplantation. you won’t believe the things we’ve found out from her work.”

Alphys gripped her lab coat again. “S-Sans has really helped though. H-his work with the souls has really helped stabilize the process.”

Sans crossed his arms and cast a gentle frown towards the yellow lizard. “you’re giving me way too much credit, alphys.”
Alphys chuckled nervously. “W-well, I’m sure if you show him, he’ll agree with me.”

“heh. sure i can show him.” Sans walked forward and motioned for Red to join him.

They walked through a door into another dimly lit hallway. Several doors lined the hall, each protected with hand scanners. Sans walked to the end of the hall and pressed his hand to the plate and the two skeletons entered a sterile medical room. There was a large set of surgical lights suspended from the ceiling and several gurneys. Counters lined the walls, and atop one set of them sat six souls encased in glass.

“yeah, those are the human souls we used to break the barrier. well, six of seven, obviously. frisk still has their soul. anyway, that’s not what i wanted to show you.”

Sans led him to a small office that broke off from the main room. The room was packed with overflowing filing cabinets and boxes. The two skeletons could hardly fit inside because it was so crowded with papers. There was a single computer along the back wall, which was surrounded by several unframed pictures of Sans and a variety of monsters, including Papyrus, Toriel, Grillby, and Alphys. Sans booted up the computer and pulled open several documents.

“so most of the work i’ve done is on the souls out there. i’ve done a lot of scans on them to see if we can transplant them into robotic bodies. theoretically it’s possible, but since we haven’t worked on human souls before, it’s been really challenging. human souls just aren’t the same as ours. i’m not sure it’ll be that easy.”

Sans paused and glanced at Red. He seemed to be weighing whether or not to tell him something. He sighed and continued, “it’s also been hard because king asgore doesn’t want us to do it. he says that if the kids are able to remember everything, they might tell the humans about how we used their souls to break the barrier. with the way things are going right now, he’s convinced it’ll lead to a war.”

Red nodded. That made sense. If the tables were turned and the humans had done the same, he’d be feeling pretty pissed too.

“anyway, the work hasn’t gone to waste. i hate to admit it, but a lot of the research i’ve done has helped with the transplantations. but i’ve also found that there are a lot of things that can help sick humans too. heh. did you know that the humans didn’t know that ‘falling down’ was related to your soul? the only reason we know about that is because of our magic, but they had no clue. well, most still don’t believe me, but when they see the evidence, it’s going to revolutionize human medicine.”

Red couldn’t help but notice the edge of pride that entered Sans’s voice. It must be amazing to discover something like that.

Sans shook his head, a smile on his face. “heh. it’s pretty amazing actually. asgore gave alphys free rein to do whatever she wanted after she got so much publicity, and she opened this lab up for anyone to research what they want. in the last three years we’ve discovered more about ourselves in thousand years before it.”

“So any monster can research whatever they want here?”

“Well, within limits. we don’t have an endless budget, so alphys has got to approve the project. but asgore has given us a lot of room to maneuver. he wants to make it clear that we’re here to help humanity, not hurt it. science projects seemed like the best course for that.” Sans turned to Red. “which i guess brings us to why you’re here. what do you want to do here? you can help me
research the souls or help alphys out. you can also start your own project if you want. there are really very few restrictions here.”

Red crossed his arms across his chest as he thought about what he wanted to research. It had to be good or he wouldn’t be able to get himself out of bed every day. As fascinating as Alphys’s transplantations were, he wasn’t really that interested in engineering or robotics. He supposed he could help Sans with research into souls, but he didn’t really want to be an assistant. There was no escaping that role when Sans was so far ahead into his studies.

Red supposed that left only one other thing.

“has any monster looked into time travel or reset abilities?”

Sans frowned slightly and was quiet for a moment. “we have some research left over from gaster, but no group has developed on it.”

Red jumped at the mention of Gaster’s name and started to wring his hands together. What was wrong with him? He should’ve expected Sans to mention his name. Still, he couldn’t stop his soul from racing wildly.

“have you looked into it?”

“i’ve touched on it. you know frisk, that human kid?” Red nodded. “well, they had the ability to reset and apparently could do minor time travel as well. they called it ‘saving and loading.’ it wasn’t anything dramatic like your universe hop, but they could go back hours at a time.

after we came onto the surface, and well, after i recovered a bit from moving here, i asked frisk about it. apparently they didn’t have much control over it. it just happened. the kid told me that there was someone called chara that did it all and that it was outside their control. i’m still not sure how much i buy it,” Sans paused to swallow uneasily, “but i guess it doesn’t really matter now. about a month after we broke the surface, they lost their abilities.”

“and that’s it? you didn’t research any further?”

Sans’s eyelights flickered and he looked unseeingly at his computer screen. He seemed to be lost in thought. A couple of minutes went by, and as Red was about to shake the skeleton out of his stupor, Sans replied, “i didn’t see a need to keep looking into it. i wanted that part of my life behind me.”

There was a moment of awkward silence, which was broken by Sans sighing loudly. “anyway, you didn’t answer my question. what do you want to do while you’re here?”

“i want to research time travel.”

The worry and disappointment was evident on Sans’s face, but he merely nodded and replied monotonously, “sounds like an interesting project.”
Sans insisted on giving Red his own office, claiming that Red would appreciate the opportunity to have time to himself. The office was off room 2005, which was located on the other side of the dim hallway from the medical room where Sans kept the human souls. The room was crammed with cardboard boxes all labeled “G’s Old Stuff – DO NOT THROW AWAY” and stuffed with files. Sans pulled out an unused computer system and set up an account for Red. Throughout the process, Sans would hardly look at Red. As soon as he finished, his duplicate jumped up from the chair and strode immediately to the door.

“we’ll get you security access tomorrow, but until then, just call me if you need to move between rooms.”

“i don’t have a cell phone. at least not a working one.” Red held up a bright red flip phone, its screen long blackened. His cell phone had died upon entry into this universe, and he hadn’t seen a need to get a new one until now.

“oh. we’ll get you a new one.” Sans paused to look at the technology, “one that’ll have more functions too. until then, you can call me on the landline over there if you need me.” He pointed towards the direction of a wall surrounded by boxes. “my extension should be listed in the directory. i’ll be back at 2:45 so we can head to tori’s.”

Sans left and Red felt some of the tension in the air leave with him. Red knew he must have pissed him off by asking to do research on time travel. Hell, he could hardly believe that he was doing it himself. But he needed to. If he could somehow jump back to the other universe and get his brother, then they could stay here. He knew it would take Boss some time to adjust to this crazy place, but once he saw the sun, the stars, the sky, and everything else the surface had to offer, there was no way he would want anything else either.

Besides his brother, there was nothing else to go back to. Who knew when the next human would come into the Underground? It wouldn’t matter much anyway. Monsters were nearly extinct in his universe. How many times had he passed an abandoned building, ransacked and forgotten? All the monsters that were left were aggressive pieces of shit. Even if they got to the surface, the humans would eliminate them on sight.

No, there was no hope for that world.

Red sighed and tried to find a place to start. He had to find out how he had jumped timelines. Red
suspected that it had to do with the sequence of procedures. If only he hadn’t tossed the damn clipboard aside before he climbed in the machine. Even if it wouldn’t work to get back to his universe, he would at least be in a good place to begin his research.

He supposed that this world’s Gaster might have written down the procedures. Hell, there was a lot more record of Gaster in this universe if these boxes were any indication. Red pulled open a nearby container and saw piles of numerical calculations. He looked around the room – the room had to be 500 square feet and it was packed from floor to ceiling with boxes of Gaster’s old files.

For now, he’d file these damn things until he came across something interesting.

By the time 2:45 rolled around, Red had only searched through 4 boxes. Some of the writings were indecipherable and it was hard to label the papers. Others clearly referenced other documents that must have been packed elsewhere. It made finding a common theme or topic incredibly difficult.

Red’s head snapped up when the door gave a small click from the unlocking mechanism. Sans strolled in, hands in his blue hoodie pockets, a smile on his face. He certainly seemed much calmer from before.

“you ready?”

Red nodded, setting aside the papers in his hand, and the two left the lab.

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Papyrus, Sans, and Red whipped through the void and landed gently in a bright field of golden flowers. In front of them stood a small, brick house framed with white wood. There was a small cobblestone path that was surrounded by an assortment of purple, red, and blue flowers. Insects buzzed lazily above the small garden and the plants danced gently in the warm breeze. On either side of the house were two other homes. Unlike in the city, however, the buildings had breathing room between them, and there was no sense of tightness like in the downtown area. Like the brothers, Toriel and Frisk must have wanted more space than Very New Home could offer.

The front door to the house slammed open and a young human came sprinting out onto the lawn towards the skeletons.

“FRISK!” Papyrus called out happily. He leaned down and stretched out his arms in greeting.

The young teenager jumped into his embrace and giggled loudly. It was amazing to see how close the human and Papyrus were in this universe. It was such a stark contrast to his own world. Red turned to his left to say as much to Sans, and saw that his duplicate’s eyelights had flickered away completely. Still holding his hand from teleporting here, Red gave a small squeeze to Sans’s to snap him out of it.

Sans’s eyes returned immediately and he gave a nervous smile to Red. “thanks,” he whispered.

Frisk pulled at Papyrus’s arm to lead him into the house, pointing excitedly at Toriel, who stood in the doorway. Red’s soul gave a lurch at the sight of the goat monster – he just couldn’t associate her image with anything other than the queen back home. Queen Toriel had always been brutal towards her subjects, and he could remember several instances where there had been a public flogging or beheading when someone had pissed her off too much. Red was always so afraid for his brother whenever he had to run a royal errand.

Sans, on the other hand, seemed to have no such reservations. He briskly walked forward and, upon reaching the doorway, got on his tiptoes and leaned his head upwards. Toriel bent down and the
two shared a kiss.

Red snapped his head towards Papyrus, wondering how he would react to the romantic gesture. The taller skeleton didn’t seem to notice, as he merely greeted the queen with a hearty wave and continued to be led by Frisk into another room.

The pair broke from their embrace and Toriel turned towards Red and said sunnily, “Hello, Red! I am so glad you were able to make it today. How are you?”

Red could feel the sweat start to form on his brow. “f-fine.” He was happy for his hoodie now – if he didn’t have his hands stuffed into his pockets right now, he knew he would be squeezing them together. He didn’t need to make it any more obvious that he was intimidated by this woman.

Toriel led them into a quaint kitchen, filled with appliances and food. Frisk and Papyrus already sat at a large wooden table that leaned against the wall furthest from the counters. The child had a large cookbook propped open and was pointing excitedly to a recipe.

“WOWIE! ARE WE MAKING A TART, TORIEL?”

Toriel beamed brightly at Papyrus. “Yes! I have been meaning to teach you this recipe for quite some time, but we have all been so busy lately!”

Papyrus did a little dance and clapped his hands enthusiastically. “A NEW RECIPE! AND IT LOOKS DIFFICULT!”

Toriel giggled and walked over to the cookbook. “Let’s get started then!”

While the two got out the ingredients and began to prepare the meal, Sans and Red sat at the table with Frisk. With a smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes, Sans asked Frisk how school was going.

In a voice barely above a whisper, Frisk replied, “Good.” They shifted uneasily in their chair and added quietly, “Mom says I have the best grades in the class.”

“well that’s great, kiddo!” Red couldn’t help but notice the fake enthusiasm in his voice. “tell me, what have you been learning about?”

The two shared uncomfortable chit chat for the next hour while Toriel and Papyrus noisily prepared dinner at the counters. Every once and a while, an awkward silence was punctuated by Papyrus shouting excitedly about some aspect of the recipe. Both Frisk and Sans would laugh at Papyrus’s excitement, which helped to ease the tension slightly. But somehow the laughter would die far too quickly. Although Sans kept trying to invite Red into the conversations, Red was far too nervous to say more than one or two words. He wish he hadn’t come here. He wasn’t much for these types of situations, and back home, a bad conversation usually led to someone’s death.

Eventually Toriel and Papyrus finished their preparation and placed the tart in the oven. They sat at the kitchen table, filled with energy.

As Toriel settled into her chair, she turned to Red and asked, “So how are you adjusting to life on the surface, Red?”

Red shrugged. “i-it’s okay i guess.”

Toriel searched him up and down, and continued quietly, “I imagine it must be quite lonely here.” She continued, her voice rising unnaturally in volume, “Seeing as you just came up from the Underground and all.” Red wondered how dumb she thought Frisk was. Anyone could tell she was
Red shrugged. The truth was that he had never been less lonely in his life, but he didn’t really want to have that conversation with the god damn queen.

“Everyone goes through a lonely period in their lives, Red. You are no exception!”

“Yeah? Have you been lonely before?”

He hadn’t expected Toriel’s smile to disappear. Honestly he had just been trying to get her to admit that she really hadn’t experienced loneliness before.

“S-shit, sorry. I was just kidding!"

“Do not worry, Red. It is much better to talk about such experiences. Besides,” her smile returned as she looked at everyone. “I think only you are not privy to the story.”

Toriel explained how her two children, one human, one goat, had died. Red was familiar with the story; everyone in the Underground knew about this even back where he was from. But unlike in his universe, Queen Toriel had left New Home to live a life of solitude down in the Ruins. And apparently she had tried to take care of all of the children that fell down into the Underground before they had left her to try to return to the surface. Apparently that had failed; Red had seen the souls floating in containers back at the lab.

“In the end, it was Sans and Frisk that helped me to leave the shambles of my past and begin life anew on the surface. I must admit that spending all that time alone for so many years took a lot out of me. When you go weeks without seeing another living soul, it can be quite… frightening, to say the least. Seeing loneliness… and being lonely can be one of the hardest things on a soul.”

“Believe me, I know all about that.” Four sets of eyes swiveled to his position and he felt himself redden.

“What do you mean?”

“Uh, nothing. Forget about it.” He waved his hand, dismissing the thought. “Nothing important.”

“It certainly sounds important! As I have told Sans a thousand times before, it is not good to keep things bottled up. It only leads to dire consequences later.”

Red darted his eyes between the others. Shit. He didn’t want to talk about this. His eyes lingered on Frisk. He smiled at them. That was his way out of this mess – he wasn’t allowed to talk about his universe in front of the kid.

Sans seemed to sense his strategy because before Red could open his mouth, Sans said, “Hey, kiddo, how about you go get started on that homework you were talking about earlier?”

Frisk huffed. They looked like they were about to argue, but Frisk saw Toriel casting a stern glare at the teenager. Frisk sighed and stomped out of the room noisily, slamming the door behind them.

“So? You were saying?” If looks could kill, Sans would be a pile of dust right now.

Red lowered his head, placed his hand on the table, and nervously rubbed it along the grains and grooves. “Listen, i-”

“TORIEL IS RIGHT! YOU CANNOT KEEP THESE THINGS TO YOURSELF, RED!”
“shhh, bro. what’s the point in sending the kid away if you can’t lower your volume?”

“Sorry!” Papyrus sounded horrified at his mistake, but continued, “Red, please?”

Red sighed and traced a particularly large dark spot in the wood. They weren’t going to leave him alone. Fine. He’d spill.

“i used to take a lot of odd jobs once we moved to snowdin.”

Papyrus interrupted energetically, “Really?! Sans did as well!”

“paps, let him talk!”

“Oh no! Sorry, Red!”

Red shrugged and continued, “anyway, most of the jobs didn’t pay well at first. so anytime i saw something that paid well, i applied immediately. there was one job that paid 20g for hour. the ad said it was a janitor position. seemed like one hell of a good deal to me. when i showed up for the interview, they told me i had to clean up waterfall of all the litter. i thought they meant the dumps at first, and i figured that’s why they were paying so well. turns out they didn’t really care about the dumps so much.”

Red stopped and took a deep breath. “don’t know if you guys have a place called ‘the last fall’ in your universe, do you?”

The other three shook their heads. Papyrus exclaimed, “Is that the last waterfall you run into before Hotlands? If so, it must be very relaxing if you are coming from that direction! Hotlands is way too hot!”

Red sighed and pinched between his eyes with his forefinger and thumb. “no, no. the last fall is a large waterfall where there are a bunch of rocks. there’s a bridge below it and there’s a single echo flower there. we call that flower ‘the last whisper’ back where i’m from.”

“oh yeah, i’ve been there a few times,” Sans said. “it’s pretty soothing there.”

Yeah. These guys didn’t get it. There was nothing soothing about that place.

Red sighed and pressed on, “in my universe, that’s where monsters go to fall down. the rocks will usually bash them on the head so they don’t feel a thing. then they fall below and turn into dust. a lot of monsters go and tell their last thoughts to that echo flower. anyone can go and listen to it. well, before they whisper their own thoughts i guess.”

A stunned silence enveloped the room.

“anyway, some monsters failed sometimes.” Red shrugged. “it happens. some poor monster will get stuck on the bridge and their body will get battered by the onslaught of rocks. some monsters are just too strong, i guess, because they survive.

“my job was to dislodge ‘em. the people that hired me said they were tired of hearing the monsters’ screams all the time. kept them awake at night. they wanted me to push them down so they’d finally die. thing is, i don’t have much of a taste for death, so i’d usually just pull ‘em up and try to help them out. i don’t think most survived, and probably most of ‘em found another place to fall down, but i just didn’t have the soul to push ‘em down.”

He had always been too weak. He remembered when his employers had found out and had told
him as much.

“well, one time there was this cat monster that had tried to off herself. she had messed up, of course, and i had to help her up. i could tell that she hadn’t even been there that long. she would have probably made it if she had gotten a doctor. but as soon as i picked her up, she started thrashing everywhere, telling me to ‘let her go now’ and other shit. she was so pissed and full of energy, i couldn’t even believe she had just been sitting there trapped against that bridge.

“i really didn’t expect her to throw herself off once i let her go.”

Red could still remember that look of absolute serenity as she had thrown herself over the edge. For a moment it looked as if she were levitating in the air, held aloft by some unseen magic. But she hadn’t been. Red could have tried to stop her with his own magic, but it had all happened so fast. One second she was on the bridge, the next, all he could see was the abyss below.

“i ended up going to the last whisper – that echo flower nearby – and i listened to her final thought. all she had said was ‘i’m so lonely.’”

Red had listened to it over and over. The voice had been so emotionless, but it had burned deep into his bones. *I’m so lonely. I’m so lonely. I’m so lonely.*

Red shook his head and continued to trace along the wood grains. “not too long after that i quit. boss got me the sentry job. it paid less, but that job wasn’t worth it.”

He slowly looked up from the table. Papyrus had a hand over his mouth and he was quietly crying. Sans looked flabbergasted. He kept opening his mouth as if to say something, but would close it almost immediately. Toriel’s watery eyes bugged out of her head.

Red cast a glance to his side. “sorry. your story reminded me of that. it’s a pretty stupid thing to talk about.”

“I don’t –” Toriel’s voice cracked. She cleared her throat and continued, “I don’t understand. Where you come from, enough monsters fall down that they have a *job* for people to clean up the failed attempts?”

Red nodded, still not looking at any of them. “that monster had it right. it’s really lonely in my universe. everyone’s killing each other left and right, and the survivors are left to pick up the pieces.” Red swallowed. “there’s not much of us left.”

Papyrus whispered, “There aren’t?”

Red looked up at the three. “nah, i’d say there’s probably a thousand of us left? everything went to shit after we didn’t get the last human soul. it had been so long since the previous one that i think monsters lost it. they knew they weren’t reaching the surface.”

Not that it mattered. They were too far gone by that point anyway.

“there’s only a thousand monsters left?” Sans’s voice shook.

“heh. there might be more, but they’re hiding well.” Red shrugged his shoulders. “it’s nothing like here. you have, what, ten thousand monsters up here?”

“Sixty thousand at the last count,” Papyrus softly corrected him.

Holy shit. No wonder the crowds made him feel so sick. How could anyone stand to live with that
“you guys are on the brink of extinction and you keep killing each other?” Sans’s tone walked the line between rage and incredulity.

Red sighed and looked towards the door. He wanted to leave. He hadn’t signed up to talk about this shit. He had already discussed the matter to death with the fucking flower. He knew they were doomed back home. He knew how fucked up the monsters were. What the fuck could he do about it?

He started when he saw a shadow dancing in the crack of the door. Oh fuck, was that –?

“uh, guys, i think frisk might be listening on the other side of the door.”

A loud noise emanated from the other side of the door and he could hear loud footsteps trail down the hallway that lay on the other side.

Red jumped at the sudden noise of Toriel shoving her chair away from the table. She hiked up her purple dress to her knees, opened the door, and chased down the hall after Frisk.

“shit, i really fucked up.” He darted his head between the two skeletons. “i’m sorry, that was so fucking stupid of me. fuck, fuck, fuck!”

Papyrus reached his hand out and stilled Red’s hand, which was still tracing the table. “I-it’s okay. Toriel will fix this.”

Red wasn’t sure how someone could fix that. Some things just couldn’t be unheard. Or unseen. He knew that much.
As the sound of Toriel’s footsteps died, guilt lay like a rock in Red’s soul. He hadn’t met many kids in his life, and the teenagers that he had encountered were tough. But he knew that children were still more innocent than the rest of monsterkind. Even though Frisk was a human, and even though he got the impression they had been through a lot, he knew he had done them wrong today. He should’ve kept his mouth shut. He definitely should’ve looked to make sure that they had really gone to their room.

No, instead Red had probably scarred the poor kid.

He wondered if the queen was going to murder him before he got a chance to apologize.

“red, you can keep talking about it if you want.” Sans

Red pushed through the lump in his throat and answered with a flash of rage, “sans, i don’t want to talk about it! that’s what i kept saying, but you all insisted!” He knew his anger was misplaced. This was his fault, but god damn it felt good to yell at someone. He hoped Sans would scream back. It would be good to argue with him over this; he used to get into the loudest shouting matches with his brother over the dumbest shit. It always felt so good to just let it all out.

But Sans didn’t say a word. He turned away from Red, his shoulders hunched in defeat. The guilt in Red’s soul intensified at the sight. He buried his face in his palms. Great. Now he just felt worse.

Someone placed a hand on his shoulder. He tore his head away from his hands and saw Papyrus standing above him, small tremors running down his arm. His voice quivered as he suggested, “L-let’s go watch some television while we wait for Toriel.”

Red nodded. At least Papyrus could appreciate that he didn’t want to talk right now.

Papyrus led the group back through the entranceway and into a large, carpeted room filled with a variety of knickknacks and potted plants. In the center of the room was a floral printed sofa that faced a medium-sized tube television against the back wall. Papyrus sat down in the middle seat.
between Red and Sans.

With a croaky voice, Papyrus asked, “Where is the remote?”

Red reached between the cushion and the sofa arm and pulled it out. He pressed the power button, and after the television flickered for a moment, it turned on to a news story.

“– the attack two months ago on the Capital, government officials are still no closer to catching the culprits behind the attack. As military forces move into the rural regions, villagers greet the soldiers with homemade meals and warm tea.”

The screen showed several young humans handing a plate of food to uniformed adults.

“However, officials advise that residents stay indoors during nighttime hours in affected regions for their safety.”

The footage switched to two young newscasters sitting in a news studio. They both wore black suits and had short, brown hair. Fake smiles were plastered on their faces and they oozed false perfection in every aspect.

“why do all humans look the same?”

Papyrus sniffed loudly, and cleared his throat, before proclaiming, “THAT IS VERY RUDE AND UNTRUE, RED.”

Red waved his hand towards the television. “but they do! how can you tell them apart? they don’t even come in varieties!”

“WHAT DO YOU MEAN? THEY HAVE DIFFERENT HEIGHTS, DIFFERENT SKIN, DIFFERENT HAIR!”

“but it’s not like us. there’s fish monsters and cat monsters and goat monsters –”

“BUT THINK ABOUT IT! THEY’RE LIKE US! WE SKELETONS DON’T LOOK LIKE ANY OTHER SKELETONS!”

“heh. well, i don’t know about that.” He leaned forward to glance at Sans, whose eyes were glued to the television set.

“YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN!”

Red threw himself backwards, disappointed that Sans was still upset and refused to look at him. “i’m just sayin’ that it’s hard to distinguish between ‘em sometimes.”

“WELL, YES. I ADMIT SOMETIMES I FIND IT DIFFICULT TOO. BUT THAT DOES NOT MEAN THAT –”

Sans shushed them sharply. “i’m trying to hear this.”

On the screen was a large throng of humans marched down a busy street holding signs that read “DEATH TO MONSTERS” and “GO BACK TO MT. EBOTT.” They screamed loud, incoherent obscenities and chants as they pressed towards the direction of the camera. Several humans dressed in black uniforms carried large metal sticks and surrounded the group from the sidelines. There was a large bang and the crowd dispersed as a lone human fell to the ground.

“Protests in the city were broken up by force yesterday after rioters smashed several storefronts for
alleged support of monster immigration. Police in that region received a tip that the groups were armed with explosives. In a statement yesterday, the police announced that they hoped to dissolve the protests before people were hurt by terrorists who had infiltrated the group.”

The footage switched to a green fish monster, bloody and beaten, being escorted by police into a building. Screaming protesters on the sidelines flung rocks in their direction.

“As tensions mount in the war-torn region, anti-monster groups are calling on the central government to ban monsters from immigrating outside of the Mt. Ebott region. They cite increased competition for jobs, lack of transparency from King Asgore, and aiding terrorists as their primary reasons for the ban. Several unnamed government officials have spoken off the record and have urged monsters to return to Mt. Ebott before violence escalates further. Any monsters, unregistered or otherwise, are encouraged to contact the Ministry of Immigration for assistance.”

“How barbaric.”

Toriel’s voice made the three skeletons jump on the couch. They had been so engrossed in the story that they had heard neither her nor Frisk enter the room. The pair stood directly behind the couch, looking at the television. Toriel’s brow was furrowed in anger.

“it’s really getting out of hand,” Sans agreed.

Red’s directed his attention to Frisk. Their eyes met before Frisk looked hastily to the side.

Red heard them quietly mutter, “Sorry for listening to your conversation.”

Red blinked confusedly and felt the others stare at him. He stammered for a few moments before replying, “w-what are you sorry for, kiddo? i’m the one who should be sorry!”

Frisk shook their head quickly, and Red didn’t know what to say.

“Sans, Papyrus, can you help me for a minute in the kitchen?” Toriel kindly suggested.

The other two murmured their assent and got up from the couch. As the three left Frisk and Red alone, Toriel gave a small smile to Red.

“come sit down, kiddo.”

Red muted the television as Frisk walked over to the couch. Their striped sweater draped over their hands, making the human look younger than they were. He looked at the human’s face, and although they looked nervous, he could see no indication that they had been crying.

“i hope i didn’t scare you with that story, kid. i really didn’t want you to hear it.”

Frisk gave a quick shake of their head. “No, not scared. Just a little upset.”

“yeah. to be honest, i upset myself a bit. i really am sorry you heard me talk about it.”

Frisk pulled their sweater further down their arms. They refused to look in Red’s direction. The kid was nervous, but Red didn’t really know how to talk about this. He wasn’t used to expressing his feelings or whatever the hell this was supposed to be.

“You’re not really from the Underground, are you? I mean…not our Underground.”

“nah. if you heard my story, you can tell i’m not from around here. different universe.”
“Yeah, Mom just told me that you weren’t actually Sans’s and Papyrus’s cousin.” Frisk chanced a glance at Red and muttered almost inaudibly, “But you recognize me, right? You looked like you had seen me before in Very New Home the other day.”

Red glanced at the doorway. “best not to talk about that, sweetheart.”

The kid looked directly at Red and crossed their arms across their chest. They furrowed their brow, and Red couldn’t help but be reminded of Toriel’s glare from minutes before. Heh. It was funny; he hadn’t expected a human to emulate a monster so well.

“Everyone treats me like such a kid. I’m thirteen years old. I’m old enough to hear what you have to say.”

Now that was hilarious. His twitched into a grin. Frisk reminded him of when he was their age – spunky and determined.

“i get it, kid, i really do. but some things are better left unsaid.”

“But I want to know!”

Red sighed and wiped the smirk off his face. He scanned the entryway one more time. He wished Toriel was here to tell Frisk to leave him alone, or maybe to demand that he go home and never come back. Red knew he could refuse, but guilt ran deep into his soul. This human was identical in almost every way to the kid he had let die back in his own universe.

Red shifted his hands to his pockets. “i don’t know how it worked back here, kid, but where i’m from, humans used to fall from the surface into the underground on occasion. we monsters all knew that if we got seven souls, we could break the barrier and live on the surface again.”

Frisk nodded quickly. Guess this world and his own shared that much.

“well, i was a sentry outside of snowdin when a human that looked just like you came wandering out of the ruins. i was supposed to kill you and bring you straight to the king and queen, but to be honest, i had lost my taste for death at that point.” Red’s face stretched into a devilish grin. “so i decided i’d have some fun. soon as the human got close enough to my station, i gave them a good spook. told them to turn around and shake my hand. soon as they did i gave ‘em a good hearty zap. heh. old buzzer in the hand trick, y’know?”

Frisk’s eyes sparkled in amusement. “Yeah, Sans did something similar here.”

“heh. it was fun messing with the kid. led them around, watched them struggle with papyrus’s puzzles while he was off training with undyne, and i even managed to trick them into buying some ‘fried snow’ for 5000g. heh. i still can’t believe they fell for that.”

Frisk giggled. “It sounds like you were friends.” Their face died into a frown and they quietly asked, “Did you two meet through a lot of… resets?”

Red let out a deep breath. “they only came through once, kiddo.”

“Really?” They beamed at Red. “Then you’re on the surface in your universe too?” Red shook his head silently and Frisk’s voice wavered as they quietly asked, “Did they kill someone?”

“sans thought the same thing.” Frisk flinched under his steady gaze. “did you kill monsters or something, kid?”
Frisk looked to their lap, playing with their sleeves again. “During some of the resets, Chara did.”

“yeah, sans mentioned that name. this isn’t the same chara from the queen’s family, is it?”

Frisk bobbed their head in affirmation. “I don’t think... they knew what they were doing, but yes. They killed a lot of monsters.” Frisk squirmed nervously. “They used me to do it.”

“nothing worse than losing control over your own actions.”

Frisk looked up and nodded slowly. Some of the uneasiness left their posture. Red wondered if the kid thought he wouldn’t believe them.

“So if you’re not on the surface, where is... your version of me?”

“dead.”

“Did you –?” Frisk swallowed nervously. “Did you kill them?”

The question took him aback. Red was starting to see a pattern here. What had Sans said when he pulled him aside in the capital the other day? we both did some things we aren’t proud of. What had Sans had to deal with in this universe that he would make him murder a kid?

“i didn’t kill them. my brother did.”

Frisk’s mouth gaped open. “Papyrus? Papyrus killed them?”

Red nodded. “once the human left snowdin, they met my brother in that area between our home and waterfall. i figured that my brother would throw a few bones around, get a few hits in, and then call it quits. my brother’s an asshole, but hell, i didn’t think he’d kill a kid. i watched the fight from not too far away. i don’t know what got into him. my brother fought to kill from start to finish. and i just stood there and watched. like a coward.

He could remember Papyrus’s face as he had struck the final blow – otherworldly and filled with rage.

“he killed the human and i just couldn’t believe it. i think it was his first kill too. and man, what a first kill – the last human soul needed to break the barrier. he was guaranteed a spot amongst the highest rungs of the royal guard after delivering that reward to the kind and queen.

“except that the damn flower monster stole it right before he could deliver it. monsters hassled him forever after that.”

“You mean Flowey?”

“heh. i didn’t think that was really his name. it sounded so stupid when he told me it. but yeah, that’s the guy.”

“But why didn’t they just reset? That’s what happened when I died.”

Red shrugged. “as far as i know, the only one who ever had the ability to reset was flowey. i never even knew the human could do it.”

“Did –” Frisk hesitated, casting a nervous glance to Red before continuing, “Did Flowey reset a lot?”

“yeah. the damn flower reset at least 109 times before i lost count. and believe me, there were a lot
after i stopped keeping tally.” Red sighed. “i think he was determined to convince everyone to stop killing. he would follow us around and tell us how bad killing was. i think he caused a few number of resets just by tailing the wrong monsters.”

“Did it ever work?”

“as far as i know, i’m the only one that remembers all the resets, kiddo. so it probably only worked on me.”

Frisk’s flashed their gleaming teeth at Red as a smile broke out onto their face. Red couldn’t stop his mouth from twitching at the corners as he felt his own grin form. Heh. Guess this kid didn’t like killing either.

“anyway, i don’t know what happened after flowey took the soul. all i know is that after that, there were no more resets.”

Frisk swung their legs back and forth, their posture much more relaxed than before. “Your world sounds very different from ours.”

“heh. you got that right, kiddo.”

They heard a faint shout from down the hallway, calling them to dinner.

“come on, frisk, let’s not keep them waiting.”

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Dinner was uneventful. At first there was an awkward silence upon Red and Frisk entering the room. However, as soon as dinner was served, Frisk asked Red for some of his best tart-related puns. The jokes and Frisk’s laughter brightened the mood considerably, and the others soon broke out into lighthearted conversation that put the previous events of the evening out of their minds.

After they finished, Papyrus got up from the table, stretched his limbs, and announced, “I ENJOYED THE MEAL, TORIEL, BUT I AM QUITE READY TO BE HOME NOW.”

“It was a pleasure having you three here tonight. You should come over more often!”

Sans looked over to Red with a smile and asked, “hey red, do you think you have a feel for where our house is enough to teleport back?”

“why? are you staying?”

Sans nodded and reached his hand out to Toriel’s on the table. “yeah, think i’m going to stay the night.”

Red glanced at Papyrus, who was smiling happily at Sans. Huh. Guess he really didn’t care about Sans’s relationships. It was bizarre, honestly. Red wasn’t even sure how such a version of his brother could exist. He felt a pang in his soul as he stared up at the lanky skeleton. He couldn’t articulate what he felt. The closest word to describe it was admiration.

“red?”

He shook himself out of his daze. “yeah, sans, i think i got it down.”

“okay then, see you tomorrow at the lab.”
Red got up from the table and waved goodbye to Toriel and Frisk. Toriel smiled sweetly and the child happily waved back as Red gripped Papyrus’s arm. Red immediately teleported the pair back to their home, finding his way through the void easily.

As they landed outside their bedrooms on the second story, Red released Papyrus and stretched his arms. He yawned and started to head to his bedroom. He called out over his shoulder, “good night, papyrus.”

“YOU DON’T HAVE TO SLEEP IN THERE IF YOU DON’T WANT.”

Red’s hand froze over the door handle and he looked up at Papyrus. He knew he must look confused as hell. What did that mean?

Papyrus shifted nervously. “YOU DON’T HAVE TO SLEEP ALONE.”

Red dropped his hand from the handle, and smiled softly at Papyrus. It was like he knew that Red had been dreading sleeping alone tonight. The story from earlier today still nagged at his soul, the words playing in his head over and over again – I’m so lonely. He knew if he slept alone, he would think about it all night.

He followed Papyrus into his and Sans’s bedroom. He lay down on the fresh sheets that Papyrus had set out this morning and sighed deeply.

“RED, DO NOT WEAR DIRTY CLOTHES TO BED!”

Red glanced over and reddened as he saw Papyrus stripping next to the bed.

“w-what?”

Papyrus, totally nude, placed his hands on his hips and scowled. “HONESTLY, RED, IT IS UNSANITARY TO SLEEP IN THE CLOTHES YOU HAVE WORN ALL DAY.”

When Red didn’t move, Papyrus leaned over and took off Red’s hoodie, throwing it across the room into a laundry basket. Red yelped and before Papyrus could reach down to tug any other apparel off, Red did it himself. Casting the clothes on the bed, he crawled under the covers as quickly as possible, trying to hide his body from view.

Papyrus took the discarded clothes and they joined the other clothing in the basket. The taller skeleton climbed into bed, reached his arms around Red, and nuzzled his head into the shorter skeleton’s shoulder. Red was brutally aware that neither of them were wearing any clothes, and he couldn’t help the pulse of nervousness that cut through his soul.

He could feel Papyrus’s breath on his neck, and Red thought back to the previous night. That had certainly been something new. He really hadn’t had too long to dwell on it, but he felt a surge of joy at the thought. It had been so different than his recent punishments with his brother. It had been more like before the resets had ended. Painful, but pleasurable. Harsh, but gentle. It was everything he had wanted.

He recalled how Papyrus and Sans had slowed down in the middle to exchange souls and couldn’t help but wonder what that had been about.

“papyrus?”

“Hmm?” His voice was sleepy.
“Why did you and Sans hold each other’s souls last night?”

Papyrus eyes snapped open and an orange blush graced his cheekbones. “Nyeh. You’ve never touched another monster’s soul?” Red shook his head. “Well, er… you see, it feels very good.”

“Well, yeah, so does sex. Is it like that?”

Papyrus buried his face in Red’s shoulder in embarrassment. His voice muffled, he said, “Yes. It is like that. But better.” He raised his head and leaned his head on elbow. “What Sans and I did last night was one thing you can do with your soul. If you squeeze and pour magic into another monster’s soul, you can feel everything they feel. It is very… exhilarating.” Papyrus shifted anxiously. “We could… try it if you’d like?”

“No!” No way. He was not letting Papyrus touch his soul. That was too much. He looked nervously at Papyrus and hoped he hadn’t upset him with his immediate rejection.

Papyrus gently smiled and delivered a quick skeleton kiss to Red’s forehead. “That is perfectly fine. It is very difficult to expose yourself so openly. It took Sans and I some time before we were comfortable enough.”

Red relaxed and felt his soul flutter with relief. At least it was normal to be hesitant. He liked Papyrus, but to show his soul to him, never mind letting him touch it, was something on another level. He doubted that he ever would.

He leaned up and planted a kiss on Papyrus’s mouth. He just wanted to show how much he had appreciated his kindness. Not just for this, but for everything today. It had been one hell of a day, and Papyrus had respected his boundaries throughout.

Papyrus pressed into the kiss and sighed tenderly. He trailed a finger delicately from Red’s chin, down his neck, and to his exposed shoulder. He drew light circles on the clavicle, sending shivers through Red’s bones.

Red pulled away from the kiss and stilled Papyrus’s hand with his own. “Don’t. Won’t Sans be angry?”

Papyrus’s brow furrowed quizzically. “Why would Sans be angry?”

“Because you belong to him.”

Papyrus pushed himself upwards and kneeled on the bed. He gazed into Red’s eyes, and Red couldn’t decipher the emotion on Papyrus’s face. Was it sadness? Pity?

“I don’t belong to anyone. And neither do you.”

Before Red could respond, Papyrus pulled the covers away from Red’s body. Red reflexively scrunched up, trying to hide the scars that mottled his bones.

His face unchanged, Papyrus asked, “Do you not want to? I understand if you are not comfortable.”

Red slowly pulled his arms away from his torso and unwrapped his legs to expose his pelvic bone. “I-I’m fine. I was just cold is all.”

Papyrus mouth crinkled into a knowing smile, but he thankfully didn’t pursue it. Instead, he reached his hand towards Red’s exposed spine and gently clasped around it. As Papyrus dragged his hand almost lazily down the bones, Red arched upwards into the touch. The taller skeleton
lingered on each facet of Red’s spine. It felt like he rubbing as slowly as possible. Every tiny caress sent small sparks of pleasure through Red’s marrow. Papyrus was so leisurely in his movements that it was unbearable.

“p-please, harder.”

“No.”

Red’s mind went blank for a moment. No? Papyrus continued to dwell on each column languorously and Red felt a whine rise up from his chest. This was torture. He never knew that he could be tortured without pain. Or that torture could feel this good.

As Papyrus continued his delicate strokes on Red’s spine, he reached his other hand down to Red’s pelvic bone. With the same measured pace, Papyrus carefully trailed his index finger along the ilium.

Red was panting now. Papyrus was tormenting him. Each stroke left him dizzy and screaming for more. But he knew if he asked Papyrus, he would refuse him. He wondered vaguely if Papyruses across all universes were this cruel.

With a sudden grip, Papyrus began to harshly fondle Red’s spine speedily. Red moaned loudly as pleasure ransacked his soul from the abrupt change of tempo. The shorter skeleton sat up, leaning on his arms, gasping heavily. Papyrus continued his snail’s pace along his pelvis, and the contrast set Red’s mind ablaze.

“papyrus. please. it. feels. so….” Each word was punctuated with a gasp. Red could feel his magic manifesting below. He could feel the energy twining and crackling in the air. He couldn’t help but thrust lightly into Papyrus’s hand as his glowing length formed.

Papyrus stopped his ministrations brusquely and Red let out a low, winding whine at the loss. Gazing into Red’s eyes unwaveringly, the taller skeleton tugged Red closer to his lap. He felt Papyrus’s length pressed against his own and shivered. The glow from their magic lit up the immediate area, and Red could see perfectly as Papyrus dragged his hand downwards with deliberation.

With the same languid speed, Papyrus wrapped his hand around both of their members and rubbed upwards from the base. Red’s breath caught in his throat. Papyrus continued to stare directly into Red’s eyes, seemingly unaffected by his self-afflicted cruelty. As Papyrus reached the ends of their members, he took his other hand and teasingly rubbed Red’s slit with the tip of his index finger. A groan cascaded from Red’s mouth at the gentle torment as Papyrus continued to run his other hand gracefully down the conjured mass.

Papyrus continued for some time, barely increasing the rate of his strokes.

Up.

Down.

Up.

Down.

It was driving Red crazy. His head was fuzzy and his soul couldn’t stop pounding frantically in his chest. He needed more and each tantalizing touch from Papyrus only served to send him into a fit of gasps and moans. Papyrus was deliberately making sure he wouldn’t reach his release and he
could feel tears forming in the corners of his sockets from it.

“i-i’m sorry, papyrus,” Red called out between groans, “i’ve got to… to do something!”

Red looked down at where their magic met and grasped firmly around their lengths. He slid his hand down quickly, pressing the two members together. Papyrus let loose his own moan, and Red felt the other skeleton give a sharp squeeze at the bases where he had left off, sending a flash of pleasure through Red’s body. Red drove his hand up and down swiftly and whined at his own touch. The change from the slow, torturous pace was utter and absolute relief.

Papyrus released his hand from around the two, giving easier access to Red, but continued to swirl his fingertip across Red’s slit. The tiny touch served as a reminder that this was more than just self-pleasure, and it sent Red’s soul ablaze. As Red increased his speed, he felt Papyrus push his pelvis upwards slightly, causing more friction between their summoned lengths.

“RED!” Papyrus had abandoned his soft voice. “YOU ARE DOING SO WELL.”

Red blushed and looked up from his ministrations. “y-yeah?”

“YES! YOU ARE VERY GOOD AT THIS!”

The praise curled around Red’s soul and he couldn’t believe how good it felt. Heh. He was doing well? He didn’t know he could do anything right.

With renewed vigor, Red began to stroke at a breakneck pace. Red was moaning out Papyrus’s name as the other moaned incoherent compliments.

“So good! It –! This is –! WOWIE!”

Red felt the pressure build up. The fact that he was making Papyrus feel so good was sending him over the edge. With just a few more strokes, Red released against Papyrus’s hand and felt the fluid flow down the red length. It only served to speed up his caresses. Papyrus was sputtering praises and driving his pelvis upwards, having yet to reach his own release. Panting, and desperate for Papyrus to end, Red reach his other hand down to the taller skeleton’s length and squeezed the tip.

“AAAAH! RED!”

Papyrus gave a final twitch, sticky liquid shooting out with great force onto Red’s hand and ribcage. Red released the lengths and fell backwards, panting and gasping. He could hear Papyrus’s labored breath close by and Red couldn’t help but feel a sense of pride. He had caused that. He had given Papyrus such pleasure.

He felt the bed move slightly as Papyrus leaned over to grab something from inside his nightstand. He pulled out a towel and wiped his soiled hand and length on it. Red saw the other skeleton dismiss his magic before he handed the towel to him.

“Clean up please! I don’t want to wash these linens again if I don’t have to!”

Heh. It was funny how much of a clean freak Papyrus was. Red wiped the mess off of himself and allowed his own magic to dissolve from his pelvic bone. As he finished, Papyrus climbed underneath the covers beside him. He threw the towel towards the basket across the room and, of course, missed. Too tired to even call upon his magic to levitate the towel, he sighed and crawled into bed beside Papyrus.

The lanky skeleton curled up next to him and clanked a kiss to his cheekbone. The gesture sent a
twisting feeling through Red’s soul, but it wasn’t one of pleasure.

No. There was that familiar sense of guilt.

He felt Papyrus drift to sleep against him and he tried to will his soul to stop pounding sensations of shame throughout his body. Red sighed gently, trying not to wake Papyrus. At least this time he wasn’t sobbing all over the place. He reached his hand to his chest where his soul lay beneath and pressed firmly.

He couldn’t regret this. It felt too good. And, well, Boss wasn’t here. There was nothing Red could do about that.

Red pushed the remorse in his soul away. He would apologize to his brother later. For everything. For cheating on him. For abandoning him. For letting him kill that kid.

Maybe even for loving him.
Sans stood at the kitchen sink, scrubbing away bits of food from the dishes. Behind him he could hear Toriel helping Frisk with their homework at the kitchen table.

“You see, the moon’s rotational period is exactly the same as the orbital period. That is why the answer here is that the same side of the moon’s sphere is always facing Earth.”

Heh. He remembered learning about that from his astronomy books in the Underground. That was when he engulfed every space sci-fi drama he could get his hands on. Back then learning that material seemed endlessly pointless – after all, why bother learning about the real stars when all you could ever hope to see were the faintly glowing cave stars in Waterfall?

But up here, even kids were taught about the moon’s orbit. Sans couldn’t articulate how much joy he felt at the thought.

He squeezed the nearly empty bottle of dish soap on his sponge and several bubbles burst out of the nozzle. Feeling mischievous, he whipped around and, facing Frisk and Toriel, tightened his grip on the bottle, sending a cascade of bubbles in their direction. Frisk’s cheeks wrinkled as they giggled at the sight.

“Sans, that is lather immature!” Toriel flashed a toothy grin.

Sans blew more bubbles in their direction. “what can i say? all i want is some good, clean fun!”

Toriel stood up from her chair, and strolled over to the kitchen sink, her hands on her hips and an impish smile on her face.

“hey tori, i’m armed and dangerous, so don’t try anything funny.” He held the dish soap in front of him like a shield.

Toriel merely glanced at the bottle and continued to grin wickedly down at Sans. “I brought my own weapons!” She brought up her claws and flexed them in the air.

A second too late, Sans realized what she meant. Toriel abruptly leaned down, brought her hands
underneath Sans’s arms, and tickled him lightly. The tingling sensation sent Sans into a fit of laughter, and he squeezed the bottle of soap, sending a torrent of transparent bubbles between them. Toriel giggled relentlessly at Sans’s reaction. Toriel continued to brush her claws rapidly across Sans’s underarms, neck, and shoulders. Sans tried to flinch away from the exhilarating touches to no avail.

Suddenly Toriel’s laughter grew deeper and she stopped her touches. Sans peeked around Toriel’s frame and saw Frisk prodding their mother gently with their own tickles. Taking the opportunity to strike back, Sans threw aside the bottle of soap and delivered his own light touches to Toriel’s underarms. She roared in infectious laughter. None of them could stop giggling as they poked and prodded each other.

Sans finally relented. “uncle! uncle! you two win!”

They sat down at the table, allowing their giggles to gradually subside. Sans felt winded, but filled with bubbling energy.

“well, that certainly was a slippery soap.” The other two chortled quietly at the joke.

Sans looked up at the clock – was it really already eight?

Toriel followed Sans’s line of sight and announced, “I did not realize how late it is!” She looked towards Frisk. “I know you wanted some time on the computer tonight, Frisk, but do not stay up too late. Tomorrow we will be going over some difficult material and I want you to be well-rested!”

Frisk nodded, got up from their chair, and gave a perfunctory hug to Toriel. “Good night, Mom. Good night, Sans.”

“night, kiddo. rest well.”

Sans was glad that he had been able to have a moment of levity with the kid. He was aware that it didn’t happen often, and he hated himself for it. He knew that Frisk was trying their best to make up for everything that had happened in the Underground. Still, it was hard to let it go. But tonight had been a real moment of fun, and it reminded him of the good times he used to have with them.

Toriel rubbed her hand against Sans’s skull as she stood from the chair. “I’m going to go read if you’d like to join me.”

Sans nodded and followed Toriel into the living room. It was a nightly routine for Toriel to sit on the couch and read a book to help settle down before bed. Sometimes she’d read a story out loud and her colorful voice would lull Sans to blissful sleep.

Toriel grabbed a book from the nearby shelf and sat on the floral-printed couch. Sans got on the couch beside her and placed his head in her lap. She held out her book, labeled *25 Teaching Methods in the Modern Era*, in front of her and began to read aloud. It was a perfect view from where Sans lay; he could see Toriel’s eyes sparkle as she read through the passages and her face light up when she read a particularly interesting strategy for teaching. God, he was so lucky to have her.

He was more lucky than Red anyway. His mind darted back to the conversation from earlier this evening and felt sick. What kind of world was that? Monsters killing each other left and right. Their population on the brink of extinction. He had thought that his version of the Underground had been empty. How could there only be a thousand monsters? It was unthinkable.

And the story Red had told. He understood that monsters fell down sometimes, whether it was
from old age, illness, or depression. But for so many to purposefully kill themselves before their souls broke on their own? And to do it in such a way? Sans couldn’t stand to think about it.

And he couldn’t help but remember how he used to stand in the very spot Red had described, looking over the edge of the falls and trying to wish away that unspoken desire to throw himself over. When Red had told the story earlier, he had almost been able to hear the echo flower whisper those words – *I’m so lonely* – and it had been his own voice echoing back at him in his head.

And he had been lonely for so long. Reset after reset and he was the only one that remembered. Those same few weeks playing over and over again. He had been all alone. Sure, he had talked to Papyrus, Grillby, and Toriel a few times about what was happening. And when they had believed him, it had been a brief respite from the overwhelming loneliness. But it hadn’t really mattered in the end. The resets hadn’t let it matter. He had been absolutely alone.

And when he had left the Underground three years ago, he had been stuck in that mindset. He hadn’t been able to trust anyone or anything. He had known it was all going to be reset again. This was inevitable. He had brushed off his friends with jokes and laughs, but those closest to him hadn’t been fooled. He hadn’t realized it at the time, but they had been watching him closely. Even then, he had come so close to falling down. He still couldn’t believe how close he had come.

He had planned to leave the capital, lay down in a bed of flowers, and look up at the stars as he slowly broke away. It had sounded so lovely at the time. So restful. A nice long sleep that he wouldn’t wake up from. No more resets. No more worries.

“Sans? Sans?!”

His eyelights returned and he was staring up into Toriel’s panicked face. Her hand was pressed into his sternum and he realized he was shaking intensely against her. Oh god, that had been a bad one. How long had he been out?

“Sans, are you okay?”

The question set something off deep within him. He cried out, “no!” and fell into a violent fit of tears. He curled into Toriel’s lap and sobbed into her midriff. One of Toriel’s warm, fuzzy hand stroked his skull softly as he choked into her dress.

“Sans, it’s been three years, four months, and.” she hesitated for a moment, and then continued, “twenty-three days since we’ve left the Underground. There are no more resets. We are on the surface and we are happy.”

Sans nodded and gasped out, “Three years, four months, twenty-three days. Three years, four months, twenty-three days.” He repeated it over and over. It had been Toriel’s idea to say the timestamp out loud whenever he had an episode. His therapist had encouraged it, but it was usually difficult to recall the date once he pulled himself out of his trances. Thank god for Tori. She could always remember it in a pinch.

He said it over and over, drilling the date into his mind. His sobs gradually receded. He pulled his face away from Toriel’s torso and returned to her lap to face her. She looked down at him with a mixture of concern and relief.

“thanks, tori.”

She leaned down and kissed his forehead gently. “Do you want to talk about it?”

Sans let out a shuddering breath. “i just… i’ve had a bad couple of weeks. i keep losing my head.
it’s the worst it’s been in a long time.”

Toriel returned her hand to Sans’s sternum and stroked calmly. “A couple of weeks? I am guessing this has something to do with Red then.”

Sans raised his left hand to his forehead and pressed firmly. “Tori, it’s like looking into a mirror and seeing yourself at your worst. You know he pretty much slept for a week straight? It kills me to see him like that because….” He trailed off, not sure how to articulate his thoughts.

“Because it reminds you of who you used to be?” Sans nodded. “Sans, if this is bothering you, you can stay here with me until Red can find his way home.”

“I don’t want him to go home! Tori, you heard him talk about that place. How could I let him go back to that?”

Toriel sighed. “You are right. But Sans, it pains me to see you suffer like this.” She pressed her hand more deeply into his chest. “I don’t want to let you go back home knowing that this is hurting you so much.”

“Well, that’s exactly how I feel about him.”

There was a pause and Toriel seemed to be lost in thought. She continued to stroke his chest, and Sans was bursting to tell her more. But the movement was so distracting. She was so close to his soul that it was making it hard to concentrate on talking. Sans reached his hand to Toriel’s and stilled her. She looked at him quizzically and he whispered, “Paps and I slept with him.”

Toriel threw her head back in surprise. “Really?” Her voice rose in incredulity.

Sans nodded. “We thought, y’know, that he would appreciate a distraction. I know what it’s like to be holed up in your room all day. It drives you crazy. And well, the opportunity presented itself.”

“Sans,” she said, her voice pitched with strained patience, “I know that your recovery began with Papyrus sharing his love with you, but why would you think that is appropriate for all monsters?”

“Well, I don’t think it works for all monsters. But if he’s me, then I figured it would help him, y’know? Sex can be a great distraction from all the bad shit.” Before Toriel could reply, Sans said defensively, “Besides, it was mostly Papyrus’s idea.”

Toriel sighed softly. “Sans, Papyrus is a wonderful monster, but he is not known for his subtlety.” Sans chuckled at that. “And I must say, I did not think you were one for casual sex.”

“I don’t know if I would call it casual.” He squirmed uncomfortably in her lap. “I like him. I know that’s strange, but it’s true. He’s unlike me in so many ways, but so… familiar too.”

“I wonder: does he know that?”

Sans stiffened. “What do you mean?”

“Well, does he see it as casual sex? Or something more?” She moved aside Sans’s hand and returned to rubbing his chest gently. “If he’s anything like you, he needs a connection.”

Sans cracked a smile up at Toriel. “And how do you know that?”

“Sans, I know you don’t just sleep with anyone who will have you. Otherwise I think you’d be sleeping with half the lab staff.” Sans chortled. “You are much more particular than that. And you
certainly don’t view it as casual.”

Sans nodded. That was true. He wondered how Red viewed him and Papyrus. He had to admit, he hoped that Red saw last night as more than just a distraction.

Toriel leaned down and graced a gentle kiss to Sans’s mouth. Sans leaned into her lips and sighed softly.

“tori, how can you know me so well?” He sighed. “you really are my rock. where would i be without you?”

Toriel smiled broadly. “Probably taking Papyrus and Grillby for granite.”

Sans laughed. “oh, tori, don’t underestimate yourself like that. you’re a gem.”

Toriel’s mouth opened in small laughter. “Sans, you’re being sed–”

Whatever she was about to say was cut off as Sans pressed his hastily-summoned tongue into her mouth. His tongue tugged against hers and he felt her hot breath as she sighed into his mouth.

She pulled her face away from his and he could tell she was blushing under all that fur. He reached up a hand to her face and stroked gently along her jawline. With his free hand, he reached around her and rubbed the small of her back. She shivered at the touch, but there was no denying the look of concern that graced her features.

“Sans, are you sure –?”

He pressed his fingers to her lips and cut her off. Of course he was sure. He hadn’t been able to spend much time with her recently, and he couldn’t stand it anymore.

Without speaking, he dragged his hands away from her and lifted himself up from his reclining position. He turned towards her and hurriedly hitched her purple dress up over her hips, exposing the black underwear between her thick thighs. Toriel shifted herself and quickly slid the barrier away and spread her thighs to allow Sans full access.

Sans took his right hand and pressed his thumb against Toriel’s clitoris. He gently swirled his thumb in tiny circles against the small ball of nerves. He stretched his head up to press his tongue into Toriel’s mouth again. Their appendages tangled together and he pressed his hand more firmly into her. It wasn’t long until he felt her moaning into his mouth and the steady waves of warmth emanating from her mound.

Sans pulled away from her lips and crawled from the sofa to the floor. He placed himself between Toriel’s legs and looked in awe at her puffy opening. Toriel scooted forward on the cushions, allowing Sans to easily begin.

Sans delicately dragged his index finger along Toriel’s slit, causing her to shiver against him. He gently pushed his finger inside the folds and began to thrust in ever-so-delicately. Using his other hand, he returned his thumb to Toriel’s mound of nerves and resumed his circular brushes. Above him, Toriel gasped. She gyrated her pelvis forward eagerly, but he could sense her frustration.

“Sans, don’t tease,” she whined.

Sans unfurled another finger inside her and plunged his fingers at a faster, yet steady pace. He heard Toriel sigh with pleasure. Only a sigh? Sans knew he could do better.
He dipped his mouth between her legs and briefly paused to listen to the obscene noises that his hand was making. Before he could get too caught up in the sound, he dipped his tongue inside to join the pumping fingers. He pressed his tongue upwards along her inner walls, tasting her citrusy flavor.

She was fully thrusting against him now, and his eyes and nosehole pressed against her white fur as he continued to press inside. He increased his pressure along her clitoris, and he could feel her body vibrate as she moaned above him.

Sans pushed a third finger inside. He knew Toriel was desperate for release now; her gyrations became fierce and he had difficulty keeping his tongue pressed inside her. He felt the tight, warm pressure around his fingers as they drove inside her. Knowing she was close to release, he reached deeper within to prod at her sensitive spot.

The reaction was instantaneous. He felt Toriel compress against his digits and she let out a low wail from above. She continued to thrust against him as fluid spilled out, catching in the fur around her opening.

She stilled, and Sans pulled his face and hands away from her. He brought his fingers, slickened from her release, to his mouth and lapped up the juices with his conjured tongue. Toriel was panting heavily, her eyes closed and her hand pressed against her mouth. He knew that she was trying to be quiet so they wouldn’t alert Frisk. Good thing the kid was on the other side of the house.

Sans crossed his legs as he sat on the floor. He leaned his elbows against his knees and placed his head in his hands. He stared serenely at Toriel as her breath gradually slowed. She was beautiful when she was flustered like this. Hell, she was beautiful all the time. He sighed lovingly.

Toriel noticed that Sans was staring at her and her face stretched into a broad smile. But it wasn’t the affectionate, tender smile that Sans expected. The only way to describe her smile was mischievous.

Uh oh.

She leaned forward and lifted Sans off the ground. She brought him close to her face and murmured, “Your turn.”

She placed him gently on the sofa, but as soon as he hit the cushion, she hurriedly dragged his shorts to his knees. She brought her claw up to his exposed pelvic bone and carefully trailed her finger. He hitched upwards at the touch.

“Now should I tease or not?” she asked playfully.

“god, tori. don’t tease. please.”

“Well, I suppose since you asked.”

She began to rub vigorous against the bone and Sans shuddered as the touch sent vibrations of pleasure down his spine. He looked up at her and saw her brow furrowed in concentration. God, she looked good like that. Sans was so turned on that it didn’t take long for his own blue opening to form.

After the magic solidified, Toriel took her hand away. She gazed at him with the same impish smile as before.
“I want to try something new.”

Sans gulped. “uh, what did you have in mind?”

Toriel sprang up from the couch, allowing her dress to fall back over her legs. “Let me go get it. I’ll be right back!”

“wait, tori, why don’t i just come with you?”

“I don’t want Frisk to hear you!” she called quietly as she left the room.

He was in trouble. Every time Toriel wanted to try something new, it usually left him unable to walk for a day. And if she thought he was going to be too loud, it was sure to be something that would absolutely wreck him. He glanced down to his dripping genitalia and cursed under his breath. It was just like her to make sure he was ready and willing when she asked to do these things.

Toriel quickly returned with a wooden box in her hands. She sat down on the couch and smiled at Sans. “I made it a few weeks ago, but we just haven’t had enough time to ourselves lately.”

Sans leaned up on his arms to get a better view, and, with much trepidation, Sans asked, “what is it?”

She opened the box and revealed a white phallic shaped object. “a dildo?” he smirked. Sure, it was new, but he wasn’t sure why Toriel was so excited to try it out.

“Yes,” she said patiently, “but I made it with magic.” She delicately pulled the length out. “So when I use it on you, I will be able to feel it too.”

Oh.

Toriel set the box to the side and crawled forward to lean over Sans. She pressed the head of the length against his slit and tilted her head questioningly. Sans nodded at the unspoken question.

She pressed the length slowly between his lips and Sans arched his spine at the intrusion. Toriel moaned softly, and Sans couldn’t help the flutter of ecstasy that went through his soul at the sound. He watched as she began to steadily pump the length inside and out. He wanted to see more, but Sans’s arms felt weak. He let himself fall backwards onto the sofa, moaning quietly.

It wasn’t long until Toriel grew more confident and began to increase her tempo. It pressed more deeply inside of Sans and he began to squirm at the pleasure.

“tori, that’s – hnn – really good,” he said as quietly as he could.

Toriel’s eyes were closed in pleasure and she nodded her head rapidly. He could see her arm shaking slightly as she continued to plunge the length in and out of Sans.

He wondered if Toriel had tried this on herself before using it on him. He felt himself tighten below at the thought.

Toriel continued her relentless thrusts and called out breathlessly, “I’ve got one more thing to show you.”

Sans was gasping and was having a hard time finding his voice. “w-what?”

He felt the familiar tingle of Toriel’s magic sizzle through the air, and a moment later the length
began to vibrate violently inside. They both moaned loudly as the pleasure intensified dramatically.

“tori! oh my god!” The pleasure was too much. He was gasping and groaning loudly now as the vibrations shook his entire body.

“Sans, be – be quiet!” she said between quiet gasps.

But Sans couldn’t stop. He was trying his best not to wail at the top of his lungs. With trembling hands, he reached behind him and grabbed a pillow from the end of the couch and stuffed his face into it. His loud moans were muffled by the fabric.

Toriel sent more magic down the conjured dildo and pressed into the back of Sans’s genitalia. He jerked his hips wildly at the sensation and Toriel relentlessly returned to the spot with great force.

He screamed into the pillow and felt himself drop over the edge. He squeezed and contracted around the length, his soul sparking from the orgasm that ripped through his body. He couldn’t stop squirming even after Toriel pulled out with a squelching pop.

As his mind returned to reality, he removed the pillow that was smashed into his face and looked up at Toriel whose fur was drenched with sweat. Her chest was heaving just as much as his, and god, it looked hot.

He bent forward, still panting, and pulled her on top of him. He kissed the top of her head as she lay across his chest, and whispered tiredly, “you sure are getting boulder.”

She giggled and rubbed her head affectionately into Sans’s chest. It wasn’t long before the two fell asleep, one on top of the other.
Abandoned

Chapter Notes

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulssex.tumblr.com. You can also find soul sex reblogs if that’s your thing.

- I got hit with a writer's block, so I am not happy with this chapter. I may come back and edit it later.
- Also not sure when the next chapter is going to be. It depends on how long this block lasts, blugh.

Additional tags for this chapter: Flowey Violence
(tell me if I should tag anything else in this chapter)

Red strolled to the far side of room 2005, arms filled with folders. He delivered the stack of documents to the bottom drawer of the filing cabinet and sighed, frustrated. It had been two weeks since he had started filing this old garbage and he was no closer to bringing his brother here.

The Gaster of the universe sure had a lot of pointless shit to say though. There were countless documents that detailed the construction of the time machine that resided in Sans’s basement. It was clear that each piece of the machine was precisely designed to cut through time and space. What wasn’t clear was how to get the damn thing running.

When Red had first run into documents describing the machine his soul had soared. There had been more evidence of the machine here than he had ever had back in his own universe. He had been sure it wouldn’t be long until he ran into the documents that would detail how to get it running.

But Red had gone through every box meticulously and there was nothing to show for it. There had to be tens of thousands of files filled with calculation after calculation related to the Core’s power supply mechanisms. Plus there were countless pages devoted to designing weapons that could pierce human souls. Gaster had taken no hesitation in describing in excruciating detail his experiments on humans that he had conducted before the war had ended.

Hell, there was an entire filing cabinet reserved for the experiments on Sans alone. Red had looked through photo after photo of Sans being injected with determination. Plus all of the work that had gone into Gaster tethering his blasters to Sans. There were so many journal entries detailing the extensive abuse Gaster had inflicted upon him. It was clear that Gaster had been a piece of shit in this world just as much as in his. He knew that he had to be to use a pair of orphaned skeletons to conduct experiments, but now he had the evidence to back it up. The notes detailed how Gaster had made sure Sans complied with all of his requests in the same way as back in Red’s universe – threatening to torture Papyrus if he didn’t fulfill Gaster’s every demand.

Red had felt sick reading through these files. But he had persevered in the off chance that notes about the time machine were hidden within the journal entries. And he hadn’t wanted to return to these files, so he had to be thorough the first time.

But it had all been for nothing! Red let out a growl of frustration. Even in this universe, Gaster had
thrown himself into the machine and left no evidence of it behind. The stupid, fucking asshole!

Red kicked the empty cardboard boxes that littered the room, sending them flying through the air. He just wanted to scream. How was he ever going to get to his brother?

As he slammed his foot against the side of a box in his fury, he felt a wave of pain reverberate through his bones. Howling, he crouched to the floor to clutch his foot.

“what the fuck?!”

He glanced at the box he had tried to kick. His soul leapt when he tore it open and saw that it was filled to the brim with papers. This was it. It had to be.

His elation disappeared when he realized that he didn’t recognize the handwriting. It certainly wasn’t written in Gaster’s bizarre script. He turned the box around and on the far side was a label scribbled in small handwriting: “DT Notes – Do Not Discard.”

Red sighed in irritation. Still, he had to look. Just in case.

It didn’t take long for Red to figure out that these were Alphys’s notes. The details of the experiments matched those of the rumors he had heard about the lizard monster back home – monsters injected with determination, causing them to melt and combine together. The photos were horrifying – was that really a snowdrake combined with a vegetoid? Red dug further into the box, setting aside the binders of information on the amalgamates. Maybe some of Gaster’s stuff had been mixed in here. Maybe something in here spoke of time travel.

He paused as he reached the last binder in the box. In the top, right-hand corner was a label that read “Flower Candidate.” He opened to the first page and saw a photo of a lone golden flower, pulled up by its roots. As Red read through the entries, he had a suspicion that he knew this flower. By the time he turned to the last entry in the binder that suspicion had grown into certainty. He read the entry: the flower’s gone.

He slammed the binder closed. Maybe he had been looking in the wrong place. Sans had said that both Frisk and Flowey had been able to reset in this universe. The kid didn’t seem to understand it, but what if the flower did? What if he could explain it? Red wasn’t expecting a miracle – Flowey wouldn’t know how to start up the time machine, after all – but he needed something. Anything that would help him try to figure out how time travel worked.

And now that he had exhausted Gaster’s notes, there wasn’t much else to work off of.

Red paused for a moment. Where would he start to look for the flower? He had probably moved to the surface like everyone else. Red pulled out his phone and looked at the time – it was already noon. Frisk was probably out to lunch with Sans and Toriel. It was their day off school and the three had decided to make plans around it. A picnic or something, he remembered vaguely. Red hadn’t bothered to ask for the details. All he knew was that Sans wasn’t in the lab today.

Still, he had to start somewhere. He couldn’t just walk up to random monsters and ask if they’ve seen a talking flower recently.

* heya, kiddo. hate to bother ya, but have ya seen flowey recently?

He climbed up from the floor. It would probably take the kid a while to respond. Maybe he’d go get lunch and –

His thoughts were interrupted by his buzzing phone. Frisk had already replied.
* No.
* well, do you know where he is?
* The Ruins. Why do you want to know?
* just curious, kid. wanted to know about the differences between our universes.

There was no need for the kid to know why. He had already tried to get information from the kid about the resets, and he knew they were disappointed that they couldn’t help him.

* Please don’t do anything dangerous.

Huh. That was weird.

* no worries, kid. i was just wondering.

He put the phone in his pocket and made his way out of the lab.

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Red’s feet landed with a small crunch as he appeared in Snowdin. He looked to his right and saw an empty plot of land where Sans’s and Papyrus’s home once stood. The sight sent pangs of pain to his soul, but he quickly pushed the feeling aside. He could’ve teleported straight to the Ruins, but he had wanted to see Snowdin. He missed the frigid chill in the air, the way the gentle darkness permeated through the town, and, above all else, how quiet it was here.

He trudged through the snow, looking around at the abandoned buildings. So many homes had been boarded up and left to rot. It was just like back home – no one was left. He approached the center of town and saw a small pine tree covered head to toe in rusted ornaments. Weird. He wondered if there was some reason for the decorations.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw a small mouse monster darting between homes. Shit, were they going to challenge him? Before he could mount any defenses the monster had disappeared into another building. Red shook his head. He should know by now that the monsters in this universe weren’t out to get him. He rolled his shoulders to try to dismiss the tension in his bones and continued onwards.

Maybe it was a little too quiet for his tastes. In fact, the silence in town was downright eerie. Even back in his universe, monsters still had to go out to work, or eat, or hell, even fight. But here, there was hardly anyone. All he could hear was the snow crunching beneath his feet.

As he reached the end of Snowdin, he looked at the shop. Unlike the rest of the buildings, it and its companion, the inn, weren’t boarded up. In fact, they each had a fresh coat of brown paint. The rabbit sisters that lived here must have stayed behind. For what reason, he couldn’t imagine. This place was a metaphorical ghost town. Just as he turned to walk towards the shop to investigate, the door burst open and a cacophony of noise filled the air.

A group of six humans, led by a towering bear monster, filed out of the shop. The group was loud, and their voices echoed through the town. Each human was holding either a cinnamon bunny or a bisicile in their hands. He heard one of them complain about how overpriced the food was here.

As realization swept over him, he felt himself shaking in rage. “are you fucking kidding me?!?”

The group went silent and they stared at Red with wide eyes. The brown bear monster turned towards him, a befuddled look on his face.

“Can I help you?”
Red clenched his fists at his side, as he bellowed, “you’re giving them a tour??”

The monster’s look of confusion grew deeper. Behind him, one of the humans held a camera aloft and flashed a photo.

Red felt his left eye alight with magic and he levitated the camera out of the human’s grasp, crashing it into the storefront. Moments later the group of humans shrieked in horror and ran through the town, desperate to get away from Red. The bear monster called after them, telling them to wait and come back. When the humans were out of sight, he turned towards Red, fury etched into his features. Red didn’t stick around long enough to find out what the guy intended to do or say. With a blink of the eye, he was landing in front of the sentry station near the Ruins.

When he landed he let out a roar of rage. He kicked the snow beneath him wildly. It wasn’t enough to quell his anger. He summoned a blaster and let a ray of energy loose into the air.

These pathetic monsters just let the humans into the Underground for tours? Centuries of being trapped beneath the ground, forced to restructure their entire society, all while the humans lived it up on the surface, and the humans had the nerve to waltz in here and take fucking photos? It was bad enough back in Very New Home, but to see it here in Snowdin, where he had seen all that suffering firsthand? There was no excuse. What the fuck was this version of King Asgore doing? He didn’t care if he was trying to impress the humans. This was too much.

He screamed out a few more choice swear words before he stomped onwards towards the Ruins. This had been a stupid fucking idea. He should’ve just teleported directly here in the first place. All Snowdin had reminded him of was what he had lost and how naive this world was.

As he approached the large purple door, he saw a large sign that read “RESIDENTS ONLY. NO TOUR GROUPS ALLOWED.” At least he wasn’t the only one pissed off. He pushed the door open and pressed inside.

After making his way down a long hallway, he climbed a set of stairs. It looked like an abandoned home. Old picture frame hooks adorned the walls and cobwebs filled every corner. As he peeked into the neighboring room, it was obvious that no one lived here. Just another piece of the Underground that had been deserted. Though Red couldn’t be quite sure whether or not it was abandoned before the barrier broke.

Red exited the building and wandered the crumbling Ruins for hours. It was oddly more lively than in Snowdin. He sometimes saw a spider out of the corner of his eye, and on occasion he passed a froggit in the halls. He tried to speak to them to get information about Flowey’s location, but the monsters merely shook their heads in confusion and continued onwards.

He wondered if this was all a wild goose chase. Hell, Frisk had even said that they hadn’t seen Flowey recently.

Just as he was about to give up and teleport home, he heard a voice behind him call out in a singsong voice, “Howdy, Smiley Trashbag.”

Red whipped around and saw the golden flower bouncing gently up and down about five feet from him. “flowey?”

Flowey’s smile disappeared. The sugariness was gone from his voice. “Who are you?”

“i’m re –” He cut himself off. What was he even saying? “i’m sans.”

The flower’s face furrowed. “No, you’re not.” He looked him up and down. “You look a lot like
“him, but you’re not him.”

Red sat down on the ground as he usually did when he conversed with the flower. Their conversations had lasted hours back before the resets ended. To be honest, Flowey could be a bit long-winded at times, but he was always friendly and ready to talk. Besides, Red was prepared to stay as long as it took to get the information he needed. “nah, we’re not the same, but i promise i’m sans.”

Flowey studied him for a few moments and his face broke out into a huge grin. In the same singsong voice as before, he said “Well then, howdy, Sans! Sorry for the nickname earlier. I didn’t realize you weren’t my Sans! Heehee! Sans and I have a lot of inside jokes with each other. You know how it is!” He winked. “So what can I do for you?”

“i was wondering if you could answer a few questions for me.”

The flower giggled. This version of Flowey was strangely happy. “Well, I’ll sure try my best to answer them!”

The way Flowey bounced on his stem was distracting and it took Red a few moments to gather his thoughts. “do you know how you are able to travel through time? you know, with the resets?”

Flowey stopped moving. “You mean how I used to reset, right? I think you already know that I haven’t been able to do it for years!”

“really? when did it stop?”

Flowey’s frowned. “That should be obvious. When Frisk came to the Underground for the first time.”

“but i don’t understand. how did you lose the ability when frisk fell down here?”

Flowey stood there, lost in thought. He shifted his eyes from side to side and leaned forward on his stem. His voice lowered to a loud whisper, and he asked, “Can I let you in on a little secret?”

Red nodded. “It was all Chara!”

So Frisk hadn’t been making it up. Or if they were lying, the flower was in on it too. “is chara really the queen’s child?”

“Heehee. Yeah. Well, they used to be anyway! I promise you that they’re different now!”

“So they’re still alive?”

Flowey face broke into a nervous grin. “Well, I’m not sure alive is the right word. They’re still around. They’re the reason I used to be able to reset! That is… before they left me to join that stupid human.” Red stared at the flower, whose face quickly returned to a giant grin. “Don’t worry though, Sans! Without them, we monsters wouldn’t be able to go to the surface and let those meatbags take photos of us! Oh!” He put a leaf to his mouth and tittered. “Was that rude? Sorry!”

Red smirked. He liked this guy. He was weird, but he agreed. “don’t worry about it. they piss me off too.”

Flowey’s grin vanished and in a serious tone, he asked, “Who are you, really?”

“i told you, i’m sans.”
“Well, ‘Sans,’ I really have to wonder why you’re asking me all this! Geez, this isn’t about the saves and loads from last year, is it?”

“well, i was wondering because –.” Red blinked. “wait, saves and loads?”

Flowey giggled again. “Yes! I’ve tried asking Frisk about it, but they just don’t want to talk to me.” He shook his head sadly. “I think they’re upset they lost their abilities and they just don’t know how to talk about it. I know when I couldn’t reset anymore, I was beyond tears!”

“but someone’s been time traveling?”

“Well, yes, silly! I’m surprised you didn’t notice! It’s pretty obvious to those of us who remember these things.” He winked. “And you know what that means, right?” Red shook his head. “Golly! It means that Chara’s moved on and found someone else with enough determination to move forward!”

Red straightened his posture. “there’s someone else who can reset?” He felt his heart flutter in utter panic. “flowey, have you met them? do you know who it is?” If someone here had the ability to reset, then could all of this be lost? Could he even bring Papyrus back here? And if it did get reset, where did that leave him?

The flower gave him a sardonic grin. “No, I can’t say I do! But really, should that be your main concern right now?”

Red looked confusingly at Flowey. Sure, Red had been here to ask what powered Flowey’s reset abilities, and if that was just Chara, then this was a dead end. But if this universe was reset, then yeah, that was a pretty big concern.

“i don’t know what you –.”

The ground beneath Red suddenly cracked and several large green vines wrapped around his neck and arms. He was snapped backwards to the ground. His skull smashed against the floor, sending waves of pain throughout his body. In his peripheral vision he saw Flowey raise his main body from the floor high above Red.

“flowey, what the fuck are you –?!” He was interrupted as another vine enveloped his chest and pushed him further into the ground. Red struggled to catch his breath.

“Heehee. Oh, Smiley Trashbag.” His face spread into an opened grin, revealing razor sharp teeth. “In this world, it’s ‘kill or be killed,’ and I’ve been waiting a long time to kill Sans. But I guess you’ll do!”

Red was gripped in absolute fear. His magic flared in sudden panic, and he felt the drain on his soul as a blaster manifested above him.

Flowey sniggered as he deftly dodged the blast of energy that emanated from the blaster’s maw. It was hard for Red to aim from the ground, especially as the vegetation choked his every limb. Flowey increased the pressure, and Red couldn’t even struggle against the tendrils. Another vine erupted from the ground and snaked its way up to Red’s chest towards his soul.

In a flurry of terror, Red did the only thing he could think of and teleported to Snowdin.

They crashed to the ground in a writhing mass of green. The sudden relocation must have left Flowey dazed because Red was able to extract the creeping tendrils from his body. But as he pulled himself away, the flower found his bearings and wrapped another vine around Red’s foot.
He had to get away. He couldn’t teleport while Flowey was still attached to him.

Red pushed the towering flower backwards with a burst of magic; instead of snapping, the vine dragged Red through the air as well. The whiplash sent Red tumbling into the packed snow. He didn’t bother to look as he threw cascades of bones in Flowey’s general direction. He grasped desperately at the vine around his foot.

“Golly, you sure are stupid!”

Red frantically summoned another blaster, pointing it towards the connection between Flowey and himself. He felt the vine crackle and burst under the blast of energy. He looked up and saw Flowey hurtling a massive bulk of vegetation toward him. The link between them broken, Red’s soul thrummed with energy as he hastily teleported himself. As he whipped through space, he saw the vines inches from his face.

He crashed with a loud thud to his bedroom floor. He scrambled backwards, ready to fend off Flowey’s next attack with another surge of conjured bones. But the flower wasn’t there. He was alone.

He fell backwards and allowed himself to catch his breath. His entire body ached with pain. He reached his shaking hands up to the back of his skull. It was tender and he could feel a delicate crack forming. He squeezed his eyes shut and couldn’t hold back the tears. His soul churned in absolute terror.

It wasn’t just Flowey’s betrayal that made him feel this way. It wasn’t even the fact that he had almost died.

No, he felt this way because he had almost been pushed to kill again.
Sans was filled with a bubbly happiness. The sun peeked behind a blanket of fluffy, cotton ball clouds and light breeze made its way through the park. Sans’s bones were pleasantly warm. He stretched out his limbs on the checkered blanket, soaking in the sun’s rays. He could hear bees buzzing in the nearby patch of honeysuckles, darting from flower to flower. To his right, Toriel sat up, staring at the sky, an almost sleepy contentment spread across her features.

“Mom, when are we having lunch?”

Sans raised his head to look at Frisk, who sat at his feet. They had shrugged one ear of their headphones off of their head and were looking at Toriel questioningly.

“We can eat now if you’re ready, my child,” Toriel responded sweetly. When Frisk nodded enthusiastically, Toriel scooped up the containers of food she had packed and distributed spring green sandwiches to each of them.

Upon seeing the selection, Frisk scrunched up their face in disappointment. Toriel chided softly, “No complaints. Eating healthy is key to a happy life.” She looked to her side. “That goes for you as well, Sans.”

Sans smirked. “hey, no complaints here. i always appreciate a homemade meal.” Sans took a bite and smiled as he chewed. Once you got past the leafiness, it wasn’t half bad.

Toriel smiled at him and took a large bite of her own sandwich. She looked up at the sky and pointed to a distant cloud, and said, “You see that? It looks like a dog, don’t you think?”

Sans sat up and looked at where she was pointing. “huh. i think it looks more like a mouse. see? the ears are huge!”

Toriel chuckled. “Which do you see, Frisk?”

Frisk looked up from their phone. “Yeah, Mom, it looks cool.” Their eyes darted immediately back to the screen.

Toriel opened her mouth to say something to them when Sans placed a hand on her shoulder. “don’t worry about it, tori.”

“They should be spending the day with us instead of looking at their phone,” she said disapprovingly.
“hey, it’s their day off too. let them spend it how they want.” The truth was that Sans didn’t really want the day to be ruined by awkward silences and uncomfortable conversations. And if Frisk was happy listening to music, that was fine by him.

Toriel sighed and shook her head. She devoured the last half of her sandwich in one bite and lay back on the ground, staring up at the sky.

“What about that one?”

Sans leaned backwards and looked at where she was pointing. “oh, that’s definitely a vegetoid. look at that grin.” Toriel giggled.

He felt his phone buzz in his pocket and gave a small start. He scrambled to fish it out, and by the time he got it into his hands, he had missed the call. Before he had the chance to check who had called, the screen flashed with another incoming call.

“Who is it?”

“It’s Grillby.” He rejected the call. “He knows I’m out with you today.” Grillby usually respected Sans’s plans with Toriel and Papyrus. He wondered if the flame monster had forgotten that he was busy today. Sans admitted that it had been a while since he had last visited the bar and Grillby would typically expect his company around now. Regardless, even if Grillby had forgotten, he would get the message when Sans didn’t pick up.

Sans placed the phone on the blanket and looked up at the sky, trying to find another interesting-looking cloud.

Sans heard the vibration of another notification and quickly picked up the phone in irritation.

“If you need to answer, please do not hesitate to do so,” Toriel said kindly.

But the only thing displayed on his phone was the time: noon. Grillby wasn’t calling and there were no new messages on Sans’s phone. He looked up and saw Frisk typing furiously on their own phone. Sans relaxed. Just one of the kid’s friends.

Then his phone pulsed in his hand. One new message from Grillby. Sans sighed in annoyance and opened his messages.

* Sorry to bother you, but there is a police officer looking for you here.

Sans blinked. A police officer? Did Grillby mean a Royal Guard? He shook his head to himself. No, when Grillby spoke he was very precise with his words.

* you mean a human?

He didn’t have to wait long for Grillby’s reply.

* Yes. She has been here for hours and refuses to leave until she speaks with you. The patrons are not happy.

He sat up quickly. The regulars at the bar weren’t the most accepting of humans. Some of them were openly anti-human. If a police officer was refusing to leave, and one of those monsters confronted her….

“tori, i’m real sorry, but this is urgent.” Toriel looked at him with confusion. He explained
Grillby’s text messages and added, “I’m sorry to cut this short.”

Her brow scrunched with worry. “Do not fret. Please keep us updated.” Sans gave her a quick kiss on her cheek and turned to Frisk. They were staring down at their own phone, face etched with concern. “Sorry, kiddo. We’ll do this another time, okay?” Frisk nodded, not looking up as they typed out their own message.

He stepped through the air and took a shortcut directly inside the dimly lit bar. The air lingered with the scent of fried food. Sans glanced around the establishment. Sans could see Grillby at the bar, his body casting a sputtering light as he prepared drinks. Doggo sat at the bar with Greater Dog, chatting animatedly. He spotted Big Mouth and Drunk Bunny eating some fries together. And in the corner of the room were the monsters he least wanted to see right now, Punk Hamster and his group of anti-human friends.

They were comprised of two vibrantly colored bird monsters, a towering, scarred black bear monster, and a young, flustered snowdrake. They didn’t visit every day, but when they did, they loved to rant and rave about their friends and family who had moved outside of Mt. Ebott’s boundaries. They would tell stories that the human news failed to report, which usually riled up more than one customer. One night they had even suggested they go chew out a few human tourists in the city. Thankfully Grillby had put a stop to that kind of talk, but it didn’t stop the monsters from getting drunk and spouting out their rhetoric against humanity.

And right now they were throwing angry glares at a uniformed human with long, braided hair who sat alone in a nearby booth. It was no wonder Grillby called. If anything happened to a human here, and a police officer at that, there was no way the human’s government was going to let that slide. Asgore would have to step in, and that wouldn’t go over well with most monsters. Most people were fed up with the way humans were treating them and –

Sans shook his head, casting off the thoughts. He needed to handle this before it got out of hand.

He took a deep breath, plastered a giant grin on his face, and stepped towards the booth. As he approached, the human turned her head towards Sans. She didn’t smile upon seeing Sans, but he wasn’t sure if that was because the scowl was permanently ironed on her face or if she just wasn’t happy to see him. Sans continued to beam and held his hand out to the officer.

“Nice to meet ya. I’m Sans. Sans the skeleton. Heard you were looking for me?”

The woman looked coolly at his proffered hand, but ignored it. She nodded at the seat opposite her. Sans retracted his hand and sat at the booth, continuing to smile despite his irritation.

“So, uh, didn’t catch your name.”

She flashed a badge at Sans. “Officer Hansi,” she said gruffly.

“Well, it’s a pleasure.”

The officer stared at Sans from across the table, her hands placed neatly in front of her. She didn’t say a word, and he wondered if maybe Grillby had heard wrong. Maybe this officer wasn’t looking for him. Sans’ s grin twitched, and just as he was about to ask the human what she wanted, she spoke.

In a hushed, but authoritative tone, she explained, “I am part of an investigation that is looking into the recent string of terrorist attacks. I’m sure you’ve heard of them?” Sans nodded. “Well, they’re getting bolder and they’ve started targeting bigger cities. Last week one of our operatives
infiltrated a group of these extremists in the capital. We found out they’ve been using magic.”

Sans’s smile slipped off his face. “wait, what?”

Humans using magic? It wasn’t unheard of. After all, it had taken seven humans empowered with magic to create the barrier that had trapped them in the Underground. But it was rare for humans to be any good at it. It usually required extensive training from a monster. Alternatively, humans could gain some level of magic when they killed enough monsters. That had been the case with those that had created the barrier. But even then those humans had killed a lot of monsters. Countless monsters. Certainly more monsters than had disappeared recently. And even those humans had needed to deliberately hone their skills in order to create the barrier. Humans and magic just didn’t really mix.

“I don’t think that it’s a coincidence that this group has been more active since your kind has started moving out of this area.”

“excuse me?” A hint of anger edged into Sans’s voice.

“When my operative asked how the group had gotten access, they were told that they had help from a scientist. A monster scientist.” She gave him a knowing look.

“you think that’s me?” He had to fight to keep the emotion out of his voice.

“You are one of many suspects, yes.”

“listen,” Sans said, struggling to keep calm, “it’s not me. i have no reason to do that.”

“You have been known to eat at this establishment, which hosts a variety of anti-human monsters.” She nodded towards Punk Hamster and his friends, who were glaring in their direction and clearly listening to every word of their conversation.

“so what? you’re going to arrest me for eating here?” Anger had creeped back into his voice. “just because some of the monsters here get a little… extreme doesn’t mean that i’m part of their group. and it definitely doesn’t mean i’m part of some wacky human terrorist group.”

“If you are not working for that group, then perhaps you can pass along information.”

Sans considered her words carefully. “if i hear anything, i can pass that intel on to the royal guard. i’m sure they can send it along to your unit.”

Officer Hansi’s scowl deepened. “We are trying not to involve monster authorities for… political reasons. Besides,” she continued hurriedly, “our agency was hoping you could do more than just inform us of potential suspects. Your knowledge in magic can help us track down these terrorists and put an end to their disgusting tactics.”

He paused to let her words sink in. “so let me get this straight.” He couldn’t stop his voice from rising in incredulity. “you want me to spy on the monsters from the lab and tell you all i know about magic, all without asgore or the royal guard knowing?” She nodded and Sans clenched his fists in his lap. “i don’t know how stupid you think i am, but i’m not going to go above the king’s head just because you think you can threaten me with this little stunt.”

She scooted out of the booth and stood up, hovering over Sans. “Believe me, this is not a threat. You are a suspect and we’ll be keeping an eye on you.” She lowered her head next to Sans’s and whispered, “And if you think for a second you’re the only we’ll watch, think again. So if you want everyone to be nice and happy, you can tell us what we need to know.”
Sans felt his eye flare in cyan magic. “get out.”

As the woman leaned backwards from him, a furred hand gripped her shoulder and forcibly turned her around. Punk Hamster and his crew surrounded the officer. Officer Hansi’s eyes widened in surprise.

“What did you just say to our friend Sans here, human?” Punk Hamster asked. His hand visibly tightened around the officer.

“punk, let her go.” When he didn’t respond, he demanded, “now!” Sans had to force himself not to throw all of them against the wall with his magic.

Punk Hamster released her. Despite her obvious fear, she turned her head towards Sans and muttered, “Think about what I said. We’ll know if you change your mind.” She left the restaurant swiftly, slamming the door behind her.

The young snowdrake twitched his wings frantically, dropping feathers on the bar floor. “Can you believe the nerve of that self-righteous, smart-talkin’ little –”

“get away from me.” Sans was breathing heavily and gripping his knee. He had to hold himself back. He couldn’t let his anger get the best of him.

Punk Hamster exclaimed, “Hey! We’re just trying to help you out. You can’t let humans walk all over you!”

“you need to shut up right now,” Sans said in between breaths.

Grillby’s smooth voice quietly called out to the group, “How about all of you return to your drinks?”

The group muttered mutinously, but returned to the bar as Grillby served them another round. The flame monster subtly beckoned Sans towards the back door.

Sans let out a grunt of frustration and walked towards the back of the restaurant. He was still shaking with rage, and he couldn’t stop his eye from continuing to flare in his left socket. As soon as he reached the back wall, Grillby opened the door and motioned for Sans to enter.

Sans stepped into the backroom and immediately started to sweat. It was always hot back in the kitchens. Since Grillby and his special guests were usually the only ones that ever came back here, he never bothered to regulate the temperature to normal monster levels. The heat only added to Sans’s ire, and he was pissed that Grillby hadn’t just told Sans to meet him in his bedroom.

Grillby lightly closed the door behind them and gestured for Sans to walk up the set of stairs to the side. Sans was in no mood to climb the damn steps. He took a quick shortcut directly to Grillby’s room like he should have done in the first place. He heard Grillby sigh loudly in exasperation through the door. Sans supposed that he should have teleported Grillby as well, but now that he was up there, he had no inclination to return. Besides, Grillby enjoyed the heat.

Sans marched his way to the bed in the center of the studio apartment. Sans had to watch where he was walking so he didn’t trip over the discarded clothes that scattered the floor. Unlike his restaurant, Grillby had never kept his bedroom clean. Sans had never asked why there was such a stark difference between his business and his apartment, but if he had to guess, it was because he didn’t have the time.

Sans was used to the uncleanness. Honestly, he had to wonder if Grillby’s habits had worn off on
him back when he had still been caught up in the resets. For years, Sans had done much of the
same as Grillby – he had never bothered to do laundry, do dishes, or help with any of the chores.
Without Papyrus around to help out, it was no wonder Grillby’s apartment looked so much like
Sans’s old room.

Sans threw himself face down on the unmade bed and huffed in frustration. He wanted to scream.
Better yet, he wanted to give that human a piece of his mind. Or maybe even show her what he was
capable of.

Sans heard the unmistakable click of Grillby’s door unlocking. Sans stewed in his anger as he
heard Grillby walk in and throw his keys to the side. Sans tensed up, waiting for Grillby to speak.
Sans knew that he would want him to talk. The old bartender confession booth. Just like old times.
Sans was in no mood. For once he just wanted to lie here and think about hitting that human in the
face with a blaster for threatening him.

But Grillby didn’t speak. Instead, Sans heard something clatter in the kitchen. Grumbling, Sans
turned over onto his back and glanced near the entryway. Grillby was at the sink, filling a tea kettle
with water.

Sans grumbled loudly. “you know i hate that stuff.”

Grillby set the kettle on the stove and turned on the heat. “You need to calm down,” he said
quietly.

Sans curled his hands into fists and yelled, “i don’t know if you heard what that woman said to me,
but i think i am completely within my rights to be angry!”

Grillby quickly walked out of the kitchen and sat on the edge of the bed. “Sans, you know they can
hear you from downstairs. You need to calm down.”

It was a warning. Sans knew just as well as anyone else that everyone in the restaurant could hear
any guests that Grillby brought upstairs. The anti-human group might think Sans was condoning
violence towards the officer if they heard him now.

Sans didn’t care. He should’ve let them threaten her. She deserved it for threatening him.

“grillbz, if you had heard her –. she wasn’t even tryin’ to –. if you had been there –.” Sans huffed.
He couldn’t stop sputtering. “this can’t just be solved with chamomile tea, grillby! i’m allowed to
get angry once in a while, y’know!”

Grillby sighed. “Lift your shirt.”

Sans stammered for a few seconds. “no! i’m not in the mood!” Did Grillby really expect to get
some angry sex out of this or something? What the hell was wrong with him?

“Trust me.” Grillby’s glasses lowered slightly on his face as he peered down at Sans. “Please.”

Sans tore his jacket and t-shirt off of his frame and threw the clothes across the room in a rage.
“there? you happy now?” He crossed his arms across his chest and refused to look at him.

Grillby leaned over Sans and planted a warm kiss on his forehead. “Yes. Thank you.” Sans felt the
flame monster’s heat as he reached an arm into his chest. A moment too late, Sans realized what
Grillby was about to do. Before he could open his mouth in protest, he felt gentle flames trickle
over his soul. Grillby lightly grasped the small heart-shaped organ and pulled it out of Sans’s chest
with care.
Sans inhaled sharply and felt light-headed. Breathlessly, he murmured, “come on, grillbz, that’s not fail-!”

His last syllable ended in a low moan as Grillby tenderly rubbed Sans’s soul along the edges. His body jerked at the gentle contact and Sans couldn’t help but squirm into the sheets.

The fiery monster then channeled soft, soothing waves of magic into Sans’s soul. Tiny tinges of pleasure tickled his every bone. Sans tried to hold onto his anger just to spite Grillby, but his boyfriend’s magic was too powerful. With each wave of magic, Sans felt himself melt further into the bed. The magic slowly drained the anger out of Sans’s soul, and it wasn’t long until the tension in his bones was gone entirely. Sans could only lay there, his eyes half-closed and a small dribble of drool dripping from the corner of his mouth.

Grillby halted his outpouring of magic and gently held the soul in his hands. “Now that you’ve calmed down a bit, how about you tell me what the human told you when she stood up? That way I can be properly angry like you,” he added sarcastically.

“What?” Sans wearily said in between deep breaths. “you get to be angry whenever you want.” Grillby smirked at that.

It was true. Grillby didn’t often let his anger show, but when he did, every monster within a hundred feet was lucky not to be burned to a crisp. There had been two times in Sans’s life when he had seen Grillby truly enraged and both had involved his ex-wife. Sans had only been able to temper his boyfriend’s anger one time, and that had been a very long night. Sans was only glad the scorch marks had healed.

Sans opened his mouth to relay what the officer had said, but was caught off guard when the tea kettle started to whistle. He turned to look towards the kitchen when his vision completely clouded. His entire body was suddenly seized with pleasure. His ribs, his vertebrae, his pelvis – every bone in his body – felt like it was being softly squeezed in the most satisfying way possible. The pleasure was so unexpected that Sans had no time to prepare himself mentally for the sensations. He arched his spine into the air, squirmed uncontrollably against the sheets, and let out a violent but sensual scream.

As his release ended, Sans lowered into the bed slowly, dazed and drooling. With half-lidded eyes, he looked up at Grillby questioningly. The flame monster looked down at Sans, clearly flustered.

“Sans, I didn’t mean to d–.” He held up Sans’s soul, tenderly clutching the sensitive organ. “The kettle surprised me and I squeezed.” He gently set the soul on Sans’s chest and hurriedly made his way to the kitchen.

It was obvious that Grillby was embarrassed. Sans knew that he usually wasn’t one to touch another monster’s soul like that. It was just too intimate. He had been trying to do Sans a favor.

Sans yawned sleepily. If he had been tired before, it was nothing compared to now. Just the thought of trying to move was tiring. He couldn’t even be bothered to place his own soul back into his chest even as it lazily dripped fluid down his curves. Sans was content with closing his eyes and listening to Grillby make tea as he lay motionless in his bed. The sounds of clattering mugs and pouring water soothed him.

Sans awoke with a start as he felt Grillby maneuver his skull into his lap. Sans cracked open his eyes to peer up at the flame monster, who was slowly rubbing Sans’s forehead. The touch sent waves of warmth through Sans’s body. Sans could smell the scent of chamomile tea wafting from nearby and it took every ounce of effort not to fall immediately back asleep.
Sans sucked in some of the spittle that had dribbled from his mouth. “don’t you need to get back to the bar?”

Grillby shook his head. “They can wait. They know I am busy with you.”

“heh. well, clearly now they do.” Sans tried to lift his arms to cradle Grillby’s face, but he was just so tired; he couldn’t raise his arms more than an inch off the bed. Grillby noticed his attempt and clasped Sans’s hands in his own. Sans twitched his fingers and closed his eyes. It would be so pleasant to fall asleep like this.

“Sans, tell me what is wrong.”

Sans sighed and detailed the officer’s threat.

When he finished his explanation, Grillby said, “That doesn’t seem that bad.” Sans’s eyes flew open and he felt his soul give a twitch of anger across his chest. Upon seeing his reaction, Grillby quickly explained, “Do not misunderstand. You are justified in being angry. What I meant is that I have not seen you this angry in a long time. It is… unlike you.” He hesitated. “Is everything okay?”

It was the second time in two weeks that someone had asked him that. He must be slipping. He had been trying to stay positive. He had been trying to convey in every action that he was fine. Nothing was wrong. Nothing at all.

But clearly no one was buying it.

“just… can we just sit here for a bit? i know you’re used to me confessing everything over a drink, but i’m bone dry right now. heh.” He looked up at Grillby’s face, and Sans could tell that he wasn’t impressed. “please?” begged Sans. “i just need a small break.”

Grillby leaned down and kissed Sans’s forehead. “Of course, Sans.”

Sans knew he could count on Grillby to understand this. Of all his friends and family, Grillby was always the one who knew how to give Sans distance when he asked for it. Maybe it was because he knew what it was like to want to keep some things to himself. Grillbz was always the quiet one, and Sans knew that he didn’t like to share his own thoughts unless he absolutely had to.

Sans sighed and closed his eyes, listening to Grillby as his flames crackled in the air. It was always so peaceful basking in Grillby’s warm glow. Back in the Underground, before he had felt the sunlight for the first time, Sans would often visit Grillby just to savor his warmth. How many times had he fallen asleep at the bar with the fiery monster hovering nearby? It had been comforting then and it was just as pleasant now.

He felt himself melt into Grillby’s lap. Sans’s last thought before he drifted to sleep was that he could always rely on him to protect him like this.
Monsters dressed in lab coats filed past Papyrus as he paced back and forth in front of the laboratory. He should be home now, making dinner. But instead he was stuck here! He had been waiting for the last half hour for Red to come down so they could teleport home. He had tried calling him several times, but there had been no answer and Papyrus was starting to worry. Papyrus couldn’t help but wonder if he was upset with him in some way. Red didn’t usually ignore him like this!

Papyrus pulled out his cell phone and texted Alphys.

* HELLO, ALPHYS! DO YOU KNOW IF RED IS COMING DOWNSTAIRS SOON?

It didn’t take long for his friend to reply.

* I haven’t seen him since this morning?? I’m at home right now, but I could head over and look for him? ^^;
* NO, NO! I WILL ASK SANS. HE WILL BE MUCH FASTER. THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND OFFER!
* Ok! Let me know if you change your mind ^u^ 

Papyrus sighed. Had Red gone home for the day? How could he have forgotten about teleporting him home? Papyrus hoped that Red wasn’t at home sleeping away the day. He knew it was difficult for Red to adjust, but Papyrus still wanted him to try his hardest!

Papyrus called his brother and jumped when Sans answered with a loud slurping noise. “SANS? ARE YOU EATING?”

Sans grumbled into the phone and answered sleepily, “nah, bro, drooling.”

“DROOLING? BROTHER, ARE YOU SLEEPING TOO? IT IS ONLY SIX!”

Papyrus heard Sans shuffle around for a moment and yawn loudly into the phone. “yeah, sorry, i’ll explain later.” He paused for a moment. “what do you mean ‘too’? is someone else asleep?”

“WELL, I DON’T KNOW WHAT HE IS DOING. RED WAS SUPPOSED TO TAKE ME
HOME TONIGHT, BUT HE DIDN’T COME DOWN AND HE WON’T ANSWER HIS PHONE.”

Sans huffed into the phone. “i take it you still need a ride home then?”

“YES, BROTHER! I CAN WALK HOME IF I MUST, BUT IF IT ISN’T TOO INCONVENIENT –”

“no, no, bro. i’ll be there in a few. just hang out while i get dressed.” The call ended.

It was quite a bit early for Sans to be naked and asleep! Papyrus had to wonder how Toriel and Sans had gotten time away from Frisk for that long. He also had to wonder why they weren’t eating dinner right now! Sans at least usually woke up in time to eat a homemade meal.

Papyrus didn’t have to wait long for Sans to appear in front of him. But Papyrus couldn’t help but notice that his brother’s clothes were disheveled and he looked worn out. Papyrus didn’t say anything though; if Sans needed to talk, he would, and Papyrus would be there for him when he did.

Sans and Papyrus whipped through space and landed in the living room. The house was dark and there were no signs of movement from the kitchen. Papyrus cast his eyes to the second floor, hoping to see Red. But there was no one there and the house was eerily silent. Papyrus couldn’t shake the feeling that there was something wrong about this.

“you think he’s here?” Sans asked quietly from Papyrus’s side, looking up at his old bedroom.

Papyrus sighed and stepped forward. “ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT.” He made his way to Red’s bedroom and gently knocked on the door. There was no reply, and Papyrus did not want to pry, but he had to make sure Red wasn’t just ignoring him. He pushed opened the door, his mouth open to call out to Red when he saw the smaller skeleton lying on the floor, shivering violently against the ground.

“RED, ARE YOU OKAY?!” Papyrus rushed forward and crawled to the floor next to Red. The gold-toothed skeleton’s pupils had flickered out entirely. Papyrus waved a hand in front of his face, trying to stir him from his spell, but Red didn’t respond.

He heard Sans materialize behind him and he quickly ran over to where Papyrus was huddled.

“What happened?” Papyrus looked towards Sans and saw his eyes flicker for a moment as he looked the trembling skeleton up and down.

“I DON’T KNOW!” Papyrus tenderly placed a hand on Red’s shoulder and shook him gently. “RED? CAN YOU HEAR ME, RED?” Red didn’t react. He only continued to quake, sending loud rattling noises through the air. “S-SANS? IT’S ME, PAPYRUS. WAKE UP, SANS!”

From beside him, Sans muttered, “red, come on. whatever you’re seeing right now, it’s not real. you’re home right now.” Sans reached out an arm and nudged Red’s quaking hand. “it’s been three years, five months, and seven days since the last reset. you’re safe.” There was still no response. The gold-toothed skeleton’s eyes were completely black.

Papyrus didn’t know what to do. He looked towards his brother who also looked at a loss. Papyrus could feel the panic starting to grip his soul, but he quickly pushed the feeling aside. He needed to wake Red up before he let fear take over! He, the Great Papyrus, could never distract himself with his own distress like that when someone was so clearly in need!
Papyrus scooped Red into his arms, bracing the smaller skeleton’s neck so as to not allow his head to flail too much. Papyrus pressed his skull next to Red’s and quietly begged for him to wake up.

“Red, please wake up! We are here for you!” He shifted Red closer to Papyrus’s chest.

“what’s that?” Sans whispered, nodding his head towards Red.

“What is what?”

“there’s something around his neck. look.”

Papyrus grasped at Red’s neck and felt something tough and sinewy wrapped around the vertebrae. It took a couple of minutes to disentangle the tendril, and when he did, Papyrus couldn’t tell what it was. He held it in front of himself, trying to get a better look. It was long, green, and covered in thorns. It was clearly part of some plant, but where had Red gotten this from?

He looked at Sans to ask what it was, but when he looked over at his brother, his eyelights had shrunk in horror. “flowey?” Sans asked in a terrified tone.

Papyrus’s soul dropped at the name. How could Red have met Flowey? Before he could ask, Red made a loud choking noise and heaved in his arms. Papyrus flicked his head towards Red’s skull and saw the smaller skeleton’s eyelights return.

“Red, are you okay?” Papyrus softly asked.

Red didn’t seem to hear the question. He was gasping for breath and flinging his head around, looking everywhere but at Papyrus or Sans.

“Red!” Papyrus tried to nudge the still-shivering skeleton so that he’d know he was there.

But instead of responding, Red focused on Papyrus’s hand, which still held the vine. Papyrus saw Red’s eyelights constrict to tiny pinpricks, and not a moment later, Red’s left eye glowed a bright red. Papyrus’s arm jerked wildly in the air as the vegetation was pushed away from them in a rush of magic.

Red mumbled incoherently and desperately tried to push away from Papyrus. The taller skeleton only gripped tighter, trying to still Red as he thrashed in his arms. Red twisted his body with great force and there was a sudden sharp pain in Papyrus’s right hand.

“OWIE!” Papyrus attempted to yank his hand backwards, but couldn’t. He saw Red’s mouth attached to his palm, sharpened teeth digging violently into his palm. Red was still trying to escape from Papyrus’s arms and was dragging his teeth back and forth along the bleeding bone. Papyrus couldn’t help but yelp in pain at the motion.

“red! stop!” Sans crouched down and held Red’s squirming skull in between his hands. “look, it’s us! it’s papyrus and sans! we’re here!”

Red froze and Papyrus could see awareness spark in his eyes. He opened his mouth and let Papyrus’s hand fall free. His quivering intensified as he looked between Sans and Papyrus, realization dawning on him.

“Red, what happened?” Red flashed his gaze to Papyrus. “You were on the floor shaking!”

Red took in a couple of deep breaths before intoning. “n-nothing. i’m fine.”
“like hell you are!”

“Sans, language!”

Red pushed against Papyrus again, but Papyrus only gripped the smaller skeleton closer.

“i’m f-fine. i-it was just a bad day, ya know?” Red said, attempting to sound casual. He pressed his right arm against Papyrus’s chest. “l-let me go, papyrus!”

“No! I will not!” He was not going to let Red go until he talked about this. He would not hear any of his excuses!

“red, how the hell did you run into flowey?” Sans’s voice spiked in anger.

Red stopped pushing at the mention of Flowey’s name and stared in terror at Sans. “i don’t….” He swallowed nervously and continued, “i don’t know what you’re t-talking about.”

Sans buried his face in his hands and let out a loud groan of irritation.

Papyrus leaned his chin on the top of Red’s skull and softly said, “Please, Red, don’t lie. I know Flowey can be quite… mean, as Sans has told me, but I promise that we will not let him harm you. So please, tell us everything!”

“t-there’s nothing to tell!” Red yelled out shakily. “i’m fine!”

“There was a vine wrapped around you!”

Red flinched and instinctively grabbed at his neck with a shaking hand. “it doesn’t matter!”

“It matters if you don’t tell us what’s happening! When something bothers us, we talk! We don’t hold it inside!”

A choked sob cut through the air, and at first, Papyrus thought Red had finally broken down. But after the two stared at each other for a few moments, they both turned towards Sans. His hands were completely smashed in his face, and he was shaking almost as violently as Red.

“Sans?” Papyrus’s voice cracked.

His brother uncovered his face. His face was drenched in tears, and Papyrus could tell by the way his eyes flickered that he was very close to disconnecting from reality.

Papyrus reached an arm out towards Sans, inviting him into a hug. His brother rushed forward and smashed into Papyrus’s side, sobbing loudly.

“i’m sorry. i’m so pathetic.” Sans cried into Papyrus’s ribs.

“No you are not!”

Papyrus felt Red fling into his chest and let out his own strangled cry. “me too! i’m worthless!”

Papyrus was having a hard time keeping himself together as the two smaller skeletons clung to him desperately. He squeezed them tight against his chest and rejected their self-deprecating comments, countering with his own praise.

“Neither of you are pathetic or worthless or insignificant or anything like that! You are the strongest and kindest monsters I know!” He felt his own tears forming. “Even at your weakest
moments you are brave and wonderful! You even have more courage than I, the Great Papyrus!” He nuzzled his cheekbones against both of their quivering skulls. “So please,” he said through choked tears, “tell me what is wrong!”

Red continued to sob loudly into Papyrus’s chest, but Sans stilled suddenly in Papyrus’s arm. His brother looked up, weeping.

“paps, i’ve been… having a lot of bad days lately.”

Papyrus nodded. “I know brother, but you have been very open with me!”

Sans shook his head. “not about everything. i’ve been having a hard time keeping it together. i’ve been zoning out a lot lately.” He sat back on his haunches and wrapped his arms around himself. “i’ve been really scaring myself, you know? i can’t stop thinking about stuff that doesn’t matter.

“i got so mad today, papyrus, i almost attacked a human.”

Papyrus’s breath hitched in his throat as he stared at Sans. Even Red stopped crying at that. The only noise in the room was the sound of Red’s bones shaking violently.

Sans explained how a human had threatened him and everyone he knew today. Papyrus couldn’t believe what he was hearing. A police officer, the human equivalent to the prestigious Royal Guard, was threatening Sans? It was outrageous! He didn’t care if the human was desperate for information – that type of behavior was unworthy of someone in such an esteemed position!

“i’m just so scared, bro.” Sans squeezed himself tighter and swallowed. “i’m so scared that i’m losing control again. i can feel myself slipping.” Sans took in a shuddering breath. “but that isn’t even the scariest thing. you know what i’m more scared of than anything, paps?”

Papyrus swallowed. “Is it Flowey?” The name had clearly set him off tonight just as badly as it had Red.

But Sans shook his head. “no, flowey i can handle. right now i’m most scared of losing red.” His voice broke. “just like you almost lost me.”

Now it was Papyrus’s turn to tremble and sob because not only was Papyrus afraid of the very same thing, but he couldn’t help but think back to that day when Sans had told him he was going to “disappear” for a while. If Sans hadn’t told Papyrus, he would have never known. Sans could have easily done it too. He could have walked off and Papyrus would have looked everywhere for him. Who knew if he would have ever found his dust? But it had been Sans’s last plea for help. His very last attempt before he ended it all.

And he wasn’t sure if Red would do the same.

Red resumed his sobbing and Papyrus hugged him with all of his strength. He needed to let him know that he cared! Anything to let him know that he was here for him in the very same way that he had been there for Sans!

Sans joined Papyrus and wrapped his arms around Red as he continued to quake and sob in their arms. Papyrus didn’t know how long they stayed like that – it could have been hours – but no one would let go.

All three of them were soaking wet from the tears they had shed when Red finally muttered groggily into Papyrus’s chest, “i’m sorry.”
“Please tell us what happened today. Please.” Papyrus’s voice was clogged with tears.

Red spoke as if every syllable pained him. “i went to the underground. i just wanted to talk to flowey about resets.” Red curled in on himself. “he tried to kill me. i had to fight back. i wanted to fight back. but i didn’t want to kill him. god, i didn’t want to kill him.”

Sans asked with no hint of emotion in his voice, “you killed flowey?” The question sent shivers down Papyrus’s spine.

“no! no, i got away! but i hate it.” Red let out a pained cry. “i hate fighting. i don’t want anyone to get hurt because of me. i can’t believe i fell for that stupid shit!”

Sans squeezed Red tighter. “red, listen to me. flowey is a liar. there’s nothing else that can be said for him. he tricked so many people over so many timelines. i don’t know what he’s like back where you’re from, but –”

“flowey’s nice in my universe! he’s the only nice one! he won’t hurt anyone and all he used to do was follow me around and tell me how wrong it was to kill! as if i didn’t already know!”

Red collapsed into a sobbing fit again. Sans looked stunned and Papyrus didn’t know what to say. Papyrus had never witnessed it firsthand, but Sans had told him all about how Flowey had manipulated and killed so many monsters across the countless resets. Papyrus shuddered. If Red had been expecting a kindhearted Flowey, and had met their version, then –

“sans,” Red said unsteadily, “he told me someone’s been saving and loading.”

Sans jolted against Red. “what?” Before Red could answer, Sans shook his head. “flowey’s a liar, red. he was just messing with you.”

“He said he told frisk!” Red squeezed his eyes shut and he looked like he was in physical pain. “i can’t do it again! i can’t live through more resets!”

Sans dragged his grip from Red and fell backwards onto the ground. He held a shaking hand to skull and mumbled nonsensically to himself. Papyrus tried to listen to what he was saying, but could only catch the occasional word.

“flowey… not true… lies… but don’t remember… just… wrong… no resets….”

Papyrus needed to take control. He couldn’t afford for Sans to lose himself right now and this was no time to panic. This was likely just another one of Flowey’s lies anyway!

“We will ask Frisk about this tomorrow! Red, Sans, he is probably lying! We cannot let ourselves be japed so easily!”

Sans nodded and looked relieved. He took a deep breath and said, “yeah. yeah, you’re right, bro. there haven’t been any resets. i think.” Sans raised a hand to his forehead and rubbed softly. “we’ll just… talk to frisk tomorrow to make sure, but yeah. we’re fine. we’re above ground. we’re safe. it’s been three years, five months, and seven days since the last reset. everyone’s okay. we’re okay.”

“You hear that, Red?”

Red bobbed his head up and down, but his face didn’t reflect his gesture. He looked terrified, and Papyrus had no other words to relieve him.
“we’re okay.” Sans repeated with less certainty. He sounded as if he was trying to reassure himself just as much as Red. “we’re all okay.”

“can we go to bed?” Red asked weakly. “i’m just so tired. please.”

Papyrus looked at Sans who nodded. “yeah, i’m tired too,” he admitted.

Sans stood up and reached his arm out to Papyrus to help him stand up. Papyrus accepted his brother’s help and shakily hoisted himself from the ground, still holding on to Red like a swaddled baby. Papyrus’s bones screamed in protest from the movement; he had been sitting on the floor in such an uncomfortable position for far too long. Ignoring the pain, he carefully deposited Red onto the bed. Papyrus didn’t hesitate in crawling into the bed next to him, fully clothed and drenched in all of their tears.

As soon as he felt Sans settle against his back, Papyrus reached to the foot of the bed and threw the covers over all three of them. He once again wrapped his arms around Red, who was continuing to tremble so hard that it shook the mattress. Papyrus gave him a tight squeeze, trying to communicate how much he cared for the smaller skeleton. Anything to stop him from getting lost in his head all night.

Papyrus lay there, trying not to think about anything. He usually had no problems falling asleep, but the possibility of a reset kept him awake. If someone was resetting, would he remember? He didn’t remember before, but maybe Sans telling him had made him capable. He wanted to remember – he didn’t want his brother to ever face something like that alone ever again!

And just how far back could everything reset? Could he and every other monster end up in the Underground with no memory of the surface? Would Frisk even be able to break the barrier again without their abilities? Would they be stuck down there forever?

He clutched Red closer to his chest. What would happen to Red?

Papyrus never liked it when others lied to him. He truly valued honesty! But right now the thing he wanted most in this world was to find out that Flowey had been lying.

He had to be lying. He just had to be.
Red woke with a start. Something had woken him up and he wasn’t quite sure what. His body tensed up, preparing for an attack. Too many years of having to protect himself at a moment’s notice were drilled into his head. Not to mention that he was still on edge from yesterday’s fight.

Red gave another small jolt as Papyrus let out a loud snore beside him. He realized that was what had woken him and relaxed the magic that had been building in his soul. Heh. This Papyrus snored just like his own brother.

He suddenly felt sick. Papyrus looked like his brother, snored like his brother, and hell, even had some of the same quirks as his brother, but he was most decidedly not his brother. And yet here Red was, lying in bed next to this skeleton who had his arms wrapped around him so intimately.

He lay there for a few minutes, trying not to think about where he was or what he was doing. He truly just wanted to sleep. He felt drained and he knew he hadn’t slept well. How could he after yesterday?

With a sigh, he carefully extracted himself from Papyrus’s arms and shifted off the bed, ignoring the pain that shot through his back as he did so. He looked behind him and saw Papyrus’s hand twitch in his sleep. Red couldn’t quite place the feeling that twisted at his soul at the sight, but it helped to alleviate the pain that he had been feeling moments before.

Sans must have woken up already because he wasn’t in bed. He knew that they had all tossed and turned for several hours last night, but Red hoped that Sans had fallen asleep for at least a little while.

Red turned from the bed and tried to stretch the kinks out of his bones, but halfway through the movement a harsh pain shot throughout his torso. He put his arms down and clutched at the ribs that pulsed in agony. He needed to assess how badly hurt he was before he went wandering off into the world. Even if this universe was safer than his own, Red didn’t feel comfortable exposing himself to so many other monsters without knowing his own limitations.
He readied himself and slowly pulled his hoodie and shirt off in one motion, exhaling sharply as the fabric brushed against the lower part of his ribcage. Bits of soil and vegetation that had stuck to his clothes fell to the ground and were immediately picked up by the nearby tornado.

He looked down and saw blue and purple bruises that snaked around his ribcage where Flowey’s vines had constricted him. One of the bottom-most ribs had a long crack in it and Red knew it was when the flower monster had tried to reach his soul mid-fight. Red shuddered and clutched tightly at the dirty clothes in his hands. He couldn’t think about that right now. He needed to move forward. He couldn’t dwell or he wouldn’t be able to stop thinking about it.

He dropped his clothes in the far corner of the room so that they wouldn’t be trapped in the self-sustaining tornado, walked over to the dresser, and grabbed a change of clothes for later. He walked out of the bedroom and closed the door quietly behind him so as to not wake Papyrus. He gingerly climbed down the stairs, trying not to make too many movements as he did so. At first he had no issues, but the closer he got to the bottom, the more the pain in his back spiked. By the time he reached the bottom three stairs, every step was agony. Something was seriously wrong. When he reached the living room, he couldn’t stop panting from the exertion, so he took a moment to lean against the wall and rest. It had been a long time since he had been injured this badly in a battle. He wasn’t exactly sure how he had slept through this.

He pushed himself off the wall and walked to the kitchen, swaying as he went. Sans was sitting at the table, nursing a large cup of coffee. It was obvious from the shadows under his eye sockets that he had gotten very little sleep, if he had slept at all. Sans’s eyelights widened as he looked Red up and down.

“oh my god, are you okay?” Sans asked. His voice was raspy from sleepiness, but his tone conveyed alertness.

Red tried to nod, but the movement sent dizzying spears of pain down his back. He wavered precariously and Sans hurriedly stood up and steered him to the couch. Red gingerly sat down, trying to make his breaths as shallow as possible so as not to aggravate his injuries further. Sans carefully inspected Red’s ribcage and inhaled sharply when he reached his back. Sans carefully touched a few ribs, and Red could tell that the damage was far more extensive on the other side.

As Sans inspected his back, Red felt Sans’s fingers graze a vertebrae in his spine and he jolted at a sudden and intense pain that gripped him. He felt faint and Sans caught him in the chest as he fell forward. Even though it caused him more pain across his front, he leaned into Sans’s hand. Anything to avoid falling backwards onto his spine. Holy shit.

“i was going to wait for papyrus to wake up before we left, but i think tori needs to see these injuries right away.”

Through shallow breaths, Red blearily asked, “toriel?”

Sans texted swiftly with his free hand and nodded. “she can heal. i think it’s better we go through her than have to answer any questions at a hospital.”

“okay,” Red relented. He was in no state of mind to argue about this and just wanted the pain to end. “let’s just go.”

As soon as his phone buzzed with a response, Sans lifted his arms under Red’s and teleported them. They landed on a bed in darkened room. They dropped a few inches due to the difference in height between the couch and bed and the fall sent a shockwave of pain through Red’s body. He clenched his eyes shut and let himself drop sideways into Sans’s lap.
Red heard Toriel gasp from somewhere above and behind him and the bed shifted as she climbed on the bed. He could hear the other two talking, but he couldn’t understand the words. Whatever Sans had done to his spine back at the house had rendered him incapable of comprehension. His vision blurred and he wondered vaguely if he was dying.

Red felt Sans place a hand on his shoulder and whisper something to the side of his skull, but he couldn’t quite make out the words. There was a moment of silence and then Red felt a surge of hot white pain dart down his spinal column. Whatever they had done to him caused him to involuntary fling and stretch his limbs to the limit. There was a loud shrieking noise in his skull and as he passed out he realized it was his own voice reverberating in his head.

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Red jolted awake and someone pressed his shoulder down so he wouldn’t sit up.

“hey, hey, it’s all good,” Sans said reassuringly. “keep still while we get you fixed up, okay?”

Red took quick, thin breaths as he lay in Sans’s lap. He stared straight ahead at the wall opposite of him, which was covered in an assortment of framed family portraits and poorly-drawn children’s art. A green reflection danced across the wall and Red wondered if there was a pool of water in the room.

He gave a gasp of relief as the pain was leeched from his back. After a few minutes of being mesmerized by the ghostly reflections, he realized that their source was Toriel’s healing magic. He hadn’t seen green magic since Gaster’s assistants had healed him in between experiments. And how many years ago had that been? Red tried to account for all the time he had lost to resets. He ended up confusing himself and by the end he wasn’t even sure what the original question was or why he was calculating the timelines.

Hands turned him onto his back and he found himself staring up at Sans. His lookalike swam in his vision, but Red could tell that he looked sick with concern.

“Does your back hurt?” Toriel said from his side. He glanced at her and saw that her fur was wet with perspiration and she looked like she might be ill.

Red shook his head he groaned from how dizzy the movement left him. Toriel went to work on his ribcage and he couldn’t help the moan of relief that escaped his mouth as she pressed her magic-covered finger over his bottom rib.

“look at this.” It took Red a few moments to stop his vision from shaking enough so that he could focus. There was a curved, pointed object in front of him. It looked like a part of a plant, but Red couldn’t figure it out. “it was in your spine.”

“what is it?” Red said woozily. Its diameter had to be half the size of one of his thoracic vertebrae. No wonder he had been in so much pain.

“a thorn. it went straight through one of your vertebrae.” Sans swallowed. “it almost poked your soul.”

Red stiffened and squeezed his eyes shut. He had slept with that thing in his back. If he hadn’t been lying on his side all night, would his soul have been impaled? He didn’t even want to think about it.

As Toriel continued to heal him, his vision steadily became less blurred and he felt himself gain more strength. Sans’s face came into focus and he realized that his lookalike had tears in his eyes.
Red felt himself warm and he looked away guiltily. This had been all his fault for running off without thinking like a fucking idiot.

Toriel ended her stream of magic and announced shakily, “I am done. Can you move, Red?” Red cautiously moved his arms and twisted his body in Sans’s lap. When he was only met with dull aches and pains, he slowly sat up. He was still a little woozy and there was a throbbing ache throughout his back. But the difference between now and before was like night and day.

When he told Toriel as much she nodded. She looked worn out and on the edge of being sick. “Good. I tried to heal where the thorn punctured you as best as I could, but you will have a small hole in that vertebrae.” She swallowed, and Red wasn’t convinced that she wasn’t about to vomit. “Sorry, I need to replenish my magic, but please let me know if any pain returns.” She stood up unsteadily and walked towards the door.

“tori, let me help you,” Sans said, lifting himself off the bed.

Toriel shook her head. “I am fine, Sans. I just need a bite to eat is all.” She smiled at him, though Sans didn’t look convinced. “You worry too much.”

She opened her bedroom door and revealed a distraught Frisk in a pair of polka dot pajamas sitting on the hallway floor. “Mom, is everything okay?” they asked quietly.

“Yes, my child.” She cast a side glance at Sans and smiled hesitantly. “Perhaps you could escort me to the kitchen to alleviate Sans’s concern?” Frisk nodded rapidly and held their hand out to Toriel.

Before they left, Sans called out to Frisk in a would-be casual voice, “hey kiddo, when you’re done, can you come back in here for a minute? need to ask you a few things.”

Frisk paled, but nodded.

As the two disappeared around the corner, Sans looked towards Red, his brow furrowed in worry. “are you really okay?”

Red nodded. “i’m more tired than anything.”

“go to sleep. you hardly slept last night.”

Red looked away. “and you got more sleep than me somehow? besides, i want to talk to frisk too.”

Sans sighed. “can you at least lay down? it would make me feel a hell of a lot better.” Red flicked his eyes to Sans and he could tell that he was about to cry again. Red decided it wasn’t worth it to fight him. He lay his head down on Toriel’s fur-covered pillow and he had to admit that the position was far more comfortable. So comfortable, in fact, that by the time Frisk came back, Red had nearly fallen asleep. He probably would have too if Sans hadn’t been shaking the bed by tapping his foot in agitation.

Lines of worry were carved into Frisk’s face as they entered the room. “Mom fell asleep on the couch. She said she needed some sleep, but to wake her if we needed her. Should I go get her?”

“No. close the door, kid,” Sans instructed. Frisk cringed at the request, but acquiesced.

Before either of the skeletons could say a word, Frisk turned to Red and exclaimed, “I’m so sorry! This is all my fault!”
Red blinked confusedly. “how is this your fault, kiddo?”

“This was Flowey, right?” Frisk asked, pointing at Red’s body up and down. When Red nodded, they continued, “I should have warned you!”

“how would you have known he’d go to flowey?” Sans asked darkly.

“i messaged them yesterday, asking them where i could find him. and you did warn me, frisk,” Red suddenly recalled. “you told me to be careful. heh, well, i should’ve been.”

Frisk shrunk away from Red and shook their head rapidly. “I should have been clearer. I should have –”

Sans cut them off angrily. “enough. that’s not even why we’re here. you’ve had contact with flowey since you came to the surface? how about you tell us about that?”

Red snapped his head towards Sans and a deep sense of unease filled him.

“I didn’t want to talk to him,” Frisk said nervously. “He would follow me around some days and told me to reset.” They stretched their nightshirt over their palms. “He wouldn’t go away until I told him that I couldn’t reset anymore!”

“but you talked to them?” Sans asked, enraged. “you told me you hadn’t had contact with him since the underground. why did you lie?” Before Frisk could answer, his eyelights shrunk to pinpoints and he asked, “and how about you tell us everything you’ve lied about? like, for instance, you loading.”

“I didn’t lie! Not about that! I really can’t do that anymore!”

There was a silence and Red could tell that Sans didn’t believe Frisk.

“frisk,” said Red, before the conversation escalated any further, “how did you lose your abilities in the first place?”

Frisk shuffled their feet. “I don’t know how. It was about a month after we got out of the Underground. I passed out and then I couldn’t do it anymore.”

“you just knew?” asked Red. “how does that stuff work anyway? you don’t have a time machine like us, right?”

Sans shot him a warning glare and Frisk’s eyes widened. Fuck. Guess the kid didn’t know about that little detail.

“Well, no,” they hurriedly said, trying to ignore Sans’s anger over the revelation. “It’s hard to explain.” They stared down at their feet. “When I could do it, there were these little… floaty star things. Those were save points. If I saved, then when I died or I wanted to go back in time, I would go back there. But I could only have one save at a time, so I had to choose carefully when to save.” Their voice got squeaky and high. “As for resets… they weren’t me. Only Chara could do them and they did it whenever they wanted.

“As for how I knew I couldn’t do it anymore. Well, the save points were gone. I couldn’t see them anymore. I haven’t tried to load, but I don’t think I can anyway.” They paused a moment before they continued shakily, “Plus, Chara is gone.”

“what do you mean by ‘chara is gone’? was it a voice in your head or something?” Red wondered
if maybe the kid was a little unstable. After all, clearly the fucking flower in this universe had some issues.

“I don’t… know how to explain Chara exactly. They were a bit like a voice I guess. I think it’s better to describe them as more of a feeling. Like… you can do anything in the world and no one can stop you.”

Red swallowed. It sounded like when he had been forcibly injected with determination all those years ago. He had experienced a sense of exhilaration that he just couldn’t describe. It had made him feel itchy and uncomfortable until Gaster had forced him to time travel.

“But there was also this other feeling.” Their eyes appeared to go blank for a minute. “And there were times where I just couldn’t control myself.”

They shook their head, drawing themself out of their thoughts. “So when they were gone, it was obvious. I was myself. I was free.” Their voice cracked on the last syllable.

“but where were you when this happened?”

“I was in Very New Home. Well, it wasn’t called that then. We were still trying to figure out where to move everyone and monsters were scouting out the area. I was invited along as the King’s Ambassador. I was in the middle of a street when I passed out and when I woke up Mom was really worried about me.” Frisk bit their lip anxiously. “I think she was worried I was really hurt or something. After that I couldn’t go to the city until it was declared officially inhabitable.”

“okay,” Sans said, pinching his brow, “if you really lost your abilities, then why did flowey say someone loaded about a year ago? is he lying?”

Frisk’s eyes were glassy and they looked like they were about to burst into tears at any moment. They shifted their feet nervously and looked intensely uncomfortable.

Oh no.

“frisk?” Red asked. “flowey said you could sense time jumps like us even though you can’t cause them anymore. did you –?” Red swallowed. “did you see anything?”

“I don’t know. It was so brief it might have been my imagination.” Red’s soul twisted. “One day I was at school and Mom was teaching us about math. I was zoning out, but five minutes later I swear she was saying the same thing again. At first I didn’t think anything of it, but then Flowey started following me around again and I only got them to leave after I threatened to get Mom.”

“why didn’t you say anything?” Sans’s voice was hollow and he was shaking.

“I wasn’t sure if it was real! If I saw anything like it again I would’ve come straight to you, I promise! But there was nothing!”

“frisk, flowey felt it,” Sans said, trembling. “why wouldn’t you say anything to me?”

Frisk began to cry silently. “You didn’t say anything to me, and I thought you of all people would confront me about it. Flowey could’ve been lying to me, so I wasn’t sure if I imagined it or not. Plus,” they said in a small voice, “I know you don’t trust me. I just didn’t see the point.”

Sans’s breath caught in his throat and looked downwards with a face of shame.

“sans, did you see anything?”
Sans gripped his knee. “I don’t know. I don’t remember anything like that. But you know how I am. Sometimes I lose track of time.”

If Sans had been in the middle of one of his episodes when there had been a time jump, there was no way he could verify it. But if Frisk and Flowey had both experienced it, then Red couldn’t see how there was any denying it. There was someone out there who had that power. Someone who had used that power. Someone they didn’t know.

“Kiddo,” Sans said unsteadily, “I’m so sorry.”

Frisk’s eyes widened but they didn’t say a word.

He looked up at the kid and said, “I’m so sorry you feel like you can’t trust me. And that I can’t trust you. I know we’ve had some rough spots, but, kid, I thought we had gotten past them. At least enough so that I thought we could talk about stuff like this.”

Frisk wiped their face of tears. “Some things can’t be forgotten. I think we both know that.”

There was something familiar about those words and he couldn’t quite place where he had heard them before. But in that moment Red realized how irreparable the relationship between Frisk and Sans was.

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Red sat on the couch, an oversized blanket draped over him. His body still ached from the abuse his body had been put through over the last day. He ignored the pain and flipped through the television channels, not bothering to stay on any one channel that didn’t immediately catch his eye. He just couldn’t choose what to watch first. He supposed that it didn’t really matter what he landed on. He could just watch the next show by the time the next reset happened. He’d have them all memorized before long. He remembered when he used to quote entire conversations to his brother during one reset. That had scared the shit out of Papyrus. It had taken a few resets to get it down perfectly, but the payoff had been spectacular. His brother had been convinced he was a psychic.

He couldn’t wait to do that again.

Oh. Maybe not.

Click. A Mettaton-themed game show was on. Click. Next, a documentary about a giraffe and a hippo in a strange relationship. Click. A news story about homemade bombs in the human capital. Click.

Sans materialized in front of him, his face stained with tear tracks. He had stayed behind to check on Toriel and bring her up to speed. Red wasn’t sure why he bothered. She would just forget everything. There were no consequences to anything again. It was all going to be reset. It was just a matter of when. Sans should know by now there was no point to explaining anything to anyone. Hadn’t he lived through enough resets?

Sans sat down on the couch next to Red.

Click. A football game. Click. Another game show, this time with an all-human cast. Click. Click. Click. Click.

Sans grabbed the remote from Red. The screen showed a vibrantly colored children’s cartoon show with skeletons battling each other with balloon animal swords. Heh. What a perfect show to start with.
“red.” He felt Sans shake his arm, but he ignored it. “red!” More shaking. “red, come on, talk to me!”


Sans sighed and leaned against Red. “please, don’t do that to me. i can hardly keep it together myself.” He sniffed loudly. “listen, we don’t know if there’s anyone out there that can reset. for all we know, they imagined it.”

“sans, don’t give me that bullshit!”

Sans leaned away from Red and chuckled. “you’re right. my doc’s got me trying out wishful thinking, but i don’t think it’s going to work here.” Sans took a deep breath and continued, “but we can’t give up this time. last time we were all alone. no one understood what we were going through. but red, think about it – we’re here together this time. if there’s time jumps, we can keep each other sane. so please, please, hold it together. please!”

Red considered his words for a few moments and then wrapped his blanket around Sans.

“i can’t promise i’ll keep it together,” Red explained, “but how about this? i promise i’ll snap you out of it if i see you’re not actually there.”

“heh. and i’ll do the same for you. that way we can make sure we don’t zone out through any more time jumps. can’t believe i was sleeping on the job again. papyrus won’t be happy when he hears about it.”

Red leaned his head on Sans’s shoulder and watched the show for several minutes. It was a really fucking stupid show. Did humans seriously think that skeletons have brains? He shook his head in disgust at the show, nuzzling against Sans’s arm. And why the fuck did all of the female skeletons have human hair on their skulls? And why did –?

Sans grabbed Red’s hand and gave it a firm squeeze. The gesture caught Red completely off-guard. Flustered, he leaned away from Sans and stared. Sans, looking sheepish, immediately dropped Red’s hand.

“sorry. thought you were….’’ Sans trailed off, a blue blush spreading rapidly across his face. He turned to face the television and Red saw tears clinging to the corners of his sockets.

Red took a deep breath and grabbed Sans’s hand. “sorry. i’m just not in the mood.”

Sans faced Red again, perplexed. “in the mood? for what?”

“You know? what does papyrus call it? ‘a fun game’?” Red chuckled, though there wasn’t anything particularly funny about it.

Sans raised their clasped hands in the air. “what is this to you? what are papyrus and i to you?”

Red was taken aback by the question. Where was this even coming from? “i don’t know. i think that i view it differently from you and papyrus,” Red admitted.

“And how do we view it?” Sans asked, his voice full of pain.

Red shrugged. “well, like i said. papyrus thinks it’s a fun game.” Red glanced to the side, refusing to meet Sans’s eyes. “it’s not a game to me.” He was horrified to admit this. Sex was obviously some sort of casual thing here. These two clearly engaged in intimate acts way more easily than
anyone from his universe, especially Sans. Red couldn’t even imagine having a relationship with three different monsters at once and Sans acted like it was no big deal.

Sans chuckled, and the laugh was so genuine that it startled Red. He looked at Sans and saw that he had biggest grin on his face. His soul felt like it was melting in humiliation.

“fuck you!” Red tried to grab his hand away, but Sans gripped him. “let me go and stop fucking laughing!”

“stop, stop. i’m not laughing at you. i’m laughing because i’m happy.” Sans grabbed Red’s other hand and intertwined their fingers together. “this isn’t a game to me either. and i know papyrus feels the same way. i don’t know what it is, but you feel it, right? the connection?”

At first Red didn’t know what Sans was talking about. Connection? But then he thought back to those first few days in this universe and he remembered that overwhelming feeling in his soul. That same twisting feeling he felt when he thought of his brother. He guessed “connection” was a good word for it. What other word was there for it?

“yeah,” Red said quietly and he felt his face redden. Why was he embarrassed? Was it because he had told Sans to fuck off? God, what the fuck was wrong wi–

His thought was interrupted as Sans suddenly pushed his teeth against his in a skeletal kiss. There was no rush to summon a tongue. Nor was there a mad scurry to undress one another. It was just their skulls pressed together. But in that moment, Red felt his entire body shiver as his soul twisted in his chest. He stared directly into each Sans’s eyes and felt it – that connection they had discussed just moments before – and Red couldn’t stop himself from leaning forward for more. Sans gently squeezed both of Red’s hands in his and Red tried to reassure the other by pressing his fingers back. Red was frozen in time. He didn’t want to break away. Breaking away meant shattering this illusion.

The moment ended when Papyrus burst open his door and came crashing onto the second floor landing. The pair of them jumped and hit each other’s foreheads with a loud clack. They both groaned at the impact and released their hands from one another to rub at their skulls.

As Papyrus hurtled down the stairs, he yelled, “WHY DIDN’T YOU TWO WAKE ME? IT’S GOT TO BE NOON BY NOW! I CAN’T BELIEVE YOU TWO LET ME SLEEP SO LATE! WE NEED TO GO VISIT FRISK RIGHT NOW!”

Papyrus paused as he approached and looked between the two of them. Red realized in embarrassment that they were both wrapped in the same blanket and were very close to each other. The taller skeleton twiddled his thumbs together and asked quietly, “Did I interrupt something?”

“uh, yeah, bro, you kinda did,” Sans replied shortly.

“Oh.” He began to yell as his own orange-colored blush graced his cheekbones. “WELL IN THAT CASE, I WILL RETURN TO MY ROOM SO YOU CAN CONTINUE BEING… ‘INTIMATE.’”

Through the cracks in his fingers, Red saw Papyrus turn towards the stairs, ready to bound away at full speed.

Sans grabbed his arm and said, “bro, stop, it’s okay. you can stay.”

“WOWIE! THANKS, SANS! BUT I MUST ASK, WHEN ARE WE VISITING FRISK? I
WOULD LIKE TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS IMMEDIATELY BEFORE WE GET SIDETRACKED.”

“well, we kinda already visited frisk.”

Papyrus looked between Red and Sans and he cracked a giant grin. “IF YOU TWO ARE DOING THIS, YOU MUST BE FEELING PRETTY GOOD! DOES THAT MEAN FLOWEY WAS LYING?” The excitement in his voice was unmistakable and it looked like he was ready to do a little jig in victory.

Red brought his knees to his chest and smashed his face harder into his hands.

“heh.” Sans’s voice broke and he cleared his throat before continuing. “not exactly.”

Sans explained and when he was done, Papyrus quietly said, “Oh.” There was thirty seconds where no one said anything and the only noise was the children’s show playing in the background. Red jumped when Papyrus suddenly resumed his yelling. “I WILL GO MAKE LUNCH FOR US IN THAT CASE. IT WILL BE DELICIOUS AND SOUL-SATISFYING, SO PREPARE YOUR TASTE BUDS! NYEH HEH HEH!”

Papyrus’s ran into the kitchen and Red could hear him getting out pots and pans from the cabinets.

“heh. can always count on him to try to lift our spirits.”

Red didn’t respond. Everything was going to shit. Who the fuck knew when the next reset was going to happen and who the hell knew what would happen to him when it did? For all he knew, he’d get stuck in between universes, alone forever.

And Red was still mortified that he had blundered that kiss so spectacularly. And he couldn’t believe he cared. Fucking hell, this was another version of himself. Why the fuck was he kissing himself? He should be looking for a way back to his brother. But hell, it’s not like it mattered much anyway. This universe was fucked too.

He wanted to scream. His trembling resumed. Fuck, fuck, fuck!

Sans placed a hand on his shoulder and the contact made Red shiver.

Sans whispered, “hey, come on, red. you still here with me?”

Red pulled himself away from his hands and saw the look of concern on Sans’s face. It was obvious Sans thought that he was having an episode. He took a deep breath and placed his hand on top of Sans’s and nodded.

“yeah, i’m still here with you.”
I wanted to see if anyone noticed the incredibly long title in this chapter

Chapter Notes

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulsex.tumblr.com. You can also find soul sex reblogs if that's your thing.

[FANART]
- OMG SO MANY PEOPLE ARE DOING STUFF FOR THIS FIC AND I AM A LITTLE OVEREXCITED FOR THIS. THANK YOU! *dies*
- First up is snassity who made an audio from the smut scene in chapter 4 here. I am dead. Absolutely dead.
- Once again, we have Kamitakai who is also making a fan comic of the smut scene from chapter 4. THANK YOU SO MUCH! You can view the finished pages here: Cover | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
- There's also YvShan who is continuing their comic on the scene from chapter 9 on their tumblr. AAAAAH! IT'S SO GOOD SO FAR! You can view the finished pages here: 1 & 2
- I'll post any updates to the subsequent chapters as they get added! :3

[NOTES ABOUT THE CHAPTER]
- This chapter... has a lot of stuff in it. Smut, sadness, anger, and plot. More plot than you know.
- [Edit 4/28: I also added some new tags.]

Additional tags for this chapter: Threesome, Voyeurism, Handjob, Crying while having sex (kind of? it's not sobbing, but eh), Sensitive bones, Sex as an emotional crutch (is that a thing??)
[I might need more tags for this chapter, so let me know if you notice something I should tag]

“Nyeh heh heh.”

Red could feel the mattress dip to his left as Papyrus giggled next to him. He heard the sound of bone softly clanking against bone.

Red took a deep breath, but didn’t open his eyes. He had been sleeping and he wasn’t sure he was ready to leave his slumber. He probably still had another hour left before the brothers would wake him up to get ready for the day. God, sleep sounded good right about now. He was so fucking tired.

He hadn’t gotten a full night of sleep in the last two weeks. Constant nightmares had plagued his sleep ever since they had confirmed the possibility of a reset. Red usually woke up to Papyrus or Sans cradling him as he trembled. He would lie there, trying to forget the images of the other two skeletons violently dying over and over again.

And despite their help with the nightmares, his sleep hadn’t been aided by Papyrus or Sans either. Red wasn’t sure what had gotten into them, but over the last two weeks, the two wouldn’t stop fucking. There was rarely a morning where he wasn’t awoken by the two engaging in some sort of
intimate act. Of course, they’d usually invite him to join once he woke up. They’d probably do it now if he opened his eyes. But Red really had to wonder why they’d gotten so horny lately. Was this their way of dealing with the resets? Back home, monsters killed each other when they got stressed. Maybe here they just fucked their problems away.

Red could feel the two beside him now, shifting in the bed. He could tell they were trying to be quiet, but he could still hear the occasional giggle or moan. Red sighed, opened his eyes, and turned to face the other two. Sans was on top of Papyrus, his mouth sucking along Papyrus’s neck. Papyrus had his hand over his mouth and was blushing furiously.

Papyrus turned his head towards Sans and took his hand away from his mouth to speak. “Oh! Red, good morning! Sorry if we woke you!” Sans gave a particularly hard suck and Papyrus let out a loud, “Nyeh heh!”

“You know, you guys could go into the other room,” Red said gruffly.

Sans removed his mouth and grinned over at Red. “What’s the point? You’re just going to feel left out if we do that.” Sans winked. “But you can go in the other room if we’re bothering you.” He returned to Papyrus’s neck and the taller skeleton let out a low whine.

Red grumbled. Sans was being an ass. Papyrus wouldn’t have minded leaving the room. Red knew it would be best if he just left. He was really tired and it would certainly wipe the cocky grin off Sans’s face if he just got up and left the two of them here.

But as he watched Sans drag his cyan tongue across Papyrus’s neck ever-so-slowly, Red realized that Sans may have had a point. He didn’t really want to leave.

Papyrus squirmed as the smaller skeleton trailed his fingers delicately across his ribcage, twisting and pulling along his sensitive bones. Every time Sans twisted his tongue along the slender chinks between the vertebrae, Papyrus would let out a shrill whine. Red couldn’t help but stare as Papyrus slowly came undone under Sans’s contact. The taller skeleton was soon bucking against Sans, clearly desperate for more.

Sans leaned back and straddled Papyrus. He turned to Red and there was that smug smile again. “You sure you don’t want to join us, Red?” He nodded towards Red’s lower half.

Red darted his gaze downwards and saw a faint red glow from beneath the blankets. He blushed and shot his hands down to try to cover himself, but there was no way to hide the light of his magic.

“Yeah, I’m good,” Red growled. He was being stubborn and he knew it, but honestly, he was just too tired to move his ass over there.

Sans smirked and then began to roll his hips, grinding his pelvic bone against Papyrus’s. Papyrus’s hands immediately shot to his brother’s back and he jolted his own pelvis upwards into Sans’s.

“SANS!” Papyrus called out, his voice cracking. Red held back a moan as he watched with half-lidded eyes. He knew that Papyrus wasn’t referring to him, but every time he heard him call out to his brother, it sent shivers through his soul. He snaked his hand around his conjured length as he watched the other two grind against each other. It wasn’t long until sparks of magic filled the air and the brothers’ own glowing genitalia formed. Sans brushed his opening against the side of Papyrus’s orange length and the two moaned loudly.

Sans ceased his movements and grasped Papyrus’s hips to stop the taller skeleton’s upwards


thrusts. Papyrus let out a pleading whine and urgently pushed at Sans’s hands, but Sans held fast. Maintaining his grip, Sans raised his own hips and hovered over Papyrus’s head for a few moments before slowly edging down. Papyrus squirmed his legs and twisted his hands into the sheets as Sans lowered himself at a snail’s pace. When Sans finally seated himself fully, he paused, eyes squeezed shut, but a wide smile spread across his face.

“Sans, please!” Papyrus pled, trying again to buck upwards. Red let loose a moan as he continued to palm himself under the covers. Sans eyes shot open and he smirked in Red’s direction.

“you’re so stubborn, red.”

Before Red could open his mouth to retort, Sans raised himself back up and quickly slid himself downwards with great force. Red couldn’t help but stare at where the two were connected and watch Papyrus’s shaft through Sans’s translucent magic. Every time Sans raised his hips, Red could see Papyrus’s length glistening with blue fluid before disappearing inside Sans again. Soon Sans was moaning just as loudly as Papyrus. Red imagined that he was the one buried deep inside the blue magic and gripped his member harder and pumped more forcefully.

He jolted when he felt something join his hand. He flashed his eyes away from the brothers’ connection to his glowing length and saw Papyrus’s slender hand wrapped around him. When Papyrus stroked upwards, Red moaned and released his own hand. He looked up at Papyrus who was staring at him with his mouth open and panting as Sans continued to bounce on top of him.

Papyrus brought his palm up to Red’s tip and held his fingers together stiffly before he twisted carefully. Red moaned and thrust upwards, forcing Papyrus’s fingers to graze past his head. He returned his gaze to where the other two were connected and allowed his imagination to roam free as Papyrus flicked his hand up and down in short, powerful strokes. It was obvious that Papyrus was trying to match Sans’s pace with his hand, but it wasn’t enough for Red.

“please, god, faster!” Red called out.

Sans moved his hands from Papyrus’s hips and leaned into the bed. He quickened his pace and Papyrus mimicked the tempo with his own hand. The taller skeleton, unfettered by Sans’s hands, began to press his pelvis upwards desperately. The speed was furious and the connection between them was a blur of orange and blue. Red ground upwards, trying to match Papyrus’s movements, but he couldn’t move fast enough.

Nevertheless, it wasn’t long until they reached their climaxes. Papyrus was first, screaming “SANS” out in desperation as he pressed himself upwards. Red could see the orange fluid spread throughout the translucent blue magic. The sight combined with Papyrus squeezing tightly at the base of Red’s length carried Red over the edge next. He moaned loudly as glowing fluid shot forcefully onto the bed. After a few more thrusts, Sans stilled and arched his back, his mouth open in a silent moan. He stayed in that position for a few moments, his bones shuddering slightly against Papyrus, before he leaned forward and collapsed onto his brother’s chest.

They lay there for a couple of minutes, panting loudly as they recovered. Sans moved first, stretching up to kiss Papyrus and then leaning over to bump skulls with Red.

“glad you joined us in the end,” Sans whispered teasingly before he pushed himself off the bed and stretched his arms into the air. “i’m going to clean up. cereal sound good for breakfast?”

Papyrus sat up and nodded, a bright smile on his face. Sans returned the grin and gathered up his clothes before he left the room. Papyrus’s gaze lingered on the door and his grin slowly faded.
Red reached his hand out to Papyrus’s arm and asked, “hey, is something wrong?”

Papyrus jumped and it appeared as if he only just realized that Red was there. “WHY WOULD ANYTHING BE WRONG?” Papyrus said, his mouth once again broadening into a smile. Before Red could reply, the taller skeleton flew out of bed. “COME ON, RED, WE MUST GET READY OR WE’LL BE LATE FOR WORK!”

Papyrus scooped up his own clothes and rushed out of the room, leaving Red to stare after him as he rounded the corner.

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Red sat at his computer, scrolling through a lengthy paper on time travel. He sighed. For the past two weeks work at the lab had been very slow. Now that he had exhausted all of Gaster’s files, there were no leads for the time machine. He had even teleported to the basement and fiddled with the machine to try to get it started. But it was pointless. It would take years to try out every combination. And what if he ended up in yet another universe? It was just too risky.

So he decided to abandon the machine for now. There had to be alternate methods of time travel out there. He had taken up reading scientific articles on time travel. There had to be something out there that could help him figure out how to get his brother. Maybe he could even build his own machine.

But the longer he looked at these articles the more exasperated he felt. With access to so much human scholarship, there was a lot to dig through. The problem was that all of these articles focused on purely theoretical models of time travel. He needed practical knowledge and the only ones with that were Sans, Frisk, Flowey, and himself.

Red closed the article. Another useless one. He smashed a hand into his face and groaned in frustration.

He heard the door to the outer room unlock with a loud click. Red turned around and saw Sans dragging two large cardboard boxes to the table at the center of the room. Red exited his office to help him, but before he reached him, Sans bent over and picked one of the boxes up and pressed it into Red’s chest.

“alphys finally got them all done,” Sans said cheerfully.

Red looked down into the box and saw tiny, cube-shaped boxes with long antenna. Sans had been eagerly waiting these past couple of weeks for Alphys to make these little fuckers. They were based on Gaster’s old designs. Apparently in this universe, Gaster had set up these detectors throughout the Underground. They were meant to perceive time anomalies, and they were specifically aimed to detect when anyone time traveled. Sans insisted that the devices worked; they had supposedly gone haywire when Flowey and Frisk had reset over and over again three years ago.

“She said that she attached cameras to each of these,” Sans said. “they’ll give us a feed that we can watch from here. she was also able to extend the range on these things by a lot, but we still gotta space ’em out far enough so they cover enough ground.”

“How far are we covering?”

“I guess… just the mt. ebott region.” Sans swallowed anxiously. His eyelights shrunk to pinpricks as he stared downwards. “i don’t know how far a reset reaches, but there’s not much we can do
outside monster territory.”

Red shifted the box in his hands nervously. “you really think those fuckers are following you?”

“yeah, i do. there’s a reason their country is in the middle of a war. apparently they’ve been doing this kind of stuff for years. y’know, following people, threatening them, that kind of stuff. at least that’s what the monsters back at the bar say.” Sans shrugged. “but i don’t know if that’s really true or not. the monsters there are pissed about a lot of things and they like to talk trash about the human government whenever they can.”

“and you don’t?” Sans shot a worried glance at Red. “these fucking humans walk all over you, and asgore’s letting them! i mean shit! you guys can’t even leave the mountain region without permission from them. it’s like monsters can’t even have our own government!”

Sans stared at Red for a few moments before he picked up his own box of detectors. “let’s spread out,” Sans said, ignoring Red’s tirade. “i know the suburban and rural areas pretty well, so you get the city, okay? make sure to space ’em out by no more than fifty meters and try to put ’em in inconspicuous places.”

“fine,” Red snapped. If Sans wanted to ignore the problem, that was fine with him. Sans could just deal with it on his own. He walked out of the room without saying anything and when he exited the building he immediately teleported outside Grillby’s. He didn’t want to be around Sans when he came out of the lab; he needed some space.

As he appeared in the downtown area, he scared a group of human tourists. Ignoring their shrieks, he immediately took a shortcut to the bar’s roof and set up a device, making sure to point the camera towards the street. He went from roof to roof and set up a device every block or so. The work was grueling. There were so many buildings here and he knew that if they ever detected anything it was unlikely that the cameras would pick up any footage of the anomaly as they appeared. There was just too much ground to cover and the streets were way too crowded.

Several hours later, Red ran out of devices. He had only covered the downtown areas and the western half of the city. They were going to have to ask Alphys to make more and who knew how long that would take?

He returned to the lab and threw the empty cardboard box to the side. He needed to make sure the camera feeds were working properly and it was already so late. He sighed and started to walk to his office when he caught a small movement out of the corner of his eye. He twisted his head and saw Sans sitting on the ground next to a filing cabinet on the opposite side of the room. He was hunched over, his back turned towards Red. There was no mistaking the intense trembling that was associated with one of Sans’s episodes.

Red strode over to where Sans sat, and as he approached, he saw piles of documents spilling out of folders onto the floor. Red’s soul twisted when he saw photos of untethered blasters and determination vials. He looked up at the filing cabinet. Oh god, it was the one with the files on Gaster’s experiments on Sans.

Red turned towards Sans and saw that his lookalike was covering his mouth. In his hand was a photo of a younger-looking version of himself strapped to a gurney. One of Gaster’s hands was wrapped around his soul and in the corner of the photo was a needle filled with liquid determination. Although Sans was staring down at the photo, his eyelights were completely gone. Red wondered how long he had been out.

He bent down next to Sans and shook his shoulder gently. “sans?” No response. “sans, come on,
wake up. I’m here.”

Sans’s hand spread open and the photo fell to the floor. Red caught him by the shoulders as he started to fall backwards. Red sat on the ground and scooped Sans into his lap, wrapping his arms around his lookalike. Sans came back to reality with a start. He took a deep, shuddering breath before he let out a quaking sob and pressed his face into Red’s shoulder.

“Sans, what were you doing over here?”

“I don’t – I can’t – it wasn’t – oh god.” Every other word was punctuated by a desperate gasp.

“Shh, it’s okay. It’s alright.” Red looked around the room. “Sans, how long have you been here?”

“Oh god, I don’t know. What time is it?” Sans inhaled sharply. “Oh god, oh god, what day is it?”

Red reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone and displayed the time and date. Sans stared at the phone, muttering incomprehensible words under his breath. When his phone went dark and Sans continued to speak unintelligibly, Red gave him a small shake.

Sans jolted and weakly said, “I’m so sorry, red. god, what the hell is wrong with me?”

Red squeezed him tight. “Nothing. Nothing at all.” He looked at Sans’s terrified expression in the fallen photo. “Nothing Gaster did was your fault.”

At the mention of Gaster’s name, Sans smashed himself against Red’s chest and sobbed. Red clanked his mouth to the top of his lookalike’s skull and held him there as he quivered in his arms.

“He did the same to me, y’know?” Red swallowed nervously. “I was stuck in those labs for years. Me and Paps both. I thought it would be better for us. It’s hard growing up on the streets, especially when every other monster out there has nothing to lose.” He squeezed Sans closer to his chest.

Sans looked up at him, tears down his face. “He threatened your brother to get to you too, huh?”

Red nodded. “Fucking bastard. Wherever he is, whenever he is, I hope he’s suffering for all the shit he put us through. The Blasters, the soul experiments, the fucking determination, all of it.”

Sans nodded and brought his hands up to Red’s arms. They sat in silence for a few minutes, Red only moving to make sure that Sans didn’t space out again.

As they sat there, Red thought back to his days as Gaster’s little experiment. He remembered how he had convinced Gaster to keep his brother as a control subject and out of the doctor’s hands. Please, I’ll do anything you want as long as Paps is safe. In hindsight, Gaster probably never had any intention of using Papyrus unless Red had kicked the bucket. His brother was the backup in case something went wrong. As the doctor always liked to say, Gaster had always planned for every eventuality.

When we get out of this hellhole, you’ll be the perfect little weapon against those humans, Sans. There’s no way they’ll win another war after we’re through. They won’t be able to stop you if they can’t catch you. And with my plans, they never will.

Heh. What did he know? The asshole was gone forever thanks to his own fuck up. Guess he hadn’t planned everything out as well as he had thought.

Sans shifted in his arms and brought a hand up to Red’s face. “Thank you,” he said quietly.
Red leaned down and planted a skeletal kiss to Sans’s mouth. When Sans pressed into the kiss, Red felt that familiar fluttering sensation in his chest. Every time Sans lavished some piece of affection of him, the feeling seemed to grow more and more intense. He really liked it. Red knew he shouldn’t – that feeling should be reserved for his brother only – but he just couldn’t help it.

Sans took his mouth away from Red’s and twisted his body to look at him straight on. He leaned forward and planted small skeletal kisses along Red’s cheekbone and then down to his neck. Red shivered at the contact and let out a low moan. But as he pushed into Sans, he felt how wet the other’s face was. He pulled back and cradled Sans’s skull, looking at the tear tracks on his cheekbones.

“What is it?” Sans asked.

“I don’t think we should do this.”

“Why?” Sans sounded hurt.

Red reached his thumb out to wipe away a tear. “Because you’re crying.”

Sans chuckled humorlessly. “That’s okay. I still want to.”

“But why?”

“Because I – well, sex helps. A lot.” A cyan blush spread on his cheekbones.

“Helps with what?”


Red stared at him. He supposed that this explained why he had been woken up every morning with sex for the past two weeks. Hell, it explained why Sans was so intimate with him in the first place. Red’s soul twisted uncomfortably as he thought back to the stair incident from weeks ago. What had that been about? Had Sans been trying to deal with his own issues? Or maybe he had been trying to help Red cope?

Had every intimate act between them been some sort of coping mechanism?

No. He thought back to his conversation with Sans from two weeks ago. It was more than just that.

“Please,” Sans begged again. Red knew that his lookalike wouldn’t press it if he refused. And Sans wasn’t moving; he was letting Red make the decision.

Red pushed forward and gently pressed a hastily summoned tongue against Sans’s teeth, asking for entrance. Red could feel Sans relax against him and he opened his mouth to allow Red inside. He sighed as Red’s appendage explored his mouth and he quickly conjured his own tongue. Their tongues tangled together, and Red felt Sans’s desperation as he pressed roughly against him.

Red felt Sans give a small but gentle tug at his waistband. He released it, snapping it against his pelvic bone, and Red knew that it was Sans’s way of asking for permission. Red’s hesitation from before must have made him nervous about taking the lead.

Red broke away from the kiss. His soul pulsed with lust when he saw Sans panting, his tongue lolling out over his teeth and covered in bits of red spittle. God, how could someone who looked so much like himself be so damn sexy? Still, he could see the tears shining under the laboratory lights. Red didn’t want them there. He just wanted Sans to be happy.
“sans, can we try something different?”

Sans cracked a real grin this time. “that’s what labs are for. experiments.”

Red laughed, but there was no humor in his voice. He usually appreciated a good pun, but right now he was feeling exceptionally nervous. “it’s not much of an experiment. it’s just something i wanted to try out after this morning.”

“heh. then by all means. i’ll let you know if i don’t like anything.”

Red already knew that.

He pushed Sans gently to the floor and hovered over him, swallowing nervously. Sans looked up at him expectantly, ready for whatever Red threw his way. Red took a deep breath and reached a shaking hand to Sans’s shorts and pulled them down to his knees. He brought his hand to Sans’s pelvic arch and flicked his face to look at Sans. His lookalike gave an encouraging smile and nodded. Red pressed into the bone roughly and Sans took in a sharp breath of air.

Encouraged by his reaction, Red dug in more vigorously and Sans pushed upwards into the touch. Red brought his head down to Sans’s chest and licked along his ribs as he continued his ministrations below. Sans was groaning softly and it wasn’t long until Red felt the sharp crackle of energy below his fingers. Red leaned upwards and removed his fingers as he saw Sans’s dripping conjured opening form.

Red took a deep breath and pulled his own shorts off, revealing his glowing red length. He sat himself between Sans’s legs and looked downwards at their genitalia. They were both ready, he just had to make himself do it.

“you okay, red?” Red looked up and saw Sans staring at him in concern.

“yeah,” Red swallowed. “i’ve never done this before.” He felt his face heat up at the confession.

Sans leaned up on his elbows and furrowed his brow. “you’ve never done what before?”

“topped,” Red admitted. He could feel his entire skull redden and his hands were shaking slightly. It wasn’t like Sans had a problem with this; he was able to be domineering whenever he wanted. God, why was this so fucking hard?

Sans reached his hand down to Red’s member and Red jumped slightly at the contact.

“You’ll be fine.” Sans guided Red’s head to his folds. Red’s breath hitched, but Sans didn’t go any further. Sans was smiling reassuringly and Red’s soul skipped at the sight.

Red pressed inside slowly and Sans let out a low, languid moan. Red buried himself to the hilt and arched his spine. God, Sans felt good wrapped around him. He looked down at Sans who was once again lying on his back. His arm was stretched across his mouth and the sight sent that feeling through Red’s soul.

Red pulled out halfway and gave an experimental thrust. Sans moaned quietly and Red groaned lustfully at the noise. He rolled his hips more confidently, gradually picking up the pace. He reached a hand down to Sans’s clit and thumbed it, invoking a soft cry from Sans.

“red.” he said breathlessly, “that’s good. nngh!” Red gave a powerful thrust on the last syllable and he felt Sans clench pleasurably around him at the sudden change in force.
“you’re not just saying that, right?” Red asked, every word punctuated by small gasps as he drove harder and harder into Sans.

“god! no, it’s – aaah!” Sans gasped as Red hit the back of his genitalia. “right there!”

Red thrust again and Sans jerked his hips upwards in response, but Red could tell he hadn’t gotten the right spot. He knew he could do better. This angle just wasn’t working. He remembered, ages ago, back before the resets, his brother had experienced a similar problem and had found a great position. His brother had left him screaming in absolute pleasure and that was all he wanted for Sans right now. Red swallowed nervously.

Red shifted his legs and got on his knees. He gripped Sans’s legs and aggressively pushed them upwards to hover over his lookalike’s head.

“h-hold them, please,” Red gasped out. Sans, heaving with heavy breaths, wrapped his arms and hands around his legs and nodded, signaling for Red to continue.

Red leaned upwards and plowed vertically into Sans, making sure he hit the spot Sans had indicated before. Sans cried out and Red saw him dig his fingers into his legs. Red continued to plunge downwards, his movements aided by the slickness of Sans’s conjured organ. He increased his speed with each thrust and soon Sans was sputtering incoherently in ecstasy. Sans’s legs threatened to jostle out of his grip with each crash and his arms trembled as he struggled to maintain the awkward position.

“red, it’s –! i’m –!” Red gave an exceptionally rough thrust and Sans let out a loud, harsh scream. Sans’s genitalia tightened, milking Red’s length as he too climaxed. Red straightened his back and let out a groan of pleasure as he felt warm fluid pool inside the blue organ.

Sans slowly released his legs and allowed them to fall on either side of Red. His pelvis clanked when it hit the ground and a pool of glowing red liquid spilled out of his opening onto the floor. The sounds of their heavy panting filled the air.

Red swallowed nervously. Frozen inside Sans, he asked anxiously, “did i do okay?”

Sans placed a shaking hand to his face and nodded quickly. “that was real good, red.” Red’s soul twisted pleasurably at the compliment.

Before either of them could say anything else, there was a loud banging noise from the other side of the table.

“I-is everything alright?! I heard a scream and I ran into the hall and then I realized you were probably hurt so I went back to get the kit and – oh my god.” Alphys, clutching a medical kit in her claws, stopped in her tracks as soon as she rounded the table. Red felt his entire face warm in mortification as he realized just how exposed he was.

Alphys’s mouth opened and closed a few times before she squeaked out a loud “Sorry!” and ran out the door, dropping the medical kit behind her as she left.

Red stared at the door long after it had clicked shut. He knew his skull, hell, his entire body, was probably red in embarrassment. Sans groaned loudly and Red turned his head back around to face him. He had a hand plastered to his face, but Red could see the glow of his blue blush from between his fingers.

Red looked at where they were connected and saw that both of their genitalia had disappeared in
their humiliation. He sighed and started to push himself off the ground when Sans grabbed him by the arm.

“thanks,” Sans whispered. Red stared at him and saw that there were fresh tears on his face. Red knew that it had been pleasurable for Sans – there was no denying that – but he couldn’t shake his feeling of disappointment knowing that he hadn’t been able to stop his tears completely.

Red nodded, turning away from Sans. Sans allowed his hand to drop without comment as Red stood up. He faced away from Sans, wringing his hands together as he tried to push down the feelings of embarrassment and disappointment in his chest. He had to distract himself before he started crying. He didn’t want Sans to know how upset he was right now.

Red glanced down at the scattered photos on the ground. “sans?” He looked at his lookalike. Sans was pulling his shorts over his waist as he walked over to the table in the center of the room. “i’m sorry to ask again, but why were you looking at these?”

Sans leaned against the table. “i shouldn’t have. i knew i should have waited for you, but i was impatient.” He crossed his arms against his chest and sighed. “i had an epiphany while i was out there.”

He indicated for Red to join him. On the desk was a thick pile of documents depicting a series of charts and graphs.

“alphys did a lot of work on determination before we got to the surface.”

“yeah, i know,” Red said shortly. He really didn’t want to be reminded of the whole Flowey fiasco right now.

Sans eyed Red warily but continued, “well, she scanned a lot of souls to measure determination levels even after we broke the surface. she specifically did a lot of work on the amalgamates since she wanted to give them checkups. but she also took a lot of soul readings on other monsters and, well, frisk.”

“the kid? what for?”

“i don’t know, honestly. alphys did a lot of medical work for monsters before we established an actual hospital above ground. i think she did the same for frisk because all the monsters that came through during that time also got their soul checked out.” Sans shuffled some papers on the desk. “but look at these readings. immediately after getting out of the underground, frisk had incredibly high levels of determination. a year later, much less, but still a substantial amount. they’ve got far more than any other soul we’ve come across anyway.”

“okay, but what does this have to do with these?” Red pointed to the photos on the floor.

“i’m getting there. the amalgamates were also injected with lots of determination. so much so that they almost melted completely. well, you know what one of them told me one day? they told me they had lived through the resets too. they repeated the same weeks over and over again while frisk wandered the underground.”

Red’s soul dropped in his chest. “there are others out there that can detect resets?”

“well, there were. not that i knew at the time.” Sans grimaced. “they’re all dead now. monsters aren’t meant to have that level of determination. i think they lasted a few months after the resets before their bodies gave out completely.” Sans sighed. “but that’s not the point. determination injections obviously gave us the ability to detect the resets, but what if, with enough determination,
“we could time travel?”

“I mean it’s not that far out there, Gaster obviously stuck us with the shit not too long before we got thrown into the machine. But why were you looking at those photos?”

“Well, I was looking to see whether or not my determination levels have lowered or not. I was trying to find the measurements after Gaster first injected me so I could compare the two.” Sans nodded his head towards the files on the ground. “Is there any way you could look? I would myself, but –”

“Don’t worry about it.” Red bent down and quickly searched through a nearby folder. “I think this is it.”

Sans took the readouts and smiled grimly. “Yeah, this confirms it. My determination levels have lowered a lot since he injected me.” He turned to the next page. “And look! He even measured the levels after I used that machine.” Sans took up a pen and scribbled something on the paper. “So my initial levels were around 4.5 milliliters of dt, then they dropped to 3.12 milliliters, and then today I have 2.65 milliliters.”

“What’s the normal level?”

“Well, I think it varies from soul to soul, but the average monster has about 0.5 milliliters of determination. Humans, on the other hand, have an average of 2 milliliters, though that varies widely from person to person. The amalgamates were injected with a solid 5 milliliters. Frisk, by the way, currently has about 7 milliliters of dt.”

Red’s eyelights widened. “Seven? And you said they had more before that?”

Sans nodded. “Before they lost their ability, they had about 10.”

Red whistled. “How the hell were they not melting? Fuck, how the hell are they not melting now?”

“Humans react to determination a lot differently. Though I think even monsters have different limits. Think about it: Gaster injected me with 4.5 milliliters and while it felt weird, I didn’t melt and I was able to walk around no problem. But Gaster used the same amount and he was a goopy mess when he used the machine.” Sans shuddered. “His right eye socket had this huge scar and it just kept getting bigger and bigger.”

“Yeah, it was the same for my Gaster. Though I don’t know how much DT he injected me with. Guess there’s no real way of knowing.”

“But you see what I mean, right? This is it! After Gaster left, my determination levels should have remained constant. But they kept dropping. It’s gotta be because of the resets. I mean, I wasn’t the one causing it to happen, but I was time traveling, right?”

“Yeah, but doesn’t that mean the other monsters in the underground would have had lower levels too?”

Sans paused. “Time travel is all about perception, right? Maybe… determination levels aren’t lowered if we don’t realize it’s happening?” He didn’t sound very convinced of what he was saying.

“I don’t know, Sans, maybe. I’m sure there’s some theorist out there that agrees with you. Or at least they would if they knew what the hell determination was.”

But even though there were holes in the theory, Red’s soul was jumping in excitement. He
wondered if this really was the key. If they could somehow manipulate the determination to make it so that they could travel through time, then maybe they could also go across universes. He had always suspected that determination was connected to his perception of the resets. After all, his brother had never been injected and he had never been affected. Or at least he hadn’t experienced anything other the occasional sense of déjà vu.

His brother. Red placed a hand to his sternum and pressed gently to stop the pain in his soul.

He was kidding himself. How the hell were they going to find a way to manipulate determination like that? He supposed that they could reverse-engineer the time machine, but that wouldn’t fix the problem of not knowing how to start the damn thing up. Not to mention, there was a chance they wouldn’t be able to put it back together again. They’d have to start from scratch and that would take just as long as manually trying every sequence.

“none of this matters though,” Red said dejectedly.

“what do you mean?”

“even if determination is the key, we don’t have the proper sequence for the time machine.”

Sans stared at him for a few seconds. “what are you even talking about?”

“how the hell am i going to get my bro back? even if i’ve got enough determination to use the machine, i can’t just test the sequences over and over again. it took years to test through them all and i still had so many combinations left!”

“really?” Sans snapped. “i wasn’t even talking about the time machine. i’m trying to find a way to track down the person with reset abilities, not get you sent back to a place where every monster is out to kill you and you look forward to being beaten by your brother.”

Red flinched backwards as if Sans had taken a swipe at him. “what the fuck did you just say?” he said quietly.

“never mind. sorry.” Sans said shortly.

Red clenched his fists. Hadn’t Sans already apologized for this bullshit? His brother was none of his fucking business. And Sans still thought Papyrus had been beating him. He didn’t even know what the fuck to say. He took a deep breath. There was no point in pursuing this. Sans wouldn’t understand.

“this isn’t for you to decide,” Red said, struggling to keep the anger out of his voice. “if i want to get my brother, i will.”

Sans nodded, not looking at him. Red sighed and bent down to pick the photos off the ground. He gathered the loose files and threw them in the cabinet, not caring whether they were organized. He paused a moment, trying to will himself not to turn around and yell at Sans. He took a deep breath. He might as well go and look to see whether the cameras were working before he headed home.

He turned around and saw Sans standing at the table looking at him guiltily.

“i’m really sorry,” Sans said, wrapping his hands around his arms. He sounded sincere this time.

Red brought his hand to his face and sighed. “you know i can’t just abandon him, right? i need to get him out of that shithole.”
He really did. His fight with his brother had been so fucking stupid. He can’t believe he had just deserted Papyrus like that. What kind of older brother was he?

Red broke out into a sob. Sans rushed forward and hugged him.

“it’s okay, it’s okay. i understand.”

But Red wasn’t sure he did.
Papyrus knew one thing with complete certainty: He was a dead monster walking. And not because he was a fucking skeleton either!

No, he was dead because Captain Undyne was going to kill him today. There was no avoiding it.

He paced back and forth outside her house in Waterfall, his tattered red scarf whisking every which way. He needed to knock on her door. He had to get this over with. He thought he had accepted his death, but for some reason facing the captain right now sent a flutter of panic in his soul. Every fiber of his being protested against knocking. Once that door opened, he was going to be a pile of dust.

Papyrus stilled and turned towards the door. He just needed that peaceful resignation he had experienced years ago. Back when he had gotten into that stupid fucking spat with that wolf monster. Before Sans had shown up and….

Papyrus shook his head. No. He couldn't think of his brother right now. He needed to concentrate on the matter at hand.

He sighed, stepped forward, and readied his fist to knock. As he lowered his fist, the door suddenly crashed open, sending him flying backwards through the air. His back smashed into the ground, his stiff armor cutting into his bones. He leaned up on his elbows and looked up as Captain Undyne approached, a toothy sneer on her face.

“Who gave you permission to lay down in the dirt, you pathetic little shit?”

Papyrus quickly crawled to his feet. He straightened his posture and placed a fist over his sternum in the traditional Royal Guard salute.

“MY APOLOGIES, MA’AM!”

The captain circled him, peering him up and down with a look of repulsion on her face.

“No injuries, I see,” she spat. “Not that I thought you had gotten injured. Several monsters reported that you were in good health while you were wandering the Underground.”
Papyrus stared straight ahead and didn’t speak. Captain Undyne grabbed him by the scarf and yanked him forward. Papyrus flinched, but continued to stare straight ahead. The stench of rotting fish wafted into his nose, but he refused to let the gag of disgust escape his throat.

“You think this is a fucking joke, guardsman?! You think you can just skip work for two weeks without informing your superior officer?!”

“NO, MA’AM!”

“Then explain!” She threw him backwards, causing him to stumble over his feet. He quickly recovered and, once he regained his footing, straightened his stance one again. “Explain why numerous sentries informed me that you wandering across half the Underground without performing your guardsman duties. And it better be a good excuse or so help me….”

“I HAVE NO EXCUSE,” Papyrus interrupted, the emotion sapped from his voice.

Her uncovered eye widened and she bore her pointed teeth in a look of fury. “You think I am just going to let this go unpunished? You think for a fucking second that you can just desert your post?”

“NO, MA’AM. I FULLY ACCEPT ANY SENTENCE YOU OR THE ROYAL FAMILY IMPOSE UPON ME.”

Captain Undyne summoned a glowing spear. Papyrus clenched his fists reflexively but otherwise didn’t react. If that was how he died, then so be it.

But the fish monster only took the pointed end of the spear and picked the spaces in between her teeth. “And Sans? Your lazy piece of shit brother hasn’t shown up for sentry duty either, you know. Does he think that just because you’re in the Guard that he’s above the consequences?”

Papyrus’s soul twisted in agony and he inhaled sharply at the sudden pain. His bones began to rattle quietly. Focus. Do not let her see. If there was anything the captain couldn’t tolerate it was an undisciplined guardsman. He smashed his raised hand further into his sternum to stop his soul from trembling.

“My brother’s –” His voice cracked. He cleared his throat and continued, “MY BROTHER’S DERELICTION OF DUTY IS ALSO MY FAULT. I ASK THAT YOU INFLICT ANY PUNISHMENT ON ME.”

Captain Undyne didn’t speak for a few moments, choosing instead to pick her teeth with the spear. Papyrus felt the occasional droplet of spit fling onto his bones as he stared ahead unseeingly, trying to maintain control over his emotions. He hoped more than anything that the captain would accept his proposal. Just in case Sans wasn’t…. No. Focus.

“Is that so?” She removed the spear from her mouth and grasped the magical weapon with both of her hands. “You know, no one’s reported seeing him around the Underground. I wonder….”

Papyrus swallowed and pressed his fist even further into his chest. No doubt his sternum would be bruised by the end, but it didn’t matter. He had to do something to stop himself from letting her see.

She licked her teeth. “Fine. I’ll punish you. But if your brother isn’t back to his duties by tomorrow, I will order him to appear before the king and queen. You understand, right?”
Papyrus’s soul dropped. There was no way Sans was going to suddenly show up for his duties tomorrow. But he couldn’t tell her that. Telling her that was accepting it all. Accepting that his brother was truly gone.

FOCUS, DAMMIT.

“YES, MA’AM. I WILL INFORM HIM.”

She crossed her arms across her chest. “Oh you will, will you? And why do you think you’ll be capable of that after I’m through with you?”

Papyrus swallowed. So he was going to die after all. The pain in his soul subsided slightly at the thought.

Captain Undyne suddenly surged forward and brought the broad end of her spear flat across Papyrus’s left cheekbone. He flinched as the magic seared his face. He staggered to his right, but before he could recover, the captain whipped the weapon across the right side of his face. The blue magic dug into his years’ old cracking scar. He bit back a scream as the inside of his skull burned intensely from the contact.

But she didn’t relent. She smacked him on each cheek over and over, increasing the ferocity of her strikes with each blow. He saw bits of his cheekbone splinter into the air as she dug further and further into his bone. It wasn’t long until Papyrus’s legs buckled from beneath him and he was sent sprawling onto the ground.

The captain paused and looked down at Papyrus, her brow furrowed into a deep scowl. For a moment, Papyrus was convinced that she had ended her assault. But then she surged forward and ruthlessly stabbed the sharpened end of the spear into his right cheekbone. She twisted and dug ferociously into the raw bone, sending shockwaves of pain through his skull. He let out a shrill scream as the magic burned him down to his marrow.

This was too much.

Captain Undyne jumped backwards as a flurry of bones shot out of the ground. He sat up, quickly summoning a bony weapon in his hand, ready to fight the fish monster. She was going to attack him again and he couldn’t just sit there and take it. It was better to have an honorable death by battle than this slow torture.

But the captain didn’t rush forward. She balanced her spear in her hands, clearly ready to fight, but a wide grin slowly spread across her face.

“Good. I was wondering if you still had any fighting spirit. I can’t believe you’d just take that for so long.”

Papyrus clenched the bone in his hand, prepared to fight. If she was going to attack him, he’d be ready. He didn’t care that he was easily outmatched.

Captain Undyne dismissed her spear and put her hands on her hips.

“Get up now and put that weapon away!” she demanded. Papyrus scrambled to his feet and hesitantly threw the bone to the side. He focused on controlling his breathing in an effort to ignore the intense burning in his skull. He could push past this pain. Concentrate.

The captain spat out, “I have no use for a guardsman that won’t even fight back.” She lifted her chin, casting her eyes in dark shadow. “But you still have some strength left in you. Good. This
will be punishment enough for now.”

She reached into her back pocket and pulled out a pile of folded papers. She walked forward and smashed them into Papyrus’s quivering hands. “Now you have a lot of fucking work to make up for, and I can’t make excuses for you if you decide to skip your duties again. And believe me, the king and queen won’t go easy on you.”

Papyrus nodded and unfolded the papers. They were royal decrees ordering payment of taxes. He sighed in frustration. He fucking hated tax duty. The debtors usually didn’t have the money to pay in the first place, so the encounters typically ended in violence. And who knew what the royal family even used the money for? Certainly nothing to improve their lot in the Underground. The kingdom was a festering dung heap and the king and queen didn’t seem concerned about it in the slightest.

“No fucking complaints, Papyrus,” Captain Undyne said seriously. He flashed his head up to look at her and saw that her smile had faded completely. “If this were anyone else, you’d be beheaded for this bullshit. You know that, right?”

Special treatment. Again. All for killing the human years ago. He swallowed anxiously.

“Yes, ma’am,” he said quietly.

“Then get going. And you better have some gold collected by the end of the day.”

She turned away from him and walked into her house, slamming the door behind her with a loud bang. Papyrus relaxed his stance, but his soul twisted with tension. For some reason, he couldn’t shake the feeling of… disappointment in his soul.

He flipped through the decrees and saw that all of the insolvents were located in Hotland. Even fucking better. All he fucking wanted to do was to spend his day traversing shitty conveyor belts in the heat. He sighed and left the cavern.

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“HOTLANDS, PLEASE,” he said emotionlessly as he handed a gold piece to the hooded figure that headed the ferry. The riverperson accepted the fare and indicated for Papyrus to climb into the boat.

He carefully stretched his limbs over the water and kneeled on the tiny rowboat. He looked over at the edge of the vessel and flinched at the grim reflection staring back at him. Deep, blistering burns marred his cheekbones, giving his face a hollowed out appearance. His scar had lengthened from Captain Undyne’s attack and fresh blood dripped freely from the opening. His soul recoiled in horror at the sight of his injuries. The riverperson jostled the rowboat as they disembarked and the resulting ripples thankfully dissolved the grisly image.

Papyrus tried to ignore the pain. He knew that he needed to get the burns healed, but if he wanted to collect this money in a timely manner, then he’d have to wait until later. Not to mention that he wasn’t sure if the captain would tolerate him healing his injuries. She hadn’t expressly forbidden it, but the unspoken rule of the Guard was to accept all wounds as a lesson. If a guardsman was injured that was their fault. They had to take that experience and improve himself for next time.

He lifted a shaking hand to his scar and grazed it softly. He exhaled sharply as an intense pain shot to his eye. His vision blurred for a moment. Involuntary tears streamed down his face into his burns, causing a biting, stinging pain to burst through his skull. Every bone in his body tensed as
he tried to fight off the unbearable pain.

He took great heaving gasps. He needed to calm down. Crying only made the pain worse. And he couldn’t handle pain. He never had been able to. That had always been Sans’s strength.

Papyrus’s soul violently shuddered in his chest. He flung his hand to his mouth to muffle the choked sob that bubbled from his chest. Fresh tears cut into his wounds, but the harsh pain was nothing compared to the way his soul throbbed in anguish.

Sans was dead. There was no way around it.

When Papyrus had stormed out of the shed over two weeks ago, he had marched directly to his room and gone straight to bed. He had known that Sans wouldn’t have dared to enter his room that evening. Not after he had made it so clear that Sans’s attack had been unacceptable. So he had slept alone that night. And when he hadn’t seen his brother the next day for breakfast, he had simply figured that Sans had spent all night at that disgusting bar. It had been good to have some time to himself in the house.

And when Sans hadn’t shown up the next evening, he hadn’t really paid attention. He had known that his brother had just been sulking as usual. That was what he always did after he had inflicted a particularly nasty punishment on him.

But by the third day, Papyrus hadn’t been able to ignore his brother’s absence any longer. He had known he had fucked up. He had recognized that he had crossed some invisible line with Sans and he had to find him. So he had abandoned his Royal Guardsman duties and had gone looking for him. He had searched all of the usual spots – Sans’s sentry post, his hot dog stand, and, fuck, he had even gone into Grillby’s shitty bar. But no one had seen him. So he had extended his search further. He had checked the more remote areas of Snowdin. He had combed the more unruly areas of the Underground where only the toughest monsters trod. He had even fucking searched the depths of Hotlands, navigating numerous overcomplicated puzzles to do so. There had been no signs of his brother anywhere.

By the time a week had passed, Papyrus had known Sans was dead. Anyone that went missing for that long was dead. There were no doubts about it.

But Papyrus had searched everywhere for Sans’s dust. Everywhere. He had even gone into the dilapidated Ruins and had searched for days in the abandoned city. Papyrus sobbed into his hand at the memory of his helplessness. He had just wanted to give his brother a proper funeral. But it was as if Sans had disappeared off the face of the planet.

Or… had thrown himself over a waterfall.

Papyrus curled in on himself at the thought. He hadn’t wanted to accept it, but his brother… had been quite upset when he had stormed out that evening. And Papyrus had said some things that… he wish he hadn’t said.

And there were only two reasons why Papyrus wouldn’t be able to find his brother’s dust. Either another monster was harboring him as some sort of trophy or his brother had thrown himself off the Last Fall. Papyrus seriously doubted that another monster would hold onto his brother’s dust without boasting about it to the world, so that left only one option. Sans must have done it. He must have fallen down.

Papyrus had checked the Last Whisper every day just to make sure his brother hadn’t spoken his last thoughts to the echo flower. Every morning and evening that he had visited the flower, he had
been filled with an ugly mixture of relief and disappointment when his brother’s voice hadn’t echoed back at him. But he hadn’t checked the first three days. He hadn’t thought to. And there was no telling if his brother had thrown himself over the edge in those few short days. The Last Fall had become quite the popular final destination. The echo flower couldn’t hold all of their voices.

“Tra la la… Watch your step.”

Papyrus looked up and realized he had reached Hotlands. He hurriedly pressed his scarf into his face to wipe up his tears, ignoring the excruciating pain the contact sent through his skull. No one could know he had been crying. If they did, he would become an immediate target.

But there was no stopping the intense pain that pulsated through his soul.

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Papyrus readied a bone in his hand as he approached a green lizard monster in the secluded corner of Hotlands. He hoped that the weapon wouldn’t be used and that the monster would pay up without resorting to violence, but there was hardly a monster left in the Underground that didn’t have a propensity for fighting. He swallowed and prepared himself mentally for the inevitable assault.

He raised his voice and called out firmly, “BY ORDER OF KING ASGORE AND QUEEN TORIEL, YOU ARE HEREBY REQUIRED TO PAY TWO HUNDRED GOLD IN MISSED TAX PAYMENTS OR YOU WILL BE BROUGHT BEFORE THE ROYAL FAMILY FOR SENTENCING.”

The lizard monster immediately whipped around, adopted a battle stance, and hissed fiercely at him. Papyrus bent his knees and prepared for an oncoming attack, but the lizard didn’t advance. Instead, the green monster tilted their head, a curious grin stretched across their face. Papyrus could tell that they were gauging his strength.

“DON’T FUCKING DARE. PAY UP SO WE CAN FUCKING GO ABOUT OUR DAYS.”

Come on. Don’t fucking attack. Just pay the debt and move on.

There was a crackle of energy in the air and Papyrus felt something manifest above his head. He quickly ran forward to dodge and heard the summoned object crash loudly to the ground. He whipped his head around and saw that a giant egg, tinged with glowing green magic, had fallen where he had stood just moments before.

He heard claws against metal and flashed his head back towards the monster. They pushed off the ground with their feet and lunged at him. Papyrus turned his opponent’s soul blue in an effort to slow them down, but he was too late. The lizard monster jumped on top of him and the two tumbled together backwards, landing in the sticky mess of the conjured egg. The lizard swung their claws wildly against Papyrus, tearing into his arms and neck. Papyrus tried to ward them off with his weapon, hitting the monster on the head several times, but they wouldn’t back off. A sudden spike of pain shot through his skull as the lizard dug their talon into his raw and inflamed cheekbone.

He screamed piercingly and pushed with all his might against the other monster. The lizard flew backwards and landed in a heap a few feet away. Papyrus clambered to get up, but slipped on the slick innards of the summoned and fell flat on his face.
Papyrus felt the air sizzle with magic once again, but his feet couldn’t find their grip on the slippery floor. He sat up and flung a wave of bones in the general direction of the monster as another magic egg crashed down upon him. He let out a screech as the top of his skull flashed with a deep, thundering pain. The force of the attack caused the egg to crack open and the liquid innards poured over him. The scorching hot magic seeped into his wounds. He fell backwards into the puddle of green magic, wracked with spasms of blinding pain. He couldn’t think. He couldn’t move. All he could focus on was the hot flash of pain shooting through his skull.

He took in several deep breaths as he tried to gather his wits about him. He knew that if he didn’t get up right now that monster was going to dust him. He had to push through this pain. He had to get the fuck up. NOW.

He pressed past the pain and flung himself off the ground. He held out his weapon, ready to fend off the lizard’s next attack. But they weren’t advancing on him. They weren’t moving at all.

The lizard monster hovered in the air, held aloft by the cascade of bones Papyrus had sent haphazardly in their direction. The monster’s appendages twitched involuntarily and blood gushed freely from their wounds. Their watery eyes were widened with stark fear.

No. NO.

Papyrus dismissed the bones, but it was too late. As soon as his magic dissipated, the monster dissolved into a pile of dust.

His soul panged violently in his chest. That wasn’t –. He couldn’t –. HE HADN’T MEANT TO DO THAT, DAMMIT!

His chest was wracked with great heaving gasps as he tried to comprehend what he had done. It had been so long since he had last killed another monster. He had spent years perfecting his magic. He had dedicated everything into practicing his magic so that he could manipulate its form and power with ease. Control was vital. He had to have control. HAD TO. He had to do everything he could to avoid repeating his past mistakes.

Papyrus stared at the pile of dust before him. He couldn’t get the image of the lizard monster’s body out of his head. The way the bones had impaled him at odd angles. The pool of red hot blood on the ground. The monster’s expression. It reminded him too much of his first kill. It was too messy. It was too brutal. It was too much for him to handle.

He tried to calm his breaths and push away the pain in his soul. He needed to calm down. He had to maintain control over his emotions. The captain was expecting him to return tonight with money. No more dawdling around. Get up. GET THE FUCK UP.

But instead he flung himself backwards onto the floor, gasping uncontrollably. What was the point? What did he have to go back to? A dark and empty house. There was nothing left. No more stupid puns. No more back talking. No more “punishment.” No more Sans.

A sharp and heavy twist of pain engulfed his soul, dwarfing the pain of his external injuries. Sans was dead and it was his fault. SANS WAS DEAD. IT WAS HIS FAULT.

The realization washed over him like a wave.

His soul suddenly stilled in his chest. He had never experienced such a feeling before. Usually his soul buzzed with a constant energy, sending constant waves of emotion through his body. But now he felt different. He felt… nothing. Nothing but an intense feeling of exhaustion. Every bone in his
body pled for him to close his eyes and sleep.

And despite the fact that he was out in the open, had no one to protect him, and he was supposed to be doing his job right now, he closed his eyes.

The moment he did so, the pain from his injuries faded away completely. He could only feel his unnaturally lifeless soul hovering within his ribcage. He knew he should be concerned about this strange sensation, but he just couldn’t bring himself to care.

He was just.

So.

Tired.

He had never been this exhausted in his life. It cut deep into his bones. He wanted to press his hand to his chest just to see if he could still feel his soul, but he couldn’t bring himself to do it. His bones were too heavy.

He took in slow, even breaths and a strange serenity fell over him. Usually Hotland’s sweltering heat was unbearable, but right now it was perfect for a nice, long nap. He had never known that falling asleep could be so easy. Papyrus was usually bounding with energy, and when he lay down to sleep it took him hours to relax into slumber. But maybe this was how monsters usually fell asleep. They just closed their eyes and drifted off. No wonder Sans had slept so often. This felt good.

He had the vague realization that he couldn’t feel his bones anymore. It was as if he had become one with the floor. All he felt was the perfect warmness in his immobile soul. He hadn’t felt this good in a long time. He had no worries about the rest of the world. No obligations to take care of. Just sweet, blissful sleep.

He dreamily wondered if this was what it was like to fall down. The warmth inside him intensified. He liked that idea. He hoped it was. Maybe his brother had felt like this before he had died. That was a comforting thought. He couldn’t even fault Sans for dying if it felt like this. The world was just too harsh and this sensation was just too peaceful.

He sighed happily. Just a small nap. Captain Undyne couldn’t fault him for that. Maybe when he got up he’d go track down the rest of the debtors. Or maybe he’d just go live in the Ruins for a while.

Or maybe, just maybe, he’d wake up and see his brother again.
Papyrus absently stirred the pot of soup as it simmered before him. The smells of garlic and basil permeated the room. Behind him came the noises of his brother click-clacking his fingers on his cell phone, presumably busy texting either Toriel or Grillby.

Papyrus sighed, staring at the blank wall, lost in thought.

Even though it was Saturday, Papyrus was not bubbling with his usual excitement. They had nothing planned for this weekend, and for that he was disappointed. But Papyrus supposed that it didn’t matter much anyway. Red had gotten sick three days ago and there was no way Papyrus was going to leave him alone just to go have fun with his brother. Still, he wished that Sans had at least attempted to make plans with him.

Papyrus continued to swirl the soup, trying to push down his feelings of discomfort. He couldn’t help but feel that his brother had become more distant with him lately. Not physically distant, of course. Sans had made sure to shower Papyrus with affection every chance he got. From the tiny little kisses to his more extreme displays of love, Sans had never been physically closer to him. But Papyrus noticed that his brother had grown more and more quiet lately. Sans was no longer talking with Papyrus about his fears or his hopes or his desires. That sense of open honesty had disappeared over the last three weeks and Papyrus was getting increasingly anxious about it. He was starting to think that Sans was replacing their candid discussions with sex and he just wasn’t sure that it was healthy.

Papyrus swallowed. It was no coincidence that his brother’s libido had increased so dramatically around the same time that they had confirmed the possibility of a reset. He knew that Sans dealt with stress in a unique way. But Papyrus recognized that it was his fault. Back when Sans had
almost fallen down, Papyrus had tried to show him how much he cared for his brother. He had made the first move. And now Papyrus couldn’t help but wonder if maybe he should have tried something else. Maybe then Sans wouldn’t rely so heavily on sex as a form of stress relief.

But he couldn’t say anything now. He didn’t want his brother to think that he didn’t love him. Not now that tensions were so high with the possibility of a reset.

Papyrus placed a hand to his sternum and pressed firmly. He wanted this strain in his soul to uncoil. First the possibility of a reset. Then Sans becoming so distant. And now Red getting sick. Papyrus wasn’t sure how much more pressure he could take.

“uh, bro, is something burning?”

Papyrus snapped out of his thoughts. The croutons!

He hurriedly grabbed a mitt and opened the oven. Papyrus waved a kitchen towel to disperse the large billows of dark smoke that poured out. Once the dark clouds dissipated, Papyrus pulled out the smoldering remains of the bread and placed the tray on the stove. He stamped his foot on the ground in irritation. So stupid! How could he have forgotten the croutons?! He fought back the tears that were threatening to spill out of his sockets.

Papyrus heard Sans get up and walk over to him. “hey, bro, it’s okay. it’s no big deal.”

“IT MOST CERTAINLY IS A BIG DEAL! NOW WE HAVE NO BREAD FOR OUR SOUP!”

Sans gently placed his hand to Papyrus’s shoulder. “bro, we still have toast from last night. and the night before that. and probably the night before that.”

“But I wanted THIS BREAD! I WANTED CROUTONS FOR THE SOUP!”

Sans rubbed his hand softly. “i know, paps, but it’s fine. we’ve got plenty of food. we still have leftovers from the last week. no need to stress.”

Papyrus crossed his arms across his chest. Sans was right of course. They had plenty of food, including leftover bread. Papyrus had thrown himself into cooking every night for the last couple of weeks and their refrigerator was overflowing with leftovers. He probably should have just served them the soup he had made last night instead of making a whole new batch. But he didn’t want to admit that to Sans right now. He just wanted a moment of frustration to himself.

“paps, is everything okay?”

Papyrus turned his head towards Sans and saw the look of worry written across his face.

Papyrus beamed at him. “OF COURSE! EVERYTHING IS FINE!” He darted his gaze back towards the soup. “I WAS JUST… DISTRACTED!”

“by what?” Papyrus could tell that Sans hadn’t been convinced by his lie.

“ER… I AM WORRIED ABOUT RED!” There. That was believable. Red had been sick for days. It was enough of a concern that Sans would understand his distraction and Papyrus wouldn’t have to divulge what he had really been thinking.

Papyrus felt Sans remove his hand from his shoulder and when his brother responded, the concern in Sans’s voice had grown even deeper. “he’ll be fine.”
Papyrus stared at Sans once again. His brother’s shoulders were hunched and his eyelights had shrunk to tiny pinpricks.

“DON’T WORRY! HE WILL BE!” Papyrus said reassuringly. He hadn’t meant to make his brother worry even more! That hadn’t been his intention at all!

Sans gave Papyrus a smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes. “yeah, you’re right.” His brother’s phone vibrated in his hand and Sans resumed his texting, the strained smile quickly disappearing.

Papyrus returned his attention to the stove. He turned off the burner and gave the soup a final stir before he fished out three bowls and a ladle.

“hey, um, paps?” Sans said nervously.

“YES, BROTHER?” Papyrus filled a bowl with steaming soup.

“you mind if i eat this later? toriel wants me to hang out with her today and i, uh, haven’t really seen much of her lately.” Out of the corner of his eye, Papyrus saw how guilty Sans looked. “i think she’s worried about me, y’know?”

Papyrus grinned brightly. “THAT IS FINE, BROTHER! I DO NOT MIND!” Hopefully Toriel could get Sans to open up and talk. She always had a way of getting Sans to speak his mind where Papyrus failed.

Sans smiled in return, though the grin died quickly. “and, uh, do you mind looking after red? i want to make sure he doesn’t… y’know, lose himself while i’m not here.”

Papyrus rubbed the top of Sans’s head reassuringly. “SANS, RED WILL BE FINE.”

“yeah, i know. i just… don’t want him to be alone if he has an attack.”

“HE WON’T BE ALONE!” Papyrus stuck out his chest and allowed his magic to levitate his cape. “HE HAS ME, THE GREAT PAPYRUS!”

Sans chuckled heartily. “yeah, you’re right.” He leaned up and placed a soft kiss on Papyrus’s cheek. “i can always count on you.”

“NYEH HEH!” Papyrus blushed brightly. “AND I CAN ALWAYS COUNT ON YOU!” He gave Sans a playful shove. “NOW GET GOING!”

Sans winked at Papyrus. “love you, paps!” And with a small pop, he disappeared.

Papyrus stared at the empty space for a few moments. He tried to hold onto the feeling of tenderness in his soul, but it wasn’t long until it returned to its familiar state of anxiety. He sighed and ladled a second bowl of soup for Red, making sure to scoop up plenty of zucchini and carrots. He grabbed the dishes and walked up the stairs, carefully balancing himself so as not to spill the overloaded bowls.

He gently pushed open the door and shuffled inside. Red was lying in bed, staring at the ceiling, his eyes narrowed to tiny pinpricks. Small pools of bright red magic fluid gathered at the bottom corners of his eye sockets, giving him a ghastly appearance. He wore only his black and yellow shorts and his soul was brightly glowing in his ribcage. His entire body was covered in glowing red sweat, but despite this, the gold-toothed skeleton shivered slightly.
Papyrus could tell Red was in the thick of his illness. He knew from experience that Red was probably so out of it that he hadn’t even seen Papyrus walk into the room. He set down the bowls of soup on the nightstand and sighed.

His soul welled up in a fit of pity for Red. Skeletons were immune to most illnesses due to their lack of flesh and organs, but the few ailments they were susceptible to hit them hard. Red clearly had what they called “Rock Fever.” It was a childhood sickness that most rock monsters, skeletons, and tsunderplanes got when they were young. Papyrus and Sans had both suffered through it when they were just kids and that had been hard enough. But the older you were when you got hit with Rock Fever, the worse the illness was.

Papyrus sat down on the bed. Confirming his suspicions, Red jerked as if he just realized that someone else was there.

“Come here,” Papyrus gently said as he grabbed a towel sitting on the nightstand and maneuvered Red’s head into his lap. He pressed the rag against Red’s eyes and tilted his head forward, allowing the liquid to spill out of his eye sockets. Once his eyes were empty of the excess magic, Papyrus gently wiped the glowing red shadows underneath Red’s eyes. His efforts were fruitless; he couldn’t remove the stains and he knew he wouldn’t be able to until this illness subsided. He carefully set Red’s head back down on the pillows and used the other end of the towel to wipe up the sweat that lingered on his skull.

“thanks,” Red weakly said once Papyrus had tossed aside the dirtied rag.

“I brought some vegetable soup for us both to eat.”

“i’m not hungry.” Red’s voice was barely a whisper.

“You weren’t hungry yesterday either.” Papyrus stroked Red’s head gently. “You have to eat or you won’t get better.”

Red rolled onto his side, facing away from Papyrus. More excess magic streamed out of his eyes, staining the pillow with red.

Papyrus sighed and rubbed Red’s back. He recalled the time both he and his brother had gotten Rock Fever. Papyrus had gotten ill first. His profuse sweating quickly had been easily excusable – just the result of running around in the streets for too long. But once the shivering and fatigue had taken hold of him, Papyrus had hardly been able to move. He remembered how Sans had scavenged a bed of tattered blankets and newspaper for their tiny cardboard shelter in a tiny back alley of New Home. Papyrus had curled up in their little fortress, trying to get warm, but just hadn’t been able to. And just like Red, he hadn’t been able to force himself to eat. Sans had even foraged his favorite food at the time – ghost fruit – and Papyrus had refused.

“come on, papyrus, you gotta eat.”

But Papyrus had ignored his brother’s pleas and had gone to sleep. The next time he had awoken, he had found himself on a gurney in a brightly lit medical room. His brother had been in the bed next to him, dark blue stains under his eye sockets. Sans had smiled so happily when he had seen Papyrus wake up.

“i found us a place to stay for a while, paps,” Sans had said with such excitement. “just while we’re sick.”

But their stay had lasted far longer than their illness.
Papyrus put the thought out of his head. There was no use dwelling on the past that he couldn’t change. Papyrus continued to comfortingly rub Red’s upper spine. He just wanted him to get better.

Red suddenly quivered violently against Papyrus’s hand. The unexpected movement caused Papyrus’s finger to slide down further than before and the tip of his finger caught in the small hole that Flowey’s thorn had left behind.

Red stilled abruptly and let out a loud groan of pain.

Papyrus removed his finger immediately and hurriedly said, “I’m so sorry! Are you okay?!?”

Red’s breath was quick and shallow. “Yeah, it felt good. Do it again.”

Papyrus stared at Red’s back for a moment before he slowly inched his finger inside the hole again. As soon as he rubbed the inside of the bone, Red let out another cry of what sounded like pain and clenched his fists on the sheets.

Papyrus felt himself blushing brightly. “This certainly doesn’t sound like it feels good!”

“it does. Promise.”

Papyrus pressed his finger deeper, eliciting a shrill scream from Red. He wasn’t sure why, but the way the shorter skeleton was acting was making him very uncomfortable. Maybe it was because Red was sick. Papyrus wasn’t sure why Red would want to do something so intimate while he was feeling so bad. But Papyrus couldn’t help but notice just how pained Red sounded. But… Red had said it felt good.

Papyrus gently massaged inside the scarred wound, trying to be as delicate as possible.

Red whined, “Yeah, b-boss, right there. A bit harder please.”

There was that strange nickname for him again. He really had to wonder why Red called him that sometimes. He really wasn’t anyone’s boss.

Papyrus pushed his finger harder against the bone, and Red began to arch his upper torso back and forth. Red’s face contorted with pain and he curled his hands tighter into the sheets.

“Red, I don’t think –”

Red gave a particular rough jerk and Papyrus’s finger slid deeper into the hole. Papyrus felt his finger press rough against something slippery and wet. He was suddenly inundated with a deluge of emotions – pain, pleasure, and above all else, an overwhelming sense of guilt. Red let out a piercing shriek and arched his spine and Papyrus felt pleasure flood his senses. Papyrus squeezed his eyes shut, trying to shut out the burst of emotions now flowing through him, but couldn’t.

He felt a hand press against his chest and push forcefully. He felt his finger slide away from Red’s soul and the stream of emotions suddenly ceased. A wave of hot red embarrassment crashed over him. He opened his eyes and saw Red twisted towards him, his hand pushing weakly against Papyrus’s chest. His face was distorted in fury and his left eye glowed menacingly.

Papyrus urgently jerked his hand away from Red and tumbled backwards off the bed, landing painfully on his back.

Red venomously spat, “Why the fuck did you touch me there?”
Papyrus leaned up and felt his entire body heat up in humiliation. “I-I’m so sorry!”

“don’t ever touch my soul without asking.” The air crackled with arcane energy. “ever!”

Papyrus felt something inside him crack. “I-It was an accident!” He felt his soul pang with guilt and embarrassment. “I’m sorry! I’m so, so sorry!” Papyrus cried out, his voice choking on the last syllable as he gave into his tears. He hadn’t meant to touch Red’s soul. That was unforgiveable. He raised a shaking hand to his face and covered his face in shame.

He heard the mattress creak and felt the floor shake as the smaller skeleton’s feet hit the ground. Was Red going to attack him? Papyrus hastily removed his hand from his face and saw the gold-toothed skeleton looking at him guiltily. Red had resorted to his bad habit again; the air was filled with small clanking noises as he wrung his hands together nervously.

“papyrus, i am really sorry,” Red said thickly. “i am such a piece of shit.”

Papyrus didn’t even bother to chastise him for his swearing. He folded his arms across his chest and continued to weep. “I really didn’t mean to, you know,” he said, his voice filled with pain.

“i know, i was seriously such an asshole. i’m just… so sorry.”

Papyrus could tell that Red was genuinely apologizing and he just couldn’t stay mad at the smaller skeleton. He reached out his arms towards him, inviting him for a hug. Red knelt down in front of him and met his embrace, wrapping his arms around him. Papyrus sobbed into the shorter skeleton’s shoulder, releasing all of the pent-up emotions he had let build up over the last couple of weeks.

“papyrus, please i’m so sorry.”

Papyrus released a deep, hiccupping sob. “I don’t care about that!”


“I’m just s-s-so worried about you and Sans and everyone!” He buried his face deeper into Red’s shoulder and he could feel the warmth from Red’s fever heating up his face.

“What do you mean?” Papyrus shook his head quickly. He had already said too much and he didn’t want to push his fears on anyone else. “papyrus, please.” Red leaned back, forcing Papyrus away from his shoulder. He looked into Papyrus’s eyes. “what’s wrong?”

“I don’t want to forget about you or Sans or any of this!” Papyrus motioned all around him. “You and Sans have each other, b-but it’s a lot to deal with on your own! If I forget then you’ll only have each other!”

And Papyrus didn’t want to be left behind.

Red bent forward and wrapped him in another hug. He seemed to read Papyrus’s mind. “if you ever forget, we’ll tell you.”

Papyrus released another sob, but as he did so, he felt his soul lighten considerably. “You promise?”

“papyrus, i’m an asshole, but i wouldn’t lie to you,” Red said seriously. “i promise.”

Papyrus squeezed him tighter against him and whispered, “Thank you.”
For the first time in weeks, Papyrus felt happy. Actually happy. No fake grins. No falsities. He was just so pleased that he wouldn’t be kept in the dark if everything was reset. He didn’t want to forget. He didn’t want them to treat him like a little kid. This promise made Papyrus feel more alive than ever.

They embraced each other for a couple of minutes before Papyrus broke away and planted a kiss on Red’s forehead. Red blushed and shivered at the gesture. He wrung his hands together anxiously for a few moments before Papyrus reached forward and stopped him.

“Really. Thank you so much.”

Red nodded and they stared at each other happily for a few moments.

Suddenly, Red’s face blanched and he hastily stood up and ran to the side of the bed. He stooped next to a large bucket and began to cough and gag as he vomited excess magic. Papyrus pushed himself off the floor and walked over to Red and gently pat him on the back as the shorter skeleton was sick. The cloy smell of the magic wafted into Papyrus’s nose, but he maintained his composure. There was no need to make Red embarrassed by getting sick himself!

When Red drooped to the ground, Papyrus asked, “Are you done?” Red nodded and the taller skeleton reached underneath his arms and softly placed him back in the bed. He maneuvered the pillows so that Red’s head leaned up against the wall.

“You need to eat and drink,” Papyrus insisted.

Red swallowed, looking like he was about to be ill again, but nodded. Papyrus handed him the bowl of lukewarm soup and stared him down as he ate. The way Red scrunched up his face made every bite look like torture. But Papyrus refused to look away. Red needed to restore his energy reserves if he was going to keep discharging so much magic.

When Red got through half the bowl, he pushed his head back against the pillow and pressed the bowl into Papyrus’s hands. “I really can’t eat anymore, paps.”

Papyrus’s soul jolted at the nickname. Red had never called him that before. He felt tears of happiness gather in the corners of his eyes, but he quickly wiped them away before the other skeleton could notice.

“That’s okay. You made an effort and I am very thankful for that!”

Red smiled feebly, but Papyrus could tell by the way his eyelids drooped that he was utterly exhausted. The glowing sweat had returned to his brow and he appeared shaky. Red just didn’t look good.

“You should get some rest, Red,” Papyrus said sweetly.

Red nodded slowly. “Stay with me?”

Papyrus hadn’t expected him to want to stay. For the past three days Red had begged to be left alone while he fought off the illness.

“Of course! Do you think I, the Great Papyrus, would really leave you alone in your time of need?”

Papyrus climbed into bed next to him. Once he was comfortably seated, he rearranged the pillows so that Red could sleep more comfortably. He lifted the covers and tucked Red into bed. Ignoring the copious amounts of sweat, he placed a gentle kiss to the gold-toothed skeleton’s forehead. As
Papyrus pulled back from Red’s skull, he realized that the liquid spilling out of his eye sockets wasn’t the result of excess magic.

Papyrus gasped. “Why are you crying?”

Red released a small sob. “I just… miss him,” he said, his tone clearly embarrassed.

“Sans? He’ll be back soon! He just went to Toriel’s for the day!”

“No, not Sans.” Red squeezed his eyes shut as if he were in great pain. “My brother.”

“Oh.” Papyrus didn’t know what to say. Red’s brother didn’t sound like the nicest monster in the world. But he could understand Red’s pain. If he were to become separated from Sans, he didn’t know what he’d do! Red cried softly beside him and Papyrus reached a hand to his brow and stroked him softly. “Do not worry! I am sure that we will find a way to get him here soon! We just need to… to stay determined!”

Red opened his eyes and stared at Papyrus for a few moments before nodding. “Yeah, I know. It’s just hard. It’s so much safer here and… my brother is a royal guard. He constantly puts himself in danger back home.”

“But would that be any different if you were there?”

“No, I guess not,” he said hesitantly.

“Then there is nothing to worry about! If I am anything like your brother, and I surely am, for we are both the Great Papyrus, then you should rest assured that your brother is completely fine! We are both fully capable of taking care of ourselves!” He rubbed Red’s head playfully. “Even without our wonderful older brothers!”

Red smirked weakly. “You two are a bit different though.” He lifted a hand to his face and wiped away his tears. “But yeah, you’re right. Papyrus is strong. I’m getting upset over nothing.”

Papyrus beamed brightly and kissed the top of Red’s skull. “You are.”

Red closed his eyes, sighed softly, and squirmed under the covers. “Can you tell me a story, paps?”

Papyrus’s soul hummed with excitement. “Really?!”

Red flinched at the noise, but nodded. “Yeah, please. Papyrus – my Papyrus – and I used to tell each other stories every night when we were little.” He smiled. “We made a bet that whoever fell asleep first would have to go get breakfast for us in the morning.”

“That’s… adorable!”

“Hey, yeah, he always won.” He opened one eye, making it appear as if he were winking slyly at Papyrus. “But only because I let him. Didn’t want him out on the streets on his own.”

Papyrus ruffled Red’s skull. That sounded exactly like something his own Sans would do.

“Wait right here. I have the perfect story for you!” He got off the bed, grabbed his favorite book, and returned to the bed.

Papyrus placed his hand on top of Red’s skull and began to rub it affectionately as he opened to the first page. Red snuggled against Papyrus’s chest, clearly trying to get a better view of the book.
“This is my favorite story – Peek-a-Boo with Fluffy Bunny!”

The first page showed a light brown rabbit covering his eyes.

“Fluffy Bunny was an odd little rabbit. He didn’t like carrots at all and he didn’t have many friends!”

He turned the page and the rabbit was surrounded by a group of rabbits with scowls on their faces.

“Fluffy Bunny’s favorite game was peek-a-boo! He liked to hide his face and surprise the other bunnies! But the other rabbits always laughed at him and soon Fluffy Bunny grew very sad.”

He flipped to the next page. The rabbit had a knapsack and was crying.

“Fluffy Bunny didn’t like the carrot farm and he didn’t like the other rabbits, so he hopped far, far away.”

The illustration showed the rabbit hopping into the middle of a field filled with turnips and other happy bunnies.

“But one day Fluffy Bunny found a new farm! Fluffy Bunny loved the turnips and there were friendly rabbits that loved to play peek-a-boo!”

The next page showed the rabbits dancing in the field.

“Fluffy Bunny and his new friends frolicked all day, so happy to have found each other! What a perfect life!”

The picture illustrated a human dressed in overalls and a plaid shirt. The human stood with their hands on their hips. They looked angry.

“But Fluffy Bunny and his friends didn’t know that the Farmer was very upset! All of the Farmer’s crops had been eaten!”

The next page depicted the Farmer grabbing all of the rabbits except Fluffy Bunny by their ears.

“So one day the Farmer grabbed all of the rabbits up! Fluffy Bunny had somehow escaped the Farmer’s traps, but he was oh-so-scared! The Farmer was not a nice person and Fluffy Bunny wasn’t sure what they would do to his new friends! ‘Help us,’ they cried!”

The next page showed Fluffy Bunny cowering in fear.

“Fluffy Bunny wasn’t the bravest rabbit, but he had to save his friends! What was Fluffy Bunny to do?”

Red cuddled against Papyrus’s chest. Papyrus looked down and saw that the smaller skeleton was fast asleep. Papyrus gently closed the book and set it aside. If Red wanted to know the end, he’d finish later. It was important that the smaller skeleton get sleep right now. Besides, the ending always made Papyrus cry and he had shed enough tears for one day.

Papyrus grabbed his bowl of soup from the nightstand and began to eat. It was cold, but Papyrus didn’t mind. The flavors were good and he didn’t want to move Red just to get a fresh bowl.

His mind returned to what Red had said earlier about telling stories to his brother. He looked down at the scars etched into Red’s exposed shoulder. What had Sans said to him? his brother abuses him. you should see the scars.
But Papyrus wondered if there was more to the story. He couldn’t help but notice that… Red seemed to enjoy pain. He always begged for Papyrus and Sans to do things so roughly. Plus, Papyrus was convinced that Red had been in pain when he had poked his spine earlier. Maybe… Red had asked his brother to do this? Sans had said that Red was in denial about his abuse, but… Sans had his own biases to work through.

Papyrus shuddered and turned his mind away from that thought. He’d ask Red when he felt better. He wasn’t sure how he’d broach the topic, but Papyrus was tired of relying on secondhand knowledge to judge this alternate version of himself. It made him very uncomfortable to think of himself like that!

He looked down at Red and allowed himself a moment to take in the smaller skeleton. His soul burst with giddiness at the sight of him. Papyrus recognized the feelings of love and adoration he felt for him. They weren’t as strong as they were for Sans, but they were there nonetheless. Careful not to shift the shorter skeleton as he moved, he bent down and placed another kiss to the top of his skull. In his sleep, Red pressed deeper into Papyrus’s chest.

Papyrus sighed happily. He hoped that the feelings weren’t one-sided, but even if they were, at least Red was comfortable enough to sleep next to him like this. Papyrus set the empty bowl on the nightstand next to him and curled up next to the smaller skeleton. He wasn’t really tired, but he wanted to be there when Red woke up.
Sans’s mind was fuzzy with sleep. He could feel the last remnants of a dream lingering in the back of his mind, but he couldn’t quite grasp what it had been about. He sighed mentally, allowing himself to forget the thought. He could feel Papyrus breathing deeply next to him in bed. If his brother wasn’t awake, then it was probably still early enough that he could just go back to sleep.

Sans lay there, trying to sense the telltale signs of morning. But he could neither hear the morning birdsong nor feel the warmth of the rising sun. Actually, now that he was focusing on it, there was a bitter chill in the air. Wait a second, wasn’t it almost summer?

He cracked his eyes open and was greeted with a forbidding darkness that pervaded the room. He darted his eyes to the window and his soul dropped in his chest. A thick layer of fresh snow blanketed the windowsill and icy veins stretched through the glass.

It had reset. Oh god, it had all reset.

Sans brought his knees to his chest and curled up in the bed. His breaths were quick and shallow. He was back in Snowdin. No more life on the surface. That might as well have been a pleasant
dream. He was all alone. What was he going to do? Could he tell anyone? Who would even believe him? He wasn’t even sure if Papyrus….

Papyrus!

He rolled over and saw the blankets flow over Papyrus’s graceful curves. He could see the back of his brother’s skull smashed into the pillow. Some of Sans’s tension died away. If Papyrus was here in bed with him, then it hadn’t reset. Or had it…? Sans’s mind was too hazy. Nothing was making sense. Why was it snowing?

Had he… spaced out? How much time had he lost?

Sans grasped Papyrus by the shoulder and shook him roughly.

“papyrus, wake up! please, what’s the date?! please, you gotta tell me!”

The mattress dipped in the middle as his brother rolled over. But as the weight shifted under the covers, he realized with a start that whoever was next to him was not Papyrus. They were too tall and the limbs were too long. The skull turned to face him and Sans’s soul screamed out in terror. Void-filled eyes, stretched by melting scars, met his gaze. As they made eye contact, the other skeleton’s face stretched into that familiar broad, inky grin.

“no! no, get away from me!”

Gaster. Oh god, Gaster.

Sans scrambled backwards, attempting to get away from the taller skeleton, but Gaster was too fast. He clutched Sans’s wrists and leaned close, his hot breath spilling into Sans’s face.

“GOOD MORNING TO YOU TOO, SANS,” he said, sickly sweet. That voice. It scratched at his skull in all the wrong ways. He had to get away from it. He had to escape from the doctor before… before….

He tried to pull his hands away, but Gaster’s grip was ironclad. The lanky skeleton dragged the now-flailing Sans to his chest and squeezed tightly.

“How beautiful, SANS,” Gaster said, his voice dripping with ridicule. “YOU EVEN DREAM OF ME.”

Gaster’s mouth opened wide, revealing a row of sharpened teeth dripping with purple saliva. He inched closer and closer to Sans, who tried to kick, punch, do anything to get Gaster to let go. His mind was blank with fear and he couldn’t even summon his magic to get the other skeleton off of him. Gaster laughed and Sans could feel his warm breath flood onto his neck. A moment later, Gaster bit down on the sensitive vertebrae and Sans could see blood dripping onto the blankets below.

“no, no, no!”

Gaster pulled his head away from him and smiled toothily at him, bloody marrow filling his mouth. How was there that much blood? How much had he bitten him?!

With a start, Sans realized that his neck wasn’t in pain. Wait. What had Gaster said? Dream? Oh god, it was a dream!

Sans’s eyes burst open and he shot up straight in bed. He immediately looked at the window. The
sill was devoid of snow and the early rays of the morning sun fell slanting through the glass. He glanced to his right and saw Papyrus laying on his side, his limbs sprawled across the bed at odd angles. His quiet snores filled the room, sending tentative waves of relaxation through Sans’s rapidly beating soul.

Sans slowly sunk his head back into the pillow. It was just a nightmare. He was still on the surface. His brother was here. That monster was nowhere near him. He was safe and free and –

He felt the beginnings of tears well in the corner of his eyes. He took in a giant, quavering breath and slowly let it out. He needed to calm down before he woke Papyrus up. There was no need to burden his brother with his nightmares again. Sans thought he had these under control. He hastily wiped away his tears and forced himself to breathe more evenly.

Try as he might to avoid thinking about it, his mind kept returning to the way Gaster had grabbed at him in his dream. It was just like the days he had been under the doctor’s ever-watchful eye. He remembered how he had been strapped to those tables while the doctor had subjected him to so much torture. Each experiment had been a test of his resilience. A test of his devotion to his brother. And in the end, he had nearly given up. He had been so tired of it all and he had been polluted by that monster, absolutely ruined by him, and… and….

Sans could feel that he was beginning to lose himself in his own thoughts. He couldn’t dwell on this of all things. He needed to distract himself. Now.

He rolled over and shakily extended his hand to Papyrus’s spine. As gracefully as he could, he traced the curves of the lanky skeleton’s vertebrae. Papyrus gave a tiny quiver and Sans pressed closer to his brother’s back. He dug his finger underneath Papyrus’s scapula, knowing that the sensitive spot was sure to incite a reaction and wake his brother up.

Sure enough, Papyrus let out a small squeak at the contact. Sans inched his tongue towards his brother’s tender ribs, ready to dive into his regular morning routine.

Papyrus let out a loud sigh. “Not now, Sans,” Papyrus said angrily, giving a frustrated wave of his hand in Sans’s direction. “I’m not in the mood.”

Sans immediately backed away from Papyrus, but his soul felt like it was cracking in his chest. Not in the mood? Since when did Papyrus turn him down for sex? His brother was always in the mood. And why, why did he have to be not in mood right now?

Sans turned onto his back and smashed his hands onto his skull. Had he done something wrong? Papyrus sounded so irritated with him. If he was angry at Sans, he wasn’t the only one. Toriel hadn’t been happy with him as of late either. He had been so out of it over the last four weeks that he had forgotten several dates with her. Had he done the same to Papyrus? There wasn’t much that would make his brother annoyed with him. The only thing that he could have missed was Papyrus’s birthday and…

Oh god, his birthday!

Sans blindly reached down to the floor and grabbed his cell phone. He unlocked the screen and checked the date. Papyrus’s birthday was still three days away. He sighed with relief. That was right. He had planned a surprise party with Undyne ages ago. He still needed to pick up a few things, and he would need to do that today, but he hadn’t missed the party. Thank god.

But then why was Papyrus mad at him?
He chanced a glance at his brother. He wasn’t sleeping, but it didn’t seem like he was about to get up anytime soon. He was just laying there, his back turned to Sans.

Sans tentatively asked, “you know i love you, right?”

Papyrus rotated in the bed, and as he did so, Sans was reminded of how Gaster had turned to face him in his recent nightmare. He quickly dismissed the thought and instead focused on Papyrus’s guilt-ridden face.

“Of course, Sans,” his brother said anxiously. “I love you too.” They looked at each other in silence for a few moments before Papyrus hesitantly offered, “I’m sorry, Sans. We can… do it if you would like.” He darted his gaze nervously away from Sans, his brow furrowed in guilt.

Sans extended his hand towards Papyrus’s face and cupped his chin gently. “it’s fine, bro. if you don’t want to, it’s fine.”

His brother beamed at Sans and pulled him in for a hug. Sans leaned into Papyrus’s chest and wrapped his legs around the taller skeleton’s waist. It didn’t matter if he couldn’t have sex. He just didn’t want Papyrus angry with him. He knew that he wouldn’t be able to handle that right now.

“Sans, have you been feeling alright lately?”

Sans flinched inwardly at the question. Just three days ago, Toriel had asked him the same thing. Was he really acting that differently?

He looked up at his brother, the corners of his mouth turned upwards into a forced smile. “no worse than usual, paps.”

Papyrus frowned at him. “Have you been going to your doctor lately?”

Sans darted his gaze away quickly, though still maintained his fake smile. “heh. now that you mention it, i think i missed my last few appointments.”

“What?!” Sans returned his stare to Papyrus’s face. His brother looked absolutely alarmed.

“woah, don’t worry, paps,” Sans said reassuringly. “i have an appointment today. i’ll go!”

Great. Another obligation for the day. He hoped that he could keep track of this.

Papyrus squeezed his arm. “Sans, promise me that you will go.”

“what? hey, it’s okay. don’t worry!”

“Promise!” Papyrus’s tone was stern and he griped his arm tighter.

“yeah, i promise. calm down, paps!”

Papyrus released his hand and relaxed against him. Sans could feel his brother release a pent up breath from his chest. Was his brother… that worried about him? He felt a twinge of remorse in his soul. The two lay there, neither one of them speaking as Sans tried to push down his feelings of guilt.

After a few minutes, Papyrus planted a kiss to Sans’s skull, disentangled himself from Sans, and crawled out of bed.

“Meet me downstairs in ten minutes?” he asked as he put on his clothes hurriedly. “I want to check
Sans swallowed and nodded. As soon as Papyrus left, Sans smashed his face in his pillow. He knew what Papyrus was angry about now. He had been attempting to avoid visiting Red’s room for the last week and a half and his brother must have noticed. Why else would Papyrus not have invited him into Red’s room just now? And why else would his brother be so upset with him? And why else would Papyrus ask him if he had visited his therapist lately?

Sans let out a frustrated yell that was thankfully muffled by the pillow. He couldn’t handle Red being sick. Every time he went into the room, the overly-sweet smell of Red’s excess magic caused Sans’s soul to twist in agony from old memories. It reminded him too much of when Papyrus had gotten sick all those years ago. They had just been kids, out on the street all alone.

He had done his best to take care of his brother, but Papyrus had needed so much more than the makeshift shelter and the stolen, rotten food that he had been able to provide. His brother had just gotten worse and worse, sweating and throwing up so much magic that Sans hadn’t known what to do. And then five days into the illness, Papyrus’s bones had gone completely dry. There had been no more magic left for his brother to expel. Sans had tried to wake up Papyrus. He could still remember how he had called out and shook his brother’s lifeless body. But nothing had worked. His brother hadn’t responded to anything.

He had broken down then. He had rarely cried when he was young. It was too exhausting for the little amount of energy that he had and it drew too much attention to them when they were trying to maintain a low profile. But at that moment he had lost all hope. There had been nowhere for them to go. An orphanage would have refused them upon sight. Who in their right mind would take in a pair of monsters, one of which was clearly in the throes of a serious illness? And even if they had, they never would have let them leave after the sickness had passed.

And so he had cried wildly into air, releasing all of that pent up emotion in his soul. His brother had certainly on the verge of death and it had been all his fault. He had failed him.

**IS EVERYTHING ALRIGHT, LITTLE ONE?** That voice that haunted his dreams now had been so sickly sweet then.

Sans had turned to the voice and had shut up immediately, inwardly cursing his own stupidity. How could he have been so loud?

He remembered how the adult skeleton had peered into the cardboard box and had seen his brother. The towering monster had scooped Papyrus into his arms and his brother had looked so tiny in that moment.

*stop! leave him alone!* Sans had cried, pulling at the monster’s sleeves as he had started to carry his younger brother away.

**YOUR BROTHER IS VERY ILL.**

*i know, but i can take care of him! don’t take him away!* The skeleton had stared down at him with those empty eyes. Even then, the sight had sent a shiver down Sans’s spine.

**I AM A DOCTOR. I WILL PROVIDE HIM WITH CARE.**

*please, Sans had said through the tears that had returned once again, we don’t have money to pay you. just leave us alone. we’ll be fine!*
The doctor had considered San’s words for a few moments and then his face had spread into a wide grin. *DO NOT FRET, YOUNG ONE. YOU CAN BOTH COME WITH ME AND WHEN THE ILLNESS PASSES, YOU CAN ASSIST ME WITH MY EXPERIMENTS. THAT WOULD MORE THAN MAKE UP THE EXPENSES.*

Every instinct had told him to grab Papyrus and run away. But his brother had been so sick and Sans hadn’t known what to do. So instead of bolting like he should have, he had accepted the doctor’s help. A few hours of assisting a doctor in exchange for his brother’s health? What a deal.

He had been such an idiot. Why had he been so opposed to living in an orphanage? Why had he trusted that strange monster? Why had he buckled to his threats? Why why why why why…

He gave one last yell into the pillow and forced himself to stop thinking about the subject. He needed to get ready and face the day. Gaster was a distant memory and he needed to look to the present.

When he walked downstairs, his brother was already busy making breakfast. He wondered vaguely how long he had been lost in his thoughts upstairs. He sat down at the kitchen table and pressed his hands against his eyes, trying to rub the sleepiness from them. He was already so tired and the day hadn’t even begun.

“RED SAYS HE IS STILL ILL,” Papyrus called from the stove.

Sans sighed in exasperation. That meant that, once again, he would have to take care of him while Papyrus was working. He swallowed nervously. Sans already had so much to do today and the thought of spending time with Red while he was sick overwhelmed him.

Papyrus set down a plate of sunny-side up eggs in front of Sans and sat down at the table next to him. His brother sighed and steepled his fingers in front of him. Papyrus’s face reflected the utter exhaustion that Sans felt.

Sans poked his eggs with his fork, allowing the yolk to spill all over the plate.

“SANS, CAN YOU BRING RED WITH YOU INTO THE CITY TODAY?”

He looked up at Papyrus in surprise. “what? you just said he was sick.”

“NO, I SAID THAT RED SAID HE WAS SICK. I THINK HE IS BETTER.”

Sans blinked in confusion. “you think he is lying?”

“I THINK HE IS SICK,” Papyrus said slowly, “BUT NOT WITH ROCK FEVER.”

What did that mean? He saw the knowing look that Papyrus gave him and Sans’s soul sank.

Sans sighed morosely. It was no secret that Red was depressed. He recognized all of the same symptoms that he saw in himself. And despite the fact that Red had been doing so much better over the last two months, being cooped up in bed for a week would drive anyone back into a depressive state. Not to mention that he knew from experience that when he had started to pull out of his own depression that he had gone through some pretty horrible days. He’d lay in bed for hours, staring into nothing, wondering why the world continued to tick on without him. Hell, he still did that.

“you’re sure he’s better? i don’t want to take him out if he’s still contagious.”

“I AM POSITIVE, BROTHER. HE HASN’T DISCHARGED MAGIC IN THREE DAYS AND
Sans leaned his skull into his palm. Yeah, Red sounded like he was better. He wished that his lookalike had been willing to just talk to him instead of staying in bed all day. Then again, it wasn’t like Sans had been around him much lately. God, what was wrong with him? He had promised Red that he would be there for him.

“yeah, i’ll take him, paps,” he said quietly as he reached out and gently patted Papyrus’s arm. “don’t worry.”

Papyrus smiled at him. “THANK YOU!” His brother pushed himself up from the table and returned to the stove.

Sans closed his eyes. There was so much to do today. He had to talk Red into coming into the city, pick up party supplies for Papyrus, and go to his therapist. He took a deep breath. He could do it. He just needed to focus.

Sans jumped as he felt his phone vibrate in his shorts. He dragged it out of his pocket and looked down at the screen. One new message from Grillby. His soul panged. Oh hell.

* Hi, Sans. I was wondering if you could stop by for a quick visit today. I wanted to talk to you about something.

He quickly scrolled through his past messages and realized that his last message to Grillby was nearly four weeks ago. Hell, the last time that he had spoken to Grillby was when that officer had stopped by. Where had all the time gone?

God, could he handle another obligation today? He smashed his fist against his forehead for a few moments, contemplating how to respond to his boyfriend.

* heya grillbz! sorry it’s been so long. can i take a raincheck? bit busy today!

Grillby’s response was almost immediate:

* No. It’s important.

What the hell did that mean? He let out a frustrated groan. Okay. Just one more thing. He could take Red there. Hell, maybe that was a good idea. They could meet up with Grillby, eat lunch together, go get the party supplies and a gift for Papyrus, and then go to the therapist. And hey, while he was at the doctor’s office, maybe he could set up an appointment for Red. If he was anything like Sans, his lookalike sure as hell needed it. Yeah, he could make this work. He just needed to breathe and remember it all.

He quickly typed out a message to Grillby:

* ok. no prob, grillbz. i’ll swing by for lunch. see you then!

There. That was fine. He could do this. As long as he focused, everything would go according to plan.
On Second Thought, Maybe Dick and Fire Don’t Mix

Chapter Notes

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulsex.tumblr.com. You can also find soul sex reblogs if that's your thing.

[FANART]

- Kamitakai's version of the smut scene from chapter 4. LOOK AAAH! You can view the finished pages here:
  Cover | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8
- YvShan updated their comic depicting the Last Fall flashback several times. You can find it here!
- I'll post any updates to the subsequent chapters as they get added! :3

[NOTES ABOUT THE CHAPTER]

- Yeah, remember how I said there was going to be a delay in updates? Yup. Here it is.
- THE SANSBY IS HERE! HOT FIRE ON BONE ACTION.
- To those that said they liked Grillby's character before when he was all quiet: WELP.
- This chapter is fucking long. 7k words. Yeah. That's just ONE reason why it took so long.
- Alternative chapter names: (1) Gratuitous Sansby Chapter; (2) This Chapter Is Flaming Hot
- If you see typos anywhere, just point them out politely please! I only looked over this once haha (that goes for the rest of my chapters)

Additional tags for this chapter: Fiery buttsex, oral sex (male), a little bit of rough sex (but nothing over the top like say...UF Sans/UF Pap), unintentional voyeurism
[I might need more tags for this chapter, so let me know if you notice something I should tag]

Sans carefully pushed opened the door to his old bedroom and a wave of that sickly oversweet magic odor smacked him straight in the face. Memories of Papyrus and Gaster in that alleyway flashed through his head. He paused and allowed himself a moment to adjust to the smell before entering the room.

Red was staring at the ceiling unseeingly, his pupils completely vanished. Sans gulped and sat down on the edge of the bed. He shook Red gently and his counterpart jolted, breaking out of whatever thought he had been trapped in.

“sans?” Red rasped, looking up at him with flickering eyelights.

“yeah, it’s me,” Sans said, his voice unnaturally high. He patted Red's shoulder comfortingly. “how are you doing?”

Red turned away from Sans and curled up in the bed. “tired.”
Sans held back a sigh and rubbed Red’s scapula. He couldn’t truly fault Red for that; he was exhausted too. He couldn’t even remember the last time he got a full night of sleep. He was just better at hiding the nightmares than Red was. But still, he had promised Papyrus.

“i was thinking maybe you’d like to come into the city with me today. get some fresh air, y’know?”

“i’m sick, sans,” Red groaned as he shifted under the covers.

“i know, but please? i want you to meet grillby! and, uh grillby’s been wanting to meet you too,” Sans lied. He had mentioned the circumstances of Red’s arrival to Grillby weeks ago, but the flame monster had never expressed any desire to see Red. His boyfriend had simply sat back and listened to Sans as he had talked about Red’s universe and how bad he felt for the other skeleton. That was the best thing about Grillbz – he was an excellent listener.

“sans, i’m so tired,” Red said wearily.

Sans rotated Red to face him. His lookalike’s eyes darted to the side in an obvious display of guilt. Sans peered at his face intensely. Like Papyrus had said, there were no red stains under his eyes. Red was better; it was just going to take some persuading to get him out of bed.

“i know it’s tough.” He slowly pressed his mouth against Red’s in a skeletal kiss and felt the familiar rush of loving adoration fill his soul. “but please? for me?” he said, pulling away with a soft smile on his face. Red was blushing furiously and squirming nervously underneath him.

“okay,” Red said quietly. He looked directly into Sans’s eyes and smiled hesitantly. “for you.”

Sans wrapped Red in his arms tightly and whispered, “thank you.”

With Red in tow, Sans teleported in front of Grillby’s. As they appeared, the loud clamor and discord of the city crashed over them. The street was filled with stalled vehicles and the air was bursting with honks and drivers’ shouts. The crowds were thick today; monsters packed the sidewalk outside the restaurant and large groups of humans were flashing their cameras all about. It seemed like everyone’s attention was focused on activity across the busy street.

Sans followed the crowd’s gaze and saw a line of monsters filing into the illustrious embassy. On the left side of the queue were several reporters – humans and monsters alike – speaking in front of cameras. On the other side of the line, there was a collection of monsters who were some sort of chant, though he couldn’t hear the words. They looked to be holding up some signs, but he couldn’t see past the long line of monsters who blocked his vision. He got on the tips of his toes to try to see what was going on, but it didn’t help.

Red’s grip tightened on Sans’s shoulder. Sans flashed his head towards Red and saw that his lookalike’s face was scrunched up tight. Beads of sweat speckled his skull and he looked like he was about to be sick.

“hey, are you okay?”

“let’s go inside please.” Red clenched Sans’s shoulder harder and leaned into him. “too many monsters, come on, come on, come on” Red repeated desperately as he smashed himself further into Sans’s arm, causing him to stumble. His obvious state of panic was almost contagious.

“woah, it’s okay,” Sans said as he wrapped his arm around Red’s back. “i got you.”
He steered Red through the throng of monsters and humans to the restaurant’s entrance and pulled open the door. The pungent smells of fried food and alcohol filled Sans’s nose as soon as he entered the bar. Compared to the raucous activity outside, the restaurant was a quiet safe haven. There were only a few monsters, and thankfully, except for Punk Hamster, none of the usual troublemakers were here.

He looked over to Red, who looked slightly unsteady on his feet. Sans squeezed his lookalike’s hand and slowly led him over to a booth to sit down. He helped Red into the seat and scooted in next to him.

“you okay?” Sans grabbed a napkin from the dispenser near the wall and wiped Red’s skull. It was drenched in sweat after the first wipe.

Red nodded quickly. “sorry, i just need a minute,” he said tiredly.

Sans pulled out more napkins and continued to wipe the other skeleton’s head as he lay his head down onto the table. Sans’s soul churned in his chest. He hoped that he hadn’t pushed Red too hard. He carefully looked over his lookalike to make sure there were no signs of illness. He saw no magic residue in the sweat or any excess magic in Red’s eye sockets. Still, Sans couldn’t displace that feeling of guilt.

Out of the corner of his eye, Sans saw a flickering light. He looked and saw Grillby towering over them, his flames casting them in a warm glow.

“oh, heya, grillbz!” Sans said as he stretched his face into a wide, tense smile. He blindly continued to dab at Red’s skull. “uhh, sorry, this is, um, red. you remember me talking about him, right?”

“hi,” Red said weakly from the table.

Grillby stared for a moment and curtly said, “Pleasure to meet you.”

Sans chuckled nervously. “red here is pretty worn out from being sick the last few weeks. it’s not contagious or anything,” he added hurriedly, “but i think all of the activity out there was messing with his head. do you know what’s going on at the embassy right now?”

“No.” Grillby crossed his arms across his chest.

“Well, it’s really crowded out there! we could hardly get through to the bar.”

“That’s horrible.”

Grillby was being exceptionally short, even for him. “uh, grillbz, is everything o--?”

“What will you two be having? The usual?”

“um, yeah sure,” he said, befuddled. “we’ll have a double order of the burg.”

Before Sans could say anything else, Grillby walked away. He headed straight for the kitchen, slamming the door loudly behind him. Damn. Why was it so hard to read his face? He couldn’t tell if Grillbz was sad or angry or what. Clearly something was up, but he just couldn’t tell what emotion he was working with here.

His hand, which had continued to pat at Red’s head throughout the interaction, stopped in midair. Sans looked over to see his lookalike clutching his wrist gently.
“i can do that myself,” Red said, as he leaned back from the table and grabbed the napkins out of Sans’s hand.

Sans pulled his hand back. “i’m just trying to help,” he said, a bit stung. “i didn’t realize you were still that sick.”

“i’m not s–” Red cut himself off and gave a low growl of frustration. “i just hate crowds, you know that.”

“yeah, but i’ve never seen you that bad.”

“well, fuck me then, right?” Red shifted away from Sans in the booth. “not my fucking fault there’s more monsters out there than the entire underground!”

Sans let out a sigh. “sorry. i forget sometimes.” Red grumbled under his breath and folded his arms across his chest. “what do you think was even going on out there?” Sans asked, trying to change the subject.

“who cares? probably some human did some shit that makes the rest of our fucking lives miserable.”

It was Sans’s turn to grumble now. Why was it that every time he had a conversation with Red about humans that it devolved into trash talk? Sans had gotten the impression that Red was getting along fine with Frisk of all humans, and yet he couldn’t wait to blame them all for the actions of a small minority. It was getting pretty ridiculous.

Sans jumped as Grillby suddenly appeared at the table again. He set down two plates of delicious-smelling burgers in front of the two skeletons.

“oh, uh, thanks grillbz!” Sans said with a nervous smile. “how about you come and sit down with us? y’know, take a small break?”

“Actually,” Grillby said, casting a quick look over to Red, who began to squeeze a copious amount of mustard on his patty, “I was wondering if I could speak with you for a moment. In private.”

“oh, uh, sure.” Damn, what the hell was Grillby so anxious about? “i’ll be back in a min, red,” Sans said, giving a tentative smile to his lookalike. Red nodded and took a large bite of his burger, glops of mustard spilling out the sides.

Sans quickly followed Grillby through the back door into the kitchen. The backroom was as hot as ever and Sans felt beads of sweat forming on his brow. He expected Grillby to go straight up the stairs to his bedroom, but instead he stopped in front of the counters, which were littered with a heap of pots and pans. The fiery monster whipped around to face Sans, orange flames dancing in the air from the quick movement. His emotionless demeanor made Sans shift uneasily.

“So, uh,” Sans said, stuffing his hands in his hoodie pockets despite the heat. “you wanted to talk to me?”

Grillby motioned for Sans to come closer. He stepped forward slowly, casting his gaze down to his feet rather than looking up at the flame monster. He was probably pissed at him. He had been such a flake the last couple of months and it was no one’s fault but his own.

“grillbz, i’m sorry about not meeting up before this. i’ve been busy with… so much crap. and i know that’s no excuse, but –”
Grillby cut Sans off by lifting his chin and pressing his tongue inside the skeleton’s open mouth. The empty cavity was filled with an intense heat as the molten appendage danced and twirled, searching for his unsummoned blue tongue. Sans pulled away from the flickering monster, panting slightly. Fiery arms pulled him into a tight embrace, sending a comfortable wave of warmth through his bones.

“wait, hold up. not that i’m complaining, but i thought you wanted to tALK!” His last word ended in an abrupt shout as Grillby extended a warm hand into Sans’s gym shorts and gripped his tailbone firmly. Sans let out a slow, quiet moan as the flame monster quickly stroked the bone up and down. He leaned heavily into Grillby, thrusting his pelvis against the deft hand that sent tingling surges of pleasure up his spine.

“ah! if you just wanted this, you could’ve said earlier!” He felt the heat in his tailbone deepen. “ngh, aah!” Hell, he was fine with this. He had been expecting a lecture, not spontaneous sex, and he was always open to having some fun with Grillby.

His lover released him and Sans was filled with momentary disappointment before he was hauled upwards into Grillby’s arms. As he attempted to adjust to the change in position, the burning monster attacked his neck with harsh kisses, leaving him reeling. He tried to return the gesture, but before he could reach his lover’s neck, he was slammed roughly onto the edge of the counter. Grillby swept a pile of pots and pans off the surface and pushed Sans into a reclining position.

Dazed, Sans lay on the cold surface for a moment, trying to gather his bearings. His shorts were violently ripped from his body. He slid upwards against the back wall, trying to give himself a better view, but was immediately pulled back down. Before Sans could open his mouth in protest, he felt something hot and wet drag languidly across his ilium. He inhaled sharply, small shivers racking his body. A moment later Sans’s pelvis was assaulted by Grillby’s twisting tongue, sending a molten heat through his lower body.

“grillbz, oh my god!” Sans cried out as he squeezed his eyes shut in bliss.

It wasn’t long until he felt the familiar tingle of magic around his pelvis. Grillby paused for a moment, giving Sans the opportunity to lean up and look at the glowing blue length between his legs. His lover’s face was plastered with a rare smile as he squeezed Sans’s base firmly in his hand. Sans let out a small shriek as Grillby leaned forward and swirling his tongue along the head, dipping inside the slit carefully. A stream of blazing saliva dripped down the side of the length as the flame monster’s appendage twisted tenderly along the head and then down to the base. The prickling heat incapacitated Sans with pleasure.

Sans covered his face to muffle the loud moans pouring from his mouth, but Grillby pulled his hand away. A sly smile graced his lover’s features as he leaned down and engulfed Sans’s illuminated tip with his mouth. His shouts rent the air as an overwhelming heat overtook his senses. He curled his legs against the counter as his lover bobbed up and down on his length, leaving dribbles of hot spittle behind. Grillby’s fingers wrapped around Sans’s conjured flesh, squeezing every inch of him. Soon Sans was immersed in a wave of satisfaction as Grillby moved more quickly and forced him deeper into his throat. The heat intensified and soon Sans was overwhelmed by the pressure, filling his lover’s mouth with glowing blue fluid.

As the last shiver of pleasure passed through him, Sans collapsed backwards, panting. He tried to recover from the exertion, but immediately shot up when he felt an onslaught of warmth cascade down his member. Grillby’s mouth still enveloped Sans and streams of his lover’s molten saliva mixed with his blue release dribbled down his shaft. The flame monster pulled back and curled his tongue around Sans’s head once again, eliciting a cry from the skeleton.
“grillbz, what the –?!”

Grillby pulled his tongue back and softly said, “I know you have more than this.” He returned his tongue to the tip and dug furiously into the slit. The flaming hand brushed upwards and downwards along the member, spreading the liquid all over. Sans writhed and whined under the treatment and it didn’t take long for him to become fully erect once more.

His boyfriend pulled his head back and straightened his posture. Sans took the break to push himself into a sitting position so that his head rested against the wall. His lover hurriedly removed his slacks, revealing the brightly radiating erection. Half clothed, he carefully heaved himself onto the counter and straddled Sans. Warm flames pushed against the glowing blue length, causing Sans’s breath to hitch in satisfaction.

Grillby delivered a forceful kiss to Sans’s closed mouth as he pushed himself onto his knees. He hovered over Sans’s lap and positioned the dripping and brilliantly glowing blue genitalia against his rear. As Grillby slowly lowered himself onto the shaft, Sans fell forward and wrapped his arms around the other.

It was so much tighter than anything he had experienced lately, and hot damn did it feel good. Sans smashed his face into the warm shoulder and let out a muffled cry as the concentrated heat squeezed around his length. The fiery monster pushed Sans back against the wall and smiled wickedly.

“Come on, let it all out,” he said with a strained voice. “I want to hear you scream.”

And with that, Grillby lifted himself nearly all the way off of Sans before pounding back down with excessive force. A breakneck pace was soon set and Sans felt himself slipping downwards against the wall as his bones rattled with the intensity of his lover’s thrusts. He weakly reached out to hold onto Grillby’s shoulders, hips, clothes, anything to steady himself, but was buffeted by a wave of the flame monster’s hands. He settled for clawing at the wall as he was rammed further and further backwards.

“grillbz! aaah! crap, grillbz, it’s too much!” he shouted as he gyrated upwards, trying and failing to keep up with his lover’s rapid tempo.

As Grillby continued his relentless pace, he squeezed his eyes shut and Sans felt the dense inferno compress even tighter around him. Sans was screaming incoherently now. Flames licked around his sensitive length as he continued to hit his lover’s deepest recesses.

“grillby, come on, i can’t – i can’t do this much longer!”

“When my name, Sans,” Grillby said between grunts. He grabbed Sans’s chin roughly, forcing the skeleton to look him in the eyes.

Sans couldn’t concentrate on Grillby’s words or actions; his mind was too consumed with pleasure. All he could do was follow his instructions as Grillby tightened even more against his length.

He shouted louder than ever before, “GRILLBZ! GRILLBZ, I’M GOING TO –! AAAAAH!”

He pressed deeply inside as he climaxed. Grillby gave one last plunge, dropping himself fully on top of Sans as ribbons of sizzling release shot into the air and onto Sans. The air was rent with pants as the two struggled to regain their breath.

“holy crap, grillby,” Sans said between gasps, his face cracking into a grin, “that was hot.”
Grillby looked down at Sans from behind his glasses with an obvious look of disdain. “Really, Sans? A pun?”

He wasn’t sure if it was because of the stress from the last few weeks or if he was just giddy from the afterglow, but the way Grillby reacted sent Sans into a fit of hysterical giggles. He heard a loud sigh as Grillby’s weight left him. Sans continued to laugh breathlessly as his lover pulled on his pants, but stopped abruptly when Grillby started to walk brusquely towards the door.

“hey, wait, where’re you going?” Grillby usually wasn’t one to skip out after sex.

“I have a business to attend to, Sans,” Grillby said stiffly as he paused to examine his reflection in a stainless steel pot, cocking his chin upwards to adjust his black bowtie.

“since when has that mattered?” He wrinkled his brow. “it’s just a bunch of the old regulars out there, they can wait.”

“Perhaps it does not matter to you,” Grillby said, turning to face him, “but this is how I make a living.”

Sans tried to read the subtle emotions on the flame monster’s face, but had no luck. Tentatively, he asked, “are you… pissed off?”

Grillby folded his arms against his chest. “And what makes you say that?”

“uh, the way you’re acting? since when do you get irritated by my jokes? what, is your ex in the city today?”

Grillby stared blankly at him. “My ex?”

“yeah,” Sans said, waving his hand in frustration. “you always get pissy when she stops by.”

Grillby laughed derisively. “Right, my ex is the problem.”

Sans blinked in confusion, stunned by the obvious ridicule in the other’s voice. “wait, are you pissed at me?”

Grillby’s flames flared suddenly. “Now why would you think that?”

“you are! hey, you’re the one that jumped all over me when we got back here! if you have a problem, why don’t you just come out and say it?”

“You’re the only one here that thinks I have a problem.”

Sans pinched the space between his eye sockets. “how about we cut the guessing games, grillbz? i’m not in the mood.”

“Yeah, it’s a bit frustrating when someone you care about won’t talk to you.”

“so this is about me not contacting you?” San’s soul surged with a mixture of anger and guilt. “look, i tried to tell you before, i’ve been real busy and –”

“I thought you said that wasn’t an excuse?”

Sans slid off the counter onto the ground. “look, it’s not, but –!”

“No, you can stop right there,” Grillby said, stepping close to Sans. “I haven’t spoken to you in
“weeks and when you finally show up today, you look like this.”

“like what?”

“Like crap, Sans. You look like crap.” His tone softened considerably as he continued, “You look like you haven’t gotten decent sleep in days. What’s going on with you?”

“what’s going on with me? nothing! what’s going on with you? since when do get so aggressive during sex, grillbz? i mean, what the hell was that?”

Grillby sighed and put a palm to his face. “Stop deflecting, Sans. What is wrong?”

Sans stuffed his hands into his hoodie pockets and cast his eyes to the side. “nothing’s wrong,” he said tersely.

There was a brief pause in the conversation before a gentle hand lifted his chin so that he was forced to look into Grillby’s face. “Sans, I know you’re not being honest. You used to tell me everything, so what’s different now?”

Guilt overwhelmed him and he could feel the beginnings of tears forming in his eye sockets. “i’m just –.” He shrugged Grillby’s hand off of his face and looked down at the floor. “i’m just stressed, that’s all.”

Silence reigned for a few moments as Sans shuffled his feet nervously. He wondered if Grillby would press him for more details. He didn’t particularly want to talk about the prospect of a reset right now. He just didn’t have the emotional strength.

He was shocked out of his thoughts when warm arms enveloped him. Grillby sighed loudly and pulled him against his torso. Sans leaned into the touch and allowed himself to take a deep breath. He didn’t want to cry right now.

“i’m sorry. i really haven’t been fair to you, i know.” Grillby squeezed his shoulders tighter. “i’ll spend more time with you, i promise. okay?”

There was a long pause before Grillby said, “Okay.”

He silently questioned if there was more to Grillby’s outburst, but didn’t pursue it. After all, he hadn’t pressed Sans for more details; if he wanted to talk, Sans knew he would. That was how it had always been. Knowing that Grillby wouldn’t force him to speak but would always be there for him was the best part of their relationship.

Grillby’s body heaved with a deep sigh as he unwrapped his arms from Sans. “I’ve got to clean up this mess,” he said, indicating the fallen dishes and the counter. “Get dressed and I’ll meet you out there in a few minutes.”

Sans nodded and pulled on his shorts, wondering how the hell such great sex had turned out to be so disappointing.

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Red watched Sans head into the backroom as he took a large bite of his burger. He leaned back into the seat, savoring the spiciness of the mustard. It had been way too long since he had last tasted the condiment, and damn, it almost made it worth fighting the crowds today. He looked at the plastic bottle of mustard and wondered if anyone would notice him stealing the stuff for later. He was sure no one would miss it, and he was still so shaky from horde outside, he thought that he deserved it.
As he reached out for the bottle, he jolted as he was interrupted by someone clearing their throat loudly right next to the table. He quickly turned his head to the source of the noise and saw the tall, neon green-haired, furred monster that he had met months earlier. What was his name? Dirty Gerbil? Rocky Hamster? Fuck, he couldn’t remember and there was certainly no equivalent monster back in his universe.

“uh, hey.” Red pulled his hand back from the bottle, wondering uncomfortably how long the monster had been watching him.

“Heya, Red! How you doin’?” the furry monster said cheerfully as he slicked his hair back with a black comb.

“uhh, been better. how about you?”

“Been doing pretty well myself!” he said animatedly. “You mind if I sit with you?”

“i guess,” he said hesitantly, “but, um, sans will be back soon.”

“Oh, no he won’t,” he said as he scooted into the seat across from Red. “We got plenty of time to chat.”

“what do you mean by th–?”

From the kitchen came the muffled sound of dishes hitting the ground. Moments later he heard Sans shout enthusiastically, “grillbz, oh my god!”

Red blushed furiously and sunk his head into his hoodie. The green-haired monster reached inside his jacket pockets and pulled out a box of cigarettes and a lighter.

“Yeah, Sans is the loudest monster that Grillby takes back there. I think anyone can make that skeleton scream.” He lit his cigarette and inhaled deeply.

Red squirmed in his seat uncomfortably. He didn’t really appreciate this fucking monster talking about Sans like that, but he wasn’t exactly okay with telling the guy to shut the fuck up either. And as the cacophony of Sans’s moans filled the room, he realized that he couldn’t really defend the other skeleton when he was being so fucking loud.

The other monster, seemingly indifferent to the racket, blew out a puff of smoke and smiled at Red. “So has your cousin been showing you all the sights on the surface?”

His cousin? Oh yeah. He was supposed to be Sans’s cousin, visiting from the Underground.

“uh, yeah. i’m actually living here full time now. it’s nice up here.”

“Hmph. Not sure ‘nice’ is how I’d put it with all these humans running around like they own the place.”

Sans’s moans intensified sharply into screams of pleasure. Red tried to mentally block out the noise and focus on the conversation.

“y-yeah, fucking tourists. they’re putting on their little shitshow down in the underground too.”

“I know, right?! And can you fucking believe the bullshit that’s going on today?”

“w-what’s going on today?” In the background, Sans let out a sharp cry, signaling his obvious climax. Red sighed in relief now that he didn’t have to sit here awkwardly, listening to Sans while
having a conversation with this random stranger.

The other monster let out another cloud of smoke and the smell of tobacco caused Red to choke involuntarily. “Dude, some monsters are finally making a stand! Well, they’re doing it all wrong, but still, we’re finally getting some fucking recognition.”

Red waved the smoke away from his face, trying to hold back tears from the noxious smell. “What’re you talking about?”

“Monsters living in human cities have been going missing for months and the families are –”

Sans called from the other room, “Grillbz, what the –?!?”

The furred monster continued without pausing, “– finally making a formal complaint as a group. I mean, it really doesn’t matter. The embassy isn’t going to do shit, and Asgore’s too much of a wimp to pursue it. But hey, finally getting some monsters to notice the bullshit that’s been going on around here.”

Along the back wall, the bottles on the shelves began to rattle loudly as Sans began to scream even louder. Red cupped his face in his hands. The glow of his blushing illuminated the area. The other monster was still yapping on and on about whatever the fuck, but all Red could hear was Sans’s incoherent yelling. He seriously wanted to leave right now. Fuck, maybe he should just teleport home. He didn’t really give a shit about being rude to this guy. He just wanted to get those screams out of his head.

“GRILLBZ! GRILLBZ, I’M GOING TO –! AAAAAH!”

“Holy shit,” the other monster said while chuckling. “They’re really going at it. You okay there, bud?”

“Y-yeah. What was that you were s-saying?”

“I was saying you should come to one of our meetings. We actually do real shit to stop humans, not that bureaucratic nonsense like outside.”

“Sure, I guess,” he said, still distracted by what he had just overheard.

“Great! Give me your phone number and we can text you when we meet next. We could always use an extra set of hands, claws, or wings.” Red gave him the phone number and once he was done, the other monster got up from the booth and clapped him on the shoulder. “Always good to have another person on board. And let’s keep it between us, okay? There’s no telling who is listening to your cousin in there, you know?”

Red blinked. Did this guy know Sans was being followed?

The monster waved at Red and exited the bar, leaving a smoky haze of tobacco in his wake. Red looked down at his food queasily. He had been starving before, but that entire experience had really thrown him off. He wanted to go back to bed. He had been tired when he had been dragged out of bed, and with the crowds and the noise, now he was fucking exhausted. He didn’t want to put up with anymore bullshit today.

Red shook his head. Plus, of all the fucking monsters, how the fuck could Sans be dating Grillby? The dude was a cheapskate back home. He charged gold to use the god damn mustard, wouldn’t allow him to start a tab even though he had been going there for years, and generally treated everyone like shit. Like everyone else here, this universe’s version Grillby was probably a
complete sweetheart. But fucking hell, he couldn’t get the image of Sans being fucked by his violet-colored version of the monster out of his head.

Maybe he should just go home. He could text Sans and let him know he didn’t feel well. Shit, he’d probably buy it. If he even cared. Maybe Sans was going for round three right now and had forgotten all about him. Well, fuck that. He wasn’t about to stick around and listen to *that* again.

Just as he was about to teleport back home, the back door opened and Sans came strolling out, his gait uneven. He looked disheveled and was completely drenched in sweat. Red looked down at his food, concentrating on ridding himself of his blush.

Sans slid into the seat opposite of him. He reached across the table for his burger and dug into it immediately.

His mouth full, Sans asked, “sorry ’bout that. grillby had some stuff he wanted to talk to me about.”

Red glanced upwards and saw no hint of embarrassment or guilt from the obvious lie. Really? *Talk?*

Sans continued to eat ravenously. “anyway, we gotta pick up a few things for papyrus’s birthday after this. i kinda forgot until this morning, but uh, we’re supposed to be throwing a surprise party for him on monday. heh.”

“Oh. y-yeah, sure.”

Red tore mindlessly at his burger bun with his fingers. He wasn’t sure how it was possible, but now he felt even worse. Papyrus’s birthday. He had forgotten too. And now he *really* wished he were back in his bed.

Or better yet, that his brother was here.

Sans finished his burger, licking his fingers of the grease and crumbs. “nothing like a burger from this place, let me tell you.” He looked over to Red’s plate and frowned. “you didn’t like yours?”

Red shrugged. “wasn’t hungry.”

Sans opened his mouth to speak, but was interrupted as Grillby approached the table.

“Oh, heya grillbz.” Sans’s voice was higher pitched than usual and Red could feel tension in the air.

“Hi,” he said quietly. “You about to leave?”

“yeah, gotta take off to do some errands, but i’ll call you later, okay?”

Grillby nodded and looked over to Red. “I was wondering if I could talk alone with you for a few minutes.”

Sans was obviously taken aback. “what you want to talk to red for?”

“I wanted to get to know him, Sans.” There was a slight edge to his voice. “If he’s going to be staying with you, it’s important that I get to know him.”

“I’d sure, we can talk,” Red said as Grillby sat down at the table. He didn’t know why exactly, but this monster intimidated the hell out of him. He’d blame it on his universe’s counterpart, but his
Grillby didn’t freak him out nearly as much as this one. At least *his* Grillby displayed his emotions openly.

“well, okay. but i gotta keep an appointment. you mind if i grab the stuff for the party without you?”

“go for it.” Red couldn’t give a shit about getting anything for Papyrus’s birthday. He just wanted to bury himself in bed and forget about the entire thing. But at least Grillby was giving him an excuse not to go shopping with Sans for the damn party.

“okay, i’ll be back pretty soon. i just gotta pick up a few things that undyne already ordered ahead of time, so i should be fast. you guys enjoy yourself,” Sans said before teleporting away.

Red looked to the blazing monster and smiled nervously. Grillby folded his hands in front of his face and stared at him. Red felt himself starting to sweat as the silence grew longer and longer.

After what seemed like an appropriate amount of time, he cleared his throat and said, “uh, so what’s up?”

Grillby quietly asked, “Did you enjoy the show?”

“huh?”

“I asked if you enjoyed the show. I know you could hear us. I just want to know if you got any pleasure out of it.”

Red sputtered incoherently. What the fuck was he saying? He could not possibly be asking him that? Was this some weird kink of his?

“Sorry, I don’t understand that. I hope you’re not like that in bed as well.”

Rage ripped through Red’s soul. “what the fuck is your problem?!” he yelled. He knew the entire restaurant was probably looking at him, but he didn’t fucking care.

“You are my problem.”

“what the hell did i do?!”

“You’re fucking Sans, right?”

“is that what sans said? that we’re fucking?” He thought that it was a bit more than just sex, but if that’s what Sans called it, then what the fuck was he doing?

“No, half of the city knows that you’re fucking after the little stunt you pulled in the lab.”

Red sat for a moment, mortified. How the fuck did Grillby know about that? Sudden realization washed over him – *fucking Alphys, god damn it.*

“I’ll take your silence as confirmation. Let me be frank with you – you have no business being with Sans.”

“and why the fuck not?”

“Sans isn’t really fit to be in a relationship with four people at once. whether he realizes it or not.”

“so you have a problem with him dating toriel and papyrus too?”
“No. Just you.”

“Once again, what fuck did i do?”

Grillby’s flames blazed higher for a moment. “First off, why the hell would you fuck yourself? That’s just weird. Do I really need to get into the whys of that?”

Red blushed brightly. No, he really didn’t.

“Secondly, and much more importantly, you’re causing a lot of trouble for Sans even if he doesn’t want to admit it.”

“Trouble? I haven’t done shit!”

“Have you seen Sans lately? I haven’t seen him in weeks, I’m pretty sure he hasn’t slept in days, and he looks like he’s about to fall apart any second.”

“Well, I didn’t cause that!”

“You haven’t? You just happened to show up at the same time as Sans slipped into a major depressive episode. Is that right?”

Red hunched his shoulders. This guy was confirming all his doubts about this entire… thing he had with Sans. What the fuck was he doing here? Why was he fucking himself?

“You want my advice? Leave. Get the fuck back to your universe and leave Sans alone.”

“Or what?”

“Or nothing. But hey, that just shows how much you care about Sans’s mental state. You’ll only leave if there’s some threat hanging above you.”

“Fuck you! That’s not what I meant and you’re… fucking wrong about this whole thing!”

“Believe me, I can read Sans like a book. He’s been coming to my bar and talking to me much longer than he’s ever confessed anything to Toriel or Papyrus. Believe me, I know. So back the fuck off before you embarrass yourself.”

There was a small pop from behind him and he knew Sans was back. Red stared at Grillby with an open mouth as the flame monster got up from the booth and stretched his mouth into an open smile and waved.

“Ah, you’re back so soon,” he said sweetly. “Did you get everything?”

Sans walked up to the table, smiling nervously with his hands in his pockets. “Yeah, told you it would be quick. hiding the stuff was the hardest part.” He looked between the two of them and anxiously asked, “You guys all finished here?”

Before Red could even open his mouth, Grillby replied, “Oh yes. It was a great conversation. I know I’m not much of a talker, Red, but it was truly a great discussion.”

Red gawked at him, not even sure what the fuck to say. He wanted to fucking tear this son of a bitch apart with every blaster that he had, but that probably wasn’t the best thing to do in front of Sans.

“Hey, you ready?” Sans asked. “My appointment’s coming up and I kinda wanted to get there early
to ask about something.”

Red tore his eyes away from Grillby to look at Sans. He hadn’t really noticed before, but there were dark shadows under his eye sockets and his shoulders were hunched in such a way that screamed absolute exhaustion. Was this asshole right? Had he really caused Sans to fall back into a depressive state? He could blame it on the possibility of a reset, but… Sans had zoned out a bunch before they had learned about the resets. Maybe he should just stop kidding himself.

“you okay, red?” Sans whispered, gently shaking his shoulder. “you zoning out there?”

He shook his head and stood up from the booth. “no, let’s go.”

Sans gripped his arm tighter and smiled at Grillby. “thanks for lunch and… everything, grillbz. i’ll talk to you later, okay?”

Grillby nodded, a smile still on his face. Red glared at him angrily. He hated that fucking flame idiot so fucking much he just wanted to fucking smash his face and –

His thoughts were interrupted as Sans teleported. The two skeletons whipped through the void and appeared in an empty hallway. Immediately in front of them was a door with a nameplate that read “Harry J. Smith, M.D., Psychiatrist.” Sans pushed open the door and led Red into a tiny room lined with chairs. There was a green lizard monster sitting in one of the chairs, reading a human magazine for makeup tips. Opposite the monster was a glassless window with a human receptionist on the other side. Sans strolled over to the human, dragging Red behind him.

“hey, jessie!” Sans said excitedly.

The human looked up from their paperwork and grinned widely. “Sans! Well aren’t you a sight for sore eyes? How are you doing?”

“heh. pretty good,” Sans said, though his smile twitched a bit as the words tumbled out of his mouth. “about time i talked to the doc though, y’know?”

The receptionist smiled kindly and nodded. “Yeah, you’ve missed your last… goodness, how many appointments has it been now?”

Sans jammed his hands in his pockets. “seven or so i think? i, uh, kinda lost count.” His eyes flickered, but he recovered quickly.

“Well, that’s okay. We’re glad to have you back! And is this Papyrus? I didn’t realize you two were twins!”

“oh, heh. we’re not. this is my cousin, red. this is jessie, she’s a barrel of laughs and makes the best chocolate chip cookies i’ve ever had. better than tori’s, even.”

“Oh, stop!” She smiled at Red. “It’s great to meet you. I didn’t realize that Sans had any cousins.”

“yeah,” Red said listlessly. “we haven’t talked much until recently.” He shrugged. “you know how it goes.”

“Well, it’s great to reconnect with family,” she said with a bright smile. “Let me go tell Dr. Smith that you’re here. Though you’re a bit early, aren’t you?”

“yeah, about that. i was wondering if we could set up just a quick appointment for red here. he’s been needing to talk to someone and i think the doc would be great for it.”
Red took a step back. “what?”

Sans turned to face him, his smile faltering. “well, y’know, it really helps to talk to someone.”

“and why the hell would i want to talk to some fucking human doctor? i could talk to you or paps or fuck, anyone else.”

“well,” Sans said as he kicked the ground mindlessly, “it’s sometimes hard to talk about certain things with people you know.”

“like what exactly?”

“like… your brother?”

Sans’s words crashed over him. That was it. He was done.

“fuck you, sans!” Sans jolted backwards. “fuck you and fuck your stupid fucking boyfriend and your fucking doctor and fucking birthdays and just fuck everyone!”

He kicked a chair and sent it flying, smashing his toe in the process. He felt all eyes on him, but he didn’t fucking care. He took a shortcut straight to his room and fell onto the bed. He was just going to fucking sleep. He didn’t give a damn who the fuck tried to drag him out of bed, he wasn’t fucking moving from here until he fucking felt like it. And he didn’t intend for that to be anytime soon.
The Most Relatable Character in This Story is Burgerpants

Chapter Notes

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulex.tumblr.com. You can also find soul sex reblogs if that’s your thing.

- Split chapter~! The next one is either going to be SUPER short or SUPER long.
- If you’re confused about what Sans and Papyrus are talking about in this chapter, there’s a reason for that. Just give me a couple of chapters.
- Alternative chapter names: (1) GONADS IN THE LIGHTNING! IN THE LIGHTNING! GONADS IN THE RAAAAAIN!
- Part 1 of Papyrus’s birthday
- I wanted to thank Psycho4sans (Tumblr/AO3) and PurrfectlySinful (Tumblr/AO3) for all of the help with wording and editing small sections of this silly old fic! Definitely check out their works - they are excellent writers and their fics are just amazing!

Additional tags for this chapter: Brief mention of suicidal thoughts, brief mention of knife play (and going beyond that, USING knives rather than just threatening), brief mention of whips, biting, and scratching
[I might need more tags for this chapter, so let me know if you notice something I should tag]

Papyrus stared into the refrigerator, incapacitated by indecision. He could cook breakfast or he could heat up one of the countless containers of leftovers. It would surely be better to eat the leftovers – there was hardly any room left in the refrigerator – but Papyrus really wanted to cook. He retrieved the carton of eggs, careful not to disturb any of the precarious towers of containers filled with decaying food. Noticing how light the box of eggs was, Papyrus carefully opened it to reveal a solitary egg.

He let out a sigh of frustration. It wasn’t enough to feed all of them. He supposed that he should just heat up one of the old dishes, but he just didn’t care enough to go through the effort. He returned the box of eggs to the refrigerator and decided that he would just eat later.

A crash of thunder rolled through the air. Papyrus could hear the onslaught of torrential rain drumming on the roof as the house creaked from a burst of wind. It was really coming down out there and he was going to have to work in this weather today. He just wanted to curl up on the couch with Sans and Red and watch television or play games instead.

But Sans was in quite the mood and Red hadn’t been out of his room in three days.

Friday evening, Sans had picked him up from the city. It had been obvious that he had been crying, and when Papyrus had asked him about it, he had gone silent. But it had soon become evident that Red and Sans had gotten into some sort of altercation because when he had tried to go into Red’s room, he was met with a locked door. He had asked his brother to teleport them inside, but Sans had refused.

"if he doesn’t want me around, then i’m not going in there, papyrus."
The weekend had been dreadful. Papyrus had continuously knocked on Red’s door only to be met with resounding silence. Sans hadn’t engaged with Papyrus all weekend, choosing instead to stew in his anger. While his brother had stayed downstairs, muttering under his breath for the last two days, Papyrus had chosen to stay in his room, watching videos of cute, fluffy animals on the internet. As enjoyable as those videos had been, Papyrus was more than a little irritated that the other skeletons’ childish behavior had continued for so long.

He entered the living room where his brother was sitting on the couch, mindlessly watching television. On the screen, King Asgore stood in front of a podium, surrounded by microphones.

“– taking this matter seriously,” he said reassuringly with his sonorous voice. “I ask that monsters allow the Royal Guard and the National Officers to investigate these cases without public interference in order to expedite the process.”

The screen flashed to protesters waving signs outside the embassy as a newscaster narrated, “King Asgore’s speech comes just days after monsters launched an official complaint with the Human-Monster Relations Embassy regarding the missing monsters. Many monsters allege that these individuals went missing only after interaction with human police officers outside monster-controlled territory.”

The broadcast switched to the weather and Papyrus tore his gaze away from the screen to look at his brother. Sans was sitting with his arms folded, his eyes underlined with dark shadows. Small taps could be heard against the backdrop of the storm as Sans agitatedly rapped his toe against the edge of the couch.

“SANS.”

His brother grunted in response, but didn’t look at Papyrus.

“SANS, I AM CONCERNED ABOUT RED.”

His brother continued to stare at the television as a deafening boom of thunder shook the house. Papyrus stamped his feet in frustration. He needed to sort out this mess with these two now, but he had to be at work soon. With great hesitation, Papyrus pulled out his phone and texted Undyne:

* I HOPE YOU DO NOT MIND, BUT I THINK I NEED TO TAKE A SICK DAY FROM WORK. I AM SORRY FOR THE SHORT NOTICE!

Papyrus sat down on the couch next to Sans and sighed. He hated taking time off work. He enjoyed getting out of the house and he absolutely loved his job. Of course, this weather wouldn’t be fun to trek through and he doubted that many tourists would visit today. But when it came down to it, if he wasn’t going to enjoy himself here with the people he loved, he wanted to keep his mind off this stupid fight. But he knew he couldn’t avoid solving this problem and the longer he waited, the harder it would be to fix this rift.

His phone buzzed in his hand.

* I wouldn't be caught dead walking any stinkin’ humans around in this weather either! Happy birthday, you nerd! Enjoy the day off! We’ll be by for the party later!

Papyrus stared at his phone for a moment before another two messages flashed on his screen:

* Ignore that message!! I meant that I am going to drop the present by later!!! Just a present! No parties!!!
* SHOOT!!!! Don’t let your brother know that you know, okay??
He continued to look at his phone, not sure what to say. He had forgotten it was his birthday. He had not been keeping track of time that well lately and Sans had certainly not reminded him. In fact, his brother hadn’t said anything to him at all today.

And he knew it wasn’t because Sans was trying to surprise him with this party. Undyne and Sans had thrown him a surprise party every year for the past five years. It had become somewhat of a tradition. And every year, Sans would wake him up with birthday greetings and presents before dragging him out to go do something for the day. And then, around midday, they would always come back home to a house full of birthday guests. It was always a blast, even if Papyrus always knew there was a party ahead of time.

But Sans hadn’t mentioned a thing. He hadn’t said “happy birthday” or presented him with gifts. So he must have forgotten.

Papyrus drew his knees to his chest and fought back tears as he typed a reply:

* I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT! BUT THANK YOU FOR THE BIRTHDAY WISHES!

He put his phone down on the couch, wrapped his arms around his legs, and placed his head against his knees. Tiny drops of tears formed in the corners of his eyes, but he didn’t want Sans to see. He took a deep, quavering breath in an attempt to calm down. Now he wished he had just gone to work. Maybe he could text Undyne back and tell her that he had changed his mind.

No. That would just worry her. She knew that Sans usually took him out on his birthday. She would wonder what was wrong and if she found out that his brother had forgotten his birthday…. Well, he didn’t want to be around for the explosion of fury that she would unleash.

Papyrus almost smiled at the thought. He truly missed Undyne. Ever since they had gotten to the surface, she had grown so busy with her duties as captain. Until recently, he had visited her and Alphys’s apartment every Sunday to “train.” Training used to mean long sparring sessions with the fish monster, followed by cooking lessons and binge watching anime.

But the truth was that Undyne rarely had time to spend more than a few minutes with him now. Usually she had more important things to do like address the booming population, find missing monsters, and manage the entire Guard. Typically when he visited, he spent his Sundays with Alphys while Undyne ran around the city cleaning up messes. For the last few weeks, Papyrus hadn’t even bothered to show up. Undyne was just too busy.

So he knew that she was sacrificing a lot to be here today. He was truly looking forward to seeing her.

“bro?”

Papyrus turned his head. Sans was looking at him with concern.

“aren’t i supposed to be dropping you off at work around now?”

“I TOOK THE DAY OFF,” Papyrus said stiffly.

“oh.” Sans paused for a bit, his face scrunched up in thought. “because of the rain?”

“NO, TO GET YOU AND RED BACK ON SPEAKING TERMS.”
Sans’s face fell, his brow furrowed in anger. “why don’t you just drop it?”

Papyrus unfurled his knees and jumped off the couch. “BECAUSE YOU ARE BEING RIDICULOUSLY STUBBORN! YOU SHOULD APOLOGIZE TO HIM SO EVERYTHING CAN GO BACK TO THE WAY IT WAS.”

“he yelled at me, paps!”

“SO?!”

“he told me to go fuck myself!”

“I DON’T CARE!”

“well if i’m being stubborn, then he is too!”

“YOU’RE RIGHT! HE IS! BUT PERHAPS YOU SHOULD BE THE BETTER SKELETON! AFTER ALL, YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO HELP HIM ON FRIDAY! YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO TAKE HIM TO THE CITY SO HE WOULDN’T BE STUCK IN HIS ROOM DEPRESSED!”

“i did! i took him to grillby’s and then we went to my therapist! i was trying to get him an appointment and he flipped!”

Papyrus stood there, stunned. “YOU JUST TOOK HIM THERE?”

“what do you mean?”

“YOU DID NOT ASK HIM BEFORE?”

“no! you dragged me to the therapist without asking! and i appreciated it! it was the best decision you ever made for me!”

“Brother,” Papyrus said, his voice dropped to a near whisper, “you were… suicidal. I had no choice.” Another past decision had come to bite him on the tailbone.

“and how do you know red isn’t at that point right now?”

“He’s not.” Papyrus was sure of that; Red was depressed, but he had made great strides since he had come to this universe. He was not nearly as sad and hopeless as when he had first arrived here and that was even after they had discovered the possibility of a reset!

Papyrus turned his head towards Red’s room, doubt trickling into his thoughts. “Well, he wasn’t before. I don’t know how he is feeling right now because he won’t come out of his room!” He looked back at Sans who had stuffed his hands into his pockets and was gazing down at his lap. “Sans, why would you just assume he was okay with that?”

Sans shrugged. “because it worked for me.”

Papyrus sighed and stamped his feet on the ground. “NOT EVERYTHING THAT WORKS FOR YOU WILL WORK FOR HIM!”

“well i guess i’m an idiot then!”

“YOU ARE NOT AN IDIOT!” Papyrus gave a growl of frustration. “YOU ARE JUST SO… SHORT-SIGHTED!”
“okay, okay, fine! i’m short-sighted! sorry!” Sans yelled in exasperation.

“TELL HIM SORRY, NOT ME!”

“fine! i will!” Sans stood up and abruptly grabbed the taller skeleton’s arm. Papyrus had no time to react before he was pulled through the void and appeared beside Red’s bed with a tiny pop.

Papyrus, caught off guard by Sans’s sudden teleportation, stumbled backwards into the window with a small thunk. He stared at Sans who simply stood there, his arms across his chest, not looking at him.

“Was that really necessary, Sans?!” Papyrus whispered. Sans ignored him, refusing to look at him. Papyrus gave a huff of anger.

He looked down at the bed. It was a mess. The fitted sheet had popped off the corners of the bed, revealing the lumpy mattress underneath. The pillows were tossed against the wall at odd angles, the cases removed with fluff popping out of the seams. And in the center of the bed was a quivering heap of blankets, sullied with stains of red magic.

“Red?” Papyrus asked as he sat down on the bed gently. A flash of lightning lit up the room and moments later there was another loud rumble of thunder. The mass of blankets gave a sharp cry and jerked at the noise.

Papyrus placed a comforting hand to the ball of blankets and softly said, “It is okay! It is just lightning! I know it can be quite disorienting, but it is a very natural thing and –”

“i know what lightning is,” said a muffled voice.

“Oh.” Papyrus paused for a moment and looked to his brother who was still looking anywhere but towards him. He wished Sans would just say something instead of being so stubborn. “Well, then you should know that it is perfectly fine to be afraid of lightning! When I first visited the surface, I, the Great Papyrus, was also scared of it! But after Sans explained how rare it was to be struck by lightning indoors, I understood that –”

“i’m not afraid,” Red said defensively.

Papyrus huffed. These two sure wanted to be difficult!

“Red, please come out of the blankets. I am very concerned about you!” The bundle didn’t move. “When was the last time you ate?”

“it doesn’t matter.”

“Of course it matters! Please tell me you have at least teleported out of this room and eaten!”

The sound of pattering rain against the window filled the silence that fell between them.

“Red,” he said in exasperation, “you know you can tell me what’s bothering you.”

“it’s not important.”

“if it’s got you this upset, it’s important,” Sans said. Papyrus was finally looking in their direction, a touch of guilt to his features.

The mound quaked violently as loud but stifled bawling pervaded the room. Papyrus dug into the tangled mess of fabric until he found Red’s head. His face was stained with days old tear tracks and
his bones rattled loudly as he shook from crying. Papyrus dragged the sniffling skeleton into his lap and rubbed the back of his skull soothingly.

“Please, tell us. We are here to listen!”

Through a choking sob, Red said guiltily, “it’s his birthday.”

Out of the corner of Papyrus’s eye he saw Sans give a little jump as realization hit him on the head.

“I promise that I, the Great Papyrus, do not mind if you tell me what is bothering you even if it is on my birthday! I am always here for you!”

Red stuffed his face into the blankets again. “no, it’s my papyrus’s birthday.”

Oh. His soul gave a tiny pang of disappointment, but Papyrus pushed it away.

“i’m such a piece of shit!” Red yelled into the fabric.

“What? No you are not!”

“yes i am!” Red looked up at Papyrus with desperation in his eyes. “i left him! i abandoned him! he’s all alone on his birthday and it’s because i’m such a shitty brother!

“you are not a shitty brother,” Sans said, finally bending down so that his face was level with the bed. “red, you’re the least shitty brother that the other papyrus could have. you put up with his abuse for how long and –”

Red tore away from Papyrus’s lap. “he doesn’t abuse me!” He pulled back the sleeve of his hoodie, revealing the deep scars along his forearm. “i ask him to do this! i like this! it makes me happy! it turns me the fuck on!”

So Papyrus had been right. Red did enjoy pain. Well, that was a relief. He had hoped that the other version of himself wasn’t an abusive creep and here was all the proof he needed.

“so?”

Papyrus’s soul sank in his chest as he turned to look at his brother. Oh no, he wasn’t – he couldn’t be –

“That doesn’t give him the right to actually do all of this.”

“Sans, no” Papyrus warned. He had to stop his brother from saying what he knew he was about to say.

“It’s disgusting,” his brother said, his face scrunched up in anger, “absolutely disgusting that he would do that to you after all you’ve been through.”

“Sans, stop it right now,” Papyrus begged.

“No! if he’s going to put himself down like this when he’s the victim here –”

“You’re such an asshole,” Red said quietly as he detached himself completely from Papyrus. An instant later, the gold-toothed skeleton was gone with a small popping noise.

Papyrus sprang to his feet, fists curled. He knew why his brother had said what he had. He knew how his brother felt about this. But that gave him no right, no right at all to put his own issues onto
“bro,” Sans said, his brow upturned in guilt. “i’m –”

“YOU ARE SUCH A JERK!” Papyrus interrupted. He stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him, leaving Sans to consider what he had just done.

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Red stared up at the canopy of trees that blotted out the darkened sky. A patchwork of green leaves churned harshly in the howling wind, sending splashes of raindrops onto Red’s already-soaking face. Even though he was wrapped snugly in his blanket, he could feel the cold, wet soil soaking through to his clothes as he lay on the forest floor. A streak of lightning flashed through the sky, and Red curled inside his cocoon as the roar of thunder tore through the air. He didn’t want to be outside in this mess, but he needed to be alone. He needed to have time to think.

He rubbed his eye sockets with the heels of his palms. All this time, he had refrained from telling Sans about his partiality to pain because he was, quite frankly, ashamed of it. Every time Sans and Papyrus had looked at his scars with that judging look it had sent him into a spiral of self-doubt. But today Red had needed to tell them about his preference. Not for his sake, but for Papyrus’s. He was so tired of his brother, who couldn’t even defend himself, getting attacked for something that he liked. Even now, he craved that rush of tingling pleasure when his brother dug into him with his fingers, his teeth, his whips, or fuck, on his more daring days, his knives.

But more than that, he missed his brother’s warm embrace and his tender little moments of love. Though it had been far longer than that since he had last received any of that from Papyrus.

It didn’t matter. It gave Sans no right to treat him this way, especially since he didn’t know anything about that. All Sans knew was that he had scars and that he enjoyed pain. And he had called his brother disgusting for it. That wasn’t fair.

Red had to wonder: Why was he here? Was he just here to fuck around with Sans and Papyrus for the rest of his life? He hadn’t been to the lab in weeks. Sure, he had been sick, but afterwards, why the fuck hadn’t he gotten his ass back there? He needed to get his brother or at the very least, get back to him.

Maybe Grillby was right. Maybe he was a self-centered prick. Here he was, clearly pissing Sans off, sending him into a depression. And all cared about was sticking around for the sex and the safety this universe offered.

He knew that wasn’t true. Despite his anger with Sans, it was more than just sex with the other two skeletons. He cared deeply about them both, and he knew that would be true even if they were back in his universe where everything had gone to shit. This world offered him safety, but it also offered him the comfort of the other two’s love.

Love.

Though the sky was still dark with grey, ominous clouds, the storm had calmed substantially. Rain dripped down in small pitter-pattering drops and the wind ruffled the leaves gently.

That connection that he associated with Sans, Papyrus, and his brother. Was that… love?

His soul hummed in his chest and he felt a mixture of warmth and regret flow through his mind.

He groaned into his blanket. Was what he doing? What was lying in the middle of the forest
accomplishing? His brother wasn’t here, couldn’t be here, and here he was crying about something that couldn’t be helped. He needed to stop wallowing in his own sorrow and get his mind back on track. If he couldn’t get his brother here right now, then he needed to take care of this universe’s Papyrus. It was his birthday, after all, and it wasn’t fair how Sans and Red had treated him the last few days.

Red pulled out the items from his hoodie pocket. His cell had gone dead yesterday. The only messages he had received over the last two days were from a worried Papyrus and that monster from the bar who had asked him if he wanted to join their anti-human club or whatever the hell it was. All that was left was his lab ID and thirty gold.

Dammit, thirty gold? What kind of gift could he buy with that? But he wasn’t about to go crawling back to the house asking for money. He’d make do with what he had.

Red disentangled himself from the soaking nest of blankets. Pausing for just a moment to gather his bearings, he took a shortcut to the downtown area. The rain had not yet abated here and the sidewalk was a sea of umbrellas as monsters and humans alike hurried through the capital. He felt the last vestiges of dry warmth leave him as the rainfall drenched him completely.

He looked down the street. There were usually sidewalk vendors peddling souvenirs, flowers, and other gifts, but they hadn’t ventured out into the storm today. Across the road was a series of high rise apartments, the embassy in all its glory, and an expensive-looking hotel. On this side of the street was Grillby’s – fat chance he was going in there again any time soon – which was bordered by a high tech computer store and an MTT-themed gift shop. The computer store was probably too rich for his bones, but maybe there would be something reasonably priced in the gift shop. Besides, didn’t Papyrus watch that channel? It seemed like something right up his alley.

He rushed into the store. As he entered, he was greeted with a tidal wave of bright pink. From the fashionable clothes to the brightly colored toys to the orange cat employee garbed in MTT-themed clothing, everything in the store screamed of this universe’s version of the garish robot.

Red walked over to a display of toys and looked at the price of one of the palm-sized Mettaton plushies lined with hot pink rhinestones. Holy shit, 150g for this tiny little thing? He threw the gaudy piece of trash back onto the shelf. He rifled through the rest of the toys and realized that his 30g wasn’t going to get him far in this store.

As he turned from the display, he nearly tripped over a mop that was scrubbing furiously at the floor. The employee was grumbling under his breath as he mopped up puddles of water that dripped from the entrance to the display. Red looked down at his clothes and realized that he was sopping wet.

“uh, sorry there, bud.”

The cat monster put on a wide grin. “It’s not a problem, sir! I’m just doing my job!” His eye twitched. “Perhaps I could suggest buying an official MTT Deluxe Umbrella?”

“uh, those wouldn’t happen to be for 30g or less, would they?”

The employee’s grin jerked at the corners. “There’s a clearance section over in the corner,” he said pointing towards the back of the store. There was a loud ding-dong at the front of the store as a large pack of tourists entered, screaming excitedly at the offerings. As they dispersed through the store, they left behind large pools of water in their wake. The cat monster slammed the mop down and returned to the cashier, muttering, “I give up.”
Red went to the back of the store and perused through the miniscule clearance rack. Most of the items were torn, broken, or revoltingly dirty. Even so, they were still too expensive. Just as he was about to give up and try another store, he found a tattered pink scarf priced at a “modest” 25g. He sighed in relief and headed to the front of the store where he was greeted with a long queue.

He looked out the window of the store. The storm was beginning to ease up – the sky was lightening, the rain slowing down, the embassy seemed to glow under a small patch of sunlight and –

His eyes swiveled back to the embassy. Was that… the Dirty Gerbil guy?

Whatever his name was, it was clearly him, and he was standing with a bunch of other monsters and a human. Weird. Didn’t that guy hate humans?

The tall, messy-haired human seemed to be directing the monsters. He pointed down the alley between the apartments and the embassy with stiff arms; one of the monsters, a snowdrake, took off, feathers dropping behind them. As the human turned to the rest of the group, Red’s soul dropped in his chest. It was that guy from weeks ago – the one that had been outside the lab taking pictures of him and Sans. He couldn’t forget those dark, dilated eyes. And yet again, he couldn’t shake that feeling of familiarity. Where had he seen this strange human before?

He couldn’t hear the group, but it was apparent that Dirty Gerbil was pissed about something. He was jabbing his finger down the alley where the snowdrake had disappeared and seemed to be yelling at the human. A moment later, the human snapped his arm back, and for just a moment, it looked like he was surrounded in an encasement of black and red-colored magic. Red blinked and the next moment, any traces of magic were gone. Dirty Gerbil was on the ground, scurrying backwards, his sunglasses askew on his face. The human, with a jerky wave of his hand, pointed towards the embassy and scowled at the monsters.

“SIR!”

Red snapped his gaze away from the window. The line in front of him had disappeared and the cashier was flashing him an obviously fake smile. Behind him, a line of humans grumbled impatiently. He walked to the cash register, gave the cat monster his scarf, and set down the 30g as he looked out the window again. The different angle made it so that his vision was impeded by the door.

The orange cat monster quickly rang up his purchase and gave Red his change and receipt. As Red grabbed the bag with the scarf and walked out of the shop, the MTT employee exclaimed, “Thanksy! Have a FABU-FUL day!”

Red stepped onto the wet sidewalk and looked across the street towards the embassy. There was no sign of Dirty Gerbil or the rest of the group. He pulled out his phone to message the monster. If Red asked, the guy was sure to let him know where to meet for whatever the fuck they were doing. But as he pressed down on the phone, he remembered that his phone was dead.

“Yes, I saw them around the building,” said a woman’s voice to his left, “but I’m not sure where they disappeared to.” He looked at the source of the noise and saw a uniformed human with braided hair and an ugly frown speaking into a handset.

If there was an officer on this case, he didn’t want to be anywhere near these monsters when they got caught. He had dealt with enough bullshit these past few weeks and he did not want to get himself or the other skeletons into more trouble by butting in where he didn’t belong. Besides, the clouds were still wringing out the last dregs of rain, and Red didn’t want his gift to get wet any
more than it already had. He put his phone away, resigning to contact the monster after he charged his phone. He wanted to know who the fuck that human was and why he thought he recognized him. After that, he’d forget all about those idiot monsters and never contact them again.

Readying himself for the confrontation that was sure to ensue when he returned, he teleported back home.

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Papyrus sat on the couch, his arms folded against his chest as he watched an MTT-themed game show with indifference. He glanced down to his phone. He had sent a text to Red about an hour earlier, begging him to talk to him and him alone, but there had been no reply. Papyrus wasn’t even sure if the other skeleton had his phone with him, and he wasn’t about to go back into Red’s room. As far as he was aware, Sans was still in there, mulling about, and Papyrus had no desire to speak to his brother at the moment.

As if sensing his thoughts, the door to Red’s room creaked open and Papyrus saw Sans’s head peek out the crack. They made eye contact before Papyrus flashed his gaze back towards the television, determined not to look at his brother.

With a small pop, Sans appeared in front of the television, hunched forward with his hands crammed deep inside his pockets.

Papyrus stared at him for a few moments before brusquely asking, “WHAT?”

Sans squirmed a bit as he quietly said, “happy birthday, paps.”

Papyrus tsked loudly. “I AM WATCHING SOMETHING RIGHT NOW. PLEASE MOVE.”

His brother reached underneath the screen and turned off the television. Papyrus averted his gaze as Sans continued to stand in front of him.

“i’m sorry, bro. i… can’t believe that i forgot.”

“WHY DO YOU THINK I CARE ABOUT THAT?”

He did care. He cared an awful lot. But he didn’t want his brother to see any tears from him over something so silly. And besides, he was much angrier about his attitude towards Red.

“i –” Sans cleared his throat. “i know you care. and i’m real sorry.”

“SORRY DOES NOT EXCUSE YOUR BEHAVIOR TODAY.” He turned his head towards Sans and glared. “AND I DO NOT MEAN YOUR FORGETFULNESS.”

His voice rising in pitch, Sans said, “if you’re talking about with red, then –”

“OF COURSE I AM TALKING ABOUT RED!” Papyrus yelled, waving his hand. “WHY, WHY WOULD YOU SAY THAT ABOUT HIS BROTHER?”

“papyrus, you can’t be serious! how can he do that to him? that’s just –”

“HE IS NOT YOU!” Papyrus screamed angrily. “STOP PUTTING YOUR PROBLEMS AND YOUR EXPERIENCES ON HIM!”

His brother was absolutely silent and Papyrus wondered if perhaps he had gone too far. All of his anger was accumulating into one ugly mess and he was being a bit harsh. But if this was the way
Sans was going to act about this, then Papyrus knew that the cold, hard truth was the only way to solve this problem.

“Sans,” he said softly, “I know why you dislike that type of behavior when it’s just you, but you cannot – absolutely, positively cannot – project your experiences onto Red. Even though he looks like you, he is not you. He probably deals with his… past in a different way.”

Sans grabbed his forearm with his other hand and seemed to close in on himself. “if that’s his way of coping, then that’s messed up,” he said with a strained voice.

“Messed up as it may be, that is his choice, and I cannot believe for a moment that his brother is at fault for that. Not with what Red has told us about him or his dreadful universe.”

Sans’s eyelights dimmed for a moment. “does his brother even know?” His voice was barely a whisper.

Papyrus didn’t know what to say. He got the impression that Red hadn’t told his brother much about either his past with Gaster or the resets. And this was another matter entirely.

As if he could sense them talking about him, Red appeared with a tiny pop by the front door. He gave a small start at the sight of them and looked away, embarrassed. He placed an MTT-labeled paper bag on the table near the door, muttering “happy birthday” quietly as he stared at the ground.

With a sudden movement, Sans rushed over to where Red stood and gave him a gigantic hug, sobbing out apology after apology.

“i’m sorry i treated you that way. i’m sorry i called your brother disgusting. i promise we’ll work to get him here. i’m sorry i dragged you to the doctor. i’m sorry, i’m sorry, i’m sorry!”

Red looked stunned. As Sans stuffed his quaking head into Red’s already-soaking chest, the gold-toothed skeleton gave a tentative pat to Sans’s back.

“i-it’s okay,” Red said as Sans continued to apologize through hiccupping sobs.

The sight was so ridiculously unfunny, but Papyrus couldn’t help but give a loud “nyeh heh heh” as Red struggled to deal with the weeping skeleton. How many times had he been on the other end of one of Sans’s breakdowns, unsure of what to do with himself? The look of absolute uncertainty on Red’s face was so priceless and so relatable. Papyrus’s short bark of laughter soon grew into a garbled mess of teary, hysterical laughter that he just couldn’t stop.

“heh,” Sans said, extracting himself from Red’s chest with a teary smile. “don’t just sit there and laugh at us, bro.”

Papyrus rushed over to the other two and scooped them up in his arms, kissing the tops of their skulls as they flailed in the air.

“what the fuck happened while i was gone?!”
Red felt a giddy warmth spread through his bones as Papyrus enveloped the two skeletons in a teary hug. He didn’t know what exactly had brought on Sans’s sudden change in attitude, nor could he figure out exactly why the two were crying, but he was relieved to finally be done with fighting. As they were gently set back on the ground, Sans wiped away his tears, chuckling softly.

“some birthday, huh?”

Papyrus gave a laugh choked with tears and Red’s face cracked into a smile for the first time in days.

They stood there for a minute, sniffing, before Sans muttered, “listen, i’m real sorry about everything, both of you. i’ve been… real crappy to everyone the last couple of weeks.”

Red wrapped an arm around his lookalike’s shoulder. “yeah, you’ve been a real piece of shit, but you know what, that’s just one thing i love about you,” he said, grinning.

Sans gave a small start and glanced at him, a blue glow blooming on his cheeks.

The weight of his words sunk in and he felt his own face warm.

He coughed and said hurriedly, “so, um, not to be a whiny bitch, but i haven’t eaten in days. you got any grub?”

Papyrus looked between the two, his grin growing bigger and bigger. He announced loudly, “THEN I WILL GO GET SOME LEFTOVERS FOR US! WAIT HERE AND WE SHALL EAT OUT HERE!”

The mention of food made his soul churn with hunger. He nodded towards the couch. His arm still wrapped around his counterpart, the two walked over to it and plopped down. From the kitchen
came the sound of Papyrus humming happily. Beside him, Sans was still sniffling and wiping up his tears, though he was smiling softly.

“sans, i’m sorry i was such an ass the other day.”

“no, it was my fault. i should’ve asked you first. and… i just want to say…” Sans trailed off, his smile faltering. “if your brother is anything like mine, he’d do anything for you. what i said was just… uncalled for.”

Red didn’t know what to say. He was glad that Sans had changed his mind about his brother, but he didn’t know how to tell him that without being a snarky asshole. Besides, as much as he loved his brother, he wasn’t sure Papyrus… was willing to do anything for him. His soul throbbed in shame as he thought of his last encounter with his brother.

He brought his hand down from Sans’s shoulder and wrung his hands together in his lap. “sans, my bro… he’s –”

Sans pat Red’s leg gently. “listen, we’re going to get him back, okay? tomorrow we’ll go to the lab and look into it. or we’ll start to pick apart the machine in the basement. we’ll do something, which is more than we have been doing.”

Red shifted guiltily. “yeah.”

“but for now,” Sans said quietly, “let’s focus on papyrus’s birthday.”

Red nodded in agreement.

“i’ve got to do a few things to prep for this surprise party i’m supposed to be throwing for him.” He rubbed at the back of his head. “y’know, decorate, get the cake,” and with an almost imperceptible whisper, he added, “get his gifts.”

“you need me to keep him distracted?”

“yeah, keep him outta the house.” He raised his voice to call into the other room, “hey paps!”

Papyrus peeked his head out of the kitchen, a worried expression on his face. “YES?”

“red here was wondering if you could pack up some food to eat outside.”

“OUTSIDE?” His eyes narrowed in confusion. “IS IT NOT RAINING? WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO GO OUT THERE?”

Red cleared his throat. “well, uh, been wanting to get outta the house, y’know? and, um, the storm’s all cleared up now.”

With the same look of confusion, Papyrus stared at the two of them for a moment. Then, suddenly, his eyes alighted with excitement and he yelled. “OF COURSE! YOU MUST WANT ME, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, TO SHOW YOU THE AREA IN THE WAY ONLY A ROYAL GUARDSMAN CAN!”

“yeah, exactly,” Red said enthusiastically.

“WORRY NOT! I SHALL PREPARE ACCORDINGLY!”

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Red and Papyrus left the house, Sans waving them off happily as they went. The rain had stopped, and the sun peeked its head out from behind great tufts of grey cloud. As they walked through the damp valley, Papyrus exclaimed happily about a spot not too far away from the house where they could eat. The taller skeleton seemed absolutely enthused about the whole venture; he kept twirling and dancing while he balanced containers of leftover soup in his hands.

Red, on the other hand, felt lethargic and hungry. He lagged behind, shuffling his feet through the wet grass as the other skeleton frolicked through the valley. When Papyrus noticed how far ahead he had gotten, he doubled back and insisted that Red crawl onto his back. He carefully enfolded his arms around the taller skeleton’s neck and shoulders and wrapped his legs around Papyrus’s torso. Once Papyrus ensured that Red was secure, he continued the journey with his trademark boundless energy, seemingly unbothered by the additional weight.

Red rested his chin on Papyrus’s shoulder, surprisingly comforted by how he was jostled up and down as Papyrus ran through the field. He thought back to when he used to carry his own brother like this through New Home. They had been kids back then, trying to evade angry shopkeepers and rival gangs of orphans who wanted them out of their territory. Papyrus had always wanted to ride on his back, whining about being too tired. With how slow his brother had been back then, Red had been happy to oblige. He wondered vaguely if Boss had enjoyed these rides as much as Red was now. Closing his eyes, he basked in the comfort that the other skeleton offered.

He didn’t know when he fell asleep, but he was jostled awake as Papyrus deposited him onto a large rock. He looked around and saw that they were sitting in a clearing on a shore of a lake. He wiped the drowsiness from his eyes and looked across the large pool of water. The area was absolutely remote. The only sign of life was a distant flock of birds that skimmed the surface of the lake. Here and there, he could see traces of the recent storm – downed trees, stray broken branches, and muddied soil. But the thing that stole his attention was the unfettered view of the blue sky over the lake. The sun shone cheerfully onto the lakeside, lighting up the otherwise lifeless shore. Red inhaled deeply, soaking in the smells of the fresh rain and pine. It was times like these when he realized how beautiful it was on the surface and just how lucky he was to have escaped the Underground.

He was jostled from his reverie when Papyrus handed him a large container of soup and a spoon. Opening it up immediately, Red shoveled warm spoonfuls of vegetables and broth into his mouth, taking no time to enjoy the flavors. His soul hummed in contentment as the food was converted into magical energy.

As he feasted, Papyrus sat on a soggy log across from him and slowly ate his own meal. He looked out over the lake and smiled.

“DO YOU LIKE IT HERE?”

Between mouthfuls, Red said, “yeah, nice place.”

“SANS AND I COME HERE SOMETIMES TO LOOK AT THE STARS.” An orange glow graced his cheeks. “IT IS VERY QUIET AND NO ONE BOTHERS US HERE. I THINK IT IS MY FAVORITE PLACE ON THE ENTIRE SURFACE.”

Red looked around at the scenery once more. “yeah, it’s beautiful.” He paused. “you like space stuff?”

“SANS DOES MORE THAN I DO, I THINK. BUT I APPRECIATE THE BEAUTY OF STARGAZING LIKE ANYONE ELSE.”
Huh. It was strange, but he felt the exact same way about space. In his universe, stars had always been the object of fascination to his brother. Papyrus had holed himself up in his room at Gaster’s lab and had read book after book about space and astronomy. When his brother had first discovered the doctor’s library, Red had listened enthusiastically to the babbling. It had been so wonderful to find a safe haven from the brutalities of the streets and he had been pleased that Papyrus had found something to be passionate about.

But as time had passed, and as Gaster’s experiments had gotten worse and worse, Red had spent less time listening to his brother’s excited blathering. He just hadn’t had the energy or the willpower to feign curiosity about the mundane subject. Eventually Papyrus had abandoned interest in it altogether. The late night reading sessions had ceased completely. There were no references to the novels in his conversations. He must have gotten bored with it.

Red wondered vaguely if Boss had kept up with the sci-fi bullshit after all those years.

As he set down his finished bowl of soup, he realized just how cold he was. He tore off his soaked hoodie and turned towards the sunlight, basking in its warmth. As the heat suffused through his bones, he picked up a stray rock from the ground and threw it into the lake, watching with pleasure as the water rippled.

“Red,” Papyrus said quietly, “do you love yourself?”

Red turned to face the other skeleton, who was staring intently at him. He felt his face warm at the question.

“You mean… sans?” Red asked, thinking back to his slip-up from earlier.

“No!” Papyrus waved his arm up and down in Red’s direction. “I mean yourself! You!”

Red didn’t know what to even say to that. It was a bizarre question.

“I guess,” he said uncertainly.

Papyrus’s brow arched in worry. “Do you ever… dislike yourself?” he said, looking Red up and down.

Red crossed his arms across his torso. “Yeah, sometimes.”

“Like… when?”

Red shrugged. He wondered what the hell had brought on this line of questioning. “I don’t know.” He didn’t exactly know when or why he hated himself, he just knew when he did.

“Do you dislike yourself today?”

He reached down and grabbed another rock and threw it into the lake. “I don’t know. This morning I hated myself, but right now…” He shrugged, not looking at Papyrus.

As he stared at the lake, another rock suddenly arced into the waters with a splash. Red looked over at the other skeleton, whose arm was still outstretched. As he stared at Papyrus, he realized just how tired he looked. There were no shadows under his eyes like there had been with Sans, but something about the way he held himself conveyed absolute exhaustion.

“Sometimes I dislike myself too.”
Red stared at him in absolute shock. “why? i mean… what the hell is there to dislike?”

Papyrus gave a faint smile, though it faltered a moment later. “Sometimes… all I see are my faults. Like this morning.”

“What? you didn’t do anything wrong this morning. me and your bro were the assholes, not you.”

Papyrus bent down and hurled another rock into the lake. “Perhaps. But that is not why –” He paused, clearly trying to come up with the right words. “This morning, when I realized that Sans forgot my birthday…” he trailed off. “Sometimes I think that I depend too much on others.”

“I don’t see how.” Red was completely alarmed now. It was one thing to deal with Sans’s depression, but it was another thing completely to hear Papyrus divulge so much.

Papyrus wrapped his arms around himself. “It’s true. It is one of my biggest faults, I think. I want people to notice me, to praise me, to be my friend.” He squeezed his arms. “And when they don’t, I truly dislike myself in that moment. I don’t think of myself as worthy of anything.”

Red was speechless. He didn’t know what to say; all he knew was that right now all he wanted to do was reach out and hug the other skeleton.

Just as he was about to get up to do so, Papyrus smiled brightly and said, “But other times I am most pleased with myself for the very same characteristics that I hate about myself.” He turned his head towards him, and Red could see tears sparkle in the sunlight. “When I make my brother happy, when a human solves a puzzle, when my friends enjoy my cooking! All of those people I am so dependent on… they make me so happy to be myself!”

“That’s… wonderful!” Red said, happy that the conversation had turned for the better, but still confused.

“I do not say this to bring attention to myself! I say this because it’s okay to dislike yourself sometimes, Red. Disliking who you are is natural. But you can’t let it consume you! You have to recognize those moments when you love yourself too!”

Red looked down at the ground. “I guess.”

“So tell me, when do you love yourself?”

“I… don’t know.” He had never really thought about anything like that before. Back in his universe, he had just tried to survive. There was no time to reflect on the moments that Papyrus spoke of. He had just seized each moment as they had come.

But Papyrus was looking eagerly at him, and he didn’t want to disappoint him. Not when he had just been so devastatingly sad and had revealed so much to him.

When did he love himself?

“I guess… i like myself when i make shitty puns.”

“Yes! You and my brother share that particular… characteristic, I think!” His smile twitched.

“And… i like it when i make you or sans… or my bro happy.”

“You often make me happy!” Papyrus exclaimed, beaming.

Red blushed, though he wondered how much of that was an exaggeration. He sure hadn’t been
making Papyrus happy lately. Plus… he didn’t seem to be making Sans happy either. Grillby had said as much, and as much of an asshole as the guy was, he knew that he was right. Red had really disrupted Sans’s life over the last two months.

Papyrus was staring at him expectantly. What was he supposed to be talking about again? What he liked about himself? His mind was filled with so much self-doubt now that he just couldn’t think of anything.

“i don’t know, paps,” he said, looking out over the lake again. “i can’t think of anything else.”

“Well,” Papyrus said gently, “from now on, think about it. Whenever you have a moment where you are proud of yourself or you are just really happy, remember it so you can do it again! I want you to love yourself as often as you can!”

“okay,” Red said softly as he threw another rock. “i hope –.” He glanced at Papyrus. “you’re happy, right?”

The other skeleton grinned brightly. “I AM QUITE HAPPY!”

There was no sign that Papyrus was lying in any way, but Red’s soul still gave an uneasy pang as he looked at the other skeleton.

A sudden buzzing noise filled the clearing, and Papyrus pulled out his phone.

“OH! SANS SAYS HE HAS BEEN TRYING TO CONTACT YOU FOR SOME TIME. DO YOU NOT HAVE YOUR PHONE?”

“oh, it’s dead, sorry.”

“WELL, HE WANTS US TO COME BACK.” He put away his phone. “HE IS PROBABLY SET UP FOR THE PARTY RIGHT NOW.”

“yeah, probab–.” He blinked in confusion. “wait, you know about the party?”

Papyrus squirmed uneasily. “ERR. YES, BUT LET US KEEP THAT INFORMATION BETWEEN US, OKAY?”

“heh. okay,” he said, pushing himself off the rock. He stretched his limbs and put his hoodie back on. It hadn’t dried, but he wasn’t about to return home to a surprise party half-naked. He grabbed Papyrus’s hand and they teleported to the front step of their home.

He stepped behind Papyrus and motioned for him to enter first. As the other skeleton opened the front door eagerly, he was greeted with a chorus of “SURPRISE!”

Papyrus’s face spread into a wide grin and he screamed, “WOWIE! YOU ALL DID THIS FOR ME?! THIS IS AMAZING!”

And despite the fact that Red knew that Papyrus was feigning surprise, Red noted just how genuine the other skeleton appeared.
Red walked into the house, hiding behind Papyrus as the taller skeleton jumped up and down in excitement. The living room was packed with guests. Looking as nervous as always, Alphys was standing next to the table, which was packed with presents and snacks. To her left stood what Red could only assume was this universe’s version of Captain Undyne, her face spread into a toothy grin. Red shuddered and cowered behind Papyrus even more. Toriel and Frisk stood next to Sans near the entrance to the kitchen, beaming happily. Throughout the rest of the room stood several other monsters, some of whom he recognized from his own universe and some of whom he had never seen in his life. There was Doggo (god, he looked different with both of his arms), Greater Dog (he was much cuddlier-looking without his armor), and two other dog monsters that he didn’t recognize (though from the way they were holding each other, he assumed they were a couple).

He had never been in a room with so many monsters except for the occasional night at Grillby’s back in his universe. But even there, the crowd was never this compacted. It reminded him of the busy streets of New Home back when he was a kid. No room to breathe and no room to escape.

Papyrus moved forward to exclaim excitedly about his gifts, revealing his presence. He could feel several pairs of eyes searching him up and down. Thankfully, Papyrus stole most of the attention away from him with his loud and demanding aura.
“WOWIE! LOOK AT ALL OF THESE GIFTS! AND DID YOU ALL MAKE THIS FOOD?!?”

The captain swept Papyrus up into a suffocating hug and bellowed, “HA! Bet you weren’t expecting all of this, huh?!?”

“NO WAY, THIS IS AMAZING!”

Someone turned on music and a catchy pop song filled the room, making the party seem even larger. The other monsters broke out into small clusters, chatting animatedly amongst themselves. Red awkwardly stood to the side, unsure whether to move and join a group or stay where he was and calm down. He compromised and decided to sit on the couch by himself, taking a deep breath in an effort to calm his racing soul.

Within the next couple of minutes, Alphys sidled near him, carrying a plate of crackers.

“U-um, hi,” she said as she shot him a flustered smile.

He stared at her icily, inwardly debating between telling her to fuck off for telling the world about the incident at the lab or greeting her as a friend.

“hi.”

She reddened. “I-it’s been a while s-since I’ve seen you or S-Sans at the lab.”

“yeah, i got sick,” he said as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

“Y-yes, Sans told me. B-but I wanted to tell you! I made you more of t-those devices! Way more!” Her look of pride gave way to nervousness again as she saw the look of confusion on Red’s face.

“Th-the ones that… t-track the time anomalies?”

“oh, yeah, that’s –” he felt his soul sink at the thought of a reset.

“that’s great. thanks.”

Alphys paused for a moment, her face stuck between embarrassment and pity. As she opened her mouth to say something, she was interrupted by Captain Undyne, who strode up and handed a glass of beer to Alphys. The lizard monster closed her mouth and looked down at the drink in disgust.

The captain took a swig of her own drink and exclaimed, “So you must be the other ‘Sans’” – she raised her right hand to mimic quotation marks – “that I’ve been hearing all about!”

“err… y-yeah,” he said, the pitch of voice higher than normal.

“Undyne, w-we’re not supposed to call him that!” She dropped her voice down to a whisper. “Th-they’re supposed to be cousins, remember?”

“Kissing cousins, huh?!” She winked at him with her good eye as she took another swill of her drink.

Red’s face warmed. The fucking captain of the Guard knew he was fucking himself. Holy shit. He leaned back from her, crossing his arms against his chest.

Alphys, whose face was entirely red, grabbed the captain’s arm and tugged. “Shh!”

“Alphys, you shush!” She tugged her arm away from Alphys. “I mean, everyone already knows!”

“W-what?! Y-you weren’t supposed to tell anyone!”
“Oh, don’t you pull that one on me, Alphs!” She grabbed the lizard monster in the crook of her elbow and gave a rough-looking noogie. The motion caused some of her beer to spill out of her glass and onto the floor.

“Pull what?!” Alphys said angrily.

“You’re trying to pretend like it wasn’t you.” Captain Undyne’s voice tightened with irritation, sending a shudder of terror through Red’s soul.

He swallowed nervously, “o-okay, um, do y-you mind if w-we drop this?”

“Fine with me,” Alphys said, though she glared daggers at the captain.

Captain Undyne scoffed and took another deep draught, emptying the glass. She smacked her lips appreciatively and smiled at Red.

“So how do you like it here?”

“it’s v-very nice.” He wrung his hands in his lap.

“What are you so damn nervous over?” Her voice was raised almost into a shout. “You’re sweating more than Alphs here when she watches one of her ‘sports’ anime.” She grabbed the untouched glass of beer out of Alphys’s claw and started to drink.

“H-hey!” Alphys exclaimed.

Ignoring the other monster, the captain continued, “I’m serious, Sans. Why are you so… flustered?”

“i-i’m not flustered, ma’am.”

“Oh. My. God! ‘Ma’am’?! Holy crap, are you like this because of me?!” She cackled. “Am I like… an asshole back where you’re from?!”

“you’re not an asshole!” Fucking hell, the last thing he needed was Captain Undyne to think he was insulting her. “y-you’re just – you’re the captain of the guard!”

“No shit!” Her voice lowered into a serious tone as she barked out, “And I can’t believe you’re sitting with such a posture, soldier! Sit up straight!”

Red straightened his back and lay his hands flat on his knees. “i d-didn’t realize –”

The captain’s smile melted away completely. “Hey, calm down. No need to be so damn formal. I get enough of that at work.” She chugged her beer, draining half the glass in one go. As she pulled away from the cup, she sighed and rolled her shoulders. “Damn, it’s been a long time since I’ve been able to unwind like this.” She turned towards the group of dogs that had congregated near the staircase. “Hey, Doggo! Thanks for booze!” Doggo waved his arm weakly and returned to his conversation.

Captain Undyne quickly downed the rest of her glass and belched loudly. “Man, that really hits the spot! I’m going to go get some more!” She whipped around and headed straight to the kitchen.

Alphys, who was still turned around to look at the group of dogs, was slow to react. Her eyes widened and followed the captain into the kitchen, calling out “w-wait, no!” behind her.

Red sighed and released the tension from his shoulders. It was bad enough to encounter Captain
Undyne on a regular day. He couldn’t even imagine how violent she could be if she were drunk. As soon as the other two monsters had disappeared around the corner, he got up from the couch. He didn’t want to be there when the captain got back. Hopefully she’d get distracted by someone else when she saw that he wasn’t there.

His eyes roamed around the room. Everyone seemed to be engaged in a lively conversation. He didn’t really want to interrupt, especially since that would require introducing himself to one of the other monsters. He just wanted a break from interacting with the others. As he scanned the room for an empty spot to just sit, he saw Frisk in the back corner of the room, hunched over a pile of papers and surrounded by colored pencils.

He walked over, stuffing his hands into his damp pockets as he went. “heya, kiddo.”

Frisk looked up and smiled. “Hi, Red.”

“you doin’ homework?”

They shook their head. “Drawing.”

“ah.” He tried to look at the notepad they were holding, but it was clutched to their chest. “mind if i join you?”

They smiled and signaled for Red to sit down. He slid down to the floor. Tired of being damp, he slipped off the soaked hoodie and threw it to the couch. Frisk handed him a piece of paper and pushed the pile of pencils between them.

“Heh. thanks, kid.” He looked down at the blank piece of paper. When was the last time he had drawn? It must’ve been at Gaster’s lab; he couldn’t recall having enough free time to do anything like that before or after his run-in with the monster. It had been so long. Still, as soon as he set his pencil to the paper, it was like greeting an old friend.

“You don’t like parties either?” Frisk asked quietly.

“nah, guess not. this is my first one, but so far,” he shrugged his shoulder and continued, “not impressed.”

They continued to draw in comfortable silence as the party continued on without them. He could hear Papyrus and Captain Undyne shouting excitedly about something and there was a chorus of whooping laughter that filled the room. Someone turned up the volume on the music, sending pounding waves of bass through the room.

“Red?” Frisk asked, barely audible over the clatter of the party.

“yeah?”

“Did you… ever find the person that can reset?” they asked with trepidation.

“i’ve been sick, so i haven’t been to the lab in like two weeks, but… no.”

“Oh.” He looked up from his drawing and saw that their face was wrinkled with anxiety as they continued to sketch in their notepad.

“listen, frisk, don’t worry about it.” They looked up at him, worry in their eyes. “i mean… we’re working on tracking whoever it is down, and if it happens again, i’m sure we’ll catch ‘em.” He shrugged. “no use worrying over something you can’t control, right?”
“Yeah,” they said with a strained voice. Frisk’s eyes darted back to their drawing, though they didn’t return to drawing. After a brief pause, they asked quietly, “Are you… mad at me?”

“What? no, kid!” Frisk continued to look concerned and he sighed. He glanced over at Sans who was doubled over, cracking up over some unheard joke with Toriel. “You know, frisk, if you’re worried about me because of sans, don’t be.” He whipped his head back to look at the teenager, whose eyes squinted at him disbelievingly. “We’re… not the same, despite how we look.”

“I know, but –”

“No buts, kid. I’m not mad at you. You’d know if I was mad. I certainly wouldn’t be sitting on ground drawing with you if that were the case.”

Frisk beamed at him and returned to their drawing. Red continued to sketch as well, tuning out the rest of the party. They sat together in comfortable silence for a few minutes before Frisk held out their drawing, nervously smiling.

“What do you think?” It was a picture of Mt. Ebott, dotted with green trees. Behind the mountain, the sky was colored with an array of pinks, oranges, and yellows, giving the drawing a warm glow. The kid had a unique style – instead of drawing with the point of the pencil, they had colored the picture with the broad side of differently-colored pencils with short strokes. It was like something out of one of those human books from the dump. Maybe humans were just good at this sort of thing.

“Damn, you’re really good at that!”

“Thanks!” they said, grinning sunnily. “Can I see yours?”

“Heh. It’s nothing special. Haven’t drawn in years.” He slid the piece of paper across the floor so Frisk could see. It was a crude drawing of Sans and Papyrus hugging each other and his brother standing behind them with his arms crossed. There were no colors and it was little more than a doodle, especially compared to Frisk’s drawing.

“Oh, is that your brother?”

“Yeah, that’s him, though you can hardly tell. Heh.”

“You can tell! It’s really good!” Their smile fell a bit. “Why is he so mad though?”

“Mad?” He looked at the sketch again and saw that he had drawn his brother with a furrowed brow. Now that he was really looking at the drawing, it looked like his Papyrus was staring at the other two skeletons with rage. “That’s just… the way he looks I guess.”

Why had he drawn him so angry?

“Oh,” their smile returning as they spoke, “I like his skull.” They pointed to his brother’s belt, which was adorned with an angry skull.

“Heh. Don’t ever let him hear you say that or I’ll never hear the end of it. I can just hear it now:’ He mimicked his brother’s high-pitched voice as he continued, “See, sans? Some people have taste unlike you!”

Frisk giggled and Red joined them, though his laughter was short-lived. He looked back at his drawing again and felt something stir in his soul.
“here,” he said, sliding the paper over further, “you can have this.” He pushed himself off the floor. “I think I’m going to… get some food. Thanks for chatting with me, kiddo.”

Frisk nodded and returned to their notepad, turning to a fresh page.

Red walked over to the table, casting his gaze downwards so as to avoid eye contact with the other monsters. When he got to the table, he grabbed a handful of crackers and stuffed them into his mouth, not tasting the food. He focused on the colorfully-wrapped gifts in front of him as he continued to dive his hands into the bowls and devoured the snacks. The noise continued to blare in the background, sending spikes of pain through his skull.

He didn’t want to be here anymore. It would be so nice to just crawl up in bed and take a nice nap. He took a deep breath and steadied himself.

Swallowing the last mouthful, he turned around and jumped backwards into the table, Captain Undyne standing inches away from him. She was gaping at him with glazed-over eyes and he could smell the alcohol on her breath.

“uh, hello again,” he said shakily.

“HOLY CRAP!” she yelled.

He jolted back, knocking over the bowl of crackers. All of the guests looked in their direction with wide eyes.

“w-what?!”

“Look… you two!” she shouted, her words slurring. “You really are the same! Sans, come here!” She walked over to Sans and dragged him over to the table.

“undyne, what the hell!” he shouted angrily as he dug his heels into the ground fruitlessly.

“Dude! When you’ve got your junky hoodies off, you really do look the same!”

“heh. yeah, we look pretty similar, undyne.” Sans said, shooting a pointed look at her. “but, uh, no need to yell about it. we don’t want to advertise that exactly, y’know?”

The captain was clearly too far gone to take the fucking hint. She grabbed Red and roughly dragged him so that he was back-to-back with Sans.

“You’re shorter! Notbymuch,” she said hurriedly, slurring the words together, “but you got a good inch on him, Sans!”

Red blushed and fidgeted. He wished the rest of the room would stop staring at them. When she finally let him go, he scooted away from Sans, hoping that people would turn their attention towards him.

“Oh man, what else is different between you two?!”

Alphys came over and grabbed at Captain Undyne’s arm, quietly pleading for her to come talk to her. The captain waved her off.

“Sans! I mean the short Sans, ha! Where’d you get that tooth? It’s wicked as hell!”

Red felt his soul drop in his chest. He gave a short laugh and wrung his hands together. “guess i should’ve brushed my teeth,” he squeaked out.
“No, come on! There’s gotta be an AWESOME story behind that!”

Sans said in a voice just loud enough for those closest to hear, “undyne, drop it.”

Papyrus and Toriel looked at him with a mixture of pity and fear. Everyone was staring at him with intense curiosity. And the music. It was boring into him, reverberating through his skull.

Red’s chest heaved with quick, shallow breaths and sweat dripped down his head. He squeezed his eyes shut and tried to calm himself down.

“Oh my goodness, undyne! Is this your gift?”

“Huh?” the captain asked, befuddled.

Red opened his eyes and saw Undyne staring open-mouthed at Papyrus as he pat a large obviously sword-shaped package.

“It’s huge! Is this really for me?!”

“heck yeah! Are we opening gifts now?!” she shouted, pumping her arms into the air.

“I think that is an excellent idea!”

“mine and alph’s first!”

Red felt the attention shift away from him to Papyrus and his gifts. Feeling clammy and wobbly, he edged away from the table.

Before he could get far, Sans grabbed his arm and looked at him with concern. “are you okay?”

Red nodded and gasped out, “i’m gonna… go lay down for a bit, okay?”

He put his other hand on Red’s shoulder and looked into his eyes. “are you good to be by yourself?”

“yeah,” Red squeaked out breathlessly. “i’ll – i’ll be back later.”

Sans nodded and allowed his arms to drift back down to his sides. As soon as his counterpart’s arms were clear of his body, Red teleported to Sans’s and Papyrus’s room and collapsed on the bed. It felt like all of the air had been sucked out of him, leaving him dizzy and shaking. His vision blinked and his bones rattled loudly. Even though no one was in the room with him, it felt like everyone was still staring at him, judging him for losing control like this. He took quick, heaving breaths as he tried to ground himself to reality.

He was pathetic, absolutely pathetic for acting like this. Who the fuck freaked out like this just from being the center of attention for two seconds? No one except him. He was fucking weak.

He suddenly felt himself being shaken roughly. With a start, his vision returned – when had he stopped seeing? – and he saw Toriel kneeling down next to the bed, her worried face inches from his. It took him a moment to register that she was calling his name.

He took a great gasp of air. How long had he been out? He looked to the window and saw that it was still daytime and he could hear music and distant conversation from downstairs. It sounded like everyone was still enjoying the party, but who knew how long he had been stuck there, lost in his thoughts?
“It’s okay, Red. It’s okay,” Toriel said softly. She took out her phone and stared at the lock screen. “Repeat after me: it’s been three years, six months, and fifteen days since the last reset. You are in a different universe – a much nicer universe – and you are safe and on the surface.”

Between gasps, Red replied, “what? i know… that it’s the same day. i just – it’s not – when –?”

He tried to slow down his thinking as he took deep, shuddering breaths. “what time is it?”

Toriel looked at her phone again. “It is four in the afternoon.”

“okay, okay, four o’clock. okay, i wasn’t out long,” he said, trying to reassure himself.

“Yes, you were out for hardly any time at all,” she said, patting his arm softly. “Just long enough for Papyrus to open his gifts.”

Red took a few more rough breaths. Hardly any time at all. Good. He looked at Toriel, whose eyes were searching his face with deep concern.

“What’re you doing up here anyway?”

“Sans sent me up here. He was quite concerned about you.” She drew her hands away from Red and placed them in her lap. “He wanted to do it himself, but Undyne and Papyrus are sparring each other with the sword she got him and I believe that Sans does not… trust the situation to leave it alone.”

Red nodded and sat up. His vision swam as he realized he was still dizzy. He clutched his head with a shaky hand and swallowed nervously.

“Well, t-thanks. sorry you had to see that.”

“You do not need to apologize. I understand completely.” She sighed. “I am sorry that Undyne set you off like that. She can be quite… crass when she is drunk.”

He dismissed her with a wave of his trembling hand. “nah, to be honest with ya, she was just the cherry on my shit sundae. one thing after another, y’know?”

“I see.”

Red leaned back against the wall and took deep, calming breaths to steady himself. He was glad he hadn’t lost it downstairs. Ruining Papyrus’s birthday with one of these episodes would’ve been just perfect after the day they had all had.

Toriel cleared her throat and looked nervously at him. “Please, feel free to tell me if none of this is my business, but may I ask if everything is okay between you and Sans?”

Red shrugged. “It’s fine. we had a fight. we made up this morning. not much to say.”

“Ah, I am most pleased that you two reconciled. I have been quite concerned about the way he has been acting recently.” Red squirmed guiltily at that – another monster confirming that he was causing Sans so much trouble. “Once again, tell me if I am overstepping at all, but what did you two fight about?”

“I don’t know. a lot of shit just piled up into one big shitstorm.” He wrapped his arms around his chest. “i guess the last straw was him dragging me to his shitty doctor because he thought my bro beat me or some shit.”
“Yes,” she said shortly, “he has expressed his concerns about your brother to me.”

Red blushed. “yeah, well, it’s all fine now.”

Toriel swept her gaze over him and he could feel that judging look pierce him. “I could not help but notice how deep some of your scars are, and –”

“look, not to be rude but… The glow on his cheekbones brightened considerably. “i’m going to be blunt. i asked my bro to do all of this. i like it.”

Toriel’s head jerked back at that, but her expression softened considerably. “I see.

I actually understand completely,” she said, nodding to him. Red exhaled and felt some of the tension leave his body. He was happy that at least someone got it.

“You…” she said, trailing off, her voice wavering. She cleared her throat before continuing, “You have not done that with Sans, correct?”

“done what?”

“Bite him? Or perhaps scratch him? Anything like that?”

“n-no, why?”

“I –” she said, looking away. “Well, if I may be candid with you, please do not ever do that with him.”

“but why?”

[Discussion of past rape begins here]

“I… Perhaps…” Toriel sighed and stooped her shoulders forward. “You have seen Sans have an episode, correct?”

Red nodded. “we help each other out with ‘em.”

“That is… good. It must be easier to help someone out if you know what is going on.” She scratched at her arm and looked to the side once again. “I had to learn how to accommodate his episodes the hard way. And I must tell you, if you are able to tell that it is the same day, you are doing much better than he was when I first got to know him.”

His soul gave a small pang. “what d’you mean?

“When we first left the Underground, Sans and I were quite good friends. We hardly knew each other, it was true, but we both shared a certain chemistry that neither of us could deny.” She smiled. “He was quite a gentleman. He asked me out on several dates and it was lovely.” Her smile faltered and she looked embarrassed. “The first time I saw him… in one of his states was quite… devastating, to be honest. He and I were engaged in… a romantic embrace.” She coughed nervously. “And I can be quite… bite-y, if you take my meaning.”

She looked back at Red whose face must have been as bright as the sun at this point. He really did not want to be discussing the fucking Queen’s sex life with Sans. It felt dirty. And of all things, he had not expected Toriel of all people to be into that.

She cleared her throat and continued, “So… the first time he and I were doing such things, I bit down on his neck and he… he absolutely lost it. I had never seen him like that before, nor have I
seen him like that since.”

“What happened?”

“He threw me across the room with his magic,” she said, her voice shaking.

Red inhaled sharply. Sans threw the Queen, one of the most powerful monsters in the kingdom, across the room? That was more than a death sentence back in his universe.

“When I got up, I had been prepared to fight him. I do not take being attacked lightly. But when I got up, I could see that he was not there.”

“He teleported?” If he had attacked her, he would’ve taken a shortcut as far away as he could and would have never looked back.

“No, he was physically there, but… no one was home. It was one of his episodes, which I had never seen before. His eyes were gone and he was just sitting there, shaking. I tried to wake him up, but I must admit that I did not know what I was doing at the time. I shouted at him, shook him, slapped him, everything that I could think of, but nothing would stir him. I ended up calling Papyrus over to try to snap him out of it, but he had never seen him like that either. At least not that strong of an attack. Papyrus wasn’t able to do anything either. He was like that… for hours. And when he woke up, he thought we were still in the Underground and that he was late for work.”

Red stared at her, wide-eyed. “And you say it’s because you bit him?”

She nodded slowly. “After that, Sans and I did not see each other for some time. Not until… Papyrus got him help. When I saw him next he apologized and told me that biting and scratching set him off.”

“I don’t understand. Why?”

Toriel’s eyes widened. Her voice strained with obvious hesitation, she asked, “You had a Gaster in your universe, correct?”

Red flinched at the sudden mention of the doctor. “Y-yeah.”

“Well,” she said, wringing her paws together and looking at him nervously, “he… liked to bite Sans.”

“He bit him?!”

“Yes, during… sex.”

Red shook his head in confusion. He must have heard her wrong. “Sans had sex with Gaster?”

“Not by choice,” she said shortly.

Red covered his mouth with his hand. His soul churned horribly in chest and he felt like he was going to be sick. “Holy shit. Oh my god.”

“Did your Gaster not –? Did he –? Was he that way with you?”

“Fuck no!” His bones were rattling far louder than when Toriel had first snapped him out of his trance. The noise reverberated in the room, drowning out the sounds of the party downstairs. He just couldn’t believe this. He didn’t want to know this. Holy shit. “Why the fuck did you tell me?”
She looked scared. More scared than the Queen ever ought to look. “I should not have – I just assumed…”

Realization hit him like a ton of bricks. “you assumed… that happened to me?”

She nodded slowly. “I believe that Sans and Papyrus think the same. Sans most definitely does. He has been most worried about you. I think that he thought… that your brother…” She motioned to his scars. “That your brother was doing the same to you….”

“my brother,” his voice rising in volume, “would never do that. holy fucking shit!”

“That is a relief to hear…”

“and what the fuck?! you all judge him for this,” he leaned forward and pointed to his scars, “and you had a monster running around doing that?!?”

She frowned. “We do not let monsters run around and…”

“you do! if gaster was out doing that, you do! no one does that where i’m from!”

Her voice was cut deep with skepticism as she said, “I am sure that is not true.”

“no! they don’t! fuck, why do that when you can just kill them and get the credit?! there’s no honor in doing it! and, fuck, the queen back home would behead any monster that even thought about doing that!”

Toriel crossed her arms across her chest, her brow furrowed into a glare. “I do not know about beheading, but there certainly would have been swift and harsh punishment had I known while Gaster was still around.”

Red leaned his skull into his hands. “fuck, fuck!” The Gaster from his universe had been cruel, but this was too much. He tried to calm himself down, but the more he thought about it, the shakier he got. God, had he ever done anything to set off Sans? The other skeleton had been getting worse and worse since he had come to this universe according to basically everyone he talked to. Was it because of his scars? Every time Sans looked at him, was he setting him off? He couldn’t even blame him. Sans didn’t deserve that.

Fuck, maybe Sans had confided in Grillby about it. Maybe that’s why the asshole had been so pissed at him. He couldn’t even blame him. Sans didn’t deserve that.

He jumped back as Toriel gently reached out a paw to gently pat his arm. He tore his hands away from his face and saw that she was shaking herself. “I can see that I have upset you. I am sorry.”

He whispered, “i just can’t believe that… that anything like that could even… happen. it doesn’t even seem real. and especially to sans.”

[Discussion of past rape ends here]

“Please… do not let this affect the way you see him. He has made great strides in trying to put it all behind him. And I should not have told you. It was not my place. I just thought… with your brother…”

“my brother is perfect!” he shouted, glaring at her angrily.

Toriel sat there for a moment in silence before she whispered, “Is he?”

He was about to yell out a confirmation – his brother was fucking perfect and nothing like that
fucking shitlord, Gaster – but as he saw the look of concern on Toriel’s face, he realized that she was just worried about him. And he also recognized… that maybe he was being irrational. He thought back to his last interaction with his brother and felt his soul sink in his chest. No, his brother couldn’t have known that he had really wanted him to stop – not with their little roleplay going on – but Papyrus had been the one to refuse a safe word, not him. And Papyrus had been the one to ignore his pleas after he had left the shed. And Papyrus had been the one to stop kissing him, being with him, loving him –

It felt like something inside him had broken as the realization hit him.

In a high-pitched voice, he responded, “i – i love my brother, but no… he’s not perfect.” He scrunched up his eyes at the admission.

“No monster is perfect, Red,” Toriel said soothingly.

He felt tears well up in his sockets. “i just… i miss who he used to be.” He opened his eyes and felt the tears fall down his face. “when i first told him how i felt, years back, i thought he was going to laugh in my face and kick me to the curb. but he didn’t. he told me… that he had felt the same.”

It had been so long ago. After Red had killed that fucking monster, they both had needed time to recover. But he hadn’t had time to stop – they had needed the money or they would not have been able to pay the bills. So he had kept going and going while his brother had rested at home, recovering from both his wound and his hurt pride.

One day, after coming home from that horrible job at the Last Fall, his brother had pulled him aside and had asked him what was wrong. Red had tried to shrug him off – no use in worrying his brother over things he couldn’t help – but Papyrus had refused to let him go. Instead, his brother had pulled him into one of his rare hugs and had asked Red what was wrong. He had collapsed in his arms then, shaking with grief and exhaustion. And once he had cried himself out, Red had admitted his feelings for him – the feelings that had been building up for years – and he had been so scared that he was going to lose Papyrus forever. But no, he had returned his affections.

“But now,” Red continued, “i don’t know… he’s changed so much. i can’t even remember the last time we kissed.” He let out a choked sob that had been building in his chest and let the tears flow freely. Toriel pushed herself off of the floor and sat on the bed. She carefully pulled Red into a one-armed hug, allowing him to lean into the crook of her arm.

He was being ridiculous, he knew that. This was not nearly as horrible as Sans’s situation. And just how the hell had this turned into a conversation about his brother? Even if Papyrus didn’t love him, didn’t respect him… he was nothing like that horrible man. Gaster, and especially this universe’s Gaster, deserved a fate worse than death.

“I must confess,” Toriel said softly once Red had calmed down, “I have wondered if you had some… issues with your brother. Though they sound much more solvable than I had originally thought.”

Red wiped the tears off his face with his arm. “i don’t know. maybe.”

“You still wish to bring him here, correct?”

“Of course! i can’t just leave him in that hellhole to die alone. i can’t believe i just… abandoned him because of a stupid fucking fight! and i can’t believe i’ve left him by himself for this long. like i don’t even give a shit.”
What kind of shitty brother was he? Why hadn’t he just talked to Papyrus before he had run off?

“Do you know what I think?” Red shook his head. Toriel looked down at him seriously. “I think you should tell Sans and Papyrus all of this. And if you can get your brother here, tell him this too. It is not good to keep people you care about in the dark. You care about all of them, right?”

Red’s soul panged violently. “i love them all.”

Toriel was silent for a minute and stared at him. “I think perhaps… you should tell them that too.”

Red nodded slowly. From downstairs he could hear an increase in activity – the other monsters were shouting happily and someone had turned off the music. He sighed and pulled himself out of Toriel’s motherly embrace.

“we should… probably head down there.”

“Are you sure? I do not think Papyrus will fault you for resting. He is a very understanding monster.”

“nah, i want to be there.” And he wanted to be away from these thoughts.

Toriel nodded gently and stood up from the bed. “Very well. If you wish, we can take a ‘shortcut,’ as Sans likes to call them.”

Red walked over to her and gripped her by the arm and teleported near the front door. The party had gathered around a lit birthday cake on the living room table. In the center of the commotion, Papyrus excitedly jumped up and down. Sans, who was standing at the edge of the group, must have heard their entrance because he turned and waved at the two, grinning. Red returned the wave halfheartedly.

Toriel strode over to Sans and bent down to deliver a gentle kiss to the top of his skull. Sans smiled warmly at her and turned his attention back to the party as they started up a chorus of “happy birthday.”

Red stayed where he was, mesmerized by how normal everything seemed. How could everyone just act like everything was fine? How could Sans be so at ease with himself?

He realized with a pang of his soul that this universe was a lot more fucked up than he had given it credit for.
"When Are They Going to Rescue UF! Paps Though?" You Ask That Again, He Dies the Next Chapter

Chapter Notes

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulsex.tumblr.com. You can also find soul sex reblogs if that's your thing.

- YOU THINK I'M PLAYING WITH A TITLE LIKE THAT?
- So, so sorry about the lack of updates. Updates are going to be sparse over the next couple of months. And I can hear you guys right now: "Oh don't worry Soul it's not a big deal." But then you're going to get to the end of the chapter and be like "YOU DARE COME INTO MY HOUSE ON THE DAY OF MY DAUGHTER'S WEDDING -"
- I also went through a little writer's block, so I started a little spin-off about Grillby and Sans meeting to try to get through the block. This will update sporadically and will largely depend on when I have time/when I am going through a block.
- Thank you to Queen_of_Sintale (AO3/Tumblr) for writing a fanfic of my fanfic! A warning: This depicts noncon between UT Sans and Gaster. DO NOT READ IF YOU ARE NOT COMFORTABLE WITH THAT. However, it's pretty much canon - the writer asked me for details regarding the incident and wrote the fanfic based on those details. So if you are okay with reading noncon, this delves into Sans's history a bit. Worth It, It's Worth It: Tumblr link / AO3 link
- If you EVER do fanart for me and I haven't reblogged it or posted it here, PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE message me on tumblr or comment here! The tagging system on tumblr SUCKS and I don't get notifications for it most of the time! Thank you!
- Alternative chapter names: "He Shivered as the Other Said Those Three Words: Hot Skeleton Threesome"; "Don't Worry, Nothing Is Wrong with Sans. He's Completely Fine."; "The First Word in the Original Draft of This Chapter Was 'Boobies'"
- FYI, this chapter was reworked six times. I had to do a section over four times. IT WAS HORRIBLE. YOU GET WHAT YOU GET I DONT CARE IF IT SUCKS
- Oh, and the next chapter... is probably going to be very short. For reasons. And by short I mean less than 1000 words. Deal with it, you guys get 7k+ word chapters from me all the time. 8);
- Final part of Papyrus's birthday arc
- Thank you to following people for providing so much feedback for this stupid chapter: Psycho4Sans (Tumblr/AO3), Purrfecktlysinful (Tumblr/AO3), Eiznel (Tumblr/AO3) Guys, check out their work! Their stuff is great!
- [Edit 6/10: Made a couple of edits to one part of the smut. Might go and make a few other changes later.]

Additional tags for this chapter: Discussions of past rape, (wow that makes the rest of these tags awkward af), BIRTHDAY SEX, makeout sessions, slight voyeurism, teasing your partner, dry humping, sensitive bones, threesome, 69ing skeletons, oral sex, vaginal oral sex, blowjob, penetration, ectotongue, ectodick, ectovag
As the singing ended and Papyrus blew out the candles, Red took the opportunity to grab his hoodie off the couch while everyone was distracted. It was still damp, but he had to make sure every inch of his scarred bone was completely covered. He couldn’t just expose himself like that now that he knew he had been hurting Sans this whole time.

Papyrus, who was now wearing his new pink scarf, divvied up the cake before he joined Sans, Toriel, and Red as they ate in the corner of the room, removed from the rest of the group. They made an obvious effort to include Red in their conversation, though he barely paid attention to what the others were saying. His thoughts were still wrapped up in the discussion from upstairs. He found himself staring at Sans’s neck. How could he have missed the marks for this long? Sure, the scars were worn and faded, but he had had every opportunity to notice over the last two months. How could he have been so self-centered?

He was shaken from his thoughts as Sans tugged on his hand gently. “hey, you okay?”

Red nodded, giving Sans’s hand a small squeeze before rejoining the conversation. He couldn’t really follow the discussion – they were talking about Mettaton’s newest venture as a guest on some shitty human dancing show – but he tried his best to appear engaged and interested. He didn’t need to worry Sans more than he already had.

His soul was curled with tension throughout the evening. The conversations were uninteresting and he found himself lost in his thoughts. Captain Undyne didn’t help his anxiety; occasionally she ran up to the group, shouting in excitement about some thing or another. Every time she did so, Red would squirm nervously at the thought of being confronted by her again, which he knew did not go unnoticed by the others. The way they eyed him carefully each time made him feel incompetent and weak.

At around eight, the party broke up. Papyrus insisted that the guests help themselves to the remaining food before Sans teleported them home. Captain Undyne was particularly enthusiastic about her oversized slice of cake that she was taking home – she loudly proclaimed that she was going to time how long it took to eat it and text Papyrus right away with the results. Her drunken exclamations were abruptly cut off as Sans teleported her and a blushing Alphys back to the city.

With their departure, finally, thankfully, Papyrus and Red were alone. Red sighed as he plopped down on the couch, rolling his shoulders to try to ease some of the tension.

“I AM GOING TO CLEAN UP,” Papyrus called out tiredly as he walked into the kitchen.

Red nodded vaguely. He’d get up to help Papyrus in a minute, but for now, he just wanted to take a breather from all the stress of today. He rubbed his skull with his hand, trying to ease the tension that had built up in his bones. But dark memories swirled in his mind. The lances of icy pain that had shot through his soul as blaster after blaster had been slowly attached. The blinding, white hot pain as the determination had been pumped into his soul. The feeling of helplessness and, in the end, near insanity, as he realized that he had never really had a true choice in anything. Instead of a job like Gaster had offered, all he had become was a test subject, tortured into submission. He had just wanted to get Papyrus off the streets, give him a proper home. He hadn’t known that they would be trapped there, unable to leave, until it had been too late.

And yet now he knew that the torture had been nothing compared to what Sans had gone through. This universe’s Gaster had forced him to do all that and more, hadn’t he? In comparison, Red’s Gaster had been merciful.

He was snapped out of his thoughts by a small pop as Sans teleported back into the room. His duplicate gave him a weary smile as he sauntered over to the couch and plonked down next to
him. Red tensed up his shoulders, bringing them up to hide the scars on his neck as Sans leaned his head against his own with a sigh.

Before Red could begin to react, Sans jerked his head away. “why are you wearing this still? it’s all wet!”

Sans immediately unzipped the hoodie and tore it off, exposing Red’s marred bones to the air. Flinching away from his counterpart, he tried his best to cover his scars with his hands, though he knew his efforts were fruitless.

“woah, is everything alright?”

Red brought his knees to his chest to better hide his scars. “yeah, fine, sorry.”

There was silence for a few moments before Sans tentatively said, “listen, red, if you’re still upset about this morning, i completely understand.”

Red refused to look towards Sans. “no, not at all. don’t worry about it.”

“is it… because of the party? i’m so sorry undyne gave you so much trouble. i tried to stop her, but –”

“sans, no, don’t worry about it. i’m completely fine.”

“are you sure? you look –”

“i’m fine.”

Another few moments passed before Sans croaked out a small “okay.” Red glanced over and guilt stabbed his soul when he saw the tears forming in his lookalike’s eye sockets. Red closed his eyes and smashed his skull against his knees. This wasn’t going to work. He couldn’t just avoid talking to Sans about this. But how could he bring it up? Sighing, he lowered his knees. He’d just have to start simply.

“look, sans, i just – i don’t want you to see me like this.”

“like what?” Sans said, his voice raspy.

“like… this.” He rubbed at a particularly deep gouge on his wrist. “i don’t want you to see my scars.”

“huh? why?”

“because…” Red squeezed his eyes shut and let out a deep breath. “because i know they remind you of stuff you don’t want to think about.” He opened his eyes and looked over at Sans who was staring at him, puzzled. “you know… gaster?” The look of confusion on Sans’s face receded, replaced with a blank stare. “i just… don’t want you to zone out just because i couldn’t keep myself covered –”

Sans held out a hand commanding him to stop. “that’s… not even an issue. it never has been.” He looked Red up and down before he continued. “listen, i was worried before about your scars because i thought your bro was, y’know, using you like… like gaster did.” His eyelights flickered for a moment, but he pressed on hurriedly, “but… he doesn’t, right? you said you asked him to do all of this, right?”
Red nodded. “yeah, but…” he trailed off, unsure exactly what he wanted to say. How could he bring this up? How could he admit to him that he hadn’t gone through what he had?

Sans sighed and scratched absently at his arm. “red, i’m not sure i’m okay with you doing that to your bro.”

Red blinked at him in confusion. “huh?” Had he heard him right? What had he done to his brother?

“i mean…” He hesitated for a few moments, continuing to rub mindlessly at his arm. It was clear by the way he was avoiding Red’s gaze that he didn’t want to talk. Sighing, he finally continued, “does he even know you’re using him in that way?” He looked up at him. Red knew that his face must have been contorted with absolute bewilderment. “you know, to cope?”

“to… cope?”

Sans placed his hands in his lap and twisted them together in obvious nervousness. He was avoiding making eye contact again. “you know, getting him to bite and whatever else you make him do. paps and i were talking about it this morning and i… i just don’t know how comfortable i am with that.” He glanced up at Red, looking more nervous than ever. “i get the impression you haven’t told your bro much, especially about gaster.” He took a deep breath. “i know it’s not my place, i do, but… i think you need to talk to him about it before you make him bite you. it’s… a little messed up.”

Red’s breath hitched as he considered the implications of what Sans was saying. “holy shit, no.”

“no?”

“that’s not – no! i would never do that.”

“oh.” Sans looked back down at his hands. “i didn’t realize you had told him about gaster.”

Red swallowed nervously. “sans, i… i gotta tell you… i think there’s been a… a misunderstanding.”

“What do you mean?”

Red wrung his hands together and took a deep breath. “gaster… never bit me.”

Sans jerked his head back. “heh. well, it’s been one hell of a day for you, hasn’t it?”

“no, and he never… did anything else either.” He hurriedly added, “i mean, gaster took us off the streets, and he put us through hell with the soul experiments and determination bullshit, but… he never you know…”

Sans stared at him with his mouth slightly agape for a few moments. When he recovered, he quietly said, “wait… what? he never touched you?” When Red shook his head, Sans muttered softly, “but you said… back at the lab… you told me he had done the same to you….”

“Well, whatever i said, it didn’t happen. i only found out what gaster did to you today. before then, i had no clue, no clue at all.”

Sans winced, but gave a weak smile. “heh. well, it’s been one hell of a day for you, hasn’t it?” Bitter sarcasm cut into his words.
“sans,” Red said, his voice full of concern.

“don’t.” he barked. Perhaps realizing how harsh his tone was, Sans coughed and said more quietly, “i know this is hard to believe, but it’s been, what, sixteen years now? i’m kind of over the sympathy. no offense.”

“sorry.” Red looked down at his hands, which he continued to squeeze together nervously. Sudden realization dawned on him and looked back up at Sans. “wait, sixteen years?”

Sans gaped at him for a moment before he reached into his pocket and pulled out his cell phone. After he checked the date, he said quietly, “yeah? that’s right, sixteen years ago.” He looked back up and saw Red’s shocked face. “wait, how long ago was it for you?”

“eighteen years ago,” he said hesitantly. “h-how old were you when –?”

“when he picked us up? i was fourteen, paps was eight. we finally got out when gaster threw himself into that damn machine. i was, what… nineteen when that happened?”

Red inhaled sharply. “he had you there for five years? what the fuck, sans, holy shit.”

“was it less for you or –?”

“i was just shy of fifteen and i think paps… was nine when gaster offered me the job. we escaped when i was seventeen.”

Sans stared at him, no emotion on his face. The silence lingered for too long, and just as Red was about to say something, Sans’s mouth curved into an empty smile. “heh. two years, huh? guess when the doc wasn’t distracted, he got his work done a lot faster.”

“sans, i’m sorry.” He couldn’t think of anything else to say.

“don’t be.” Sans sighed, his fake smile slipping off his face. “red, i’m so… glad… you never had to go through that.”

Red looked down at his lap, trying to think of something to say that would sound appropriate to say to him. Nothing came to mind, and the longer he sat there, the more awkward he was making the situation. But he just couldn’t think of any words. What could you say in a situation like this?

His thoughts were interrupted as Sans leaned forward and scooped him into his lap. He wrapped his arms around him and brought their chests together in a tight hug. Leaning into Red’s shoulder with his chin, Sans whispered, “i’m just so… glad.”

Red pressed into Sans’s chest and tried to convey his remorse, his pity, his love with the motion. At least some of this must have gotten through; Sans pushed away from his shoulder and looked at him, a gentle smile on his face, no sign of hesitation or sadness as Red had expected. He smiled back, happy that there was nothing else between them. No secrets, no misunderstandings. Sans leaned forward and pressed his mouth against his in a soft skeletal kiss. Red melted into the touch.

A loud yawn emanated from the kitchen, causing the two of them to jump and clank their foreheads together. Papyrus walked into the room, his eyes closed and his arms stretched over his head.

“I CLEANED THE DISHES AND PUT AWAY THE LEFTOVERS, NO THANKS TO YOU TWO LAZYBONES,” he said teasingly. He opened his eyes and looked between the two of them bemusedly. “OH! IT LOOKS LIKE YOU TWO… TALKED?”
Red’s face warmed as he realized he was practically straddling Sans.

His lookalike blushed as well, but his grin grew bigger. “heh. yeah, bro, it was a good talk.” He turned towards Red, reaching a hand up to stroke his cheek. “but sometimes talking is overrated, right red?” he said playfully. He cocked his head, a sly grin on his face, and Red could tell he was asking permission to go further.

His soul gave an unpleasant lurch, though he couldn’t pinpoint why. Maybe… in the back of his head he was still worried about setting off one of Sans’s attacks with his scars? But Sans had assured him that it was fine. The feeling itched at the back of his mind, but he dismissed it, reassuring himself that he was being ridiculous. Red nodded his assent.

Sans cast a teasing smirk towards Papyrus before he softly grabbed the back of Red’s head and pressed their skulls together. Red didn’t hesitate in opening his mouth and conjuring his tongue as he felt the other skeleton do the same. The moment their tongues clashed together, there was a zap of energy where their magic collided. Heat suffused through Red’s skull as their appendages twirled together passionately.

Still gently holding the back of his skull, Sans leaned his chest forward, lightly pushing Red backwards against the couch cushions as their magic continued to dance together. As Red was pressed into the sofa, he wrapped his legs around Sans’s waist, desperate to maintain their embrace. Still pressed together, he felt Sans’s breath hitch against his tongue as he chuckled. Before he could question it, he felt Sans slowly grind his pelvis against his. The friction sent shivers of satisfaction up his spine, making his head spin. Moaning quietly, he thrust his hips upwards, desperate for more.

Red nearly whined with disappointment as Sans disengaged from the kiss. His lookalike smirked at him, a trail of glowing red drool trailing down from his mouth. Red released another low moan of pleasure as Sans gyrated his hips forward one more time.

Sans turned to his right, a smirk on his face. Red followed his gaze and saw Papyrus standing across the room, blushing bright orange. He was staring at the two slightly open-mouthed, but clearly excited. So excited that Red was surprised there wasn’t drool spilling out of his mouth.

A wide grin still on his face, Sans asked, “well, paps, what do you think? you want to join in our little ‘conversation’ here?”

Papyrus let out a low whine as his eyes darted between the two of them. A look of hesitation crossed his face, though it was obvious by the way he was squirming that he wanted to join the two. Whatever moment of indecision he had, it was short-lived; after a few shorts moments the lanky skeleton practically ran across the living room, all too eager to join the pair. As soon as he reached the couch, Sans grabbed him by his pink scarf and dragged him down so their skulls were level. Sans stuck his cyan tongue inside his brother’s mouth as he renewed his thrusting against Red more quickly and more harshly than before.

No longer blocked by Sans’s mouth, he gave a sharp cry as pleasure permeated his pelvic bone. Sans continued to press into him, gradually increasing his speed, leaving Red moaning and panting beneath him. He could feel his magic starting to stir below. But before anything could manifest, Sans stopped as Papyrus abruptly broke away from Sans with a loud sucking noise.

“BROTHER, NOT DOWN HERE.”

Slightly out of breath, Sans said, “huh? why not?”
He blushed brightly. “NOT ON THE COUCH.”

Sans laughed loudly and Red’s face stretched into a giddy grin.

“DON’T LAUGH! I DON’T WANT TO STAIN IT! WHAT WOULD PEOPLE THINK?”

“bro, who cares what they’d think? it’s our house.” Upon seeing the look on Papyrus’s face, he relented. “okay, okay, birthday boy. your party, your rules. but we’re definitely doing it on the couch for my birthday, okay?”

Papyrus let out a soft “nyeh” as Sans wrested himself out of Red’s grip and jumped off the couch. He grabbed Papyrus and, winking at Red, disappeared. Smiling to himself, Red took a quick shortcut to the bed in the brothers’ room. As he materialized in a reclining position at the head of the bed, Papyrus’s head fell at his feet. Sans, a wide smile on his face, climbed on top of his brother and planted a trail of kisses along his neck.


Papyrus squirmed underneath his touch, moaning softly. As Sans continued to guide his head lower and lower, Red sat up and leaned down to the taller skeleton’s head.

Grinning, he whispered, “happy birthday.” He closed the gap between them, pressing his tongue inside Papyrus’s mouth. The upside-down position left him fumbling. He pushed against the bottom of the cavity, seeking out the other skeleton’s tongue. After a few moments of awkward searching, he finally found the other’s conjured appendage. The two of them desperately clung to one another, their tongues wrestling inside Papyrus’s mouth. Red melted into the other skeleton, his soul tickling with excitement.

Papyrus’s breath hitched with a moan against Red’s tongue. Curious, Red dragged his head back, panting slightly, and looked down the taller skeleton’s body. Sans, whose head was resting in between Papyrus’s trembling legs, had already pulled off his brother’s pants and was tenderly licking along the curves of the pubic bone. Papyrus arched his spine off the bed, his arms squirming at his side. Smiling slyly, Red carefully crawled over Papyrus, and upon reaching his pelvis, joined Sans in licking along the edges of the ilium.

“MMM!” Papyrus yelled from behind.

Encouraged by the sound, Red pressed his tongue more firmly into every crook of the bone. He knew from the way that Papyrus whined and thrust his pelvis up that he was enjoying every moment. Sans, inches from Red’s face, smiled wickedly at him and moved his tongue towards Papyrus’s pubic arch. Reaching ones of his hands underneath his brother’s pelvis, he pushed the bone upwards, giving them both a better angle to continue their ministrations. As Sans began to lick harshly against the arch, Red moved from the ilium’s curves to the dips in Papyrus’s sacrum, twisting his tongue delicately in every hole. The quivering in Papyrus’s legs intensified and Red could feel the familiar tingle of magic creep along the edges of the bone.

But before he saw anything manifest, Red’s attention was abruptly drawn away as he felt his shorts tugged off of him. He tilted his head forward to look in between his legs and saw that Papyrus was leaning on his elbows, pulling away the clothing. Before he could say a word, the taller skeleton shoved his tongue against his own pubic arch.

“hnng, fuck,” Red moaned as Papyrus coiled the appendage around the bone. Shivers of pleasure spread throughout his body as the other skeleton quickly increased his tempo. His limbs weak and quavering, he slowly lowered himself onto the other skeleton’s body and allowed his head to spill
onto Papyrus’s pelvis. While he had been distracted, Papyrus had already summoned a glowing orange mound, which Sans was licking tenderly.

Red thrust his hip backwards as Papyrus continued to dip his tongue along his bone. Panting slightly, he pressed his skull forward so he could swirl his red tongue along the taller skeleton’s nub while Sans licked lazily along the slit. Papyrus moaned loudly against Red’s pelvis, shooting vibrations of pleasure through his lower half.

Exhilarated by the other skeleton’s reaction, Red increased his tempo against the sensitive ball, twisting and twirling his tongue in tiny circles. He reached his hands to Sans’s skull and dragged him forward so that the cyan appendage pressed further inside Papyrus. He watched with satisfaction as the blue tongue snaked through the translucent orange magic, pressing deeper and deeper inside. Papyrus pulled his tongue away from Red for a moment, panting and groaning at the skeletons’ treatment. When he recovered, Papyrus returned to Red’s pelvis, more enthusiastic than before. Soon Red felt his own magic forming below and he let out a sharp gasp against the orange mound as he felt a tongue wind inside his own tight opening.

With a loud smacking noise, Sans withdrew his head and removed his hands from Papyrus’s pelvis, causing the bone to fall to the bed. Red quickly pressed closer and took Sans’s place, pushing his red tongue inside the entrance. He was overwhelmed with an intoxicating citrusy taste as he thrust in and out of the organ, writhing and groaning against the opening as Papyrus did the same to him.

His head was suddenly lifted upwards from the mound by a shaking hand. Inches from his face was a bright cyan erection, dripping with glowing precum. He looked up at Sans who was looking down at him lustfully, driblets of red and orange magic smattered on his chin. Red reached upwards and brought the length closer to him, squeezing lightly at the base as he dropped his mouth around the head. As the length hit the back of Red’s throat, Sans squirmed and moaned languidly. Red moved up and down on the length, tasting the other skeleton’s sweet flavors as the droplets of precum coated the back of his tongue. God, Sans tasted so good. And fuck, he could hardly handle how good he was feeling as Papyrus continued to work his magic with that delightfully long tongue of his. He groaned against the length as Papyrus teased him.

Sans moaned and abruptly pulled away, leaving Red panting and temporarily dazed. A moment later, Red felt Papyrus’s pelvis tilt forward once again. The mound pressed into his face, giving Red full access to Papyrus once more. Sans’s length reappeared in front of him, gently brushing against the glowing orange folds. Red gasped and whined as Papyrus withdrew his tongue below.

“Sans…” Papyrus moaned languidly.

Sans wasted no time; he gently pressed the tip inside and Red watched with fascination as the glowing blue head shone through the orange right in front of him.

“SANS!” Papyrus thrust his hips, causing both Sans’s shaft to plunge further in and Red to jostle forward, his skull lightly tapping the exposed portion of his duplicate’s erection.

As Sans burrowed further inside, Red extended his tongue and lapped tenderly at where the two skeletons’ magic connected. Both Papyrus and Sans moaned lowly at the contact. Encouraged, Red returned, dipping further inside as his lookalike began to pound more passionately into his brother. Every time Sans pulled upwards, Red pressed frantically against Papyrus’s walls, and with every downward stroke, Red’s tongue was whisked away, ensnared inside Papyrus’s dripping folds.

Red moaned into the magic as he felt Papyrus’s tongue return to its ministrations. This time, however, the lanky skeleton wasn’t teasing as he had been before – he pressed the appendage all
the way to Red’s most sensitive spot, causing his hips to jerk brusquely against the sudden penetration. He keened quietly, his tongue twisting inside as Sans continued to slam into his younger brother.

“aaahn,” Sans whined from above.

Red was close. The way that Papyrus seemed to know exactly where to hit him with that long tongue of his was driving him crazy. He could hardly breathe as buzzing pleasure assaulted his bones. Continuing to rotate his hips against the other skeleton as he was impaled, Red brought a quaking hand to Papyrus’s sensitive nub and rubbed forcefully in tiny little circles.

His efforts paid off. He felt Papyrus tighten around his tongue as Sans continued to thrust over and over again. As Papyrus jabbed deep inside him, he pressed his hips backwards. With just a few more thrusts of the other skeleton’s tongue, he fell over the edge too.

“mmm!” he cried out, his moan muffled by the other two’s organs. He twitched and writhed as his walls constricted around Papyrus, satisfaction overwhelming his senses. As he came to, he felt Sans slam into his brother one last time before a flood of sweet, tangy fluid coated his tongue.

“aaah!” Sans yelled out as his body arched in a shaking orgasm.

After a few moments, Sans pulled out, allowing Red to disentangle himself from Papyrus. Panting harshly, Red rolled off of the taller skeleton’s body and onto the bed, closing his eyes and taking a moment to catch his breath. The bed jostled slightly underneath him and he cracked his eyes open as Papyrus leaned over him. Panting slightly, the taller skeleton placed his forehead against Red’s and extended his tongue outwards. Red met him halfway, and as their magic clashed together midair, he could taste his own essence mixing with the liquids that coated his tongue. The combination of their three flavors was intoxicating and it sent another shiver of pleasure down Red’s spine. They pulled apart from each other, and Red was happy to see a look of pure bliss on the other skeleton’s face.

Papyrus gave a tiny “nyeh” before he moved away. Red tilted his head upwards to follow his movement and saw Papyrus wrap his arms around his brother tenderly. Sans, his eyes closed and panting, jumped at the initial contact, but leaned into the touch, a look of contentment on his face. There was a small clank as Papyrus delivered a gentle skeleton kiss to the top of his brother’s skull.

“Thank you,” he whispered.

Sans enveloped an arm around Papyrus, smiling widely. “mmm, ’course, paps. happy birthday.” He cracked open one eye and looked up at his brother. “sorry it kinda sucked.”

Papyrus squeezed him more tightly. “It was wonderful! You did such a marvelous job with the party! And tonight was even better! I, the Great Papyrus, had an amazing day!”

Sans chuckled softly and cuddled closer to his brother. As Red lay there and watched the two skeletons embrace quietly, his soul swelled with happiness. He had half a mind to get off his lazy ass and join them. Just as he was about to, Papyrus pulled away from Sans, yawning loudly.

“Bedtime, I think, for the Great Papyrus!” he said as he stretched his arms upwards.

Red gave a tired murmur of agreement, pushed himself upwards, and crawled to the head of the bed. Sans sandwiched himself between the other two skeletons and pulled the covers over them. Red closed his eyes, feeling warm and fuzzy as he nestled into the bed. He was immensely satisfied that he was sleeping next to Sans and Papyrus again. It had been such a long couple of
weeks, sleeping all alone in that room every night. He was happy he was able to share a bed with them once more.

Papyrus’s quiet snores soon filled the air, and Red felt that familiar mixture of contentment and painful nostalgia tug at his soul. It was just like his brother, but this Papyrus… this Papyrus was just so different. He sighed quietly and pushed the thought away.

Papyrus must have been really tired if he had fallen asleep first. He couldn’t blame him. It had been the most intense day Red had experienced since coming to this universe, and he hadn’t even stayed for most of the party. But then again, maybe Papyrus hadn’t had to deal with as much stress as he and Sans had done today.

Red cracked open an eye and looked to his left. He had been expecting to see his duplicate happily slumbering, but Sans was wide awake. He was staring at the ceiling, his eyelights flickering.

Becoming more alert at the sight, Red opened his other eye and stared at Sans more intensely. The other skeleton didn’t even seem to realize he was looking at him.

“sans, you okay?” Red asked quietly.

Sans nodded, but didn’t say anything. The unpleasant feeling from earlier returned, nagging at the back of his mind, and yet again, he couldn’t explain why. The way that Sans continued to lie there, staring at the ceiling just… unnerved him.

He grasped at Sans’s hand under the covers, eliciting a small gasp from his lookalike. Sans turned to face him, his brow lined with guilt.

“sorry,” Sans whispered.

“You’ve got nothing to be sorry about.”

Sans flinched. The movement sent an aching lance through Red’s soul. Was Sans keeping something from him? Had he done something wrong? Was he imagining discomfort where there was none? He didn’t know why the way Sans was acting was making him so uncomfortable, but he wanted it to stop. He didn’t want there to be any more barriers between them.

Taking a deep breath, he interlaced his fingers with the other skeleton’s and brought their hands from under the covers to his face.

Lightly pressing his mouth against their hands, he whispered, “s-sans, you know… you know i l-love you, right?”

Sans stared at him for a moment, neither moving nor speaking. The brief pause sent a stab of pain, guilt, shame through Red’s soul. How could he have said that? Why would he think Sans would feel the same? What was thinking?

But his thoughts were interrupted as Sans gently squeezed his hand against his. “i love you too.”

His soul fluttered violently in his chest. It was as if he had been transformed. The lingering thoughts that Sans was keeping something from him were cast aside. Sans loved him. He hadn’t heard those words in so long. So, so long. He felt his eyes beginning to mist as unrestrained joy raced through his entire being. He delivered another skeletal kiss to their joined hands. Sans gave a weary smile and reached his other hand to Red’s skull and soothingly stroked it. The slight pressure tickled him, sending shivers of pleasure down his bones.

“I do. i love you a lot,” Sans said, his voice wobbling slightly.
Red smiled and cuddled closer so that their skulls were touching. He wanted to share his warm happiness with Sans. He needed to let him know how he was making him feel.

Sans chuckled softly. “let’s go to bed before we wake up paps, hmm?” He continued to brush his fingers along Red’s skull. “we can talk more tomorrow.”

Red’s soul hummed with contentment. Sleep sounded wonderful. He couldn’t believe how this day had gone from shit to shittier to shittiest to leaving him feeling better than he had felt in years.

The feeling in his chest left him feeling invincible. Nothing could bring him down right now. He’d probably feel different in the morning. After all, the sensation had definitely diminished the day after he and his brother had shared their love for another for the first time all those years ago. But for now, Red held onto that sensation.

He drifted off, soul vibrating, as Sans continued to gently sweep his hands along his skull.

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A sudden loud bang snapped Red out of his sleep. A high-pitched screaming noise bore into his skull, driving out all coherent thought. Deep vibrations rattled his entire body, leaving him breathless and aching. His soul twisted uneasily as the sensation evoked some faded memory, etched far in the back of his mind.

no, no, please don’t put me in there! i saw what happened to everyone else. please, god, no!

The noise abruptly ended, filling the air with a dense, but merciful, silence. The vibrations subsided, but his soul felt weak, as if it had just been held in a vice grip. He blinked his eyes open. As his sight returned, he realized that he was curled in a ball on the bed, his shaking hands tightly holding his skull. He felt almost like he had been held underwater for too long – every bit of him was weak and achy and his breaths came in great, heaving gasps. But with each inhale of air, he felt his soul strengthen.

From beside him, he heard Sans gasp out, “are you… two… okay?”

Red uncovered his head. Sans was laying down, hugging himself tightly as his eyelights guttered violently in his sockets. Papyrus was sitting up, his chest rising up and down as he took quick, shallow breaths.

“y-yeah. what was that?”

Papyrus twisted his head to look at the two of them. “Brother, was that –?”

Sans nodded and flung himself upwards. He jumped off the bed and reached down to grab a pair of shorts off the floor, which he promptly threw at Red.

As he hurriedly pulled on his own clothing, Sans said, “both of you, get dressed.”

Red clambered out of bed and pulled on his clothes as Papyrus did the same. “w-what’s going –?”

His sentence was interrupted as Sans gripped his arm and teleported all three of them suddenly. Red’s vision was obscured by a thick steam that filled the room in which they had appeared. Sans released his arm and walked forward into the mist. There was a loud click-click-click noise and Red’s line of sight was cleared as the clouds were sucked away by a nearby vent.

They were in the basement. At the far end of the room, the time machine was vibrating slightly
and expelling puffs of thick steam. Sans was standing just to the side of the contraption, his hand hovering over a switch labeled “VENTS.” Eyelights flickering slightly, Sans rushed to the front of the machine and pressed a button. The steel door flew open and from the machine spilled out a tall figure, clothed in black leather and accented with red garments.

Red’s soul stilled in his chest. Unthinkingly, he teleported next to the machine and bent down. The newcomer was seizing violently. His bones made loud clanking noises as his limbs convulsed against the tile floor. As Red flipped the skeleton over to face him, he nearly cried with happiness. It was him. It was him!

“papyrus!”
Always Look on the Bright Side of Life!

Chapter Notes

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulex.tumblr.com. You can also find soul sex reblogs if that’s your thing.

FANART

- Almalon drew the last scene from chapter 24 where UF!Papyrus enters the UT Universe! 8D AAAAH, GIVE IT A LOOK HERE! THEY DID SUCH A GOOD JOB!
- Although it is a work in progress, Kay-sins is drawing the first threesome scene from chapter 7! You can see a preview here!

CHAPTER NOTES

- Yes, it IS a Monty Python reference. That seems to be a theme here! :3
- This is the short chapter! I said it was going to be less than 1000 words, but heeeey, I got it up to over 1500! Woohoo!
- Heeeey, remember how I said I was originally going to put chapter 17 around here? Welllll, this is a continuation of that chapter. 8D; YUP, IT'S A FLASHBACK CHAPTER.
- Chapter 17 (and this chapter) take place a little over 2 weeks after Red traveled to the UT universe. As of chapter 24, Red has been in the UT universe for approximately 9.5 weeks.
- Alternative chapter names: "The Cocktease Chapter"
- If you EVER do fanart for me and I haven't reblogged it or posted it here, PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE message me on tumblr or comment here! The tagging system on tumblr SUCKS and I don't get notifications for it most of the time! Thank you!
- Once again, I might be slow with updates. Sorry!

Additional tags for this chapter: Unwanted medical procedure, unwanted soul touching, medical experiments

Blissful warmth. That was all Papyrus could feel.

He didn’t want to feel anything else anyway.

How long had he been lying here?

It didn’t matter. None of it mattered. He didn’t matter.

What if Sans found him like this?

His brother was gone. That was his fault. All his fault. And now there was nothing he could do to get him back.

His soul was slowly fading.
That was okay. It felt good. It felt warm.

Was that someone’s voice? Was it Sans? Was he finally with his brother again?

No. It was a woman’s voice. She was yelling.

He tuned it out. There was no point in talking to anyone except Sans.

What if she attacked him?

Then she’d get the glory of the kill and he’d be dead that much sooner.

Distantly, he could sense something happening to his body. Someone was gripping his arms together and pulling harshly. His bones were scraping against the ground. He was moving.

Were they going to throw him into the lava?

At least he’d still be warm.

He ignored the external sensations. All he wanted was sleep. Whatever the other monster did, it didn’t matter.

His soul was continuing to slip away. It was motionless in his chest. The energy inside him was quickly fading. The warmth was starting to recede. Papyrus didn’t want it to go away. He liked it. He wanted to be comfortable.

There was another voice. Higher-pitched this time. Closer to him too.

 Couldn’t they see he was sleeping? What was the point in talking to him? He wished that they would leave him alone.

Something wrapped around his chest, his arms, his legs.

Maybe they were finally killing him.

Good.

.

.

.


No. Bring it back. He wanted to be comfortable. He didn’t want to feel anything else again.

But he could block it out. It wasn’t even that hard. All it took was a little bit of effort. And a little bit of energy.

Energy that he didn’t have. But that didn’t matter.

He stopped the flow of emotion.

His soul dimmed.

He could feel it. He was about to fade away completely.
Finally.

He melted into the sensation. His soul felt looser. Lighter. Like dust.

There was nothing left to feel. Nothing. Nothing at all except… except…

PAIN.

OH GOD, IT HURT.

Something was piercing him. Jabbing him. Gnawing his soul. His entire being. It hurt. God, it hurt. Make it stop. Let him sleep. Please. PLEASE.

The pain intensified. He was BURNING. Fire was trickling into his soul.

Sensation, awareness of the world around him suddenly returned to him. He was thrashing violently, pressing his body upwards as fiercely as he could. But something was holding him down. He couldn’t move. He couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t do ANYTHING.

His soul was scorching. Something was being pumped inside him. He could feel it rush inside him, taking over everything. Tiny pinpricks of boiling pain lanced through every bone in his body. Everything hurt. Everything burned. His mind couldn’t comprehend this. It was too much. TOO MUCH.

A loud, piercing noise sent violent vibrations through his skull, adding to the discord. It took him a moment to realize it was his own voice tearing from his mouth. He was screaming. Oh god, was he ever screaming.

Sudden realization struck him.

His soul. It wasn’t in his chest. WHERE WAS HIS SOUL?

His eyes shot open.

It was bright. Far too bright. White lights from above shone directly into his eyes, blinding him temporarily.

And the pain raged on.

He needed to find his soul. Why wasn’t it here? Why wasn’t it safely tucked away inside his ribcage? He swiveled his eyes around, his vision blurred, trying to locate it. If he found it, maybe he could stop this. Please, please let it stop.

Though his vision was blurry, he could see that he was strapped to a gurney. Leather straps tore into his naked chest and limbs as he arched his spine off the stretcher, trying to escape the pain. The raging fire continued to press into his mind, his bones, everything.

And then he saw it.

His soul.

To his right stood a short, sharp-toothed yellow lizard monster wearing a pristine white lab coat and red-tinted glasses. His mind vaguely recognized her as the Royal Scientist. But neither her title nor her appearance mattered. What mattered was that, delicately held between her claws, was his soul, glowing brightly with his red magic.
WHAT WAS SHE DOING TO IT?

Piercing the center of his soul was a thick needle. The scientist was slowly pressing down on the plunger. Bright red liquid was being slowly pumped into his pulsating soul. It was burning him. It was killing him. GOD, HE HAD TO MAKE IT STOP.

His soul glowed more brightly as he summoned a wave of bones at the monster’s feet, trying to knock her down. She squeaked loudly and tripped forward, but caught herself last minute before she could fall completely. Muttering under her breath, she looked Papyrus straight in the eye as she pressed her claws harshly into the curves of his soul.

THE PAIN.

Instead of the slowly itching burning, it felt like a knife had cut directly into him. He choked on his scream and jerked violently against the gurney as the burning and stabbing combined into a swirl of mind-numbing pain. For a moment, his thoughts were drowned out by the immeasurable agony that swept through his body. It was torture, THIS WAS TORTURE.

After who knew how long, the pain from the claws subsided, leaving him trembling on the medical table. He whimpered as he realized that he was at this monster’s complete and utter mercy. Any thoughts of using magic again were immediately banished from his thoughts. He had to focus the little energy he had on surviving.

A dark shadow fell over him as the lights from overhead were blocked. Above him hovered Captain Undyne’s face, distorted with red-hot rage.

“Don’t you dare fucking attack her again or I’ll do more than burn your face, Papyrus!”

He turned away from the captain and returned his gaze to the lizard monster as she removed the depleted syringe from his soul. The pain wasn’t stopping. He gasped and groaned as waves of agony rippled through him. The Royal Scientist placed his throbbing soul back in his chest and looked up at Captain Undyne, a look of worry on her face.

The captain smiled at her reassuringly. “Thanks, Alphys. You did good.” She looked back down at him, her face contorted with disgust. “The same can’t be said for you, fuckhead! Pathetic. I can’t believe I had to use this measure on you of all monsters.”

Papyrus whimpered again and turned his head to the side, determined not to look at her. She scoffed at him and the shadow above him disappeared. Shame, coupled with the excruciating pain, burned through him. Unbidden tears dripped down the side of his face and plopped onto the medical paper beneath him. He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to will himself to regain control over himself, over these ugly emotions. No one would tolerate this disgusting display, and he couldn’t blame them. It was pathetic. He was pathetic.

“Cart him downstairs and put him with the others.”

The blinding light thankfully disappeared, though he kept his eyes shut. Odd echoes of sound reverberated in the room as the gurney was rolled across the floor. The stretcher’s wheels squeaked loudly, the Royal Scientist’s harsh wheezes blew across his face, and there was a loud smacking noise as clawed feet hit against tile. The strong chemical odors that hovered in the air left him feeling lightheaded and shaky.

Although the occasional spurt of sharp burning sent him lurching against his restraints, with each passing second, the pain that roiled through his bones lessened bit by bit. But as the pain
decreased, his emotions returned to him, stronger than ever. The giddy warmth that had enveloped him before was replaced with a rippling cacophony of emotions. Grief. Loss. Guilt. Shame. Heartbreak. Loneliness.

But there was something else that was coursing through him now. His soul pulsed with it. His bones tingled with it. He wasn’t sure he had ever felt it so strongly in his life. Not even when he was young and had thought he could take on the world. Not even when he had encountered the human, earning him his first and most important kill. Not even when… he had told his brother how he had felt back before the world had gone to shit. Before Papyrus had gone to shit.

As he lay there on the stretcher, his destination unknown, the pain still lingering in his bones, trying but failing to comprehend all that had happened to him, he was gripped by this new sensation above all others.

He was filled with determination.
Red’s happiness was dashed away in an instant as he took in the state of his brother.

What had happened to him?!

Even as Red lifted Papyrus into his arms, his brother’s head and limbs continued to seize uncontrollably. His eyes were squeezed tightly shut and, although his teeth were clenched, he could hear faint groans emanating from his mouth.

But what took his breath away was the state of his brother’s face.

It was as if someone had smashed his face into a smoldering pile of coals. His cheeks were charred with aged burns and the blackened and splintered bone gave his face a gaunt appearance. And his scar. The lower end of his scar had extended another inch, almost trailing to the top of his mouth. Red gently ran a shaking hand against the burned bone and Papyrus let out a sharp shriek at the touch. The noise sent an icy lance into Red’s soul. He hadn’t heard his brother in such pain since… since he had almost gotten himself killed all those years ago.

“papyrus!” Red called out again, shaking his brother in his arms in an attempt to stir him.

But he didn’t respond.

Red jostled his brother again, more desperately this time. “boss, i’m here! come on! y-you made it here!” His voice cracked as he yelled out, “wake up!”
Someone grasped his shoulder tightly, causing him to jump slightly. He looked up and saw Sans staring at him, his brow furrowed in concern.

“hey, it’s okay.

“it’s not okay!” Tears desperately sought escape from his sockets, but he held them back. “look at him!”

A shadow fell over him as Papyrus – this world’s Papyrus – stood next to him.

“Red,” Papyrus said soothingly, “do not worry. When you got here, you were not in the best of conditions either.”

It was true. He could vaguely recall his entry into this universe. His head had panged with excruciating pain, violent tremors had taken over his body, and he had passed out upon seeing Sans. And that had been nothing compared to when Gaster had thrown him into the machine the first time – he had not been conscious of anything until the next day when he had woken up in a medical bed, his brother sitting patiently next to him.

“see, he’s already shaking less,” Sans said.

Sure enough, his brother’s convulsions were slowing rapidly. Once the tremors had diminished to a tiny rattle, Red tried to shake him awake again.

“bro!”

There was still no response. He looked at his brother’s face and saw it was still contorted with pain.

“let’s take him inside the house,” Sans suggested quietly.

Red nodded and the three of them teleported to the living room. With strength that Red hadn’t thought him capable of, Papyrus scooped the still-quivering skeleton into his arms and easily carried him over to the couch. Red scrambled from the floor and rushed over as his brother was gently lowered onto the cushions, his long legs draped over the arms of the sofa. As soon as Papyrus backed away, he took his place by his brother’s side, kneeling on the ground and grabbing one of Boss’s hands tenderly in his own. His brother gave a low groan.

“boss,” he whispered.

Behind him, he could hear the other two skeletons talking softly, but he ignored them. Right now all that mattered was Boss.

His brother’s skull was slick with sweat and the way his face was scrunched up so tightly left Red feeling sick. At least the convulsions had died away completely. It was hardly a reassurance, but he had to hold on to something.

Red looked desperately at his brother, hungry for answers. How had he gotten those burns? Why was he in such pain? And how, how had Papyrus found his way here?

His brother gave another cry and he squeezed the gloved hand more tightly, hoping that the reassuring gesture would somehow get through the fog of the pain. It didn’t do much good; Papyrus only jerked against him.

There was a sudden crashing noise behind him. He whipped his head around and saw that Papyrus
had dropped several dishes on the stairs. Sans came rushing out of his old room holding a fresh set of linens in his hand, looking at his brother in concern. Apparently they were cleaning the room upstairs. He returned his gaze to his brother, trying to push away the irritation that crept into his soul as the racket continued behind him.

He didn’t know how long he sat there, ignoring the rest of the world as he stared at his brother, but by the time the clamor behind him ended, his brother’s face had smoothed, no longer pinched with pain. His chest rose up and down with deep, even breaths. Still, the tension in Red’s soul wouldn’t let up.

He jumped when he heard a quiet voice immediately behind him.

“Red, do you want anything to eat? It is almost morning.”

Morning? Sure enough, the first traces of daylight spilt into the living room from the front window. He vaguely wondered how long he had been sitting here.

“no thanks.” Although his back ached from the awkward position, he had no intention of getting up right now. And eating was the last thing on his mind. He felt a reassuring squeeze on his shoulder before the other skeleton walked away.

Red sighed as he firmly pressed against his brother’s hand. He tried to breathe past the tightness in his chest. He knew he was being ridiculous, and maybe he was just being stubborn, but he wanted to be here the moment Papyrus woke up. To see what had happened. To care for him. To apologize.

Wetness gathered at the corners of his eye sockets and tight pressure coiled around his ribcage. He shook his head rapidly as he took in a deep, shaking breath. He couldn’t be seen crying when Boss woke up. He’d never forgive him for such a pathetic display of emotion. He reached his hands up to hastily wipe away the bothersome tears. As he did, his brother gave a low groan. Red lowered his hands from his face immediately, his soul beat rapidly.

“papyrus!” He grabbed his brother’s right hand again, eliciting another sharp cry. He paused and lifted the gloved hand, causing Papyrus to squirm beneath him. He couldn’t be sure, but it felt different somehow. Lighter.

Swallowing past the lump in his throat, Red slowly peeled away the red glove, causing Papyrus to whimper and writhe forcefully against the couch. Red’s soul sunk in his chest as the hand was revealed. His brother’s ring and pinky phalanges were missing, cut down to the metacarpals. All that remained were little nubs of spongy bone.

Red cursed under his breath, staring at his brother in horror. What hell had he gone through in the few weeks Red had been here?!

He jerked with surprise as Sans silently slid down onto the floor next to him. The movement caused Red to jostle the injured hand slightly, provoking another grunt of pain from his brother. As he turned to look at his duplicate, he realized that his vision was clouded with tears. He was breathing quickly now, trying his best not to allow the full torrent to escape. But the moment he felt Sans’s hand on his shoulder, whatever was holding him together broke. Careful not to hurt his brother again, he carefully set down the injured hand before he threw his arms around Sans and let loose the sob buried in his chest.

“hey, hey,” Sans muttered against the side of his skull as he pat his back gently. “it’s okay. your bro’s gonna be fine.”
“look at him! his face, his hand! this is all my fault!”

“no it’s not.”

Red pulled away from the embrace and flinched at the sight of his brother’s injuries. “yes it is! if i had been there…”

“what? you could’ve stopped it?”

“you’re fucking right i would’ve!”

“red….”

He knew he sounded childish, but he was so pissed at himself. He should’ve been there. Any fucker that had done this to his brother would’ve wished that he had dusted them after he got through with them.

Sans lifted a hand to Red’s cheek. He leaned into the gentle gesture, though guilt clawed at his soul as he did so. He turned to face Sans, who smiled weakly at him.

“listen, if your bro’s here, then he must’ve really wanted to see you again. so don’t worry about what you could’ve done. what’s done is done, as my doctor likes to tell me all the time.” Sans’s eyelights flickered for a moment and his voice quavered as he pressed on, “no use dwelling on things that couldn’t be stopped. and your bro’s here, right? that’s what matters now.”

The tension in Red’s soul mixed with a rush of affection. He leaned his head against the other skeleton’s shoulder and sighed deeply.

“thanks,” he whispered.

Sans gently leaned his skull against his. Eager to show his appreciation and to find something solid to hold onto, Red firmly gripped Sans’s left hand. Closing his eyes, he melted into the embrace. He desperately tried to push down the panic in his chest, the worry that his brother might never wake up, and the fear of the unknown horrors that had befallen his brother while he had been gone.

Instead, he focused on the here and now. The distant sounds of this universe’s Papyrus as he cooked in the kitchen. The warmth of Sans’s breath on his skull. The tickling feeling that rattled his bones as Sans wrapped an arm around his back and gently brushed his cheek. Slowly, surely, his breathing calmed and the tears stopped flowing. The tension in his soul uncoiled bit by bit. As he heard Papyrus let loose a loud “NYEH” from the other room, he even allowed a tiny smile to stretch across his face.

“What the fuck,” said a raspy, high-pitched voice.

Red’s eyes shot open and there was his brother, leaning on the couch on his elbows and staring at him with wide eyes. Soul trembling with utter happiness, he pushed himself away from Sans and scampered to his brother’s side, grasping frantically at his arms.

“papyrus!” he cried out with relief. His brother was awake. He was here. He was alive! And he was…

Pissed.

Papyrus pushed Red away, causing him to tumble backwards into Sans. His skull hit the floor with a thud and for a moment his vision tilted.
Red shook his head, trying to clear his vision as he felt the sharp crackle of his brother’s magic fill the air. He hurriedly disentangled himself from Sans and looked at the double image of his brother who now stood in a fighting position near the couch. Red’s vision reluctantly returned to normal, and as it did, he realized that his brother’s eye was glowing crimson as he looked wildly between him and Sans. Confusion was etched deep into his brow and his chest heaved with quick, shallow breaths.

In the corner of his vision he saw Sans standing, ready to fight. He could feel his magic swirl in the air around them.

Hoping to stop this from going any further, Red stepped forward and called out, “it’s okay! it’s me!”

His brother turned his gaze towards him and as they made eye contact, Red felt the confusion, the anger, the pain in his eyes.

“b-boss…”

His eye continued to glow fiercely and Red couldn’t be sure that he wouldn’t attack. He never would have before, but… something seemed different about him. Something had changed.

“All three of them turned towards the entryway to the kitchen where Papyrus stood with his hands on his hips, blushing brightly but looking resolute. Red looked back at his brother who stared at the other Papyrus with absolute shock. The magic in his eye faded into a dying wisp of energy.

Red took a single step toward his brother who continued to gawk at his lookalike.

“papyrus?” he whispered as he inched forward. His brother didn’t respond. “boss, it’s me. it’s your bro.”

Finally he looked at him again, but when they made eye contact this time, the anger had given way to something else. Papyrus trembled violently and let loose a loud wail, shocking Red into stopping his slow advance. He stared, wide-eyed, as his brother’s chest was wracked with giant, heaving sobs.

It had been a long time since he had seen Papyrus like this. He hadn’t seen him truly cry since he was real young. Real, real young. In fact, the last time he had seen him shed so much as a single tear was right after Gaster had offered Red the job as his “lab assistant.” It was part of the reason he had accepted the damn position in the first place. His brother had been too loud for life on the streets. For his survival, it had been imperative to find him an actual shelter.

Red rushed forward, closing the gap between them. He started to wrap his arms around his brother’s torso, but before he could complete the motion, Papyrus grabbed his arms and pushed him back, though far more gently than last time.

“DO NOT TOUCH ME!”

Red withdrew his arms completely. “b-boss, it’s m-”

“I KNOW IT IS YOU!” He summoned a bone into his hand, swinging it without any real force behind it. “DO NOT TOUCH ME!”
His brother slid down to the ground and curled in on himself as he shook with hiccupping sobs. Red stood over him, wringing his hands together. His soul ached with the desire to rush over and cradle his brother in his arms as he would have when they were young. Back then, he would have welcomed the gesture.

But Papyrus was a different monster now, wasn’t he? To him, this emotional outburst was just another weakness. Hell, it wasn’t until recently that Red thought any different. He quivered violently as a wave of stark realization crashed over his soul. Maybe holding back that emotion just caused more problems in the long run.

They stayed like that for several minutes – his brother sobbing quietly on the floor, no one speaking, no one moving. Although Papyrus’s sobs eventually died away, he didn’t lift his head from his chest, and instead continued to sit slumped on the floor. A heavy silence fell over the group that was only broken by this universe’s Papyrus pointed coughing. Red turned to look at the other skeleton, who was sweating profusely and had adopted a shaky smile.

“BROTHER, PERHAPS WE SHOULD… GIVE THEM SOME SPACE FOR A WHILE?”

Sans eyed his brother with uncertainty. “I don’t know about that, paps.” He turned and looked at Red and the gleam in his eye told him that he didn’t want to leave him alone.

Wringing his hands together shakily, Red walked over to Sans and muttered quietly, “Come on, I can’t do this with you two hovering over my shoulder like this.”

Sans glanced over Red’s shoulder and narrowed his eyes. “Are you going to be okay with him alone?”

“I can handle myself, you know,” Red spat out. Sans returned his gaze to look at him, clearly hurt. Realizing he may have been too harsh, Red gripped one of his lookalike’s hands in his own and gave a gentle squeeze. “Sorry, sorry. It’s just… if it were your bro, you’d want some space too, right?”

Sans smiled weakly. “Yeah, you’re right. It’s just…” He quickly shot another glance over Red’s shoulder. “Just… promise me you’ll be okay.” As soon as Red nodded his assurance, Sans sighed quietly, stepped away from him, and walked into the kitchen. Papyrus gave a crooked smile before following him.

When he turned around, he saw that his brother was no longer crumpled on the ground. Instead, he was bounding up the stairs, two at a time, his arms stiff against his sides.

“Boss, wait!”

Papyrus pressed on, ignoring his plea. Grumbling, Red teleported to the top of the stairs, blocking his brother from entering the other skeletons’ room. From this angle, he could see that his brother’s brow was furrowed with anger. Red opened his mouth to speak – to tell his brother to just talk to him, to stop running away, to even look at him – but Papyrus sped past, rushing into Sans’s old room. The door slammed shut behind him with a resounding bang.

Frustration rolled over Red. He took a deep breath and counted to ten, trying to force away the tension in his soul. It was pointless – he almost felt sick with anxiety knowing that he had to confront his brother about his disappearance. But he knew that he couldn’t put it off.

Releasing the pent-up breath, he took a quick shortcut into the room. The bed was freshly made and all evidence of his illness from the past two weeks was completely gone. It was darker than
usual in the room; the window acted as the only source of light and Papyrus was currently standing in front it, his face pressed against the glass. With a start, Red realized that this was the first time his brother was seeing the surface.

He coughed to alert his brother to his presence, but he didn’t react.

“we’re above ground, y’know?” he offered uselessly.

“I CAN SEE THAT,” Papyrus replied shortly.

Red wrung his hands together and tried to smile, though he knew it probably looked more like a grimace. “well, it’s… pretty bright out there. takes some getting used to.” He chuckled humorlessly. “like the sun… y’know, the big ball in the sky? it’s –”

“I KNOW WHAT THE FUCKING SUN IS, SANS.”

Red shuffled his feet. “y-yeah, forgot you were into all that space stuff when you were a kid. probably know more than me.”

Papyrus let out a loud growl of frustration and flipped around, his arms folded across his chest. He had adopted his familiar emotionless expression, though Red could still see the vestiges of tears in his sockets.

“What the fuck is going on, SANS?”

Red wrung his hands together in front of him. “well, i thought you’d probably have a better idea than me.”

“No, I mean… who the fuck are those dopplegangers downstairs?”

“Oh, well…” He felt himself getting warm in the face. “th-they’re um…” God, how could he explain this? “uh… they’re like different versions of us?”

“Different versions of us,” Papyrus repeated coolly.

“y-yeah, we’re sorta in a different universe. the machine you used, it can hop universes apparently. it’s supposed to be a time machine, y’know?”

“I think i could have figured that out from the screen that said ‘time machine’ on it, Sans.”

“Well, sorry!” he huffed out.

“And what the fuck was it doing in our basement, by the way?!” Before Red could even open his mouth to answer, Papyrus pressed on, “You know what? never mind. What i really want to know is what the fuck you are doing here.”

“Well, i’ve been… living here? but –”

“Living here? Really?”

“I… well, i didn’t know how to get back!” Red yelled defensively. “fuck, how the fuck did you get here?! it took me years to figure out how to get that machine running and you just get it figured out in a few weeks?! i mean, fuck, papyrus, i knew you were smart, but –”
“WEEKS?!” Papyrus clenched his fists. “TRY MONTHS, SANS. ALMOST AN ENTIRE FUCKING YEAR!”

Red’s soul clenched tightly. “a year?”

His brother was pacing back and forth alongside the length of the mattress, staring at the ground. “I WAITED AND I SEARCHED AND I… I….” He stopped and looked up at Red again, his face twisted with barely suppressed emotion. “WHAT HAPPENED?!”

“well, i… got in the time machine. i didn’t think i’d end up in a different universe with no way back, but –”

“OBVIOUSLY!” Papyrus screamed. “WHAT I WANT TO KNOW IS WHY?”

“why?”

“YES, WHY! WHAT THE FUCK POSSESSED YOU TO GET IN A FUCKING TIME MACHINE IN THE FIRST PLACE?”

Why? Well, that was the question he had been asking himself over the past few weeks. How could he have just deserted his brother like that? But now that his brother was here, screaming at him like this, he was starting to remember all the reasons he had given up on everything in the first place.

“do you even remember what the fuck happened the last time we saw each other? you… you fucking wouldn’t listen to me! i told you to fucking stop, to let me down, to listen to me and you ignored me!”

“How the fuck was i supposed to know that you didn’t like it?” Papyrus screamed, looking away from him.

He dug his fingers into his palms. “Bullshit, papyrus! How many fucking times did i ask you for a god damn safe word?”

“This again? you could always handle whatev-”

“Whatever you threw at me?” He scoffed. “Obviously the fuck not! but, oh, let’s not pretend that was the only thing you did that day. do you remember what you fucking told me when you got back after leaving me there for fucking hours? you told me how pathetic i was for crying! and… and… you brought up my first kill, dammit!” He looked away from his brother, embarrassed to admit one of his greatest flaws. “you acted like i was weak for crying then too.”

“And that’s it?”

Red worked his jaw for a minute, barely restraining himself from rushing over and shaking Papyrus by the shoulders. “that’s it? that’s it? no, that’s not fucking it! you fucking treat me like shit over the last how many years? you act like i’m lazy, and fucking stupid, and… and… pathetic!” He felt the tears building up in his sockets. “the only real interaction i had with you over the last three years is fucking sex?! well, fuck you, papyrus! excuse me if i am tired of being treated like garbage!”

Red ground his teeth together, allowing the anger to flow through him like a river. It felt good to tell his brother all this. To release all the pent up frustrations from over the last few years. The unspoken woes had nagged at the back of his mind, burrowing deep into his soul. He breathed in and out, watching his brother carefully for the outburst that was sure to result.
What he hadn’t expected was for Papyrus to sit down on the bed and respond, in a voice barely above a whisper, “Fuck you.” His brother cradled his skull in his hands. “Do you know what hell I went through?”

The anger in Red’s soul combined with a fresh wave of guilt. Papyrus’s burns. His fingers. Red shook his head rapidly, as if it could help to ward off the remorse that bit at him.

“you know what, no, i don’t! and it doesn’t fucking matter!”

He didn’t deserve the bullshit Papyrus dealt him. He didn’t deserve to be treated like garbage just because his brother went through hell after he left. He deserved better.

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Papyrus stared at his brother, his soul burning with hot rage.

“Doesn’t matter? DOESN’T MATTER?!” He stamped his feet on the ground. He knew that he was allowing his control to slip away again, that he was reverting to his childhood tendencies of allowing his emotions to run free, but he didn’t care. Sans’s rant had confirmed every little insecurity about himself. Every flaw in their relationship laid bare between them. And he knew that Sans was right. It didn’t fucking matter. None of his pain mattered. All the suffering he had gone through over the last ten months hadn’t meant anything. Not to Papyrus and certainly not to Sans.

But it hurt. And he wanted to make sure Sans knew exactly what he was dismissing.

“I FUCKING FELL DOWN!”

His face warmed at the confession. Tearing his head away from his hands, he saw that his brother was staring at him with flickering eyelights.

After a moment of hesitation, Sans finally spoke. “w-what?”

“WHAT DID YOU EXPECT, SANS?!” He could feel the tears streaming down his face, pouring into the old wounds. It stung, but Papyrus had learned to ignore the pain. “I THOUGHT YOU HAD DIED! NO, NOT JUST DIED. I THOUGHT YOU HAD THROWN YOURSELF OFF A WATERFALL!”

Sans gawked at him, and there was a hint of shame to his expression now. Good. Papyrus hoped that he felt bad because… because he had gone through so much shit thanks to him. His soul pulsed with guilt at the thought, but he pushed it down as he continued to yell at him.

“But don’t worry, sans! Captain Undyne and that fucking lizard fixed everything… me… the entire fucking underground… just a quick shot and no one falls down anymore! Wowie,” he twirled his finger in the air as his voice dripped with sarcasm. “Too bad it feels like you’re being burned alive!”

His brother gasped loudly and worked his mouth a few times before he finally said, “they… they pumped everyone with determination?”

Papyrus opened his mouth to say more, but paused as he realized what his brother had said. He knew about determination? How did…? He clenched his fists, sending a fresh wave of pain through his injured right hand. That was just confirmation that Sans was keeping secrets from him. As if the time machine wasn’t any indication.

“How… how did she get so much?”
“WHAT?”

determination… you can’t just get it anywhere. i mean, they’re in the human souls, but they had to have depleted at some point, right? you said the entire underground got injected? i just don’t understand how…?

Sans was missing the point as always. Papyrus let out a howl of frustration. “NOT THAT IT FUCKING MATTERS, BUT THE FUCKING FLOWER HELPED HER WITH THAT.”

“what?! flowey?!”

And it looked like Sans knew who Flowey was. So the fucking flower hadn’t been lying. More secrets.

“YES, I HAD THE LOVELIEST CONVERSATIONS WITH FLOWEY WHILE I WAS STUCK IN THAT FUCKING LAB.”

When he had first seen the flower monster, back when Captain Undyne had made him “recover” in the lab, Papyrus had nearly attacked the creature out of shock. He had only had the briefest time to look at the flower monster when he had stolen the human soul from him all those years ago, but there had been no denying that he had grown substantially by the time Papyrus had seen him next. He had been planted in a flower pot the size of a bed, but even that hadn’t been enough for the monster. His thick, writhing roots had spilled over the edges of the pottery and onto the floor and a red glow had shimmered around his enlarged body. The flower monster’s physical changes had been obvious.

And even worse, he had made it his mission to hound Papyrus with endless questions, discussing every tiny thing with him in tedious detail. About how dreadful life had been in the Underground. His plans for the future. And, the worst torture of all, how Sans had just disappeared of the planet. Those weeks in the lab, as he had been subjected to Captain Undyne’s torture and Flowey’s cheerful, optimistic attitude, had nearly driven him insane.

“i don’t fucking understand.” Sans put a quivering hand to his head and wiped the sweat that had accumulated on his brow. “how the fuck did flowey end up in the lab?”

“CAPTAIN UNDYNE,” he spat the name out with revulsion, “FOUND HIM…. FOUND HIM… AND TALKED HIM INTO BEING HER FUCKING SLAVE.”

Oh, Flowey hadn’t thought he was a fucking slave. No, he had assured Papyrus that he was the one in complete control. He and someone he referred to as “Chara.” He had assured Papyrus that, in exchange for providing determination, Captain Undyne would only use determination on fallen monsters. That way, no one has to die! We can save them all and help all of monsterkind!

The fucking flower had made no sense. It was like he had gone crazy. And maybe he had. Determination did funny things to a monster. He had witnessed that firsthand. The substance accentuated certain traits in every monster who had been subjected to the stuff. One of his comrades in the Guard had become prone to unpredictable laughing fits. Other monsters had become lethargic and depressed, but unable to fall down completely because of the substance. Even Captain Undyne, who had insisted upon receiving an injection, had experienced side effects. After her treatment, there had been no mistaking her increased thirst for power.

And even he had experienced side effects from the determination. Control – the one thing he had sought to perfect ever since joining killing the human – had become so elusive. Ever since his injection, his emotions commanded him, much to his disgust.
So if the flower had gone mad after absorbing all that determination, it would not come as a shock.

“STUPID FUCKING FLOWER! HE RUINED EVERYTHING!” He kicked at the ground, his contempt for Flowey returning full force. For the life of him, he could not understand why the flower monster had been so trusting of Captain Undyne. It had backfired on them all. She had most certainly not upheld her side of the bargain. After she had injected herself, she had decided to give determination only to those monsters most loyal to her, fallen or not. Not that Flowey had believed it.

“So if the flower had gone mad after absorbing all that determination, it would not come as a shock.”

“BUT I SUPPOSE IT DOESN’T MATTER ACCORDING TO YOU. IT DOESN’T MATTER THAT FLOWEY LET CAPTAIN UNDYNE OVERTHROW THE KING AND QUEEN.”

“What?” Sans shook his head rapidly, sending droplets of sweat flying in the air.

“Yes, Sans,” he sniped. “She was tired of following orders, so she gathered us up, pumped us full of determination to make sure we wouldn’t fall down, and trained us to fight boss monsters.”

Papyrus shuddered as he remembered how she had kept them all under lock and key, determined not to allow a single one of them to flee. He, as well as many of his fellow guards, had so desperately wanted to jump off a waterfall during those long, grueling months. But the captain wouldn’t give them the chance. She had become especially cruel after her own determination injections.

“She poisoned the king’s tea and all hell broke loose. It took five of us to take down the queen, but in the end… we won,” she said bitterly.

Queen Toriel had nearly wiped them all out, but she hadn’t been able to withstand the combined powers of his blue magic and Captain Undyne’s green magic. Though the queen had certainly left her mark on several of his comrades.

“Holy fucking hell! Captain Undyne is leading the underground now?!”

“No, she is not leading the underground! She is dead!” A disgusting mixture of relief and sorrow stirred in his soul. “You think the monsters she forced determination on were going to let that go? She was killed within a week.”

They had been out in New Home, announcing the enactment of martial law. Two of the captain’s most loyal guards – everyone simply referred to them as 01 and 02 – had cut her down with their magic. He could still remember the look of betrayal on Captain Undyne’s severed head as it had gone flying through the air before she had dissolved into a pile of dust.

“I barely escaped New Home myself! The entire underground was in Chaos. I doubt many of those in the capital survived the onslaught.”

He recalled the mad rush to escape as the onlookers had devolved into a rioting throng, hell-bent on seizing some bit of glory for themselves. He had pushed through the group, flinging bones every which way, trying to avoid actual battle. The entire Underground had gone mad at the news of the royal family’s death. He had barely made it back to Snowdin alive. And when he had… he had not been sure why he had not just thrown himself off a waterfall. Some part of him must have hoped that his brother had somehow made it back to the house.

“What the fuck, Papyrus!” Sans started to walk towards him, his arms reaching out in obviously
what was meant to be a hug, but Papyrus glared, stopping him before he could even get halfway across the room. If his brother hugged him… if he hugged him… he’d be accepting everything. He’d be forgiving Sans.

“WELL, ACCORDING TO YOU, IT DOES NOT EVEN MATTER.”

“boss,” Sans said quietly, and the pet name stabbed at Papyrus’s soul. “you know that’s not what i mea –”

“FUCK YOU, SANS!” The tears were flowing readily now and he hated himself for it. Hated how he cared. “I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD! DEAD! AND THEN… THEN I MAKE IT BACK TO THE HOUSE AFTER ALL THAT AND I… I FIND OUT WE HAVE A BASEMENT WHERE YOU KEEP A FUCKING TIME MACHINE? I MEAN, I CAN UNDERSTAND KEEPING A SECRET, BUT I CANNOT BELIEVE YOU WOULD HIDE THAT MUCH FROM ME.”

Papyrus squeezed his eyes shut, trying to hide from the truth, but it was impossible. Sans had not trusted him with this secret… but, by the way he had been talking earlier, he also had not trusted to tell him so many things. No, from the sounds of things, his brother hated him. The knowledge tore at Papyrus’s soul in a way that nothing else could.

“But none of that mattered if I could just find you.” He opened his eyes and saw that Sans was shaking. “And when I saw the instructions on how to operate the damn machine, I hoped… I hoped that somehow I would find you.” He paused to breathe, realizing he was yelling this all in one angry breath. “It only took months to figure out how to use the damn thing. But I knew if I could figure it out, I could at least have the chance to go back and save you before you went and killed yourself.”

He hadn’t been able to recall the exact date of his brother’s disappearance, so he had used his own birthday. And he had figured that he could always just go back further and further until he found the right one.

And it hadn’t even mattered apparently. His brother hated him and had found a new place to live without him. On the surface. With different versions of himself. And from the way he had seen his brother interacting with the other two earlier, they had become very close. Closer than anyone he had ever seen act. Except when they were…

Papyrus tried to drive the thought from his mind, but he could feel the tightness building in his chest again. He recognized the sure sign that he was about to cry at full force again, and he knew he could not stop it. Could not stop the reality that was his brother abandoning him completely.

“papyrus…” Sans started to walk forward again, but he was not in the mood for his brother’s excuses, his apologies, his… anything.

“FUCK YOU! I HAVE NOTHING TO SAY TO YOU! ‘It doesn’t matter!’ it fucking matters, sans! You left me!” He let out the heavy sob that had been building in his chest. “I was all alone! All alone and you were here… here because you…” Papyrus couldn’t get the words out, couldn’t find the way to express everything he was feeling right now. He decided he just wouldn’t do it. Not until he could regain control over himself. He let out another loud howl. “Just get out!”

“boss, come on,” Sans said quietly.
Sans shuffled his feet against the floor, looking unsure if he should leave. Papyrus wanted to force him to get out, throw a bit of magic at him to let him know that he was serious. But he couldn’t. Deep down, pushing through the absolute rage he felt at the moment, he knew that he loved his brother more than anything. He could never fling magic at him like that.

Instead he clenched his fists and glared at Sans, trying to convey all of the betrayal, hatred, and fury he felt in this moment. For all of the things that his brother had said to him. For all the feelings that had built up in his soul since he had last seen him. For everything in his life. He hoped that the look would let Sans know exactly how much he wanted him gone from this room before he lost control of himself completely.

His brother stared at him for a few moments before he finally conceded and crept out of the room with his shoulders hunched. As the door clicked softly behind him, Papyrus threw himself backwards into the bed, punching the mattress over and over, sending jolts of pain through his wounded hand. Combined with his burns, which throbbed from the tears he had shed, he couldn’t stop himself from shaking with pain. But he welcomed it. It gave him something to focus on. At least physical pain he could deal with. What he couldn’t handle, what he knew in the deepest recesses of his soul, was that his brother detested him.

And he knew that was all his fault.

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As soon as Red shut the door behind him, he crumpled onto the floor, incapacitated by all that Papyrus had told him. He silently sobbed into the floor as reality hit him full force: his universe had fallen into anarchy. Although he had no intention of going back, no friends to speak of from that universe, to know that everyone he had ever met had been subjected to such torture, that the entire Underground had fallen apart… there were no words.

But the worst thing, the thing that he could never forgive himself for, was that his brother had been forced to face it all on his own. He really was the shittiest brother. Papyrus deserved better. And the way his brother had looked at him right before he had left the room… well, obviously, he felt the same.

He cried himself to sleep, knowing that there was nothing he could do or say to fix this.
When In Doubt, Fuck Yourself

Chapter Notes

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulsex.tumblr.com. You can also find soul sex and Papby reblogs if that's your thing.

-Purrfecktlysinful (Tumblr/AO3) wrote a fanfic for my fanfic! IT HAS THE BEST SOUL SEX EVER! Like seriously, this fic is hilarious and sexy! I highly recommend! Check it out: Butterfingers

- THIS CHAPTER IS 9,300 WORDS LONG! IT TOOK FOREVER TO WRITE!
- So um. Just to let everyone know: I am going on hiatus for the month of July. Sorry, I have got to study for my exam! When I get back I plan to write a bunch! You guys remember when I had a release every other day? That is a distinct possibility after I get done with my exam! And believe me, I have many, many plans for this fic! I will not be abandoning it! So I hope you guys will stick around to read! ;^;
- Alternative chapter names: "Sexy Fiesta In the Labs"; "Proper Lab Protocol"; "I Reference Flowers a Lot in This Chapter"
- Over 20k views, 1.1k kudos, and 550 followers on tumblr! ;^; THANK YOU GUYS!
YOU ARE TOO AMAZING!

Additional tags for this chapter: Soul sex, office sex, overstimulation, drool?, chair sex, ectodick, ectovag

Red lay motionless on the bed, his face warm from pressing it into the pillow all night. He felt the bed jostle underneath as Sans and Papyrus got up from beside him. Their whispers carried across the room, though he couldn't distinguish what they were saying. And quite frankly, he didn’t really give a shit. He just wanted to go back to sleep.

That had basically been the only thing he had done over the last day – sleep. After he had cried himself into a stupor in the hall yesterday, he had been awake only momentarily when someone had picked him up and carried him into the other room. In his state of delirious sleepiness, he had thought – or maybe he had hoped – that it had been his brother, carefully bringing him to bed, letting him know in his own way that everything was okay and all was forgiven. But that dream had been crushed when he had heard Sans mumble something to the skeleton holding him. Even in his tired state, he had known that could only mean that the one carrying him had to be this universe’s Papyrus. Disappointment had rankled his soul at the realization.

They had tried talking to him, asking him to wake up and eat lunch with them. But he had ignored them, feigning sleep. It hadn’t been long before they had given up and tucked him tightly into bed. He had almost immediately fallen back into a deep slumber.

But now he was awake. The other two were just being too loud – with each whisper, he became more alert, more aware of the world around him. He folded the pillow around his skull, trying to block out the noise.

He didn’t want to wake up. Waking up meant facing reality.
“Red?”

He pressed his head further into the pillow.

“Please, you should get up. At least come eat breakfast.”

He shook his head, his sleepy groan of frustration muffled by the fabric. Papyrus sighed, but thankfully said no more. For a few moments, Red thought he was finally in the clear and he was relieved that he could finally return to sleep. But, of course, the other two just wouldn’t leave him alone. The bed sank with additional weight and gentle fingers caressed his back, lingering on the grooves of his ribs, sending tiny, unwelcome shivers down his spine.

“time to get up,” Sans whispered from beside him. Red’s irritated reply was smothered by the pillow. “what was that?”

Red grumbled as he twisted to face the other skeleton. Sans’s eye sockets were underlined by dark shadows, and there was no mistaking how tired he looked, but he nevertheless greeted Red with a weak smile.

“i said i don’t wanna,” Red rasped out.

“welp, it doesn’t matter. you gotta get outta bed.”

Red responded by pulling the blankets close to his chest and closing his eyes, fully intending to go back to sleep. But a moment later, he felt Sans press more firmly into his back as the bed shifted slightly beneath him. He cracked open his eyes and saw that his lookalike had lay his head next to his and was staring at him with a half-lidded gaze. For a moment, he wondered if Sans was going to join him in sleeping the day away. The thought was oddly comforting and, despite his deep sorrow, a soft warmth enveloped his soul.

Sans continued to drag his hand up and down the back of his ribcage as he quietly asked, “you remember what we promised each other a few weeks back?” Red shook his head. “we said we’d snap each other out of it if either of us zoned out. keep each other sane, remember?”

Sans moved his hand from Red’s back and gently brushed his fingers against his skull. The motion made his soul flutter and he inclined his head towards the other skeleton.

“if i let you sleep here all day, i’d be breaking that promise.”

Sans leaned forward and, with a small clank, kissed him on the brow. Red’s bones buzzed with warmth as he pressed into the touch. When Sans leaned away, he softly trailed his fingers down the curve of Red’s skull, lingering along the vertebrae of his neck, and finally dragging languidly along his scapula.

“So get up for me, okay?”

Red sighed. The last time he had gotten out of bed for Sans like this it had gone so horribly for the both of them. Fights, chaos, and a weekend in bed all alone. And yet he just couldn’t deny him. Not now. Not after their confessions. And not now that his brother….

He pushed the thought out of his head, though he couldn’t dismiss the guilt that crept into his soul.

His bones felt heavier than usual as he slowly pushed himself into a sitting position. Papyrus, who had been standing near the door, cast a quick, wavering smile towards him before he rushed out of the room. Apparently he was full of his usual boundless energy. Red was glad for that. Papyrus, at least, deserved to be happy. He just hoped the rest of them wouldn’t bring him down.
His thoughts were interrupted as Sans tossed some clothes onto the bed next to him. “get dressed. we’re going to the lab today.”

“the lab?” He wasn’t sure what good going to the lab would do.

Red tore the dirtied blue shirt from his chest, replacing it with his own red one. As he pulled it down over his head, he could smell the floral fragrance of the fabric softener that clung to the clothing. It reminded him of Sans and Papyrus – their clothes always smelled so fresh and clean. For just a moment, he stopped to savor the scent.

“yup, we got work to do.”

“work on what exactly?” He crawled off the bed and changed into a fresh pair of shorts. “it’s not like we’re doing anything important.”

“well,” Sans said, hesitating for a moment, “we haven’t checked the time anomaly detectors in a few weeks.”

Red flinched as he was reminded of the possibility of a reset on top of everything else. “you haven’t?”

“nah, i was taking care of you while you were sick,” he said guiltily. “‘sides, you haven’t sensed anything, right? i mean, i haven’t, but…” Sans shrugged as if he couldn’t be bothered to finish the rest of the sentence, but his expression was shadowed with worry.

“no,” Red said, and his duplicate sagged with obvious relief, “but isn’t that just… proving my point? we’re not actually working on anything right now.”

Sans considered him a few moments, folding his arms across his chest. “listen, i’m sure alphs could use our help with something. those robots don’t just build themselves.” Red looked at him, puzzled by his insistence. With obvious reluctance, Sans explained, “a bit of work will do us both good. and it’s better than being holed up in this house all day.”

So that was it. He just wanted to get them out of the house. Going to the lab meant nothing. For some reason that bothered him. Maybe it was because there was no real point to anything. Or maybe it was because he knew he wasn’t really contributing. He was just a drag on everyone. A problem with no real solution. Sighing to himself, he pulled on his jacket and pushed through the door, desperate to put the room – and his thoughts – behind him.

As he walked out of the room onto the landing, Red turned his head to look down the hall. For a moment he was incapacitated as he stared at the entrance to the other room. His brother was just on the other side of that door. He was probably sitting there, hating him for everything he had done. And he couldn’t blame him. Not really. But he just wanted to tell him how sorry he was. For everything he had done.

He was stirred from his trance only when Sans gave one of his hands a gentle squeeze.

“let’s go eat,” he suggested as his face stretched into a nervous smile.

Red swallowed as he looked down the hall again. After a moment of indecision, he tugged his hand away from Sans and cast him a nervous look.

“just… just give me a sec.”

He rushed to the door and lowered his fist against the wood, his soul clenching with anticipation.
When there was no response, he knocked again and spoke his brother’s name into the door, his voice barely above a whisper. The only answer he received was silence, but it resounded more loudly than anything else could.

As he stared at the door, waiting for a response that he knew was never going to come, he felt his soul sink further and further into his chest. He knew he could just teleport into the room, see how Papyrus was doing, beg for his forgiveness. But all of that meant nothing if his brother didn’t want to see him. He pressed his skull against the wood and felt the vibrations rattle his head as he desperately knocked one last time.

A loud thump against the door caused him to jolt backwards.

“GO AWAY!”

He stood there, staring blankly at the door as he was filled with shame, anger, and an overwhelming sense of defeat. Maybe he should just go back to sleep. There seriously wasn’t a point to being up and bed sounded real nice right about now. As he made his decision, Sans came up from his left and pulled him into a side hug.

“come on,” he whispered. “let’s go eat. you can try again later.”

Red sighed and nodded, resigning himself to the fact that Sans wasn’t going to let him go back to bed. They went downstairs where Papyrus served them a fresh breakfast, though the food was flavorless to Red. Throughout the meal the two skeletons made several attempts to make conversation with him. First they told him that Papyrus was taking an additional day off “just to clean up around the house.” Then they tried to discuss the news stories they had seen last night on the television. But when it became obvious that he was not interested in talking, they thankfully left him alone, choosing instead to talk between themselves. He basked in the isolation, relieved to not have to talk to either of them while he dwelled on the conversation from yesterday.

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Red and Sans stood next to each other in silence as the elevator slowly ascended to the twentieth floor of the laboratory. The lift was crowded and by the time half the monsters had departed, Red was drenched in a thick layer of sweat. His anxiety was not helped by the fact that several monsters kept casting furtive looks at the two of them during the ride up. One brown-haired rabbit monster even had the balls to grin and wink at him as they stepped onto the fourteenth floor. He had a feeling he knew why they were all looking at him like that, and it only served to make him feel, somehow, worse than before.

By the time they got off the elevator, Red’s soul churned with an unhealthy mixture of embarrassment and guilt on top of all of the other shittiness he was feeling. As he tried to push down his emotions, the two of them pushed through the heavy doors of the twentieth floor and entered the front room. As they stepped inside, it became apparent that the mess was more out of control than usual – brightly colored robot shells and tiny mechanical parts were scattered widely around the room, no longer organized into tiny, neat piles. Alphys’s desk was covered with even more takeout containers and opened cans of soda than usual and her trash can overflowed with garbage. Sitting atop the trash heap’s peak was a bouquet of smashed and bent roses, petals strewn on the floor.

Alphys, who had clearly been tinkering with a robot in the center of the room as they had entered the room, looked up from her work. The moment she made eye contact with Red, she reddened and bunched the arms of her lab coat in her hand. After having to endure the fruits of her gossip on the elevator, her display of nervousness really fucking pissed him off.
“G-good morning, Sans. Red.”

Sans cheerfully replied, “good morning.”

Ignoring her greeting, Red walked across the room towards the door to the hall, hoping to put as much distance between them as he could before he snapped at her.

As he reached his hand to the door, Alphys shakily called out from behind, “U-um, Red?” He sighed in exasperation as he turned towards her. Her face displayed none of her usual attempts at smiling. “I, um, just w-wanted to say s-sorry for how Undyne treated you at the party. S-she was pretty drunk, so I d-don’t think she knew she was making you uncomfortable.” She pulled on the arms of her lab coat. “B-but that’s no excuse! S-so I’m s-sorry she did that!” She bowed her head and continued to squirm nervously.

As Red looked at her, his soul overflowed with rage. He knew he was angrier than he ought to be, but he couldn’t stop himself from yelling at her.

“you’re saying sorry for what undyne did?! maybe say sorry for what you did!”

Alphys’s blush deepened as she stammered incoherently in response.

Sans looked at him with wide eyes. “wait, what’re you tal–?”

“she told everyone about… about us.” His face warmed considerably. “the whole city knows about… us… on the floor… in the other room.”

Sans’s face turned a deep shade of cyan. “wait, what? alphas, what the hell?”

Alphys finally found her tongue. “I-I swear it wasn’t me! I mean… I think that was Undyne too… I’m so sorry. I didn’t think she’d tell…”

“well why the fuck did you tell her? that was none of her fucking business!”

“I – well, she promised she wouldn’t say anything!”

“yeah, right, because a promise is gonna ensure that. i have a hard time believing that you just happened to tell the captain of the royal guard about it and no one else. you must think we’re pretty fucking dumb…”

“She’s… she’s my wife, of course I didn’t…” She eyes became watery. “I didn’t think she’d just break a promise like that. And she said she wouldn’t say anything.” She pushed her glasses up and wiped her eyes on her sleeve, sniffing loudly. “I’m so sorry, really.”

Red stared at her, speechless. He had no idea that the two monsters were together. His soul gave a pang. Even though their situations were completely different, he couldn’t help but relate to her. She had fucked up just like he had with his brother.

Sans sighed and rubbed his face. “it’s okay, alphas, but… does the entire city really know?”

She ducked her head and didn’t make eye contact as she continued to blush. “I mean… not everyone. T-that would be impossible, but…”

“well, that’s real nice,” Sans grumbled. “good to know everyone’s aware. maybe… next time don’t tell undyne, okay?”

Alphys nodded quickly, muttering another “sorry” under her breath. Sans stood there for a few
moments, shaking his head, before he moved towards the door to the other room and beckoned Red to join him. Before they stepped into the hall, Red gave a final glance towards the lizard monster and saw that although she had returned to her work, she had dissolved into silent tears. Uneasiness filled his soul at the sight.

As the door closed behind them, Sans mumbled lowly, “gonna grab a few things for us to work on, ‘kay? you good with checking the sensor feed?” Red nodded and they parted through their respective doors.

He sat down at his desk in the tiny office that branched off the main room and turned on the computer. As it booted up, he pressed his palms against his eyes and sighed. Somehow he felt even shittier than when he had woken up this morning. For some reason, the fact that he had had no clue that Alphys and Undyne were together really bothered him. He wasn’t even sure why. Maybe it was because he had treated her so rudely just now. And fuck, he couldn’t blame Alphys for telling her wife that. He would have done the same for the monsters he loved, even if they happened to be loudmouths like Undyne clearly was.

He wondered if the two were a couple back in his universe. Getting to know either of those monsters was a near impossibility back there. After all, Captain Undyne had only ever talked to him when she had come to inspect the Snowdin posts. And when she had, all she had ever done was rebuke him for slacking off in his duties. And Dr. Alphys had never said more than a few words when she had worked under Gaster. But despite this, he wondered if the two found each other back in the other universe. Maybe that relationship had crossed universes like his and his brother’s.

And then it hit him – it didn’t even matter. Whether or not Undyne and Alphys were together in his universe was entirely pointless speculation. Captain Undyne was dead. The Underground was in chaos. There was no home to return to even if he wanted to. And the truth was, the only monster from home that had really mattered, Papyrus, was safe. But despite that they were in the same universe, with how distant they were, he may as well have been separated from him by the damn time machine.

Warm tears pooled in his hands. He was alone. Utterly isolated from the monster he had shared all of his burdens with over the years. All because he had given up on him. Red was the biggest fuck up.

“red?”

He jumped at Sans’s soft voice, though he refused to look at him, embarrassed by his emotional outburst. He pressed his face more firmly into his hands and gave a low sob. There was a jangling noise as the other skeleton set something down and moments later he heard him close the door. He felt the chair rotate beneath him and a moment later he was pulled into a tight hug.

“no, please… tell me what’s wrong.” Red shook his head, but Sans persisted. “come on, you can tell me. it’s your bro, right?”

He dropped his hands from his face and let out a hiccupping sob as Sans dropped his chin onto Red’s shoulder. “papyrus hates me!”

“i’m sure that’s not tr–”

“he does! and i deserve it! i’m a piece of shit! i can’t believe… can’t believe i just…” He let out a growl of frustration, unsure how much he could – or hell, wanted – to articulate. “i fucking hate it! i hate what i did! why the fuck am i such a fucking idiot?!”
“stop, stop.” Sans backed up a bit and cradled Red’s face in his hands. “you can’t hate yourself that much.”

“and why not?!”

“because you don’t deserve it. i don’t know what your bro said to you yesterday, but –”

“that’s right, you don’t! if you did, you’d hate me too!”

“i doubt that.” Sans brushed Red’s cheek with the tips of his fingers, but Red flinched away at the tickling motion. His duplicate sighed and looked him directly in the eyes, his eyelights unwavering. “tell me what happened then.”

His bones rattled slightly as he confessed, “my universe… everyone’s dead. the king, the queen, captain undyne. apparently it’s fucking anarchy and from the sound of it, there’s no going back.” He let out another sob. “it’s like… my home, as shitty as it fucking was, it’s gone!”

Sans’s eyes widened, and when he didn’t respond immediately, Red burst into incoherent tears.

“woah, woah. i don’t understand –”

“what’s not to understand, sans? it’s fucking gone!”

“no, no, i don’t understand how this is your fault.”

Red blinked. “i don’t kn–” He took a deep breath. “i could’ve stopped it!”

“how?”

“i just could’ve!” He wiped away the tears that clouded his vision to get a better view of Sans who was frowning at him and shaking his head.

“i don’t know how you could’ve stopped all of that.”

“well, i could’ve helped papyrus at least! he fucking fell down!” His soul shuddered in his chest at the admission.

Sans’s eyelights flickered precariously. “what?”

“yeah! fell down and then pumped full of fucking determination! just like us!” He flinched as he realized he had failed to keep his brother safe. All those years ago he had sworn to protect Papyrus from Gaster’s experiments, and yet he had allowed him to suffer through all that over nothing. “god, how could i have just left him there!” He sobbed. “no wonder he fucking hates me!”

Sans shook Red’s skull in his hands slightly, forcing him open his eyes. “he said that? that he hates you?”

“he didn’t need to say it! the way he was talking – no, the way he was looking at me. it’s fucking obvious and i don’t fucking blame him!”

Sans hesitated a moment, grinding his teeth together quietly before he finally spat out, “if that’s true, then that’s bullshit.” His words shocked Red into silence. He couldn’t recall ever hearing Sans swear before. His lookalike continued, more softly this time, “you don’t deserve to be hated – or to hate yourself – for something like that. especially since what happened, how you got here, was clearly a mistake.” Sans reached a hand to Red’s face and wiped away the tears tenderly. “how the hell could you have known that you’d end up here?”
Red was stunned, his soul hesitantly unknotting in his chest. What Sans had said was true. He really hadn’t meant to travel here. Hell, he hadn’t really anticipated time traveling at all. Sure, he had figured the damn machine out, but it was completely by accident. Not to mention that he had set the destination time for the same exact same second he had left. If he had really intended to time travel, to leave his brother behind completely, he would haven’t done that. He had just been tinkering, trying not to give up completely on his sad little existence back in his old universe.

Sans suddenly stood up and backed away from the chair, taking off his hoodie and casting it to the side. His breathing quickened a bit as he pulled the hem of his shirt from his body and dipped his hand inside. Red stared in shock as his duplicate slowly lowered his hand, revealing his soul. Sans looked at his quivering hand and took a deep breath before offering the white organ to him.

“here,” he said, his voice shaking.

Red stared at the proffered soul. “what?”

“just…” Sans swallowed nervously. “just take it for a sec.”

He hesitated for a moment before he softly grabbed the soul in his right hand. The moment he made contact, a trickle of emotion channeled through him; he could distantly sense a nervous energy emanating from the vibrating soul sitting in his outstretched hand.

“why are you –?”

Before Red could finish the sentence, Sans suddenly sat down on his lap, stretching his legs on either side of chair. He leaned forward so that their chests were touching and Red had to quickly move the hand that held Sans’s soul so that it wouldn’t be crushed between them. His lookalike’s bones rattled against him as he took in deep, shaky breaths.

Sans whispered, “just… just feel.”

Red closed his eyes as a sudden influx of emotion overpowered him. The nervous energy that had trickled through his mind was replaced with a fuzzy warmth that pressed against his chest. The sensation poured into him, leaving him giddy and excited. The contrast between his mood now and a few moments ago was overwhelming – it seemed impossible to move between such extremes in a matter of seconds. As he concentrated on the emotion, he realized with a pang of his own soul that it was the same feeling he had experienced the other night when they had told each other they loved each other. And like then, he was transformed – the corners of his mouth were upturned into a smile, he shivered against Sans, and his soul fluttered violently.

As he let the sensation wash over him, he could sense different layers to the channel of emotion radiating from Sans. There was that excited nervousness from just moments before. A subtle sadness that lingered behind the warmth. A tingle of pity that bit at the wave of loving affection. And at the very edges, undercutting everything, was the hint of ugly jealousy.

Red opened his eyes and stared at Sans, who was looking at him lovingly even if he was still shaking slightly in his lap. Jealousy? What did he have to be jealous of?

Sans put his hand to Red’s face and stroked it soothingly, sending that familiar tickling sensation down his spine. “you feel that, right? it’s everything i feel for you.” He put his forehead against Red’s, and the intensity of his gaze was breathtaking. “if your bro hates you – and y’know, i don’t know if that’s really true – but even if he does, just know that i love you.” He pressed his mouth against his to deliver a small skeletal kiss. “i love you so much.”
The loving adoration cut through all of the other emotions again, filling Red’s mind. He was so overwhelmed by it, tears formed in the corners of his sockets, misting his vision. It was just so invigorating. Wrapping his left arm around Sans’s body, he pulled him in as closely as possible, trying to convey just how much he appreciated the gesture. It was hard to believe that all of that love was directed towards him. How could anyone feel that way about him?

Though he knew that it was exactly how he felt towards Sans.

“hold on a sec,” Red whispered.

He softly pressed the other skeleton backwards so that there was room to maneuver between them. Carefully balancing Sans’s soul in his other hand, he reached underneath his shirt and into his ribcage. For the briefest of moments, he hesitated. Could he really do this? No one just handed their soul over to another monster. It was a fucking death wish. Sans would literally be holding his life in his hands.

But he wanted Sans to know… to know exactly what he meant to him.

He took a deep breath and grasped his soul. It felt bizarre touching his own soul like this; his mind felt woozy and almost giddy with exhilaration as he brought it out in between them.

With his hand violently quaking, he extended his soul towards the other skeleton and said, “t-take it.”

Sans looked at him, his brow furrowed. “you sure?”

When he nodded his assent, Sans gently clasped his hand around the soul. The moment his delicate fingers wrapped around the edges, Red jolted against the other skeleton as a powerful shiver ran through his bones. His breath quickened and he could feel sweat gather on his skull as Sans gently maneuvered the soul to lay flat in his hand. It felt so strange to have his soul apart from him and it was even stranger to trust someone so completely.

After he took a few moments to adjust to the odd sensation, he looked at Sans and allowed all of his emotions for the other skeleton to flow through him. He hoped that he was conveying all of his unrestrained love and giddy happiness for the other skeleton just as he had done for him. And as Sans cast a relaxed smile at him, his gaze half-lidded, Red could tell that he had succeeded.

He leaned forward and whispered against Sans’s skull, “i love you too.”

As the words echoed through the air, Red’s vision clouded as he simultaneously felt every bone in his body shiver with intense pleasure. It was as if many pairs of invisible hands were sensually caressing him, lingering on every groove of his sensitive bones. The sensation left him lightheaded and gasping. As the pleasure rippled through him, he couldn’t hold back the low moan that escaped his mouth.

The bizarre feeling tapered off and he could distantly feel the sensation of bone gripping along the edges of his soul. He pulled away from the other skeleton to get a better look and saw that Sans’s hand was slightly cupped around the sensitive organ. It looked as if he had barely grazed it, and yet, where bone touched soul, there were small pools of glowing red magic already forming.

He jumped, his intense focus on the organ broken, as he felt Sans brush his fingers alongside the side of his skull. When he looked up, his lookalike’s face was etched with concern.

“i’m so sorry.” Sans delivered the tiniest of kisses to his cheekbone. “i swear i didn’t mean to do that.”
Reaching his hand underneath Red’s shirt, he brought the slightly dripping organ towards the ribcage. As soon as he realized what he was doing, Red grabbed his arm gently. Sans blinked, his eyes squinted in confusion.

“don’t.” Red could feel himself blushing, but his gaze was unblinking. “let’s… let’s keep going.”

Sans paused, one hand continuing to lift the shirt, the other hovering between their chests. “red, you don’t have to do th –”

He clenched his fingers around his duplicate’s arm. “i want to. promise.”

At that, Sans smiled widely and pressed his mouth against Red’s. The other skeleton gave the tiniest of squeezes to his soul, causing him to jerk as the caressing sensation whipped through him again. He let out another low groan and as his mouth fell open, Sans snaked his quickly-summoned tongue inside, exploring every crevice before Red had the presence of mind to conjure his own appendage. As their magic weaved together, Red threw himself into the embrace, wanting to be as close as possible to the other skeleton.

Sparks of electrifying energy ripped through his bones as he felt Sans apply more pressure to his soul. The languid massage made it hard to concentrate as the sensation gripped him, and he could do little more than whimper and cling onto Sans’s ribcage with his free hand. He tried his best not to lose himself completely to the rolling waves of pleasure that flowed through his body; he didn’t want to drop the quietly humming soul that he cradled in his outstretched hand.

Sans pulled away, and as their tongues parted, a long trail of red drool draped between them before it fell onto their laps. Even though they had broken their kiss, there was no respite from the pleasure that surged through him as Sans continued to slowly knead his soul. He panted heavily and squirmed against the other skeleton, his mind a hazy mess. With a start, he realized he was having a hard time gaining control over his magic. His drool pooled in his mouth and dripped off his chin as the sensation continued to burn through his bones. He tried to stop the flow of it, but each time Sans stroked his soul, his hold over his magic got weaker.

“you’re not gonna leave me hanging here, right?” Sans asked, a teasing grin on his face.

It took Red a moment to gather his senses enough to understand what he was saying. His vision was blurry, his mind clouded. He forced himself to concentrate, pushing past the buzzing that obscured his thoughts. After he repeated the words to himself a few times, he realized with a start what Sans meant.

Swallowing the saliva that had collected in his mouth, he looked down at Sans’s hand and watched how he massaged the now-glowing organ. Despite the intensity of the pleasure, he could tell that Sans was barely grazing his soul. Red copied the gesture, slowly rubbing the sides of Sans’s soul with the tips of his fingers. The reaction was instantaneous – Sans scooted forward in his lap, their ribcages meshing together through the fabric of their clothes.

“mmm,” Sans moaned. As he gripped the back of his skull, he whispered, “you can do it a little harder.”

Red kneaded the soul more vigorously, his hand becoming slick with the glowing blue juices that poured off the organ. Sans groaned softly and began to grind against him, sending vibrations of pleasure up his spine. In tandem, Sans increased the tempo of his massage, and Red’s head was soon spinning in bliss as his magic coiled tighter and tighter inside him. He closed his eyes, rotating his hips forward as he gave into the sensation.
And then, all of a sudden, the pleasure died away. He flashed his eyes open, almost angry with disappointment. He opened his mouth to tell Sans to keep going, but his words of protest died in his throat when he saw what the other skeleton was doing.

Red’s soul, which now freely oozed with steady streams of red magic, was raised to Sans’s open mouth. He could feel the hot breath hit against the sensitive organ and his bones filled with a tingling warmth. Some of the pleasure that had built inside him trickled away as he melted in the chair with contentment.

“heh.” Sans’s grin was wicked now. “don’t get too relaxed.”

“h-huh?” Red said, his mind couldn't comprehend what the other skeleton was saying.

In response, his lookalike darted out his tongue and lapped softly at the soul, causing Red to thrust upwards as the shocking shivers of satisfaction returned to his bones. Soon Sans was plunging his tongue more fiercely into the organ, twisting and turning right in the center of the organ, at the very core of his being. Red couldn’t think, could hardly breathe. His magic was rippling through him, reacting involuntarily to the ministrations. He gurgled on his excess drool as Sans twirled and thrust into the heart-shaped tissue. And as their pelvic bones ground together through their shorts, he could feel the sharp crackle of magical energy filling the air as his magic manifested below.

The sensation stopped again and this time Red let gave voice to his frustration immediately. “stop teasing!”

Sans smirked. “same goes for you,” he said as he nodded towards Red’s hand.

He looked down and saw that he had unknowingly stopped his massage in the throes of his pleasure. Heat suffused his face at the realization that he really didn’t know what the fuck he was doing. Knowing that Sans could probably feel his emotions even now, he pushed the thought away as he returned his attention to the soul, digging his fingers into the center. Sans thrust forward at the motion, which in turn elicited a cry from Red as he felt aching pressure along his newly formed member.

Laughing softly, Sans shakily stood up and hovered over Red’s lap. Magic sizzled through the air again, and soon there was a bright blue glow radiating from Sans’s shorts. He slowly pulled down his pants just far enough to reveal an entrance, dripping with cyan magic. Reaching his free hand down, Sans slid Red’s black and gold shorts down to his knees, exposing his glowing red length. Taking his erection firmly into his hand, Sans slowly lowered himself until he was fully sheathed.

Red had to stop himself from wildly thrusting as the wet walls gripped him tightly. Breathing heavily, he continued to dig his fingers into Sans’s soul, hoping that the pleasure would drive Sans as crazy as he was making him. He knew he had succeeded when he felt the other skeleton shiver against him and tighten even more around his length. It filled him with a smug sense of satisfaction.

“heh. don’t get too cocky now.”

Gripping Red’s shoulder with his left hand for support, Sans raised himself from the chair and when he was elevated just enough to almost allow the length to topple out, he plunged downwards with a fierce energy. Red moaned as the warmth gripped him, his mind hazy with pleasure. With his free hand, he grabbed Sans’s ilium for leverage as he stabbed upwards to meet him, driving in as deep as he could. Clanking noises filled the air as bone met bone in their frenzy. As their movements quickened, the back of the chair hit the desk, and Red could hear papers and stray objects flying off behind them.
Between thrusts, Sans mumbled, “squeeze it!”

“w-what?” Red said breathlessly as he rolled his hips upward.

“squeeze my soul!” Sans begged. “hard!”

Red complied, firmly pressing into the organ with his fingers. As he did so, Sans let out a loud cry and in turn clutched Red’s soul tightly in his own hand. The moment his soul was constricted so violently, his mind was inundated with a series of new sensations. He could feel not only his own length jabbing wildly into the folds, but he could also sense what Sans felt. The way his own member impaled Sans’s most sensitive spot as if it were his own genitalia being stabbed. The satisfaction as Sans rubbed his tingling nub against Red with every downward thrust. The burning energy that lit up Sans’s bones as his soul was squeezed and massaged.

Red’s mind nearly broke from the pleasure. He couldn’t see, couldn’t think, couldn’t breathe. All he could do was give into his most basic of instincts as he uncontrollably rammed inside Sans, feeling everything. There were tears in his eyes – no, both of their eyes – as he screamed out obscenities and lost himself to the ecstasy.

It wasn’t long until the coiling tension within him broke as he felt both his and Sans’s releases simultaneously. He went blind with pleasure as Sans milked his length and he felt warm liquid splatter against his skull and clothes as his soul burst with orgasmic relief. His climax was achingly long and hard, and when the sensation passed, he nearly passed out from the exertion.

Sans fell against his chest, his breathing as labored as Red’s. “god damn.” He pressed his mouth against Red’s. “i love you.”

He kissed him back and whispered, “love you too.”

With his soul still in his hand, Red could feel how utterly spent Sans was. Taking great care not to grip the organ too harshly, he slowly placed the soul back into the other skeleton’s ribcage. Sans did the same, but not before pressing the organ against his mouth in a skeletal kiss, sending a jolt of overstimulation through him at the contact.

Once their souls were safely tucked away, Red realized what a mess the two of them were. His entire body was covered in white liquid that was tinged with glowing red magic. If anyone saw them, there would be no doubts what the two of them had been doing. As he realized this, his chest tightened with embarrassment. What the fuck had he just done? Hadn’t the entire city just found out about them fucking on the lab floor? He cast his eyes towards the door and saw it was closed. Still, there was no denying that they had just been screaming their heads off. He just hoped that Alphys had enough fucking sense not to tell everyone about it this time. Though he supposed that didn’t really matter. After all, everyone already knew about how they were fucking.

Everyone except his brother.

Guilt surged through his every bone. Holy shit, what the fuck was he doing?

His train of thought was broken as Sans leaned forward and kissed his forehead. This time, Red couldn’t return the kiss – he was too mortified by his epiphany.

Sans didn’t seem to notice; he merely hummed with contentment as he pulled himself off of Red, causing another pool of liquids to fall onto his lap. As the release soaked into his shorts, he swore and jumped up from the chair. He had to clean this up before anyone saw and figured out what they had been doing in here.
“heh. you okay?” Sans asked as he sat down in the chair.

“fine! fuck!” He grabbed the box of tissues that sat on his desk and pulled one out to dab at the juices that soaked his clothes. “fuck, fuck, fuck!”

Sans laughed. “don’t worry about it, we’ll get it out later.” Red grumbled as he pulled out a handful of tissues, desperate to soak up all of the red and blue liquids that drenched his clothing and bones. Sans scoffed and swiveled in the chair, turning to face the computer as Red tried to clean up the mess in vain.

He took several deep breaths, trying to calm himself. This wasn’t going to work. The stains would only come out from a thorough wash, he knew that. And why was he getting so worked up over this anyway? Because his brother might find out? Papyrus was holed up in his room, refusing to even look at him. Not to mention that he would discover it eventually. And when he did, Red wasn’t just going to give up his relationship with Sans or this universe’s Papyrus just because his brother was here. He cared for them too much to do that.

Besides, his brother hated him. There was no point in trying to accommodate him if he didn’t even want to be around him.

But in the back of his mind came a dark thought: what if Sans was right – what if his brother didn’t hate him? Would Papyrus be okay with him being with the other two skeletons? If he wasn’t…

Red’s soul clenched. If his brother wasn’t fine with it, then he’d just have to get over it. Red couldn’t give them up. He loved them and he wouldn’t just throw them away.

Sighing, he tossed the dirtied tissues into the trash bin near the door. Sans was silent and out of sight, his figure obscured by the chair as he faced the computer. Red knew that he had been rude to him. His swearing and desperate attempts to clean himself off were so idiotic. There was no point in making Sans feel bad over something so stupid. He didn’t deserve that. Especially not after the moment they just shared.

“sans,” he said quietly. “i’m real sorry.” When the other skeleton didn’t respond, he pressed on, “i’m just… real nervous about how boss is gonna adjust to life here… and to us. but i shouldn’t have freaked out. i’m sorry i snapped.”

Sans didn’t speak and the chair didn’t move. Bewildered by the other skeleton’s continued silence, Red walked to the desk to get a better view. As his lookalike came into view, panic gripped his soul. Sans was staring sightlessly at the computer, his eyelights vanished completely.

“sans?” He gently shook Sans’s shoulder, stirring him from his episode. The other skeleton’s breath came in great heaving gasps as he returned to reality. “what is it? what’s wrong?”

Between breaths, Sans said, “it happened.”

“huh?

He pointed to the screen. “look.”

There was a small notification displayed on the screen that read:

TIME ANOMALIES DETECTED
7 NEW DETECTIONS
LOG:
[REL TIME // PEAK TACHYON COUNT // TIMESTAMP // LOCATION]
[9 HOURS AGO // 450tc // 01:21 // LOC: 085]
[9 HOURS AGO // 200tc // 01:15 // LOC: 085]
[2 DAYS AGO // 5620tc // 23:59 // LOC: 003]
[5 DAYS AGO // 480tc // 00:25 // LOC: 085]
[5 DAYS AGO // 190tc // 00:23 // LOC: 085]
[8 DAYS AGO // 440tc // 00:57 // LOC: 085]
[8 DAYS AGO // 210tc // 00:23 // LOC: 085]

Red stared at the monitor, uncomprehending what it was displaying. “h-huh? what the fuck is this?”

“They’re the detectors!” Sans’s voice wobbled and the sound of his rattling bones filled the air. “there’s someone out there time traveling!”

Red grabbed onto the back of the chair for support as his legs trembled precariously beneath him. “no fucking way.” He shook his head, not believing what he was seeing. “i didn’t sense it! not at all! this has gotta be wrong!”

“It’s not. look.” Sans pointed to the third line of the log. “this one has the largest tachyon count by far. you know what set that off?”

He looked at the timestamp and jolted once realization hit him. “my bro.”

“yup. that’s the moment he showed up.” He double clicked the most recent entry, opening up a program that gave a more detailed readout of the log and displayed several graphs. “which means that the rest of these show that someone else is time traveling.”

“What makes you say that? couldn’t it be, i don’t know, a residual effect?”

Sans shook his head. “back when flowey and frisk were wandering the underground, resetting all the time, these detectors would always register every instance that they time traveled. the resets always registered high tachyon numbers and the saves and loads always printed out lower counts. just like these.”

“But how the fuck are we missing this shit?!”

Sans clawed at his face, bone scraping against bone as the fingers dug into his cheekbones. “i don’t know…. maybe we don’t have enough determination? i don’t know!” He slammed his hand down on the desk.

Red looked at the screen again, trying to find a clue – anything at all – that would indicate why they hadn’t sensed the familiar blips and stutters of time travel. “these are all happening at night. really late at night.”

Sans removed his hands from his skull, revealing his flickering eyelights. “when we’ve gone to bed?” His tone was almost hopeful.

“Definitely. it’s after midnight for all of these entries.” He clicked on a button next to the most recent entry and a video filled the screen, displaying the downtown area. Framed neatly in the center was the illustrious embassy, the white marble seemingly glowing in the darkness. Bright lights from the nearby storefronts made it easy to spot the roaming groups of humans and monsters below. Even though the timestamp in the corner clearly indicated the early hours of the morning, it
seemed as if the city never slept. Red almost shuddered at the thought of having to face those crowds at all hours.

After a minute of watching the feed, Sans jumped forward in his chair, grabbed the mouse from him, and rewound a few seconds. “look at the flag on the right side of the embassy.”

A banner with the human government’s insignia waved in the wind, casting a long shadow on the sidewalk below. Then, all of a sudden, it was as if the recording had stuttered. One moment the flag was fluttering outwards, the next it was flat against the building, as if pressed by an invisible force.

“What the fuck?”

“look for other signs. subtle stuff like that. maybe we’ll see them – the one doing this i mean. it’s how i caught flowey at it.”

Sans replayed the recording over and over, but neither of them saw anything else. He opened the videos for the other timestamps, replaying the footage until they were convinced they saw all they could see. In one video, the only sign was a slight flickering of a streetlight. None of the other recordings revealed anything. It didn’t help that in the earliest video, the camera was blocked by a fucking pigeon.

Sans stood up in a rush, sending the chair flying behind him. “damn it, is this the only footage we have of this area?!”

“We didn’t have enough cameras when we put ‘em out there. fucking hell.”

Sans crouched down to the floor, hugging himself as he shook violently against the tile floor. His breathing was quick and shallow and Red could tell that he was close to zoning out again. Hoping to head off the episode before it started, Red bent down next to him, rubbing his back just as Sans had done to him this morning.

“It’s okay. we’re okay.” He looked up at the monitor, the footage of the pigeon still on the screen. “Listen, we’ll go put up more cameras. we’ll figure out what’s going on.” He wrapped his arms around Sans and squeezed tightly. “we’ll catch ‘em, and when we do, we can talk to ‘em. find out if they even know what they’re doing. make ‘em stop if we have to.”

Sans nodded, pressing into the embrace. “yeah… yeah, you’re right. thanks.” He sat there for a couple of minutes, allowing his breath to even out before he stood up and walked over to a box near the door. He opened the container and pulled out a camera. “Heh. i was actually going to have us do this anyway. we had never covered the eastern side of the city, so i figured we’d do it today.”

A forced smile spread on his face. “we’ll set up cameras in the denser parts of the area, make sure we’re able to get enough footage if this happens again. and the first place we’re going,” he said, pointing towards the monitor, “is downtown.” His eyelights flickered and his smile slid off his face.

Red walked over and placed a hand on his shoulder. “do you need a moment before we –?”

“No, no, i’m good.” He stood up and took a deep breath. “let’s just… let’s do this.” Although his eye sockets were lined with dark shadows, the firm focus of his gaze conveyed utter determination.

They grabbed the cameras, left the lab, and teleported outside Grillby’s. Once there, they stuck together to hang up the devices, making sure that they spread them evenly along the storefronts and alleyways to get adequate coverage of the area. Both of them were a bit nervous about going
near the embassy, fearful that someone would come and yell at them for setting up unauthorized devices. But security was surprisingly lax; it was only after an hour of placing cameras along the building that a Royal Guard came out to see what they were doing. And even then, once they explained that they had permission from Dr. Alphys, the guard left them to it, ordering them to “not break anything.”

It took a surprisingly long time to place all the cameras in the area, and once they did, they went to the eastern half of the city to place the remaining time anomaly detectors, unaccompanied by cameras. The work was as tedious and frustrating as last time, and by the time they were done, Red was completely spent even though it was only early afternoon. His limbs were heavy with exhaustion and all he really wanted to do was sleep. Sans must have picked up on that because, much to Red’s relief, he suggested that they return home instead of going back to the lab.

“we did a lot today, considering everything.” He shrugged. “plus i don’t know about you, but i’m starved.”

Red agreed and the two of them took a quick shortcut to the house. As they appeared in the living room, Red’s eyes were drawn to the table where a vase of white and yellow tulips sat next to a card with his name written in sloppy handwriting. He walked over, his soul pounding in his chest. He smelled the flowers and their scent made his head swim. His hands shaking with excitement, he tore open the card.

Yo Red,

I know you’re probably pissed at me and you have every right to be!! I totally deserve a butt kicking after the crap I pulled at the party. So I hope these flowers will make it up to you! I totally wanted to give these in person, but Papyrus (not your Papyrus, who, by the way, is a total weirdo!!!) told me that you weren’t going to be around until later. And unlike these nerds, I have to get back to my job!

Anyway, I SUCK at apologies, sorry!! But hey, let me know if you need a favor from me anytime!

Later, nerd!
Undyne

He dropped the card down on the table as disappointment washed over him. He didn’t know what he was expecting. Certainly not this. For some reason, in the back of his head, he had hoped that the flowers had been from his brother. A sign of love. Or forgiveness. A bitter taste filled his mouth as he realized – yet again – that Papyrus didn’t care about him. He’d never be the type of monster that gave him flowers. Not anymore. That was far too sentimental.

His soul clenching tight in his chest, he turned to walk towards the kitchen, but was stunned into immobility as the very monster he had been thinking about stood in the doorway. His brother was staring at him, his arms folded against his chest. His marred face made him look downright frightening. But, despite this, somehow his features seemed softer today – less angry, less upset – and for a moment, Red wondered if he was going to say something.

“EDGE!” called the other Papyrus from inside the kitchen. “ARE YOU GOING TO GET THE FLOWERS OR NOT?!”
His brother’s eyes darted to the vase and then back to Red, his brow furrowing. “GET THEM YOURSELF!”

“What?”

Ignoring the other Papyrus’s exclamation, his brother looked him up and down a couple of times and tsked at him. The noise made Red boil with rage. He worked his mouth a few moments, trying to find something to say to him. But Papyrus merely left him there to seethe, stomping up the stairs loudly, his arms still crossed against his chest. It wasn’t until he was nearly to the room that Red finally found his voice.

“Well, fuck you too, papyrus!”

The door slammed shut, and Red’s face warmed with fury. He went into the kitchen, storming past a very confused-looking Papyrus who was wearing a frilly apron and holding a spatula. On the kitchen table were a pile of brownies sitting on a plate. He rushed over to them, grabbed one, and stuffed the still-warm treat in his mouth. He wiped away the bothersome tears that blurred his vision, trying to ignore the quavering in his soul.

Just as he was about to teleport to his room, Sans grabbed the arm of his jacket. “hey, don’t – ”

Red pulled out of his grasp, choking back his tears as he declared, “i’m going to bed.”

But as he called on his magic for a shortcut, he felt long arms wrap around him from behind. He twisted and pushed at the limbs, trying to disentangle himself so he could go away and just be by himself, but he couldn’t get loose from the skeleton’s tight grip. As he felt a skull collide gently with the top of his head, he realized with a start that Papyrus was the one hugging him. And when he felt another pair of arms wrap around him, he began to cry in earnest. Frustration, guilt, and disappointment welled up in his chest, threatening to crush him.

But as the other two continued to hug him, he leaned into the embrace. And for just a moment, he wondered if he could just forget his brother and stay with the two of them.
Papyrus blinked rapidly.

He couldn’t move, could hardly breathe.

And for some reason he was being carted down the crowded streets of New Home, strapped down to a gurney. Dr. Alphys shadowed over him from the foot of the stretcher, a sinister smile spread across her face as she pushed him down the bumpy road. Papyrus’s soul twitched unpleasantly in his chest as an unruly throng of monsters came into sight, pressing closer to them.

“Make him pay!”

“KILL HIM!”
“Chop off his legs!”

“Lower him in the Core one inch at a time!”

What had he done? He couldn’t remember, but from the way the crowd was jeering at him, one thing was clear: he was in deep shit.

He tried to summon a wave of bones to throw the Royal Scientist off balance, to allow him to escape, to do something. But every attempt at magic left him reeling. His soul burst with pain and his vision blurred. Dr. Alphys cackled at him, her usual nervous demeanor completely gone.

“PLEASE! PLEASE LET ME GO!”

“Any why would we do that, scum?” said a voice that came from the head of the gurney.

Papyrus twisted his head upwards. He didn’t know when the two of them had gotten here, but they were suddenly at the entrance to the Royal Family’s home. Captain Undyne, who was dressed in her guardsman’s regalia, grinned at Papyrus, revealing her sharpened teeth.

“CAPTAIN, WHAT IS –?”

Her fist crashed down onto the stretcher, causing it to teeter precariously to one side for a second before slamming back down to the ground. The captain withdrew her hand from the gurney and summoned a glowing spear that hummed with magic.

She raised her gaze to look over the crowd and Papyrus could feel the mob surging closer. His breathing quickened and he could feel the sweat pool on his brow. The crowd’s presence was suffocating him. He pushed against his restraints, desperate to escape before… before….

“Guardsman Papyrus,” Captain Undyne proclaimed to the horde of monsters, “as newly-appointed High Commander of the Underground, I hereby sentence you to death for lying to a superior officer, falling down without the captain’s permission, and treason. Do you have any last words?”

Papyrus opened his mouth to protest the charges, but Dr. Alphys, her eyes flashing with malevolence, clasped her claws over his mouth to block the noise. The audience roared its approval as Undyne raised her spear high above his chest. Papyrus threw his head back and forth, pressing as firmly as he could against the leather fetters, desperately trying to summon his magic to do something, anything. He looked into Commander Undyne’s determination-red eyes, pleading silently for mercy. Surely she would show him mercy. After all, he had been the one to kill the human, right? He had earned it!

But her only response was a sadistic smile.

And then a long, white blade cut through her neck.

Time seemed to slow down to a crawl as several things happened almost simultaneously. Commander Undyne’s head dropped onto the gurney right next to Papyrus’s head, spraying the side of his skull with bright blue blood. Dr. Alphys shrieked and stumbled to the ground, and as her claw left Papyrus’s mouth, his horrified scream rent the air. The commander’s body collapsed into a pile of dust and Papyrus watched as the pointed end of her spear, somehow still conjured despite its owner’s death, rushed downwards towards his chest. He frantically flung his magic outwards, trying to stop it before it pierced his soul, but it was out of reach, as if hidden behind some barrier. He was going to die and there was nothing he could do about it!

And then suddenly the spear’s descent was suspended in midair.
For a brief moment, Papyrus thought his magic had finally worked. But then he saw a bony hand grasping the handle of the glowing blue magic.

It was Sans. Papyrus’s soul burst with joy as his gold-toothed brother pulled the spear away from the gurney.

“BROTHER! YOU ARE ALIVE!” He could hardly believe it. After all this time, Sans was alive! “THANK GOD! NOW GET ME OUT OF HERE!”

“and why would i do that?” Sans smirked as his eye sockets went completely dim.

“W-WHAT?!”

“you haven’t received your punishment yet, boss.” Sans grabbed Papyrus’s right hand and extended the phalanges outward so that they were spread flat onto the gurney.

“SANS, THIS IS NOT FUNNY!”

His brother had to be joking. This was one of his cruel pranks. There was no way he was serious right now. Papyrus looked desperately around him, waiting for someone to pop out of the now-raging crowd and shout “Surprise! Just kidding!” There had to be something that would show him that this was not reality.

“Don’t worry,” said a female voice to his right. He turned his head and saw Commander Undyne’s decapitated head smiling viciously at him. “It will be over soon!”

“YES, PAPYRUS,” said a grating, halting voice from behind him. He looked up and there was a tall skeleton garbed in black staring down at him with void-filled eyes. Something about the monster was wrong – completely and utterly wrong – and seeing him made Papyrus panic in a way that nothing else had. He pressed desperately against his restraints, the leather digging into and chafing his bones. It was pointless, he knew that. But he didn’t care. All he knew was that he had to be away from this monster. Immediately.

“DON’T STRUGGLE, PAPYRUS,” the void-eyed skeleton said, his grin growing wider and wider. “IT WILL ONLY MAKE IT WORSE.”

Papyrus returned his gaze to his brother, who in turn was eyeing him with sadistic glee as he brought the spear closer to Papyrus’s hand. “SANS, PLEASE!” He struggled to get his hand out of his brother’s, but Sans’s grip was ironclad.

“this is for all the bullshit i’ve had to put up with over all these years.”

And with a flick of his wrist, Sans cut off the last two phalanges on Papyrus’s hand. Excruciating pain reverberated through his bones, sending jolts of electric pain straight into his very marrow. He could hear himself screaming incoherently, his soul screeching with unspent magic as the pain took over his mind. Sans, Commander Undyne’s head, the sinister skeleton, and even the crowd all laughed in unison as he tossed and turned on the gurney. He had to escape, had to find a way out of this nightmare.

Nightmare.

He woke up with a start, flinging the covers off his sweat-drenched body as he readied himself to fight, pushing down the pain that surged in his hand. The air tingled with his unformed magic as he looked around the room, trying to ground himself to reality while also trying to discover any hidden enemies who could be lurking in the shadows.
Wait a moment. Why was he in Sans’s room?

After a few moments of searching the dark corners of the room, he realized that there was an unfamiliar brightness emanating from the window. As he stared at the light source, his sense of urgency and fear were replaced with the memories of the previous day.

That was right. He was in the other universe now. His brother was alive. Alive and well and…

He hated Papyrus.

Sighing, he flung himself backwards onto the bed and stared at the ceiling. Deep-seated disappointment flowed through him, replacing the grief of losing his brother and the hopefulness that he could time travel to him.

As he gazed upwards, he realized that the ceiling was littered with glow-in-the-dark stars that were arranged in no particular pattern. They were barely visible now, their glow long ago spent from the last time they had been exposed to light. It reminded Papyrus of the cave stars from the Underground – both were pitiful attempts at mimicking the real thing.

And last night he had seen the real thing. He had been all alone the entire day, left to dwell on his argument with his brother. But as soon as the inky black night had settled in, he hadn’t been able to stop himself from opening the window and poking his head out into the warm summer air to look at the distant dots of light. He had recalled how when he was young – a baby bones by almost all accounts – he had studied the patterns of the constellations for hours on end, hoping against all logic that he would one day see the stars on the surface and never see the Underground again.

But now that he was here, even the stars left a bitter taste in his mouth. At least down in the Underground Sans had wanted to be with him, to spend his time with him. There, he had known where they stood. Now everything was chaos.

His brother’s words echoed in his head, causing his soul to burn with an ugly mixture of guilt and rage. The fact that Sans thought that their relationship only boiled down to sex, and unenjoyable sex at that… well, it shamed him deeply. Buried deep in his mind were the memories of all those months spent alone, dragged along by the then-Captain Undyne through the Underground. All he had craved was death.

And here was Sans, living freely on the surface with another version of themselves. He drew his arms around his chest as jealousy washed through him. There had been no mistaking the way this universe’s Sans had been wrapping his arms around his Sans when Papyrus had first woken up.

His thoughts were interrupted by a sudden knock at the door. The noise reverberated in his skull. His soul jumped in his chest. He stared at the door in silence.

There was another knock and he could hear his brother, his voice barely above a whisper, beg into the door, “papyrus.”

For a moment, Papyrus wanted to jump up and run over to the door, throw it open, and scoop his brother into his arms. So much so that he had already flung his legs over the edge of the mattress and was about to rush over when sudden realization hit him. His brother hadn’t given one shit about him while they had been separated. Months apart and Sans acted like it was nothing. According to him, “it didn’t fucking matter.”

He clenched his fists, renewing the pain in his right hand. He wasn’t ready to forgive Sans. Not now. He reached down to the floor and picked up one of his red boots. Glaring at the door, he
silently dared his brother to knock again. There were a few moments of almost-disappointing silence and Papyrus figured that Sans had given up. But just as he was about to put the shoe back down, there was another knock, louder this time.

Papyrus chucked his boot at the door. His aim was true and his soul burst with angry satisfaction as it thumped against the wood.

“GO AWAY!”

He wondered if Sans would try again, and he almost reached down for his other shoe, but this time the silence went uninterrupted. After a minute of staring at the door, his racing soul calmed and his righteous anger was replaced with frustration and guilt. He pressed his face into his hands and groaned. Why was he such an ass? He missed Sans. And from the way Sans had spoken Papyrus’s name into the door just now, it was clear that he missed him too. He could’ve just ended their fucking pointless fighting right then and there. And yet he couldn’t even do that. He was just too stubborn apparently.

And yet he knew that his anger was justified.

He pushed himself off the bed and began to pace back and forth across the room. His emotions were building up again, spiraling out of control. The determination was burning hot within him. He needed to maintain control over himself, dammit! Losing control over his emotions, his magic, his body, over anything, was the worst thing possible. It led to mistakes, to messy kills. He shuddered as he thought back to his first kill – the way the human’s body had been impaled by his carelessly-thrown bones, causing red blood to spill onto the floor at his feet.

Too many mistakes.

As he paced across the room for the umpteenth time, his attention wavered and was caught by a stack of books sitting on the old, dilapidated dresser. He immediately rushed over to the pile and snatched them away before promptly plonking himself down on the floor.

Distractions like this helped him to ground himself before he lost himself completely to his rage. Captain Undyne had encouraged him to embrace the side effects of the determination – to allow himself to lose control. But the first time he had listened to her, he had injured another royal guard in his fury. Their hearing was never quite the same after that. No, focusing on something mundane was better than carelessly hurting someone.

He grabbed the book at the top of the pile and began to read. The old, tattered book, which was entitled Peek-a-Boo with Fluffy Bunny, was clearly meant for children. Its illustrations and exceedingly simple language made that obvious. But the story’s ending was surprisingly depressing. After he was finished with it, he cast the book aside, disappointed that it had added more to the chaotic turmoil that churned within his soul.

He picked up the next book, which was much thicker than the previous, and recognized it almost immediately as a novel he had read when he was young. It was a tale about a human child who was selected by a human military to train aboard a space station in order to fight an enemy alien race of bugs. He remembered loving the book when he had lived at the… well, wherever it was he and his brother had lived at the time. Hours had been spent poring over this book and countless other sci-fi novels he had kept back then.

And then one day he had just… stopped. Like a light switch being flipped, his interest had gone away in an instant. He had abandoned them in earnest and he couldn’t quite recall why.
How had he even gotten those books again? He struggled to remember. Although he knew he had gotten them when he was just a child, he could not recall the details. It was if there was a blank space in his mind. He shook his head, casting away the thought. It didn’t really matter.

Though when he looked down at the book again and realized that he couldn’t really remember how the book ended either. But that was something he could fix easily enough.

He opened it up and began to read in earnest. It was as if he had stepped into another world – he lost himself in the story, pushing down his emotions as he focused on the familiar characters, the plot, the prose. It felt good to lose himself in the novel.

After he had read several chapters, his soul gave a violent pang of hunger. Reluctantly he set the book aside and stretched his limbs. Sighing, he looked towards the door. Since his determination treatments, he no longer needed to eat technically. He could no longer fall down in the traditional sense; only extreme physical damage would kill him. But if he didn’t eat regularly, he became lethargic, and, given enough time, he wasn’t able to move. Several months ago, he had attempted to forego his meals while he had trained with the elite squad under Captain Undyne. It was one of his many attempts to end his misery. But once he had become too slow and had nearly died during his practice, the captain had put an end to his attempt immediately. And violently. For some time afterwards Captain Undyne had force fed him at every meal until the habit of eating regularly had been drilled into his head.

But eating now meant that he would have to face Sans.

Papyrus sighed, pushed himself off the floor, and walked over to the door. With his bare foot, he kicked the boot that he had thrown earlier. Taking care to be as quiet as possible, he slowly opened the door and looked into the hall. The house was dead quiet. He rose onto the tips of his toes to glance down into the living room. There were no signs of Sans, the other versions of themselves, or any other monsters.

He quietly walked down the stairs, taking care to avoid the creaky step near the bottom. He turned his head every which way to ensure that Sans was not hiding in some corner, waiting to confront him. As he looked around, he realized now just how much of a stranger he was in this world. Although the furniture and the placement of everything was the same, all the details were different; the mismatching colors of the walls and carpets disoriented him. He wondered just how different this universe was from his own. If they were on the surface, that meant they had either won the war with the humans or they had crushed them upon leaving the Underground. In either case, he knew that these monsters would be nothing to trifle with. He had to be on his guard.

He approached the entrance to the kitchen quietly, careful not to immediately enter in case Sans had decided today of all days was the time to get off his lazy ass and start cooking. But as he peeked around the corner, he didn’t spot his brother. No, instead this universe’s version of himself was sitting at the table. His movement must have alerted the other him because before Papyrus could leave, his duplicate gave a small smart and gasped as they made eye contact.

“OH! HELLO THERE!” exclaimed his other self. Papyrus hoped to avoid a conversation with the other him, but before he could take more than a single step backwards, his lookalike jumped up from the table, scraping the chair along the floor as he pushed it backwards. “PLEASE DO NOT BE AFRAID! I KNOW THAT I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, CAN BE QUITE INTIMIDATING, BUT FEAR NOT! I WOULD NEVER BE SO RUDE AS TO HARM A GUEST! ESPECIALLY ONE AS GREAT AS ME! NYEH HEH HEH!” As he laughed at his own joke, he put his hands on his hips and protruded his chest.

Papyrus folded his arms as he looked the other skeleton up and down. “I AM NOT…
INTIMIDATED.” He shook his head. “BUT I AM GOING BACK UPSTAIRS.”

As he turned around to return to the bedroom, his other self shouted, “W-WAIT!” Papyrus looked back at his duplicate, who was now twiddling his gloved thumbs together in the air. “DID YOU NOT WANT TO EAT? I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, CAN SURELY FIND SOMETHING FOR YOU.”

“IT DOES NOT MATTER.”

“NONSENSE! I WOULD BE A POOR HOST IF I LET YOU GO HUNGRY! PLEASE, SIT DOWN!”

Papyrus cast his gaze around the living room, once again nervous about being ambushed by his brother. But there was no sign of him or the other Sans. Did that mean that the two of them were up in the other bedroom together? His soul churned at the thought.

As if sensing his thoughts, his lookalike said, “IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR BROTHER, THEN WORRY NO LONGER! HE AND MY BROTHER ARE WORKING AT THE LABORATORY TODAY!” He beamed.

Laboratory? Since when did Sans have an interest in something like that? As far as he knew, his brother avoided anything to do with science at all costs. And now he was working at the lab? Was Dr. Alphys still the royal scientist? What were they doing there?

His other self was continuing to smile at him, looking hopeful and excited. Papyrus supposed that if Sans wasn’t here, it would be acceptable to eat down here. But if this was some sort of trick, he would be gone in an instant. He had no desire to talk to his brother about their issues in front of anyone else. It was bad enough that he had lost control over himself down here yesterday.

Just as long as he could maintain his composure, he didn’t foresee any issues with eating downstairs.

As he strode into the kitchen and sat down at the table, his other self was almost bouncing with joy.

“WONDERFUL! WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO EAT? I COULD MAKE YOU EGGS! OR WE HAVE LEFTOVER SOUP! OR PERHAPS IF YOU WOULD LIKE SOMETHING MORE FILLING, WE HAVE LEFTOVER SPAGHETTI AS WELL!” He babbled the words hurriedly, as if the prospect of feeding him was the most exciting thing in the world. “I AM CERTAIN YOU WOULD APPRECIATE A BOWL OF SPAGHETTI. IT IS, AFTER ALL, ONE OF OUR FAVORITE DISHES!”

Papyrus tilted his head at the other skeleton. “IS IT? I CANNOT EVEN RECALL THE LAST TIME I HAD IT.”

His duplicate gasped. “THEN IT IS DECIDED! SPAGHETTI IT IS!”

He turned his back on him to get out the leftovers and a pot to heat up the dish. As his other self opened the cabinets and refrigerator, Papyrus could see that the kitchen was filled to the brim with food, spices, and dishes. Unlike his own home, which had been emptied of most food for quite some time now, this universe seemed to offer no shortage of supplies. It certainly did not appear as if these skeletons had needed to forage for food as he had been forced to do over the last several months.

As he gazed around the room, he noticed a large heavy-looking book sitting on the table across
from him at the spot where his clone had been sitting just moments ago. He stretched his neck across the table for a better look and saw a large header that read “Chocolate Chip Brownies.” To the right of the header was a sticky note that said “TORIEL SAYS TO ADD CARAMEL SYRUP!” Papyrus stared at the words with amazement. Toriel? As in the queen?

“AH!” his other self shouted, breaking Papyrus out of his thoughts. “I SEE YOU ARE ADMIRING MY COOKBOOK! IS IT NOT THE MOST AMAZING THING YOU HAVE EVER SEEN? TORIEL AND FRISK GAVE IT TO ME FOR MY BIRTHDAY A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO AND I MUST SAY, IT IS FANTASTIC! I TRY TO MAKE A RECIPE FROM IT AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK!”

Papyrus stared in wonder at his duplicate who seemed so proud of himself. “THAT IS… GREAT.” How did this monster have time to just waste like that? Did he not have Royal Guardsman duties?

“I WAS HOPING TO TRY OUT THAT BROWNIE RECIPE TODAY! IT HAS BEEN ON MY TO-DO LIST FOR QUITE SOME TIME AND I FIGURED THAT YOU WOULD ENJOY THE DESSERT!”

He was making them for him? Papyrus eyed his other self with suspicion. What was this monster’s game? Was he hoping to poison him? Suddenly he had no desire to partake in the spaghetti despite the fact that the mouthwatering aroma of the Italian spices now permeated the room.

His doubts must have shown on his face because his other self looked at him nervously. “WELL, IF YOU DO NOT LIKE BROWNIES, I CAN UNDERSTAND THAT. I MUST SAY THAT I ENJOY DESSERT ONLY SPARINGLY. TOO MUCH CAN BE QUITE OVERWHELMING IF I SAY SO MYSELF. IF YOU DO NOT LIKE THEM…” he trailed off, looking unsure of what to say.

Papyrus felt a twinge of guilt in his soul. For some reason, it upset him to see his other self looking so distraught. “I DO NOT KNOW IF I LIKE THEM. I HAVE NEVER HAD THEM.”

“WOWIE! NEVER?!” When Papyrus shook his head, his lookalike exclaimed, “THEN YOU ARE IN FOR QUITE THE TREAT!”

Despite himself, Papyrus could feel the corners of his mouth twitching upwards. His other self was quite amusing, truth be told. And his bubbly happiness was almost contagious. He couldn’t remember the last time he had smiled. Though, to be fair, he couldn’t really remember the last time he had truly interacted with another monster. It had to have been months ago. Perhaps right before or after Captain Undyne had been…

He shuddered as he remembered how she had been decapitated right in front of him. He cast away the memory. There was no need to linger on such things. But even though he abandoned the line of thought, he could feel his smile sliding off his face.

A heaping bowl of spaghetti was placed in front of him. He looked up at his other self who was grinning widely at him. “BON APPETIT!”

Papyrus blinked. “WAS THAT… A PUN?” He could not recall the last time he had heard a shitty pun lie that.

His duplicate’s eyes grew wider. “WHAT?! NO! IT IS FRENCH, NOT A PUN!” Papyrus felt his smile return as the other skeleton sputtered. After years of growing up around Sans and enduring his puns and teasing, he had to admit that it was quite humorous to be on the other end.
As he struggled to hold back his amusement, he scooped a bite of spaghetti into his mouth. The moment the food entered his mouth, he was momentarily stunned as the strong flavors enveloped him. The flavor of the spices. The way the tomato sauce complemented the noodles. It was… it was…

He shoveled forkful after forkful into his mouth, his hunger suddenly awakening at full force.

“You like it?”

Papyrus looked up at his duplicate and nodded enthusiastically. He did not want to be rude by speaking with his mouth full, but he was not sure that he could properly articulate the feelings he had for this delectable dish. Knowing full well that his manner of eating was undignified, he reached for a napkin to wipe off his face in between mouthfuls. But he did not relent in his pace.

“That is wonderful!” his clone said, beaming at him. “It took quite some time to master the art of pasta, but it was worth every moment of training!”

Papyrus swallowed his mouthful and replied, “I agree wholeheartedly.” His lookalike’s smile grew even bigger and – Papyrus did a double take – an orange blush dusted his cheekbones. How odd.

“Well, Papyrus,” and his duplicate’s mouth twitched as he said the name, “I am glad you appreciate all that spaghetti has to offer.”

“I suppose so, Papyrus,” he teased.

“Nyeh heh! This is so… bizarre! I must admit, it was odd enough getting used to red, but Sans assured me that having a second Sans was not weird at all! But… now that you are here I cannot understand how he has been so calm about this! It is so strange!”

Papyrus swallowed his last bite of spaghetti and nodded. Then he thought about what his other self had just said.

“Wait… who is ‘red?’”

“Your brother, of course!”

Papyrus couldn’t help but snicker at that.

His lookalike blinked rapidly. “Why is that funny?”

“Why red?! What an odd name for him.”

“Well, because his magic is red!” his clone said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

“So is mine! Are you going to call me that too?”

“But you already have a nickname! Red calls you ‘boss,’ right? We can call you that too!”

Papyrus’s amusement died away immediately. “Don’t call me that,” he said quietly. That name wasn’t for anyone but Sans to say. It was his term of endearment for Papyrus. A sign of respect, of loyalty, of the closeness of their relationship. It felt dirty hearing the pet name come out of this
Papyrus’s mouth.

And it reminded him of how alone he truly was.

“S-SORRY!” The other him looked dismayed and embarrassed as he sat there rubbing absentmindedly at his arm. “WE CAN THINK OF ANOTHER NAME INSTEAD! HOW ABOUT LARRY?”

Papyrus was snapped out of his spiraling thoughts. “LARRY? WHAT?! WHY WOULD YOU CALL ME –?” He shook his head rapidly. “NO, NEVER MIND THAT. WHY ARE YOU GIVING ME A NEW NAME IN THE FIRST PLACE?”

“BECAUSE CALLING US BOTH PAPYRUS IS CONFUSING! AND IT ONLY SEEMS APPROPRIATE GIVEN THAT YOU RECEIVE THE NEW NAME SINCE YOU ARE IN MY UNIVERSE. BESIDES, I AM ONLY EVER CALLED ‘THE GREAT PAPYRUS.’ WHAT OTHERS NAMES COULD I EVEN GO BY?”

Papyrus smirked. “I COULD THINK OF A FEW.”

“LIKE WHAT?!” He grinned brightly and leaned across the table. It looked as if he waiting on pins and needles waiting for his new nickname.

“WELL, HOW ABOUT ‘CREAM PUFF’?”

There were a few moments of still silence before his other self burst out angrily, “YOU ARE NOT CALLING ME ‘CREAM PUFF!’ I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, AM TOO STRONG, TOO MANLY, TOO –”

Papyrus cut him off with a burst of laughter. The other him appeared affronted, but Papyrus couldn’t stop himself – it was truly hilarious how his clone was acting. His chest ached with glee as he lost himself to the hilarity of it all. It wasn’t long before the other him was joining in and the kitchen was filled with a loud chorus of “nyeh heh hehs.”

As their laughter died away, Papyrus realized just how much the exertion had hurt his cheekbones. It has been far too long since he had laughed so hard. And despite the pain in his face, the exertion had felt… good.

His clone snapped his fingers. “I KNOW WHAT TO CALL YOU!”

“WHAT? LARRY IS NOT A GOOD NAME AFTER ALL?”

“No,” the other him said, waving away the interruption. “I REALIZED THAT I KNOW A GUARD NAMED LARRY. BUT HOW ABOUT… EDGE?”

“EDGE?”

“YES, ON ACCOUNT OF YOUR OUTFIT!” His lookalike waved his hands towards Papyrus’s pointed shoulder pads. Papyrus looked between their outfits and realized that his duplicate was much more casual attire than he was. He had to admit that his leather armor truly made him look much “edgier” than this universe’s version of him.

“I SUPPOSE THAT IS AN… ADEQUATE NAME.” In truth, he really liked the name, but he was embarrassed to admit it. “BUT I THINK I AM STILL GOING TO CALL YOU CREAM PUFF.”

“DON’T YOU DARE! BROTHER WOULD NEVER LET ME HEAR THE END OF IT!”
“NYEH, MAYBE ONLY WHEN IT IS just THE TWO of US THEN.”

His duplicate blushed orange at that and it took Edge a moment to realize why that was the case. It was at moments like this that he was grateful for the burns on his cheeks because, without them, his glowing red blush would be obvious.

As he recognized how uncomfortable his lookalike was acting, his thoughts returned to his brother… and the other Sans. Once again, his soul twisted uneasily in his chest. But he had to know the extent of their… relationship.

“So…” Edge said, unsure exactly how to broach the topic… and unsure if he truly wanted to know. “YOU and YOUR BROTHER SEEM to GET ALONG WELL with… MY BROTHER.”

“Oh, well, yes! He is very SWEET and THOUGHTFUL and KIND!” Papyrus smiled brightly. “He has quite the MOUTH on him, but I think I have tamed it since he has shown up here.”

Edge’s face warmed again as he wondered what Papyrus meant by that. It was true that his brother had quite the mouth – both with his unnecessary swearing every other word and his bedtime habits. But what he really wanted to do was ask Papyrus if the two of them had been fucking his brother. Though he was having a hard time asking that without being crude.

“So you have gotten to… know him well?”

“Yes, quite well!” He beamed at Edge.

Edge coughed awkwardly. “Your brother too?”

Papyrus blinked at him and he seemed to deflate a little as obvious realization hit him. “Oh,” he murmured. “I… err… are you asking…?” He waited a few moments as he stared at Edge, but when no answer was forthcoming, he quietly offered, “Yes, well… your brother has gotten to ‘know’ us… very well indeed.”

Edge bowed his head as disappointment settled into his bones. So it was true. While he had been suffering at the hands of Captain Undyne, his brother had been here, living it up with the two of them. He knew he should be angry. Hell, just about anyone in the Underground would expect him to kill this other Papyrus here and now for fucking his mate. But he just wasn’t capable of it. He felt too… inadequate. And as he looked back up at his duplicate, tears blurring his vision, he couldn’t help but feel that this Papyrus, who was so soft around the edges, must have something that he did not.

“But… er… do not fret, Edge.” Papyrus twiddled his thumbs together and looked to the side, not making eye contact. “It was just… just sex for Red. He really missed you.”

“What do you mean?” Edge croaked as he brushed away the irritating tears that had gathered in his sockets.

“He… he does not like me in the way you think.” He almost sounded disappointed. “He truly does love you.”

“I do not know how having sex with you and your brother demonstrates that in any way.”

“It was just sex for him.” He rubbed his arm absently. “Every time we… shared an intimate moment, he would, erm, call out your name. ‘Boss,’” he clarified at Edge’s confused look. “At first
I thought it was his nickname for me. But now I can see that he… just wanted you.”

Edge blinked a few times and despite his misgivings about the whole situation and his deep sense of betrayal, he couldn’t help but feel the tiniest bit uplifted by Papyrus’s words. Had his brother truly missed him?

If that was the case, then Edge really had fucked up.

He buried his face into his palms, reigniting the pain in both his cheekbones and missing fingers. He shouldn’t have thrown the shoe this morning, shouldn’t have allowed Sans to go away without talking to him. He loved him after all. What was his problem? Why couldn’t he just let things go?

Papyrus coughed nervously. “I could not help but notice that you and your brother appear to be… having some issues.”

“That is one way to put it,” Edge said, his words muffled by his hands.

“Has something… happened?”

Edge sighed and lowered his hands. Papyrus was looking at him with concern. “According to him, I’m a failure that does not listen to him. And he thinks I do not care about him.”

“I doubt he said that!”

Edge nodded. “He hates me. And I… I am very angry with him for his actions. I thought… the two of us were… were…” He couldn’t find the words to articulate their relationship. “Real. The only good thing in the world and he just –” He stopped midsentence and blinked. Why was he telling him this? This was none of his business. He didn’t know him at all, so how could he trust him?

But Edge supposed if there was one monster anyone could trust, it was themselves, right?

Papyrus cleared his throat and when he spoke, his tone conveyed authority and seriousness. “Edge, you must trust me when I say this – your brother loves you. A lot. And although you are angry, perhaps… you should be the bigger monster and apologize?” Edge opened his mouth to rebut, but was cut off immediately by Papyrus. “Now, do not misunderstand! I am not taking Red’s side. For all I know, he has been a jerk! But I know that sometimes I fight with my Sans and I know just how frustratingly stubborn and boneheaded he can be!” Papyrus’s mouth twitched. “But I love him and I… depend on him a lot. So sometimes I apologize even when I am in the right.”

Edge gripped the table and stared at his scarred and injured hands. He knew Papyrus was right. It was horrible to admit, but… he really missed Sans. It was as Papyrus had said – he depended on him a lot. He was everything to him. The only source of light in this fucked up world. And if could just make himself apologize… maybe they could have a discussion. A real discussion. Without the shouting, the insults, the pain. They needed to discuss… all of this. Whatever the hell this was.

“If you are open to it, may I give you a suggestion?” Edge looked inquiringly at Papyrus whose brow was furrowed with concern. “Perhaps… you could bake some brownies with me today? And that way you can give them to Red as an apology gift. I always find that giving something alongside an apology is much more effective.”

“I… suppose. I have never made them before though.”

Papyrus’s voice returned to full volume. “WELL THAT IS WHERE YOU ARE IN LUCK BECAUSE I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, WILL AID YOU WITH THAT!” His smile was brilliant and Edge couldn’t help but let some of his anger dissipate as he looked at him. It was so odd how
Papyrus was just so different from him and yet so similar.

A sudden knock at the door startled Edge from his thoughts. He instinctually summoned a bone weapon in his hand and jumped to his feet, ready to fight.

“Nyeh! Put your magic away!” Papyrus whispered at him. When Edge didn’t respond to his request, Papyrus explained, “No one is going to attack you and you will just scare people waving your bones around like that!”

Reluctantly, he dismissed the weapon and only then did Papyrus walk over to the door. Edge stayed behind the wall, peering his face out to watch the other skeleton’s back in case an enemy attempted to break in. Papyrus flung the door open, but his tall frame obscured the visitor. Edge tensed – he didn’t like being in the dark about a potential enemy.

Papyrus’s voice constricted with excitement. “UNDYNE! WHAT ARE YOU DOING ALL THE WAY OUT HERE?!”

Edge’s soul sank in his chest. Undyne? As in… Captain Undyne? She was alive?

“Hey, Papyrus!” She sounded almost mellow compared to the captain’s usual snappish tone. “I, uh, was wondering if Red was around?”

“ARE THOSE FOR HIM?”

“Yeah,” and Edge saw a bouquet of flowers wave into his line of sight from behind Papyrus’s frame. “Figured that I owe him an apology for the other night. Alphys said I… got a little drunk.”

“ERR… ‘A LITTLE’ MAY BE A BIT OF AN UNDERSTATEMENT, UNDYNE.”

“Gah! I know! I messed up big time! Alphys is real pissed at me. I may have, um, promised her that I wouldn’t drink at the party.” Papyrus sighed at her as he put his hands on his hips. “Ah come on, don’t be like that! You have no clue how stressful it’s been at HQ, Papyrus! I just needed one night to relax and –” Papyrus held up his hand and the captain sighed this time. “Sorry, sorry! I just know I was not my best that night. So, um… is the punk around?”

“RED IS WORKING AT THE LABORATORY RIGHT NOW.”

“The lab?! But I just got back from there! GAH!” Her sudden shout caused both Papyrus and Edge to jump. “Do you mind if I leave these here? I really need to get back to work. Ugh!”

“OF COURSE YOU CAN! HOW ABOUT I GO FIND SOME PAPER AND YOU CAN LEAVE A NOTE FOR HIM?” He moved out of the way to beckon her inside the house, and as he did, he revealed the captain to Edge. Except for her outfit – a colorless suit of armor – Captain Undyne looked exactly as he remembered her.

A burst of trepidation pumped through his soul as the captain – the no-longer-headless, still-alive captain – walked through the door.

“Thanks, Papyrus!” She slapped Papyrus on the back and grinned, revealing her sharpened teeth. “Always knew I could count on you!”

“NYEH!” Papyrus was smiling with pride. “I WILL BE RIGHT BACK! YOU CAN SET THE FLOWERS DOWN OVER THERE.” He pointed to the table in the living room. “AND MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME!”
“Thanks! Don’t mind if I do!”

Edge whipped his head back into the kitchen and pressed himself flat against the wall. His breathing quickened as he shook with horror. If Captain Undyne saw him here… what would she do to him? What would she do to the other Papyrus? He hoped that she would have no inclination to visit the kitchen.

As if hearing his thoughts, the fish monster walked into the kitchen and went straight to the stove. She looked down at the pot of leftover spaghetti. Without bothering to take off her gauntlet, she lowered her hand inside, scooped a handful of sauce-drenched noodles into her mouth, and slurped them up loudly. Edge put aside his terror over being caught for just a moment and shuddered with disgust as he tried not to gag at the noise.

“UNDYNE!” Both the captain and Edge jumped at the sound of Papyrus’s voice. His face reflected the revulsion that Edge was feeling at the moment. “THAT IS… GROSS! THERE ARE BOWLS RIGHT THERE!” He pointed to the drying dishes next to the sink.

The captain turned around towards the kitchen entrance, smiling, and said, “Why should I get a bowl dirty when I can just – AAH!” She jumped backwards and summoned a spear into her hand as she noticed Edge in the corner. “What in the world?!”

Edge straightened his posture, curled his injured right hand into a fist, and placed it over his sternum in the traditional Royal Guard salute. He could feel a coat of sweat pool across his skull as he shouted, “GREETINGS, MA’AM!”

“Oh, er, Undyne, this is Edge!” Papyrus said as he waved pointlessly towards the corner. “Edge, this is Undyne!”

Captain Undyne looked at Papyrus like he was crazy. “What do you mean ‘this is Edge?’ This is clearly… some really messed up version of you, Papyrus! What the hell is going on?!”

“Yes, well, he just arrived yesterday, and he is new to the –”

She cut him off. “How are you so calm about this?! And you!”

Edge flinched as she pointed at him with her spear, though he recovered quickly. “Yes, ma’am!”

He just hoped this version of the captain hadn’t undergone any determination treatment. Perhaps then she would work out her curiosity… more gently than the Captain Undyne he had known. He felt a specter of pain in both his face and right hand at the thought.

“Don’t ‘yes, ma’am’ me!”

“Y-YES, MA’AM?” He swore at himself inside his own head. Smooth. Real smooth.

“And stop… saluting me.” Edge immediately complied and Captain Undyne shook her head as she dismissed her spear. “What is it with you and Red? I assume you two are from the same universe?” He nodded. “Does everyone stick to formalities there or something?”

“I… ER…” What could he say to that? Of course they stuck to formalities. Failing to give the proper respects to an officer of the Royal Guard… that would be a death wish!

“UM… UNDYNE?” The captain snapped her attention back to Papyrus. “EDGE HERE… AND RED TOO… WELL, THEIR UNIVERSE IS A BIT DIFFERENT FROM OURS.”

“Really? The massive burns on this guy’s face didn’t clue you in?” She sighed as she smashed her
face with her ungloved hand. “Sorry, sorry, that was rude.”

“WELL, YES… THEIR UNIVERSE IS NOT QUITE AS… NICE AS OURS.”

Edge stared at Papyrus, wondering what he meant by that.

“You mean it sucks? If his face is anything to go by, I’m sure that’s true.”

“MMM, NO… I MEAN… THE MONSTERS THERE ARE NOT AS… KIND AS THEY ARE HERE.”

“Well, Red doesn’t seem like much of an asshole. Is this guy a jackass or something?”

“LANGUAGE!”

Undyne snickered at that. “Well, guess I won’t question it too much then. Though if you two start fucking, I’m going to have to intervene, Papyrus!”

Papyrus dissolved into a sputtering mess as Edge felt his face heat up. The fact that the Captain Undyne – the monster who had trained him since joining the Royal Guard, who had tortured him for months, who had taken his fingers – was teasing him about fucking himself… well, it was disconcerting in a way he had never experienced before. He felt like he was going to be sick.

“SO… ERR… HERE IS YOUR PAPER.” He practically threw the pen and paper at her. “YOU CAN LEAVE IT NEAR THE FLOWERS WHEN YOU ARE DONE.”

Captain Undyne looked at the two of them and smiled wickedly. “Oh, okay,” she said as she chuckled lightly and bent down over the table to write. When she was done, she folded the paper into a card.

“Well, I need to head out. But hey, Papyrus, we totally need to chill together again! Your party was a total blast and, well, I know I’ve been MIA these last few months. You’ve really got no clue how busy Asgore and those friggin’ police officers have got me!”

“I COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND, UNDYNE! WORK COMES FIRST! WE ROYAL GUARDS MUST GIVE IT OUR ALL!” He clapped his hands onto his hips and stood proudly for a few moments before he saw the haggard expression on Undyne’s face. “BUT! A DAY OFF SOUNDS LIKE IT WOULD BE A LOT OF FUN!”

She pumped her fist into the air. “Definitely! I soooo need it! And hey, Edgy-poo, you can join in too. Just don’t be too much of a nerd, alright?” She beamed at him, flashing her pointed teeth in his direction.

Edge still hadn’t recovered from the earlier comment… or to the captain’s relaxed attitude in general. So he merely nodded in response. She laughed and waved goodbye to the two of them before leaving. As soon as the door slammed shut behind her, the house felt almost empty.

Papyrus rubbed the back of his skull as he looked over to Edge with an apologetic grin. “S-SORRY ABOUT THAT! UNDYNE CAN BE QUITE… BLUNT. BUT I AM SURE IT IS MUCH THE SAME BACK IN YOUR UNIVERSE?”

It was a question, not a statement.

Edge simply nodded. He didn’t have the soul to say that his Undyne, while also blunt, was quite dead. Somehow he didn’t think Cream Puff here would take that news all that well. He certainly
hadn’t and he couldn’t even be sure that he had wanted her alive in the end.

“SO… DO YOU STILL WANT TO MAKE THOSE BROWNIES?”

Edge nodded and the two set to work immediately. It was odd – he had always told his brother (especially when he visited that grease pit, Grillby’s) that food was for survival. But as he helped Papyrus gather the ingredients, he realized that he was having… fun.

When was the last time he had had fun?

Unless he counted the grim, half-crazed joy he had experienced upon finding the time machine in their basement, the last time he had been this happy was when he had last slept with Sans. And even that pleasure had been short-lived once his brother had attacked him.

But this felt good. He could not understand why this exceedingly simple task was bringing him such pleasure.

“NO, NO! DO NOT ADD THE EGGS YET, EDGE!”

“THEY ARE ALL GOING INTO THE SAME BOWL IN THE END, RIGHT?”

“But you cannot mix them together right away! It does not work that way! You have to follow the recipe exactly!”

Perhaps “exceedingly simple” was the wrong description.

As soon as they had added all of the ingredients to the bowl, Papyrus handed him the hand mixer and told him to blend the ingredients together while he got the brownie sheet. As he switched on the machine, somehow his finger slipped on the dial and turned the mixer to full speed. The half-submerged spindles sent batter flying everywhere. Some even hit the nubs of his metacarpals on his right hand.

“OW!” he hissed. Quickly, he turned off the machine and flung it into Papyrus’s hands. His fingers stung as the chocolate began to seep inside the spongy bone.

“ARE YOU OKAY?” Papyrus shouted. Edge nodded but sat down at the table, gripping his legs to try to focus the pain elsewhere.

Papyrus handed him a towel, and although it helped to clean up the batter, it still stung as the fabric rubbed against the raw bone.

“How did that happen anyway?”

Edge continued to wipe at the hand, studiously ignoring his lookalike’s question. He really didn’t want to discuss Captain Undyne’s punishments. Especially not this particular one. And certainly not after it had become so obvious how close this universe’s Undyne was to Papyrus.

The silence between them lingered for too long.

“SORRY. I SHOULD NOT HAVE ASKED. IT WAS RUDE OF ME.” He returned to the bowl and began to pour the batter into the pan.

“IT IS FINE.” Though Edge had to wonder why Papyrus had asked. He was right – it was rude. Did he not have the sense to refrain from asking such a personal question? Maybe… that sort of thing didn’t carry the same weight in this universe? He thought back to Papyrus’s earlier words to Undyne.
“WHAT DID YOU MEAN EARLIER WHEN YOU SAID MY UNIVERSE WAS NOT NICE?”

Papyrus placed the prepared brownie sheet in the oven and turned around, a twitching smile on his face. Edge could see the sheen of sweat on his brow.

“WELL… THINGS ARE JUST A BIT DIFFERENT HERE.”

“CLEARLY IF WE ARE ON THE SURFACE. AND HOW DID YOU ALL MANAGE THAT? DID YOU WIN THE WAR? OR DID YOU JUST GET ALL OF THE HUMAN SOULS TO BREAK THE BARRIER?”

“WELL, THE LATTER.” Papyrus’s smile slid of his face. “B-BUT LET ME ASSURE YOU WE DO NOT CONDONE KILLING HUMANS HERE. OR… ER… ANY MONSTERS EITHER.”

“YOU… DON’T? YOU DO NOT KILL FOR HONOR?” How did they determine who would lead if not by testing one’s power? Is that why Queen Toriel was apparently giving recipes to his other self here? Did she not lead their kingdom?

“NO. ERR… THIS IS HARD TO EXPLAIN, BUT WE THINK KILLING IS… NOT GOOD. NOT GOOD AT ALL.”

Edge couldn’t help but scoff at that. Of course killing was “not good.” It made him feel like shit, to put it mildly. But that was just how things were done. It was kill or be killed. And it was almost inconceivable to think that anyone at his age could go without a kill tally attached to their name. And… wait… did that mean…?

“HAVE YOU NOT KILLED ANYONE BEFORE?”

“OF COURSE NOT!” His eyes widened. “KILLING IS WRONG!”

Edge blinked. This world really was strange.

“DOES THAT MEAN… YOU MONSTERS HAVE NOT KILLED THE HUMAN EMPIRE HERE YET?”

“THERE IS NO ‘YET!’ WE HAVE NO PLANS TO KILL ANY HUMANS. THEY ARE OUR FRIENDS… SORT OF.”

“…FRIENDS? DIDN’T YOU JUST SAY YOU TOOK THEIR SOULS?”

“WELL, YES, BUT –”

“AND DOESN’T THAT MEAN YOU WERE ALL UNDERGROUND AT SOME POINT?”

“YES, THREE YEARS AGO, BUT –”

“SO HOW ARE THEY FRIENDS?” Edge huffed. “THEY TRAPPED YOU DOWN THERE, RIGHT? HOW COULD THE WAR NOT HAVE BEEN REIGNITED?”

“THAT IS NOT HOW THAT WORKS HERE. THAT IS WHAT I WAS TRYING TO SAY EARLIER.”

“HONOR FOR THE KILLS ASIDE, DON’T YOU ALL WANT… REVENGE?”

“WHAT! NO! HOW CRUDE!”
Edge stared in wonder. It was like he was down in the labs again, stuck talking to Flowey. Was everyone here like this? How could they not be angry about being trapped underground?

But then he thought back all of the kills attributed to his name and his soul churned with guilt. From the human to the queen, each kill had taken a small piece of him away that he knew he would never get back. Were monsters here able to avoid that feeling? Did none of them feel empty inside?

Maybe revenge was overrated.

The timer for the brownies went off and Papyrus returned to the oven to pull the pan out. A super sweet aroma permeated the air and Edge’s soul panged with renewed hunger.

When Papyrus returned to his seat, he looked Edge in the eye in a way that unnerved him. “ARE YOU OKAY?”

Edge was taken aback. “WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?”

“I AM SURE THAT IT IS A LOT TO TAKE IN, ALL OF THIS,” he said as he waved his arm around. “I WANT TO MAKE SURE YOU ARE OKAY.”

Edge’s face warmed. It was odd having someone else care. Of course Sans had asked him similar questions in the past – in fact, he had used to check in all the time to make sure he was doing okay. But it had been a long time since his brother had last asked him. And now a near-stranger was asking him. It was bizarre.

Well, maybe “near-stranger” was the wrong way to phrase it. After all, he was talking to himself.

“I AM… ADJUSTING.”

“YOU KNOW, I AM SURE THAT AS SOON AS RED SEES THESE BROWNIES, HE WILL BE SO HAPPY. IF I KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT SANSES IT IS THAT FOOD WILL WIN THEM OVER IN AN INSTANT. RED IS CERTAINLY NO EXCEPTION”

Edge nodded. Papyrus was right – food really was the way to his brother’s soul. But even so, he felt slightly sick at the prospect of interacting with his brother again. Still, he appreciated Papyrus’s kind words.

“THANK YOU.”

“FOR WHAT?”

“FOR BEING SO… NICE. IT IS VERY STRANGE THAT YOU ARE ACTING THIS WAY, BUT I DO APPRECIATE IT.”

“NYEH!” Papyrus smiled brightly at him. “OF COURSE! DO NOT EVEN MENTION IT!” He stretched his arms in the air and yawned. “WELL, HOW ABOUT WE PLATE THESE BROWNIES AND THEN PERHAPS WE COULD WATCH SOME TELEVISION?”

“TELEVISION? YOU MEAN MTT?” Edge could not remember the last time he had seen anything but the “Off the Air” screen on his defunct television set.

“OH, THERE ARE PLENTY OF MTT PROGRAMS TO WATCH, BUT I MUST ADMIT THAT EVER SINCE LEAVING THE UNDERGROUND I HAVE BECOME FASCINATED WITH THE HUMAN STATIONS! THEY HAVE SO MANY DIFFERENT THINGS TO OFFER!”
Papyrus jumped up from his chair and strode over to the stove and began to cut the brownies and transfer them to a plate. As he neared the end of the sheet, he turned to Edge and exclaimed, “OH! YOU KNOW WHAT WOULD BE LOVELY TO ACCOMPANY THESE?” Edge shook his head. “UNDYNE’S FLOWERS. WE CAN PLACE THEM ON THE TABLE NEXT TO THE DISH. WOULD YOU MIND GRABBING THEM?”

Edge nodded and exited the kitchen, ready to rush back with the vase of yellow flowers. But he was stunned into immobility as he saw that his brother and the other Sans were standing right there in the living room. The other Sans was staring at him, a worried look on his face. His brother, on the other hand, had not noticed Edge’s presence; he was reading the card that Undyne had left behind. Edge crossed his arms against his chest and just stared as his brother focused on the card. For an instant, he wanted to forget their stupid fight and scoop him up, hug him, and tell him that he was sorry.

But as he continued to stare, he realized that his brother’s hands, skull, and clothes were all stained blue.

Edge hadn’t forgotten the color of the other Sans’s magic. He flicked his gaze towards him now. Sure enough, this universe’s Sans was covered in splatters of red as well.

Edge’s soul sunk in his chest. His brother had been off… fucking his other self all day? After all they had been through over the last day, Sans had decided that he wasn’t satiated with making him feel like shit with words? That had to be it, right? He just wanted to make him feel like garbage to get back at him.

His brother dropped the card onto the table and turned towards the kitchen. Shock overtook his brother’s features as he made eye contact with Edge. Should he say something? Was there even a point anymore?

“EDGE!” called Papyrus from behind him. “ARE YOU GOING TO GET THE FLOWERS OR NOT?”

His eyes darted to the vase and then back to Red, his brow furrowing. Fuck apologies. Fuck being nice. Where would that get him? He was clearly the third wheel in this household.

“GET THEM YOURSELF!” he shouted back to Papyrus.

“What?”

Ignoring Papyrus’s exclamation, Edge looked his brother up and down a couple of times, taking in the magic stains all over him, and tsked loudly. He did not stick around to see his brother’s reaction, but instead chose to return to his room. He quickly stomped up the stairs, his arms still folded against his chest. It wasn’t until he was nearly to the room that his brother seemed to finally find his voice.

“well, fuck you too, papyrus!”

Ignoring his brother’s remark, he slammed the door shut behind him. He slid down to the ground, hugging his knees as emotion overtook him.

Whatever Papyrus had said earlier clearly wasn’t true. If his brother was off fucking the other Sans, clearly he didn’t love him. Who would do such a thing? And all of those comments from earlier about how his Sans didn’t love the two skeletons from this universe? All bullshit! Every single word.
He groaned into his legs. He didn’t want to be angry. He didn’t want to be disappointed. He didn’t want to feel betrayed. And he certainly didn’t want to be jealous. He didn’t want to feel anything at all.

And yet here he was, allowing the emotions to take over once again, losing control.

But maybe he just didn’t care anymore.
Papyrus stood in the doorway to the kitchen, stunned, as an incredibly angry-looking Red rushed past him. He had no idea what had just happened; one minute Edge had been happily helping him and the next, he was yelling at him and loudly stomping up the stairs. Hoping to get some answers, he turned and arched his eye ridge at Sans, who merely sighed and shook his head in response.

With trepidation, Papyrus turned around to look inside the kitchen and watched as Red stuffed an entire brownie into his mouth. His face was distorted with emotion and even from here, Papyrus could see the tears running down his face. The sound of Red’s loud sniffling as he wiped at his face sent a dagger of pain through Papyrus’s soul.

Papyrus didn’t know what to say or do. His soul quivered at the sight of Red in such distress.

There was the tiniest crackle of energy in the air and from the way Red’s eye glowed with magic, Papyrus could tell he was about to teleport away. But before he could, Sans rushed from the living room and grabbed the arm of Red’s jacket.

“Hey, don’t –” Sans said.

Red pulled out of Sans’s grasp and said tearily, “I’m going to bed.”

Papyrus bounded forward and wrapped his arms around Red from behind before he could teleport away. The other skeleton twisted in his grasp, pushing at his limbs and trying to disentangle himself, but Papyrus only held on tighter. Red needed his support right now and if he ran away, who knew when he would get out of bed next? Papyrus gently lowered his head and nuzzled the top of Red’s skull. As he did so, Sans joined in the embrace.

Red leaned into them and let out a deep, uncontrollable sob that shook his body. Papyrus’s soul quivered with sadness for the other skeleton and he pulled him in even more tightly to his chest. The three of them stood there together for a couple of minutes, giving Red time to cry himself out in violent, hiccupping sobs. From the way he was crying, either Edge had said something particularly rude as he had marched up the stairs or Red had kept his emotions pent up for far too
Papyrus inwardly sighed. He honestly couldn’t understand why Edge had suddenly gotten so angry. Hadn’t he just agreed to give Red the brownies as an apology gift? What had happened?

Thankfully, it wasn’t too long before Red’s loud sobbing trailed off into low whimpers and then eventually into silence. Papyrus planted a small kiss on top of Red’s skull before he extricated himself from the smaller skeletons. As they broke apart, he rubbed Sans’s and Red’s backs, moving his phalanges in small circles between their ribs soothingly, trying to convey just how much they both meant to him. Sans backed away from Red and reached up to pat Papyrus’s hand reassuringly.

Loud sniffing noises filled the room as Red wiped his face on his hoodie. He murmured a small “thanks” to Papyrus and Sans as he walked over to the kitchen table and plopped himself onto the chair.

Sans coughed pointedly, drawing Papyrus’s attention. “so, uh, how about an early dinner, bro?”

He flashed at grin at Papyrus, though the expression didn’t quite reach his eyes. In fact, now that he was looking properly, Papyrus realized that Sans appeared as if he was about to pass out from exhaustion at any second. There were dark shadows under his eye sockets and his eyelights were jittering ever so slightly. It reminded Papyrus of when they were younger, back when they had lived in Hotlands. Sans had always looked like he had never gotten any sleep back then as well. Probably because he hadn’t. His soul twisted with guilt as he remembered how… insensitive he had been back then.

“paps?”

Sans was looking at him worriedly and Papyrus realized he hadn’t responded to his question yet. He was just standing there, looking quite foolish indeed.

“OF COURSE! SIT DOWN AND I WILL HEAT UP SOME FOOD FOR THE THREE OF US!”

Sans smiled weakly at him and sat down at the table as Papyrus brought out a pot of unfinished soup from a couple of days ago. After giving it a quick whiff and determining that it was still safe to eat, he placed the pot on the stove and turned on the burner. After stirring the soup a bit, he turned around to join the other two at the table. But before he took more than a couple of steps, he was stunned into immobility as he noticed the state the other two were in. They were both covered in a blend of red and blue spatters that stained their hands, skulls, and clothes.

No. They wouldn’t have….

“ERR… WHAT DID THE TWO OF YOU DO TODAY AT THE LABORATORY?” he asked, knowing full well what they had done.

Sans leaned his elbows against the table and pressed his face into his hands. “ugh… you would not believe the day we’ve had.”

Red gave a deep sigh and added, his voice hoarse from his breakdown, “yeah, i’ll say. between alphys and the time anomalies and…” He trailed off for a second as he wrung his hands together. “and… everything here, it’s just been one shitstorm after another.”

“LANGUAGE,” Papyrus responded out of habit, though his mind was focused on what Red had just said. He had been expecting the two of them to get embarrassed about what had clearly been… a fun day for the two of them. But it sounded as if it had been much more eventful than that. He put
his hand on Sans’s shoulder and felt him jump at the touch.

At Papyrus’s questioning look, Sans explained how there had been signs of time travel – no resets, thank goodness for that – and that they had been out all day trying to put up cameras. Papyrus felt his soul twist in his chest as Sans spoke. If there was someone out there time traveling, then that meant they could go back to the beginning. Make it all reset. He could lose all of his memories, his life on the surface, everything.

He could even forget his relationship with Sans.

Papyrus hoped that none of his fear was showing because he knew from the way the other two were acting that they were barely holding it together. He would have to be strong for all of them. It was what he did best, after all! There was no time for self-pity or fear when others were in need of the Great Papyrus’s help!

He took hold of Sans’s shoulders and gave them a light squeeze, trying to put all of his love and reassurance into the gesture. There was not much he could say or do to let him know that everything was okay (perhaps because it wasn’t), but he hoped it helped. Lately, this sort of thing was all he could do.

However, as he looked at both of them – their hands still covered with the remnants of their activities earlier – he wondered if his current methods of helping out were actually doing any good. He just could not believe that Sans and Red had the audacity to do such a thing when Edge was clearly in such distress! He eyed his brother, who was hugging himself as he stared into space. Papyrus knew that it had been his idea. It went back to how obsessed Sans was with sex these days. It just wasn’t healthy! And he had hoped that own his refusal to engage in it over the last few weeks had sent a message!

Well, he supposed he hadn’t refused the entire time. He blushed as he thought back to a couple of evenings ago. It had been his birthday, and Red and Sans had teased him, and he had just wanted to have a little fun, and –

He shook his head. Now was not the time for this. Instead, he clearly needed to knock some sense into these two!

He cleared his throat and looked Red up and down. “DINNER IS ALMOST READY. PERHAPS THE TWO OF YOU SHOULD CLEAN UP.”

Red sat up straight in his chair and followed Papyrus’s gaze to his clothes. As he brought his hands in front of him, a look of horror crossed his face as he saw the blue stains. Sans, too, looked down at his clothes, and upon seeing the tinge of red in his shirt, groaned lowly and smacked his head.

“damn,” his brother muttered under his breath.

“YES, WELL,” Papyrus said as he crossed his arms across his chest. “IT WOULD BE QUITE UNSANITARY FOR YOU TO EAT DINNER LIKE THAT.” He stared pointedly at Red whose face now matched the color of his hoodie.

“fucking hell, i’m a fucking idiot.”

“I THINK WE HAVE ALL MADE SOME MISTAKES TODAY.” Papyrus gave his brother a significant look, and Sans seemed to shrink under his gaze.

“yeah, guess you’re right, bro…”
That night, the three of them ate in awkward silence. Papyrus was sure that the other two were preoccupied with their own thoughts – Sans about the time anomalies, Red about his brother. Papyrus, on the other hand, was worried about everything. His brother’s health was clearly not in the best of shape, and Red’s rocky relationship with Edge was certainly not helping. There was nothing he could do about the time anomalies, so he would have to fix what he could, and that meant repairing the bond between Red and Edge.

The problem was that he did not know how best to tackle the situation. From their discussion earlier, Papyrus could tell that Edge did not appreciate Red’s relationship with Sans nor the fact that he had slept with the two of them. And he must have gotten quite hurt indeed after seeing the clear evidence of Red’s and Sans’s intimacy all over their clothes.

But he, the Great Papyrus, was not an unreasonable monster, and he was sure that his counterpart was not either. So he would speak with Edge and see if he could talk some sense into him. He just hoped that Red and Sans would leave him alone long enough to allow him to do just that.

As they finished their meal, Papyrus announced that he wished to watch television tonight. A look of confusion crossed Sans’s face and he opened his mouth to protest. But when Papyrus gave him a stern look, he closed his mouth immediately and remained quiet. Red didn’t even bother trying to argue; he just nodded absentmindedly. Papyrus was sure that he hadn’t listened to a word he had said.

Red and Sans settled on the couch and turned on the news. As images of the war-torn country and clips about terrorist activities in the human capital flashed across the screen, Papyrus hoped he now had the opportunity he needed to visit Edge and talk with him.

“IF YOU DO NOT MIND, I NEED TO… DO SOMETHING UPSTAIRS. I WILL BE BACK LATER!” He hoped his vagueness would not alert the other two too much. To his pleasure, Red simply nodded as he stared, unseeing, at the television screen.

Sans, on the other hand, looked at Papyrus pointedly, though he only nodded and replied, “okay, paps.”

With the other two distracted, Papyrus rushed up the stairs, marched directly to Sans’s old bedroom, and knocked firmly but quietly.

From the other side of the door came an almost-immediate reply: “FUCK OFF, SANS.”

Papyrus stood and stared at the door, affronted that Edge would use such language. He had figured that a skeleton such as themselves would never resort to such crudeness! Simply put, there were many ways Edge could have conveyed his anger and Papyrus had thought better of him.

Offended by this display of vulgarity, and knowing that knocking again would do little good anyway, Papyrus flung open the door and stepped inside the room.

As he closed the door behind him, the bedroom grew dim. The window provided the only source of light and the sun had already disappeared behind the line of trees in the distance. It took a moment for Papyrus to adjust from the brightness of the living room to the darkness of Sans’s stuffy room. He made a mental note to pick up lightbulbs when he next went to the store – he’d had enough of the darkness in here!

As he glanced toward the bed, he was shocked to see that Edge was not there.
“WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN HERE?”

Papyrus turned to his left and saw his lookalike sitting cross-legged on the ground, a thick book perched in his hand.

“OH, HELLO, EDGE,” he said, flashing him his friendliest smile. “I ALMOST DID NOT SEE YOU THERE!”

Edge snapped his book shut with a loud clap and Papyrus saw that it was one of Sans’s old science fiction books. Edge enjoyed reading? How wonderful! So did the Great Papyrus! He knew that this was something that the two of them could bond over. Discussing books was –

“I SAID,” Edge snarled as a wisp of magic flowed from his right eye, “WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?”

Papyrus recoiled at the venom in his duplicate’s voice. As he looked at Edge, his face was taut with anger… and perhaps a bit of pain.

“ER… I… I…”

Edge let out a low howl of frustration and smacked the floor with his left fist. “CAN’T YOU TELL THAT I JUST WANT TO BE ALONE? GO BACK DOWNSTAIRS, GO FUCK MY BROTHER, DO WHATEVER YOU WANT. BUT JUST LET ME HAVE MY SPACE, DAMMIT.”

Papyrus waved his hand, indicating for Edge to lower his voice. “Edge, please do not –”

“AND DO NOT CALL ME THAT! MY NAME IS PAPYRUS. PA-PY-RUS.”

“Fine then, Papyrus!” he hissed sharply. He felt his own frustration welling up inside him despite his best efforts to maintain control over the situation.

“WELL? WHAT DO YOU WANT?”

“I just came upstairs to tell you that I am sorry and that I understand why you left earlier!”

Silence fell between them for a few seconds and Edge’s magic died away. When he finally responded, his voice was barely above a whisper. “What?”

Papyrus nodded. “You heard me. I, the Great Papyrus, apologize on behalf of Red and my brother. Mostly my brother. They acted most foolishly and I am quite disappointed in the pair of them!”

Edge’s brow furrowed. “Do not pretend that this is just them! You lied to me!”

“You did earlier! You told me that Red does not love you or Sans. And yet there he was today, fucking himself. Either was out of love… or spite.” As he said the last word, he looked away from Papyrus, his shoulders sagging forward.

Papyrus let out a giant sigh. “I said that Red does not love me. I said nothing about Sans.” Edge shot an ugly glare at him. “And I do not think they did it out of spite. They both… have grown quite close.”

“Close? They are the same monster! How the fu –?”

Papyrus interrupted him before he could finish the vulgar word. “Are we the same monster?” He
looked Edge in the eye. Despite their similar appearances, mannerisms, and voices, one thing was painfully obvious: they were not the same. Just as it was with Red and Sans.

“I suppose not,” Edge conceded. “But even so, that does not matter! How dare Sans do this to me? He is supposed to be mine!”

Papyrus barked. “Yours? That seems rather… possessive.”

“Excuse me?”

Papyrus placed his hands on his hips. “I do not know how it is back where you are from, but here, monsters do not own other monsters. We are free to be with whomever we want, whenever we want.”

Edge blinked rapidly. “You know what I meant!”

“No,” Papyrus said as he crossed his arms against his chest. “I do not.”

“I… I…” Edge trailed off, looking befuddled. It took him some time to find his words, but when he did, his voice was softer somehow. “Do you not understand loyalty here? Would you not be angry if your Sans slept with another monster?”

It was Papyrus’s turn to be confused. “What do you mean? Sans sleeps with other monsters all the time.”

Edge gawked at Papyrus and this time he really had no rebuttal. The silence lingered for a couple of minutes as his words sunk in. Maybe this was why Edge was so upset about all of this – he did not understand the rules here. Well, explaining the rules was not a problem for the Great Papyrus!

“Perhaps it is different in your universe,” Papyrus said kindly. “But here, if a monster wishes to mate with only one monster, that is what they do. If they want to be with many monsters, they may do that as well.”

Edge worked his jaw a few moments before he asked, “And if one monster in the relationship does not approve?”

“It is different for every monster. I, for instance, do not care who Sans dates so long as he is happy.” And still loves me, whispered a tiny thought in the back of his head that he did not give voice to. “However, I know Grillby is particularly adamant that Sans tell him every time he dates someone n–”

“GRILLBY?!” Edge stood up, his eye flashing red with magic once again. “HAS SANS BEEN FUCKING GRILLBY TOO?! WHO ELSE HAS HE –?”

“No, no! Not your Sans! Shh!” Papyrus did not want to alert the others to this. It was supposed to be a conversation just between the two of them. “Red has only been with Sans and I. Please, please sit down!”

Edge’s magic disappeared as he sat back down on the floor, though worry still danced across his face as he huffed and puffed on the floor.

After a few moments of silence, his lookalike whispered, “So is it just sex or…”

“As I was saying before, each monster is different. But for Red and Sans… it is more than that.”
Edge bowed his head forward, looking utterly defeated.

Papyrus cleared his throat and said, “That does not mean that he does not love you.”

Edge cocked a brow at him. “What do you mean?”

“Sans loves me. And he loves Red. And Grillby, and Toriel, and maybe other monsters that choose not to be with him. It is in his nature to love… whether he sees it that way or not.” Papyrus sighed. “It is that way for Red too.”

Papyrus stepped closer and bent down on one knee, grabbing Edge’s hand. His counterpart looked startled by the contact and eyed Papyrus cautiously.

Making sure that Edge was staring him directly in the eye, Papyrus stated, “Red loves you. It might not seem like it, but I promise he does.”

Edge’s face contorted with sudden sorrow as he let out a low sob from deep in his chest. As the tears escaped his eye sockets, Papyrus sat down on the ground next to him and pulled him into a hug.

“If he loves me, then why would he do this to me? Why would he sleep with Sans today? Or is that just normal here?”

Papyrus let out a huff of frustration. “No. What he did was rude. Red needs to apologize.”

“What, I don’t need to say sorry now? I thought I was going to be the bigger monster.”

“Yes, he needs to say sorry. But you will still need to be the bigger monster by giving him that opportunity.” Papyrus grabbed Edge by the shoulders and turned his lookalike to face him. “No more running away. No more closed doors. It is time to let him apologize.”

Edge let out a shaky breath as he wiped the tears from his face. The effort clearly pained him because he flinched as the side of his hand brushed against the burnt bone.

“I suppose.”

“It will be difficult, but… if I know you – and I must since you are me! – then I know you are strong enough to do this.”

Edge scoffed, his eyes darting away to one side. “You do not need to baby me. I am aware that I am strong enough.” His mouth twitched upwards into the shadow of a grin. “But thank you. For telling me. And for explaining all of this…” He gestured at everything around him in consternation before spitting out, “…madness.”

Papyrus beamed. “Of course! The Great Papyrus would never leave a friend in the dark!”

“Friend?”

“Yes, the Great Papyrus has many friends and you are lucky enough to be one of them, Edge!” He gasped as he realized his mistake. “I mean ‘Papyrus,’ sorry!” He hoped that he had not upset his counterpart too much by using the offensive name.

Edge snorted. “You can call me Edge. It would be much less confusing after all.”

“Nyeh heh! Of course! Plus it is a very cool name!” He winked at his clone.
The corner of Edge’s mouth twitched slightly. “Not as cool as Papyrus, but I suppose I will have to make do. This is your territory after all.”

Papyrus’s smile grew wider at the other skeleton’s sudden willingness to banter with him. Already it appeared as if Edge was in a better mood! So it was with great reluctance that he asked his next question.

“So… should I go get Red?”

Edge frowned and gave a small sigh. “No, not now. Let me sleep on it. Please.”

Papyrus nodded. It had been more than he had expected for the evening and he was quite glad that Edge was willing to do this much.

“Would you at least like some dinner?”

Edge shook his head. “I had more than enough food for one day.” Papyrus tilted his head at that. It had been a heaping bowl of spaghetti, but it hardly seemed adequate for an entire day! But before he could ask about it, Edge said, “I think I wish to sleep soon.” His duplicate looked toward the window and Papyrus followed his gaze. They could already see the first few glimmers of starlight as night began to fall. “But… thank you for asking. It is strange relying on others for food again.”

“O-Of course!” Papyrus had no idea what Edge meant by that, but his thanks sounded genuine enough and that was all that really mattered. “If you need anything at all, please do not hesitate to ask!”

Edge nodded his head in thanks and as Papyrus left the room, his soul raced with pride. He knew he had helped his other self in a way that no one else had been able to. It filled him with such joy that he almost didn’t notice that Red and Sans were both curled up next to each on the couch, fast asleep.

No, not both of them. Upon closer inspection, Papyrus saw that Red was snoring away on Sans’s shoulder. However, Sans was still awake, his eyes barely open. He was looking up at Papyrus, the hint of a grin on his face.

“how’d it go?” he whispered.

Papyrus beamed. “Wonderfully.”

“heh. i knew my super cool bro could do it.”

Papyrus straightened, laughing softly as he posed gallantly. “Nyeh heh heh! Of course, Sans! I am the Great Papyrus after all!”
Don’t Get All Choked Up on Me Now

Chapter Notes

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulex.tumblr.com. You can also find soul sex and Papby reblogs if that's your thing.

- Phew. So this is my longest chapter yet. And it was a doozy to write. One of those chapters I'm just glad to see over with haha
- Thanks to Purrfecktlysinful (Tumblr/AO3) for helping out with some edits for this chapter! And also thanks to Askellie (Tumblr/AO3) for supplying the taste for UF Paps. (°͜ʖ°)
- Might be a bit before I post the next chapter (as in a few days, not a month like last time haha).
- OH! To clarify, Red is gonna refer to UF Paps as "Boss" in his POV. The rest of them refer to him as Edge. Hopefully not too confusing for everyone.
- Okay, technically I don't know how the fuck a skeleton would get pleasure out of choking since they DON'T HAVE FUCKING ARTERIES. So we'll just say it's magic. Like everything else. YAY *handwaves*
- I know I'm forgetting to put something to the notes section this time, but I just can't remember it right now. Sooo these notes are gonna get updated. Just letting you know in case you read these.
- Alternative chapter names: "Can You Feel the Love Tonight?"; "SANS, GO THE FUCK TO SLEEP"; "But Will They Get a New Dungeon?"

Additional tags for this chapter: Discussions of safe word, discussions of sadism, discussions of murder, make up sex, rough sex, panicking in the middle of said sex, BDSM Negotiations, light bondage, sensitive bones, masochism, asphyxiation, fingering, wall sex, outdoor sex, painful but pleasurable sex, penetration, hints of dubcon (but turns fully consensual anyway), quiet kink
(If I forgot anything, please let me know!)

**5**

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Feeling drained and fatigued, Red slowly woke up, hesitant to abandon the comfort that sleep offered. He lay there with his eyes closed for a few minutes, focusing on the warmth of the blankets that enveloped him, the distant sound of birds singing in the distance, and the heavy weight that burdened his soul as he took in deep, sleepy breaths.

When he finally opened his eyes he was disoriented for a moment – hadn’t he fallen asleep on the couch? Papyrus must have carried him upstairs at some point because here he was, cuddled next to Sans in the car-shaped bed. He looked towards the window and noticed bright light cascading inside the room. From the way the sunlight was colored, Red could tell that it was no longer morning. They must have overslept.

Red glanced over at Sans and saw that he was already awake, staring at the ceiling. All of the usual
signs of exhaustion were on his face and Red wondered if he had even slept at all.

Papyrus was apparently awake as well. The bed jostled as the lanky skeleton pushed himself into a sitting position at the side of the bed, his legs hanging over the edge of the mattress. But before he could leave, Sans grabbed his brother’s arm and pulled him back down.

“What?” Papyrus whispered, his brow furrowed.

Sans wrapped his hand along the curves of Papyrus’s ilium, drawing him in closer. “good morning,” he murmured huskily as his face stretched into a sly grin.

Papyrus’s mouth twitched and a faint orange blush crept along his cheekbones. For a moment, Red was convinced that he was going to get back in bed and cuddle up to Sans to do… well, do what they always seemed to do. But he was shocked when a stern frown crossed Papyrus’s face.

“It is not ‘morning’ anymore, Sans. We have already slept the afternoon away, and I am hungry, and…” He shook his head and sighed. “I am simply in no mood right now for any of this.”

Sans snapped his hand back as if he had just grazed a hot burner. The moment they were no longer touching, Papyrus leapt out of bed. He practically ran to the closet, grabbed his clothes, and without even bothering to put them on, rushed out of the room.

“is he mad at you or something?” Red asked, utterly confused by Papyrus’s odd behavior.

Sans jolted at the sound of his voice and turned towards Red, his eyes wide. After a second, the shock on his face dissipated into a relaxed expression once again… if “relaxed” was the right word. Truly, it appeared as if Sans was about to fall asleep. Or maybe he just needed to.

“good morning,” Sans said, grinning as he rubbed Red’s shoulder gently.

But Red wasn’t about to be distracted by Sans’s gesture. He continued to stare at his lookalike, his brow furrowed, and after a few moments of silence, Sans’s smile disappeared once again. He drew back his hand and looked towards the door.

“nah, he’s not mad. just hasn’t been in the mood lately.”

But he continued to stare at the door with worry and Red could tell that even he wasn’t convinced of what he was saying. But there was nothing to be gained by saying anything. Whatever was going on between the two of them was none of his business. Especially given the status of his own relationship with his brother.

He sighed. Yeah, he was one big fuck up. That was for sure.

As the sound of Red’s sigh, Sans reached an arm around his shoulder and pulled him in for a hug. Red tensed at the touch. It wasn’t that he didn’t appreciate the gesture. Hell, if he were to be honest with himself, he just wanted to lean in and snuggle with Sans. But his brother was in the other room and after yesterday, he couldn’t put him through that again. Flaunting his relationship with Sans like that just wasn’t fair.

But if Sans noticed his hesitation, he didn’t show it. Instead, he continued his embrace, sweeping his hand up and down Red’s arm. Despite his reluctance, the gesture made Red’s soul tingle with guilty pleasure.

Red sighed and pressed the back of his skull further into the pillow. “god, i’m tired.”
“heh. i know the feeling.”

Red’s eyes flashed to Sans’s once again. “did you even sleep?”

“a bit, yeah,” Sans said as he looked back towards the ceiling, slowly blinking.

“you look like shit.”

“heh, thanks.”

“well, you do. obviously you haven’t gotten jack shit for sleep. what’s up?”

Sans cast a sideways glance at him and Red could see guilt and… something else in his expression. Fear? Anger? He couldn’t exactly tell.

“just nightmares. they make it hard to sleep sometimes, you know?”

“sorry.”

“don’t be.”

Silence fell between them again and Red lay there, feeling worn out and like a sack of shit all around. He sighed, feeling the weight of his eyelids grow heavier.

“you think we could stay in bed today?”

He expected Sans to tell him no, that it was important to face the world, or whatever bullshit he usually said. But instead, Red was only met with continued silence. Surprised, and a bit worried, he rolled over onto his side to stare his lookalike straight in the face. Sans seemed to be lost in thought, completely focused on the ceiling. His eyelights hadn’t disappeared, so Red knew he wasn’t having an episode, but… the way he was acting was concerning.

“sans?”

Sans blinked and twisted his head to face him. “sorry, was just giving it some thought.” He let out a heavy sigh. “as much as i’d like to, it’s already so late and we’ve got a lot to do. or i do at least.”

At Red’s questioning expression, Sans clarified, “i got a doctor’s appointment today. plus i promised grillby i would stop by more often, so i was kinda hoping to do that today.”

“oh.” Red had no fucking inclination to be around Grillby today or ever again really, so that just made him want to go back to sleep even more.

“and… both of us need to check out the sensors.” Sans groaned. “i kinda just want to ignore them because i really don’t see the point. but if you honestly think we could talk some sense into the person time traveling, then i guess we should.”

“i mean, i don’t know,” Red said, shrugging. “just because they’re time traveling doesn’t mean anything. i seriously doubt they know that we can perceive it and it’s not like they’ve actually done anything with it so far, right?”

“that we know of.”

“right. but still, if we talked to them, let them know the consequences of what they’re doing…”

“you think i didn’t do that with the kid?” Sans said bitterly. “i gave them every chance in the world and they still killed every single one of us when they got the chance.”
“yeah, but that was chara.”

Sans stared at him. “well, if that’s the case, then we’re screwed if this ‘chara’ is the one giving them the ability to do the saves and loads. i mean, according to the kid, chara was the one who caused all the resets.”

Panic gripped Red’s soul, but still, he tried to maintain a positive attitude. “well, we still gotta try, right?”

Sans nodded. “well, if that’s the case, then we definitely can’t stay in bed.” He let out a loud huff of air. “not that paps would’ve let us anyway. he’s worried about the two of us. especially me.”

Red scanned Sans’s face, once again noting the signs of exhaustion. “i’m worried about you too.”

Sans threw a guilty look his way. “don’t be. you got enough on your plate.”

Red knew that Sans was right – he was overwhelmed by what was going on with his brother. Still, that didn’t mean he was just going to leave Sans alone to deal with his anxiety. Hadn’t they made a promise?

Ignoring the growing pit of guilt in his soul, Red wrapped his arms around Sans and brought him in closer. As Red smashed his face into the other skeleton’s shoulder, Sans relaxed into his arms and planted a skeletal kiss to his skull. They lay there for a few minutes, neither one of them moving, and Red could feel himself drifting off. This was exactly what he wanted – to sleep away the rest of the day with Sans, ignoring the world.

Just as he was about to give in and close his eyes, the door flew open, startling him from his doze. Papyrus stood in the doorway, triumphant and full of energy. Red sighed, knowing full well that he was here to drag the two of them out of bed. It was time to face reality.

“mm, what’s up, bro?” Sans said, yawning.

As Papyrus regarded the two of them, the excitement drained out of him bit by bit. “WERE YOU SLEEPING, SANS?”

Sans dug the heels of his palms into his eyes. “nah, bro. we were just getting up.” He let out another loud yawn. “we’ll be down in a minute, so no need to drag us out there.”

Papyrus cleared his throat. “ACTUALLY, I WAS NOT HERE FOR THAT. ERR… I WAS HERE TO ASK IF RED WOULD BE WILLING TO TALK TO EDGE? HE IS ASKING FOR HIM.”

Red blinked. “edge?”

“YOUR BROTHER.”

“i’m sorry,” Sans said as he sat up and rubbed his face. “what are you calling him? edge?”

Papyrus huffed in exasperation. “YOU CAN MAKE FUN OF MY CHOICE OF NAME LATER, SANS.” He glanced at Red, a hesitant smile on his face. “WELL?”

For the briefest of moments, Red sat there, stunned. But as he realized what Papyrus was asking him, he flung himself from the bed and threw on a set of Sans’s clothes. He rushed into the hall, ready to run into his brother’s room when Papyrus grabbed him by the arm. The caused him to trip and nearly fall flat on his ass from the whiplash. Once he regained his balance, he glanced up towards the other skeleton.
Papyrus leaned down, their faces inches apart, and whispered, “When you go in there, you need to apologize.” Red blinked rapidly as he stared into Papyrus’s eyes. “You know what you need to apologize for.”

Papyrus gave him a pointed look and Red’s face warmed as he thought back to his fuck up from yesterday. It was true, he needed to apologize. But still, his soul throbbed with heated anger. Why was Papyrus taking his brother’s side?

“i don’t know what he said to you, but he needs to say sorry for shit too.” If Papyrus thought his brother was some innocent angel, then he needed to get things straight.

“That is between the two of you. But what you did yesterday was unacceptable.”

Red shrunk under the weight of Papyrus’s glare and he found himself averting his gaze as he nodded. Sighing loudly, Papyrus released his arm.

Guilt and trepidation welled up inside Red’s soul as he walked to the other door, suddenly aware that he was about to enter the lion’s den. And he knew he couldn’t even blame Boss for being angry right now. He had every right to be. Red shuffled his feet back and forth against the multicolored carpet as his soul was stretched taut with nervous energy.

“Red?” He snapped his head back to the other bedroom and saw that Papyrus was giving him an encouraging smile. “I know you can do this. You both love each other very much.”

Red very much doubted that Boss loved him after all the shit he had put him through, but he nodded anyway, not wanting to disappoint Papyrus. Taking a deep breath, he stepped towards the door and knocked.

“it’s me, bro.”

There were a few moments of resounding silence, and Red’s soul was practically thumping against his chest. Had his brother changed his mind? Was Boss just playing minds games?

But then his brother finally responded, “COME IN.”

Red steadied himself for a moment before he pushed open the door and entered the dark room. His brother was sitting on the bed, his legs swung over the side of the mattress. He was wearing his full outfit, boots and all, and at first glance, it appeared as if he was about to leave the house to attend to his Royal Guardsman duties.

“hey,” Red said as he stuffed his hands into his hoodie pockets.

“Hello,” Boss muttered as he tapped his fingers against the edge of the bed.

Scuffing his feet on the floor, Red tried to find something to say to his brother. He knew he needed to apologize, but how could he say it without sounding like a grade-A jackass? Plus, if his brother just thought that he was saying it out of obligation, that was not going to go over well.

Out of the corner of his eye, Red saw Boss fold his arms across his chest as he let out a deep sigh. “Sans, this is so tiring.”

Red cracked a forced grin. “heh. i’m tired too. maybe we should just go to sleep.”

“Hilarious, Sans.”

“sorry.” Red shrugged, his voice dripping with sarcasm. In his peripheral vision, Boss’s head
twitched in his direction, and Red looked up to see his brother’s chin trembling as he stared at him. Shit.

“no, really, sorry,” Red said seriously this time. “for everything. i fucked up. i fucked everything up.”

Boss worked his jaw a few times and Red wondered if he was about to start yelling. But when he finally spoke, his voice was soft; it almost sounded as if he was confessing a secret.

“Do you hate me?”

“no,” Red immediately replied. “do you hate me?”

“No.”

Red felt some of the tension drain from his shoulders and the knot that had curled in his soul unwound just the tiniest bit. He had been convinced that his brother hated him. To say he was relieved would be an understatement.

“If you didn’t hate me, why did you leave?” Boss asked as he shifted his weight nervously. “Why did you get in the time machine?”

How could he tell his brother what he didn’t really know himself? There was no way to pinpoint exactly why he had gotten in the damn machine. All of it had been adding up – his universe, the way his brother had been treating him, his life going nowhere.

“i was stupid and angry, bro.” He shrugged. “and i really didn’t think the time machine would work. i was just fucking around.”

“But were you really that angry that you would try? The machine is not simple to operate. It must have taken you quite some time to figure it out.”

Red sighed. “yeah, i guess i was pretty pissed.”

“But why? What did I do?” Unlike the last time his brother had asked the question, Boss’s voice was devoid of anger; instead, his voice was lilted with curiosity.

“you didn’t listen to me.”

His brother was silent for a few moments before he stated matter-of-factly, “I did not listen to you because there was nothing to hear.”

Red’s soul exploded with a sudden burst of anger. “what the fuck does that mean?”

Boss sighed as he pinched the space between his eye sockets. “You said you did not like it when we had sex. For how long?”

Red blinked, confused by the sudden change in topic. “i don’t know. i mean, it wasn’t all bad i guess. you just got… really rough sometimes.” He thought back to when he had first started noticing his brother’s lack of intimacy. “it hasn’t been all good for a couple of years now i guess.”

“Then why did you keep that to yourself? You could have told me.”

“i did, boss. i did.” Red dragged his hand down his face as he sighed. “or i tried anyway, i kept asking for a safe word. i thought at least you’d figure out that i didn’t like it if i kept asking.”
“Sans, I cannot read your mind. You could have told me when I had gone too far.”

“and you could’ve let me use a safe word. but you didn’t. why?”

His brother lowered his arms from his chest, folding his hands in his lap. “I thought… that you were asking for my sake.” A crimson blush spread across his skull as he averted his gaze.

“wait, what do you mean by that?”

Boss shifted his weight as he twiddled his fingers together in his lap. “Sometimes… I got worried that I was hurting you too much. But you seemed to enjoy it a lot, and… I really like it too.” He glanced upwards and Red saw that a slick sheen of sweat covered his brow. “Making you hurt, I mean. It is… exhilarating.” He gulped. “But there were times where I did things I was not comfortable with. And you loved it. You always begged for more. So I kept doing it.”

Red’s soul seemed to stop in his chest as he gawked at Boss in horror. “like what?”

His brother shrugged. “Sometimes when we used knives. It does not really matter. But…” He trailed off, looking down at his lap. “I knew you liked it and I was just being weak. And I knew you did not need the safe word, you were just asking for my sake. You were just trying to protect your little brother,” he added bitterly.

Red swallowed. “i didn’t know. i thought you liked it all.” He had never thought for a moment that his brother hadn’t enjoyed their times together. It had always been him who had ever had an issue.

Slowly nodding, Boss replied, “I thought you enjoyed it all too. And I always thought I would be able to tell if you did not like something. Which was why I was so surprised that you were so upset after our last time together.”

“is that why you brought up my first kill? because i surprised you?”

Boss stared Red directly in the eye and when he spoke, his voice wobbled. “I am sorry.”

There was a brief moment of silence before an explosion of sobs filled the air. Boss buried his face in his hands as his shoulders shook from the torrent of muffled wails. In between his brother’s gasping cries, Red could make out only one word, repeated over and over: “sorry.”

Red stood there, stunned. His first instinct was to run over to his younger brother, hug him, let him know everything was okay. But he couldn’t. Last time he had tried that, it had ended badly for the two of them. It was better to stay here until he calmed down.

“boss?”

His brother peeked an eye out from between his fingers and choked out, “I’m pathetic. Absolutely pathetic.”

Red’s soul twisted in his chest as the familiar insult rang inside his skull. “you’re not… pathetic. come on, boss, tell me what’s wrong.”

“Me. I am what is wrong. Why did I say that to you when I knew… I knew…”

“knew what?”

Boss tore his hands away from his face. “What it feels like!” At Red’s questioning stare, his brother explained, “What it feels like after your first kill. No, when you kill anyone. Why did I say
that to you?” Another wave of hiccupping sobs overtook him as the words left his mouth.

Red couldn’t take it anymore. He knew it was risky, but he couldn’t stand to see his brother like this. Taking a deep breath, he walked across the room and sat down on the bed. His bones shaking, Red placed a hand on Boss’s arm. To his surprise, his brother didn’t pull away or tell him to fuck off. Instead, Boss leaned his head onto Red’s shoulder as sobs racked his chest.

It reminded him of when they were little, the two of them living on the streets of New Home, trying to keep low and out of trouble. Back then they had been forced to steal food, make shelter where they could. And sometimes it hadn’t been easy. They often went without a meal. Back then, his brother had always been so whiny. And a weepy little babybones, as he called him all those years ago. Many times he had been forced to tell his brother to shut up because he had gotten so loud. Survival had commanded silence. And it hadn’t been until after they had left the lab that his brother had finally seemed to learn that lesson.

Boss choked out, “Why did I kill them? The human did not deserve that. No one deserved it.” He took a shaky breath. “I cannot… cannot get their faces out of my head.”

Red’s soul felt like it was breaking. The wolf monster he had killed all those years ago still haunted his nightmares. He could still remember every detail of their fight. And the look on their face as he had struck the final blow….

Before coming to this universe, he had never really talked about his kill before. Only those that invited battle ever discussed their past kills. The entire Underground already knew, so what was the point? The honor had already been won, the monster dead. The surviving monster had already achieved victory.

Yeah, victory.

But to know that his brother had been feeling all the same doubts about his kills… God, why hadn’t he spoken about this earlier?

Because no one talked about that sort of thing back there. It just wasn’t done.

“it’s the same for me, bro. ever since i killed, i feel like i’ve been lost in my own head.” He laughed humorlessly. “we’re fucking idiots. our entire universe.” Red wiped his own tears from his sockets. “you know they don’t even kill here?”

Boss nodded as he took in a trembling breath, his sobbing tapering off. “The other me informed me. Though I can hardly believe it.”

“Well, believe it, bucko,” he said teasingly. “and let me tell you, we are never going back to that shithole. this place is a fucking paradise.”

“I have not seen much of it, but it does seem nice, though quite peculiar.” He rubbed his face, wincing as he scraped against his injury. “But… don’t you miss home?”

“I just missed you.”

His brother pushed himself off of Red’s shoulder and gave him a stern look. “Do not say that if you do not mean it.”

“I do mean it.” Red sighed. “boss, i really did try to get back to you, but i didn’t know how to work the machine. i didn’t have the sequence. i was a fucking idiot for not keeping it on me.”
Straightening his posture, Boss dug into his pocket, pulled out a folded-up sheet of paper, and handed it to Red. His soul beating frantically in his chest, Red unfolded it and saw that it was the hastily scrawled procedures that he had written months ago.

“You had left them there in the basement,” Boss explained. “It took a while to figure out what everything meant, but once I did, it was not difficult to follow.” Red nodded and refolded the paper before stuffing it into his hoodie pocket. “Now why don’t you tell me how that contraption got into the basement in the first place?”

Red snapped his head to look at his brother, who was eyeing him intensely. Already he could feel sweat beginning to trickle down his skull as he realized exactly what Boss was asking. It meant talking about everything. Gaster. The determination experiments. Flowey. The resets.

“bro, if i tell you this, you gotta promise me something.”

“And what is that?”

“that you won’t get mad at me for not telling you.”

Boss considered him, working his jaw for a few moments, before he nodded.

Wringing his hands together, Red took a deep breath and told his brother everything. He started with Gaster, explaining how the doctor had offered him a job as an “assistant” but had ended up an experiment. But at the mention of the doctor’s name, Boss jerked violently next to him, interrupting Red mid-sentence.

“woah, you okay?”

His brother brought a hand to his chest and pressed. “I know that name. But it is as if… something is missing.” He squeezed his eyes shut and shuddered. “Or… or… something else.” His eyes flashed open. “I do not like that name.”

Red nodded. “that makes sense. i get the same way. he was a real asshole.”

He explained how they had lived in the lab for several years with Red offering himself as a science experiment in exchange for food and shelter. At every mention of Gaster’s name, Boss visibly reacted. It became distracting and after the sixth time it happened, Red began to refer to him as “the doctor,” which seemed to help weaken the reaction.

After Red explained his abilities, Flowey, and the resets and all that they entailed, Boss sat there in silence for a minute, staring down at his clenched fists.

“All of this happened… and you never told me?” He didn’t sound angry. Just disappointed.

“there was nothing you could do about it. i didn’t wanna burden you.”

“Burden me? Sans, telling me something like this would not have been a burden. And I thought we were close enough that you could tell me anything.”

“it’s like our first kills, bro. it’s not exactly easy to talk about.”

“When you put it like that….” Boss shook his head. “But still, I cannot take this anymore. No more hiding things from each other. Especially nothing as big as any of this! If… if we cannot trust each other enough to talk about these things, then who can we trust?”
A tiny voice in the back of Red’s skull said that he could rely on Sans or Papyrus, but he kept his mouth firmly shut.

They sat there in silence for a few minutes, and as Red looked out the window, he realized that they must have been talking for hours. Already the last vestiges of the sun were disappearing behind the line of trees and the sky was a motley of golds, pinks, and purples. The feathery clouds that stretched across the horizon soaked up the colors, and it felt like the scene was something out of a painting.

As the lateness of the hour hit him, his soul prickled with hunger. It had to have been at least twenty-four hours since he had last eaten, and although he had spent most of that time sleeping, he now felt lethargic and slightly ill.

“bro, let’s go downstairs and eat. i’m tired of being all cooped up in this room and i’m sure paps and sans are worried about us.”

Boss nodded, though Red didn't miss the nervous expression that flashed across his face. He knew that they still needed to have a conversation about his relationship with the other two skeletons. But for now, he just wanted a break from all of this heavy shit. If he was gonna talk about the three of them and their love life, he was sure as hell not gonna do it while he was starving.

The two of them left the quickly-darkening room and as they entered the hall, the smell of tomatoes and basil wafted into Red’s nasal cavity. His soul gave another violent pang of hunger and he rushed down the stairs, more excited to eat than he had been in a long time. When they entered the kitchen, Sans and Papyrus greeted them with enthusiasm and invited the two of them to join them at the table. A pot of some sort of vegetable medley was simmering on the stove and Red could hardly stop himself from just serving himself a bowl of whatever the fuck it was.

As he sat down at the table next to Sans and Boss, an awkward silence filled the air. Red looked over at his brother, and saw that his face had tautened as stared at Sans. God, he hoped that Boss was not about to say something about yesterday. But a couple of minutes passed, and to Red’s relief, neither one of them brought it up. Still, it didn’t stop his soul from prickling with nervous energy.

Wanting to break the silence, Red turned to Sans and asked, “so... how was your day? you get to check on the sensors?”

Sans flinched. “nah. i only went to the doctor’s. was just too tired to get to the lab.” He looked down at the cell phone in his hand and frowned. “had to cancel on grillbz too. but i’m sure he’ll understand.” Sighing, he smashed his face into his hands. “kinda feel like i wasted the day though.”

Red reached a hand to Sans’s shoulder and gave it a tight squeeze. “hey, you got to see your doc. that’s good at least.” He only hoped that the human had helped as much as Sans claimed he had in the past. From the way he was looking these last couple of days, Red figured that he really needed the help.

Papyrus clapped a hand to Sans’s other shoulder and smiled gently. “I AM PROUD, BROTHER. I KNOW HOW MUCH YOU WANTED TO SKIP THAT APPOINTMENT TODAY.”

Sans dragged his hands down his face and grinned weakly at the two of them.

“thanks. and hey, at least something went well today.” He glanced between Boss and Red, his grin growing.
Boss returned the gesture with his own smile, though it lasted only a brief moment before it melted away. Red felt uneasiness pulsate through his soul at the sight, thought he tried to keep up the optimistic attitude.

“yeah, we had a talk. it went real good, right, boss?”

“YES,” Boss replied curtly. “WONDERFULLY.”

Red looked at his brother and could feel waves of tension rolling off him. There was no way to ask what was wrong without being direct and he was sure that Boss would not appreciate him asking in front of the other two. So instead he tried to flash him an encouraging smile, which either his brother ignored or didn’t notice.

“WELL, THAT IS SPECTACULAR!” Papyrus shouted as he beamed at the two of them. “I WAS HOPING THAT THE TWO OF YOU COULD TALK IT O–!” He was cut off midsentence as the oven timer began to beep loudly. “OH! EXCUSE ME!” he exclaimed as he jumped up from his seat and rushed over to the stove.

Tonight’s dinner, called ratatouille according to Papyrus, was particularly mouthwatering. It consisted of an assortment of vegetables – zucchini, tomatoes, eggplant, and crookneck squash – mixed with a bright red tomato sauce served over rice. The rich aroma of spices made Red’s soul burst with hunger. As soon as the dish was placed in front of him, he dug in, stuffing his face with forkful after forkful. Despite how quickly he ate the meal, he savored every single morsel. It was fucking amazing how well Papyrus could cook. He was a god damned godsend.

As he neared the bottom of his bowl, he saw out of the corner of his eye that his brother was doing the same as him; he was practically inhaling the meal and there were messy smatters of tomato sauce outlining his mouth. Red wasn’t sure he had ever seen Boss abandon his manners like this before. At least not since he had been a kid living on the streets.

“heh. really going to town there, eh, boss?”

His brother’s eyes darted to Papyrus and Sans as he set the bowl down on the table, shrinking backwards into his chair. Red followed his gaze and saw that Papyrus was looking at the two of them with mild disgust. Sans, on the other hand, appeared amused; his face was stretched into a playful grin as he stared at Boss.

“heh. i thought it was ratatouille, not pigatouille,” Sans teased.

Red grinned wickedly at the joke. “boss is getting pretty saucy there, isn’t he?”

“ARGH!” Papyrus yelled, barely disguising his smile. “COME ON YOU TWO! NO PUNS AT DINNER!”

Sans ignored his brother’s interjection and winked at Red. “i don’t mean to rat you out, but you’re quite a mess yourself.”

Red wiped the tomato sauce from his face onto his hoodie sleeve. “and here i thought i might squeak by without being noticed…”

“That is disgusting!” Papyrus screamed.

“Well i guess i caught you both by the tail then, didn’t i?” He turned his gaze towards Boss who was staring at the two of them with his mouth agape.
“heh. just make sure you don’t pull boss’s whiskers too hard, okay?” He winked at Sans.

“ENOUGH!” Boss slammed his fist onto the table, jarring Red out of the flow of the conversation. Red sat up straight and gawked at his brother, wondering what the fuck had happened.

“the fuck, boss?”

His brother stood up, sending the chair flying behind him, and walked out of the kitchen. There was no noise save the sound of Boss stomping in the other room and then the booming of the front door slamming shut. Red looked around at the other two skeletons who were staring wide-eyed at the kitchen doorway.

“I… ERR… DOES HE HATE PUNS THAT MUCH?”

Red felt his soul twist in his chest. There was no way that was it. His brother didn’t like puns – or he pretended not to anyway – but he would never react like that over a bit of wordplay.

He pushed himself out of the chair and mumbled, “i’ll be right back.”

As he stepped outside, a warm summer breeze whipped through the nearby pine trees. They crackled and whispered in the wind, and the eerie noise sent tiny shivers up Red’s spine. It was already dark out, and there was no sign of the moon. The inky black sky seemed to completely envelop the forest and a trickle of fear ran through Red’s soul. It looked like the house offered the only source of light for miles. If his brother had wandered far, Red had no clue how he was going to find him in the darkness. He frantically whipped his head in all directions, trying to determine the best place to start searching for his brother. If he moved quickly, he might be able to make up the distance with the use of his teleports.

Thankfully he didn’t need to go far. As he whipped his head to the right, he saw his brother sitting on the ground beneath the front window. Light poured from the window overhead, illuminating his brother’s hunched up figure. Boss had his face buried in his hands and Red could tell by the way his brother’s body trembled that he was crying again. He walked over and stood above his brother as silent sobs shook his body.

“bro?” Red said gently.

His brother jerked and slowly removed the hands from his face, revealing both his ugly scars and a steady stream of tears. Boss huffed loudly as he folded his arms across his chest and looked away from Red.

“look, boss, i’m sorry about the puns. i didn’t think they’d piss you off so much.”

His brother wiped away his tears as he ground his teeth together. “IT IS NOT ABOUT THE PUNS.”

Well, Red had already figured that out.

“Well then, what’s up? you said you were gonna be open with me about everything, so how about you tell me what’s got you so upset?”

“YOU. ME.” He slammed his fist down onto the side of the house. “EVERYTHING.” He sighed. “I AM TIRED OF LOSING CONTROL OVER MY EMOTIONS.”

“boss, everyone has a cry now and then.”
Though he had to admit that it was strange seeing his brother like that. Boss, who had such precise control over himself in everything he did and who made fun of monsters for showing their emotions publicly, was not usually one to cry like this.

His brother let out a grunt of frustration. “YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND. THE DETERMINATION TREATMENT,” and Red’s soul sunk in his chest at the words, “MADE IT SO THAT I CANNOT THINK STRAIGHT. WHEN I GET UPSET I HAVE TO LEAVE OR I JUST… LOSE CONTROL.”

“why do you think it’s from the determination treatment?”

“BECAUSE OTHER MONSTERS EXPERIENCED THE SAME OR SIMILAR. BESIDES, I AM NOT AN IDIOT, SANS.” His eyes snapped towards Red. “ONE DAY I HAD CONTROL OVER MYSELF AND THE NEXT I… FOUND MYSELF PUNCHING A WALL CLEAN THROUGH IF I GOT ANGRY ENOUGH.”

Red wondered if there was something to that. After his own determination treatment, he had felt as if all the energy had been sapped from him. It was as if he could never catch up on sleep. He had chalked it up to his own depression, caused by his enslavement under Gaster and made worse by his first kill. But maybe it had been caused by the determination. After all, those feelings had started not too long after the doctor had given him his dose.

But none of this answered his original question.

“and why were you upset in the first place? you said it wasn’t the puns, so…”

Boss’s jaw clenched. “IN THERE, THE TWO OF YOU WERE… MAKING FUN OF ME.”

“boss, we weren’t making fun of you. we were just having a little bit of fun.”

“YES. A LITTLE BIT OF FUN WITH THE MONSTER YOU ARE FUCKING.”

Oh.

He wrung his hands together. “boss, you really wanna have this conversation now?”

“YES, I DO! I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE FUCKING THEM. BOTH OF THEM!”

He balled his fists. “DO YOU LOVE THEM?”

Red sighed and sat down on the ground next to him, feeling the damp dirt soak into his shorts. “yeah.”

“I THOUGHT YOU LOVED ME,” he whined.

“boss, just because i love them doesn’t mean i don’t love you.” He didn’t expect him to get it, but he had to try, had to make him understand that he loved him just as much as Sans and Papyrus.

“THE OTHER ME SAID AS MUCH.”

Red blinked at him. When had Papyrus talked to him about this?

“But… I THOUGHT ONCE WE MADE UP YOU WOULD… REALIZE YOU WERE MISTAKEN ABOUT IT ALL.”

“i’m not mistaken, boss.” Red reached his hand up to his brother’s shoulder and when the other skeleton didn’t shy away he dragged him down to his eye level. “let me make it clear to you. i love
them both. just as much as you.”

“AND YOU…” Boss averted his gaze downwards and when he spoke, his voice shook. “YOU REALLY DO STILL LOVE ME?”

“do you even need to ask?” Red placed a finger underneath Boss’s chin and lifted it so that they were looking at each other again. “i fucking love you, boss. there’s no way around that.”

Silence fell between them and Red could only hear the sound of the wind rushing through the trees. But the longer they stared at each other, the more intense their gaze grew. There was a violent energy sparking in the air between them and he knew that his brother felt it too.

Boss made the first move and pressed his mouth against his. Their teeth clanked together roughly and Red could feel the tingle of magic in the air as the two of them summoned their tongues at the same time. He opened his mouth, allowing Boss to enter immediately, and his brother’s tongue pressed violently against his own. The taste of Boss’s magic filled his mouth, and he closed his eyes as he savored the familiar warm, spicy flavor.

Boss broke away from the kiss and a moment later Red was pushed backwards into the wall, causing his vision to swim. As he tried to recover from the impact, Boss ripped the hoodie from his shoulders and cast it to the side. Red tried to lean towards his brother to help remove his clothes, but Boss shoved him back again as he grabbed the hem of Red’s shirt and pulled it over his head. The movement forced his arms to stretch above his skull, and as the clothing was lifted over his hands, he could feel his brother tussle with the fabric. Red looked up, dazed, and saw that Boss had wound the shirt together tightly, creating a loose knot that bound his hands together.

Despite the warmth of the summer air, he shivered.

“fucking hell, boss,” he crooned, his soul screaming out in anticipation.

Boss brought his mouth to Red’s neck and his tongue swirled along the vertebrae, twisting and pulling along every dip and curve. At the same time, his brother dropped a hand to his spine and began to jerk harshly, sending violent waves of pleasure through his bones. Involuntary groans escaped his mouth as he squirmed underneath the rough touch.

“boss, fuck, i just wanna… wanna feel you… all over me. fuck, please,” Red begged as he thrust his hips up into the air.

His brother paused for a moment in his ministrations, and the lull was torture in Red’s mind. Hadn’t they waited long enough? Fuck, he just wanted Boss to screw his brains out already!

But then his brother dragged his mouth next to the side of his skull and whispered, “Did I give you permission to speak?”

Red felt Boss grip and twist his spine violently, and a sharp spike of pain ran up his bones. Intoxicating tingles of pleasure filled his soul as the delicious pain ripped through his body. God, he had missed the thrill of this. He hadn’t realized how much he had craved the sensation of pain mixed with pleasure that his brother had mastered so well.

But at the same time, Red couldn’t help but feel a rush of fear as he remembered the last time they had fucked. Or rather, the last time his brother had fucked him.

And as he thought back to it, overwhelming panic took over his mind.

“w-wait! stop, stop, stop!” Red practically screamed as Boss continued to manhandle his vertebrae.
For a moment he wondered if his brother would ignore him and he readied himself to tear away the loose restraint that bound him. This time, he wasn’t about to let Boss just fuck him however he wanted if he refused to listen.

But his worries were pointless – he felt the hand relax around his spine and Boss pulled back, his eyes wide with fear, or perhaps panic, or maybe even… concern?

“W-WHAT IS WRONG?” He brought his hands together and fidgeted his fingers as he stared Red up and down. “DO YOU NOT… NOT WANT TO DO THIS?” From the expression on his face, it looked as if he was about to be sick with worry.

Tension melted from Red as he realized that his brother was willing to listen to him. It seemed as if Boss was taking their discussion seriously. He let out a sigh of relief and leaned backwards into the wall, bringing his bound hands down from above his head and into his lap.

“no, i wanna do it, i really fucking do.”

“THEN WHY DID YOU TELL ME TO STOP?”

“because if we’re gonna do this, we’re gonna do it right. no more fucking around without a safe word, papyrus.”

His brother sat down and there was a loud thump as his weight hit the ground. “O-OKAY.” He paused as he looked Red up and down nervously. “HOW DOES IT WORK? DO WE JUST… STOP WHEN YOU CALL IT OUT?”

Red sighed. “i don’t know, bro, i’m flying by the seat of my pants here just as much as you. but yeah,” he said as he shrugged his shoulders. “i guess that sounds about right. though if what you said earlier is true, you can always call it out too.”

“WELL, WHAT WORD IS IT?”

“uhh, i don’t know. how about, um…” He tried to think of a word, something easy to remember.

“How about ‘time out’?”

“yeah, yeah, that works.” He grinned at his brother. “great idea, boss.”

Boss smiled weakly, though his face fell flat a second later. “IS… IS THAT IT?” He broke eye contact, looking at the ground. “IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE BEFORE WE START?”

“well, um… i don’t know. i guess, you don’t like knives, right? so let’s not use those anymore.”

“I AM NOT OPPOSED TO KNIVES ALL OF THE TIME,” Boss said, continuing not make eye contact with him. “I JUST DID NOT LIKE IT WHEN YOU WANTED ME TO CUT YOU WITH THEM. IT MADE ME… UNCOMFORTABLE.”

Red felt a sudden wave of shame crash over him as he realized all of the times he had begged for his brother to use a knife to cut into his bone. He could recall the satisfaction from the blade slicing into his ribs, his vertebrae, every inch of his bones, drawing from him screams of euphoric ecstasy. But none of that was worth it if his brother didn’t like it. He just wished he had known sooner.

“okay, so none of that. anything else?”

His brother shook his head and glanced up at him. “AND YOU?”
It was Red’s turn to avert his gaze now. It was embarrassing now that he thought about it. He was basically expressing all of his weaknesses to him. All of the things he didn’t have the nerve to do. It was pitiful.

“well,” he said, swallowing anxiously. “i really didn’t enjoy, um, the last time we had sex. actually, i kinda hated every minute of it.

“EVERY MINUTE?” Boss looked down at Red’s restraints, his eyes widening.

“no, i don’t mind this,” he said, holding up his hands. “in fact, i love it.” He felt his face warm as he admitted it. “but i don’t like it when… you fuck me when my magic isn’t formed.” He squirmed nervously. “it doesn’t feel good.”

“FINE,” his brother said, though he sounded slightly disappointed. “NO MORE OF THAT.”

“and, um, if you use ropes again, can you make sure they’re tight enough so that they don’t rub? sometimes it really chafes my wrists.”

Boss sat up straighter. “OF COURSE. THAT IS QUITE SIMPLE TO DO.”

Silence fell between them once again as Red continued to think back to previous encounters. Nothing specific really stuck out in his head, but he knew there was something else he wanted to say. He just… wasn’t sure how to say it.

“IS THAT IT?”

“no, i… i have one more thing.” He swallowed nervously. “after we’re done can you just… make sure you hug me?”

“HUG YOU?” He tilted his head.

Red nodded and he felt his face heat up even more. “and you know, check in on me. like when we first started doing all of this.” He looked up at his brother who was staring at him with concern. “you used to make sure i was okay with everything we did and i really liked that.”

They stared at each other for a few seconds, and by the expression on his brother’s face, it appeared as if he was having some sort of internal battle with himself.

“Okay,” Boss finally said.

“then, that’s it. you got anything else you don’t care for?” When Boss shook his head, he said, “then, yeah, i guess that’s all i wanted to say. you can, um…” He smiled and made a come hither gesture as best he could with his bound hands. “pick up where you left off.”

His brother nodded and returned to his previous position, pressing his tongue along his cervical vertebrae. But although the pressure sent tingles of pleasure down his spine, there was none of the fire in his brother’s movements as before. His touches were gentler, less passionate. And Red didn’t overlook the fact that he was no longer stroking his spine. It just didn’t feel right.

Red arched his neck to glance down towards Boss, trying to get a better view of him. His brother was frowning slightly, his face taut with an emotion that Red couldn’t quite pinpoint. And his movements were choppy as he licked Red’s neck.

Was his brother hesitating?
Well, Red wouldn’t stand for that.

“heh. that feels good and all, boss, but i figured you could do a bit more than that.” Boss snapped his head up and glared. Red gave him a sly grin and closed one of his eyes in a prolonged wink. “here i thought i was gonna get a proper punishment. i wonder if i just don’t deserve –”

He was cut off midsentence as Boss slammed his back into the wall once again, knocking the wind out of him. A moment later, he felt three fingers press against his chin and his head was lifted so that he was staring directly into his brother’s eyes.

“DO NOT TALK BACK TO ME.” His voice brokered no negotiation.

And yet Red just couldn’t resist.

“why don’t you try and make me stop, asshole?”

His brother’s eyes narrowed as he looked into Red’s face. For a moment Red was convinced that his brother was just going to try to intimidate him by glaring at his ugly mug. He opened his mouth to tell Boss how laughable it was when he felt his brother drag his fingers down from his chin and then languidly wrap around his neck.

“OH, I WILL,” Boss said as a wicked smile crossed his face.

His brother tightened his hold around his neck, cutting off the flow of air, and Red gasped and sputtered as his soul cried out in fear. Technically skeletons didn’t need to breathe – at least not in the traditional sense – but the habit was drilled into his mind. Every bit of him screamed as his brother gripped more fiercely, his mind dizzy from the force. It had been a long time since they had last done something like this, and so instinct kicked in, driving him to reach up with his bound hands and claw halfheartedly at his brother’s fingers.

But Boss leaned his weight into Red’s arms, pushing him more firmly into the structure behind him. His shoulder blades and ribs slid against the wall, and he could feel splintered wood grate against his bone, sending delightful waves of pleasure into his soul, enhanced by his lightheadedness. And as he stared at Boss’s face, the fierce, dominating look in his brother’s eyes sent violent shivers up his spine.

“LET’S SEE WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT DOWN HERE.”

His shorts were ripped from his pelvis and he thrust upwards against Boss’s hand as the brisk air hit his over-sensitive bone. As his brother applied rough pressure to his tailbone, giddy euphoria filled his mind. He wriggled against the touch, though his brother’s weight held him back from doing much more than raising his pelvic bone slightly. Every sensation he felt was heightened now, and all of the pain and pleasure from his brother’s ministrations were mixing together, driving him wild.

And yet he needed more. Desperation for his brother, to feel him inside him, was taking over his soul. He needed to tell Boss, to let him know how crazy he was making him and how he wanted more. But his eyes were rolling up into his head now and he couldn’t think straight. As his mind grew fuzzier with each passing second, a checked and frantic whine escaped his mouth. A dribble of saliva spilled from his mouth and down his chin, leaving behind a warm wetness along the bone.

The pressure around his neck suddenly eased up, allowing him to take giant gasping breaths. His vision cleared and the lightheadedness slowly dissipated as he came back to reality. But for a few moments his hypersensitivity lingered, and as Boss continued to harshly fondle him below, he
writhed under the touch. He lost himself to the pleasure, letting out choked shouts between gasping breaths.

“fuck, fuck, fuck! please boss! more! fuck!”

Boss smirked and leaned down to press his forehead against Red’s as he continued to jerk his hand along the bone below.

“BEGGING ALREADY I SEE?” He laughed and the warm breath entered Red’s open mouth. “DO YOU REALLY LIKE IT WHEN I DO THIS?”

At the last word, he gave a particularly violent twist to the very tip of the tailbone. The motion caused Red to surge forward against Boss’s skull as he yelped from the buzzing ache that shot up his spine. It was the last straw for him – his magic reacted immediately to the sensation, and with a sharp crackle of energy, a glowing red mound formed below.

Boss pulled away, staring down at Red with an impish grin on his face.

“IT LOOKS LIKE IT.”

With his brother no longer pressed against his chest, it gave Red the opportunity to take a few deep breaths and to stretch his bound limbs, which ached from his brother’s weight. But his respite was short-lived. Boss gripped his femurs and forced Red to open himself up to him, his genitalia on display for all the world to see.

He hardly had time to adjust to this open position; already, his brother was reaching a hand downwards, and – oh god – there were three fingers inside him, pumping fiercely but steadily. Incoherent garbling fell from his mouth as he felt the tips of Boss’s fingers delve deep inside and pull back again. The slick, lewd noises of his brother’s fingers plunging inside him was driving him wild. Desperate for more, he jerked his hips forward, trying to get his brother to go faster. But Boss merely grabbed his pelvic bone and held it steady as he continued his even pace, ignoring Red’s jumbled pleas.

“b-boss,” he begged. “come on. ‘s not enou–. need mo –. boss, please!”

He reached his bound hands down to his brother’s wrist and pulled, trying to drive him deeper inside. He so desperately needed more and Boss just wasn’t listening. But as his fingers made contact, his brother stopped and pulled his hand from the opening with a loud sucking noise.

“please, no, don’t stop,” he said, gasping.

“TSK.” His brother took Red’s hands and pressed them into the wall, high above them. “TELLING ME WHAT TO DO WILL NOT GET YOU WHAT YOU WANT.” His smile wider than ever, Boss stood up and hovered over him, as he continued to hold Red’s hands aloft.

Red’s desperation was at a peak now, and he wriggled and twisted under his brother’s grasp.

“please, i need it. i need you.”

“THEN YOU KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY.”

Red let out a low whine. “sorry, sorry! come on, boss, use your fingers again. i’m real, real sorry.”

His brother scoffed. “NO MORE FINGERS FOR YOU, SANS.”
Red opened his mouth to apologize again, desperate for more, but before he could say a word, Boss released his arms, allowing them to fall back down into his lap. He had no time to react before his brother bent down and grabbed underneath his arms, lifting him from the ground in one smooth motion. Shocked, Red grabbed weakly at his brother’s chest with his bound hands and hastily wrapped his legs around the other skeleton’s torso, trying his best not to fall back to the ground.

As he was focused securing his position, he was suddenly thrown backwards into the house again. He could hear the sound of metal on metal as his brother hurriedly unbuckled his belt and there was desperation in the other skeleton’s movements as he worked to undo his pants. Once he was successful, Red felt the tip of Boss’s erection graze against the folds of his opening, causing him to shiver.

“heh. no fingers, huh? that’s fine with ME!” Red’s sentence ended in a harsh scream as Boss quickly brought him down on his length all the way to the hilt.

His brother set an unforgiving pace, slamming into him over and over without giving time to adjust to the appendage. Back pressed into the wall, the wood once again dug into his bones as his brother fucked him mercilessly. The fingers had been nothing compared to this. His brother’s dick filled him up just right and his relentless speed was exactly what Red had craved. He rotated his hips, trying to match Boss’s tempo, but his position made it too difficult to do much more than allow him to rub his clitoris against the hem of his brother’s chest piece. But god, he needed more.

And then his brother hit deep inside, stabbing at his most sensitive spot.

“boss, right there. shit!”

In response, Boss dropped his mouth down to Red’s neck and chomped down on the sensitive vertebrae.

A surge of painful pleasure flooded his bones as his brother’s teeth sunk in. He shrieked loudly as he tensed below, wringing the length that continued to impale him ruthlessly. As Boss released his mouth, Red fell forward, smashing his face into his brother’s chest. As his face rubbed against Boss’s armor, the smell of leather filled his nasal cavity. He savored the scent as he continued to cling to the chest piece as best he could with his bound hands.

The way that Boss was pounding into him so feverishly now, Red could feel that his brother was close to his peak. And Red was close as well. His brother was now repeatedly jabbing at the spot he had indicated earlier, and his mind was going fuzzy with electrifying pleasure. He lifted his head from his brother’s chest and called Boss’s name over and over in a desperate mantra, squeezing his legs tightly around his brother’s waist.

It took only a few more thrusts before he was seized by an orgasm, his vision going white with pleasure. As he came, Boss continued to ram him violently, and he couldn’t stop himself from screaming with wild abandon as the length slammed against his oversensitive walls. Once his orgasm tapered off, Boss finally reached his own climax; his brother let out a low, extended moan as he thrust deep inside Red.

As Red felt the warmth of his brother’s release spread inside him, he panted against his brother’s chest. It took him a few moments to come back to reality, and he was still shaky after his release. But he knew that Boss couldn’t hold him up like this forever. Making sure to maintain his grip on his brother’s armor, he slowly unwrapped his legs and gently fell to his feet on the ground below. As he dropped, his brother’s length slid out of him, and he could feel Boss’s release leak from his opening. His legs were wobbly, so he took a moment to steady himself before letting go of his brother’s shirt.
He took a step backwards so that he could extricate himself from the shirt, but before he could do anything else, his brother grabbed his arm and dragged him close.

“w-what?” He lifted his head and saw that Boss was gently smiling at him.

“YOU SAID YOU WANTED A HUG AFTER, RIGHT?”

His brother wrapped his arms around him, embracing him tightly. For a moment, Red was too stunned to do anything. He hadn’t expected Boss to remember. Hell, he hadn’t even remembered. But as the wind blew against his exposed bones, he snuggled into his brother’s warmth. It had been so long since he had last done this with him. He couldn’t deny that it felt strange; he had long ago stopped associating his brother with this type of love. But god, now that he felt it again, he knew he’d never be able to get enough of it.

“SO… EVERYTHING WAS OKAY, RIGHT?” Red looked up and saw Boss staring down at him, his brow furrowed with worry. “I WAS NOT SURE IF YOU STILL LIKED THE CHOKING.”

“it was good. everything was good. fuck, it was more than good.” He hugged even tighter. “god, i missed this.”

And he had. Sex with Sans and Papyrus was good, especially what Sans had done yesterday. But this was different. Boss was more primal and knew exactly how to fuck him hard. He was just rougher around the edges and it really showed.

He thought back to Papyrus’s name for his brother earlier and grinned.

“well, edge,” Red said jokingly. “i think we should probably head back inside. the other two are gonna start looking for us soon.”

His brother released him, quickly untied the shirt around Red's wrists, and put his hands on his hips. “WHAT? NOW YOU ARE GOING TO CALL ME THAT TOO? SHOULD I START CALLING YOU ‘RED?’”

Red gathered up his clothes and began to put them on. “if that’s what you want, you got it, bro.”

“HMPH. I AM NOT GOING TO CALL YOU THAT.”

“it’s gonna get real confusing real fast if you don’t,” he teased.

His brother rolled his eyes and sniped, “AS IF IT IS NOT CONFUSING ENOUGH ALREADY.”

As soon as they were both fully clothed, they entered the house where the mouthwatering smell of ratatouille still lingered in the air. Red was curious if the other two skeletons had gone to bed yet, so he motioned for Boss to follow him. As they entered the kitchen, Red saw Papyrus, gathering the used dishes from the table. There was an orange blush spread across his cheekbones, and as Papyrus noticed the two of them enter the kitchen, his mouth stretched into a shaky grin.

“Ah, hello,” he whispered. “I hope you two had a lovely time… doing whatever it is you two did out there!”

Well, clearly Papyrus had heard them. But oddly enough, Red didn’t really care. In fact, he was glad that he knew. After all, it was thanks to him that the two of them had rekindled their relationship.
Papyrus hushed Boss, gesturing for him to be quiet as he nodded towards the table. Red glanced over and saw that Sans had fallen asleep; he was leaned over the table, his head resting on his folded arms.

“He needs to sleep,” Papyrus said, his voice strained with concern.

Red nodded as he yawned. “I need to hit the hay myself.” He glanced up towards Boss and smiled. “I think I’m going to sleep in the other bedroom tonight, if you don’t mind, paps.”

“Yes,” Boss replied. “We most definitely are.”

“Alright, I will be upstairs shortly as well. Good night, you two!”

They wished him good night and went upstairs into the second bedroom. Red immediately started discarding his clothes onto the floor. But as he slid off his pants, he jumped as he felt hands wrap around him and grip at the inside of his femurs.

“Oh, what is this?” his brother hissed to the side of his skull. He lifted one of his hands to hover in front of Red’s face. On the tips of his fingers were the sticky remnants of his glowing red release.

“Boss, what’re you – ?”

With his other hand, his brother gripped Red’s pubic arch below, and Red groaned at the touch. “Hmph. I do not know why you were expecting to sleep tonight. I have not inflicted nearly enough punishment on you yet.”

Red’s soul throbbed with renewed lust. Fuck, more punishments? He was all for that right now. Except….

“Bro, we can’t do this, the other two are gonna be sleeping soon.”

Boss began to rub little circles along the sensitive bone, causing Red to fidget against his brother’s hand.

“Then we can be quiet, right?”

Red was panting now as the jolts of pleasure traveled up his bones into his soul. God, he was never good at being quiet. It was difficult to hold it all in when someone made him feel good. But shit, he wanted this. He wanted it real bad.

“Y-yeah, we can.”

“Good, because,” he whispered as he stuck his cum-coated fingers inside Red’s mouth. “We don’t want to disturb the other two.”

And as Red quickly conjured a tongue to taste his brother’s release, he had one thought:

Tonight was going to be one long night.
What Do You Mean by 'Sex Isn't a Cure for All Of Our Problems'?

Chapter Notes

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulsex.tumblr.com. You can also find soul sex and Papyb reblogs if that's your thing.

- *collapses* Just taaaaake it.
- Thanks to Purrfecktlysinfuful (Tumblr/AO3) and Acci (Tumblr/AO3) for helping out with some edits for this chapter! Go check out their fics! :D
- Also thanks to Ixis for helping me look up stuff related to Papyrus! They've been helping me out for ages and I always forget to credit! Go check out their awesome art on tumblr! <3
- And thank you to Alldrawnup for reading a section and providing feedback! <3
- Thanks so much! -kissu-
- Once again, there's probably going to be a bit of a gap between this chapter and the next update! Sorry, these chapters are a bit lengthy and require a looooot of writing
- Thanks to everyone who made it to my stream while I typed up this chapter! Sorry I was so slow, haha <3
- I only looked over this once, so if you spot a typo or anything, feel free to point it out :3 I really don't mind~
- Thanks to ryysin for drawing some UF Paps from the last chapter here and here! EEEEE! The way you drew Edge is just SO ADORABLE AND GREAT <3
- Alternative chapter names: "PUNNED INTO THE WALL"; "You Might Want to Slow Down There"; "The Really Unsatisfying Smut Chapter"; "Hex"

Additional tags for this chapter: Because of the amount of smut and the different pairings in this chapter, I'm splitting up the tags accordingly:

**First smut scene (Fellcest):** Soul sex, rough sex, drool, "punishments"???, clawing/scratching

**Second smut scene (Soriel):** Sex as a coping mechanism (which is nothing new, buuuuut), petting, handjob, blowjob, domming goat mom, uncomfortable sex, sex gone wrong, panic attack

**Third smut scene (Fellcest):** Unintentional voyeurism, soul sex, biting, use of safe word, penetration, bondage??, panic attack, references to past rape

**Everything in between:** Panic attacks, references to past rape, SOMEONE ACTUALLY TALKS THINGS OUT

(If I forgot anything, please let me know!)

**4**

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Red was happy and warm.
Not to mention sticky.

It had been one hell of a night. He had been thoroughly fucked – from behind, against the wall, sideways, upside down. And Boss hadn’t been gentle either. With the use of his bones, his brother had been able to do so much with so little. Red wondered if the holes in the wall where he had been pinned could be painted over. His new collection of bite marks and scratches certainly couldn’t. He relished the dull aches that emanated from those injuries; every mark was a reminder of his brother’s love.

Now he was curled up in bed, his brother’s arms wrapped around him in a tight hug. He looked into Boss’s face and grinned. His brother’s ribs clicked against Red’s as his chest expanded with every deep, sleepy breath. Soft snores escaped his mouth and the sound warmed Red’s soul. It had been a long time since they had fucked all night like this, and even longer since his brother had stayed with him after sex. Seeing Boss sleeping so soundly just made his soul sing.

And yet, Red just couldn’t resist.

Smirking, he flicked the side of his brother’s skull.

“hey, wake up!”

His brother’s eyes flew open, a momentary expression of panic stretched across his face that melted into confusion as he stared at Red’s face.

“SANS?” He blinked rapidly. “WHAT DID YOU DO THAT FOR?”

Red chuckled. “you were snoring. can’t have you waking up the whole house.”

To Red’s displeasure, his brother broke their embrace and pushed himself up into a sitting position. He stretched his limbs and the blankets cascaded off him, revealing his naked body.

“I THINK YOU PROBABLY DID THAT SEVERAL TIMES LAST NIGHT,” he teased. “WHY WORRY NOW?”

Red’s face warmed. “fuck you, i was quiet!”

Mostly. Sure, there were a few times that Boss had caused him to call out a slew of choice curse words, but he doubted it was anything that could wake the other two.

Boss scoffed and a look of skepticism crossed his face, but he didn’t comment. His eyes darted to a point somewhere behind Red’s back.

“IT IS SO BRIGHT OUT. IS IT REALLY ONLY MORNING?”

Red flipped over and peered out the window. Tiny droplets of dew covered the pane and early morning light brightened the landscape surrounding the house, highlighting the thick clump of pines in the near distance. Above the thicket several birds soared through the air. Although he had only ever seen them a few times, from the shape of their wings and their dark plumage, Red could tell that they were crows. They were easy to spot against the white, fluffy clouds.

Realizing he hadn’t answered his brother’s question, he replied, “yeah, it gets real bright here, even in the mornings.” When he turned back around, he saw that Boss had a spark of wonder in his eye. “you haven’t been out there, have you?”

Boss shook his head. “EXCEPT FOR LAST NIGHT, NO.”
A grin crept onto Red’s face. “well, that’s one hell of an introduction.”

“HMPH.” His brother crossed his arms against his chest. “IT DOES NOT SEEM MUCH DIFFERENT FROM THE UNDERGROUND. IT IS JUST BRIGHTER.”

“nah, it’s pretty different. especially the city.” He repressed a shudder and continued, “but even the woods are different here. it’s all wide and open and shit.”

“I MUST ADMIT, THE STARS ARE NICE.”

Red’s soul leapt as he realized just how much Boss was going to love it here.

“yeah, we should totally go out stargazing sometime. you know, i hear sans is even into –”

A knock on the door interrupted him mid-sentence.

“yeah, come in.”

“WHAT, NO –!” There was a flurry of movement in Red’s peripheral vision as his brother buried himself under the blankets.

The door creaked open and Sans walked in, smiling, his eyes underlined with dark shadows.

“morning, you two,” Sans said, yawning.

Red propped himself on his elbow. “morning, sans.”

From underneath the blankets came a muffled “GOOD MORNING,” which made Red chuckle.

Seemingly unperturbed by Boss’s odd behavior, Sans said, “hope you two had a good evening.” He yawned again. “just stopped in to let you know i’m heading over to tori’s after i drop paps off for work. she took a sick day, so i thought i’d drop off a bowl of soup, say hello.”

“oh, okay. tell her i said hello.”

“you two can join me if you want.”

“uh…” He reached to his left and lifted the covers to reveal his brother’s flustered face. “you wanna meet toriel, bro?”

Boss’s eyes widened. “T-THE QUEEN?”

“uh, yeah. though she’s not exactly –”

“NO,” his brother cried out, shaking his head furiously. “NO, NO, NO.”

Red’s soul dropped in his chest. Of course he didn’t want to see Toriel. His brother had just murdered her back in their universe.

He dropped the blanket again and turned back to Sans. “n-no thanks. gonna skip on that i think.”

Sans’s shoulders sagged and he let out a sigh. Squirming guilt needled its way into Red’s soul as he realized how much Sans had wanted him to come. But he just couldn’t do that to his brother.

“not a problem,” Sans said. “i might, er… drop by the lab later to check out the sensors. and after we can go to grillby’s to grab a bite. if you want to join me.”
Ugh. Grillby’s. And the time sensors on top of it? That sounded like a lovely fucking day. But hell, if Sans wanted him to go….

“um, yeah, sure. just check in with me later? after tori’s and all.”

“yeah, sounds good,” he said, shrugging his shoulders. “paps is downstairs making breakfast if either if you want any.”

Red was famished after staying up all night, but before he could say anything, his brother shouted from underneath the covers, “NO THANK YOU.”

“alright then, i’ll leave you both to it then.”

And before Red could say another word, Sans left.

As soon as the door clicked behind him, Boss tore the covers off his body and rounded on Red.

“WHY DID YOU DO THAT?” he yelled, his fists curled.

Red stared at him blankly. “do what?”

“LET HIM IN LIKE THAT. WE ARE…” He looked down at his body and cringed. “INDISPOSED.”

“sans doesn’t give a fuck.”

“I GIVE A FUCK! THIS IS AWKWARD ENOUGH WITHOUT THEM SEEING US NAKED!”

An unbidden thought came to the forefront of Red’s mind: They had already seen him naked, so it didn’t even matter.

He squirmed guiltily in the bed. Clearly he wasn’t about to say some shit like that. He wracked his mind, trying to think of something appropriate to say.

But before he could think of anything, his brother said, “YOU ARE GOING TO KEEP SEEING THEM, AREN’T YOU?”

Red glanced over and saw that he was frowning.

“that’s right,” he murmured.

As Boss turned to stare at the ceiling, Red could feel sweat forming on his brow and he had to refrain from wringing his hands together.

“WHY?” his brother asked after remaining silent for a couple of minutes.

“you know the answer to that.”

Boss sat up and twisted to face him, his face contorted with emotion. “WHAT DO THEY HAVE THAT I DO NOT?”

Red pressed his hand to his face. “nothing, it’s not like that at all.” He sighed. “i love them. they’re just… nice monsters. they make me feel all… warm inside. hell, i’m sure you’d like them too if you gave them the chance.”

“ARE YOU SUGGESTING I FUCK THEM?”
Red lowered his hand and gawked at his brother. “what? i wasn’t actually thinking of –”

“BECAUSE I WILL NEVER DO SUCH A THING.” His eyes were narrowed and the space just above his nasal cavity was wrinkled in disgust.

“pfft… never? come on,” he teased. “you can’t deny that they’re attractive pieces of ass –”

“NEVER!” Boss shouted, and Red could see that there were tears forming in his eyes. “WHY SHOULD I WHEN I HAVE EVERYTHING I COULD EVER WANT WITH YOU?”

Red could feel himself blushing again. “heh. aren’t you a charmer?”

“CAN’T YOU TAKE ANYTHING SERIOUS FOR ONCE?” He huffed. “JUST EXPLAIN HOW I AM NOT ENOUGH FOR YOU!”

Red sighed and tried to find the right words to say, but nothing was really coming to mind.

“don’t be like this, boss.” He grabbed his brother’s injured hand and gently nuzzled it. “i already told you that i love you all. that includes you.”

“HMPH.” Boss snatched his hand away and folded his arms.

It was obvious that he didn’t believe him. Or maybe he was just in one of his moods. In either case, Boss’s dismissal filled his soul with dread. When Red had confessed his love to Sans, all it had taken was his word. But Boss was just so distrusting. And he had every right to be. It had taken Red a while to open up to anyone here, and his brother had been through so much more than he had. Why trust anyone when it only led to getting fucked over?

But he wanted his brother to believe him. To know how he truly felt about him. And words alone wouldn’t work.

There was one way to make him understand. His soul.

Red gulped and he could feel himself shaking at the thought. Was he ready for that? It wasn’t that he didn’t trust his brother. Fuck, after last night’s discussion, he felt like the two of them could take on the world together and no one could stop them. But… giving over his soul wasn’t exactly the easiest thing to do. It was his life. The culmination of his being.

But he had done it for Sans. Given the chance, he would do it for Papyrus too. And he loved his brother just as much as them, right?

He took a steadying breath and reached inside his chest to tenderly clutch his soul. As he pulled the delicate organ out, his bones rattled softly. He silently cursed his nerves – he shouldn’t be this scared, he trusted Boss. He took a steadying breath as his brother turned towards him, his eyes widening.

“What the fuck are you doing?!”

Red extended his unoccupied hand to his brother’s arm. “c-come here,” he said as he pulled weakly.

Boss balked. “ARE YOU CRAZY? PUT YOUR SOUL AWAY!”

“i just wanna show you something, gimme your hand.” When his brother continued to stare at him flabbergasted, Red begged, “please, boss.”
With obvious hesitation, his brother extended his injured hand outwards. Trembling, Red took hold of it and softly spilled his soul into Boss’s outstretched palm. The moment the white organ touched his brother’s bone, his feeling of anxiety intensified. He jolted forward as he could feel his brother’s fear, confusion, and anger flow through him. His shaking was fierce now, and he could hardly stay still with how forceful it was.

“f-fuck, calm down, boss.”

“CALM DOWN? YOU JUST HANDED ME YOUR FUCKING SOUL, HOW CAN I BE CALM ABOUT THAT?!”

His emotions spiked again, and his soul felt like it was going to burst under the pressure of it all. He fell backwards into the bed as his quivering grew even stronger. Any more of this and he was going to be sick.

“g-god damn it, you gotta c-calm down!” he shouted shakily. “or block off your emotions or something because fuck, i can feel everything right now. h-holy shit!”

“THIS IS HARD ENOUGH WITHOUT YOU YELLING AT ME!”

Red grit his teeth and bit back a retort. If his brother couldn’t chill the fuck out, they were just going to get stuck in a loop where neither of them could do a god damn thing. He took a deep breath and focused on calming thoughts, trying to drown out his brother’s heightened emotions. It was difficult, but he somehow managed to get Boss to relax enough that Red didn’t feel like he was about to have a god damn panic attack any second.

“This IS… STRANGE,” Boss said as he glowered uneasily at Red’s soul. “AND I JUST DON’T UNDERSTAND WHY YOU’RE DOING THIS IN THE FIRST PLACE.”

“because,” Red said as he took a deep breath. “i wanted you to know how i felt about you.”

“YOU ARE THIS SCARED OF ME?”

Red shook his head quickly. “no, not this. fucking hell.”

He lifted a shaky hand to his face and rubbed his eyes. This was seriously not going as planned. How had he done this so easily before? He sure hadn’t been able to feel Sans’s emotions as strongly as his brother’s. This was overwhelming.

“THEN WHAT?” A flash of frustration weaved through their connection.

“i wanted to say that i fucking love you, you fuckhead!”

His brother stared at him blankly. “YOU ALREADY TOLD ME THAT. YOU NEEDED ME TO HOLD YOUR SOUL TO TELL ME?”

This wasn’t fucking working. Red let out a deep breath, trying to release all of the tension that had built up inside him. He focused on Boss, channeling all of his love for him into his thoughts. He revisited the memories of when he had confessed his love to his brother. All the times they had comforted each other all those years ago. All the tribulations. And all the happy moments. His brother gasped and Red felt a trickle of surprise flow through their link.

“What THE –?”

“s-see? i fucking love you, bro. i wasn’t lying.”
Boss paused as he stared down at the soul in wonder. “S-Sans,” he murmured.

“So you gotta start believing me, boss.” Sudden sadness filled his soul as he tried to make his brother understand. “Just because I love the other two doesn’t mean I don’t love you.”

Tears were spilling down his face now and he couldn’t understand why he was feeling this way. It was ridiculous and he knew it.

A rush of guilt filled Red’s soul as his brother gripped his shoulder.

“Sans, I didn’t mean to —” He paused, working his jaw for a few moments. “I know you love me. I was just...” There was a surge of jealousy. “Being absolutely ridiculous.” The jealousy gave way to guilt again. “I didn’t mean to make you upset. Please don’t cry.”

Red took a couple of minutes to stymie the flow of his tears, his brother watching with concern the whole time. As soon as he felt ready to return to the conversation, Red took a deep breath and sat up. He was no longer shaking, though he could feel Boss’s shame pulsate through their link. It was bizarre just how strong his brother’s emotions. Red wasn’t even touching Boss’s soul and it was like a floodgate.

“You know it took me months to share my soul with anyone? And with you, it was just a couple of days.”

His brother stared at him and Red felt another flicker of envy. “You already did this with them?”

Red sighed. “That wasn’t the point. What I’m telling you is that it only took me a few days to trust you absolutely. I love you.” He sent another wave of affection through the connection again.

“But... it hasn’t been a few days.” Bitter resentment flared between them.

Red blinked. “Yeah it has. You only got here, what, three days ago? Almost four, right?”

“That is not what I meant,” Boss said as he avoided his eyes. “You have known me my entire life and you are only trusting this with me now. And you have been here, eight months? No, wait... you said only a couple of months? And you trusted one of them like that?”

Red grabbed his brother’s knee and gave a reassuring squeeze. “I never knew that you could do this with souls before coming here, did you?” Boss shook his head rapidly. “If I had known before...”

Sudden doubt filled his mind. He probably wouldn’t have given his soul over to his brother if he had known. Well, maybe back during the earlier days. But not in the last couple of years. Boss had become too brutal by that point. Although now he knew his fears had been unfounded. He released the tension in his shoulders at that thought. His brother was rough, but he was careful. And if they had only talked, Red would have known that.

“What I’m trying to say,” he said, a smile alighting on his face. “Is that I trust you completely.”

A rush of affection poured between them and Red shivered, stumbling forward as the emotions ran through him. His brother caught him and scooped him into his lap with his free hand. As Red leaned backwards into Boss’s chest, his brother tipped forward and planted a skeletal kiss to his skull.

“I know,” he whispered. “Thank you.”
Red looked up at him, smiling dreamily. He was just so warm and giddy from the outpouring of love, he could hardly handle it.

Eventually the feeling gave way to his brother’s nervous energy again, and the two sensations mixed uncomfortably. Boss gently wrapped his three fingers around the soul in his hand, eliciting a quiver of pleasure from Red. A spark of curiosity weaved its way across the connection and Red waited with bated breath, ready for his brother’s next move.

But Boss merely shook his head and reached underneath Red’s ribcage, presumably to return the soul back to its home. Frustration guiding his movements, Red grasped his brother’s arm, stopping him before he allowed the soul to levitate upwards.

“wait,” he commanded. “let’s do more.”

Boss frowned as he stared into Red’s eyes. “Sans, I do not…” He swallowed. “I do not think I am comfortable with this.”

“What? why not?”

“I just do not… like sharing my emotions,” he confessed as he averted his gaze.

Oh, was that all?

Chuckling, Red replied, “you can do so much more than just share emotions. fuck, it’s like… the best orgasm ever.” Red pushed his brother’s arm downwards to reveal his soul once more. “rub it and you’ll see.”

Boss continued to frown at him, his brow wrinkled with wariness, but did as suggested. With his thumb he slowly drew a circle at the center of the white organ. The motion drew a sharp cry from Red and he surged backwards into his brother’s chest as the pleasure ripped through him. God, it was amazing how even the slightest touch drove him wild. He couldn’t believe how long he had been missing out before. His hesitation from the past couple of months were laughable.

Boss snorted and when Red twisted his neck to look up at him, he could see the skepticism etched in his face.

“Really? That felt good?”

The corner of Red’s mouth twitched upwards. “fucking yeah, it feels amazing.”

“I do not understand how,” he muttered as he stared down at the organ. “I have never heard of a soul being used in this way before.”

“boss, you really think they’d do this back home?” Red sniggered at the thought of any monster sharing their soul like that. “it’s too bad too. they’re really missing out.”

Boss tilted his head. “What does it feel like?”

“like… i don’t know.” Red tried to find the right words for the emotional intensity, but gave up after a few seconds. “it’s like your whole body is a dick getting rubbed. but better.”

“How crude!”

Red shrugged, winking. “it might be crude, but hey, i’m a crude guy. now come on, do it more! please! you’re killing me with this blabbering here.”
Boss’s mouth curled into a wicked grin and Red could feel the lust flood through their link. His face flushed with heat and he squirmed in his brother’s lap as his soul visibly twitched with desire in Boss’s hand.

His brother bowed his head so that their cheeks were touching and hissed, “Does this really feel good?”

As the words left his mouth, he pressed his thumb firmly along the curved edge of the organ. Red’s bones rattled as he cried out from the pleasure that whipped through his body.

“Hmph. You’re so sensitive, as always.”

Red tilted his head up to glare at him. “it’s my fucking soul, of course it’s sensitive!”

Boss smirked as he brought his unoccupied hand to the soul. “Talkback already?”

Red shivered, ready for whatever punishment his brother was going to inflict. And Boss wasted no time. He maneuvered the organ to sit comfortably in both of his hands, wrapping his fingers along the curves of the pulsating soul. Red let out a low moan that quickly grew into a howl as his brother fiercely pressed down with both of his thumbs, using far more force than Red had been expecting. Electrifying pleasure ignited deep within him, his mind already blurring around the edges.

“f-fuck, boss!” he shouted, his ribs sliding against his brother’s as he wriggled in his lap.

Red surged forward against Boss’s arms as the delicious pain ripped through him. Fuck, he loved how rough and raw Boss was. Even now, despite his inexperience, he was moving with all the confidence in the world. And damn, it was fucking amazing. Every rough stroke drove Red closer and closer to the brink in no time at all. He could already feel himself losing his mind to the intensity of his brother’s movements.

Choking on the growing pool of slobber in his mouth, he blindly reached behind him, scrambling to grab on to Boss. When the tips of his fingers finally grazed against the curves of his brother’s skull, he grasped fiercely as he arched his spine forward, lifting his pelvis upwards. Little whimpers were escaping him now and he was on the precipice. Just a little more, oh god, please, please, please –

His brother brought his thumb and forefinger together, pinching at the top of the soul and that was it. With a final shriek, Red lost himself completely as his soul burst, sending splatters of viscous red fluid flying through the air. He squeezed into his brother’s chest as he slowly came down from his release, allowing his arm to drop down to rest on Boss’s shoulders. Damn, it felt good. So fucking good to ha –

“aaah!” he shouted as Boss pressed into the soul once again.

His brother laughed. “Sans, just think of all the things we can do with this.” He tilted down next to
Red’s skull and whispered, “How about we try some of them out?”

Red shivered. They had been up all night and already Boss wanted to go at it for a few more rounds. He really did have endless energy. Not that Red was complaining. Whatever his brother had in store for him, he was fucking ready.

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To say Sans was tired would be an understatement.

Even now, as he slowly stirring the pot of vegetable soup that Papyrus had supplied him, he could feel himself drifting off. Puffs of steam warmed his face and the delicious scents of rosemary and thyme filled his nasal cavity. It would be so easy to fall asleep standing here. He used to do that sort of thing all the time back in the Underground. Sleeping anywhere he wanted, anytime he wanted.

But he couldn’t do that now. He was here to help Tori, not take a nap.

Besides, sleep wasn’t really in the cards for him right now. And he could blame Red and Edge for his exhaustion – they had been loud enough last night – but he knew it wasn’t really their fault. It seemed like every time he closed his eyes he was haunted by some nightmare from his past. Whether that was repeating the worst instances of the resets or revisiting his childhood in the lab. Too many times he had been awoken by the image of Gaster slowly dragging his hands up his femurs, digging his fingers deep into his soul, hovering over him, his breath hot on his –

Sans squeezed the life out of the spoon he was holding and took a deep, steadying breath. There was no need to dwell on this. It was bad enough that he was up all night. Somehow he had avoided his episodes the last few days. And focusing on this was sure to prompt one.

It was no real mystery why he couldn’t sleep. The very real possibility of more resets scared the crap out of him in a way he just couldn’t articulate. And no one really got it. Sure, it was one thing to explain it to them. What was hard to understand about repeating the same couple of weeks over and over ad nauseum? But it was another thing completely to live it.

Not even Red could understand.

It wasn’t lost on him that Red had seen his fair share of resets. But from the sound of it, he had never had to face the same crap as he had. Flowey sounded a hell of a lot nicer in the other universe and Sans seriously doubted that the flower monster had ever tortured Red’s brother half to death during a reset.

Not to mention, Red had never been forced to deal with Frisk. How many times had Frisk – or Chara or whomever – murdered half the underground? And how many times had Sans killed the kid in the Judgement Hall? Sans had been all alone during those times. Red had never had to deal with that.

In fact, Red had never had to deal with a lot of things.

It was petty, he knew that, but… when Red had first shown up, he had been so happy to have someone to share all of this with. Finally, someone that got it. But even his alternate self didn’t have to face all of the stuff he had been forced to endure for years.

He really was all alone.

Sans let loose a deep breath. It was good that Red hadn’t come with him today. He had seriously
needed a break before he said something stupid. It wasn’t Red’s fault and he knew that. But all the same, he had been so relieved to get some time apart from him for a bit.

And it was nice to spend some time with Toriel even if she was sick. He had been neglecting her as of late, and he could tell by her text messages that she was frustrated with him. Not that he could blame her. Lately he had been a shitty boyfriend all around. Grillby wasn’t answering his texts anymore. Papyrus wouldn’t sleep with him. And he needed a break from Red.

So he couldn’t deny that he was happy when Tori said she’d be staying home sick today. At least he could try to make amends with her.

He tested the broth to make sure it was warm enough and ladled a bowl before heading into the bedroom. Toriel was sitting in her bed, a book in hand and a pair of reading glasses perched on her snout. As he walked through the door she beamed at him.

“Ah, thank you, Sans,” she said, her voice groggy. “You can set that on the nightstand.”

As he set the bowl down, Toriel leaned across the mattress and brushed her snout against Sans’s cheekbone in a gentle kiss.

“Truly, Sans. Thank you for doing this,” she said as she pulled back from him. “You did not need to go through all of this effort for me.”

A smile crept onto Sans’s face. “heh. it didn’t take all that much. paps did most of the work.”

She set her book down on the nightstand and patted the space next to her, inviting him to sit.

As Sans slid onto the bed, she said, “Still, you did not have to come all this way. Especially since I am sure that your guests demand much of your attention.”

“pfft, them? nah, they can take care of themselves. ‘sides, i missed you.” He flashed a toothy grin at her.

She returned the smile and pulled him into a side hug. “I have missed you as well. How have you been?”

“eh, you know me, i’m always chill. how about you? your messages made it sound like you’ve been real busy lately. the garden treating you well?”

Toriel smiled and described all the fruits and vegetables that she had planted at the school. As she detailed how each of her students had contributed to the garden, Sans pressed into her, basking in her warmth. This was exactly what he wanted – a chill, lazy day. No responsibilities. No resets. No nagging. No nightmares. Just relaxing in bed with Tori without a care in the world.

As he lay there, he realized that at some point Tori must have stopped talking. He turned towards her and saw that she was staring at him with concern.

“You look quite tired. Are you perhaps getting ill as well?”

So much for not having a care in the world.

“heh, don’t worry about it,” he said, trying to maintain the grin on his face. “the other two kept me up all night. you know how that goes.”

Toriel continued to frown at him, appearing unconvinced.
“I cannot say that I do. However, if you are having trouble with sleep and need some time apart from the others, please know that my home is always open to you.”

“heh, it would be, wouldn’t it?” He winked.

Toriel flustered at that, but was not deterred. “I am being serious, Sans.”

His smile faltered for a moment, but he recovered quickly. Reaching a hand to Toriel’s shoulder, he slowly brushed the soft fur along the nape of her neck.

“So am i. you goat monsters are always so horny.”

She paused for a moment before she let out a booming guffaw that eventually transformed into a scratchy cough. Sans rubbed tiny circles into her back as the coughing fit wracked her frame.

Once her breathing returned to normal, she nuzzled the side of his skull and murmured in exasperation, “Sans! Don’t tell me you have a boner for me even now! I am sick!”

“Heh. what can i say?” He trailed his hand down her shoulders, lingering on the straps of her nightshirt. “you really get my goat.”

She chuckled, but this time with less energy. “Are you sure you want to do this? You do seem awfully tired.”

He planted a series of kisses up her shoulder to her cheeks. Knowing that she was sure to like it, he reached a hand up to scratch behind her ears.

“Tori, don’t worry about me,” he said as he continued to rub at the sensitive spot. “Boning is my specialty.” He lowered his hand to cradle her face. “but if you’re too sick –”

“No, no. I just wanted to make sure you were not just doing this for my sake.”

“Of course not,” he said, beaming. “guess you’ve been getting pretty pent up without me, huh?”

In reply, she clasped his hand and dragged it down from her face as she tossed him to lay flat on the bed. He shook his head, trying to adjust to the abrupt change in position, as Toriel’s face hovered into view, a sly grin stretched across her features. His soul beat fiercely in his chest as she inched his pants down to his knees. As soon as his pelvis was revealed, she wasted no time in getting to work, rubbing a hand to his pubic arch.

“Aaah! i, uh, didn’t think you’d –” He gulped. “i mean, i figured with you being sick that you’d sit back, let me do the work.”

“And let you have all the fun?” She snickered and winked. “Besides, you owe me for skipping out on all those dates.”

“Yeah, guess so.”

Sans forced out a laugh, but god, for some reason his soul twisted with anxiety. Toriel continued to massage below as she wrapped her other paw around his spine and pumped steadily. The soft hairs on her hand tickled his delicate vertebrae, sending jolts of pleasure through his bones. Although he thrust upwards into her hand, the sensation mingled uncomfortably with the heavy feeling in his soul. Beads of sweat formed on his eyeridge as she continued her even pace.
He silently told himself to keep it together. It was ridiculous to feel this way. This wasn’t Gaster. This was just sex. Sex with Tori. Fun, fun sex with Tori. Nothing scary, nothing unpleasant. Just good, old-fashioned –

He inhaled sharply, arching his spine off the bed, as the tip of one of Tori’s claws grazed his pubic arch. Damn, it felt good – really good – but… but…

The magic that had been building up within him broke free, allowing his erection to form below. Toriel stopped her ministrations and reoriented herself to sit in between his legs, a sly smile on her face. The pause gave Sans a moment to catch his breath and wipe the sweat from his brow.

With deliberate sluggishness, she trailed her paw down the underside of his length, her touch feather-light. He surged forward as the fur on her paw tickled his sensitive magic. The way she was handling him right now was torturous.

“How about you first and then me?”

Just a handjob. He could do that. Then it would be his turn to be in control and everything would be hunky-dory.

“y-yeah, sure.”

Her hand constricted around the base of his cock, and as she guided her hand up and down leisurely, he bit down on the protest that he so desperately wanted to shout. It felt like his soul was pounding against his sternum now, the pleasurable tickles driving him crazy in all the worst ways. As she continued her lazy pace, he rotated his hips forward with wild abandon, not holding back at all. At this point, he just wanted this over with.

But as he thrust, she flashed him a roguish grin and scooted backwards. Still maintaining her grip on him, she inched her face downwards. As she neared his length, her white canine teeth flashed under the light of his magic.

Teeth. Sinking in, digging deep, ripping off his magically-conjured flesh. No, no, no.

Gasping, he pushed himself backwards, escaping her grip.

“haha, wait a second!” he called out as his soul screamed with terror. “let’s uh… do you first actually. i’m just, um…” He tried to think of a pun, something to lighten the mood, but nothing came to mind.

She stared at him wide-eyed. “Sans, what is wrong? Did I hurt you in some way?”

“What?” His voice squeaked as he spoke. He cleared his throat, but it didn’t seem to help much. “no way, you’re golden, tori. i just, um, really wanna get your goat,” he finished lamely.

She leaned forward, reaching her arm out to grasp Sans’s shoulder. “Do not lie to me – something is bothering you.”

He dodged her grasp, flattening his back against the headboard.

“n-nothing’s wrong. i just wanna have some fun, is all. c-can’t let you have all the fun, r-right?”

He didn’t want to tell her what was going on. It was ridiculous and embarrassing enough as it was without letting her know all the details. He had already gone down that road with her and they almost hadn’t been able to recover. Besides, it wasn’t Tori’s fault that she had teeth. She didn’t do
anything wrong.

“Sans,” she said sternly, “if you do not tell me what is wrong right now, you can just leave. There is no need to lie to me.”

Sans stared at her, his chest heaving as panic continued to grip his soul. He didn’t do well with ultimatums. And he wasn’t about to drop all of this crap on Tori again. Maybe it was best to just leave.

“fine then.” He launched himself off the bed, pulling his pants up as he went.

A look of shock and dismay crossed her face and she clasped a hand on his shoulder. “Wait! I did not mean that, I just –”

But Sans shook her off, ignoring her protests. Before she could finish her sentence, he took a quick shortcut home, landing safely in the living room. The house was quiet; there were no signs of any of the other inhabitants. He threw himself onto the couch, clutching his chest as he breathed in and out, in and out, in and out.

It was over with. He was fine. There was nothing to panic about.

There had never been any real reason to panic in the first place.

He smashed his face in his hand and groaned. What the hell was his problem? He probably just scared the crap out of Tori and it was all his fault. She didn’t deserve this kind of treatment.

Taking deep, calming breaths, he pulled out his phone and called her. He needed to apologize right now. For all of the crap he had put her through. And dammit, she was sick today too. None of this was fair to her.

The phone seemed to ring endlessly, but Toriel didn’t pick up.

Swearing under his breath, he opened his text messages. He clicked his most recent contact and typed out a lengthy message, apologizing for all of his recent stupidity. But just as he was about to hit send, he realized that he wasn’t replying to Tori at all. He blinked as he read the contact name.

Alphys?

The most recent text had been sent just this morning.

* Hi Sans! Um… sorry if you are still mad at me. (°ω°;) You have every right to be! And if you need to cool off a while, I completely get it! x_x But I was wondering if you installed any of those cameras in the lab? I was having a look around with the maintenance crew and I just wanted to make sure they weren’t yours before I had them taken down. (▅•﹏•);*

He stared at the phone, trying to make heads or tails of the message. Did she mean the cameras they had set up around the city? No, that didn’t make any sense. He sent a reply:

* no, what do you mean by “in the lab”?

He went to Toriel’s messaging tab, but before he could type out more than a few words, Alphys replied:

* There’s at least one in every room. (・‸・) We haven’t taken them down yet just in case they were yours.
He sighed at his phone. Who the hell had been putting unauthorized cameras up in the lab? And how? No one but Alphys, Red, and him had been inside the lab in ages. Hell, even the janitors weren’t allowed in there – they had to take all of their own garbage out into the hall. He couldn’t remember the last time that a guest had been given access. It had become top priority to restrict entrance because of the human souls. Especially after the journalists broke into the lab a while back.

Wait a second, the journalists!

He unlocked his phone again, scrolling to find his messages when all of a sudden a high-pitched scream echoed through the house. His phone went flying across the room as he started forward. That was Red and it sounded like he was in the most intense pain of his life. Without thinking, Sans immediately took a shortcut into the spare room, ready to help Red with whatever had happened.

As he appeared in the dimly lit room, the first thing he noticed was the intensity of Red’s scream emanating from behind him. It was loud enough to give him a splitting headache within just a second. As he turned around, time seemed to dilate as he looked upon his duplicate.

Red was bouncing up and down in Gaster’s – no, no, Edge’s – lap, their pelvises connected together by glowing red genitalia. One of Edge’s arms was entwined around Red’s neck, causing it to extend backwards so that Red was forced to look up at the ceiling. Edge was bent over, his skull hovering next to Red’s. His eyes were shut tight, an expression of pure pleasure on his face, as he thrust upwards into his brother.

But the thing that drew Sans’s attention was the object in between Edge’s teeth. He was biting down on Red’s soul.

Unbidden images flashed in Sans’s mind. His soul was screaming. The memories of endless agony took over his mind. Gaster clawing, biting, raping his soul.

He couldn’t move. He needed to fight. But god, he was stuck. Frozen like always. He was so useless. Why couldn’t he do anything?

Red’s incomprehensible shout tapered off into a cacophony of half-formed words.

“n-no! sto-! oh g-! no! s-stop!” Red’s head rolled forward, his eye sockets dark. “t-t-time! time o-! time out! time out! aaaaah!”

Magic was flaring all around Sans now and he was calling on his blasters. He needed to blow this disgusting creature away, to save Red. He could feel the familiar tightness in his chest as the constructs started to form behind him.

No, no, no. He needed to leave. This wasn’t Gaster. This wasn’t his business. Red liked this, remember? His screams of displeasure were just… just in his head. They were… they were…

Before he could fully materialize his weapons, he teleported to the other bedroom, stumbling as he appeared. He could still hear Red’s desperate shrieks through the wall and he had to force himself not to return. His soul was calling upon his blasters, and they were surrounding him now, maws
dripping with bright cyan magic. It took everything he had to stop them from blowing the bedroom to bits.

His soul wouldn’t stop pounding in his chest. The pressure was making it hard to concentrate on anything other than holding his magic back. Hell, he could hardly even breathe. He stumbled forward as his vision swam, the room blurring together before him. He reached his hand out to the bed, trying to stop himself from falling, but he couldn’t get a proper hold. His fingers grasped the blankets, and as he tumbled to the ground. The pillows were sent flying sideways, crashing with a bang into something just out of his line of sight.

His face slammed into the ground and he took in great gasping breaths, the smell of the dirty carpet filling his nasal cavity. He had to keep himself from losing it completely. Focus on something. Anything.

But he couldn’t.

Why couldn’t he catch his breath?

Why couldn’t he get that image out of his head?

It wasn’t Gaster. He was safe. No one was touching his soul. He was alone. There was no one near him. Alone. Please god, he was alone.

He could hear Red wailing in the other room.

No, maybe it was his own crying that he heard.

The blankets had fallen over him and he was shrouded by them, drowning in them. He couldn’t breathe.

He couldn’t breathe.

He couldn’t.

Couldn’t…

C o u l d n ‘ t…

C o u . . . 1 . . .

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Papyrus was not happy. Not one little bit.

He was stomping up the dirt path to their home now, his fists curled. Nighttime had already fallen and it had become difficult to see the trail for the last half hour.

He was exhausted, both physically and mentally. And he knew it was making him cranky. But that did not matter! He had been standing around for hours, waiting for Sans to pick him up and teleport him home. But neither Sans nor Red had picked up their phones when he had tried calling! And when he had messaged Undyne, she had told him that she couldn’t make it – some story about meeting with Asgore about some security risk or some nonsense.

So once he had given up on anyone picking him up, it had taken him three hours to get home. Three! Hours! He had been forced to hitchhike all the way from the city. All because Sans and Red had decided that today would be the perfect day to ignore him. Again!
Maybe they were busy having fun with each other. That was fine, but they didn’t need to disregard him altogether! They could at least answer his messages!

He banged open the front door and marched inside the house. The television was on and Mettaton was dancing across the screen, making some hilarious quip about something or another. But Papyrus wasn’t focused on that. Instead, he was staring at the couch where both Red and Edge sat. Red was curled up under a blanket, shoveling ice cream into his mouth directly from the carton. Edge was staring intensely at the television screen, his brows furrowed.

They were just watching TV?! Seriously?!

Papyrus stomped in front of them, blocking their view of the show.

“What are you doing?” he demanded of them.

Red blinked lazily at him and replied thickly, “uh, eating.” He held up his spoon.

Papyrus stamped his feet on the floor in frustration.

“Why have you been ignoring my calls? I have been trying to reach you and Sans for hours!”

Edge sat up, scowling. “Calm. Down.”

His voice carried the hint of a threat and Papyrus’s soul twitched with anger.

But before he could retort, Red made a loud sniffling noise, drawing his attention back to him. As he studied the other skeleton, he saw that there were tear tracks on his face and as he stared down at the carton of ice cream in his hands, his eyelights wavered.

“Sorry,” Sans murmured to Papyrus, the grogginess in his voice unmistakable. “I think I left my phone upstairs.”

The raging hot anger within Papyrus died down as he took in the two other skeletons. Now that he was looking properly, he noticed that they were sitting at opposite ends of the couch. Edge sat with his arms crossed against his chest, his shoulders stiff. His eyes kept darting to Red, an uneasy expression on his face. And it appeared as if Red was refusing to make contact with anyone.

The tension in the air was palpable.

Papyrus now felt silly for his outburst. Clearly something had happened and he had just marched right in and made a fool of himself.

“Is everything… okay?” he said as he twiddled his fingers together.

Red sniffed again, staring down at his lap. “Yeah, fine.”

He set the carton of ice cream down on the couch cushion next to him, drawing his knees to his chest. All of the rage disappeared from Edge’s face, replaced with concern as he looked over at his brother.

“Are you sure?” Papyrus asked.

Blushing, Red glanced up at him and gave a quick nod. “Just a bad day. You know how it goes.” His eyes flitted over to Edge, a tight grin on his face. “But I’m feeling better already. Boss here has been really good to me.”
His brother returned the smile, though he didn’t look entirely at ease. He kept rubbing his arms agitatedly.

“THAT IS… GOOD.” Papyrus said, though he was unable to shake his discomfort. His eyes shot towards the kitchen. The lights were off. And there was no sign of activity upstairs either.

“HAVE EITHER OF YOU SEEN SANS THEN?”

They shook their heads. The needle of worry that had been threading through his soul pierced deeper. If Sans wasn’t here, then where was he? His eyes flashed towards their bedroom door.

“TORIEL SAID HE LEFT HOURS AGO,” he said worriedly. “IS IT POSSIBLE THAT YOU MISSED HIM?”

Red shifted in his seat, his blush intensifying. “definitely possible.”

Edge followed Papyrus’s gaze to the bedroom door. “HE DID SEEM QUITE TIRED. OR IS THAT JUST HOW HE ALWAYS LOOKS?”

“boss,” Red said in exasperation.

Edge blinked, though some of the tension left his shoulder as he replied, “WHAT?”

“that’s rude,” he scolded.

“WELL HE LOOKS EXHAUSTED, WHAT CAN I SAY?”

As the two began to banter back and forth, the strain between them diminished considerably. But Papyrus couldn’t shake the feeling that something was wrong. Leaving the other two to quibble, he walked up the stairs, his worry growing with every step. If Sans wasn’t up there, then where was he? His mind flashed to years ago when Sans had told him he was “going to go away for a while.” But no, he wouldn’t do that. Not now that Papyrus was here for him.

Papyrus entered the dark room, looking towards the bed for his brother’s familiar frame. But Sans wasn’t there. In fact, it was hard to tell in this light, but it appeared as if the bed was unmade. He flipped on the switch, illuminating the room. The covers were draped off the side of the bed. Somehow the pillows had been flung onto the nightstand and the lamp had fallen onto the table that stored his collection of action figures and figurines. Shattered glass and broken toy parts were scattered across the floor.

His concern grew. What had happened? Clearly someone had been in here, but why had they made such a mess?

He moved forward to inspect the mess more closely, but as he stepped on the blanket his foot slipped on something hard, causing him to almost fall to the ground. Once he regained his balance, he bent down and pulled the covers off the floor, revealing his brother’s body.

“SANS!”

His brother’s bones were rattling loudly as powerful convulsions ran through his body. As Papyrus flipped him over, he saw that Sans’s eyelights had completely disappeared.

“Oh no, oh no, oh no,” Papyrus muttered under his breath.

How long had he been like this? When had he gotten home? Papyrus shook his brother by the
shoulders, calling out his name over and over, but he didn’t respond.

This was a bad one. A really, really bad one. Papyrus couldn’t even remember the last time he had seen Sans have an episode this bad.

Tight panic welled up in his chest, but he pushed it down as he dragged Sans onto the bed. Once his brother was lying flat on the bed, Papyrus sat at the head of the bed, pulling Sans’s trembling skull into his lap. He draped his arms around Sans’s chest, the strong tremors traveling through Papyrus’s bones.

Dropping his skull next to his brother’s, he whispered, “Sans, wake up. You are safe. I am here for you.” He chanted the words over and over again, praying that Sans would wake up. His voice became raspy from exhaustion and overuse, but he couldn’t stop. Not until Sans was awake and safe.

“Sans, wake up. You are safe. I am here for you. Sans, wake up. You are safe. I am here for you.”

By the time that his brother’s shaking finally started to weaken, Papyrus’s back ached from sitting in the awkward position for so long. When Sans showed the first signs of stirring from his episode, Papyrus clasped his brother’s hand in his own and gave it a reassuring squeeze.

“Sans, are you okay?” he said as gently as he could. “Wake up please.”

His brother’s eyelights suddenly reappeared as he woke up gasping and shaking, his hand crushing Papyrus’s. A wisp of cyan magic sprang from his left socket as his eyes darted around the room. When Sans’s scanning eyes found Papyrus, he gasped.

“bro?” he rasped, his voice quivering.

Papyrus stroked his brother’s chest, hoping that the reassuring gesture would calm him down.

“Thank heavens, you are okay.” He released a shaky breath, feeling the beginnings of tears forming in his sockets. The emotions that had piled up over the last few hours were threatening to burst from him now, but he told himself to keep it together. Allowing Sans to see him overemotional might trigger another attack and that would do neither of them any good.

“What happened?”

Sans took a couple of steadying breaths, blinking slowly. “sorry, papyrus, it was just a stupid nightmare.”

“A nightmare?” He glanced at the shards of glass and toy parts strewn across the floor. “What sort of nightmare?”

His brother stilled in his arms, though he could still feel light tremors running up his body.

“eh, it doesn’t matter, bro,” Sans said as a forced smile stretched across his face. “let’s just put it behind us.”

“Sans!”

His brother withdrew his hand from Papyrus’s and pushed himself into a sitting position.

Cocking an inquisitive brow at Papyrus, Sans asked, “yeah?”

Something was wrong. Sans was acting far too casual about this. Usually he at least allowed
Papyrus to comfort him after an episode. But this…. Had they really grown so distant as of late?

“Please, Sans, talk to me. If a nightmare has you shaking this bad –”

Sighing, Sans said, “they’re just nightmares, papyrus. i get ‘em all the time, you know that.” He dug into his pocket and swore under his breath. “where’d my phone get to this time? i gotta get to work.”

“Work? Sans, it is already evening!”

His brother shrugged. “i’m sure i got enough time to work the hot dog stand for a few hours at least.”

As Papyrus realized what Sans had just said, his soul sunk. Oh no.

“Sans,” he said, trying his best to keep the panic from his voice, “we’re not in the Underground, remember?”

His brother guffawed, though as he made eye contact with Papyrus his smile faltered a bit. “yeah, right. where are we then, on the moon?”

“I am serious. We have been living on the surface for over three years now.”

Shock ran through Sans’s face. “what?”

“Remember? You have been living outside of Very New Home for a couple of years now.” He pointed to the window, though it was too dark to tell where they were. “And you have been working in the lab with Red and Alphys. And we are in a relationship.”

God, please let him remember. Don’t let him forget all of this.

Recognition dawn on Sans’s face and for a moment he just sat there, stunned. But then his chest began to heave up and down with hysteria. Papyrus rushed to embrace him as the hyperventilation kicked in.

“paps, oh god – sorry, i – i – i can’t believe – d-dammit –”

“It is okay, Sans.” He held him tight to his chest, rubbing tiny circles into his back. “I am here.”

He allowed his brother to cry in his arms as he fought down his own panic. It had been a long time since he had last seen Sans have an attack that big. Those severe episodes had always been triggered by really bad things. Gaster-y type things.

As soon as Sans’s crying had slowed to a crawl, Papyrus extracted his brother from his soaked chest so that they could make eye contact.

“What happened?”

Sans avoided his gaze. “please, i don’t wanna talk about it.”

“Sans, you will feel much better about it if you do.”

“i really, really won’t.” He cast doleful eyes at Papyrus and begged, “please.”

Papyrus sighed and hugged him again. “You scared me so much.”
He planted a kiss to the side of his brother’s skull and squeezed him tighter. As he felt Sans continuing to shake slightly against him, a lance of pity and remorse shot through his soul. The last few days had been so horrible for them. Papyrus should have expected this. If only he had thought things through. So stupid!

As he contemplated all the ways he could have prepared, he was suddenly pulled from his thoughts as he felt a gentle tickle along his cervical vertebrae. He looked down as saw that Sans was brushing his neck with his teeth. With a sharp gasp, Papyrus grabbed him by the arms and pushed him out of his lap. As Sans bounced on the mattress, he appeared absolutely dumbfounded.

“What are you doing?!”

“i – i just thought that maybe you’d… i don’t know.”

“Do this? Now? No!”

Sans looked down at his hands, his eye sockets filling with tears again. “bro, do you…” He swallowed. “do you not love me anymore?”

“Of course I love you, Sans! But I am worried about you! I – I –” He ruffled the sides of his skull with his hands. “I do not want to do this when you are so upset!”

Sans sniffed. “why not? i like it.”

“Well I don’t! It is like you are just… using me. And it feels horrible!”

“using you? never, paps!”

“Then why are we doing this now?”

“because…” He looked down at his lap and muttered, “it feels good.”

“I do not think it feels good.”

Sans mutely stared at his lap for a few moments before he released a loud sob.

“i didn’t know. i thought you always liked it. i’m sorry. i’m so, so sorry, paps. so, so sorry.”

Papyrus sighed as a wave of exhaustion crashed over him. “It is not your fault, Sans. I am to blame for all of this.”

“wait, what?” His shocked eyes latched on to his face. “what’re you talking about?”

“I should not have… enticed you back when you almost fell down.” At his brother’s questioning look, he explained, “You only stayed because I slept with you. I never should have done it!”

“paps, no!” A horrified expression crossed his face. “that’s not it at all!”

“You cannot fool me into thinking otherwise.”

“i swear, bro. i’ve… god, i started doing this way before… y’know, we got together.”

Papyrus blinked. “Started doing what?”

“you know what i mean,” he said as his face burned a bright blue. “using sex to get through the day. that sorta thing.”
Papyrus gawked at him. “How long?”

“I don’t know, I’m bad with time.” He cringed and added, “since we got outta the labs.”

It took a few moments for it to click.

“With Grillby?”

Sans nodded. “so don’t think for a second that it’s your fault. i’m the fucked up idiot here.”

Papyrus flinched as the curse word left his brother’s mouth, but he didn’t say anything. He simply stared as Sans sat there in silence, crying silently. After a few minutes of neither one of them talking, his brother wiped his face on the arm of his hoodie and began to move off the bed.

“i’ll sleep on the couch tonight. you can wake me up – hrk!”

Papyrus grabbed the hood of his jacket and dragged him back into his lap.

“You are not sleeping alone tonight. And you are going to tell me everything that is bothering you right now."

“paps, i told you, i really don’t –”

“No, you will talk! I, the Great Papyrus, am an excellent listener!” He paused a moment, trying not to let out any of the emotions that he had been holding back. “And… because I am also very afraid, Sans.”

Sans narrowed his eyes. “of what?”

“Of losing you.” He squeezed his eyes shut as he grabbed his brother closer to his chest. “Sans, I can’t lose you. You are the only one that cares about me.”

And as the words left his mouth, it was like a dam broke inside him, releasing a river of emotions. One moment he had it together, the next he was collapsing backwards in a fit of sobs.

And he knew it was true. No one cared about him at all. Every time he tried to make friends with someone, they laughed behind his back, made fun of him for being so weird. And the few people he was close to weren’t much better. Undyne didn’t have time for him anymore. Red didn’t love him. Plus, he was too busy fixing things with his own brother. Or having fun with Sans.

Sans, still in his arms, turned around to face him, grabbed him by the skull, and locked eyes with him.

“papyrus,” he chided. “i am not the only one that cares about you.”

“Sans,” he whined.

“no, paps. i won’t hear it. how can you think that monsters don’t like a cool guy like you? you’re always trying to make us happy, you help everyone out. there’s nothing you can’t do. and everyone loves you for it.”

Papyrus hiccupped on a sob. “That isn’t true!”

“yes it is. why do you think so many people showed up for your birthday? they care about you, paps.” He kissed Papyrus’s forehead. “and you’re right, i care about you too. and you’re never gonna lose me. i promise.”
Papyrus wrapped his arms around him as he shook with violent tears. Sans dragged his hands up and down Papyrus’s shoulders in a soothing gesture.

“i haven’t been good to you lately, bro. i’ll do better.” He gave him a kiss on the side of his skull.

They lay there, hugging each other on the unmade bed for a few minutes, as the two of them continued to cry silently. When both of them had gotten all of the tears out, their breathing returned to normal, Papyrus wiped his eyes on his gloves and looked at Sans.

“Please tell me what happened today. I want to be here for you. And I want you to be here for me.”

His brother’s eyelights flickered for a moment as he stared into his eyes, but he nodded. “anything for you.”

Papyrus’s shoulders sagged with relief.

“but before i do, you gotta tell me something first.”

“Anything.”

“how did i end up with someone as amazing as you in my life?”

Papyrus let out a choked laugh. “Because I have you, Sans.”
Edge wrapped his arm around Red’s neck as he thrust upwards, his movements short and shallow. He twisted his tongue deep in the center of the slick soul, and his brother let out gargled moans, squeezing tightly around Edge’s length as he threw himself into the pleasure. Red’s bound hands scraped along Edge’s bones, struggling – and failing – to find purchase on his ribcage with every stab.

He withdrew his tongue from the soul and whispered into it, “Do you like this? Do you like it when I use my tongue?”

Red made a loud gulping noise and gasped out, “y-yes!”
As Edge plunged his summoned tongue back onto the slippery surface of the soul, his brother cried out in blissful relief.

It was amazing how much fluid the tiny little organ could produce. Red was basically drowning in his own saliva and Edge’s arms were soaked in sticky, glowing red liquid from the multiple orgasms he had already inflicted upon his brother. His injured metacarpals stung from the fluid, but he pushed past the pain, reveling in the pleasure he was experiencing vis-à-vis his connection to Red.

As his brother lost more and more control over himself, the strength of their link grew all the more. Even now, as his brother’s walls clung tight to his length, every swipe of his tongue outshone any of the usual carnal pleasure he felt. His mind was hazy with a mixture of lust and ecstasy, and through it all, he could feel his brother’s bubbling giddiness. It was unlike any sensation he had ever experienced before and he didn’t want it to end.

But it would be over soon. He was too tired from last night to go for much longer and he had already almost pushed himself to the brink this morning. Every one of his brother’s releases had been followed by a flash of blackout euphoria that had flung itself across their connection. Edge had gasped and panted as the sensation ripped through him, but had held himself together every time by dropping his brother’s soul onto the bed at the last second. He had wanted to hold off his own climax until he was completely spent and the two of them would be done for the day.

And he knew that moment was coming very shortly.

He was desperate for it now, and he burrowed his tongue inside the malleable soul as his movements below became jerky. His brother was writhing in his lap, his soul vibrating with intense energy against Edge’s mouth. Buzzing pleasure throbbed through Edge’s bones, making him dizzy. He was so close, so close, so close….

But he needed to make sure his brother came too.

With a loud sucking noise, he pulled his tongue away from the soul and bent down so that his face was level with his brother’s. He dragged Red’s skull backwards with his arm, and he could see the flickering eyelights make eye contact with him.

He purred into the side of his brother’s head, “Let’s make this even more enjoyable.”

Making sure Red was watching, he brought the quivering soul to his mouth and, with great force, bit down.

For a moment all he could focus on was just how easily the soul squished together between his teeth. He didn’t know why, but it was softer than he had expected.

And then the next moment, all of the pleasure that had built inside him exploded into overwhelming, mind-crushing agony.

He scrunched up his eyes and chomped down reflexively as the pain flashed across their connection. There was no way of stopping it. He was frozen. A sudden lump of uselessness. As if his mind had somehow detached from his body, he could vaguely feel himself jerking upwards, backwards, all directions, as his mind screamed in terror. He had to get away from it, but there was nothing he could do. Loud, wordless shrieks filled his skull, overtaking everything.

He needed to… do… something. Anything. Anything to stop this. He could never handle pain. It was always too much.
Something hard caught him on the side of his jaw and he gasped, the soul tumbling from his mouth. The screams from earlier were given shape, and Edge realized they were coming from Red.

“time out, time out, time out!”

His eyes flashed open and he saw his brother’s fist just as it connected with the space between Edge’s eyes. Seeing stars, he tumbled backwards onto the bed, dislodging Red from his lap. Waves of terror flowed through him and he fought for his breath as he scrambled in the bed, but before he could sit up, his brother was pouncing on him, clawing at his chest. Edge could see wisps of bright red magic pouring from his brother’s eye.

“give it back! give it back now!”

Shocks of pain shot through his bones as Red struck him repeatedly, shouting something else. His mind was struggling to comprehend the words – the fear and pain were too much and he didn’t know how to make it stop.

“SANS, STOP! I DO NOT UND–”

The air crackled with malevolent energy and he lurched as sharp electric jolts ran up his left arm. As he writhed from pain, the magic took shape in the space behind his brother’s shoulder. Sleek bone curved into the shape of a skull, eerily dog-like in appearance, with a pointed crest and gaping mouth full of sharp teeth. A low hum of magic filled the room and the vibrations struck at Edge’s core. It had been a long time since he had last seen his brother’s blasters with all of their cold fury. They were nothing to trifle with, and after his first kill, his brother had been hesitant to use them.

He had never imagined that he would be staring down the barrel of one of these creatures.

The construct’s maw began to glow red, sending more shocks up Edge’s arm.

“S-SANS, N-NO! D-DON’T, PLEASE –”

His brother grabbed him by the shirt, pulling their faces together so that they were only inches apart. Edge stared into his brother’s empty eye sockets as the humming in the air intensified.

“g i v e m e m y s o u l n o w.”

With a sharp intake of breath, Edge finally understood. The fucking soul. He was still holding onto it, squeezing the life out of it as he squirmed under Red’s grip. The fear, the pain, the crackles of energy – all of it was flowing through their connection.

His bones rattling fiercely, he raised his arm and deposited the soul into his brother’s lap. As soon as the organ left his hand, he gasped as all of the heightened emotions crumbled away. His mind was suddenly clear, the haze of all the terror of what he had done abruptly lifted. Relief spread through his exhausted soul.

His brother clambered for his soul and hugged it to his chest, clenching his eyes shut. The room filled with a discordant chorus of wordless wails as Red leaned his weight into Edge’s ribcage. Behind him, his blaster crumbled into cinders of formless magic that dissipated into nothingness as they hit the ground.

As Edge lay there, watching his brother turn into a trembling, sobbing mess, the gravity of what had just happened finally sunk in.

“SANS, ARE YOU OKAY?” he choked out as he sat up, wrapping his arms around the smaller
Red struggled and pushed against his limbs, and Edge released him, allowing him to scramble off his lap and burrow under the covers. He formed a small, quivering ball of blankets, and Edge could hear his deep sobs through the fabric. His bones still shaking, Edge reached a comforting hand to graze the curves of Red’s body.

“SANS, IT IS OKA–”

“don’t touch me!” Edge jerked his hand away at the venom in his brother’s voice. “get out!”

“PLEASE, I AM JUST TRYING TO –”

“get out!” he repeated, a sob cutting through his words. “get out now!”

Edge stared, unmoving. It didn’t seem like a good idea to leave his brother alone like this. They had made a promise not to allow things to become as they once were. And that meant he was supposed to comfort his brother. His sense of duty, of loyalty, just wouldn’t let him leave this easily. All he wanted to do was uphold his oath to take care of his brother, to hug him, to check in on him. He didn’t want to fail again.

His voice tiny, he whispered, “Brother, I just want to help.”

Red raised a shaking hand out from beneath the blanket and pointed towards the door. “and i want you to leave! so just go!”

Edge’s soul churned with a mixture of frustration and disappointment as the hand disappeared under the lump of blankets again. Yet again, his brother was afraid of him and there was nothing he could do. He wanted to shout, to tell Red that he was doing what was best for him.

But instead he swallowed his anger and muttered, “Fine.” His chest bursting with fiery rage, he took a deep breath and added, “Sorry.”

And with that he rushed out of the room, slamming the door behind him with a resounding bang before making his way downstairs. He threw himself on the couch, bouncing slightly on the cushions, and released a howl of rage.

He was a fucking idiot! How the fuck could he have thought that it would be okay to bite his brother’s soul? Of course it would be too much – every little rub and lick had been so intense, driving both of them crazy; his teeth were sure to be nothing but painful.

And dammit, why had he agreed to touch Red’s soul in the first place? They weren’t for touching! They were their essence, the very core of their existence. Not some mere magical appendage that could be used for whatever purpose. When his brother had insisted on doing all of that, he should have followed his instincts and refused. It had been inevitable that something like this would happen!

How could he be so stupid? He banged his fists against his forehead, sending a wave of pain through his injured hand. Taking a deep breath, he held out the palm, flexing the release-stained metacarpals in front of him. It was another reminder of how illogical he was when it came to his brother. Captain Undyne’s words echoed in his head as he stared at the memento from his old universe:

_Ha! Still trying to protect that shit stain of a brother to the end. Let this be a warning to all of you to never lie to me. I will not tolerate treachery._
She had taken his fingers as punishment for lying about his brother’s disappearance. But not immediately. No, she had waited until the kingdom had been won. Until he and the rest of the squad had slain the royal family. And when he had expected some sort of recognition for playing his role in the coup, she had instead brought him out in front of the Guard and used him as an example.

She had said it was a mercy. That anyone else would have faced worse. But because of his loyalty, she had gone easy on him.

And perhaps it was true – he had become her most prized soldier. When he had been able to keep his emotions in check, his control over his magic had no match. And he had always been one of the captain’s favorites. Any other monster probably would have faced far worse if they had faced punishment by the time she had undergone the determination treatment.

But the rest of the Royal Guard had not liked it. Not one bit. Mutinous murmurs had crept through their sleeping quarters the night after his amputation. If the captain’s pet had fallen victim to her wrath, what would happen when she next lost her temper?

When all was said and done, the captain’s punishment had ultimately led to her downfall.

But the captain had been right about one thing: Edge never thought things through when it came to his brother. Why else would he have given in so readily this morning?

A small popping noise startled him out of his thoughts and when he looked up he saw his brother, still enveloped in his oversized blanket, staggering towards the kitchen.

“SANS!”

Red glanced over his shoulder, and Edge got a glimpse of the tear-stained face before he turned back around and disappeared into the kitchen.

Edge froze. Were his brother’s actions an invitation to join him in the other room or just a snub? He just didn’t want to make things worse by making the wrong move.

Red had teleported into the living room, right? If he hadn’t wanted Edge to know he was here, he could have gone straight to the kitchen. So his brother must have wanted him to join him.

As he was about to jump up and head to the other room, Red walked out, carrying a glass of water. Without saying a word, he sat down on the far side of the couch, taking in great gulps of his drink. He was still crying, though there was none of the energy behind his tears as there had been upstairs.

“ARE YOU OKAY?” Edge asked, his soul taut with worry. “I WAS SUCH AN IDIOT. I CANNOT BELIEVE –”

“turn on the t.v.” His brother’s voice was monotonous.

Edge let out a huff of frustration. “I THOUGHT YOU WANTED ME TO CHECK IN WITH YOU.”

His brother ignored him and reached for the remote that sat in the cushions between them. Before he could grab it, Edge snatched it from his grasp and turned on the television.

Images of what could only be this universe’s version of Mettaton – pink and decidedly less lethal-looking – flashed on the screen. The robotic monster was hosting some game show or something
of the like. Although it had been a long time since anything MTT-related had aired back home, and
this program was vastly different from anything he had ever seen, he savored the familiarity of the
show. Back before this mess had all started, he and his brother would occasionally sit down
together and laugh their asses off at the poor monsters who had offered themselves up to
participate in Mettaton’s games.

But back then he had been able to focus all of his energy on the program. Right now, all he could
focus on was his brother’s sniffling; it was driving him up the wall. His soul coiled every time he
glanced over at him and saw his tear-soaked face. Why was Red so stubborn? Edge could comfort
him, uphold his promise to him, but instead, his brother was making him suffer. It was probably a
punishment for fucking up so badly.

They sat there for hours, watching program after program without saying a word, the awkward
energy never fizzling away. Eventually the day gave way to night, and as the Mettaton Power Hour
drew to close, his brother stood up abruptly. Edge wondered if he was going to leave him alone to
stew in his anger and misery, and his soul hammered in his chest at the thought. But his brother
merely went into the kitchen and returned with a carton of ice cream.

Edge eyed the container with disdain. “YOU ARE NOT GOING TO EAT THAT WITHOUT A
BOWL, ARE YOU?”

Red gave him an exasperated look before plunging his spoon into the carton and delivering an
overflowing spoonful into his mouth. Shuddering with disgust, but unwilling to get into an
argument when everything was so precarious between them, he returned his attention to the
 television. But every time his brother’s teeth scraped against the metal, his mind screamed with
rage. He hugged his arms to his chest, digging his fingers into his bone as he tried to hold back his
emotions. Every slurp and clank of his brother’s teeth drove him closer and closer to outright
murdering him.

Just as he was about to snap and tell Red where to shove the spoon, the front door burst open,
causing him to jolt in his seat. He glanced towards the entrance and watched his alternate self
march into the house, his fists clenched and looking ruffled. With a quick turn of his head, he set
his sight back on the screen, staring intensely at it as if the show were the only thing on his mind.
Droplets of sweat pooled on his skull as anxiety stabbed at his soul.

If Papyrus noticed that they were fighting, would he try to take Red away? He didn’t want his
brother to leave – he hated being alone, and he knew that the other skeletons would ostracize him
if they found out what he had done. Besides, it was his job to comfort Red and to hell with them if
they thought they would just take that duty away from him.

As he stared at the television, contemplating what he would do if his brother left, Papyrus stomped
into his line of sight and placed his hands on his hips.

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING?” he barked at them.

Edge gulped, quickly trying to think of something to say to get him to leave, but his brother got
there first.

“uh, eating.”

Papyrus stamped his feet on the floor, sending waves of shock through Edge that quickly gave way
to fury. His brother was in no condition for this type of childish behavior. What the hell was
Papyrus doing?
“WHY HAVE YOU BEEN IGNORING MY CALLS?” The harsh tone needled at Edge’s soul, and he was so close to screaming he could hardly handle it. “I HAVE BEEN TRYING TO REACH YOU AND SANS FOR HOURS!”

Edge straightened in his seat, and, trying his best to keep as much of the fury out of his voice as he could, he demanded, “CALM. DOWN.”

If he could keep it together enough not to yell at his brother, then Papyrus could too. And if his lookalike insisted on harassing them, he would kick him out. By force if necessary. Red was in no fit state to be yelled at and neither was he.

As Papyrus opened his mouth, his brows furrowed with anger, Red made a loud sniffling noise. Edge’s eyes darted to his brother and his soul sunk when he saw how empty and downtrodden he appeared. There was none of the usual spit and fire in his expression, and it was obvious that he was refusing to make eye contact with the two of them.

“Sorry,” his brother muttered, staring down at his lap. “I think I left my phone upstairs.”

Edge’s eyes flitted back and forth between the other two skeletons as his chest tightened with guilt. While his brother continued to look away from the two of them, Papyrus continued to stare at him, the anger in his stance melting bit by bit, giving way to an expression of concern.

Papyrus twiddled his fingers together in front of him and, with a much softer tone, asked, “IS EVERYTHING… OKAY?”

Red sniffed again, staring down at his lap. “Yeah, fine.”

He set the carton of ice cream down on the couch cushion next to him, drawing his knees to his chest. Any lingering traces of rage disappeared from Edge as he looked over at his brother. All he just wanted to hug him, protect him from the rest of the world.

“ARE YOU SURE?” Papyrus asked. The question caused Edge’s soul to pound with dread.

Blushing, Red glanced up at Papyrus and gave a quick nod. “Just a bad day. You know how it goes.” He shot a tight grin towards Edge. “But I’m feeling better already. Boss here has been really good to me.”

Edge returned the gesture with his own forced smile. What had he done to help? All he had been was a useless pile of bones as always, unable to do a damn thing for his brother. He rubbed at his arms absentmindedly as he tried to figure out Red’s game. Was he trying to avoid Papyrus’s comfort as well as Edge’s? Well, if that were the case, at least the other skeleton hadn’t bested him in that arena.

“That is… good.” Papyrus’s eyes shot towards the kitchen and he hurriedly asked, “HAVE EITHER OF YOU SEEN SANS THEN?”

Edge shook his head, thankful that he hadn’t seen the other Sans – he didn’t think his soul could take much more tension.

Papyrus’s eyes flashed upstairs. “Toriel said he left hours ago,” he said worriedly. “Is it possible that you missed him?”

“Definitely possible.”

Edge followed Papyrus’s gaze to the bedroom door. “He did seem quite tired. Or is
“boss,” Red said in exasperation, though Edge recognized his teasing tone. It seemed as if his brother was trying to bury the hatchet and Edge barely held back a sigh of relief.

“What?” he replied in feigned confusion.

“That’s rude!”

“Well he looks exhausted, what can I say?”

“That doesn’t mean you can just say that. It makes you look like an ass.”

“Like you can talk!” He nodded towards the container of ice cream between them.

“Eating food like that – without proper dishes – makes you look like an ass.”

“Why does that matter?”

Edge shuddered. “It is unsanitary!”

“Pssh. Yeah, right.”

“It is true! You leave all sorts of germs behind.”

“Germs? What germs?”

“Magic germs, of course!”

Red sighed. “You’re just making shit up now.”

“That is very untrue! I am sure that Papyrus here –” he glanced towards where his lookalike had been standing, but he was nowhere to be found. “Could… err… explain?”

“Heh. Yeah, he probably could,” Red said, all of the levity gone from his voice.

Now that Papyrus had left, the room was filled with tense energy again, all of the lighthearted bantering ending in an instant. His brother was back to staring down at his lap, and Edge could see him giving into one of his oldest bad habits: wringing his hands together noisily. Taking a deep breath and hoping that Red would perhaps listen this time, Edge broke the silence.

“I hope… you are okay?”

Red stopped fidgeting, his jaw suddenly tight. “Yeah. Sorry about that.”

“Sorry? Why are you sorry? I was such an idiot for biting down.” He brought his hand to his forehead as he shook his skull furiously. “I should have thought things through. Or asked. Or something! I do not know what I was –”

“Stop.” Red snuffled and Edge saw that there were tears rolling down his face again. “I should’ve let you stay. You were in pain too, right?” He averted his gaze. “I’m sorry.”

His brother’s bones were rattling again, and from the way he held his jaw tight, it was apparent that he was trying not burst into full-fledged sobs. Edge set the carton of ice cream to the floor and scooted across the couch so that he could take his brother into his arms.
With a soft voice, Edge admitted, “It did hurt. A lot.” He squeezed his brother to his chest. “But it was not as painful as not being able to properly apologize.”

Red burrowed his face into Edge’s ribs, and he could barely make out his muffled words. “i’m sorry. i just needed some space or – or – or something.”

Edge rubbed small circles into his brother’s back. “I just wish you had told me that. You just kept screaming and hitting me.”

“i know. i was just… really freaked out. i don’t think you know how bad that hurt. my soul is still tingling from it.”

Red wrapped the fabric of his brother’s hoodie. “Are you okay? Do we need to go to a healer?”

Red shook his head. “i’m fine. i just need… some rest i think.”

“Sans, I do not want to leave this to chance. If your soul is damaged, then to hell with leaving a scar. No one will be able to see it anyway.”

Red looked up at him, tears clinging to his eyes. “i don’t care about leaving a damn scar. it’s just not worth going to a healer over.” He blushed and continued on hurriedly, “i feel good and it’s coming back together just fine. there’s no point in bothering someone with this.”

Edge grumbled under his breath as he massaged his brother’s back more intensely.

“come on, don’t be like that. if there’s any issues, we’ll visit a healer. i promise.” He sniffed again. “now how are you?” He lifted a hand to Edge’s face so that he would turn towards him. “i could feel how scared you were earlier… and i know you felt all of the same stuff i did when you bit down.”

“What I felt is not important.”

“stop fucking being like that,” he retorted, though his tone still tender. “we were both scared to death – just admit it.”

Edge opened his mouth to argue, but instead let out a deep sigh, the stiffness rolling from his shoulders.

“Yes, I was scared. But not just because of the pain.” His face warmed. “I was most afraid when I came downstairs. I feared that you were going to hate me again.”

Red arched away from him and gave him a fierce glare as he wiped the tears from his cheekbones. “i never hated you in the first place, ya idiot! i love you too much!”

The last of the tension in Edge’s bones seeped away, replaced with a fuzzy warmth. With a quiet clank, he kissed the top of Red’s skull.

“I love you too.”

His brother made a low whining noise and wrapped his blanket around Edge, and as Red cuddled into his chest, Edge took comfort in the warmth that his brother brought him. He sighed, relieved that Red still loved him.

But something still tugged at the back of his mind, and although he thought it might bring about another argument, he gave voice to his concern.
“Sans, I never want to do that again.”

“What?”

“The stuff with your soul,” he muttered as his face blushed with embarrassment. “It… was not worth all of that.”

“It’s not usually like that though…”

“Sans…”

“It’s way better than all that, I promise. Just don’t bite down again.”

“I did not enjoy it,” he said, his tone stern. “Please.”

Red looked disappointed, but he nodded. After a few seconds of silence, he murmured, “We’re doing things all wrong anyway.”

“What do you mean?”

“I wanted to slow down with all of this, remember? I really don’t want sex to be the only thing between us.”

Edge sighed. There was more than that between them. His brother was the only one in the world that cared about him; the pleasure he got from having sex with him was just a delicious bonus. But if Red thought that they were moving too quickly, then he would listen to him. He could not lose him again. Besides, he had made a promise to respect his wishes, and he would honor that oath for life.

“I suppose so.” He scooped his brother the rest of the way into his lap so that his legs straddled his hiphones. Bending down to deliver another quick skeletal kiss, he whispered, “I understand. Let’s just watch some television then.”

A smile spread on Red’s face. “Sure, but let’s change the fucking channel. This shit sucks.”

“I did not hear you complaining earlier! Besides, Mettaton has the finest programs in the entire Underground.”

“You only like the shows because you like to look at Mettaton’s ass,” his brother muttered under his breath.

Edge balked. “I do not!”

“Can’t fool me. I see the way you stare at it.” He placed a hand to the back of his skull, mimicking one of Mettaton’s trademark poses, and winked. “Ooh, check out my sweet robot ass! Who knows what secret my trunk holds?”

“Shut up!”

“Can’t fool me, edge-face.” He grinned wickedly. “I don’t see the appeal of a robot dick personally, but – ow!” Edge had playfully flicked the side of Red’s skull with his fingers. “What was that for?”

Edge smirked. “You were being too loud. You don’t want to wake the whole house, do you?”

“Oh, ha ha.” Red pressed his head against Edge’s chest. “Robot fucker.”
“Dick breath.”

His brother yawned. “don’t know how that’s an insult.”

“Neither is fucking robots, you shithead.”

Red chuckled but said no more as a documentary on time travel came on the screen. A sleepy silence fell between them as his brother slowly brushed his hand up and down Edge’s arm, sending tiny tingles of pleasure through his bones. He couldn’t remember the last time Red had done something so mindlessly sweet. Savoring the feeling, he squeezed closer and pressed his face to his brother’s old, ratty hoodie, filling his nasal cavity with the scent of pine.

As the film credits rolled across the screen, Red’s stroking crawled to a halt and Edge heard his brother’s slow, deep breaths – a sure sign that he had fallen asleep. Although it was late, there was no way Edge could sleep yet – his soul was still bounding with unspent energy.

And so he lay back on the couch, maneuvering Red so that he lay on top of him, his hands still clinging to Edge’s chest even in his sleep. Edge watched movie after movie until his eyelids grew heavy and slumber finally overtook him as well.

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A loud clanging, metallic noise awoke him with a start. Soul racing, he glanced around the room, searching for the source of the clamor, but saw nothing. His brother, who was still grasping at his shirt, blinked lazily at him.

“g’m-m-morning,” Red yawned.

His soul still fluttering in his chest, Edge looked around the room, trying to find whatever had woken him up, as he distractedly murmured, “Good morning.”

There was another loud bang, and now that he was awake, he realized that the sounds were coming from the kitchen.

“guess paps is already up.” His brother sat up and stretched his arms towards the ceiling, his bones making a loud series of popping noises. “might as well get some grub before he leaves.” He sighed as he scratched his ribcage. “i seriously don’t wanna go to the lab today.”

“Well not?”

“heh.” He winked. “i’d rather spend the day with you.”

Edge felt the corners of his mouth twitch into a smile. His brother was always such a smooth talker when he wanted to be.

Red crawled off his chest and headed for the kitchen, Edge following close behind. As they entered the room, the smell of some delicious concoction filled the air, awakening a dull hunger within him. Papyrus was standing at the stove, his shoulders hunched slightly. He didn’t turn to look at them until they sat down at the table, and when he did, he displayed none of the usual signs of his boundless happiness.

Through a half-stifled yawn, Red mumbled, “good morning.”

“GOOD MORNING,” Papyrus responded as he clutched his spatula to his chest nervously. “ARE YOU TWO… DOING WELL?”
Edge could sense that there was something more to the question, but his brother didn’t seem to notice.

“yeah,” he said happily. “doing real good. starved, but oh boy, i can already tell you’ve got the answer to that problem cookin’ up.” He sniffed the air hungrily, his face bright with excitement.

Papyrus smiled at the reply, though the gesture didn’t quite meet his eyes. Raising an inquisitive brow at Edge, he asked, “AND YOU?”

“I AM DOING QUITE WELL, THANK YOU.”

Papyrus stared at him for a few moments, as if considering Edge’s answer before replying. “GOOD. THAT IS VERY GOOD.” He turned around, returning his attention to the sizzling frying pan.

“how about you?” Red said as, much to Edge’s disdain, he cracked his knuckles.

There was a long pause. “I AM… OKAY.”

His brother glanced upwards, his eyes boring into the back of Papyrus’s skull for a few moments before flitting to Edge’s eyes, a puzzled look on his face. Edge shrugged. If he had to guess, his lookalike was not “okay” as he claimed. But then again, it was not as if he knew him all that well.

Red cleared his throat. “so… was sans at grillby’s last night or something?”

Papyrus shook his head slowly. “HE WAS UPSTAIRS. HE STILL IS.”

“oh. guess he’s sleeping in?”

Papyrus nodded, though the movement was stiff. Despite his… distaste for the other skeletons’ relationship with his brother, Edge’s soul gave an uncomfortable twist. He could not shake off the feeling that perhaps something was wrong.

“IS EVERYTHING OKAY?” He cast an uneasy glance towards his brother.

Papyrus did not answer the question, but instead took his time turning off the burner and plating their meals. As he turned around, Edge saw tears pouring down his face. “holy shit, what’s wrong?” Red stood up, his eyes wide. “is something wrong with sans?”

Papyrus set the dishes down on the table and wiped his face. “NO, NO HE IS FINE. WELL, MAYBE NOT FINE, BUT HE JUST NEEDS REST.”

“rest?” Red asked, appearing completely nonplussed. “what exactly happened?”

“HE EXPERIENCED AN ATTACK LAST NIGHT.”

Red blanched and threw himself down into the chair.

Edge was, quite frankly, bewildered. “AN ATTACK? I THOUGHT YOU SAID MONSTERS DID NOT FIGHT HERE! IS HE OKAY? DID HE WIN?”

His brother motioned for him to calm down. “not that kind of attack, boss. a panic attack.”

Ah. Panic attacks he was intimately familiar with. They had become far too common during his final days as a Royal Guard. And after his experience in the elite squad, he now recognized that his
brother had displayed signs of them as well. He thought back to yesterday’s fiasco and shuddered. Yes, he was all too aware of those types of attacks.

“What triggered it?”

Papyrus looked down at the omelette on his plate and twirled it around. There was an uncomfortable silence between them some time before he finally answered his question. “IT HAS BEEN BUILDING UP FOR SOME TIME.” He sniffed and wiped his face again. “HE HAS NOT BEEN SLEEPING WELL.”

Red dropped his voice low. “he mentioned nightmares.”

Papyrus nodded. “THAT… AMONG OTHER THINGS.” His eyes flashed to Edge before he returned his gaze to his meal.

Red cradled his skull in his hands. “i should’ve been there. i said i would be. fuck, fuck, fuck!”

“LANGUAGE.”

“i know, i know, sorry.” He groaned. “i really should’ve been though.”

Papyrus threw Red a significant look. “BELIEVE ME, I DO NOT THINK THAT YOU BEING THERE WOULD HAVE HELPED THIS TIME.” He sighed and massaged his temples. “LAST NIGHT HE AND I HAD A LONG DISCUSSION ABOUT MANY THINGS AND NOW I AM NOT ENTIRELY CONVINCED HE HAS TOLD THE DOCTOR EVERYTHING THEY NEED TO KNOW. TO BE COMPLETELY HONEST, I AM NOT SURE HE PLANS TO EITHER. THAT LEAVES IT TO ME TO TALK TO DOCTOR ABOUT THEM.”

“What do you mean?”

Papyrus shook his head. “NOT NOW. IT IS A LONG STORY AND I AM IN NO MOOD.” With a great huff of breath, Papyrus finally began to eat.

“Is that what you two are doing today? visiting the doctor?”

Papyrus swallowed his bite, his face etched with concern. “NO. I HAVE TAKEN FAR TOO MUCH TIME OFF OF WORK. I AM JUST A TAD WORRIED ABOUT THE BILLS.” His eyes glanced upwards in the direction of their bedroom. “BESIDES, SANS IS FINALLY ASLEEP. I WANT HIM TO REST FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE.”

“Yeah. probably for the best.”

“I DID NOTICE THAT HE LOOKED VERY TIRED,” Edge said.

“Yes, well, he has been.” Papyrus stared at Red, a hopeful expression on his face. “I WAS ACTUALLY HOPING YOU COULD LOOK AFTER HIM TODAY. I WANT SOMEONE TO MAKE SURE HE RESTS. NO VISITS TO THE CITY, ESPECIALLY THE LAB. HE IS FAR TOO STRESSED ALREADY.”

“Yeah, we can do that.”

Edge nodded. “YES, IT WOULD BE AN HONOR TO HELP YOU IN WHATEVER FASHION THAT WOULD BEST BENEFIT YOU.”

He didn’t make promises to just anyone, but he could not deny that Papyrus had been instrumental
in aiding him and his brother during their tribulations. If he could help out the other skeleton with his problems, then maybe one day his debt to him could be repaid.

And keeping an eye on Sans would not be an issue. He just hoped that he wouldn’t have to resort to magical attacks to keep him here. Somehow, he did not think Papyrus would appreciate that. Maybe he would make it a challenge for himself – keep the little pissant of a skeleton in bed without resorting to magic. That would make it entertaining and keep Papyrus happy.

“AND RED?” Papyrus coughed pointedly. “NO FUN GAMES. NOT UNTIL I HAVE SPOKEN TO THE DOCTOR.”

“uhh…” Red’s skull blushed all over as he sputtered over his words. “y-y-yeah. i c-can do that!”

Papyrus let out a loud sigh of relief. “THANK YOU. I THINK YOU MAY BE THE ONLY ONE CAPABLE OF GETTING HIM BACK TO BED RIGHT NOW.”

A surge of jealousy overtook Edge and, without thinking, he squeezed the fork in his hand so that the handle bent. Placing the now-useless utensil on the table, he took a deep breath, trying to calm his sudden rage.

His brother’s voice squeaked when he replied, “w-what? n-nah, i’m not the only one. tori would for sure. and maybe grillby,” he added with distaste. “and you, paps, you know him better than anyone. you’d get him back to bed faster than anyone. hell, you already did.”

“NYEH.” A faint orange glow graced Papyrus’s cheeks. “WHETHER OR NOT I COULD GET HIM TO SLEEP DOES NOT MATTER. I REALLY MUST WORK TODAY. AS FOR THE OTHER TWO… WELL, GRILLBY…” he said doubtfully before shaking his head. “AND TORIEL AND SANS HAD QUITE THE ARGUMENT YESTERDAY. SHE HAS MESSAGED ME QUITE A NUMBER OF TIMES THIS MORNING, BUT I THINK IT BEST IF SHE LEAVES HIM ALONE FOR A WHILE. SANS IS REALLY NOT FEELING UP TO TALKING TO HER RIGHT NOW. BESIDES, I DO NOT THINK SHE HAS THE SAME UNDERSTANDING OF SANS’S PROBLEMS AS WE DO.”

“i guess…”

Papyrus rubbed his face, digging the heels of his hands into this eye sockets. “YOU TRULY DO NOT MIND CARING FOR HIM TODAY, RIGHT?”

Red’s eyes darted between Edge and Papyrus, looking nervous. “of course not.”

“AND YOU MUST PROMISE: NO FUN GA–”

“yeah, yeah.” He waved his hand in dismissal as his blush grew. “i got it.”

Edge had a sneaking suspicion that “fun games” was a euphemism for something else. And he did not like it one bit. But under his watchful eye, he was not about to let those two start games of any variety. After all, he was now bound by his agreement to watch over this other Sans, and what Papyrus wanted done, he would do.

And if that meant his brother and Sans would not be able to have sex, that was all the better.

Papyrus gave a dry cough and cast a nervous glance towards Edge. “I WAS HOPING FOR ONE MORE FAVOR?”

Edge cocked his head questioningly. “WHAT?”
“WOULD YOU ACCOMPANY ME TO WORK TODAY?”

Edge gawked at him, his sense of honor and his very strong desire to stay home battling each other inside his mind.

“huh? why do you want him to do that?”

“OH. NO REASON IN PARTICULAR,” he replied, his voice pitched an octave higher than usual. When Red eyed him with suspicion, he added hurriedly, “I THOUGHT HE WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE SURFACE.”

“I SEE IT RIGHT NOW,” Edge said dryly.

“But THIS IS NOTHING! YOU HAVE NOT SEEN EVEN THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY!”

Edge grumbled under his breath about how it sounded like a waste of his time.

“It WOULD BE SO FUN!” Papyrus said as his face brightened considerably. “YOU COULD MEET MY FRI– I MEAN… COWORKERS! AND HELP WITH PUZZLES! AND TALK TO SO MANY NICE PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER!”

“heh. yeah.” His brother cradled his head with his hands, smiling slyly at Edge. “you could even see what it’s like to be a royal guard here.”

For a moment, Papyrus’s face fell, though he recovered quickly. “Y-YES! I AM SURE THAT IT MUCH DIFFERENT FROM YOUR UNIVERSE.”

Edge looked between the other two, his disappointment and anxiety building. He did not want to go. But he had made a promise and he intended to keep it.

“FINE.”

Papyrus beamed and loaded his fork up with a heaping bite of egg. “EXCELLENT! NOW EAT UP, YOU TWO! A HAPPY DAY STARTS WITH A HEALTHY BREAKFAST!”

Edge stabbed at his eggs with a sigh. He could already tell that it was going to be a long day.

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After the three of them ate and got ready, Red teleported them to Papyrus’s work, and with a tiny pop, they appeared in a room cramped with vending machines, tiny tables, fold out chairs, and a miniature kitchen. Monsters of every kind – including several types that Edge had never seen before in his entire life – were lazing about, chatting amongst themselves, filling the room with tired murmurs.

It was uncomfortably hot, and despite the fact that there were several ceiling fans blowing sticky air around the room, most of the monsters were coated in a thick layer of sweat and many looked like they were about to pass out in their chintzy suits of armor.

As Red waved goodbye and teleported back home, Edge’s soul squirmed with worry and doubt. And not just because his brother was going to be with Sans all day, but also because it seemed like it was going to be a miserable, nerve-racking day. As he eyed one of the monsters he had never seen before – a vulkin named Suzy, according to Papyrus – he realized that he would not know how best to defend himself should they be attacked. It was difficult to trust that this universe was as safe as everyone claimed. He jumped at every noise inside the packed room, anticipating a magical attack at any moment.
After Papyrus put away some food for later and introduced Edge to some of the monsters, he rushed to open a door and shouted, “OUT HERE!”

As Edge exited the building, a refreshing breeze hit him, clinging to the beads of sweat that had accumulated on his bones. Although the scorching sun bore down on him, heating up his bones to the marrow, leaving the sweltering stuffiness of the breakroom was revitalizing.

Not to mention the view. The bleak concrete building behind him offered such a stark contrast to the world around him; it was just so dazzling and colorful and alive. He stood at the end of a dirt path, worn into a grassy meadow dotted with beds of bright yellow flowers. White butterflies flitted across the blue, cloudless sky, landing only to suckle on the nectar of the surrounding blossoms. The air was suffused with an overly sweet floral fragrance, and for some reason the scent sent a shiver of fear and regret up Edge’s spine.

Birds were singing cheerful morning ditties in a small grove of towering pine trees about a stone’s throw away to his left. And some miles away to his right, set against a backdrop of what had to be Mt. Ebott, stood a collection of lofty skyscrapers, their reflective windows shining brightly under the brilliant sunlight. In the immediate distance sat a row of small, cube-shaped buildings, not unlike the one he had just left. Each was decorated with an assortment of images and advertisements, and from here he could see signs for “Outer-VNH Ice Cream” and “Outer-VNH Haunted Tours” and a variety of other similar establishments.

As he took in the sight, he could hear a large group of monsters animatedly chatting away somewhere close by. But as his eyes darted across the landscape, trying to locate the source of the chatter, he saw no signs of anyone. His soul tautened with anxiety as he stepped into his lookalike’s shadow, suddenly aware that he was a sitting duck in this open territory.

“COME ON, WE HAVE THE FIRST GROUP!” Papyrus yelled as he strode down the path towards a building labeled in big bold letters with “RG Division 1 – Open Tours.”

Edge matched his pace, following directly behind the other skeleton. “THE FIRST GROUP OF WHAT?”

“HUMANS, OF COURSE!”

His soul sunk in his chest, realizing in an instant what the source of the chatter was. Humans? What did the Royal Guard have to do with humans? It had always been one of those things everyone said – lining up humans and mowing them down – but that had always been an empty threat. Did they actually do that here? No, no. It made no sense. Papyrus had said humans were monsters’ “friends” here.

Then what was this?

As they rounded the corner of the building, they saw a buzzing throng of fleshy humans, all standing in a queue. Each one was bedecked in some combination of sweat-stained t-shirts, shorts, sundresses, visors, and sunglasses, and wore a bright smile on their face. And once they spotted the pair of them, they greeted them with a chorus of excited shouts, accompanied by bright flashes of camera lights that threw temporary spots into Edge’s vision. The humans came in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors, but as his eyes darted amongst the group, he spotted a short child with a bob-cut of dark hair. Images of his first kill flashed through his mind and he averted his gaze, unwilling to dredge up the nightmare memories in a situation like this.

While Edge was shrinking away under the crowd’s scrutiny, Papyrus was posing for the cameras. His hands were on his hips, his chest was puffed out, and although there was no wind, his hot pink
scarf levitated behind him, held aloft by what had to be his own magic. Everything about him screamed of Edge’s attitude when he was a young bag of bones – boisterous, child, naïve.

He couldn’t help but feel a little bit envious at how easy this sort of thing came to the other skeleton.

As Papyrus took a step towards the group, Edge grabbed at his arm and murmured, “What are we doing here?”

“Err…” The smallest hint of an orange blush bloomed onto his face. “We are giving tours.”

Edge stared at him uncomprehendingly. “Tours? I thought you were in the Royal Guard.”

“Division One is the human liaison group,” Papyrus said as he rubbed at the back of his head. “It is our job to show all of humankind what life in Underground was like! To demonstrate the traditions that we cultivated while living beneath Mt. Ebott! And my job is to show them the ancient art of puzzle-making.”

That was how life had been in the Underground for monsters here? Had being forced under Mt. Ebott even been considered a punishment in this universe?

“And that is what the Royal Guard does?” Edge asked, trying to keep any insult from his tone.

“No, just Division One.” Papyrus cleared his throat. “The other divisions work with Undyne and Asgore to protect the kingdom. But that requires… er… special qualifications.”

Special qualifications? The Guard could not be that stringent with its members if this was the state of things. He eyed the surrounding area. Having so many people in such close quarters – human or not – was a security risk. Any moment a riot could break out, or someone could unleash an attack, or anything, and there were no “real” Guards to keep things in check. As far as he could tell, no one was stationed on the roofs of these buildings and there were no obvious measures to keep trespassers away. It would be easy for anyone with ill intent to pick off these tourists and flee before anyone could do a thing about it. And no one would be any the wiser as to their identity.

Whomever was in charge needed to learn how to do their job or they were going to have real problems on their hands.

“Will you be okay?” Papyrus whispered, his brow scrunched with concern.

Edge nodded, wiping his skull of sweat with the back of his hand. “Of course! I am always up for any task that is set before me!” His eyes latched onto the child he had spotted earlier who was now pointing animatedly at them. “But… do tell me if I act foolish. It would not do well to act inappropriately in front of so many.”

“Nyeh heh heh!” Papyrus slapped a hand to Edge’s shoulder. “Of course! That is what friends are for!”

Edge blinked. Friends? Before he had a chance to ask about it, Papyrus pulled him towards the crowd, a large smile on his face.

“GREETINGS! IT IS I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS! I WAS TOLD THERE WAS A GROUP OF HUMANS WAITING FOR ME HERE! BUT… THAT CANNOT BE RIGHT! ALL I SEE ARE A BUNCH OF SKELETONS WITH BITS OF FLESH ATTACHED!”

The joke got a chuckle out of the crowd, and their laughter seemed to reassure Papyrus – he
straightened his posture and his grin grew wider. Edge, on the other hand, had no idea what to do. It had been a long time since he had been in front of such a large group, and these humans were surely expecting a great performance from him. He did not want to disappoint.

“What about you?!” The young child Edge had spotted earlier was now jumping up and down excitedly, pointing towards him. “What’s your name?!”

Edge paused, wavering between giving his real name and the pseudonym that his counterpart had supplied. But as he hesitated, Papyrus let out a loud “NYEH HEH HEH!” as he approached the tiny human.

“What IS YOUR NAME, LITTLE HUMAN?” he said, leaning his weight onto one hip as he folded his arms against his chest.

“Kasta!” they proclaimed proudly as they copied Papyrus’s stance.

“Well, Kasta, that is my cousin, Edge. He is one of the toughest monsters I know. Although not quite as strong or as handsome as me. But I suppose not many are!”

The crowd laughed again and Edge found himself smiling with them. Encouraged, and not willing to let Papyrus down, he stepped forward to stand closer to the crowd.

“Hmph,” he replied. “I am far better-looking than you, Papyrus. And none can surpass my strength. Just look at these.” He flexed his arms as if to show off a bicep, and there were several flashes of light as more photos were taken.

“That is nothing! Take a gander at these!” Papyrus copied Edge’s movement.

“But you only worked out to get those. I got these from fights! It is much different!”

Kasta clapped their hands together and squealed with excitement. “Wow! Did you get those –” They pointed to the scars on his face. “from fights–?!”

Edge’s smile twitched. He racked his mind, trying to think of some clever story to tell the child, but all he could picture was Captain Undyne’s face as she whipped her spear against his face over and over again.

“NYEH HEH!” Papyrus shouted, taking over once again. “THOSE? OH, EDGE HERE WILL TELL YOU ALL ABOUT HOW HE PICKED A FIGHT WITH THE WRONG MONSTER, BUT I KNOW THE TRUTH.” He winked at Edge. “THIS, HUMANS, IS WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU PUT METAL IN THE MICROWAVE. NEVER HAVE I SEEN A SADDER BREAKFAST BURRITO IN ALL OF MY LIFE.”

The humans were eating it up.

“Watch it or I will tell them all of your secrets! Do not forget that I have seen you in your bunny slippers!”

Papyrus clapped his hands to his face. “AH! NO! NOT MY BUNNY SLIPPERS! MY GREATEST WEAKNESS!” He let out an overdramatic sigh. “ENOUGH! WE ARE NOT HERE TO DISCUSS EMBARRASSING CLOTHING ITEMS! WE ARE HERE TO SHOW THE HUMANS OUR PUZZLES!”
“HMPH. DO THEY REALLY WANT TO SEE THEM? IT DOES NOT SEEM LIKE IT.”

At that, the group shouted as a whole, telling Edge that he was wrong and that they wanted to start the tour. Their reaction filled Edge with pride. It had been a long time since a crowd had cheered or laughed when he spoke. And back then the monsters had been jeering at him. To receive this kind of response would have made his younger self’s soul sing.

Truth be told, his soul was jumping for joy in his chest now. Every witty bit of banter with Papyrus, every bark of laughter from the humans, and every shout of excitement filled his soul with an almost-embarrassed sense of happiness that he had never experienced before.

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“I ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT HUMANS WERE SHORT.”

Edge took a bite of his sandwich, relishing the flavors of the roasted bell peppers, grilled onions, and spiced tomatoes. It was even hotter than before in the breakroom, but with fewer monsters here for the late lunch hour, it seemed more manageable.

“I THOUGHT THE SAME THING WHEN I MET FRISK! I WAS SHOCKED WHEN I FOUND OUT THEY WERE JUST A CHILD! THEY WERE SUCH A LITTLE FLIRT!”

Edge wondered if the child he had killed had been flirtatious as well. They had certainly been daring, coming to the Underground and challenging him without a weapon. And, oh, how he had avoided trying to harm the child too much –

He dismissed the thought with a shake of his head. None of that now.

“ARE THEY ALL SO… RAMBUNCTIOUS?”

“NYEH HEH! NO, THAT GROUP REALLY LIKED US. IT WAS WONDERFUL TO PLAY OFF YOU! IT MADE IT EASIER TO GET THEM TO LAUGH!”

“NYEH HEH, I MUST ADMIT THAT IT WAS FUN.” Papyrus absolutely beamed at his statement. “HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN DOING THIS?”

“I BECAME A ROYAL GUARD NOT LONG AFTER WE REACHED THE SURFACE. THAT PUTS ME AT ABOUT THREE YEARS.” Papyrus’s postured straightened a bit as he spoke.

So at the same time as Edge. Intriguing.

“I ALWAYS THOUGHT HUMANS WOULD BE A LOT MORE… MURDER-Y,” Edge confessed. That was how they were always portrayed back home: as bloodthirsty little goblin-like creatures with no respect for monsters. Perhaps it was just different in this universe.

“MOST ARE QUITE KIND ACTUALLY! SOME CAN BE A BIT… IGNORANT SOMETIMES! BUT AT HEART, THEY ARE VERY NICE.”

Edge inclined his head and stuffed another mouthful of his sandwich into his mouthS, contemplating all that he had seen today. When he finished his bite, he smiled and said, “THANK YOU FOR BRINGING ME HERE. THIS EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN VERY EDUCATIONAL.”

Papyrus’s grin faltered.

“I AM VERY HAPPY THAT YOU ENJOYED IT.” He set down his sandwich, folded his hands
in front of him, and adopted a more serious tone. “IN TRUTH, I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE THE HUMANS. I WAS PREPARED TO BRING YOU BACK HERE IN CASE… WELL, THAT IS NOT IMPORTANT. YOU DID VERY WELL!”

Edge nodded, though he sensed that Papyrus had more to say.

“I… ERR… WELL, THE REASON WHY I INVITED YOU… ERR…” He dropped his voice to a whisper. “I know this is not my business, but I just want to be sure that you are okay.” He tapped his fingers together anxiously. “I know you have been doing some things with Red’s soul –”

Edge nearly choked on his sandwich. “W-WHAT? HOW DO YOU –?”

“Ah! Do not worry, I knew that the two of you were close enough to do such things. It was to be expected! However, I also know that Red had never done it before… and so I imagine you probably had not either?”

Edge’s face heated. “THAT IS NOT SOMETHING I AM GOING TO DISCUSS HERE!” He cast his gaze around the room and spotted three monsters sitting at a nearby table – two alligator monsters and a dog monster with black and white fur that he swore looked like Doggo with both of his arms. It did not appear as if they were listening to their conversation, but just the thought of others knowing about his inexperience was mortifying to say the least.

Papyrus placed his hand on Edge’s and gave a reassuring squeeze. “It can be quite overwhelming. If you need any advice on how best to –”

“STOP!” He yanked his hand away and covered his face, though he was sure was crimson from head to toe at this point. “MY BROTHER AND I ARE NOT EVEN… GOING TO DO THAT AGAIN. WITH SOULS.”

“Oh!” Edge peeked through his fingers and saw that Papyrus was frowning at him. “Well, if that is your decision…”

“WE THOUGHT IT BEST,” he said with finality.

“UNDERSTANDABLE!” Papyrus said, returning his voice to its usual volume. “I SHALL NOT SPEAK OF IT AGAIN, FRIEND!”

Edge dropped his hand to his lap, though he could still feel how heated his face was. “WHY DO YOU CALL ME THAT?”

Papyrus tilted his head. “CALL YOU WHAT?”

“FRIEND.”

All traces of Papyrus’s smile were gone. “DO YOU… NOT CONSIDER ME YOUR FRIEND?”

“I DO NOT KNOW.” Was it possible for him to get even redder? “EXCEPT FOR MY BROTHER, I DO NOT THINK I HAVE EVER HAD ANY FRIENDS.”

Friendship was the sort of thing straight out of a fairy tale. Back home, you had allies and you had enemies. And it was not always clear which was which. Friends were as rare as lovers in the Underground.

But this wasn’t the Underground, was it?
Papyrus stared at him a few moments before the corners of his mouth slid upwards into one of the biggest, most infectious smiles Edge had ever seen.

“YOU AND I SHARE MANY SIMILARITIES, RIGHT?”

Edge snorted. “YOU COULD SAY THAT.”

“And we do seem to get along well, right?”

“I suppose,” Edge said with a small shrug.

“Then we must be friends!”

Edge cocked his head. “Is it really that simple?”

“Of course! Making friends is… easy.” His smile twitched.

Edge considered him for a moment. “Fine. I will deem you a friend, but on one condition.”

“What is that?”

Edge held up his sandwich. “As a friend, you must show me how to cook! I never knew food could taste so amazing!”

Papyrus clapped his hands together, his eyes absolutely sparkling. “Of course! I, the great Papyrus, will teach you everything you need to know about the art of cooking! And this particular recipe is so simple! A beginner can do it with no problem!”

And he began to rattle off a list of ingredients and instructions. Edge listened carefully, hinging on every word. He didn’t understand it all, but from the sound of it, with his current skill level the recipe would only take a few hours! Or maybe a couple of days! In either case, mastering this would be simple, and once he did, everyone, especially his brother, would be very impressed.

He vaguely wondered what his brother was doing right now.

A loud, pointed cough interrupted Papyrus as he was explaining the proper bread to vegetable ratio for the recipe. Doggo – and there was no mistaking him now that Edge saw his face and those hideous leopard print pants – was standing next to the table, an unlit dog treat hanging precariously from his mouth.

“Doggo!” Papyrus jumped up and hugged the dog monster, who seemed flustered at the gesture. “It is wonderful to see you! I never thanked you properly for attending my party!”

“Heh heh, don’t mention it. Your parties are always great.” The corners of his mouth jerked upwards and Edge could not tell if he was smiling or grimacing. Staring at a point just over Edge’s shoulder, Doggo asked, “Um… are you… another cousin?”

“Yes, they call me Edge.” He crossed his arms against his chest and Doggo started, shifting his head ever so slightly so that they made direct eye contact. Ah, that was right. It had been a long time since he had last interacted with the pooch, but he recalled that Doggo had the most difficult time seeing things that didn’t move. It had been no wonder that the dog monster had lost his arm in battle back in his universe. Doggo could never see anyone until they were right on
him, and ambushes against a nearly-blind dog were easy enough. In fact, Edge was surprised that
he had stayed alive for as long as he had. The poor creature really had stood no chance with his
impediment.

As a courtesy, Edge began to tap his foot on the floor, causing his whole body to shake slightly.

“Nice to meet you, Edge.” Doggo said as he gave a sloppy, human-styled salute.

“WOULD YOU LIKE TO JOIN US?” Papyrus offered excitedly.

“Mmm…” Doggo took his dog treat out of his mouth. “Sorry, no thanks. I actually came over to
talk to you about something. You know Larry?” He pointed over his shoulder towards the other
table. The alligator monsters were staring at their claws, and it appeared as if they were refusing to
look their way.

“OF COURSE! LARRY IS GREAT!” Papyrus winked at Edge.

Doggo didn’t seem to notice Papyrus’s attempt at an inside joke, and pressed on, his voice filled
with hesitation.

“Well, he was showing me something that… I don’t know if you’re aware of?”

“WHAT IS IT? IS IT A LATE BIRTHDAY GIFT?”

“Uh, definitely not.” His eyes flashed to Edge again and in his expression there was a glimmer of
something he didn’t recognize. Nervousness? Fear perhaps? “Sans and… your other cousin, Red, I
think you said? They’re dating, right?”

Edge’s foot stilled as tension gripped his soul.

“ERR… YES?” Papyrus eyed Edge with unease. “BUT… SANS WANTED TO KEEP IT
QUIET.” He dropped his voice to a whisper. “Humans don’t like the idea of it, and he is worried
about my job if anyone found out.”

Edge blinked, momentarily distracted by what Papyrus had said. Found out about what? It wasn’t
like the humans knew that they were alternate versions of themselves, and they looked different
enough. And… Doggo didn’t know either, right? It wasn’t exactly common knowledge to know
about different universes. So why was Papyrus saying anything?

Doggo’s eyes widened. “I think you already have a problem then.”

“WHAT DO YOU MEAN?” Edge spat out, his eyes narrowing as he stared the dog up and down.

Doggo tapped his dog treat on the table a couple of times, bouncing up and down with nervous
energy. “There’s… a video of them online.”

“A VIDEO?” Papyrus’s brow furrowed with confusion. “WHAT KIND OF VIDEO? IS IT FROM
THE PARTY?”

Doggo groaned as he dragged his hand across the sides of his snout. “No, the lab, but… You know
what? Never mind. Forget I said anything, Papyrus. I’m just going to tell Sans myse–”

And that’s when it clicked.

“A VIDEO?!?” Edge stood up, sending the fold-up chair flying backwards into the wall.
“WOAH!” Doggo jumped backwards and lost his balance, falling flat on his tail. As Edge rounded on him, he scrambled backwards, slipping and falling on the dirty linoleum tile beneath him. “Hey, hold on a sec!”

Edge picked him up by the scruff of his shirt, placing his face centimeters from his snout.

“WHERE DID YOU SEE THIS VIDEO?"

“Online!” Doggo shouted as he tried to yank himself out of Edge’s grip. “Crap! Come on, let me go!”

“AND WHAT WERE THEY DOING IN THIS VIDEO?”

The flash of fear in Doggo’s face was all the answer he needed.

“I don’t kn– I didn’t watch it! I just heard about it! Come on, put me do–!”

Edge tossed him back onto the floor, letting out a wordless howl of anger as he marched out of the breakroom. Behind him, he could hear Papyrus shouting his name, but he ignored him, slamming the door with such intensity, he would not be surprised if the door was broken off its hinges.

Without thinking, he headed towards the nearby thicket of pine trees, his eye burning with flames of enraged magic. Fury flowed through him, and as he approached the nearest tree, he flung a wave of bones haphazardly in front of him. Splinters of bone and wood alike shot through the air as he hurled magical attack after magical attack against the trunk.

But it just wasn’t enough to satisfy his rage.

Abandoning his magic, he sprinted to the wounded tree and slung his fist straight into the tree. A sharp lance of pain shot up his arm, shaking him to his core. Usually he would bend over, groaning incoherently, as he tried to get over the pain. But this time it gave him focus, allowed him to push past the image that played over and over in his head: his brother getting bent over and thoroughly fucked by his alternate self in a lab, in front of a camera, for the whole world to see. Every punch blew away a bit of the nightmare. He lost himself in the motions, even as bits of his bones chipped away against the wood. There was just something about the way the tree bent beneath his blows that invigorated him.

Every strike drained him of energy, and when he finally wore himself out, he slumped onto the ground, pine needles sticking to his sweat-coated bones. He knew there were tears on his face – his wounds stung as they fell – but for once, he didn’t care. Let everyone know how upset he was. He had every right to be.

As he leaned his forehead against the decimated tree trunk, his chest heaving as he tried to catch his breath, a pair of bony arms wrapped around him from behind. He didn’t even attempt to pull away. There was just no point. He was too tired and Papyrus would just get upset if he refused the hug. It wasn’t his fault that his brother couldn’t keep his magic in his pants.

He turned to face the other skeleton and saw only pity scrawled across his face.

“I do not understand,” Edge muttered. “Why aren’t you upset?”

Papyrus released him, sliding down to the forest floor next to him as a heavy sigh rattled his bones.

“I am upset.”
Edge harrumphed. “But only because other people can see them online, right?”

“Although I cannot believe someone did that – and I assure you, that was done with neither Sans’s nor Red’s permission – that is not what I meant.” He worked his jaw a few moments before continuing. “I will not deny that I worry about Sans and his choices sometimes.”

Edge blinked and asked hopefully, “So you are jealous?”

“No, no,” Papyrus said with a wave of his hand. “There is nothing to be jealous of. My brother loves me even if he loves others as well. And so does your brother.”

Hmph. Typical. Edge brought his knees to his chest and rested his chin on them.

“What I meant to say is that I think he is stretched thin.” Papyrus rubbed a hand against one of his temples. “And he is not making the smartest of decisions… or choosing the right people to associate with.”

Edge cocked a brow. “That sounds like jealousy to me.”

Papyrus sighed. “I know jealousy. I am not jealous of Grillby nor will I ever be.”

Edge held back a snorting laugh. Neither of them had even mentioned Grillby. But the slip-up made him oddly happy. Those two weren’t as perfect as they pretended. Whether it came from a sense of jealousy or not, clearly Papyrus didn’t like Sans and the bartender dating. And he couldn’t blame him one bit – he didn’t want that flame monster within ten feet of his brother. He was an asshole, to put it mildly. Though, of course, that was back in their old universe. Perhaps it was different here.

As he considered this, the sadness and anger in his soul was replaced with something else…. Not joy, but perhaps… reassurance?

Papyrus’s confession made him realize that maybe one day he could work to where they were. Perhaps he could even be… as okay with his brother dating other monsters as Papyrus was. He doubted it, his brother was his, but….

Papyrus clapped a hand to Edge’s back, startling him from his thoughts.

“NOW ENOUGH OF THIS! AS FRUSTRATING AS THIS IS, I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, CANNOT STAND TO SEE YOU SO UPSET!” He jumped up and offered Edge a hand. “THERE IS A NICE CREAM STALL JUST DOWN THE ROAD AND WE ROYAL GUARDS RECEIVE A SPECIAL DISCOUNT. IF WE RUN, WE CAN MAKE IT IN TIME JUST BEFORE OUR FINAL TOUR!”

Usually his jealousy and anger would linger well beyond now, and he would have no inclination for ice cream or any other treat. And yet, he found himself smiling like an idiot through his tears as he took Papyrus’s hand and allowed the other skeleton to help him up.

It was stupid. And it was fanciful.

But maybe, just maybe, Edge could allow himself to be friends with him.
Why Didn’t the Ministry Send an Owl to Sirius Black and Follow It on Broomstick?

Chapter Notes

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulsex.tumblr.com. You can also find soul sex and Papby reblogs if that's your thing.

FANART

- Thank you, Ganz, for drawing part 2 of the comic adaptation of the threesome scene from Ch 7! :D I KNOW THIS WAS A PAIN TO DRAW, SO THANK YOU FOR STICKING WITH IT! ;u; It came out amazingly!

NOTES

- Sorry this took so long! I've been busy with a giftfic that will be coming out soon. I GOT REALLY THIRSTY, SORRY. :x
- If you're interested, I wrote some headcanons/worldbuilding stuff related to this fic on my blog. Bear in mind that this is discussing aspects of noncon in the UF universe.
- Speaking of noncon... MIND THE TAGS THIS CHAPTER. 8); I've labeled the noncon section in this chapter within the text, so please skip that section if you don't want to read it.
- Thanks to Purrfecktllysinfal (Tumblr/AO3) for helping out with a few parts of this chapter (including some help with metaphors)! Go check out her fics! :D
- Alternative chapter names: "Moaning Myrtle Should've Fucked Harry Potter"; "Sans Has a Bad Day"; "The Plot Moves On"; "Two Codes - And One's a Curse!"; "Punk Hamster sure was a piggy eater, eh? ;D"
- [Edit: Changed the code on this because I hated the website I used to generate the first one x_x] Additional tags for this chapter: References to past soul sex with biting, panic attacks, nightmare (in-text warning), body horror (in-text warning), noncon (in-text warning), biting of a whole new kind (in-text warning), Sanster (in-text warning), uncomfortable Sansby (no smut, but just in case you don't like reading the pairing), Sans has a really bad day and it doesn't feel good
(If I forgot anything, please let me know!)

**2**
Sans needed to get out of bed. He had slept for way too long. Rays of afternoon sun were spilling across the bed and the oppressive summer heat was cooking him alive under the heavy blankets. A thick layer of sweat coated him from head to toe and his soul felt like it was simmering in the sticky warmth.

He knew he needed to get up, even if only to open the windows. But he was so tired after last night. The panic attack and the conversation afterwards had drained so much from him. But even his sleep had been fitful. Throughout the night, he had visited him in his dreams, mocking him, his teeth shining in the darkness. His only solace was that he had fallen asleep in Papyrus’s arms; every time the nightmares began, his brother had stirred him from his slumber, rocking him gently in his arms until he fell back asleep. Eventually his efforts must have paid off because Papyrus wasn’t here and Sans had been able to sleep straight through to the afternoon.

But that didn’t mean the effects of the evening hadn’t affected him. He was sapped and every bit of him radiated with a dull achiness. His skull felt thick and fuzzy, as if it had been filled with cotton balls, and he was having a difficult time keeping his eyelids open. A heavy, invisible weight compressed around his ribcage, making it a strain to breathe. Every bone in his body screamed at him to go back to sleep.

But he couldn’t; he had overslept as it was. Papyrus always told him how important it was to wake up every morning. Sleeping in like this was pure laziness. How could he expect to ever recover if all he did was sleep all day?

Throwing every bit of energy he had into the effort, he pushed the suffocating covers off his body and slowly sat up in the bed. His eyes drifted around the room, examining the bits and pieces of broken glass and toy parts strewn on the floor. A lance of guilt shot through him. Not only had he left one hell of a mess, but he had broken some of his brother’s favorite things in the world. Sans leaned his face into his palms and sighed. There was so much to apologize for, he didn’t even know where to start.

Well, maybe he could start by getting up. With a deep breath, he climbed out of bed, his bones protesting through every moment. As he stood up, his legs trembling slightly beneath him, he realized he was still wearing his clothes from yesterday, hoodie and all. No wonder he had been sweltering under the covers. But even with the uncomfortable heat, he was grateful that he didn’t have to get dressed; it would have been dreadful to put up with the aches and pains.

He wondered if the house was empty right now. Papyrus’s work ethic usually drove him to work on even the toughest of days, but he really hoped that maybe his brother had taken a day off. He knew Papyrus had taken a lot of time off work lately, but Sans really needed to apologize to him for putting him through all that crap last night.

Plus… it would be good to give him a hug. After seeing his brother’s tears last night, Sans knew that he wasn’t doing so hot. Papyrus didn’t cry much anymore. At least not since Sans had gone through his little freak-out period a couple years back. So if he was this upset, Sans knew it was his fault. His brother deserved better. And it was time for Sans to start showing his appreciation for him by stepping the hell up and getting his life in order again.

Determined to at least do right by Papyrus, he teleported downstairs to the living room, hoping that his brother would be sitting there, waiting for him.

But he wasn’t. Instead, as he appeared in the room, he gave a small start as he spotted Red lounging on the couch in a sweat-stained white t-shirt and black gym shorts. A rush of panic
gripped Sans as he remembered the events of yesterday. Edge biting down on Red’s soul. The shrieks of pain or pleasure or whatever they had been. The panic that had ensued as a result. Sans took a deep breath, trying to calm his magical nerves.

Red scrambled into a sitting position and muted the television.

“you’re up!” Shock ran through his voice.

Sans nodded. “why didn’t you come and get me? it’s so late.”

“well, uh… paps said you had a really bad day yesterday and that you needed some sleep.” He looked suddenly sheepish. “and to be honest, you kinda look like you need some more.”

Ignoring the comment on his appearance, Sans stuffed his hands in his pockets and hunched his shoulders forward. “where is papyrus anyway?”

“work.”

“and your bro?” He glanced towards the door to the second bedroom as he tried to push down his renewed panic.

“he went with paps to work. don’t know why, but your bro seemed pretty intent on it.”

Sans hardly suppressed his sigh of relief. “well, that’s fine. just the two of us today then.”

Red nodded slowly. “how about i heat some lunch? then you can go back to sleep.”

“i’m not hungry and i really don’t feel like sleeping anymore. i mean,” he looked out the window, noting how late it was already. “don’t we got crap to do?”

Red stared at him blankly. “what kind of crap?

“the lab, obviously.”

“sans, we really don’t need to –”

“crap!” Sans interjected as he was gripped by a sudden memory. He pat his pockets desperately, trying to find his phone. “dammit, where is it?”

“what’s going on?”

“my phone!” Sans called out as he ducked to the floor, searching under the couch. “alphys said she’d message me!”

Red stood up, casting a shadow over Sans, making it more difficult to see. “what’s so urgent about talking to alphys?”

“atbash!” Sans cursed as he hit his head on the coffee table. Rubbing his head, he replied, “she said she found cameras all over the lab yesterday and we’ve got no idea how they got there.”

He blindly reached under the television stand, his fingers grazing against wires until he felt something small and metallic.

“got it!” Sans shouted as he pulled out his phone.

“cameras? how the fuck –?”
“sec, lemme… dammit!” He clicked at the unlock button, but the screen wouldn’t turn on. Of course. A dead battery. He punched the power button over and over, releasing a slew of profanities that would have his brother gasping.

Red rushed over and put a reassuring hand to his shoulder, “hey, it’s no problem, man. we can just charg–”

“it is a problem! those damn journalists from years back, i’m pretty sure when they broke in they set ‘em up! i gotta tell alphys and – and – this god damn phone won’t turn on!”

“sans, calm down! i can message her while we charge your phone. don’t get worked up about this.”

Sans huffed. “you don’t get it, red. those guys broke into our lab a while back, way before we transferred the human souls there. if they have them on camera, forget immigration policies, there’ll be war within a week!”

“listen,” Red said, his voice calm. “those cameras had to be there for weeks. if they had that on camera, we’d know by now, right?” He got out his phone and began to type. “so lemme just text alphys now, let her know your phone’s dead, and she’ll get back to us.” He massaged one of Sans’s shoulders with his spare hand. “alphys will let us know if she needs us, so let’s just sit back, watch some tv, and chill.”

Sans shrugged off Red’s hand. “y’know, you don’t need to coddle me.”

Red’s eyelight darted to his, a touch of anger to his expression. “these past two months, you and papyrus both ‘coddled’ me. and i didn’t always appreciate it either. but you know what? sometimes you need coddling. and right now, you need it.”

Sans sighed, and as he did so, he could feel of the tension from his soul push towards his skull. Tears were building up in his eyes again, but he didn’t want to cry. He was absolutely drained. Any more and he might just shatter into a million little pieces.

“okay,” he replied, his voice unnaturally high-pitched. “okay, i’m sorry.”

“no reason to be sorry,” Red reassured. “let’s just sit down and relax for a bit, okay?”

Sans nodded and allowed Red to guide him to the couch, his bones rattling as he fought to restrain his emotions. When he sank down into the cushions, he groaned with relief, the tension in his bones melting away bit by bit. He had been unaware of the extent of his achiness until he was finally off his feet again. Although he didn’t want to fall asleep – except he really, really did – he pressed backwards into the couch, stretching his limbs outwards. A whine of satisfaction escaped him as he got into a comfortable position.

“see?” Red asked as he gently brushed the bare bone of Sans’s outstretched leg. “it’ll just be a nice, lazy day.”

Sans sighed and nodded. He supposed that spending the day with Red would be okay. And he’d be right there when Papyrus came home, so there was no chance he’d miss him. Maybe just one more day of laziness would be alright.

Red unmuted the television. Sans watched with subdued amusement as an assembly of cartoon skeletons wearing multicolored wigs danced across the screen. Why was Red watching something like this? He wanted to laugh at him for his choice, and yet, he couldn’t muster the energy. It was way easier to just sit back and let his bones rest as he absorbed the mindless entertainment. His eyes grew heavier with each passing minute, though he forced himself to stay awake.
After the episode ended, he glanced over at Red and saw that his posture was at a complete contrast to his: he sat straight, his shoulders tense, and he was tapping his foot on the ground anxiously. He was perched at the end of the couch and looked ready to take off at any moment.

“hey, you okay?”

Red jolted and looked over at him in surprise. “thought you had fallen asleep.”

“nope, still kickin’.” He tried to smile, but the movement came out looking more like a twitch. “what’s up?”

Red stilled his legs, sighing as he threw himself back into the couch next to Sans. “nothing.”

Sans gave him a pointed look and Red let out a little huff of exasperation.

“fine, fine. i just – it’s dumb, but i wanna make sure…” he trailed off uncertainly.

“What?”

“you don’t mind that i’m with my bro, right?”

Sans blinked. “why would i care about that?”

With a small shrug of his shoulders, Red replied, “i don’t know.”

“this had to come from somewhere. i’m not exactly the jealous type, so what did i do to make you feel that way?”

“it wasn’t you. it was… well… boss. he’s real jealous of you and paps being with me.” He sounded hurt and Sans couldn’t blame him – if Papyrus was jealous of the other monsters that he loved, he wouldn’t know what to do. “i just wanted to make sure you didn’t care.”

“of course not. as long as everything’s peachy between you two, i don’t care what you do.” Sans turned his head to look at him full on. “and everything’s okay, right?”

“y-yeah,” Red squeaked out, blushing brightly.

“What’s wrong? i thought you two had made up just fine.”

Red rubbed his face. “yeah, we’re fine. it’s just… yesterday… i don’t know.”

Sans sat up, ignoring his moaning bones. “wait a second, yesterday?” He recalled those piercing screams he had heard – screams of pure agony, he was sure of it now – and his eyes widened. “did he hurt you?”

“huh? no!” Red exclaimed as his face grew redder. “i mean… yes, but –”

A sudden flare of anger over took Sans’s soul and he was ready to teleport to Papyrus’s work and murder Edge then and there, consequences be damned. “if he hurt you, so help me –”

“calm down! he hurt me, but… i hurt him more!”

Sans paused as he thought back to yesterday, his chest gripped with tight panic. Had he misunderstood the situation? Had it been Edge making all of that noise? No, he had seen Red screaming. And Edge had been biting down on the soul.
“please, sans, i’m fine. we had a little… misunderstanding, but i swear the two of us… mostly worked it out. he didn’t intentionally hurt me – not like you’re thinking.”

“red, you gotta promise me –”

“i promise, i really do. it’s just that… i really messed up. we were doing stuff with my soul and now he won’t ever do it again and i –” red growled in frustration. “you know what, that’s not even the problem.”

“then what is the problem?”

“it’s just… i don’t know how i’m gonna deal with the four of us living together. i know it’s hard for him, but i feel like i can’t even kiss you or paps good morning without him getting angry.”

“he doesn’t hurt you when he gets jealous, does he?”

“no!” red shouted, indignant. “sans, we’ve already talked about th–”

“sorry, sorry.” sans leaned back into the couch, resuming his original position. “maybe you should just talk to him.”

“that’s what i’ve been doing, but it’s hard trying to skirt around the details of everything when he gets so mad. and i don’t wanna piss him off too much. he’s been through so much and we just made up.”

“well, i talk about everything with paps and it seems to work out.”

“i know you do, but it’s just… different with my bro.”

The silence lingered between them for a minute, punctuated only by the noises of the cartoon program.

“y’know,” sans drawled. “if you want, i’ll talk to him for you.”

red’s eyelights grew big. “no, that’s okay. i’ll talk to him about it. tonight,” he added hurriedly.

“yeah, okay.”

sans knew from red’s tone that he was lying, but he kept his mouth shut. after all, there was no point in getting into an argument about it, especially when he had so little energy. but he’d talk to edge about it. the whole situation was unhealthy for all of them, and especially for sans. just the thought of accidentally seeing edge engaged with red again like that again sent waves of panic through his soul. and if he ever heard those head-splitting screams again – whether they were born from pain or pleasure, it didn’t matter – he was going to freak out. this type of living arrangement just wasn’t going to work out.

discussing this with edge truly seemed like the best idea. and if red wasn’t going to talk to him, he was going to have to do it himself.

but first he was going to sit here and… gather his energy. the summer warmth had sunk deep into his marrow, and he savored the occasional cool breeze from the nearby open window. the television’s dull murmuring was lulling, casting a sleepy spell over him. red leaned against him and brushed his hand ever-so-softly, sending gentle tickles up his bones. he fell back into the couch, sighing. he wasn’t sleeping – he refused to go back to bed at this hour – but everything was distant and fuzzy. his eyelids were growing heavier and heavier, and every time he blinked it was
harder to open them.

But he wasn’t going to fall asleep… he wasn’t…

[NONCON BEGINS HERE]

A sudden clanking of metal startled him awake. When he opened his eyes, he found that he was no longer in his warm, bright house. Instead, he was enclosed in a tiny, dimly lit room. He twisted his head every which way, wildly inspecting his surroundings.

Deep maroon walls lined with lavish-looking portraits of various humans and monsters. Sleek, mahogany floors. Pots of diseased and decaying ferns in every corner of the room.

And in front of him, sitting on the other side of a sturdy-looking desk, a figure cloaked in shadow.

“My… how did I…?”

Sans tried to stand up, but he found that both his arms and legs were tethered to a heavy, mahogany chair.

His breathing quickened. Heavy pressure wrapped around his ribcage. He couldn’t stand being tied down. Not since Gaster had assaulted him over and over in the lab.

As if waiting for his panic to set in, the figure stood up from behind the desk. They lingered in the shadows for a minute, watching Sans struggle against his bonds.

And then they laughed. That laugh. That voice. It was inside his skull, clawing at every inch of him. No, no…

Gaster stepped out of the darkness, his mouth split wide in a sharp-toothed smile. Jagged cracks extended from his empty and misshapen eye sockets and droplets of thick, white liquid – melted bone, Sans realized – dripped off his chin, spilling onto the once-pristine desk below. A thin, black aura encased his body, enveloping him in a shifting shadow. As he sauntered over to where Sans sat, the cloak of magic rippled and elongated into slender, shimmering tendrils.

“No, please, no!”

Sans stretched his limbs to the limit, desperately trying to escape the doctor before he could touch him. But there was no stopping Gaster now. Once he had that ravenous look on his face, the only way to end it was to give him what he wanted.

The shadows snaked across the gap between them, and there was no way to avoid them, no chance to escape. Sans jolted as the first appendage grazed his hand, its humming energy sending a tight, compressing sensation into his bone, right down to his marrow. He tried to shake it off, but there were more of the undulating shadows now, sliding up his arms, molesting his legs.

One was even snaking inside his shorts now, needling itself into the delicate holes of his sacrum. The pressure was disgustingly satisfying.

“Please, please!” he cried out, making fruitless attempts to dodge the shadows. “Don’t do this!”

Gaster was inches from him now and Sans could feel hot breath spilling onto his face. “YOU DON’T WANT YOUR BROTHER TO HEAR YOU, DO YOU?” He lifted a phalange and dragged it across Sans’s chin, leaving a viscous trail of melted bone behind. “OR SHOULD I SUMMON HIM IN HERE? I AM SURE HE WOULD BE VERY CURIOUS.”
And he was a little kid again, thrashing against his restraints, but no longer capable of making noise. He couldn’t put Papyrus at risk like that. There was no way he’d survive the doctor. Sans had to do his best to endure this.

Even more appendages appeared, sliding Sans’s shorts to his knees. He could see the shadows gathered around his pelvic bone now, coiling against every curve. They caressed him, shooting heated jolts of energy through every bone. His soul stung with hatred and revulsion, but he couldn’t stop the pleasure that surged through him, overtaking his senses. He burned with humiliation as a low moan escaped his mouth.

“THAT’S RIGHT, SANS. DON’T YOU REMEMBER HOW MUCH FUN WE HAD BACK THEN?” Gaster snapped a hand down to Sans’s pubic arch and rubbed the tips of his fingers languidly. “YOU WERE SO EAGER TO PLEASE ME IN THE END.”

“i wasn’t… i didn’t… stop, please,” Sans begged, clenching his eyes shut.

“IT’S TIME FOR YOU TO FACE THE TRUTH,” he spat out. “YOU LIKED THIS, DIDN’T YOU?”

“no, i didn’t! i didn’t, i didn’t, i di– aah!”

Gaster gave a violent twist along the sensitive bone, and with the rippling tendrils stroking so thoroughly along every inch of him, Sans couldn’t take it anymore. A surge of magic crackled through his bones and he felt something manifest below.

There was a break in the doctor’s movements, the shadows pausing their leisurely massage. Tentatively Sans opened his eyes and looked down. Much to his horror, his cyan magic stood ready beneath his legs, nestled between the shadowy appendages. His eyes darted to Gaster and he saw that all of the mirth had disappeared from his face.

Sans’s soul clenched in horror.

“WHAT DID I SAY ABOUT SUMMONING ONE OF THESE?” Gaster flashed a toothy grin. “I THOUGHT YOU HAD ALREADY LEARNED THIS LESSON.”

The tendrils redoubled their efforts, twisting and pulling along Sans’s spine, working their way up to his ribcage. They dug roughly between every crevice, uninvited pleasure stealing through Sans’s bones. He was shrieking and crying again, unable to stop himself as Gaster lowered his dripping mouth over his erection. Wet warmth swathed around his magic, and the doctor was using his tongue so well, curling it along every fold. He bobbed his head up and down, tinges of ecstasy shooting up to mix with the terror nettling through his soul.

Sans knew what Gaster was doing. He knew, he knew, he knew…. of these?” Gaster flashed a toothy grin. “I THOUGHT YOU HAD ALREADY LEARNED THIS LESSON.”

But he could feel his length already hitting the back of Gaster’s throat, magical saliva engulfing him. Sans was so close now. So close!

And that’s when he felt the teeth pierce his magical flesh.

Sans screamed as loudly as he could, his voice hitting a pitch that he hadn’t been able to reach since he was a kid. His soul was screeching, telling him to run away, use magic, anything! But he couldn’t – he was trapped, he couldn’t move or breathe, there was no escape! His brother was going to hear him, and come into the room, and – and –
There was a low voice shouting his name into the side of his skull over and over. But Sans couldn’t tear his eyes away as Gaster dug deeper and deeper, tearing into his flesh so violently. The pain was too much, he was going to die from it. Please, please, let him die!

[NONCON ENDS HERE]

“wake up!”

The scene was gone, Gaster was gone. Red was inches from his face, shaking him repeatedly, as a loud, piercing scream echoed through the room. Red was mouthing something, but he couldn’t hear it over all the noise. It took him much too long to figure out that it was his own voice tearing from his throat. When realization hit him, he swallowed the scream and Red’s words became audible.

“– awake?! sans, can you hear me?! come on!”

Sans took in a great gulp of air and fell forward as he was overcome by violent sobs. Red caught him by the shoulders and pushed his shuddering body back onto the couch.

“sans, it’s okay.” Red’s voice commanded his attention. “i’m here. i’m here.”

“it was gaster!” Sans croaked out between gasping sobs. “oh god, he was there, and he was on me, and his teeth, and that magic –”

“shh, shh…” Red wrapped his arms around Sans and dragged him against his chest, cradling him closely. “it was just a dream. it’s okay –”

“it’s not okay!” Sans gasped out. “it’s never gonna be okay! i’m never gonna be okay! god, i can’t even sleep anymore!”

“i know, i know.” He rocked him gently.

“you don’t know! you don’t, you don’t, you don’t!”

And he didn’t. He really, really didn’t. And he never would.

He devolved into a senseless mess of tears, Red quietly holding him as he whispered empty words of encouragement against his skull. Sans’s chest burned with pain as he tried to catch his breath through the sobs. He was so dizzy with exhaustion, he could hardly think.

Eventually his sobs tapered off into hiccapping whimpers. When he felt like he could stand to talk, he squeezed Red closer to him, taking comfort in his closeness.

“do you wanna talk about it?” Red asked. When Sans shook his head quickly against his chest, Red said, “okay, okay. it’s alright. we don’t gotta. let’s just relax here and we can –”

“i don’t wanna sleep again!” Panic gripped at his soul, threatening to carry him away into another fit of tears.

“hey, hey, wasn’t even gonna suggest it! we’re just going to chill, nothing else!”

Sans clutched at Red’s shirt. “i can’t do this anymore. i’m too tired, but i can’t sleep. i just can’t!”

“i’m not gonna let you sleep. i’ll wake you up before you start. but you gotta calm down. just breathe.”

Sans followed his advice and inhaled deeply, expanding his chest as far as he could so that air
flowed into the magical barrier around his soul. He held the breath for five seconds before releasing it in a slow, even exhale. Then he repeated the process, each breath allowing a channel of calming energy to pour through his bones. Throughout his exercises, Red rubbed soothing circles into his back, the gesture helping to ease away some of the tension in his bones.

Soon he was relaxed and limp in Red’s arms, his breathing returned to normal. His head felt stuffy, and his soul was still pulsating with fear, but he was no longer about to fall apart at any second.

“okay,” Red murmured, letting Sans fall gently into his lap. “we’re gonna watch some t.v. now. unless you wanna talk?”

Sans shook his head again and focused on the screen as animated figures darted across it. The volume was as dangerously quiet as before and his soul constricted at the thought of drifting off again.

“please turn it up. loud.”

Red obliged his request, and Sans let the last traces of tension roll from his shoulders as the cartoon characters’ loud voices resonated through the room. There was no way he was going to fall back asleep with these annoying voices pounding against his skull. He took pleasure in watching the show now, concentrating on every detail so as to distract himself from his thoughts and to stay awake. Throughout the show, Red threw worried glances his way, but didn’t say a word. Sans was grateful for it – he just didn’t have the energy to talk about his nightmare.

After they watched two episodes of the cartoon, Red announced that he needed to pick their brothers up from work. Sans nodded, stretching out of Red’s lap, bones popping loudly as they shifted back into place. Despite the unpleasant ache that was still settled in his bones, he was feeling oddly better than he normally would after such a horrible nightmare. Still a shambling mess, but somehow not as bad as last night.

“did you wanna come with me to pick ‘em up?”

He had no intention of showing up to Papyrus’s workplace looking like he did. His brother would be horrified. Not to mention fraught with worry.

“no point in doing that. i’ll be fine here.”

Red nodded, disappearing into thin air as soon as he stood up. After taking a moment to steady himself, Sans slid off the couch, his limbs trembling beneath him as he hoisted himself to his feet. The television was still blaring at full volume, filling the room with discordant and cartoonish sound effects.

Unwilling to be still for too long, he dragged himself to the kitchen and threw open the cupboards, searching every last one until he found the old coffeemaker, hidden behind a set of rusted pots and pans. He pulled the machine out and blew off the thick layer of dust that covered it. An old bag of coffee grounds was attached to the top, and when Sans opened it, he relished the rush of energy the sharp smell brought him.

It wasn’t long before he was sitting at the table, nursing a cup of freshly brewed coffee and savoring the burst of artificial energy that flowed through him. He didn’t exactly feel good – his chest was like a wire pulled taut, ready to snap at any moment – but the aches and pains were now bearable thanks to the caffeine. More importantly, he didn’t feel like he was about to fall over from exhaustion at any second.
A small pop just outside the kitchen alerted him to the other skeletons’ presence. He felt a rush of almost-happiness at the thought that he was no longer alone.

That was until he turned around to look at them.

His eyes first darted towards Edge, his soul pumping wildly in his chest as they made eye contact. For a moment all he could see was Gaster staring back, the elongated scars reminiscent of his nightmare, and cold malevolence spelled throughout his features. But upon closer inspection, he realized his first impression was wrong. Edge was not cold in his anger; instead, there was a deep, heated resentment burning off of him. He shot Sans a dirty look and the expression made Sans want to take a quick shortcut away so that he’d never have to see him again.

When he was able to pull his gaze away, his eyes flashed to Papyrus. And, oh, he did not look happy. His brother’s arms were crossed against his chest and he was staring down at the cup of coffee in Sans’s hands with that same look of disgust that he gave greasy foods. Crap.

“What is that?”

Sans waved the mug around, hot steam whirling in the air. “cup of joe.”

“SANS, WHAT HAVE I SAID ABOUT COFFEE BEFORE DINNER?”

“probably the same thing you say about coffee at any other time – it’s unhealthy and unnecessary.”

“And it ruins your appetite,” he sighed.

Red and Edge made their way to the table, sitting across from him as Papyrus stamped to where Sans sat. Sans hunched his shoulders, ready for the lecture that was sure to ensue. Out of the corner of his eyes he watched his brother’s hand move towards his cup, and for a moment he thought Papyrus was going to snatch it away. But instead his brother clasped at his hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze. When Sans glanced upwards, all he could see in Papyrus’s face was pity.

Sans flinched away, his face warming. After a few moments of silence, the hand disappeared, though the memory of the comforting pressure lingered across his bones. He wanted to apologize to Papyrus, to tell him that he was sorry for being a little pissant. But it was hard to say anything with the other skeletons watching him. He sighed as the kitchen was filled with the sounds of his brother tussling pots and pans about.

Red must have noticed Sans’s discomfort because he cleared his throat and quietly said, “so, uh, how was your day, boss?”

Sans’s eyes dashed towards the other two. Edge was sitting with his arms and legs crossed, his body angled away from Red.

“WONDERFUL.”

Red’s smile twitched. “did you do anything fun?”

“Yes.”

Sans arched a brow at Red who shook his head in response.

“So what did you –?”

Edge stood up abruptly. “PAPYRUS, MAY I HELP YOU WITH THAT?”
Sans blinked in confusion as Edge made his way to the stove. Papyrus was now explaining the art to cutting onions and proper knife sharpening skills. Edge listened intently, nodding occasionally as he followed Papyrus’s instructions carefully. When Sans turned back around, he realized just how hurt Red was – his eyes were trained on his brother, pinpricks of tears gathered in his sockets. A touch of indignation ripped through Sans’s soul. Was Edge seriously *that* jealous?

“you okay?” Sans asked quietly.

“fine. absolutely fine.”

They fell into an uncomfortable silence that was filled with the sounds of the other two preparing dinner. Throughout their preparation, Sans sipped at his coffee, nursing the headache that had settled into his skull, while Red stared at his brother mutinously.

Soon the smell of rich Italian spices filled the air and before he knew it, Papyrus was serving them all plates of pasta. Sans tentatively put a forkful in his mouth. It wasn’t up to the usual standards, but all in all, it wasn’t as bad as his brother’s first attempts at making the stuff. It was certainly miles better than the spaghetti from the reset days, that was for sure. His soul warmed with the knowledge that Papyrus was an excellent teacher.

Though Sans hardly touched his meal. As Papyrus had suggested, the coffee had stunted his appetite. Not to mention he was incredibly distracted. Every second he sat across from Edge caused him to dwell on his nightmare from earlier. It was exhausting, to say the least, and so he hardly paid attention to what the other three were talking about until a particularly heated conversation.

“THAT HUMAN WAS A THREAT, I AM SURE OF IT!”

“HUMANS ARE NOT THREATS, EDGE. IN FACT, NO ONE IS REALLY A THREAT HERE. I ASSURE YOU!”

“yeah,” Red interjected. “boss, you’re just used to our universe. most people here are really relaxed.”

Edge tsked loudly. “NOT EVERY MONSTER CAN BE TRUSTED, UNIVERSAL DIFFERENCES BE DAMNED! AND FROM WHAT I HAVE SEEN FROM YOUR TELEVISION, THAT IS TRUE OF HUMANS AS WELL.”

“bro, i agree,” Red said, throwing a nervous glance at Sans. “but that doesn’t mean the humans at your tour were a threat.”

“THEN WHY WAS THIS HUMAN TAKING SO MANY PHOTOS? THAT IS BIZARRE BEHAVIOR!”

“IT WAS A TOUR!” Papyrus exclaimed. “OF COURSE THEY WERE TAKING PHOTOS!”

“They were taking photos of you and me!”

“We are the tour guides, some of the first monsters to talk to them! Of course they took photos!”

“But you said that this one has visited multiple times! You even said that they follow you around every time!”
That caught Sans’s attention. “wait, what? what human are you talking about?”

Papyrus sighed. “IT IS NOT A CONCERN! THEY JUST VISIT EVERY SO OFTEN AND TAKE PHOTOS.”

“AND THEY COME WITH NO ONE ELSE? HIGHLY SUSPICIOUS!”

“what?” San tilted his head. “why is someone going on a tour over and over? that’s just bizarre.”

“SEE?” Edge slammed his fist down on the table, causing Sans’s soul to race in his chest. “EVEN YOUR BROTHER FINDS IT STRANGE. IF YOU WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME, LISTEN TO HIM!”

Papyrus huffed. “IT IS NOT STRANGE AND THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH THEM! THEY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN QUITE FRIENDLY AND HAVE NEVER BOTHERED ME!”

“paps, if someone’s following you, that’s weird. what did they look like?”

“I DO NOT KNOW. BLACK HAIR. THEY LIKE TO SMILE A LOT.”

“They are creepy.” Edge shuddered. “I DO NOT KNOW WHY, BUT EVERY TIME THEY LOOKED AT ME... I JUST FELT LIKE – LIKE –” He stared into space a few moments, as if he were trying to remember something. “LIKE THEY DID NOT BELONG THERE!”

Sans took a bite of spaghetti. “i wonder if it’s that officer.”

“the one following you?”

Sans nodded. “yeah, what was her name? hansi?” He swallowed his bite. “you know, the lady can waste her time with me all she wants, but if she’s following you, pap, i’m gonna have a word with undyne. enough with this crap.”

“I AM SURE THAT WILL NOT BE NECESSARY!” Papyrus exclaimed, folding his arms against his chest.

“still, just in case, if they show up again, take a photo of that human and send it to me. i don’t want someone harassing you.”

“THERE IS NO HARASSMENT GOING ON.”

“it’ll make me feel better.” He shot a gentle smile towards his brother.

Papyrus relaxed his posture and returned the gesture. “ALRIGHT. IF YOU INSIST.” He coughed. “BUT DO NOT THINK THAT THIS MEANS I AGREE. THE HUMAN IS NOT A PROBLEM.”

Sans sighed and Edge shook his head skeptically, but neither of them said anything else about the matter.

Red stretched his arms above his head, his joints popping loudly. “well, i’m absolutely stuffed. you guys are fucking amazing at this cooking shit.”

“LANGUAGE!” Papyrus admonished.

Edge continued to avert his eyes, but his shoulders loosened up by the tiniest of increments. “THANK YOU. IT WAS QUITE ENJOYABLE,” he admitted. “IF IT IS NO PROBLEM WITH YOU, PAPYRUS, I SHALL DO THE DISHES.”
“OF COURSE NOT! THANK YOU FOR OFFERING!” he beamed.

“i’ll help ya out,” Sans offered, standing up to gather the dishes.

Papyrus’s head darted towards Sans for a fraction of a second, but before Sans could see the look on his face, his brother turned towards Red and smiled. “WELL, IF YOU TWO ARE DOING THAT, THEN PERHAPS YOU CAN HELP ME WITH THE LAUNDRY, RED?”

Red was hardly paying attention; he was frowning at his brother who was already standing at the sink. “how am i supposed to help with that?”

“YOU CAN ERR… HELP ME GATHER THEM.” Sans didn’t know what Papyrus was talking about – his brother had been picking up their clothes and putting them in baskets for years. There was no “gathering them” in their household. This was a well-known fact between the three of them.

“PLEASE?” Papyrus added quickly, shooting a pointed look at Red.

Red snapped to attention. “oh, uh, yeah, sure.”

They left immediately and Sans gave a sigh of relief. He would have to thank Papyrus later for distracting Red. Leave it to him to catch on to the fact that he wanted to talk to Edge alone. His brother was simply the best.

Sans sidled up to the sink, placing the dishes on the counter. Now that he was so close to the other monster, his soul was racing.

“hey, i wanted to talk to you about something.”

An awkward silence fell between them for a few seconds.

“WELL?” Edge spat out.

Sans shuffled his feet. “i wanted to talk about red’s relationship with the three of us.”

Edge squeezed the bottle of soap violently, releasing a torrent of bubbles into the air.

“PERHAPS NOW,” Edge said through gritted teeth. “IS NOT THE BEST TIME.”

“i think now is the only time.” His eyes flitted to the kitchen entrance to make sure no one was returning. “red says you don’t like it when he’s with paps and me.”

“YOU COULD SAY THAT.”

“Well, i don’t mean to spoil your reunion or anything, but i just wanna make it clear that this relationship isn’t going to stop unless red wants it to.”

Edge didn’t say a word as he scrubbed an already-scoured plate.

“this isn’t gonna be a problem, is it?”

“IT IS NOT LIKE I HAVE A CHOICE IN THE MATTER.”

Sans didn’t really know what to say to that. It was true, but he didn’t want to say that. And his attitude was mystifying. Truth be told, he had been expecting more anger from the other skeleton. Maybe he wasn’t as jealous as Red thought.
But that didn’t change what he had to say next. Sans took a deep breath. He knew Red wasn’t going to like this, and heck, it wasn’t even entirely Edge’s fault, but... he knew he had to do this early before things got really out of hand.

“i also wanted to talk to you about when and where you’d like to move.”

Edge slowly turned off the sink and grabbed a dish towel to wipe off his hands. “MOVE?” he asked shortly.

“yeah, well,” Sans said, rubbing the back of his skull. “it’s just that you would probably prefer a place of your own after all of this. it can’t be easy for you. i know it’s not easy on red.”

Nor was it easy for Sans, which was really the point. Even now his soul was screaming to run away from Edge, the skeleton that looked so much like Gaster with his scarred face and with his propensity to bite. He tried to shake the image of Red’s punctured soul out of his head. Those piercing screams – both his and Red’s – threatened to take over his thoughts.

“And are you kicking Red out too?” Sans didn’t miss the way the other skeleton clenched his fists.

“Well, red can stay if h–”

“So just me then.” Sans was surprised by the tone of his voice – not angry, almost... disappointed.

Guilt twisted through Sans’s soul, and he suddenly felt like he owed Edge an explanation. “look, i’m sorry, i really am, but you gotta understand, this isn’t about y–”

“Just to be clear,” Edge interrupted. “i will not let you take my sans away from me.”

Sans stood there stunned until his fury from earlier kicked back into full gear. “excuse me, but he’s not yours. he can do what he wants.”

Edge’s voice filled with abrupt, heated rage. “yes, which i suppose includes getting fucked on camera for the whole world to see!”

Sans blinked. “huh?”

Edge stomped past him, throwing the dish towel onto the ground as he rushed into the living room. It took Sans a few moments for his mind to catch up with what was going on, but once it did, he ran into the other room at top speed. By the time he got out there, Edge was already at the foot of the staircase. Papyrus and Red must have heard Edge’s shouting because they were standing outside the laundry room, looking down at the two of them from the second floor.

“What is going on?” Red asked tentatively.

“I am in no mood for games!” Edge screamed out as he marched up the stairs. “If you wanted me to leave, you could have just said so instead of sending your boyfriend here to do the job!”

“What? leave?”

Edge was at the top of the stairs now, and he tried to push past the two other skeletons, but Papyrus was blocking his way with broad shoulders.
“WHAT IS GOING ON?” Papyrus demanded, his hands on his hips.

“LET ME THROUGH! IT IS BAD ENOUGH THAT I HAVE TO PUT UP WITH THE EVIDENCE OF YOUR PUBLIC AFFAIR, BUT TO MAKE ME MOVE OUT, AS IF I HAVE NO SAY IN THE MATTER –”

“what?! we’re not kicking you out! what are you even talking about?”

Edge straightened his posture and waved in Sans’s direction. “WELL HE IS KICKING ME OUT!”

Red’s and Papyrus’s eyes shot towards Sans. He shrunk under their stare.

“IS THIS TRUE, BROTHER?”

Sans looked down at the ground, rubbing his arm. “look, with all the jealousy stuff and with me –”

“are you fucking kidding me, sans?!”

Sans’s eyes darted upwards. Red was standing there, wisps of magic coming out of his eye. Edge was staring at his brother, open-mouthed.

“i told you not to get involved! and i certainly wasn’t about to fucking kick boss outta the house, so what the fuck is your problem?!”

Anger tinged with guilt flowed through Sans’s bones. “you know what, screw you, red! you weren’t gonna say a damn word to your bro about your problems and you know it!”

“i actually was, sans! and you know what, that’s between him and me anyway!”

“this may shock you, but i got my own problems with him too!”

“So YOU ARE JEALOUS!” Edge shouted.

“no, god, this isn’t about jealousy –”

“I don’t care what the hell problems you’ve got going on with my bro, you don’t just kick him out without talking to me!”

Sans opened his mouth to retort, but Papyrus spoke before he got the chance. “Sans,” he murmured. “Why would you not consult with us first before doing something like this? I just do not understand.”

His brother’s quiet disappointment was the last straw.

“you know what, i don’t gotta explain myself to you guys. if you need me, i’m gonna be at grillby’s.”

And before they could get another word in edgewise, he teleported straight to the pub. As he materialized there, the sounds of excited chatter filled his splitting skull. The room was packed with monsters – mostly regulars as far as he could tell – and there were no seats available except for a stool at the bar. That suited Sans just fine seeing as he was only here to talk to Grillby and had no inclination to sit with anyone else.

As he ambled his way over, his bones creaking with weariness, a sudden shout to his right caused him to jolt. His eyes flitted over to the source of the noise and he sighed when he saw the group of anti-human regulars having a round of drinks over a game of cards. Without further hesitation, he
made his way to the bar and plopped down in his old, regular chair.

Grillby wasn’t in sight so he reached over the counter for a half-drunk glass of beer. It had been a long time since his last drink, but god, he needed something in him or his soul was going to burst from all the tension that had built up. In hindsight, maybe that cup of coffee had been a bad idea after all.

As he sipped on the drink, he mulled over his stupidity. Everyone was angry at him and they were right to be. He was a screw up. A good-for-nothing jackass.

He had been horrible to Toriel. Ignoring her for ages and then traumatizing her with his own problems. God, why hadn’t he just said something to her about his nightmares yesterday? Why was he such a stubborn idiot?

And Papyrus expected so much of him. He always wanted Sans to do this or that, all with open and honest communication. Which was wonderful. He wanted that in his life. But god, it had become so exhausting as of late. How could he keep up with being open with everyone all of the time?

But Sans’s lack of communication had made his brother miserable too. All because he couldn’t reassure Papyrus that he was one of the best things in this world. Sans was a failure of a brother.

Now Red was angry too? It was so stupid; why couldn’t Sans think things out? Why didn’t he just listen to him when Red had said he would take care of it? And why had he been so stupid and teleported to Red’s bedroom when he had heard the screams? Those horrible, horrible screams.

He hadn’t been able to do anything right these days. Just like when he was a kid.

His bones trembled. He could really use Grillby’s company right now. More than anything in the world, if he were to be honest.

As if hearing his thoughts, Grillby suddenly burst out of the backroom, balancing a tray of burgers and fries in his right hand. Sans tried to make eye contact with the bartender, but he was too busy delivering the food to the group of anti-human monsters. Loud shouts filled the room as he approached, and it was clear from their drunken ramblings that they had been here for a while. Grillby lingered at their table for some time, laughing at their dumb jokes, chatting about the abnormally hot weather, and even flirting with one of the monsters. Irritation flitted through Sans’s soul as he watched the spectacle for what seemed like ages.

Just as he was about to get up and alert them to his presence, Grillby finally rushed away from the table towards the bar.

“heya, grill–”

But Grillby shook his head in his direction before heading into the backroom.

Tears were building up in Sans’s eye sockets now. The one thing he could always count on – Grillby being there in his time of need – was obviously out the window. He pressed his forehead to the counter, feeling the coolness of the surface as he took deep, even breaths.

When the back door opened again, Sans tentatively lifted his head. Grillby was filling a glass with lager about a foot away from him.

“grillbz?” Sans mumbled, his voice raspy.

Though Grillby continued preparing drinks, he softly said, “Sans, I am working right now. I do not
have time for all of... this.”

The irritation from earlier came back full force. Grillby sure seemed to have plenty of time with the other patrons.

“you sound like your old man,” Sans sniped.

“Old man” was not exactly accurate – he had been Grillby’s father-in-law – but he knew that the insult would hit home. Grillby had been forced to work at all hours, sacrificing all his time, in the name of making money for the man. It had been a serious point of contention between him and his ex-wife. Though Sans knew he hadn’t helped matters either...

Grillby’s flames flared out, illuminating the bar with their flickering glow. “When this place clears out, we’ll talk. Until then, stay out of my way.”

He gathered up the drinks and skirted around the counter. Sans didn’t even bother watching where he went; he placed his head on the bar again and tried to hold onto something so that he didn’t start spacing out. He was losing it, he knew it. And so he started mumbling to his old mantra to himself to try to keep himself in the moment.

“it’s been three years, six months, and twenty days since the last reset. everyone’s happy. we’re all on the surface. happy and safe and free. all of us. even me.”

He repeated it over and over, trying his hardest to believe what he was saying. He didn’t even care if anyone heard him. Let them think he was crazy. He just needed something to grasp onto. Something that wouldn’t fall apart. Something that would allow him to stay awake despite his desire to go to sleep at the bar forever. He sat there like that for hours, his litany falling from his mouth as his soul continued to stretch in his chest.

A small tap on his shoulder jarred him from his stupor. He glanced to his right and saw the familiar green jumpsuit of Punk Hamster.

“Hey, Sans.”

Sans sighed and rubbed his tear-soaked face. “leave me alone, punk.”

“I was wondering if I could talk to you for a second.”

Was the kid seriously that stupid? Grumbling under his breath, Sans dragged his hands down his face.

“you know, i have no interest in joining your stupid group, if you haven’t gotten the hint yet. and since you don’t seem to get my subtle hints, lemme tell ya: this is not a good time to bother me.”

“Please?”

Sans jerked his head up, ready to tell the idiot to step off before he made him. But as he came up from the counter, Punk Hamster flinched backwards, nearly tripping over his own legs. There was a deep, partially healed gash cutting across the other monster’s forehead. It had to be at least 3 inches long, stretched across a patch of furless skin.

“woah, are you okay?”

Punk Hamster looked as bad as Sans felt. There were dark bags under his eyes, and he was quaking all over. From the greasy stains that soaked into his clothes, it looked like he hadn't changed out of
his clothes in days. There was an air of jumpiness to him – like he had consumed far too much coffee – and as he went to light a cigarette perched on his lips, his uncontrollable shaking caused it to spill onto the floor.

“Yeah, yeah, don’t worry about me, I’m always good,” he said, his voice carrying loudly through the room, as he returned his lighter to his pocket. He lowered his voice and asked, “I was just wondering… do you have that police officer’s number?”

Sans stared at him for a second. “what do you need it for?”

Punk Hamster’s head twitched towards the group of anti-human monsters who were congregating near the door, ready to head out for the evening.

“Nothing, nothing. I just wanted to see if you had it. I tried messaging Red about it, but he never responds.”

Sans had to wonder how the hell this guy had gotten Red’s number.

“i mean… she said she was following me. apparently i’ve been a suspect for some crap for a while. but i haven’t seen her in ages and she didn’t leave me with any info.” Punk’s shaking intensified. “hey, are you sure you’re okay?”

“Y-yeah, I’m f-fine, I just –”

“Hey, Punky!” a voice from the group called out. Punk twisted his head towards them, an expression of fear momentarily flashing across his face. “Are you coming or not? Mister ain’t gonna be happy if you show up late again!”

The group snickered as Punk Hamster flinched.

“Yeah, okay! One minute!” He whirled back around and grabbed Sans’s shoulder, a look of desperation in his eyes. “Please,” he whispered. “If you hear from her at all, send her my way. I really need to talk to her about something.”

Sans nodded slowly. “okay.”

Punk squeezed his shoulder. “Thanks.” He glanced sideways at the group before adding quickly, “And stay out of the city.”

Sans gawked at him, unsure if Punk’s final words were a threat or a warning. Before he could ask, the furred monster rushed over to his group of friends.

“About time! Mister is gonna be pissed if we don’t haul ass!”

The group departed, slamming the door shut with a loud bang. A thick silence fell over the room. Grillby and Sans were the only ones left in the restaurant now.

Sans was still trying to process the conversation he had just had with Punk, but as he heard the sound of chairs scraping across the floor to be stacked on tables, he returned to the moment at hand. He could deal with Punk Hamster later. Grillby demanded his full attention now.

Sans got up from the bar and began to stack chairs onto the tables closest to him, his bones protesting with every move. He slowly made his way through the room until the two of them met in the middle. When they finished stacking the last table, Sans looked up at Grillby, wrapping his arms around himself.
“y’know, i really needed you today,” he said, tears threatening to cut into his voice. “i thought i could always count on you to be there.”

Grillby’s flames gave a sharp crackle. “Sans, look around you. All of this –” He pointed all around the restaurant. “– is my life. And it costs money to run. I can no longer afford to hold your hand every time you have a bad day.”

“you don’t understand.” His body was shaking now as he fought back his sobs. “it’s been more than just a bad day. it’s been a gaster day.”

It was their old code. Those days when Sans couldn’t sleep or live or even think. Where all he wanted was to be held by Grillby, wasting away the day with him while they skived off work.

For a moment, Grillby’s flames faltered, the glow surrounding them muted. But when Sans blinked, the luminosity had returned to normal and he could feel the anger burning off of them in waves.

“I am sorry, Sans. I truly am. But that doesn’t give you the right to ignore me for weeks on end and then just come in here to use me like that.”

“use you? use you for what?”

“Talking about whatever problems are going on in your life at your convenience.”

“that’s what boyfriends do, grillbz,” he said sarcastically. “it’s not about using you.”

“Then why not talk to your brother or Toriel about whatever is going on? Or perhaps yourself?” He added a contemptuous bite to the last word.

“myself?”

“Yes, your newest boyfriend I’ve heard so much about? The one in all the videos?”

Sans stared blankly at him. “you mean red?”

Grillby snorted derisively. “Yes, the other Sans.”

“What are you talking about – videos? what videos?”

“The one where he screws you in the laboratory. I mean, Sans,” he laughed scathingly. “I knew you had a thing for public places, but this is too much.”

“What are you talking about?”

Grillby crossed his arms against his chest. “The video online. Which, by the way, was a wonderful way to be informed that you two are dating. Getting a cell phone full of skeleton porn waved in my face was just perfect.”

Sans worked his mouth, trying to think of some way to respond. His mind couldn’t comprehend what exactly Grillby was saying. There was a video of Red and him doing what?

After a few moments of silence, Grillby spat out, “And not even an apology. I don’t know what I was expecting.”

Sans finally found his voice. “an apology for what? i didn’t know that there was a video of us on the internet.” He smashed his hands into his skull. “holy crap! who the hell put it up?”
“Maybe your boyfriend? It’s not like I know the guy.”

“What the hell is wrong with you? red’s not like that at all, so stop acting like that!”

“And still no apology.” Grillby waved his hand dismissively. “I’m done, Sans. If you can’t even tell me when you’re dating someone, I just don’t see the point in this. It was one thing with Papyrus –”

“What are you talking about?! i told you i was dating red!”

“No, you didn’t. You came in here, introduced him to me, and then left to get a birthday gift.”

Sans racked his mind, trying to think back to last week. So much had happened in between, he couldn’t even remember what he had said that day.

“grillby, what can i say?! i swear i told you, but even if i didn’t, it was obvious we were dating!”

“I have two rules, Sans, and you should know them well by now.” He held up one finger. “First, we have our personal space to do whatever we want.” He put up a second finger. “And secondly, if we date someone new, we tell them. Immediately. And you know why I have that rule.”

Sans cursed at himself internally. Grillby was right – he was always right – and dammit, this was all his fault!

“i’m sorry, i didn’t think about it, i was just –”

“No, Sans, you didn’t think about me.” Grillby shook his head. “I’m through with waiting around for you. I have other monsters I could be taking more seriously. Instead I’m stuck here, waiting for you so that I can talk to you about them. I’m tired of being the only one to listen. I’m tired of being your therapist.”

“come on, don’t be like that! i’ll listen! i promise!” Sans moved forward, reaching out to grip at Grillby’s arm, but he stepped backwards.

“No, you should leave. I’m tired. You’re obviously tired too. And quite frankly, I don’t see how talking is going to help anything out this time.”

“grillbz, don’t do this! please, please! i can’t do this right now, please!”

“Yes, because it’s all about you.” Grillby shook his head again. “Goodbye, Sans.”

And with that, he stormed out of the room, leaving Sans in the darkened room as he slammed the door shut behind him.

Sans took deep, heaving breaths. He could teleport upstairs, demand that Grillby talk to him, to take him back. If he could explain the crap he had been dealing with these past few weeks, maybe Grillby would get it. It wasn’t hard to understand how the threat of the resets had made his life unmanageable.

But what was the point? In the end, he knew he’d just screw that up too.

He stuffed his hands into his pockets, fishing for his phone. He wanted to message someone, anyone really, just to talk. But his phone wouldn’t turn on. That was right – it was dead.

Besides who was there to talk to right now anyway?
Sans pushed open the door and stepped out into the city. Small groups of monsters and humans filled the sidewalks, chatting animatedly as they meandered from shop to shop. The embassy shone like a beacon in the night, casting an eerie glow over the streets. It was hot and sticky out, and in his hoodie it was almost unbearable.

But Sans didn’t care. Nothing mattered at the moment.

With no particular destination in mind, he strolled into the sea of people, allowing himself to be carried away by the ebb and flow of the crowd.
Just Shove Alphys in That Fridge

Chapter Notes

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulsx.tumblr.com. You can also find soul sex and Papby reblogs if that's your thing.

FANART

- Blue drew a flashback from Chapter 6 for my birthday!! AAAAAAH! You can find it here!
- A bunch of people drew art for me for my birthday n_n Thank you to everyone that drew stuff! :D You can find all of the gifts here!

NOTES

- Mmmm, my apologies for this chapter :3 It kinda suuuucks haha
- Thanks to both Eiznel (Tumblr/AO3) and Uggy (Tumblr/AO3) for helping out with the injuries parts of these chapters! Go check out their amazing fics! :D
- Alternative chapter names: "Great Minds, Blah Blah Blah, Fuck You I'm the King of This Playground"; "I Continue to Disappoint my Feminist Self"; "Blaise de ________"; "The Passcode is the Speaker in These Codes"
- Additional tags for this chapter: Description of injury, character death????, vomit
(If I forgot anything, please let me know!)**1**

O WALL Z IOMEH YGVW MSLIHWW LZS JMLX FTE DTWK ZIEX. FLZ I KNTGUSW AI NGS GGPP KVWK XVSPGKEIE AFRARE.

Red swiftly made his way out of the kitchen, following closely behind Papyrus as his pink scarf trailed behind him. Curiosity tugged at his soul as they traversed the stairs. He didn’t know exactly what Papyrus wanted, but it sure as hell wasn’t “to gather laundry” as he had claimed. In this household, the moment any piece of clothing touched the floor, Papyrus would descend upon the litterer and hound them for being careless and untidy. Laundry didn’t survive the floor long here. And all three of them knew this.

So it came as no surprise when Papyrus came to an abrupt stop outside Red’s and Boss’s room.

With a heavy sigh, Papyrus turned around towards Red. His face was dusted with orange and his brows were creased with obvious tension.

“I, um, do not actually need your help with this.”

Red nodded and waited for Papyrus to continue, but when nothing more was forthcoming, he tentatively asked, “so, uh… did you want me to leave or –?”

“No! I just… do not know how to say this.” He fidgeted with his gloves and looked down at the floor.
Red cocked a brow at him. “probably best if you just say it.”

He really didn’t want to leave Sans and his brother alone together too long. It had been obvious that his brother was hardly holding his tongue at dinner tonight. And he thought it had been aimed at Red, but that didn’t mean that Boss wouldn’t try to rip Sans a new one while he wasn’t there.

“Well, I… err… I do not know how to ask this without being rude, but… are you aware there is a video of you and Sans on the internet?”

Red blinked. “a video? what do you mean?”

Papyrus’s blush intensified. “I… You…” He stamped his feet as he let out a low huff of irritation.

Red’s soul tightened with unease as he tried to think what Papyrus meant. “paps, what is going on?”

“I just… Well, Doggo told us about a video at work today. And I have not seen it yet, but it does not sound very good.”

“okay?” Red honestly had no clue what the hell he was talking about.

Papyrus whined, took a deep breath, and spilled it all out in one breath. “There-is-a-video-of-you-and-Sans-having-fun-games-on-the-internet.”

Red stared at Papyrus as his mind sluggishly tried to comprehend the stream of words. His unease prickled, quickly turning into something close to panic. “i’m sorry, what did you just –?”

His sentence was interrupted by a loud scream from downstairs.

“YES, WHICH I SUPPOSE INCLUDES GETTING FUCKED ON CAMERA FOR THE WHOLE WORLD TO SEE!”

Papyrus’s face transformed, reflecting all of the horror Red felt. His brother did not just…

Boss stomped out of the kitchen, his fists curled at his sides and his face flushed with anger. As he reached the bottom of the stairs, Sans came flying into the living room, an expression of panicked desperation on his face.

“What is going on?” Red asked tentatively, knowing full well he was in deep shit.

“I AM IN NO MOOD FOR GAMES!” Boss screamed out as he marched up the stairs. “IF YOU WANTED ME TO LEAVE, YOU COULD HAVE JUST SAID SO INSTEAD OF SENDING YOUR BOYFRIEND HERE TO DO THE JOB!”

“What? leave?”

Red was completely lost. His mind was still grappling with the news of apparent sex videos, but it sounded like his brother was talking about something else entirely.

Boss was at the top of the stairs now, and there were tendrils of red magic curling from his eye as he approached the pair of them. Red cast a questioning glance at his brother, trying to get a straight answer from him, but his brother was rushing forward, trying to push past them. Papyrus, however, was having none of it. He met Boss head on, putting his hands to his hips to block the way.

“What IS GOING ON?” Papyrus demanded.
“LET ME THROUGH! IT IS BAD ENOUGH THAT I HAVE TO PUT UP WITH THE EVIDENCE OF YOUR PUBLIC AFFAIR, BUT TO MAKE ME MOVE OUT, AS IF I HAVE NO SAY IN THE MATTER –”

“what?!” Red spluttered, trying to figure out how a video would even suggest that he wanted his brother to move out. “we’re not kicking you out! what are you even talking about?”

Edge straightened his posture and waved his arm wildly in Sans’s direction. “WELL HE IS KICKING ME OUT!”

Red’s eyes shot towards Sans who seemed to shrink under their glare. There was no way… Sans would never ask him to move out… Hadn’t he offered Red a place to stay forever?

“IS THIS TRUE, BROTHER?” Papyrus asked.

Sans’s eyes darted towards the ground, rubbing his arm. “look, with all the jealousy stuff and with me –”

Rage engulfed Red’s soul and he could feel his magic flaring in his eye. “are you fucking kidding me, sans?!”

Sans visibly flinched at his shout, but Red didn’t care.

“i told you not to get involved! and i certainly wasn’t about to fucking kick boss outta the house, so what the fuck is your problem?!”

Anger flitted across Sans’s face. “you know what, screw you, red! you weren’t gonna say a damn word to your bro about your problems and you know it!”

He did not just –

“i actually was, sans! and you know what, that’s between him and me anyway!”

“this may shock you, but i got my own problems with him too!”

“SO YOU ARE JEALOUS!” his brother shouted.

Sans hurriedly said, “no, god, this isn’t about jealousy –”

“i don’t care what the hell problems you’ve got going on with my bro, you don’t just kick him out without talking to me!”

Sans opened his mouth to retort, and Red readied his own shout, but before either of them could speak, Papyrus interrupted.

“Sans,” he murmured. “Why would you not consult with us first before doing something like this? I just do not understand.”

A thick silence fell over them for a few moments before Sans’s defeated voice carried through the room.

“you know what. i don’t gotta explain myself to you guys. if you need me, i’m gonna be at grillby’s.”

And before Red could say another word, Sans disappeared with a small pop. As soon as he was gone, Papyrus let out a groan of frustration, stamping his feet on the ground. Red was beside
himself with anger; a litany of swear words flew from his mouth, echoing through the house.

“i don’t fucking believe this fucking bullshit! he is such an asshole sometimes! he promises to not to fucking mention shit and then he pulls this crap! what the fuck was he thinking?! god fucking dammit, this is too fucking much!”

All of a sudden, Boss rushed forward, ducking beneath Papyrus’s arms to get around him. But instead of making a beeline for the bedroom door as expected, he walked straight towards Red.

“boss,” he said, all too aware that his brother was probably still pissed. ”i swear to god, i didn’t tell him that i wanted you to –”

He gasped as Boss bent down and urgently planted a skeletal kiss against his mouth. It was so unexpected, so contrary to what he thought his brother would do, that he started to fall backwards against the pressure. But as his body tilted, Boss caught him and pushed him back into his arms. Red closed his eyes and leaned forward, pressing against his brother’s chest and drowning in the kiss. The shock and fury from before quickly dissolved into warm, glowing love that spread through his bones.

When Boss dragged his head back, Red looked up at him, a shit-eating grin spread across his face.

“What was that for?” he asked happily.

His brother clanked his mouth to the top of his skull and murmured, “Because I love you.”

“heh.” He stepped back from him, hugging himself as his face warmed even more. “i love you too, boss.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Papyrus, standing there with his arms crossed against his chest, seemingly shrinking upon himself. He was watching the two of them with a strange sort of expression – was it sadness? Jealousy? Loneliness? Red couldn’t quite tell.

“sorry about that, paps,” he said ashamedly.

“That is quite alright.” His voice was heavy with exhaustion and oddly subdued. Guilt flickered inside Red’s chest as he realized just how insensitive he had just been. Not just with the kiss, but to Sans as well.

“shit, paps, i’m sorry for losing my temper like that. i should’ve… i don’t know, kept my cool or something. fuck!”

“Language,” Papyrus said shortly.

Red swallowed. “fuck, lemme go to grillby’s right now and –”

“No, don’t,” Papyrus sighed. “Leave him be.” He dragged a hand to his face and pinched the area between his eyes. “Grillby… Grillby will take care of him,” he added, and Red couldn’t help but notice that he said it with an almost bitter tone. “That way, he won’t be alone and, quite honestly, i think he needs to have some space… from us.”

Red nodded. Papyrus was right. Sans needed a break from them, and honestly, they needed some time apart from Sans as well. And as much as he hated that fucking flame asshole, Sans could at least get some comfort… or something from Grillby.

“I am going to go to bed,” Papyrus mumbled. “My skull is killing me and I just think… I don’t
know. I just… don’t know what I’m going to do.”

“What do you mean?” Boss said as he wrapped his arm around Red’s shoulder.

“I think I’m going to work half a day tomorrow. I really need to speak to Sans’s doctor. This just isn’t working anymore.”

“I thought you could not afford to take a day off?”

Well, I have to afford it now.” As Papyrus lowered his hand from his face, he revealed the shadows under his eye sockets. Red really hadn’t seen them earlier – he had been too focused on other things all evening – but now that he saw them, his soul fluttered with worry.

“You know, I’ll talk to Alphys tomorrow about getting paid. I could do some work for her on the side for her robot projects. I mean, I’ve already been doing it, but it’s all been for free.”

“And I can act in your stead tomorrow if you so wish. I think I was quite good at it today.”

Papyrus offered a weak smile. “You were, but I do not think my supervisor would appreciate you stepping in without formal training. Though… I would love it if you asked Alphys, Red. I know Sans does not like working for money much anymore, but…”

“It’s hard when it’s all on one person,” Red said, nodding. “Yeah, I get it.”

Boss squeezed his shoulder. He knew he was thinking back to the days of their first kiss, when he was losing his mind from working that job in Waterfall.

Papyrus sighed. “I am going to bed. You two should get some sleep too.”

“Are you gonna be okay?”

Papyrus let out a soft “nyeh.”

“I am the Great Papyrus. I am always okay.”

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Red folded his arms against his chest as best he could in the crowded elevator. He could feel several monsters’ eyes boring into him as he rode his way to the twentieth floor. Someone was even snickering and whispering under their breath to the person next to them. He ground his teeth together, willing himself not to summon his magic. He so wanted to let these monsters know where they could shove it.

His conversation with his brother about the damn video had been brief but painful. Boss was clearly hurt that everyone knew he was fucking Sans. Neither Red nor, thankfully, his brother had watched the video, but from what he could tell, this was all linked to the fucking cameras Alphys had found. After all, it had supposedly taken place in the lab. This couldn’t be a coincidence.

So when he met with Alphys today, he was going to have more than a few words with her. She was going to tell him exactly where those cameras had come from and how the hell they had gotten in the lab. All evening he had texted the lizard monster, asking for updates on the damn things. He had expected her to take Sans’s assertion about the journalists seriously. But she had insisted that she was following another lead and that it would take time to track it down.
But enough was enough. Red was done with this “waiting” bullshit. Even if it wasn’t Alphys’s fault, she needed to make this a priority. Who the hell would just upload a video like that? And why? He would do all he could to figure this out as soon as possible.

But first, he was going to have to ask her for a salary. So he was going to be on his best behavior around her. No snapping at her over the videos. No irritation when she asked where Sans was (who the hell knew where he was right now?). He just had to be calm.

There was another snicker and his soul gave an angry twitch.

Once he stepped out of the elevator and into the small, dark hall, he took a few moments to quieten the infuriation that had built up in his soul. He took a huge breath in and then let it out over and over again until he felt capable of facing Alphys.

But when he opened his eyes and approached the entrance to the lab, he was stunned into immobility.

The metal door, which was normally closed at all hours, was hanging slightly askew. A large, vicious dent marred the steel, warping the edges and twisting it inwards. The old warning sign had been blown away and only singed remnants remained. Red could detect the distinct odor of burnt ozone lingering in the air.

His soul raced as he leaned into door and shoved it open, the metal grating along the tile floors. As he stepped into the room, he immediately spotted Alphys’s crumpled form in the middle of the room amidst a sea of mechanical parts.

“Oh my god! Alphys!”

He sprinted forward and knelt down beside her to shake her shoulders wildly as he called her name over and over. There was no response; Alphys remained a useless lump on the floor. As he brought his trembling hands away from her shoulders, he realized that his left hand was stained red.

That was when he spotted it: beneath her head frills was a small pool of blood. He flipped her around, her limbs flopping lifelessly against the floor, and he gasped as he saw the extent of her injury. Just underneath the crest of her head, her yellow, leathery skin was split open, revealing her cracked skull. Blood slowly poured from the swollen opening, trickling onto her white lab coat and dying it red.

“Holy shit.”

There was no sign of dust trailing from any of her appendages, but there was no denying that she needed a healer. Fast.

His soul pumping violently in his chest, he softly set her body on the floor and scrambled to his feet. As he skirted the mechanical parts scattered on the tile, his eyes darted around the room, taking note of the surroundings. The other doors were as mangled and twisted as the one he had walked through. It appeared as if several robotic husks were missing from the room – whether because Alphys moved them or if they were taken by someone else, he wasn’t sure. And finally, he noticed that Alphys’s desk had been thrown against the wall with great force. Her computer tower was cracked open and parts were strewn across the floor, broken and useless.

He dashed to the red phone labeled with a large sign that read “EMERGENCY USE ONLY.” As he waited for the other person to pick up, he let out a string of curses under his breath and silently hoped, against all else, that Alphys would be okay. Please don’t let her dust, please don’t let her
Red’s tailbone ached with discomfort as he sat on the uncomfortable bench, his skull cradled in his hands. Unnaturally bright light poured over him, making him feel as if he was under a spotlight, his emotions on display for all the world to see. But doctors and nurses passed by him without second glance, scurrying to their patients and tests and whatever else they needed to do. He took in a shaky breath, trying his best to ignore the suffocating stench of disinfectant that filled his nasal cavity. His eyes were trained on the door opposite him where he knew Alphys and Undyne were waiting on the other side.

He had never been to a hospital before – as far as he knew there had only ever been one in his universe, and it had been shut down long before he was born. But he had seen them in human television shows. It was supposed to be a place of healing, a sanctuary to recover. As ridiculous as it sounded, Red had always figured that such an imaginary place would be comforting. After all, they were supposed to be surrounded by healers, right?

But this place was far from comforting. As soon as he had arrived with Alphys, the monsters that worked here had shuttled him from one waiting room to the next. They had refused to answer any of his questions or inform him of Alphys’s condition even after waiting around for hours. And everything in the hospital just felt wrong on a level he couldn’t articulate. It was artificial. Too clean. Stiff and unfriendly.

It did nothing to calm the tight panic that had welled up in his chest over the last several hours.

The door across from him suddenly flew open and a team of doctors carted Alphys out of the room. Moments later, Undyne staggered from the room, her gaze following the gurney down the hall. Deep wrinkles were etched under and around her eyes and her mouth was set in a deep frown. As soon as Alphys and the doctors disappeared from view, Red flew to her side, his soul pounding against his sternum.

“What’s going on? No one’s told me anything. Is she –?”

Undyne held up a hand to silence him. “She’s going in for surgery.” Her voice was filled with suppressed emotion. “They’re going to try to relieve the pressure in her skull. But… she hasn’t woken up yet.”

Red wrung his hands together. “What does that mean?”

“I… I don’t think she’s…” His soul dropped in her chest as she trailed off, her eyes beginning to water. “I mean… she should be… awake…”

He reached a hand out to her, intending to rub her shoulder in a sympathetic gesture. “Oh god, I’m so sorry–”

But before he could get the words out, her face furrowed with abrupt rage. “It doesn’t matter! She’s going to be fine!” She curled up her fists and hit the air as if attacking an imaginary foe. “And when I find out who fucking did this to her, I’m going to kick their ass to hell and back!”

Red recoiled from her, suddenly all too aware that he was standing next to the Captain Undyne. Whether it was this universe or his own, she was sure to be prone to fits of anger and he didn’t want to get in her way when she dealt out her punishments.

She whipped around to face him, her pointed teeth bared. “Tell me what you know. Did they figure
out what was missing?"

Undyne had left a full team of Royal Guard and investigators back at the lab, hell-bent on discovering who had done this to Alphys as soon as possible. Upon arriving at the hospital, she had informed Red to keep all Guards out and to ask them to report any of their findings to him. She hadn’t wanted to be disturbed while she had been with Alphys and the doctors.

“yeah, someone came by about a half hour ago.” He dropped his voice to a whisper and he tried his best to keep the panic from his voice. “whoever it was stole the souls.”


Red motioned for her to calm down, his eyes flitting around the hall. Several staff members were throwing them scandalized glares

“please, you gotta be quiet! we can’t let anyone know!”

Red flinched when Undyne shot him a furious glare, sure that she was going to inflict some punishment on him. Thankfully, she instead chose to listen to him and lowered her voice.

“I’ve got to tell Asgore about this right away. I can’t even believe this bullshit.” She bashed her forehead with a closed fist. “Is that it? Just the souls?”

Red shook his head. “they also stole some robot parts. the team thinks they took more, but there’s no way to tell for sure until alphys, sans, and i get a good look. from the way they’re describing it though, it was mostly alphys’s stuff that went missing.”

“Great. Just great. I swear, when I find out what happened and who did this, I’m going to –”

“UNDYNE!”

The two of them twisted their heads to the source of the loud shout. Red was shocked to see Papyrus striding towards them, his face full of worry.

“paps, what’re you –?”

Ignoring Red, Papyrus rushed to Undyne and engulfed her in his arms.

“I CAME HERE AS SOON AS YOU MESSAGED ME! WHAT HAPPENED?!”

Undyne hunched her shoulders, falling into the hug.

When she didn’t reply, Papyrus quietly asked, “Undyne?”

She shook her head and when she finally spoke, her voice was raspy and strained. “I don’t…” She swallowed. “Not out here.” She nodded towards Alphys’s unoccupied room. “We can talk in there, but just… I can’t do this out here. Please.”

Papyrus nodded and guided her towards the door. When Red tried to follow them, Undyne sighed and twisted her head in his direction. Her eyes were brimming with unspent tears and her utter exhaustion was spelled across her features.

“You can go home, Red,” she croaked out. “Papyrus and I will let you know if… well, we’ll keep you informed.”
“are you sure? i don’t know if –”

“Just go home. Please,” she muttered as Papyrus shot him a pleading look.

Red sighed. He supposed that when it came down to it, if their positions were reversed, he wouldn’t want her to see his tears either. That was fine. He’d leave it to Papyrus.

“really, let me know if anything happens.”

Only when Papyrus nodded his assent did he teleport home. As he materialized in the living room, the smells of Italian herbs and tomato sauce hovered in the air, undercut by the scent of something burning. He made his way to the kitchen, his bones rattling as he walked, and spotted his brother at the stove, stirring a pot of what was presumably spaghetti. As his footsteps reverberated against the floor, Boss twisted his head towards him, a bright smile on his face that quickly turned into a concerned frown.

“SANS? ARE YOU OKAY?”

Red’s shaking intensified, but he didn’t reply; he was just too tired. Boss set down his spoon and rushed over to him.

“Sans?”

Red released a shuddering breath, and with it, the tears he had been holding back all day spilled from his face. He immediately brought his hands to his face, trying to hide the evidence of his emotions as he twisted away from his brother. Before he could take more than a step, Boss grabbed his arm and gently pulled it down. As his hand left his face, he saw that his brother was bent down next to him, his eyes wide with worry.

“Do not leave. Please tell me what happened.”

That was when Red turned into a shambling mess of a skeleton. He fell into his brother’s arms, smashing his face into his shoulder, and with a tear-choked voice told him everything that had happened today. Throughout it all, his brother gripped him tight to his chest, never saying a word, letting Red talk about everything he needed to.

“and fucking hell, papyrus. just yesterday sans was talking about how if the humans found out about the souls, there could be war. shit!”

Boss finally spoke, his tone bordering between incredulity and confusion. “Why did you have those in the first place? I would imagine that the Royal Family would have more use for them than you.”

Red pulled away, wiping the tears from his face even as more poured from the sockets. “sans mentioned working on them in the past to try and revive ‘em or something.”

His brother’s eyes widened. “They can do that here?”

“Well apparently not. but they were tryin’.”

“That sounds… dangerous to me.”

Red tilted his head. “what d’ya mean by that?”

Boss shook his head and waved his hand dismissively. “Never mind. It does not matter. What is important is how you are feeling.”
Red’s eyes trained on his brother’s face. Boss was being sincere. It amazed Red just how much he had changed since Red had come to this universe. Then again, his brother had listened all those years ago. The memory of their first kiss still nettled at the back of his mind.

“i don’t know. i’m worried.” Red’s soul squirmed with guilt. “about a lot of stuff.”

“The souls are a huge concern,” he agreed. “But I am sure that the humans are not as big a threat as they were back in our universe. Everything here is so much… softer.”

“They were strong enough to trap all of them underground, bro. and you’ve seen the shit they do on t.v.” He sat down at the table, looking down at the wood. “though… that’s not all i’m worried about.”

“Of course not! I had a feeling something like this would happen. The security here is so lax! And this attack came just when I was starting to believe all of you that it was safe here.”

“It usually is safe here. i don’t understand who the fuck would do something like this.” Red coughed. “it’s fucking scary to think that someone might be attacking monsters here. and i don’t…” He swallowed. “i don’t wanna see anyone dust ever again.”

His face warmed at the admission, and he expected a rebuke from Boss; after all, killing was just a way of life. But his brother didn’t scold him at all. In fact, a heavy silence fell between them. Red glanced upwards and saw Boss standing there, staring at him with his brows creased upwards.

“Yes,” his brother murmured, breaking the quiet. “I do not want to either.”

At that, Boss turned around and headed for the stove. With a start, Red recalled how his brother had confessed just a couple of days ago to disliking killing. It was difficult thinking of Boss as anything other than a Royal Guard, sworn to uphold the kingdom through any means of necessary.

“Dinner is ready,” his brother called out softly as he pulled out plates. “I made spaghetti for all of us.”

All of them. What a joke. It was just the two of them tonight – Papyrus was still at the hospital and probably would be for hours. And Sans… Well, who knew where the fuck Sans was? Red had tried messaging him all day, trying to figure out if he had been by the lab at all over the last twenty-four hours. But apparently Red hadn’t been worth his time because he hadn’t replied to a single text.

At least that was what Red hoped. The alternative…

Red ate his extra-crispy spaghetti, pushing past the strong burnt flavors that filled his mouth, as he tried to ignore the panic blossoming in his chest. Sans was fine. There was no real reason for him to have been at the lab this morning. Sure, he might’ve gone to check if there had been by the lab at all over the last twenty-four hours. But apparently Red hadn’t been worth his time because he hadn’t replied to a single text.

And besides, they hadn’t discovered any dust, right? The investigation team would’ve told them. Sans was okay. He had to be.

His fork clanked against the plate as his hand started to shake violently.

“Sans?” Boss stared at him with concern.

“heh. sorry.” He grabbed his own, trying to still his quivering. “your spaghetti was great, but i
think it’s impastable for me to eat right now.” He made a halfhearted attempt at a smile as he pushed the half-eaten plate away. “but y’know, thanks for making it. great to know you’re enjoying cooking so much.”

Boss nodded, though he looked down at his own dish with disappointment. “I am done as well. I am… not that hungry,” he sighed, scooping up the unfinished meals.

As his brother began to wash the plates at the sink, Red swallowed nervously and asked the question that had been tugging at the back of his head throughout dinner. “bro, has sans been by at all today?”

“No.” The short reply was thick with barely-hidden animosity.

Red wrung his hands together, their soft clanking carrying through the room. “i know you’re pissed at him, and you have every right to be, but i’m real worried.”

Boss shut off the flow of the water and turned around to face him. “You are worried he was in the lab?”

Red nodded. “what if… what if someone kidnapped him or… or something?”

His brother leaned back against the counter, crossing his arms and rolling his eyes. “Your boyfriend is fucking fine, Sans.”

“he won’t answer my messages,” Red shot back defensively. “been sending them all day.”

“Then it sounds to me like he’s having a good old time with his pal Grillby then.”

“boss, this shit is serious.”

“As am I. To be quite frank, it sounds like he does not even care enough to respond to you. He doesn’t seem like good boyfriend material if you ask me.”

Red let out a growl of frustration. “listen, y’know, this is what i was gonna talk to you about last night.”

“About your boyfriend fucking up?”

“no, about you… being jealous.”

Boss shrugged. “I am not exactly hiding my feelings about the situation, Sans. I do not care for this relationship as you very well know.”

“but you know i’m still gonna do it, right? be with the two of them, i mean.”

His brother flexed his hands. “Yes.”

“and that means i’m gonna talk about them. with you. and when i do, i might complain about ‘em and how they’re acting, but i still love them. so when you talk shit about them like this, it hurts me. it feels like… you don’t trust me.”

“What can I say?” he huffed through gritted teeth. “The other Sans sounds like a fuck up and I don’t think he is good enough for you.”

“boss, he was there for me. same with paps.”
Boss grumbled under his breath for a couple of seconds before continuing. “I will confess, the other Papyrus seems like a stand-up fellow. He is quite the host.” He rubbed his arm with a curled up fist. “And I must say, I can see why you would… be his friend.”

Red gawked at him openly. What was this? Was his brother seriously complimenting Papyrus?

Boss cleared his throat, his voice returning to its angry tone. “But that does not mean I can understand your relationship with the other you! Sans, he is a jerk! Crying and moping and then telling me that I am the problem?” He snorted. “He is the one that seems to be causing all the problems here.”

“look,” Red said protectively, “i know you don’t get it, but he’s been going through a rough time lately. and he’s had to deal with a lot.”

“What has he faced that you haven’t? As far as I can tell, this universe seems incredibly easy to live in. No fighting. No death. And he and his brother seem to get along just fine,” he added resentfully. “His behavior is ridiculous given the situation.”

Red gulped. “it’s a bit more complicated than all that.

“Then enlighten me,” Boss demanded as he sat down at the table, rage in his eyes.

“fine then, come and sit down and i’ll explain.”

And he did. It was difficult since his brother didn’t actually fully understand Red’s own resets and the whole Gaster situation back in their own universe, but he tried his best to convey everything as accurately and succinctly as possible. Boss seemed to understand the resets easily enough; after all, it wasn’t too hard to imagine what it could do to a monster to live hundreds of timelines all on their own.

But it was when Red detailed what he knew about this universe’s Gaster – which was minimal, he admitted – that his brother ran into issues.

Boss gasped sharply, gripping the table tightly with his hands, and groaned out, “I am going to be sick.”

“i know, it’s really fucked u–”

“No, I am really going to be sick!” he shouted as he flung himself away from the table.

“wait, what? boss?!”

But his brother was now bent over the sink, retching. Red hurried over to him and rubbed small circles into his brother’s back as red magical discharge dripped from his mouth. After a couple of minutes, Boss stood up, placing his injured hand on Red’s shoulder as he wiped his mouth off with a rag.

“are you okay?” To say he was shocked, was an understatement. Sure, the news had made Red feel sick as well, but to actually vomit from the news? And Boss wasn’t exactly a monster that threw up from any old thing. Red really hadn’t thought that his brother would care enough to react this violently.

Boss nodded hurriedly. “Sorry, sorry. That was…” He swallowed and his eyes moved around the room as if he were searching for the right words. “Unexpected.”
“yeah, i’ll say.”

“Unexpected and –” He swayed on his feet a bit. “– upsetting.”

“come on,” he order as he tugged at his brother’s arm. “let’s sit back down.”

He guided Boss back to his seat and joined him at his side. His brother appeared shaky and flushed, and Red hoped he wouldn’t be sick again.

“So, uh… yeah, that’s why sans has been doing so bad. lots of nightmares lately because of the possibility of a reset like i was telling you about. and apparently his nightmares feature a lot of gaster.”

His brother balled a fist and pushed it against his eye. “Do not… say that name please.”

“whose? gaster’s?”

He nodded, shutting his eyes tight. “I cannot stand it. Every time you say it, my skull feels like it’s on fire.”

“o-okay,” he said, bewildered. “i won’t say it anymore, s-sorry.”

Back in their old universe, most monsters didn’t react that way to hearing the doctor’s name. When Red had first let the name slip from his mouth, the monster had stared at him like he had just spoken in a foreign language.

But this… this was odd.

“a-anyway, i know he was a piece of shit last night, but that’s what sans has been dealing with. so he’s not a fuck up. he’s just been… going through a lot.”

Boss dragged his hands up and down his face. “He still needs to apologize to you. And me. And the other Papyrus! In fact, he needs to apologize to a lot of monsters from the sound of things!”

“yeah, he does,” Red admitted. “but when he does, i’m gonna forgive him. because… i love him, y’know?”

His brother’s eyes trained on him and he asked emptily, “You really are going to stay with him, aren’t you?”

Red clanked his mouth to Boss’s cheek. “just like i’m gonna stick with you.” As Red leaned away from the kiss, he saw that his brother was beginning to cry. He shook his shoulder lovingly. “boss, come on.”

“Promise me, Sans.”

“promise you what?”

“Promise me you will stick with me. Please,” he begged.

“until the very end.”

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Red blinked his eyes open, his vision straining against the soft flickering of the television in the dark room. One of his brother’s arms was wrapped snugly around him, and his head was pressed
against Boss’s chest, soaking in all the warmth. He yawned loudly as he looked up at his brother who was studying him intently.

Red wondered when he had fallen asleep. They had agreed to stay up until either Papyrus messaged him for a lift home from the hospital or until Sans teleported home. But at some point the television must have lulled him to sleep.

Maybe he should just close his eyes a bit longer… Take a nice little nap… It was so enticing…

A loud clanking noise from the kitchen stirred him as he started to doze off again. He twisted his head towards the source as Papyrus came rushing into the room.

Upon seeing that he was awake, Papyrus called out, “I AM SO SORRY, I DID NOT MEAN TO WAKE YOU!”

“What? don’t even worry about it, i don’t c– wait, hold on a sec.” Red brushed the sleepiness from his eyes. “how the hell did you get here?”

“AH. I WALKED.”

Red sat up, pushing his brother’s arm off of him. “why did you do that? i was waiting for a message from you all night.” He pulled out his phone. There were no missed calls or texts. “when did you even get here?”

“ABOUT FIVE MINUTES AGO.”

“five minutes – what the fuck, paps? it’s two in the fucking morning!”

“LANGUAGE.”

“No, don’t ‘language’ me!” He flew up from the couch, walking up to the other skeleton, his soul nettled with irritation. “i could’ve teleported you straight here, why the hell did you wal–?”

His voice died in his throat as he saw that Papyrus was crying silently. Reality shifted as realization hit him. For a half a second, it was as if his vision had split and there were two Papyruses standing there, tears streaming down their faces. He backed away as the image returned to normal, his soul beating violently in his chest.

“I AM SORRY. SHE… THE SURGERY… IT WAS NOT GOOD… SHE DIDN’T…” His voice sounded stuck, as if he couldn’t get the words out. Maybe he just didn’t want to admit it. But Red knew what he was trying to say. It was as clear as day.

Red covered his mouth with his quaking hands, staring emptily at Papyrus. It seemed impossible that this could’ve happened. He hadn’t liked Alphys all that much, but… she had still treated him well enough. And now that he knew that it wasn’t her fault that everyone in damn city had known Sans and him were a pair… Fuck, he was a piece of shit. He couldn’t believe he had treated her that way.

Shit, he should’ve done things differently… Maybe if he had just teleported her straight to the hospital, he could’ve…

“WAIT A SECOND,” Boss called out from behind him. “DIDN’T YOU JUST –? AND YOU WERE JUST –? HOW DID YOU –?”

Red twisted around, his hands still on his face. His brother was gawking at them unblinkingly, his
face stretched with horror.

“w-what?” Red stammered, his voice muffled by his hands.

“I DON’T –” He looked around wildly, as if trying to find something in the dark room. “NEVER MIND, IT WAS… JUST…” He cleared his throat. “I AM SORRY, IT HAS BEEN A LONG DAY…”

Papyrus let out a loud sob, and as Red turned around to face him, he felt bony arms envelop him.

“I CANNOT BELIEVE SHE IS GONE!” he screamed out as he squeezed Red to his chest. “JUST A PILE OF DUST!”

“i know, i know,” Red mumbled, and he had to wonder: was this the first death that Papyrus had ever faced? From the way he was wailing, it sounded like it. Then again, the two of them had been close. Close enough to invite to his birthday party.

“WHERE IS SANS?” Papyrus yelled against Red’s skull. “IS HE HOME?”

“i don’t…” He swallowed, the panic rekindling in his soul. “i don’t know, paps. he’s been gone all day.”

“HE WON’T ANSWER MY MESSAGES,” he sobbed. “AND I HAVE TO TELL HIM! THEY WERE VERY GOOD FRIENDS!”

“he’ll be home soon, we just gotta wait.”

His soul tensed. Sans needed to get here soon or he was going to kick his ass.

“How do i tell him? i do not know… i do not know how to do this!”

Red searched his mind, trying to come up with the best advice, but in all honesty, he had no fucking clue how to approach this. Back in their universe, everyone knew when a monster got dusted. Word got around fast. And it wasn’t like anyone cared too much anyway. Everyone was a dead monster walking.

But if it had happened to Boss, he wouldn’t know how to handle it. How could anyone just tell someone that the monster they cared about had died?

“I WILL DO IT.”

Papyrus let go of Red and the two of them turned their gazes toward Boss.

“I HAVE DONE IT BEFORE. MANY TIMES. I WILL TELL SANS WHEN HE GETS HERE.”

“boss, do you really think that’s the best idea?”

His brother tsked. “REALLY, BROTHER, WHAT KIND OF MONSTER DO YOU TAKE ME FOR?” His eyes flicked towards Papyrus. “I PROMISE, I WILL DELIVER THE NEWS AS GENTLY AS I CAN.”

Papyrus hesitated for a moment, but nodded. “THANK YOU.” He wiped his face on his pink scarf. “BUT… I STILL DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHERE HE IS. HE SHOULD BE BACK BY NOW.”

“have you texted grillby?”
Papyrus shook his head. “I TRY TO RESPECT THEIR PRIVACY WHEN THEY ARE TOGETHER, BUT… I SUPPOSE THIS IS AN EMERGENCY.” He fished out his phone and typed out a message. “THERE. SENT. I ASKED HIM TO SEND SANS HOME AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.”

“yeah, i’m sure sans’ll show up soon. we’ll… we’ll wait up for him. come on, let’s get to couch and we can wait there. he’ll be home soon…”

The two of them dragged themselves to the couch and plopped down next to Boss. As soon as their tailbones hit the cushion, Papyrus’s sobbing redoubled. For hours, all he did was cry and recall all the times he had spent with Alphys. The anime sessions. The birthday parties. The exercise sessions.

Red half-listened to the tales. It was hard hearing about it all – about this monster that he hardly knew and yet who he had been so rude to. Guilt bit at his soul like never before. He should’ve been nicer to her. Fuck, his last messages to her were all about how she needed to take her job seriously. What kind of monster was he?

Eventually Papyrus fell asleep after a long story about Undyne and Alphys almost kissing for the first time in front of the human of all people. As his quiet snores filled the room, he and his brother watched television in the dark. Red didn’t even flirt with the idea of sleep. His soul was absolutely racing at this point. Alphys was gone. Gone.

But it wasn’t the only thing that was filling his soul with panic. He was scared to death. Scared that Sans wasn’t coming home…

He took out his phone and looked at the time: almost six in the morning.

Where was he?
Papyrus just couldn’t drag his eyes open this morning.

Usually it was not a problem to wake up. He loved to greet each morning with enthusiasm. Every day was the start of a new adventure that he couldn’t wait to experience.

But today he didn’t have the energy. His eyelids were glued shut and a dull achiness was wrapped around his skull. Every bone in his body felt drained and weary.
When was the last time he had felt like this? Papyrus couldn’t really recall ever feeling so absolutely worn out. Perhaps he was sick? And why wasn’t he laying down? He could feel his back pressed up against a stiff cushion and his legs were awkwardly dangling off the mattress.

He let out a heavy sigh, his mind too foggy with exhaustion to figure it out. As he released the pent-up air, he felt something move against his chest. Ah, that was right. His brother had fallen asleep in his arms last night after his panic attack. No wonder Papyrus was in such a strange position. He clutched Sans closer as he lazily opened his eyes.

The first thing he noted was just now bright it was. Much brighter than he was expecting. How late had he slept in? Oh no, what time was it?! He was needed to go to work!

His eyes shot open. He was in the living room, not his bedroom. And that wasn’t his brother in his arms, it was Red. He blinked the sleepiness from his eyes, turning towards the other side of the couch. Edge was sitting there, fully alert and watching television. What were the three of them doing down here?

And that was when Papyrus remembered all the events from last night. Alphys was gone. Gone forever.

He sucked in a deep breath as tears sprang to his eye sockets. A sudden, unbidden flood of memories flashed through his mind. Alphys going gaga over a scantily-clad anime character as Papyrus blushed and hid under a blanket. Standing on the sidelines with Sans as Undyne and Alphys sealed their marriage with a kiss. Celebrating Alphys’s birthday by playing board games at Toriel’s home late into the night. Watching Undyne fall to the ground in a mess of tears as the doctor delivered the news that Alphys was dead.

Papyrus smashed his face into Red’s shoulder and let out a choked sob, startling the smaller skeleton awake.

“huh? what?”

Red struggled in Papyrus’s arms, squirming wildly and pushing at the limbs with all his strength. But Papyrus held tight and continued to cry, his tears soaking into the other skeleton’s hoodie. Eventually Red stopped fighting him and instead reached a comforting hand to Papyrus’s face. He appreciated the gesture, but it did nothing to stop the panic blossoming in his soul.

“IS SANS BACK?” Papyrus choked out between sobs.

He needed him to be back. His brother was supposed to be here for everything, good or bad. And this was something he could not face alone.

So when Edge replied with a short “NO,” Papyrus’s mind went fuzzy around the edges. How could Sans still be gone? Had he really been that upset with him?

He untangled his arms from Red and dug into his pants pocket for his phone. There had to be some explanation for this. Sans wouldn’t just ignore him like this. But when he unlocked his phone, there were no new messages from his brother.

There were, however, two messages from Grillby.
Papyrus covered his mouth as he gaped at the phone. What did Grillby mean by “part on the best of terms”? And why hadn’t Sans been with Grillby for the last day and a half?!

“What is it?” Red asked, twisting in his arms to face him.

“I DO NOT UNDERSTAND! IF HE IS NOT WITH GRILLBY, THEN WHERE –?”

“BE QUIET FOR A MINUTE!” Edge snapped as he stared at the television, his brow furrowed.

There was a momentary silence before Red exploded. “what the *fuck*, boss? how about you show a little sympathy here!”

“SHH!” Edge yelled, his face fraught with worry as he jabbed a shaking finger at the television

Papyrus followed the gesture. On screen was a young, brown-haired human news reporter who
stood in front of the Human-Monster Embassy. At the bottom was a banner that read “BREAKING NEWS: OFFICER MURDERED AT MT. EBOTT.”

“– and authorities say at least one witness has come forward with information.”

An off-screen male voice asked, “Have you been able to see any part of the crime scene, Cherille?”

The camera panned to the right side of the embassy. An oversized black tarp swept over the marble walls, blocking the large flags that usually hung there. Yellow tape encircled half the building, encompassing even the small alleyway that ran between the embassy and the neighboring hotel. A handful of police officers and Royal Guards guarded the perimeter, their faces drawn into serious scowls.

“This is the only image we have been able to get at this time. However, we were told that until around five this morning, the officer’s body was on display near the alleyway just behind us. Investigators put up this tarp immediately due to the graphic nature of the scene.”

“And have you been able to get any more details about the officer who was killed?”

The screen cut to a photo of a black-haired human in a police officer’s uniform. To the right of the image read:

Officer Jane Hansi
- Officer for 10 Years
- Mother of two
- Awarded the Medal of Honor 4 years ago for her heroic efforts during the Teida Terrorist Attack

“Yes, I have been told by an investigator here that Officer Jane Hansi was part of an undercover unit that was working to uncover terrorist networks in the countryside. They told me that they could not give much detail due to the confidential nature of her duties. However, my source says that they believe the monster dust at the scene may be related to her investigations here in Very New Home.”

“And have you heard any information about the monster that was killed in this incident?”

“According to investigators, the coroner’s office has not yet identified the remains. They did tell me that we should expect an official announcement within the next twenty-four hours. The local law enforcement, known as the Royal Guard, has been –”

“Sorry, Cherille, we’re going to have to cut away. We just got word that the officer’s murder has sparked protests in the capital and we have reporters on the scene.”

The footage switched to a large group of humans amassed in the streets of a city. Several of them carried large, hand-painted signs that read “MONSTERS GO HOME” and “MONSTERS BRING HIGHER MURDER RATES.” Their words were inaudible, but the rage in their booming voices was unmistakable.

Papyrus hid his eyes behind his hands, unable to watch a second more. “Oh no. Oh no, no, no…”

This couldn’t be a coincidence. Hadn’t Sans been talking about this officer just two days ago? If he had gone to her… If he had been around her…
If that was his dust…

He was going to be sick. Absolutely sick. He pressed a hand to his sternum, trying to stop his soul from churning. But his head was all wobbly and every breath he took sent stabbing waves of panic through his chest. There was no way he could live without his brother.

Red tugged at his arm insistently. “paps, it’s not him. sans wouldn’t get mixed up in that crowd. he just wouldn’t!”

Papyrus uncovered his face and stared at Red who looked as unconvinced as he had sounded.

“You heard the name,” Papyrus whispered, his voice trembling. “He was – and that was the –”

Red lifted himself from the couch, his face distorted with rage. “he’s fine, dammit! he wouldn’t just go fucking talk to her like that! he said he would only if she harassed you!”

“But what if he did!?” Papyrus’s bones rattled noisily, drowning out the humans’ shouting from the television. “HE SAID HE WAS GOING TO TALK TO HER. AND, OH MY GOD, IF HE DID, THIS IS ALL MY –”

“Shut up! he didn’t! i don’t know where the fuck he is, but – but –” His words ebbed into a thin whine, tears choking off whatever he had been about to say.

Papyrus joined him, his chest heaving with hysterical sobs. “WHERE IS HE?” He pushed himself off the couch and paced around the living room, clutching at his temples. “How could he just disappear like this? why isn’t he home right now? and why won’t he call?!”

“I don’t know! dammit, when he gets home, i’m gonna kick his fucking –”

There was a sharp popping noise, and for a moment Papyrus thought Red had teleported away. But when Papyrus turned towards the couch, his soul clenched with shock. Sans was standing in the middle of the room, his hands stuffed into his pockets and a worn grin on his face. Mud coated his pink slippers and his shoulders were dusted with a thin layer of snow. He seemed tired and a little worse for wear, but he was alive. He was ALIVE!

“Oh, hi, guys,” Sans murmured as he glanced around the room. His face was tinged with cyan as his eyes darted down towards his feet. “i didn’t expect all of you to be h–”

“SANS!” Papyrus surged forward, knocking the wind out of his brother with a loud “oof!” as he tackled him with a massive hug. Tears were streaming down his face, spilling onto Sans’s skull as he embraced him, but his soul was soaring with relief.

“What the – egh!”

Red joined in the hug, throwing his arms around Sans and squeezing harshly.

“You fucking idiot!” Red planted a series of kisses on the top of Sans’s skull. “you fucking stupid jackass!”

Papyrus tightened his grip as he sobbed out, “WHERE WERE YOU?! OH GOODNESS, WHERE WERE YOU?!”

“The underground,” Sans replied with a tiny voice. “i thought i’d visit snowdin for a bit.”
“WHY DIDN’T YOU RESPOND TO ME?! I TRIED CALLING! I TRIED MESSAGING! I EVEN GOT IN CONTACT WITH GRILLBY! YOU WERE MISSING!”

“i’m sorry,” Sans mumbled. “my phone was dead.”

“god fucking dammit, sans!” Red bawled into Sans’s shoulder. “why the fuck wouldn’t you just come home, you fucking idiot!”

“guys,” Sans muttered. “i didn’t mean to make you worry. i just… needed a break is all. i wanted to come back here when i could look you all in the face and apologize.” His eyes focused on Papyrus’s face. “i’m sorry. i didn’t know the two of you were so freaked out.”

“SANS,” Papyrus cried out, his voice breaking. “I THOUGHT YOU – YOU –” He couldn’t get the words out.

“papyrus,” Sans gasped out. “i would never do that. look at me, look at how serious i am. never. i won’t leave you alone like that, i swear. you’re too important to leave behind like that.”

Red released a choked sob as Papyrus’s soul dropped. He hadn’t even thought of that…. not like that. He had been so preoccupied with the murders that it had never occurred to him that Sans might fall down. Sure, Sans hadn’t been doing all that well recently, and he clearly needed help, which was why he had visited his therapist yesterday. But to think that his brother would be at that low of a point once again was unimaginable.

“THAT IS NOT WHAT HE MEANT,” Edge called out from the couch.

Sans pushed away from Papyrus and Red, confusion written on his face as he glanced towards Edge.

“What do you mean?”

Edge’s reply was to point towards the television. As Sans watched the reporters discussing the murders at the embassy, his face blanched.

“They thought –” Edge said, his voice shaking. “NO, WE THOUGHT THAT YOU WERE THE MONSTER THAT GOT KILLED.”

Red draped his arms around Sans again, his wails loud and high-pitched.

“Guys,” Sans said, shooting Papyrus an exasperated look. “i haven’t seen that lady in weeks. i wasn’t about to go chat her up any time soon.”

“that’s not the point!” Red sobbed, nuzzling his head into Sans’s shoulder.

“We were so scared!” Papyrus wrapped his arms around himself, trying to stop his bones from rattling as he shook violently. “NEVER DO THAT AGAIN! EVER!”

“hell.” He gently pat Red on the back. “i really screwed up.”

“You did!” Red agreed.

“red, paps, i’m so sorry. i left you in the dark and i… i just don’t know what to say but sorry.” He extracted himself from Red’s arms and gave him a reassuring squeeze on the shoulders before turning towards Edge. “and you too, buddy.”

“ME?” Edge’s head darted around the room, as if trying there was someone else that Sans could be
“yeah, you.” To Papyrus’s surprise, Sans sauntered over to Edge, burying his head against his chest as he enveloped him in a warm hug. “i’m sorry for being such a jackass to you. i should’ve talked with you or just done anything but what i did. i don’t know what i was thinking.”

“I… ERR…” Edge raised his arms above Sans’s head, casting his gaze around the room frantically. It looked like he didn’t know what to do with himself, and Papyrus had to wonder how many times he had been hugged in his life by anyone other than Red. Edge shot a beseeching expression towards Red and Papyrus. When neither of them moved to help him, he timidly pat the top of Sans’s skull.

“You can stay for as long as you want, okay?” Sans mumbled into Edge’s chest. “i just got so wrapped up in my own head, i thought the only solution was to shut you out. i’m an idiot, i know.”

“YES. YOU ARE,” Edge said roughly as he finally pushed Sans away. “AND YOU WERE VERY RUDE TO ME. I HAVE NEVER FELT SO UNWELCOME IN MY LIFE. AND THAT IS COMING FROM SOMEONE WHO HAD TO COLLECT TAXES FOR THE QUEEN FOR THREE YEARS.”

Sans hunched his shoulders and tilted his head towards the ground in shame.

“But… I WILL ACCEPT YOUR APOLOGY.” He shook a scolding finger at him. “BUT ONLY ON THE CONDITION THAT YOU STOP CAUSING ALL OF THESE PROBLEMS. I CAN STAND BY YOUR PETTY JEALOUSY –” Sans snorted. “– BUT I WILL NOT STAND FOR ILL TREATMENT OF MY BROTHER LIKE THIS.”

“boss, come on,” Red grunted out. “he’s not treating me badly.”

“NO!” Edge crossed his arms against his chest. “YOU MUST PROMISE IT OR I WILL TAKE MY BROTHER AND LEAVE.”

Papyrus expected Sans to get angry. To tell Edge that Red wasn’t his property to barter. To let him know that he wasn’t going to be ordered around in his own home. What he wasn’t expecting was Sans to nod, looking ashamed.

“You’re right,” he muttered, staring at the floor. “red deserves better. you deserve better. you all do. i promise to treat all of you right from now on.”

Edge grimaced, but nodded begrudgingly. “OKAY. OKAY, GOOD. I AM GLAD YOU UNDERSTAND MY POSITION.” He swallowed nervously. “I ACCEPT YOUR APOLOGY THEN.”

Sans broke out into a beaming smile – the most genuine smile Papyrus had seen on his brother in a long time.

“It’s not so bad to talk things out, is it?” He turned towards Papyrus and winked. “i guess i oughta do it more often, right, paps?”

Normally it would be easy for Papyrus to join his brother’s playful bantering. Especially after being worried for his safety for so long. But Papyrus’s soul was too heavy with grief. All he could manage to do was cast a twitching smile at Sans before he squeezed his eyes shut. The reality of the situation was hitting him square in the chest: he was going to have to tell Sans about Alphys.

“Oh come on, bro.” Papyrus opened his eyes and saw the disappointment on his brother’s face. “i
know i screwed up, but… i’ll do whatever it takes to fix this. i promise.”

“NO, I…” He clenched his fists, glancing away from Sans. “IT IS NOT ABOUT THAT… IT IS… ABOUT…”

“SANS,” Edge interjected, his tone somber. Papyrus could feel his soul going a mile a minute as Sans turned around, a look of curiosity on his face.

“yeah?”

Edge straightened his posture and placed a closed fist over his sternum – the traditional Royal Guard salute.

“I REGRET TO INFORM YOU OF SOME RATHER GRAVE NEWS.”

Sans chuckled lightly. “what? you gotta salute and all for it?” He cast his gaze around the room, his smile melting away when no one else laughed with him. “wait, are you serious or –?”

A loud, steady knock at the front door interrupted his question midstream. All four of them stood there, confusion etched into their features. Who would be visiting them all the way out here without calling them first? The only monster he could think of was Undyne, and she certainly wasn’t about to travel over here any time soon.

The unknown visitor knocked again, more urgently this time, spurring Papyrus into action. He hurried to the door, straightening his clothes and wiping his tears into his pink scarf as he went. After taking a deep, calming breath, he flung the door open. Much to his surprise, there were two uniformed humans standing at the door. One was short and had spiky blonde hair while the other was tall with dark skin. Each wore a grim expression and shifted their stances nervously at the sight of Papyrus. About ten feet behind them, parked in a patch of dirt, stood a large police car – or perhaps police tank was more accurate – that was covered in a thick coat of brown mud.

“H-HELLO?”

The taller human cleared their throat, their eyes shifting to a point behind Papyrus. “Is this the home of monster known as Sans the Skeleton?”

“THAT IS MY BROTHER, YES. WHY?”

The taller human shot a significant look towards the other human before asking, “May we speak with him?”

Sans lightly pushed at Papyrus’s hip to move him out of the way, and as he came into view, the humans almost seemed to lean away from him. They tugged at their belts agitatedly as he sauntered onto the porch.

“what’s up?”

The shorter human stepped forward. “You are Sans the Skeleton?”

Sans lifted his arms, a playful smile crossing his face. “in the flesh. heh.”

The taller human nodded to the other human, his hands grasping at something along his belt.

“Sans the Skeleton, you are under arrest for the murders of Officer Jane Hansi, Dr. Alphys, and the unidentified monster that was killed in Very New Home this morning. We are taking you to the
embassy for questioning.” The pair of them rushed at Sans and gripped at his arms.

“wait, what?!” Sans tried to jerk away, but the humans held fast as the taller one pulled out a pair of handcuffs from their belt.

Papyrus gasped. “NO, WAIT! YOU HAVE THE WRONG MONSTER!” He stretched forward, trying to put himself in between his brother and the officers, his soul fluttering.

“Back down!” the shorter officer barked out as a bright yellow glow emanated from his chest.

Papyrus flinched. He had never actually seen a human assume an attack position before. This was getting out of hand fast, and he knew that he needed to try to deflate the situation.

“HUMAN, NO, NO! I DO NOT MEAN YOU ANY HARM! THAT WAS NOT MY INTENTION! I JUST –!”

“I said back down!” The officer was reaching at his belt with quaking hands, his eyes alight with fear.

Papyrus could hear Red and Edge running in the living room, their footsteps reverberating off the floor. Their shouts echoed through the house and they were raising such a clamor, but all Papyrus could hear was his brother’s desperate shriek.

“what do you mean by alphys?! you don’t mean our alphys, right?! she’s dead?!”

Papyrus’s soul dropped at the words. “LET HIM GO! PLEASE!” He needed to explain this to him. This couldn’t be the way he found out about Alphys.

Sans dug his feet into the ground as the officer dragged him towards the car.

“where the fuck are you taking him?!” Red bellowed as he skidded into the grass, his eye aflame with magic.

“PLEASE!” Papyrus screeched as he grabbed at the taller human’s arm. “STOP!”

The officer elbowed Papyrus sharply in the ribs, knocking him to the soil. For a moment, all he could do was sit there, sprawled in the dirt, too dazed to move.

“DO NOT TOUCH HIM!” Edge roared as he ran toward the human.

But as Edge advanced on the two of them, the shorter human pulled a small metallic object from his belt and pointed it in Edge’s direction. It took a moment for Papyrus to recognize the little thing – he had only ever seen one on television – but when he finally realized what it was, his soul pounded with fear.

The officer was pointing a gun at Edge.

“If you take one more step, I will not hesitate to shoot!” The human screamed, his voice echoing through the open space. “Now BACK DOWN!”

The human’s threat stunned the three of them into immobility. Papyrus was so afraid of frightening the human, he didn’t even speak. Sans, however, continued to thrash against the other human’s arms, yelling loudly into the clearing.

“don’t cuff me!” There was true terror in his voice now, the tone usually reserved for his panic attacks. Papyrus just wanted to run to him, comfort him, do anything! But he couldn’t! Not while
the officer had his weapon trained on Edge!

“please! i’ll talk to you, just don’t cuff me!” The tall officer stuffed him into the backseat of the vehicle, but before he could slam the door shut, Sans screamed out, “guys! get undyne! get asgore! get anyone!”

The utter desperation in his voice shocked Papyrus into climbing to his feet. He needed to get to his brother NOW! But even as the two humans climbed into the vehicle, the shorter one still had his gun pointed at Edge. It was only until the tank was driving down the valley that Papyrus felt safe sprinting after him.

“NO! BRING HIM BACK!”

As he ran down a small knoll, his foot tripped on a loose rock, and he found himself sending him face first into the grass. He pushed himself into a sitting position, his soul hammering in his chest. But as he watched the vehicle meandering through the field, he realized it was going too fast. There was no way for Papyrus to catch up to it. All he could do was shout uselessly after Sans as the tank disappeared over the hill.

---

It took a long time for Red to convince Papyrus to come into the house. The lanky skeleton had just sat in the grass, yelling for several minutes, refusing to answer either of the other skeletons.

But it had forced Red to wait there, which was ultimately for the best. When Red had first run up the other skeleton, all he had wanted to do was chase the humans down and blast them away. Picturing their scared little fleshy faces had seemed immensely satisfying. That was until he had contemplated the actual consequences of such actions. So he was glad that Papyrus had slowed him down.

But once Red had calmed down, getting Papyrus inside became a real chore. He wouldn’t respond to either of them; he just sat on the hill outside their home, crying into his scarf. It was only when Boss had suggested contacting other monsters for help that Papyrus relented and allowed Red to teleport them to the living room.

When they had first gotten back, Papyrus had tried calling Undyne. To no one’s surprise, she hadn’t picked up. Doubtless she was either in mourning… or she thought Sans was involved in the murders and was refusing to help. Either way, she was of no use.

So Red decided to call Toriel. No doubt the retired queen could give some insight into this bullshit.

“Wait a moment,” she croaked out between violent coughs. “Humans took Sans away?”

“yes!” Red shouted impatiently.

“That… Excuse me, but that goes against every protocol that we have set up for this type of thing.”

“what d’you mean?”

“The extradition process was something our kingdom had to negotiate for several months. It was something Asgore was adamant about. The Royal Guard has jurisdiction over all crimes committed within our territory and their government is not permitted to arrest anyone without the Guard’s supervision! If what you said is true, this is an outrage!”

“well, i guess it’s a fucking outrage then because yeah, it’s true! they just took off with him!”
“You said they were going to the embassy?”

“yeah!”

“I know a number of people that work there; I will call them to ask for them to look into this. Asgore’s advisory council will also likely have something to say about this. I will give them a call right away.”

Red let out a deep sigh as he rubbed his temple with his unoccupied hand. “thanks, toriel.”

“Now while I make a ruckus in the proper circles, I suggest that you find an attorney online. Preferably one that understands extradition law and that is located within our territory. I dare say they’ll try to block anyone from outside our borders.”

“okay, we’ll get on it.”

When he relayed the information to the other two skeletons, Papyrus jumped to his feet, his face wrinkled with determination.

“I WILL CREATE A LIST OF ATTORNEYS!” Papyrus shouted, enthusiasm sparking in his voice. “AND YOU LOOK THROUGH OUR CONTACTS FOR ANYONE THAT KNOWS A GOOD LAWYER!”

Papyrus threw his cell phone at Red before running up the stairs two at a time and disappearing into his room. His soul thumping with resolve, Red unlocked his phone and searched through the few contacts he had. He quickly eliminated Toriel, Undyne, and Frisk for obvious reasons. There weren’t many others in his cell – just the few monsters he had met at Papyrus’s party last week.

But as he scrolled through his old messages, he saw one more contact he hadn’t thought about in ages: Dirty Gerbil. He scrolled through the many unread messages that he had gotten over the last couple of weeks. The oldest messages were mostly the same:

* Hey, man! I wanted to see if you wanted to come to our meeting tonight. We’re looking forward to new recruits!

* Hey Red! Another new recruit day! Hope to see you there!

* Yo Red! Would be nice to hang out some time! Send a message!

Red scrolled down to the more recent messages. Starting on Papyrus’s birthday, the texts acquired a completely different tone:

* Hey, Red. Sorry to bother you, but are you still in town? Wanted to talk to you about something important.

* Do you know if your cousin has that officer’s phone number? I really need to talk to her.

There were several more messages asking for the officer’s number and asking him to hand out. And then, dated to just yesterday, were two more messages:

* I know we’re not friends or anything, but I need some to talk to. Anyone. Please.

* Are you there? I’m in a real bad place right now and could use a friend. Please, I got no one to talk to anymore.

Despite the fact that he had been constantly checking his phone for word from Sans, he had never
seen either of those messages. If he had, he would’ve responded. Dirty Gerbil was annoying with his constant barrage of texts, and he didn’t care much for the guy’s personality, but clearly something had happened. Something bad. He typed a quick reply:

* dude, dirty gerbil, i’m so sorry. i never check my messages, man. what do you need? are you okay?*

It seemed pretty tacky to ask him for a lawyer, so he left it at that. He just hoped the kid would respond soon so he didn’t have another thing to worry about.

With Dirty Gerbil off the list, Red had no more contacts to message from his phone, so he moved on to Papyrus’s cell. There were far more monsters programmed into this phone, though most had no message history with Papyrus. Red went through about ten contacts, explaining the situation as best he could, when the television got suddenly louder. He flicked his head upwards and saw Boss extending the remote towards the set, his eyes glued to the screen.

On the T.V. was a chubby human, clothed in a police officer’s uniform, standing at a podium outside the embassy. Dozens of reporters surrounded him, stuffing microphones into the officer’s face. But despite the thickness of the crowd, everyone was hushed, allowing the human’s voice to ring out over the group.

“At this time, the embassy would like to announce that we have apprehended a suspect in relation to these murders. A monster known as Sans the Skeleton was arrested about an hour ago and has been brought in for questioning. This monster had been the subject of Officer Hansi’s investigation for the last several months and a witness has come forward identifying a skeleton as the murderer.

“I have also been granted permission to disclose the identity of the slain monster. At around two this morning, Phene Hanton, also known by the street name ‘Punk Hamster,’ was killed alongside Officer Hansi. We believe both murder victims were killed at around the same time this morning.

“This is all the information we have at this time. Thank you.”

The officer stepped to the side as reporters hurled questions after him. Red’s soul twisted with rage at the unfounded accusations. Those fucking bastard got it all wrong and now Sans’s name was being dragged through the mud with no proof. A witness saw a “skeleton?” That was the vaguest description he had ever…

And that was when it hit him. They had named the victim as “Punk Hamster.” That was the name of the monster who had tried to recruit him into the anti-human group. Not “Dirty Gerbil.”

He snatched up his phone to revisit the messages when he saw that had a reply… from “Dirty Gerbil” himself.

* Sorry, I am fine. It was a long night. You know how it goes. Unfortunately, I have a new phone, so I do not know who this is. Could I have your details please?*

Red stared at the phone in horror. What the fuck? This had to be an investigator. There was no way it could be anyone else. The language was all wrong. Perfect. Just what he needed: evidence that he had been in contact with the fucking murder victim!

Before he could reply or show his brother Papyrus came bounding out of his room, waving a piece of paper in his hand.

“I HAVE A LIST OF ATTORNEYS!” Red and Boss rushed over, meeting him at the bottom of the stairs. “THERE ARE TEN IN THE CITY! I HAVE MARKED THEIR LOCATIONS HERE!”
he said, pointing to a crudely-drawn map.

Red motioned for Papyrus to put down the paper. “listen, i just got a really bizarre mess – aah!”

His sentence ended in a sharp gasp as a sudden violent rumbling ran through the ground. Red’s legs fell out from beneath him, causing him to land painfully on his tailbone. The framed pictures of cartoon bones slid off the floor, crashing to the floor, sending glass flying across the room. To his right, the television made a high-pitched squealing noise before smashing forward into pieces. The lights above them brightened to a fierce glow before blowing out with a loud hiss. Red gripped the nearby banister, holding on for dear life as the quaking rattled his bones.

Eventually the intense shaking tapered off into tiny shivers that rippled through the ground. The entire episode couldn’t have lasted longer than twenty seconds, but that had been more than enough time to damage the room. Shards of glass glinted in the sunlight. The flowers Undyne had given them were scattered on the carpet. And there was no salvaging the television.

His eyes whizzed to the other skeletons. Papyrus was sprawled on the bottom stairs, clutching his head and looking like he might be sick. Boss was sitting next to Red, his hands tightly gripping the old, dirty carpet.

“what the fuck was that? an earthquake–?”

A deafening bang resounded through the room, drowning out his words and shaking the house again. The noise and movement didn’t last nearly as long as the initial shaking, but it still gave Red a skull-cracking headache the likes of which he had never experienced.

He slowly got to his feet, his legs wobbling. When he steadied himself enough, he darted out of the house. As he stumbled into the open space, the first thing he noticed were all of the birds. Crows, ravens, hawks, and songbirds alike were soaring through the air, all in one direction: away from the city.

And hanging behind them was a towering, blackened plume of smoke that stretched far into the sky, hovering over the forest.

“What THE FUCK?” his brother asked from behind him. The other two skeletons had followed Red out and were now staring upwards, their eyes wide with shock.

“that… looks real bad.”

They stood there for some time, their eyes trained on the dark clouds, not saying a word. As Red was about to suggest that they go inside, he felt a slight vibration against his leg. He reached into his pocket and pulled out Papyrus’s phone. Without hesitation, he unlocked it and saw one new message from Undyne:

* If you are receiving this message it is because of your affiliation with the Royal Guard. If you are not a member of the Royal Guard, please disregard this message.

RG ALERT: ALL ABLE-BODIED RGS REPORT TO DOWNTOWN HQ IMMEDIATELY. NO EXCEPTIONS. MASSIVE CASUALTIES.

“There must have been an accident,” Papyrus whispered, seemingly to himself, after Red relayed the message. “But now how am I supposed to get the lawyer?”

“do you really gotta go? they can stand to have one less guard, right?”

“IT IS MY DUTY! I CANNOT JUST ABandon IT!”
Red sighed. “then gimme the list and i’ll do it. hell, i’ll drop you off and then go on my way.”

“I SHOULD GO TOO!” Edge called out from behind them. “IF THEY NEED ROYAL GUARDS, I AM SURE THEY WILL NEED MY ASSISTANCE.”

“but you’re not a royal guard here. they might not let you.”

“EXCUSE YOU, I AM A ROYAL GUARD. AND JUST BECAUSE THEY DO NOT RECOGNIZE MY STATUS HERE DOES NOT MEAN THEY CANNOT USE MY SKILLS.”

“IT IS FINE,” Papyrus hissed as Red opened his mouth to protest. “BOTH OF YOU CAN COME WITH ME. IF THE GUARD IS SHORTHANDED AT ALL, THEY WILL NEED HIM TOO.”

“okay, fine.” He grabbed both of the other skeletons, but as he was about to take a shortcut, he realized he didn’t know where the fuck he was going. “where is this place? i don’t know where the headquarters are.”

“TAKE US AS CLOSE TO DOWNTOWN AS YOU CAN. WE WILL WALK THE REST OF THE WAY.”

Red nodded and took a shortcut right outside Grillby’s, his oldest teleportation point in this universe. As the three of them materialized, they fell forward, flat on their faces. He must have somehow misaimed because he had somehow landed them on a pile of jagged rocks.

Wait.

These weren’t rocks; somehow the ground had been torn asunder and pillows of dark smoke were floating through the air, filling his nasal cavity, causing him to choke and splutter. He cast his eyes to the right and spotted Grillby’s restaurant, partially obscured by a plume of smoke. Massive chunks of concrete were scattered around the entrance and along the sidewalk abutting the building. In between the pieces of debris were groups of monsters and humans sprawled on the ground. Some were groaning and getting to their feet. Many, however, were motionless and silent. And from their missing limbs to their bashed-in skulls, they were obviously incapable of moving any time soon. Horror gripped Red’s soul at the sight.

But it was nothing compared to what lay to his left.

The street was packed with blazing bits of rubble that stretched for the entire block. Massive steel beams littered the road, crushing vehicles and people alike.

Directly across from Grillby’s was the worst of all. Red’s mind couldn’t completely comprehend what he was seeing. A massive pillar of black smoke, crackling with sparks of purple electricity stretched into the sky. Below the column were the smoldering remains of the building that used to sit there. It had been completely decimated, and there was no recognizing it now. He gawked at the now-empty lot, unable to remember what had once sat on the other side of the street.

To the left of the charred remains stood the old apartment tower. Or at least half of it. It was as if someone had split it right down the middle. Red spotted exposed pipes and sparking wires, completely open to the neighboring spiral of smoke. When he looked closely enough, he could even see the remains of the old residences – a bed here, a kitchen there – tipping over the edge of the partially disintegrated building.

On the right side of the destroyed lot was where the hotel once stood, now blown to bits. Only the bottom three floors remained standing, and they were currently engulfed in flame.
Red tried to scramble to his feet, but fell back down to the ground with a crack as his hoodie snagged on the cracked sidewalk.

“how the fuck did this –?”

Papyrus let out a high-pitched, agonized scream. It was the most spine-tingling thing Red had ever heard, and it echoed painfully in his aching skull. The lanky skeleton hurriedly pushed himself off the ground, his horror-stricken eyes focused on the lot across the street. Red watched as Boss sat up, gaping at Papyrus with the same fear he felt in his own soul.

“paps!” he shouted as Papyrus ran to the edge of the road. “stop, paps! we gotta get to headquarters, remember?!”

The smoke. The fires. The crumbling city. All of these dead humans and monsters scattered around. This was no place for someone like Papyrus. Red had to get him out of here. He scrambled to his feet, rushing over to Papyrus as quickly as he could.

But as he reached him, Papyrus shrieked, “SANS!”

Red froze, his soul stiffening in his chest. Realization hit him like a truck. He looked at the burning lot across the street. There was definitely white marble there. But it couldn’t be. It just couldn’t be.

“SANS!” Papyrus screeched again as he traversed over one of the smashed cars.

Red couldn’t move. All he could do was stare at the remains of the building across the street. The building that was no longer there. The building that used to stand as a beacon for all monsters.

The embassy was gone.
Chapter Notes

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulsx.tumblr.com. You can also find soul sex and Papby reblogs if that's your thing.

FANART

- Thank you, Docanjing, for drawing the rock-tripping scene from chapter 35! DANG FRIENDO YOU REALLY KNOW HOW TO DRAW FAST! You can see it here!
- Docanjing also drew sweatered-up skeletons here because the skellies needed some love!
- Rei also drew some amazing shitpost art for my entire fic here! Check it out if you want a "WTF" laugh! Hehehehe
- OKAY WOW, EVERYONE CHECK OUT THIS AMAZING ART OF CH 9 OF MY FIC (The Last Fall chapter where the cat monster commits suicide). THANK YOU SO MUCH datchidatchi! The timing of this comic is AMAZING as you'll see in this chapter. Like really. I WAS FLIPPING OUT WHEN I SAW THIS!

NOTES

- I'm so sorry it took SO long to get this chapter out. D: I wrote another fic (which I posted on AO3/tumblr if you want to check it out. I also had so much real life stuff pop up, I got a writer's block, and then I ended up getting sick for a week. :( It took soooo much to write this. I hope to do the next one soon.
- I'm going to respond to everyone's comments tomorrow. Too tired right now, sorry.
- All credit for the last scene goes to pancakeuniverse. They really wanted papcest in the last scene, so I delivered.
- Alternative chapter names: “Did the Skeleton a Dead??????”; “LOL SUCKERS”; “Hey I Recognize Those Ferns”; “Everyone is Happy, Aren’t You Happy?”; “Welcome to Jackass! Today We Have a – Oh Oops, They’re Dead.”; “Tea Doesn’t Spoil”; “The Misspelled Word from Cipher Ch 33 is the Keyword”

Additional tags for this chapter: Gore, Injuries, Depiction of a Terrorist Scene, Character Deaths!!!!!!!
(If I forgot anything, please let me know!)

F PBCUQB RM PBQBR UKIBQQ F ELVB KM SEMFSB.

Red was stuck. Frozen. Absolutely unable to do anything.

His soul felt like it was going to shatter into tiny pieces.

He needed to move. This place wasn’t safe. The scorching heat from the flames could be felt even from here. He was in danger every moment he stayed still. And as he stood there, Papyrus was getting away; already he was vaulting over cars, pushing deeper into the center of all the chaos.
But it was as if all the energy had been sapped from Red’s body. There was no way to make himself move. And he shook all over. So much so that his legs gave out from beneath him. He found himself falling flat on his tailbone. As he hit the concrete, a bolt of pain ran up his spine, prickling even his cervical vertebrae. It was too difficult to breathe; he was gasping for air, trying so desperately to get air to his soul. But every time he inhaled, it felt as if something was gripping him around his ribcage, holding him tight. It was suffocating him, quickly making his vision fade to black.

His mind was too focused on one thing:

The embassy was gone. Sans had been in the embassy. The embassy was gone. SANS HAD BEEN IN THE EMBASSY.

He felt something shaking him, and it took him far too long to realize that the movement was stronger than his panic-induced trembling. As he grappled with the thought, his eyelights returned to him. His brother was inches from his face, his eye sockets wide with fear. Red gawked at him, his mind struggling to keep up with everything that was happening. As he sat there, he saw that Boss’s mouth was moving, but Red couldn’t comprehend the words. It was as if his skull was full of cotton, muffling all coherent thought. Something was blocking him from the world.

Though it all stopped when he saw Boss start to cry.

The sight of the tears brought him back to reality in a way that nothing else could. Suddenly he could hear his brother’s desperate shouts over the loud crackling of the nearby blazes.

“PLEASE! WE NEED TO LEAVE!” he choked out between sobs. “WAKE UP! WE NEED TO TELEPORT OUT OF HERE! PLEASE WAKE UP!”

Red reached a quivering hand to his brother’s shoulder. It took him a few moments to find his voice, and when he did, all he could wheeze out was a single word.

“b-boss.”

“SANS!” His brother drew Red to his chest in a life-squeezing embrace. “THANK GOD. YOU ARE HERE. YOU ARE HERE.” He pulled away, wiping the tears from his sockets. “WE NEED TO LEAVE THIS PLACE!”

Red glanced towards the smoking lot, his soul screaming in terror. “but s-sans is –”

Boss grabbed Red’s skull and tilted it towards his face. “SANS, LOOK AT ME! THE OTHER YOU IS FINE! HE PROBABLY TELEPORTED OUT OF HERE AT THE FIRST SIGN OF TROUBLE!”

Red gasped as the words sunk in. His brother was right. How the fuck could he be so fucking stupid? There was no way Sans didn’t get the hell out of here as soon as he sensed danger. There were only a couple of things that would stop him from taking a shortcut. There were, of course, magic inhibitors, but he seriously doubted humans had access to anything like that. Another way his ability would be stopped is if he hadn’t been able to gauge the weight of something holding him down. That was really rare. And, finally, of course, if he was caught off-guard. And Sans was just like Red. Nothing caught him unawares like that. So he was fine.

The sound of metal grinding against metal abruptly echoed through the streets, the piercing noise drowning out all other thought of teleportation, Sans, or any other concerns. It drew Red’s attention towards the remaining half of the apartment building. Its frame was wobbling precariously in the
wind and something large and metallic fell from it, cutting through the smoke that wafted through the air. And even though Red watched the object’s speedy descent, he still jumped from the resounding bang that carried through the air as it hit the ground.

Boss hooked his hands underneath Red’s arms and lifted him to his feet. “COME ON! WE NEED TO GET THE OTHER ME AND TELEPORT OUT OF HERE!”

“o-okay.” Red peered behind his brother and spotted Papyrus climbing over a large hunk of concrete that stood close to the remains of the embassy. He took a deep breath, swallowing down the thick lump in his throat, and ordered, “hold on tight.”

As soon as Boss had a firm grip, Red twisted through space, landing on the hood of a white car just in front of Papyrus.

“paps!” Red bellowed as he jumped down from the vehicle. “come on, we gotta go!” He moved to hold onto Papyrus, but before he could grab him, Papyrus skirted his grip by stepping to the side. Already Papyrus was beginning to climb a large piece of concrete that abutted the car.

“papyrus!”

“NO!” he shouted over his shoulder.

“PAPYRUS,” Boss said sternly as he clapsed Papyrus’s arm and pulled him down from the structure. “YOUR BROTHER TELEPORTED OUT OF HERE. WE NEED TO LEAVE! LOOK AT WHERE YOU ARE! IT IS NOT SAFE!”

“I DO NOT CARE!” Papyrus yelled, squirming out of Boss’s grip. “I REFUSE TO LEAVE UNTIL I AT LEAST SEE HIM!”

“come on, be reasonable! if sans got outta here, then there’s no way he’s coming back! it’s too dangerous here! and if he didn’t make it outta here, then –”

Red’s voice died in his throat. He shook himself, angry that the thought had even crossed his mind.

“just… come on! let’s at least step away from these buildings.” He looked at the half-tower, which seemed ready to collapse at any moment. “this is seriously dangerous!”

And now that he was closer to the remains of the embassy, he could taste something in the air. There was the smoke, of course. But mixed inside it was something that tasted thick and bitter. It weighed heavily in his mouth, and every time he breathed his vision sputtered for a moment.

But Papyrus either didn’t notice or didn’t care. His mouth was already open, ready to argue with him. But before he could say anything, an abrupt high-pitched shout sounded through the area, startling the three of them.

“HELP!”

Red twisted his head, unsure where the noise had come from. But Papyrus took off, climbing onto the hood of the car. With a heavy sigh, Red readied himself to teleport after him, but stopped himself when Papyrus remained standing on the car instead of running off like he expected.

“THERE!” Papyrus yelled as he pointed to their right.

Red followed the finger and saw a human lying flat on her face about five meters away. There was a loud thud as Papyrus jumped off the car, a resolute expression on his face. As he rushed to the
human, Red raised a questioning brow at Boss. After his brother’s nod of assent, Red grabbed
Boss and took a shortcut to the human just as Papyrus approached.

“Oh thank god!” the human cried as she gave a jerky nod towards her lower half. “Please, you’ve
got to help me!”

Red’s stared from her tear-streaked face to her legs and it instantly became apparent why she
needed help. A long metal pole jutted from her left calf, piercing through her thick black slacks and
poking clean through to the other side. There was surprisingly only a small smear of blood along
the puncture points, far less than Red had expected for an injury of this caliber. After all, Alphys
had bled so much from seemingly so little. But that didn’t mean the injury appeared any less
painful.

“holy fucking shit,” Red swore under his breath.

Papyrus’s eyes flitted between the woman’s face and her leg, his expression horrified. “ARE YOU
OKAY?!”

“No!” the human choked out. She tried desperately to raise herself to one knee, but gasped and fell
to the ground as she jostled her injured leg. Red’s chest heaved with terror as he ran over and held
her down, making sure she wouldn’t try again. As he maneuvered her to a more comfortable
position, Boss marched over to the human, appearing calm and collected as he bent down to
inspect the pole.

“SHOULD WE TRY TO PULL IT OUT?” he asked matter-of-factly.

“N-NO!” Papyrus squeaked out. When Boss threw him a questioning glance, he explained,
“DIDN’T YOU HAVE TRAINING WITH THE GUARD? THEY TOLD US TO NEVER TRY
to treat an injury we do not fully understand! We are supposed to
contact a doctor!”

“DO YOU REALLY THINK A DOCTOR IS GOING TO COME OUT HERE?” Boss asked,
motioning to the flaming wreckage.

“w-we’ll teleport her, b-boss.” He swallowed nervously. “i know the hospital will take her if we
get her there.”

His brother gawked at him a few seconds before he said, “I FORGOT THAT YOU HAD
HOSPITALS HERE.” He nodded at Red. “TAKE HER THEN. BUT COME RIGHT BACK.” He
peered towards the swaying apartments, worry spread throughout his face. “WE NEED TO
LEAVE.”

Red grasped onto the woman’s arm and quickly transported her to the hospital. As soon as he
materialized, the smell of antiseptic smacked him in face, permeating his skull and making him
dizzy. The emergency room was already in a state of pandemonium. Doctors were rushing around,
pushing occupied gurneys in and out of the room. Monsters with missing limbs and gaping injuries
were being carried in through the automatic doors by guardsmen and civilians alike. Someone was
screaming orders, their sonorous voice booming against the sleek floors, commanding the attention
of most of the staff members. With all the chaos it took some time to get a nurse’s attention, but
when he finally managed it, a group of physicians converged on the two of them. Their voices
jumbled together as they frantically buzzed around them.

As soon as the woman was hurried out of the room, Red returned to the clearing near the white car.
Upon arrival, a rush of smoke-laden air assaulted him, causing him to choke and splutter. There
was no mistaking it now. He could detect the sharp, bitter taste of someone’s magic mingled with the fumes.

His chest tightening with queasy dread, he turned to where he had left Boss and Papyrus to tell them of his discovery, but they were nowhere to be found. His soul pulsed with terror as he twisted his head every which way, trying to find them. The clearing was empty. There were no signs of them. Anywhere.

Just as the panic in his chest was approaching a point of no return, he heard Papyrus – or perhaps it was Boss, it was hard to tell without seeing their faces – give a wordless shout. The voice, which was rife with fury, echoed through the clearing, audible even over the raging fire. Red scurried onto the top of the white car, desperate to find the source of the noise.

As he scanned the area, he realized just how much dust covered the stretch. His mind had a hard time grappling with it. How much of the ash was from the fire and how much of it was dust from dead monsters? It was impossible to tell, and he couldn’t stand to think about it for too long. The thought sickened him.

He also noted that there were now several monsters traversing the wreckage. They were shouting something, though their voices were muted by the sound of the roaring fire. Many of them wore makeshift masks over their faces, though it was clear that it wasn’t all that effect. For the short amount of time that he watched, at least two monsters fell to the ground in coughing fits.

It didn’t take long to spot Boss and Papyrus; their bright and colorful clothes stuck out like a sore thumb amidst the sea of black and grey rubble. They were about fifty meters away, standing next to a gargantuan metal beam that stretched across the road and crushed several cars with its hefty weight. Boss was making wide motions with his arms, pointing towards a large slab of concrete to their immediate right. Papyrus stamped his feet, and appeared to be shouting something. Clearly whatever they were talking about was commanding all of their energy. With a sigh mixed with relief and irritation, Red teleported to the other two.

“– AND I AM TELLING YOU THAT WE SHOULD JUST LIFT THE THING!” Boss bellowed.

“SHE COULD HAVE A SPINAL INJURY!” Papyrus retorted.

“SHE’S GOING TO HAVE TO DEAL WITH MORE THAN A SPINAL INJURY IF WE DON’T GET HER OUT OF HERE!”

“guys?”

The other two jolted at the sound of his voice.

“RED! OH THANK GOODNESS!”

Red sighed. “why the hell did you two move? we’re supposed to be getting the fuck out of here!”

Boss replied, his voice filled with frustration, “THERE WAS A SCREAM AND CREAM PUFF OVER HERE –”

“HEY!”

“– DECIDED TO TAKE OFF WITHOUT EVEN CONSULTING WITH ME. THEN WE FOUND HER,” he said, nodding to his right.

Red eyed the large slab of concrete to the right. It had obviously come off from one of the nearby
buildings, it was impossible to distinguish exactly which. A large, gaping crack split the material down the middle, causing the concrete to slope down on either side into a low-hanging tent-like formation. Although there was a shaded opening into the structure, other bits of debris surrounded it, pouring inside and blocking anyone but the smallest of monsters from entering.

Boss continued, “AND NOW HE REFUSES TO HELP THE POOR GIRL!”

“THERE IS NO WAY I AM REFUSING TO HELP HER,” Papyrus huffed. “WE JUST CANNOT PULL HER OUT ALL WILLY-NILLY AS YOU SEEM TO BE SUGGESTING.”

Red bent down and knelt between the two of them, moving aside some of the rocks that buried the entrance before peeking his head into the dark enclosure. The ceiling hung so low there was hardly enough room for him to crawl inside, though he could if he had to. But just sticking his skull inside induced a feeling of claustrophobia the likes he had never felt before.

“BE CAREFUL!” Papyrus warned.

Red sighed, continuing to peer into the thick darkness. “are you sure there’s anyone –?”

“I’m like here! Please don’t leave us!” cried a high-pitched voice. Red turned to his right and saw two slitted, yellow eyes shining in the darkness. As he shifted his head, he allowed sunlight to pour into the cramped space, illuminating the person trapped inside. What he saw sent him flying backwards, his chest heaving with unrestrained panic.

“What is it?” Boss asked. “IS SHE WORSE OFF THAN BEFORE?”

Red was having a hard time thinking. It was impossible. She couldn’t be here. She was dead. Gone forever. It was all his fault. He had accepted that.

“If so, we should definitely get someone else! Right, Red?” Papyrus demanded.

When Red didn’t answer, his brother stepped forward and asked, “Are you okay?”

Red gripped at the rubble beneath his hands, concentrating on the way the grit rubbed against his fingers, trying to hold onto something tangible. He couldn’t lose himself here. Not when he didn’t even have Sans to snap him out of it.

But it was her. Anyone but her. Please.

“Red?”

“Please! Don’t leave us!” the cat monster called out from inside the structure, her voice wobbling in her throat. “Help us!”

The desperation in her voice was such a stark difference from the absolute hopelessness that usually played over and over in his head. It shocked him to his very soul. He scrambled forward, his eyes focusing on the familiar cat monster that had plagued his memories for so long.

It was definitely her. There was no denying it. Her short fur was dusted with grey ash, making it impossible to distinguish the original color of her hair. Blood was pouring from her head, combining with the coat of dirty grime into thick, gloppy mats of fur. Tears were streaming freely down her face, cutting through the ash that covered her, and she looked at him desperately for help. As he allowed sunlight to pour across her body, he could see that the concrete was pinioning her arm down to the ground. There was no way she could get out without them lifting the structure
somehow.

Not that she wasn’t trying. She kept squirming, pulling at her pinned limb. The movement was obviously hurting her, to say the least; she kept letting out sharp yelps of pain.

“s-stop!” Red commanded. “we gotta get you outta here and you’ll wreck your arm if you keep moving it like that.”

“Please, you totally need to help us! Don’t just leave us!”

“us?”

“My friend is, like, back there!” She tried nod her head to motion a point behind her, but the movement jostled her wounded shoulder and left her gasping. “She was just talking right before you showed up. But now she won’t respond to me! Like, Bratty, come on!”

Red arched his head as high as he could. His skull collided with the roof, sending bits of crumbling dust onto his face. There were no signs of anyone behind the cat monster, but it was honestly too hard to tell for sure. The sunlight didn’t reach that far and he couldn’t extend his skull high enough to get a good view.

“RED?”

He lowered his head and murmured, “okay, we’ll get you both out. don’t move, okay?”

As soon as she agreed, Red maneuvered his head out of the enclosure and peered up at the other two skeletons.

“you guys think you can lift this?”

Papyrus shot him an offended look. “WE SHOULD NOT DO THAT! IT IS NOT SAFE! AND IT WOULD BE BETTER TO –”


“I REALLY DO NOT THINK WE SHOULD BE –”

“listen, all i need is for you two to lift it long enough so that i can teleport her out. it won’t take long.”

“But –”

“we’re saving her,” he stated, his tone offering no room for negotiation. “and whoever else is back there too just as soon as i get back.”

There was no way he wouldn’t save her. This was his second chance. He needed to make up for all of the things he hadn’t been able to do. Maybe then he’d get it all out of his head. The image of her throwing herself over the edge of the Last Fall. The words spoken like a throbbing heartbeat – I’m so lonely, I’m so lonely, I’m so lonely. The nightmares that plagued his sleep. If he could save her, maybe he could put the Last Fall behind him once and for all.

Boss bent down and gripped underneath the side of the concrete. “ARE YOU GOING TO HELP OR NOT?” he asked, glaring at Papyrus.

Papyrus cast a nervous glance towards Red. “ARE YOU SURE YOU CAN GET HER OUT WITHOUT HARMING HER?”
“like i said, as long as you can lift this damn thing, we’re golden.”

Papyrus took a deep breath and nodded before moving towards the other end of the broken structure. “JUST LET US KNOW WHEN TO LIFT.”

“Alright, gimme a sec!”

Red withdrew his head back into the shadow of the concrete. “okay, we’re gonna get you outta here.” He wrapped his hand around the cat monster’s right arm. “you just can’t let go of me. otherwise we can’t teleport outta here.”

“You, like, promise to come back for Bratty, right?” Her tear-filled eyes boring into his. “Please, please, I can’t be all alone. You’ve got to get her too!”

“Don’t worry about it,” he said, nodding. “We’ll get her. Promise.”

She let out a tired but relieved sigh. “Okay then.”

Red swallowed and yelled out, “Okay, lift!”

The other two grunted as the slab began to slowly creep off the ground. Crumbling flakes of debris fell from the roof, dusting Red and the cat monster’s faces with chalky bits of cement. Red trained his eyes onto the edges of the enclosure, waiting for the moment that the others elevated the structure far enough from the ground that he could transport the two of them out of the way.

But as light poured between the cracks and onto the wound, he couldn’t stop himself from gasping at the grisly sight before him. Her arm – if it could even properly be called an arm at this point – was a mangled mess of blood, splintered bone, and bits of torn flesh. He wanted nothing more than to tear his eyes away, to look anywhere but at the decimated limb, but he needed to watch so that he could teleport once they were in the clear. To his horror, as the structure continue to lift several inches off the ground, bits of bloody fur and flesh, which had gotten stuck to the deep cracks in the cracked concrete, plopped onto the ground below. Her high-pitched screams were echoing through the tight space, vibrating against his skull, giving him an aching headache that he had to ignore.

Every second dragged on for an eternity, stretching on like an endless nightmare, as the structure inched upwards bit by bit. Through it all he held her uninjured arm with an ironclad grip, choking back the bile that was climbing to his throat. The moment her body was clear of the structure, he wasted no time and took a fast shortcut to the hospital with a small pop. As soon as they appeared, her agonized shrieks echoed through the room, alerting every physician in the hospital of their presence. They pounced upon her immediately, placing her on a gurney as a team checked her vitals.

When they began to push her out of the room, Red prepared to teleport away. But before he could, she made eye contact with him and screamed, “Don’t forget her! She’s back there! You have to save her too! You promised!”

They rounded a corner, disappearing from his sight, leaving him shivering in their wake. After taking a deep breath to steady himself, he returned to the site. Boss and Papyrus were sprawled on the ground, gasping and panting wildly, recovering from their exertions. Red ignored them, diving back into the dark enclosure immediately. His eyes darted around the tiny space, watching for any sign of the other monster as he crawled forward. But the darkness was simply too thick for him to see anything in the area that the cat monster had indicated.

“Hey, i’m coming back here to help you! Can you lemme know that you’re back here or something?”
He waited for a sign – anything at all – that there was someone back there, but was only met with dense silence. His soul beat violently in his chest as he grazed his hands along the floor blindly, sweeping against the chalky dust that coated the floor. He let out a litany of curses when his skull hit the back of the structure. It wasn’t enough to hurt, but reaching the wall meant that there was no one here. Had the cat monster been mistaken? She had seemed so convinced that her friend had been back here, waiting for rescue. But, then again, she probably had been delirious from her injury.

Still, the expression on her face. The desperation in her voice. The driving need to do whatever he could for this monster that had affected him so much. He couldn’t just leave her friend here.

He hit himself on the skull, swearing to himself. Wow, could he be any more of an idiot? He had a fucking light! With shaky hands, he fumbled for his cell phone, his fingers snagging on the inside of his pocket as he struggled to remove the device. Even when he was finally able to turn on the phone, the light was too dim to see farther than a few inches in front of him.

And all he could see was that chalky dust from the concrete. It coated the floor, the walls, and even his clothes. There was no one here but him. Completely empty.

He sighed heavily, sending a poof of air over the surface, kicking up dust in every direction. As he inhaled, he choked on the grit, the fine granules sticking to his throat as he coughed and spluttered. More dust flew through the air, obscuring his vision, and he was forced to bring the neck of his hoodie over his face as his coughing fit continued.

“RED? ARE YOU OKAY?”

“fine! i just got some dust –” He gasped sharply as he realized what he was saying. The dust. It wasn’t all white like the concrete. He shone his light over the floor. There was a layer of darker, heavier-looking dust to his immediate right. It wasn’t from the debris.

“dammit.” He clenched his eyes shut, his chest bursting with pain. “fucking hell!”

This wasn’t fair. It just wasn’t fucking fair! Of all the monsters to have died, why this one? Now the cat monster… she was going to be alone. That voice played in his head again. I’m so lonely. I’m so lonely. I’m so lonely. That fucking stupid echo flower just wouldn’t shut up!

“BROTHER? DO YOU NEED US TO LIFT THIS AGAIN?”

He took a deep breath. “no! i’m just… give me a sec, okay?”

Swallowing past the lump in his throat, he crawled towards the dust and began to scoop it into his hoodie pockets. He had made a promise to the cat monster to get her friend, and if that meant carrying her dust, then that was what he was going to do. At least… at least she’d get a proper burial.

I’m so lonely. I’m so lonely. I’m so lonely.

By the time he got to the hospital and handed the remains over to a nurse, the gravity of his absolute failure had sunk into every inch of his being. His soul felt like it was going to burst from the weight of it all. But he couldn’t stop. He had to keep going. Boss and Papyrus were waiting. They needed to go home. To see Sans. He was waiting for them, after all. And when Red saw him, he was going to hug the fuck out of him. He needed to let him know how much he loved him. How much he meant to him.

But when he appeared back to the site, Boss and Papyrus had moved on to another area to rescue another person. And then there was another monster, shouting from somewhere nearby. And
Red couldn’t leave them. Not when he had the ability to save them. He dug out their bodies from the rubble, teleported them to the hospital, and moved on to the next. Again and again.

At some point the remaining half of the building toppled to the ground, sending a wave of thick smoke through the city, cloaking them in heavy ash. He tried to block out the bone-rattling screams of pain and horror. But it was impossible to avoid it when you were staring it all right in the face.

He lost count of how many people he dug out of the remains of the city, of how many times he returned to the hospital, of how many monsters turned to dust before his eyes. Before he knew it, night fell over the city. And yet they still continued; the blazing fires were lighting up the district, allowing them all to rummage through the debris to find more survivors. Even as firefighters finally got the flames under control, the Royal Guard ensured that they could work longer by putting up blindingly bright spotlights to shine over the wreckage.

As the hours went by, Red’s bones began to tremble with fatigue. How long had he been awake? He knew that after spending so many hours waiting for Sans to come home last night, his body needed more sleep. But he pushed through it, his chest taut with restrained emotion as he continued to push through the rubble. He couldn’t stop. There were too many to save and the other two skeletons kept rushing off to save even more. Besides, a little bit of sleepiness was nothing. He could do this. He could do it. He could.

There was no wondering why, after so many hours of helping everyone, he grew careless and distracted. As the early morning sun lit up the sky, he tripped over a loose bit of metal, his head slamming into the pavement with a loud crack. For a few moments all he could do was lie there, his skull throbbing as he soaked in the stupidity of the situation. Even when Papyrus and Boss turned him over and asked him if he was okay, he could only nod and blink at them dazedly. As he stared at the two of them, he could see the utter exhaustion spelled throughout their features. Their shoulders sagged, dark shadows underlined their eyes, and their bodies seemed just as shaky as his own.

So when they asked him if he needed a doctor, he nodded and allowed them to pick him up from the ground. They were all too tired to keep going, and if this got them out of this hellhole, then that was all the better. Besides, his head really didn’t feel all too well. His forehead throbbed and he felt his vision flickering along the edges. So while Papyrus held Red close to his chest, running through the wreckage, he found himself drifting off, unable to keep his eyes open.

Only when he was set down on a stretcher did he snap out of his stupor. He lifted himself up onto his elbows, twisting his head around to take in his surroundings. It was pointless; his vision was still swimming and it wasn’t long before a large, furred hand pushed him back down to the bed. He blinked and saw Toriel’s blurry face hovering above him, an expression of concern spelled across her features.

“Do not – ” She turned to the side and hacked loudly before returning her gaze to Red. “ – get up. I need to – ” She coughed a few more times. “— heal your skull.”

He let out a sharp cry as her fingers pressed into his forehead, dragging into the unseen crack that must have formed where his head hit the ground. A bright green wisp of light flowed from her hand and the ache washed away, replaced with the soothing tickle that only healing magic could offer. He melted into the touch, letting out a throaty groan as the magic worked its way through his skull.

As the pain receded, he realized that he was in some sort of tent. Boxes of medical supplies and packets of high-energy food products sat against the white tarp that surrounded them. To his right
stood Papyrus and Boss, their arms folded against their chests. Their faces were etched with a mixture of worry and utter exhaustion.

“Put them over there!” bellowed a familiar female voice from just outside the tent. “And don’t even think about going out there, you two! You’re off duty now! Captain’s orders!”

The tent opened up, spilling blindingly bright sunlight onto Red’s face for a moment as a tall figure entered the room. When his eyes finally adjusted he saw Undyne standing there. To say she appeared disheveled would be an understatement. Her clothes were muddied with dust, blood, and dirt, and her eyepatch was off-center, revealing a patch of scarred blue flesh where her left eye should be. She had none of her usual boisterous energy to her; a deep sadness marred her face and the way her shoulders hunched in defeat was in stark contrast to her usual demeanor.

“Oh thank the stars the three of you are okay!” Undyne cried, rushing towards Papyrus, her face drawn with concern. “I have been so worried about all of you!”

But as she approached, Papyrus shied away, his face scrunched. “Undyne, have you seen him?”

She faltered in her step, stopping at the foot of the stretcher as she gawked at him, nonplussed. “Huh?”

“SANS!” Papyrus sobbed out as he hugged his own chest. “HAVE YOU SEEN HIM?!”

The tent went eerily quiet for a moment. He could only hear the sound of others shouting and running outside the tent. No one moved.

That was until Toriel pressed her fingers harshly into Red’s skull.

“ow!” Red cried as the pain ripped through his head again.

Toriel inhaled sharply, triggering a prolonged coughing fit. “Sorry!” she croaked out between her wheezing and gasping.

“I HAVE ALREADY DISCUSSED THIS, PAPYRUS,” Boss said sternly. “SANS IS FINE. HE CAN TELEPORT. AND AS MUCH AS IT PAINS ME TO ADMIT IT, HE IS A HIGHLY CAPABLE MONSTER.”

Papyrus shot Boss a look of incredulity, but didn’t say anything else, choosing instead to cast his eyes downward. An awkward silence fell over the group, broken only by Toriel’s periodic whooping cough. But as Red watched Undyne hover uncertainly by the other two skeletons, it became clear that she wanted to talk to them about something. And he was pretty sure he knew what that “something” was.

Since Papyrus seemed to be too preoccupied to ask, Red prompted, “how is… um… everything, undyne?”

She visibly flinched, and for a brief moment her face contorted with agony. But when he blinked her face was back to being emotionless, albeit marked with exhaustion.

“I am not allowed to speak about the ongoing investigation into the explosion,” she said gruffly.

So it had been an explosion after all. Red had suspected as much, but no one had confirmed a damn thing the whole day. Though that hadn’t been what he was asking about as she very well knew.

“Undyne…” Papyrus whispered, surveying her with tear-filled eye sockets.
Undyne glanced away from him, her jaw set with restrained emotion. “You all should go home.” She nodded towards Toriel. “You’re finished up here, right?”

Toriel removed her hand from Red’s skull and inclined her head towards Undyne. “Yes, and I agree, you all should go home. You three look like you’ve been out there all night.”

“BUT WHAT ABOUT SANS? HE IS STILL MISSING!”

“you’ll call us if you get word about anything, right? i mean… we’re still okay for that, right?” He shot a pointed look at Undyne, trying to ask so much more than he could verbalize. Did she believe the humans? Was Sans a suspect for murdering Alphys in Undyne’s eye?

She stared into his eyes for a few moments, completely silent, before giving him a curt nod. “Of course. And… don’t worry about that.” She cleared her throat. “I know it wasn’t him. Sans would never… never do that to… Alphys.”

As she spoke Alphys’s name, she broke down into a weeping mess. A lance of regret shot through Red’s soul as he watched her crouch in on herself, her body quivering. And when he saw Papyrus move out of the corner of his eye, he fully expected Papyrus to rush over and hug her. But instead Papyrus buried his face in his hands and began to cry as well.

Panic gripped at Red’s soul. Something about seeing Papyrus break down always seemed to get to him in a way that nothing else did. He pushed his anxiety down, driving past the fatigue in his bones as he climbed out of the bed. As soon as he reached the other side of the tent, he wrapped his arms around Papyrus in a gargantuan, tight hug. Neither of them said a word. He just allowed Papyrus to bawl against his shoulder, small tremors rocking both of their bodies. At some point he heard Toriel get up and give Undyne a comforting hug, and soon she was crying as well, their soft sobs adding to the clamor in the tent. Only Boss was left alone, and when Red glanced his way, he appeared more weary than emotional.

And oh god, could he relate. Exhaustion had long ago settled into his bones, making it hard to even just stand there, and with Papyrus’s weight on his shoulders, he could hardly even handle thinking.

“come on, guys. let’s go home.” He patted Papyrus’s back softly. “sans will be there. he must be worried sick about us.”

Boss immediately rushed over to him, squeezing his shoulder tightly before giving him a curt nod. When Red glanced towards Papyrus to ask whether he was ready, Papyrus merely pressed harder into his shoulder.

He looked to Undyne, who was still crying in Toriel’s arms. “promise you’ll message if something comes up, alright?”

“Yeah,” Undyne croaked out. “Of course.”

With a small pop, Red teleported the three of them to the living room. Upon arriving, Papyrus seemed to acquire a newfound burst of energy; he flung himself away from Red’s arms, shouting Sans’s name as he tore through the house. As he ran up the stairs, Boss ambled over to the couch and collapsed on it, sinking all his weight into the cushion. And although Red knew he should be helping Papyrus search for Sans, and even though he hadn’t had a bite of food over the last 48 hours, his aching exhaustion was just too much. He joined his brother on the couch, melting into the comfort that it offered. Papyrus disappeared into the spare bedroom as Red let out a loud sigh, the last vestiges of his energy draining away.
As his eyelids began to slowly close, he was startled awake when he heard soft sniffling to his left. When he turned, he was shocked to find his brother crying gently beside him.

“boss?” Red asked gently.

His brother shook his head. “Sorry,” he whispered. “It is just… that was… it was like…” He let out a huff of air. “It was like when everything fell apart back home, Sans. I cannot… do this again.” He choked on a sob, his bones rattling as he shook.

Red wrapped an arm around Boss and pulled his head to his shoulder, stroking comfortingly along his brother’s back as he cried. He hoped it was enough for him; he was too tired, too stressed, too panicked to do much else. And he knew if he focused on the events of today, he might just break. All the blood, all the deaths, everything. He needed to shut it out.

And he couldn’t think about the fact that he didn’t know where Sans was.

But Papyrus still hadn’t come out of the spare room. Maybe Sans had been up there, waiting for them to return. Honestly, he wouldn’t be surprised. After all, he had probably been waiting for them all day, worried sick. It had been stupid to leave him hanging like that, but… he’d understand… Maybe he had even… been helping out… and they hadn’t crossed paths…

Sans was fine… they were all fine…

Red didn’t know exactly when he had drifted off, but the next time he opened his eyes, the room was dim, the sunlight long gone. It took him a moment to figure out where he was, he hardly recognized the blank walls. But when he spotted the toppled-over television and the broken vase of flowers, he realized he must have fallen asleep on the couch once again.

Boss was also awake… or at least just waking up; he was pushing himself off Red’s shoulder, rubbing the tiredness from his eyes.

“W-WHAT TIME IS IT?”

As Red started to pull out his phone, Papyrus’s booming voice called out in the dark, “IT IS PRECISELY 11:02 PM!”

Red’s eyes flicked towards the stairs and immediately realized what had woken him up. Papyrus was running up the loudly squeaking stairs, staring at his phone. Once he reached the second floor, he would pause for a few seconds to gaze intently into his phone screen, and then would quickly rush back down, repeating the process at the bottom.

“paps, what’s going on?”

“I AM TRYING TO WATCH THE NEWS,” Papyrus yelled out as he bounded up the staircase. “THERE IS STILL NO WORD ABOUT SANS YET.”

It took Red a few moments to grasp what Papyrus had said, and when he did, a penetrating chill shot up his spine. “wait, he’s not here?”

“No,” Papyrus replied curtly.

Red brought a quaking hand to his sternum and pressed hard, trying to dispel the panic that was blossoming in his soul. Sans was fine. He had probably teleported somewhere else, humans in tow. Out of sight, not wanting to show himself to the world. Just like when he had gone to the Underground just the other day.
With shaking hands, Red fished his phone from his pockets. He wiped off the layer of dark dust that coated it – god, he’d never be able to remove it all, would he? – and loaded up a news stream from a human-run website.

A grim-faced reporter was standing in front of the crumbling ruins of the downtown region, discussing the extent of the damage.

“– know where. And just as with our capital, the explosion here at Very New Home seems to have been targeting areas with large concentrations of monsters.”

The footage split in two to show two images – the downtown ruins on the left and an unfamiliar, decimated building on the right labeled with a red banner that said “Monster District Bombed.” At the bottom of the screen was a large headline that read “Coordinated Attacks at Both Capitals – Sans the Skeleton at Fault?”

Red stared uncomprehendingly for a few moments, hot rage seeping into every inch of his being. So there had been multiple attacks. They had targeted monsters.

And they were blaming Sans for this?

He took a deep breath, fiercely tightening the grip around his phone.

The footage switched to a view of three humans. A blonde, rosy-nosed man on the left, a serious-looking white-haired man in the center, and a red-haired woman on the right.

The man in the middle spoke first. “Officials are not releasing any information on whether they still suspect the skeleton known as ‘Sans’ of the attack. And after the key witness in the murder case came forward and said they had the wrong skeleton, is there some reason why they wouldn’t eliminate him as a suspect for this terrorist attack? You’re up first, Bob.”

The human on the far left responded, his voice full of passionate anger, “Well, I’ll tell you why: This monster was clearly involved in the attack. Even if the witness is claiming that it was another skeleton that murdered the officer, that doesn’t mean that this Sans character was not involved in these attacks. I think we all know the government needs good reason to include him as a suspect.”

The woman on the far right butted in, “Excuse me, but there’s no way to tell why they have refused to dismiss him as a suspect, and as we know, the government has held people on suspicion for unwarranted charges on multiple occasions.”

“So you’re suggesting that they have no reason to hold him? Sorry, but he’s a dangerous monster that doesn’t deserve that sort of –”

“And speaking of monsters,” the woman interrupted, running over his sentence so that he couldn’t be heard. “I seriously doubt that this skeleton – or any monster for that matter – is behind this attack. Tell me, why would they go after their own kind? It makes no sense!”

“Listen,” the other human responded. “All known terrorist groups have disavowed any involvement with these attacks, and it is a known fact that magic was used at both explosion sites. That means it was a monster, and I’ll bet my bottom dollar that this Sans guy was involved. The government had him labeled a shady person – no, excuse me, monster – for a while.”

“I’m sorry, but we know next to nothing about him!”

“No, no, there is all sorts of information about him out there on the internet. Apparently he’s been sleeping with his own cousin and posting video pornography of these acts on the internet. I’m
sorry, but the guy is a grade A weirdo at best, and a maniacal mass murderer at worst. Excuse me if I think we don’t owe him the benefit of the doubt.”

The other human opened her mouth to respond, but Red couldn’t watch for another second. He practically threw the phone at his brother, refusing to be anywhere near it. His soul felt ready to burst from all the emotions he felt right now.

He sighed, pushing all of his doubts and feelings down. Sans was okay and they’d clear his name. He just had to show up. That was all it would take. Red knew this with absolute certainty.

So why was his soul fluttering so violently?

Unable to handle sitting a moment longer, he rushed to his feet. His vision swam for a second as dizziness swept through him. After he recovered from his spell, his soul roared with hunger. It had been far too long since he had last eaten.

“come on, guys. we should eat. y’know, get our energy back after the long day.”

“NO THANK YOU,” Papyrus responded shortly as he continued to march up and down the stairs. “I AM NOT HUNGRY.”

And when Red glanced towards his brother, it appeared as if he was too engrossed in the news story on the cell phone to hear a word that he had said. Sighing as he went, Red walked into the kitchen and prepared a helping of some old oatmeal he found in a cupboard. When he sat down at the table, he found that irritation nettled through his soul as he heard Papyrus continued to pace loudly up and down the stairs.

Didn’t he know Sans was fine? Why was Papyrus so worried when Sans probably just needed to lay low for a while? When Sans got back home, he was going to have a long talk with Papyrus about how ridiculous he was acting.

By the time he was finished eating, he was so pissed off by the whole situation that he left his bowl at the table, refusing to wash it. He knew Papyrus would yell at him later and he would be forced to clean the dish himself, but Red didn’t care. Papyrus was infuriating him so much! For now, let him clean them up! In fact, he was going to tell Papyrus where he could shove his newly-acquired pessimistic attitude right now.

He rushed out of the kitchen, his anger threatening to spill out as magical energy, but when he entered the living room, he saw that Papyrus was no longer pacing. Instead, he was sitting on the bottom stair, his phone lifted to his skill, an expression of pure horror on his face.

He glanced towards Boss, trying to wordlessly ask what was going on, but his brother was continuing to stare at the cell phone, eyes wide with shock.

“What is it?” Red asked, his eyes flitting between the two skeletons. “paps, who are you talking to?”

The phone spilled from Papyrus’s hand and crashed to the ground with a loud clunk. Papyrus was shuddering violently, his face scrunched up with barely-restrained emotion.

“w-what? who was that? what’s going o –?”

“He’s dead,” Papyrus whispered, staring emptily into the space in front of him.

Red blinked. “who is d–?”
“Sans. Dead.”

All the air seemed to leave Red’s chest. He felt like he was going to faint. “what? how do you know that?”

“Undyne,” he said, his voice emotionless. “She just called. She told me that’s what everyone is saying. The human government confirmed it.”

The anger from earlier returned full force, bursting in his chest like a roll of firecrackers. “and you just believe that?”

“Sans,” Boss said quietly from across the room, but Red refused to pay him any attention right now. This shit was serious and demanded his attention far more than his brother right now.

“papyrus, get a fucking grip. if you haven’t realized yet, those fucking humans don’t have a god damned clue what they’re doing. first they arrest sans for killing alphys of all people. then they say he’s a fucking terrorist. and now he’s dead? what next? is he a secret bodyguard for mettaton?”

Papyrus made a low, pained noise as he hugged himself tight, still refusing to make eye contact with Red.

“Sans,” Boss repeated a little louder this time.

“come on, stop acting like that!” Red shouted, once again ignoring his brother. “you know they couldn’t have found his dust there. the fires were everywhere. How the fuck would they even know?”

Papyrus was now burying his head in his forearms, deep sobs wracking his entire body. The sight enraged Red like nothing else.

“stop crying!” There was no keeping the desperation out of his voice now. He needed Papyrus to know how gullible and stupid he was being. “we’ll find him. hell, let’s go now! he’s probably helping at the explosion site! or he’s in the underground just like the other day! come on!”

He took a step forward, ready to grab Papyrus and teleport him. But before he could move any further, he was stopped by a rough tug on his arm.

“SANS!” Boss shouted, just inches from him.

“what?!” Red yelled as he whipped around, fury in his soul.

Boss had those same haunted eyes as before, and Red couldn’t quite place the look on his face. Fear? Hesitation? Concern? He was so distracted by his brother’s unusual expression that it took him a moment to realize he was holding up the cell phone. There was a video playing, its quality horribly grainy. In the center of the screen was Sans sitting in an oversized chair. At the bottom of the screen was a headline that read “Government Releases Video of Sans the Skeleton.”

Red took the phone into his hands, watching with intensity as the Sans on the screen struggled wildly against his bonds. He was in a small room, surrounded by maroon walls and mahogany floors. Fancy portraits of humans and monsters lined the backdrop, giving the room an opulent feel. There were pots of dying ferns in the two visible corners of the room.

There was no audio in the video, but it was obvious that Sans was screaming, pulling at the handcuffs that bound him to the chair in the room. His eye flashed with bright cyan magic, and Red could tell by the way his image seemed to stutter that he was trying to teleport away. But as he
distorted briefly, a bright white spark of electricity jumped from the metallic cuffs to Sans’s bones, causing him to jolt in his seat. Even though the shock clearly hurt him, Sans struggled to use his magic over and over, panic gripped his features more and more with every failed attempt.

And then, all of a sudden, Sans stopped. He tilted his head, casting an intensely inquisitive look towards something unseen. And for a moment, all the horror was gone from his face.

The next moment, the walls exploded inwards in a large fireball.

Red gasped, taken aback by how quickly the scene had changed. He couldn’t tear his eyes away as the footage faded to grey and white fuzz.

But the video wasn’t over. The last ten seconds of replayed. Slower this time. Enough to catch every detail. Sans staring at a point off-screen with curiosity. Then the walls caving in. And then… he could see it. Sans turning to dust as the fireball hit him. Then the feed cutting off.

It played over and over again.


Curiosity.

Fire.

Dust.

Dead.

Dead.

Dead.

Dead!

Dead!

DEAD!
DUST LUBE! BUY NOW! FOR THAT WEIRD GRITTY FEELING!

Chapter Notes

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulsex.tumblr.com. You can also find soul sex and Papby reblogs if that’s your thing.

FANART

- Thank you, Ganz, for drawing THE SANS DEATH VIDEO LIKE 2 HOURS AFTER I POSTED THE DAMN THING! WHAT THE HECK! You can see it here!
- For all your TLY Papcest needs, check out Muskka’s sketch here! 8D WOWIE!

NOTES

- Thanks for all of the people that have been visiting my stream! You guys are just awesome to talk to and make the best shitposts! 8D *fistbump*
- I stayed up waaay too late to type this up, bwaha
- Alternative chapter names: “Red Plays with Jars of Dust like Barbie Dolls”; "Dust in the Wind"; "ICH LESE!"; "Boss the Ham Ham"; "Undyne is in the Pie"

Affine! Where a = number of skeletons that were alive ten days ago, b = the sequential number of the missing letter

Additional tags for this chapter: Dealing with character death
(If I forgot anything, please let me know!)

KCNFN CPBTGF TAN TWW KLL QANIHDKTYWN. KCNJ ZLG’K FNN HK DLBLHGX. YPK FTGF ZHWW.

Red stared at the stars, transfixed. He had been examining them for some time, unable to tear his gaze away for longer than a brief moment.

His body was shaking; he was craving rest so badly. And even though the kingdom has shut down after the attack, leaving the three of them housebound for the last six days, he hadn’t slept a wink. How could he sleep? Even when he lay in bed, as he was now, his mind wouldn’t let him close his eyes for longer than a second.

All he could do was stare at the stars.

They weren’t real stars. He had neither the energy nor the inclination to even peek his head out the window to see those. No, he was looking at the glow-in-the-dark stars that littered the ceiling.

He had noticed them so long ago, when he had first arrived in this universe. But now that he had slowed to a complete and utter stop, he was fixated on them. They were so old, their glow long since faded to nearly nothing. Many of them had fallen, leaving only a glob of dried white putty behind.

He had never really paid much attention to their patterns before. In fact, he had assumed whoever had put them up there had placed them in no particular order. But now that he truly looked, he saw
that there were some shapes scattered here and there. He thought he recognized the haphazard outline of a skull, much like Boss’s old puzzles before he had become a Guard. Near the door was a femur-shaped pattern. A smiley face near the center of the room. A soul at the foot of the bed.

And to his right, just on the other side of the window, was a message.

“I LOVE YOU, SAN!”

The last “S” was missing. Papyrus must have run out of stars. Or maybe he had forgotten the letter. In either case, there was no mistaking the message.

Once he had seen it, he hadn’t been able to pull his eyes away.

Today was the funeral. Well, funeral was the wrong word. After all, there was no way to find the dust in the wreckage. With so many dead, and the remains of so many monsters never found, King Asgore had announced a public memorial to which everyone was invited. Papyrus had been so animated about it the last two days, his babbling seemed to never end. Red had gotten so fed up with it last night that he had gone to bed early.

He knew that he too should be looking forward to it. Or dreading it. Or crying over it. Or something. Anything.

But he felt nothing at all.

He continued to stare at the pattern on the ceiling, trying to focus his thoughts on anything but the funeral. Had Sans ever seen this message before? It was so out of the way, so difficult to see because of the light from the window. Maybe he had never gotten the chance.

And now he never would.

There was a soft knock at the door, startling Red from his thoughts. He tried to tell the visitor to come in, but his throat, raspy from disuse, allowed nothing more than a nearly inaudible groan to escape his mouth. It didn’t matter anyway; even when he seemingly didn’t answer the visitor, the door slowly creaked open, allowing Boss to squeeze inside the room. A sympathetic frown adorned his features as he ambled over to the side of the bed.

Red flicked his eyes back to the message on the ceiling, unwilling to look at his brother’s pity-filled face longer than he already had. There was no point. Red didn’t feel anything at all, so there was nothing to sympathize over.

“Did you even sleep at all?” Boss asked gently.

Red shook his head rapidly, the dizzying movement causing his vision to swim briefly. Boss sighed softly, and the bed dipped slightly as he sat down on it.

“You really needed to get some rest for today, brother.”

Red didn’t even have the energy to get irritated from his rebuke. It wasn’t like it mattered anyway. Arguing with his brother over something that he knew Boss was right about… well, that was pointless.

His brother’s weight shifted and he felt long arms wrap around him, gripping at his back. For a moment, his vision tilted as he was scooped upwards.

When his chin came to a rest on his brother’s shoulder, Boss murmured, “I’ve drawn a bath for
you.” His brother rubbed small circles into his back. “You need to look presentable if you are going out in public! Have you even cleaned yourself at all this week?”

Of course Red had, but he had done a poor job of it. All he had been able to do was rinse off the outer layer of dirt and ash from the explosion site. It had taken all his energy just to do that. He could still feel so much clinging to his bones.

Boss knew all this, he was sure. Still, for once, he appreciated the lecturing. It reminded him of the early days of their relationship. Back when his brother had saved him from giving up on everything. He had shown him there was something worth living for. In truth, he really needed that now.

Not that he could ever really recover from this. But at least he still had his brother to look out for him. That thought was oddly comforting.

Boss set him down on the long-unused toilet and deftly removed the long, stained t-shirt that had served as both his pajamas and day clothes for the last six days. As soon as the dirty shirt was cast to the side, his brother picked him up and slowly lowered him into the bathtub. The warmth of the water seeped into his bones, and as his soul submerged beneath, the heat went even deeper. It was as if every bit of him was warm, going straight to his core.

To fall asleep would be so easy now, if he only let himself. But now that it was so late, and he was obliged to attend the funeral, sleep wasn’t an option. He didn’t think he’d ever wake up and he needed to be there. For Papyrus’s sake at the very least.

So even though he let himself melt into the bath, he fought the exhaustion that tugged at him. It became even harder as Boss began to massage his bones with a wet washcloth. With a firm hand, he scrubbed at his joints, digging out the black grime that had accumulated there over the last few days. Red groaned and slid down the wall, reveling in the comfort as small chunks were dislodged, plopping into the water below.

His bones felt so good as his brother cleaned them. It was the most pleasure he had experienced in a long time. But what felt truly amazing was the way Boss was taking control. He didn’t want to think, to move, to do anything. So as his brother attacked every part of him with the cloth, Red let his limbs go limp, allowing Boss to do whatever he pleased.

As Boss flipped him onto his side to get at his thoracic vertebrae, his brother permeated the dense silence.

“So Papyrus and I went to the store last night to buy some groceries.”

Red didn’t reply, though he twisted his head slightly, casting Boss a questioning look. Although Red had hardly touched a crumb, they had been running dangerously low on food for the last few days. Just yesterday they had all agreed to go after the funeral, so he was surprised to hear that they had left the house without him.

“He just kept pacing the room,” Boss said, a touch of guilt in his voice. “I thought… that perhaps it would be a good distraction.”

Red finally found his voice. “how did you get past the reporters?”

Newscasters, both monster and human alike, from every nation imaginable, had been camped outside their home for the last few days. All of them wanted to ask questions about Sans. *How do you feel about the government’s mistaken arrest? Do you agree that the Royal Guard should have*
been the one to make the arrest? Why do you think the government refuses to release Sans’s death tape with the audio intact? Were you and Sans close?

All these questions and more were thrown his way when they had first knocked five days ago, pushing overlarge cameras in his face, bright lights piercing his eyes. After that, he had refused to answer the door, leaving it to Boss to scare them off. As far as he could tell, they hadn’t left after all this time.

“We climbed out Papyrus’s bedroom window,” his brother answered as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. “Although I think most of them had gone home by the time we had left.”

“when did you leave?”

“Not too long after you went upstairs. It took some time to convince him, but I think he really wanted to get out of the house.”

That was good. If he was excited to get out of the house, Papyrus was taking this much better than him. Though that much had already been made apparent. While Red had been moping about all week, unable to even make himself get up from the bed, or the couch, or wherever he sat, Papyrus was running around the house at full energy. Cleaning, exercising, pacing. Nothing seemed to be different for the skeleton. Honestly, he couldn’t believe how well Papyrus was taking it. Hell, one day Red had even heard him laughing at some stupid cat video on his phone.

Laughter was the last thing on Red’s mind.

“Anyway, when we got there, we saw tanks rolling into town. Lots of tanks. At least ten by my count.” Boss flipped him around again so that Red could see the worry in his eyes. “When I asked a passerby about it, they told me that the human government is trying to declare martial law over our territory.” He adopted a disgusted tone. “Can you believe this bullshit, Sans? They’re pretending like this is our fault!”

Red didn’t know what to say. Quite frankly, he didn’t give a fuck what the human government did. It was no concern of his.

“did you at least get some food?”

“What?” Boss blinked. “Yes, we did.”

“that’s good. paps and you were probably starved.”

His brother gawked at him, his brow arching. Red averted his gaze, unable to take the concern directed his way. As his brother finished up the scrubbing, he chose instead to stare at the facet, poring over every detail of the shiny metal. He just couldn’t handle Boss right now. Thinking about this was too much for him. Let him go back to his emotionless state.

Soon his brother was lifting him from the bath and setting him on his feet. Water dripped from his bones and onto the bath mat as Boss assaulted him with a bright blue towel. When he finished patting him dry, he wrapped the towel around Red’s hips, tying the ends in a loose knot.

“Okay,” Boss said decisively. “Now tell me what clothes you will be wearing today and I will grab them for you.”

Red shrugged halfheartedly. “i’m just gonna wear my regular old stuff.”

“Brother!” Boss exclaimed, clearly scandalized. “You cannot go to a funeral in clothes like that!”
“well, i’m not going in sans’s clothes, so unless you plan to go clothes shopping in the next hour, that’s what i’m wearing: my clothes.”

Boss went quiet at that, the worried look returning. Incapable of handling that expression for a moment longer, he walked into the hall, heading straight for the washing machine. Papyrus was already there, though he hadn’t seemed to notice Red; instead, he was staring down at something in his hands, failing to react to Red even as he stepped closer and closer.

“you got my clothes there, paps?”

Papyrus jumped and spun around, a touch of guilt on his sleep-deprived face. Red’s soul dropped as he spotted what the other skeleton was holding: Sans’s blue hoodie.

“No!” He squeezed and wrung the jacket between his hands. “Sorry, I am – ” He gulped. “I am trying to find the right coat to bring today. I do not know… if I should bring his oldest one or his newest one. Which do you think was his favorite?”

Red eyed him incredulously. “neither.”

“Really?” He gripped the hoodie more tightly. “You think somewhere in the middle then? Just to be safe?”

“paps, don’t be stupid,” he spat out. “you really think his favorite thing was his jacket?”

Papyrus clung the hoodie to his chest. “Then what was?”

“i don’t know. not that, obviously.”

“That is not obvious to me.” He peered down at the blue fabric sadly. “If you think he would have wanted something different, you should bring it. I am going to stick with this.” He brought the jacket to his face and inhaled deeply. “It smells like him.”

“that doesn’t make it his favorite.”

He knew he was being too harsh, but he hated the idea that they were going to bring such a clichéd item to the funeral. Everyone brought a piece of clothing. They could at least be original. Though the more he thought about it, he realized he couldn’t really think of an alternative.

It didn’t matter anyway. The whole funeral was fucking dumb. They weren’t even going to have any dust to spread on whatever damn thing they brought. This was all for show. And those fucking cameras were going to be recording every bit of it.

Fuck it all.

Papyrus was staring at him, most of his face blocked by the hoodie that he still held to his nasal cavity. Pushing down the unexpected anger that yanked at his soul, Red stomped forward, gently nudging Papyrus out of the way as he opened the dryer. As soon as he dug his clothes out, he dropped his towel to the ground and started to put them on.

“Brother!” Boss was standing in the doorway of the bathroom, his hands on his hips. “At least have the courtesy to change in your room!”

“why? you’ve both seen me naked.”

Even though he meant it as a joke, there was no joviality to his voice. And from the way Boss
seemed to deflate, he knew that it hadn’t been taken as a joke either. He supposed it wasn’t that funny anyway.

But stupid shit like this didn’t matter. He had no energy to deal with his brother’s bruised ego right now, so Boss would have to deal with it. Pressing down his bubbling guilt, he zipped up his jacket and avoided his brother’s gaze.

He glanced towards Papyrus who was still clutching at the blue hoodie like a lifeline, his wide eye sockets trained on Red. “so where is this shit happening anyway? if i can’t teleport us close enough, we might have one hell of a walk ahead of us.”

“I –” Papyrus swallowed as he extracted his phone from his pocket. “I think it is on the outskirts of town, but let me check the e-mail.”

“I am going to make breakfast.”

Red’s eyes shot towards his brother as he took a step down the staircase. “don’t even bother making anything for me. i’m not hungry.”

Boss paused on the step, flashing an exasperated expression his way. “Sans,” he said sternly. “You need to eat.”

“i ate last night.” A few bites anyway.

“You are going to need energy today.”

“i got plenty.”

“Do not be stubborn about this! At least try to eat!”

“why? i already know i’m not –”

He cut himself off as he heard loud rattling coming from his right. A lance of icy fear shot through his chest as he turned towards Papyrus. The lanky skeleton was standing there, hoodie pressed to his face, his bones shaking violently as he stared at his cell phone with shocked eyes.

“What?” Red whispered, trying his best to keep his own bones from shivering.

“What happened now?”

Papyrus lowered both the phone and the jacket, though he maintained his ironclad grip on the latter. “They cancelled the memorial.”

“What?”

“They… the Guard… received a bomb threat, so they cancelled it last night. I have not been checking my phone…”

“A bomb threat? Really?” Boss exclaimed as he marched towards them. “From whom exactly?”

“The e-mail did not say.”

For a moment, no one spoke. The only noise that could be heard were Papyrus’s clattering bones. Finally, Red said with a shrug, “well, whatever. this whole funeral bullshit was pointless anyway.”

Boss appeared taken aback by the statement. “How can you even say th –?”
His brother stopped mid-word as Papyrus rushed forward, his features contorted with repressed emotion.

As he reached the door to his bedroom, he called over his shoulder, “I am going to be in here. Sleeping. Do not bother me please.”

With that, he hurried in the bedroom, slamming the door behind him with a resounding bang. Whatever Papyrus claimed, he was clearly not going to sleep; Red could soon hear the sound of the creaking floorboards as he took up his recently-acquired habit of pacing. A surge of remorse rushed into Red’s soul, threatening to incapacitate him. He shook his head, shoving the unwelcome feeling back down.

Boss let out a huff of frustration. “Could you at least try to have a little more tact?” He paused a moment, the fury on his face dissipating again, and when he spoke again he adopted a softer tone. “I know you are in pain, but you should really – ”

“you know what? i’m tired of finding out all this important shit from undyne’s fucking e-mails.”

“What? Sans, what are you even talking about?”

Before his brother could make him explain, Red took a quick shortcut to the shed. He wasted no time in gathering the assortment of tools and hardware that were scattered across the wooden floors. As soon as he had placed the full set in a bright red toolbox, he teleported next to the broken television in the living room. His sudden appearance caused Boss, who was standing just feet away at the bottom of the stairs, to shout loudly.

“What THE HELL, SANS!”

Red ignored him, focusing on placing the toolbox on the floor and dragging the TV away from the wall.

Boss walked over to him. “What are you doing now?”

“What does it look like?”

“But why?”

“because i don’t wanna watch the news on my phone anymore. or, y’know, maybe i just wanna watch some trash t.v. instead. some mtt sounds real damn good right now.”

His brother sighed as he dropped to his knees next to Red. “Do you even know what you are doing?”

“not a clue.”

Sighing, Boss drew out another screwdriver from the box and wordlessly began to help him. Although Red didn’t particularly want his brother’s help, his presence was surprisingly soothing. They popped open the back of the television, exposing the wires and other mechanisms. It was shockingly dusty inside, and for a second Red’s soul tightened in his chest as he was reminded of the ash and dust from the explosion site.

He shook his head, trying to clear his mind of the memory. It was stupid. There was dust all over the place. He couldn’t be nervous over something as dumb as that.

As he hauled the TV closer to him for a better look, there was a loud knock at the front door. Boss
grumbled under his breath, his hands gripping his knees as he glanced towards the entrance. Ignoring the interruption, Red continued to inspect the electronic innards of the set, but was cut short when a second, more insistent knock rang through the room.

“OH FOR FUCK’S SAKE!” Boss cried as he rushed to the door. “I SWEAR, IF THESE JACKASSES DO NOT STOP BOTHERING US, I AM GOING TO FLING A BONE OR TWO THEIR WAY!”

Red sighed, flitting his eyes towards the toolbox to search for a pair of pliers. Even though he wasn’t looking, he knew the exact moment when Boss opened the door; the journalists’ probing questions resounded through the house and the bright flashing of their cameras reflected in the window. Usually when they dared to knock persistently like this, Boss would scream some warning at them and slam the door shut in their faces. The tactic would earn them at least a few hours of peace.

So it came as a surprise when he heard his brother coolly ask, “WHAT DO YOU WANT?”

Red couldn’t see who Boss was referring to; his figure blocked the doorway.

A gruff male voice replied, “We were wondering if the skeleton known as Red was here.”

“WHY? HAVE YOU COME TO ARREST HIM TOO?” There was a sharp edge to Boss’s voice and there was no mistaking the unspoken threat that lingered in the air.

Red’s soul pounded as he heard his brother’s words. If those humans tried to arrest him like they had Sans, he didn’t know what he’d do. God, he didn’t think he could go quietly.

“No, no,” came another voice, female this time. “We just have some questions for him. No arresting. May we come in? These questions are rather… sensitive.”

Boss clenched his fists. “Fine. But any funny business and you are out of here.”

He moved out of the way to reveal a tall light brown rabbit monster and a short, petite male human with an angled chin.

“I’m Guardsman Tally and this is Officer Marles. We’re not here to cause any trouble.” She shot a judging expression at the human. “Are we?”

“No,” the man replied shortly, avoiding her gaze. He glanced towards Red, and as they made eye contact, his brow furrowed ever so slightly. “Are you Red then?”

Red averted his eyes, his soul racing at the sight of the uniformed officer. “yes.”

“Cousin of Sans the Skeleton?”

Red ground his teeth together. “yes.”

“And you? Are you Sans’s brother?”

Boss nodded and when he caught himself, his eyes widened. “YES, I AM RED’S BROTHER. MY NAME IS… EDGE.”

“Where is Papyrus?” asked the Guard as she scribbled hurriedly on a pad of paper.

“UPSTAIRS SLEEPING. NOT THAT IT IS ANY OF YOUR BUSINESS.”
The officer harrumphed. “You look a lot like him from what I’ve heard. Except the scars. When did you get those anyway?”

“LONG AGO, HUMAN. WHAT DOES IT MATTER TO YOU?”

“Just making chitchat,” he said in a would-be casual voice. “I know this can’t be the most pleasant of experiences.”

“STOP IT THEN. YOU CAN MAKE THIS MORE PLEASANT BY ASKING YOUR QUESTIONS AND THEN LEAVING. MY BROTHER IS NOT FEELING HIS BEST.”

“i’m fine, boss,” Red lied in a hushed tone. He trailed his fingers along a loose wire inside the television set. “what do you want?”

“All we want to do is ask you a few questions.” He coughed softly. “How long have you been on the Surface? I heard you moved up here pretty recently.”

There was the end of the wire. He tugged gently, dislodging a small dust bunny.

“about two, three months ago maybe.”

“Oh? Why’d you move?”

He plugged the connector at the end of the wire into the television. As his eyes scanned the rest of the set, he saw that one of the screws had come loose from the circuit board; the flat green panel was sliding out of its compartment precariously.

“i don’t know. just didn’t like it down there. too cold.”

“Can skeletons even feel the cold?” he asked skeptically.

“WE MOST CERTAINLY CAN, YOU IGNORANT WHELP. MAYBE YOU SHOULD CONSULT A BOOK BEFORE ASKING ABOUT SUCH BASIC THINGS.”

“Alright, alright. Calm down.” The human sighed. “So according to the Guard you’ve been working in the lab since coming up here?”

“that’s right.” Red jiggled the board.

“Doing what?”

“research.”

“On what?”

Snap. It was back in place. Now to screw it back in.

“time travel mostly.”

“Is that what Dr. Alphys was working on the night of her murder?”

Red’s hands rattled against the board. “i doubt it. alphys wasn’t into that stuff too much.”

“What was she doing? The last message she received was from you, demanding an update on something.”
“if you’ve read the messages, then you already know.”

“Not really. The messages only mentioned journalists and a video. Then you continuously asked for updates.” He cleared his throat. “What video were you referring to in those text messages?”

Red’s skull warmed. “you know which one.” It hadn’t been the only video he had been worried about, but it had been the most pressing one.

“The video with Sans?” the human asked, and the way he asked, Red knew that this asshole knew exactly which video.

He tightened his grip on the screwdriver as he fastened the circuit board, nodding slowly.

“It’s hard to tell in texts, but you seemed pretty upset.”

He could feel a lump forming in his throat. “i was so mad at her for not listening. she kept insisting there was another lead, but she wouldn’t say anything else.” He swallowed before admitting, “i was such an ass.”

“Is there a reason why she wouldn’t tell you about the lead in a text message?”

Red pulled the back panel of the television and began to screw it back on. Of course there had been a good reason not to put it into writing. If she had discovered anything to do with those human souls, there was no way Alphys would have been stupid enough to disclose that so readily.

But he couldn’t say that, so he merely shrugged as he continued to stare at the television set.

“What about you? Do you know anything about these videos?”

Red gasped, flitting his eyes towards the other three. His brother’s features were twisted with the most furious expression Red had ever seen. If looks could kill, the human would probably be dead ten times over.

“I KNOW ABOUT THIS VIDEO,” he huffed through gritted teeth. “BUT I FAIL TO SEE HOW MY KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THAT HAS ANY BEARING ON ANY OF THIS.”

The human cocked an inquisitive eyebrow at Boss. “I take it you don’t approve of that relationship? You seem rather –”

“ENOUGH!” Boss screamed as he stamped his foot on the ground violently, causing all three of them to jump. “NO MORE QUESTIONS! YOU CAN LEAVE! NOW!”

The rabbit monster inclined her head and started to put her notepad away, but the officer crossed his arms against his chest as he frowned at Boss.

“One last question for you before we go: where were the two of you on the night of Officer Hansi and Phene ‘Punk Hamster’ Hanton’s murders?”

Red froze, the question chilling him to his core.

“How. Dare. You,” Boss choked out, his wrath sparking the magic in his right eye. “How DARE YOU IMPLY SUCH A THING? AFTER WHAT YOU DID TO SANS… GET OUT! GET OUT NOW!”

The human opened his mouth, clearly ready to argue the point, but the Royal Guard stepped forward, a determined expression on her face.
“Enough, Marles. He said no more questions, and that means no more. You want to ask anything else, you get a warrant.”

The human tsked, but shrank under the rabbit monster’s stern gaze. “Fine.” He glanced towards Red, flashing him a crooked grin. “Thanks for cooperating. It was… a pleasure to speak with you.”

Boss showed them the way out, slamming the door behind them with so much force that it shook the house. As soon as they were gone, his brother began to curse and shout about the nerve of the human officers and their proclivity for dishonesty and trickery.

Red was just glad to see them gone. As he secured the final screw to the back panel, his soul’s rapid thumping slowed to a regular, even pace. But instead of the anger that Boss was clearly feeling, Red was overwhelmed by the guilt of everything he had done. Alphys. Sans. The cat monster. And now Boss was being dragged into this on top of everything else. If only he had been more careful with his words, if he hadn’t fucked Sans in the lab, if he had gotten the cat monster’s friend out first, if he hadn’t come to this universe in the first place…

His bones were clattering faintly as he shook from the weight of it all.

“Are you okay?” Boss asked quietly, the rage had once again transformed to concern.

Red didn’t deign him with a reply. No, he wasn’t okay, but there was no point in saying as much. He took a deep breath, trying to return his soul to that blissfully emotionless state that he had been experiencing over the last few days. No emotions. No guilt. The guilt would kill him if he gave it the opportunity. Better to not feel at all.

He plugged the television into the wall as his brother continued to eye him up and down with worry. Without even bothering to move it onto the stand, Red pressed the power button. Miraculously the screen flickered on, though thick cracks pervaded the display, making it difficult to see all the details. Still, it was better than most monsters would’ve hoped for.

Unsurprisingly, this small victory offered no happiness.

He threw himself onto the couch, allowing his legs to stretch across the expanse. As he lay his head on the armrest, he glanced towards the television and saw that it was playing news. Of course. Frustration bit at his soul at he dug the remote from between the cushions. When he tried to change the channel, nothing happened. With a deep sigh, he set the remote down and drew his knees to his chest. Fine, news it was. He wasn’t about to get his ass up to change it manually.

“-ttaton unable to maintain his form for much longer without the aid of his doctor. The Royal Laboratory says that the doctor’s death could also have long-term effects on other projects, including the health of other monsters who have been transplanted to robotic bodies.”

Boss crossed in front of him and plopped himself down next to Red as the story changed.

“Last night, hundreds of monsters took to protest in Eastern Very New Home after the cancellation of this morning’s memorial.” The screen cut to a view of dozens of monsters yelling as they marched down the darkened streets. Several enraged monsters held up signs that read things such as “NO MORE KING ASGORE – HUMAN SELLOUT” and “CPTN. UNDYNE = LAX!! GIVE HER THE BOOT!”

But other monsters in the crowd appeared much calmer; they held lit candles, the flickering light cupped delicately in their hands as they walked peacefully through the streets. The eerie glow glistened against the tears staining their faces, giving them a haunted air.
“Many business owners are reporting that these protestors damaged their property and are demanding immediate compensation. King Asgore has not yet announced if they will pay out these claims.”

The report changed again to the footage of Sans getting killed. At the bottom of the screen was a header that read “Sans the Skeleton Dismissed as Suspect for Attack.” A small strangled noise escaped Red’s mouth as the explosion in the video took out Sans.

“THAT IS IT,” Boss said as he moved to get up from the couch. “NO MORE NEWS.”

Red clasped at his brother’s arm and yanked him back down. “I wanna watch.”

“SANS,” he said pityingly. “THIS IS NOT HEALTHY FOR YOU.”

Red didn’t respond, returning his full attention to the news program. The footage of Sans dying was looping over and over.

“Despite demands for the accompanying audio, government officials refuse to release it, citing that it would interfere with their ongoing investigation.”

The screen switched to a wrinkly, white-haired human sitting in a studio that said, “This footage was leaked to the press by an unknown source and was not intended to be viewed by the public. It was supposed to be used for internal investigation only at the prosecutor’s office. The only thing that audio would provide is an opportunity for the true perpetrator to prepare for their own trial when they are arrested.”

An unseen interviewer asked, “And what about the call to release the audio to family members only?”

The old human shook their head incredulously. “Look, the audio would only hurt the family, I promise you. It’s bad enough that they’ve had to endure the feed in the first place.” They cleared their throat. “But if they do want the audio, they only have to ask. So far, there’s been no communication from them.”

Red clenched his eyes shut as he curled up even tighter. He never wanted to hear Sans’s screams as the blast hit him. Ever.

As he lay there, trying to shut out the memory of Sans’s panic, he heard loud footsteps reverberate through the room. For a moment he thought his brother had finally gotten up to turn off the television, but when he opened his eyes he saw Papyrus marching into the kitchen, his fists at his side. It wasn’t long until the loud clattering of pots and pans echoed through the room as Papyrus began to cook breakfast or lunch or whatever meal was appropriate for whatever fucking time of day it was.

“GOOD,” Boss said, nodding as he eyed the kitchen doorway. “HE IS COOKING AGAIN. I WAS GETTING CONCERNED. HE NEVER SKIPS A MEAL.”

“i don’t know why you were worried at all. he’s taking this whole mess like a champ.”

His brother gaped at him. “YOU CANNOT BE SERIOUS.”

“well, he is. i can’t believe how okay he is.”

“NO,” Boss said shaking his head. “NO, HE IS NOT. NEITHER OF YOU ARE.” He gripped one of Red’s feet gently.
Red glanced back towards the television, refusing to make any further conversation with his brother. Talking about how he was feeling was… well, it wasn’t in the cards right now.

He vaguely recalled asking Papyrus and Sans to play a game of poker some months ago. They never had done that, had they? Another lost opportunity.

The news report was no longer on; a commercial for a red luxury car was currently on screen. He stared mindlessly, feeling himself drifting off as the commercial break continued for far too long. He was just too tired to keep going. His bones were aching with exhaustion. But he didn’t want to sleep. He didn’t deserve sleep.

Yet he couldn’t stay awake forever.

---

Red woke with a start at the loud clanging noise of metal banging against metal. Somehow he was no longer lying down on the couch; instead he swathed in a blanket with his brother’s arms wrapped around him. Boss was peering down at him, frowning.

“He has been going all night, I am surprised you slept through it for so long.” He kissed Red’s forehead gently. “I am glad you did though. You really needed it.”

Red sat motionless on his brother’s lap, unable or perhaps just unwilling to respond. His bones ached with lethargy; it felt like he had never fallen asleep in the first place. In fact, somehow he felt worse than before. It was as if sleeping had made him realize that none of this was a dream. All of this was actually happening.

“You look terrible,” Boss said as he massaged Red’s right arm.

“thanks,” Red replied sarcastically, his voice groggy. “I appreciate that.”

“You need to eat. You have not been getting nearly enough food lately.”

“i’m not hungry.” Red wasn’t lying about that either; he truly hadn’t felt any hunger pangs in days. “you can go get some if you wanna eat. i won’t go anywhere.”

Boss sighed loudly. “No, you are eating,” he asserted as he pulled Red to his chest and stood up. He must have expected Red to thrash or fight or something because he gripped him tight and looked down at him sternly, as if to tell him that he was not going to listen to his protests. But Red didn’t have the willpower to do a damn thing. Let Boss take him wherever. He didn’t care.

His brother tenderly rubbed the back of Red’s skull as he hugged him to his chest. As they moved forward, Red closed his eyes, basking in his brother’s comforting warmth. Just as he figured he might go back to sleep, Boss abruptly stopped and took in a sharp breath of air.

“What the hell, Papyrus?”

Red twisted in his brother’s arms, freezing as he took in the state of the kitchen. Every spare inch was covered in an assortment of food. Pies lined the table. Bowls of pasta littered the floor. The sink was filled with a stack of dirty dishes that had most definitely not been there yesterday. And in the center of it all stood Papyrus, stirring a pot of some steaming concoction at the stove, the biggest smile on his face.

“GOOD MORNING!” Papyrus trilled. “I WAS WONDERING WHEN YOU TWO LAZYBONES WOULD WAKE UP!”
“WHAT… WHAT IS ALL THIS?” Boss asked, motioning to the kitchen as a whole.

“THIS? WELL, I DECIDED TO TRY SOME NEW RECIPES!”

Boss walked to the table, moved a wooden bowl of salad to the floor, and softly set Red down on the now-empty chair.

“I DO NOT UNDERSTAND.” Boss’s brows turned upwards as he turned back towards Papyrus. “DID YOU USE ALL OF THE FOOD WE BOUGHT?”

“YES! DO NOT WORRY! WE CAN GET MORE!”

Red eyed the pie that sat directly in front of him. The edges of the crust were blackened and when he sniffed it, he couldn’t stop himself from gagging. Why did it smell like rotten fish?

“WHY?!” Boss exclaimed. “YOU WERE JUST TELLING ME THAT WE COULD NOT AFFORD WATER OR ELECTRICITY THIS MONTH!”

Red tore his eyes away from the pie, guilt nipping at his soul. Was this true? Shit, he had never gotten anything from working at the lab. Alphys had died before he had gotten the chance. And with tours cancelled indefinitely, Papyrus hadn’t been at work for the last week.

But Papyrus’s grin only grew. “IT DOES NOT MATTER!”

“what do you mean?” Red croaked out.

“THE BILLS, THE FOOD, EVERYTHING!” Papyrus shouted, flinging his arms open so that a tomato-based sauce went flying across half the kitchen. “NONE OF IT MATTERS! IT IS ALL GOING TO RESET ANYWAY!”

There was a long pause. Papyrus began to hum happily to himself as he stirred the pot.

“THAT IS… PREPOSTEROUS. PAPYRUS, YOU CANNOT WASTE ALL THIS FOOD JUST BECAUSE YOU ARE HOLDING OUT FOR SOMETHING THAT MAY NEVER HAPPEN!”

“IT WILL HAPPEN!” Papyrus beamed. “RED AND SANS ALREADY TOLD ME ABOUT THE TIME ANOMALIES! WE JUST HAVE TO WAIT!”

“Papyrus,” Boss said, dropping his voice to a much lower volume. “I understand where you are coming from, but please –”

“he’s right.” Red’s mouth slowly stretched into a broad smile. “none of this matters at all.”

Boss twisted towards him, his eyes widening in fear. “SANS, NO…”

There was a loud clanking noise as Papyrus dropped his spoon to the ground. “THAT IS NOT HIS NAME.”

Boss tilted his head. “WHAT?”

“HIS NAME IS RED, NOT SANS.”

Boss gaped at him for a few moments before he slowly shook his head. “RIGHT…” He turned to Red again, a grim expression on his face. “BROTHER, WE CANNOT THINK LIKE THIS. I KNOW IT IS DIFFICULT, BUT… WE HAVE TO MOVE FORWARD.”
Red’s grin twitched. “did you move forward when you thought i was dead?”

His brother shrunk back as he rubbed his arm absentmindedly. “Not by choice,” he whispered. “But yes.”

“pff.” Red waved his hand in dismissal.

“Sans, I –”

“HIS NAME IS NOT SANS!” Papyrus screamed, fury permeating his voice in a way Red had never thought capable of the monster. It would have frightened Red if he wasn’t so amused by the sudden change. He sounded like Boss when he got angry. Heh. Yes, just like Boss. Not like they weren’t the same monster or anything.

“yeah, papyrus,” he said, his voice tinged with laughter. “my name isn’t sans. sans is dead!” He cackled madly. “and other papyrus, don’t hold it all in! don’t want you exploding like sans! then you’d be dead too!”

Boss gasped loudly as Red dissolved into a fit of giggles. “Stop,” he hissed.

“w-why?” he wheezed. “i’m having a blast!”

Papyrus turned his back to him silently, returning his attention to the stove.

“D-don’t,” Boss pleaded. “Please stop.”

“can’t handle it, huh? my jokes are just too bombing!”

He was laughing hysterically now, his chest heaving as he took in great gasping breaths of air. There were even tears pooling at the edges of his eye sockets now. Tears. Ha! The fact he was crying over this was hilarious.

His giggles were growing out of control. Were they even giggles anymore? His chest was heaving violently as the laughter left his mouth. He couldn’t stem the flow of his tears; they streamed freely down his cheekbones, misting his vision. But really, what was the point in stopping them anyway? What was the point in anything? It was going to get reset!

“Please, brother,” Boss murmured as he stepped forward, opening his arms in an offer to embrace him.

“n-no!” Red choked. “i don’t – just no!”

Before his brother could insist, he teleported to his room, welcoming the familiar darkness. For a good minute all he could do was stand there and let the sobs rack his body. He had to endure this. All of this. Just until there was a reset. God, let there be a reset please. Please. Please.

And then it hit him. He didn’t have to wait for a reset. Fucking hell, he didn’t have to wait at all.

He rushed to the drawers of the dresser, tossing aside Sans’s old clothes until he found what he was searching for: the crumpled up piece of paper that Boss had given him only a couple of weeks ago. Armed with the procedures, he teleported to the basement.

He was such an idiot not to think of this earlier. Just the thought of saving all of those people, the cat monster and her friend, Sans… it thrilled him in a way he couldn’t articulate. His hands shook as he pulled at the machine’s mechanisms, pushed every button. He was so shaky that he kept
dropping the instructions every few seconds, prolonging the process.

When he was done, he pressed the paper into his pocket and walked into the time machine. He went to the humming electronic interface. The screen was lit with the same bright green text as before.

//MACHINE 53021X, V.2.023

INPUT DATE AND TIME HERE: (YEAR) (MONTH) (DAY) (HOUR) (MINUTE) (SECOND)

//OR

INPUT TIME UNITS IN µS HERE: (TIME UNITS)

When would be a good time? He thought back to when it all went to shit. When had Alphys died? Nine days ago. So that meant Sans had gotten into that stupid fight ten days ago.

That was when he had to aim for. That night. His brother was still here, but it was before Sans had marched off. Before Alphys had been murdered. Before everything had gone to shit.

He strapped himself into the chair and input the date. Clenching his eyes shut, he drew a deep breath and hit the return key. He fully expected to feel the door slam shut or to hear the loud whine of the machine as it powered on. What he did not expect was a loud beeping noise to resonate through the tiny space. He opened his eyes and leaned forward to inspect the now-flashing screen.

//SYSTEM FAILURE

//INADEQUATE SOURCE OF DT

Red blinked. This had to be a joke, right? Inadequate source? INADEQUATE SOURCE?!

He hastily unbuckled himself from the seat, flailing as the belt wrapped around his arm. His soul raced with fury as he rushed to the lab drawers and dug through the notebooks and loose papers. Come on, come on. He had stashed one of them away here back in his own universe ages ago. Sans had to have had one.

There! He took out the soul analyzer and brought it to his chest. He quickly turned on the device and held it inched from his sternum as it scanned. When the process was complete, he stared at the digital screen, his patience wearing thin. A tiny beep sounded and the device, among other health-related information, printed out:

[Test] ………………………. [NORMAL MONSTER LEVELS] …… [RESULT]

DETERMINATION …………. 0.50 mL ………………………………… 0.62 mL

His entire body was quivering, but instead of the hysterical energy he had felt just minutes before, all he was experiencing now was rage. How? How could this have happened? It made no sense. There hadn’t been that many saves and loads. Shouldn’t he still have some determination in his reserves? This piece of shit had to be wrong! He threw the scanner across the room, and when it hit the wall it exploded into a hundred little pieces.

This wasn’t fair! None of this was fair! He summoned a blaster as he screamed wordlessly. Magical energy soon rent the air, as he released all of the emotions he had built up over the last few days. The tears had returned, running down his face in small rivulets.
Blow it all up! Everything! He didn’t care!

He cared so little that it felt like his soul was going to burst at the seams.
Nine out of Ten Doctors Recommend Not Hitting Your Head Several Times within the Span of Ten Minutes

Chapter Notes

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulsex.tumblr.com. You can also find soul sex and Papby reblogs if that's your thing.

FANART

- Ganz, YOU ARE SO AWESOME! This artist has posted the next part of the comic adaptation of chapter 7 for this fic, and they colored it, and it looks AMAZING!!!! You can check it out here!
- Sicksickrick drew the Sans death scene video, which looks great! You can find it here!
- IF YOU ARE IN THE MOOD FOR SHITPOSTING, CHECK OUT Docanjing's take on the title of chapter 37 here!

NOTES

- Sorry for the delay with this chapter! I've been dealing with real life stuff! :3 Thanks for being patient! :D
- Alternative chapter names: "Like Ropes, Wool, and Snakes"; "In an Alternate Universe, They All Went to the Monster Truck Rally and Had a Wonderful Time"; “Lou, Lou, Skip to my Lou!”; "How Many Times Did Edge Activate or Try to Activate His Magic in This Chapter?"

Additional tags for this chapter: Dealing with character death, Character death?????, Violence, Car accident, Bad Times(TM) continue
(If I forgot anything, please let me know!)

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Edge watched as his brother curled in on himself as he dissolved into a fit of giggles, tears streaming down his cheekbones.

It had been obvious that his brother had been holding it in the whole week, his emotionless state a reminder of how the two of them used to live just months ago. They had made a promise to be honest with each other about the crap in their lives and Red was doing everything but that. Edge couldn’t blame him; his brother didn’t seem capable of being honest with himself right now, never mind with anyone else. He had figured that when his brother started to release his emotions, Edge would feel relieved that he was giving in and expressing his grief.

But this… this was not right at all. He didn’t know if Red was weeping because he thought a reset could actually happen or if the reality of Sans dying had finally sunk in.
There was one thing he did know: despite his growing frustration with the whole situation, his brother needed him.

Edge stepped forward, opening his arms to embrace Red.

“n-no!” Red choked out. “i don’t – just no!”

As Edge opened his mouth to tell him that he was there for him, Red disappeared with a pop. For a few seconds, Edge stood there aimlessly, his arms outstretched and his knees slightly bent. Then it hit him. His brother had run away from his feelings – and him – again.

“DAMMIT!” He collapsed on the now-empty chair, burying his face in his hands.

What could he do? Coddling his brother clearly wasn’t working and they had agreed not to yell at each other anymore. They were supposed to communicate!

Tiptoeing around Sans’s death was not helping, but every time he even hinted at discussing the matter, Red would find some way to avoid him or ignore him entirely. And now his brother was hoping for a reset? Edge gripped his leg. This was too much.

Especially when everything was centered on one of the most self-centered, frustratingly stubborn monsters he had ever met.

Guilt nipped at his soul. That wasn’t appropriate to think and he knew it. As much as Sans had been a little pissant the days leading up to his death, he had apologized. Besides, it was not proper to think ill of the recently-dusted, particularly if they went out with honor. His guilt intensified as he thought back to his last interaction with the other skeleton. Yes, he had accepted Sans’s apology, and they had been cordial, but perhaps he too should have apologized. That evening he had been crass, absolutely untoward, and –

A loud sniffling noise tore him from his thoughts. Edge snapped his head up to stare at his lookalike who stood motionless at the stove. His soul squirmed. Was Papyrus crying?

Edge hadn’t been focused on him these last few days, what with his brother commanding so much of his attention. Yes, they had gone to the store the other night, but Papyrus had been abnormally quiet the entire time. Full of boundless energy and constantly moving, but quiet. Edge hadn’t pressured him to talk. He figured if Papyrus had wanted to speak about his brother’s death, he would have come to him on his own. Forcing him to talk to someone he didn’t know that well didn’t seem like the most prudent of ideas.

Though now that he thought about it, Papyrus hadn’t spoken more than a few words here or there over the last seven days. Even on the way to the store, Edge had done all the talking.

“ARE YOU OKAY?” Edge asked.

Papyrus’s spoon clanked against the pot loudly as he jumped.

After a moment’s pause, he cleared his throat and said, “I DID NOT REALIZE YOU WERE STILL HERE.” There was another brief lull where Papyrus lifted a hand to his skull as he continued to stir the pot, his back to Edge. “TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTION, I AM DOING GREAT, AS ALWAYS! BETTER THAN GREAT EVEN! NOW I CAN FINALLY TRY OUT THESE COMPLICATED RECIPES!”

Edge stood up, his soul squirming unpleasantly. “Papyrus.”
“MAYBE I CAN EVEN DO THINGS I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN TOO FRIGHTENED TO TRY! I HAVE ALWAYS WANTED TO SEE A CAR RACE IN PERSON! OR A MONSTER TRUCK RALLY! NYEH, WHAT A WONDERFUL NAME FOR AN EVENT RUN ENTIRELY BY HUMANS!” He dropped his unoccupied hand by his side. “SANS LIKES TO JOKE ABOUT IT QUITE OFTEN.”

He cleared his throat as he stirred the pot. “HE AND I HAVE BEEN TRYING TO GET VISAS FOR YEARS SO WE CAN GO TO ONE, BUT THEY WON’T APPROVE THE APPLICATION! BUT WHO CARES ABOUT THAT NOW? WE CAN DO WHATEVER WE WANT! I CANNOT WAIT TO TELL SANS THAT HE MISSED OUT ON ALL THE FUN!”

Throughout his tirade, Papyrus’s voice was full of energy, and to anyone that didn’t know him well, he would have sounded genuinely happy. But Edge wasn’t fooled; his duplicate’s voice was cracking softly at the end of every sentence, just like when he himself got upset.

“Perhaps… you should invite Undyne with you?” he asked softly. “The two of you would have fun.”

Papyrus flinched towards the stove. “SHE… WOULD NOT UNDERSTAND. I THINK SHE WOULD HAVE A BLAST, BUT…” He sighed. “SHE IS GRIEVING. I DO NOT WANT TO BURDEN HER.”

Something about the way he said it spurred Edge to walk to him. “Cream Puff, you are grieving.”

He reached his hand out to grasp him by the shoulder, but hesitated when Papyrus yelled, “I AM NOT!” Now that Edge was so close he could distinctly hear Papyrus’s ragged breath and soft sniffling. “SHE IS GRIEVING BECAUSE SHE DOES NOT COMPREHEND HOW A RESET WORKS! AND… AND NEITHER DO YOU! YOU ARE TREATING ME AS IF I AM DELUSIONAL, BUT… SOON SANS AND I WILL BE BACK TO NORMAL!”

Edge pressed his hand to Papyrus’s scapula, paying no attention to the tingle of pain that shot up his arm as his injured fingers dug into the fabric of his clothes.

“When I lost my brother, I tried to deny it for a long time. I searched everywhere for him –”

Papyrus abruptly shoved Edge’s hand away and twisted around to face him. Tears were pooled at the edges of his sockets, but his brow was contorted with fury.

“YOU LISTEN HERE!” Papyrus shouted as he thrust his spoon at Edge’s chest, and with each poke, some of his hot rage transferred into Edge’s soul. “YOU DID NOT LOSE RED. HE IS FINE!”

“You know what I –”

“NO, YOU DO NOT GET TO ACT AS IF YOU KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON!”

Edge clenched his fists. “YOU ARE BEING SO STUBBORN! I AM JUST TRYING TO HELP!”

“WELL, IT… IT DOES NOT HELP!” He averted his gaze as he lowered the spoon. “I AM FINE! THIS IS ALL FINE! SOON IT WILL RESET AND THIS WILL BE A BAD MEMORY WE CAN LAUGH OFF!” He back up an inch, and added in a quiet, but hopeful tone, “Or maybe it will not be a memory at all.”

Edge wanted to shake Papyrus, to tell him that he was being childish. But he just couldn’t. Not when the other skeleton was in such a delicate state of mind. Pushing down his anger, he opened
his mouth, ready to tell him, quite calmly, that he needed to be honest with himself. But before he could say a single word, he was interrupted by a distant humming noise that echoed oddly in his skull. He blinked. That sounded very much like his brother’s blaster, but there was no way that –

His suspicions were confirmed when the low whine intensified to a roaring blast, and the sound of glass shattering immediately followed. The room shook from the force of Red’s attack, rattling the dishes that lined the floor. Edge’s soul raced as he tried to imagine what the hell had caused his brother to bring out his blasters. The sound of more and more glass being broken accompanied by his brother’s long, wordless cry rent the air.

“What is he doing?” Edge asked as he glanced towards the floor. It sounded like his brother was below him, but that wasn’t possible. It wasn’t as if –

Edge’s soul fell. The basement. Red wasn’t doing what Edge thought he was doing, was he? He couldn’t possibly be so stupid, so incompetent, so desperate. But that was the only reason he had to be down there. The thought made him sick to his soul.

Another loud shout reverberated from beneath him, followed by the sound of Red’s blasters activating once more.

“Damn him!” He could feel fury and disappointment burning in his soul. “I am going to – to – to have words with him!” he bellowed at the floor.

“You should try to calm him down before he hurts himself,” Papyrus said softly as he returned to the stove, his voice barely audible over the din.

For a moment, Edge didn’t move. Papyrus was, yet again, so quiet and just so different from his usual self. Something in Edge’s mind was telling him to stay put and comfort Papyrus. But his brother’s pained yells and general ruckus were getting louder by the second.

“Grr!” He stamped his feet. “I will be back, Papyrus!”

Papyrus didn’t respond, but instead stared down forlornly at the pot of food. Ignoring the growing pit of worry in his soul, Edge went to the front entrance and strapped on his boots. He would calm his brother down and come right back to comfort Papyrus. The three of them needed to sit down and talk about this reset business. And about Sans.

Muttering to himself, he stepped onto the front porch. That’s when he saw them. The herd of news reporters were gathered on the lawn, their cameras aimed on the house. It didn’t take much to tell why; even with the door shut, everyone could still hear Red’s temper tantrum as he continued to scream in the basement.

It took them a moment to register that Edge was there, but as soon as they did, they renewed their interrogation of him. He grit his teeth, trying his best to shut out the insensitive questions hurled his way. These bastards didn’t know when to leave well enough alone. It was bad enough that they had to replay Sans’s death tape on every news station at all hours, but they just wouldn’t take no for an answer!

He marched towards the basement, hugging the edge of the house, but the journalists soon converged upon him. As they approached, their voices grew louder and their demands for answers resounded in his head. They were too close to him. Far too close.

“Go away!”

It was to no avail. They shoved microphones in his face, encroaching upon him. Several of them
even crouched down on the ground, inches in front of him. Edge had to stop himself from tripping over the invasive pests as they snapped photos of him. Bulky video cameras gathered around him, recording his every move.

Their voices. Their proximity. It was just like back home. Back when the captain had…

“DO NOT COME NEAR ME!” he bellowed, and he was unable to keep the tinge of panic from his voice this time.

When they persisted, he glared at the journalist directly in front of him and turned their soul blue with a sharp ding. The reporter – a gangly human with short brown hair – seemed to sink under their own weight and fell flat on their tailbone.

Either the rest of them hadn’t realized he had attacked one of them or they just didn’t care; almost immediately after his attack, another person took the fallen reporter’s place, waving an oversized microphone in front of him. They were still yelling at him, crowding him until his back was pressed into the side of the house.

He summoned a bone to his hand and smacked a microphone out of one of their hands.

“GET THE FUCK AWAY FROM ME!”

For a moment, silence fell over them as Edge brandished his weapon, his face contorted with ugly anger. Half an instant later, one of them shrieked at the top of their lungs and scurried away. There was a burst of movement as the rest of them scrambled to get out of his way. The only one that remained was the human whose soul he had turned blue. Whether they were immobilized by fear or his magic, he could not tell. They gazed up at him, eyes wide and watery, as he catapulted over them and ran as fast as he could to the entrance of the basement.

Shock ran through his bones as he opened the door without needing a key. Why didn’t they keep this locked? Were they seriously that trusting? Kinder universe or not, this was foolish given how nosy the reporters were here.

When he stepped inside, he dug the tips of his phalanges into his palms. The room was an absolute wreck to say the least. Various mechanical bits and shards of glass blanketed the floor, glinting under the glow of the hanging lights. As he followed the trail of fragmented glass, he saw that the display case to the left was completely decimated. A circle of burnt ash marked where a blaster’s concentrated magic had struck the pane and seared the wall.

And the cause of all the destruction, his brother, was hunched up against the time machine. His skull was buried in the crook of his arm and his body trembled violently from intense sobs.

With a shout of frustration, Edge made his presence known. Red jumped at the sound, revealing his teary but confused expression.

“What? are you o –?”

Edge rushed over, grabbed him by the front of his shirt, and shook him. “WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU ARE DOING?!?”

Fear flashed on Red’s face. “what do you mean?”

“THAT.” Edge pointed towards the machine. “THAT IS THE ONLY REASON YOU WOULD COME DOWN HERE. I CANNOT BELIEVE YOU!” He shook his brother, though not as hard as before; his wrath giving way to his other emotions. “How could you?” he asked quietly. “After
“everything, you were just going to leave me *again*. Why would you even want to go back there without me?”

Did he really love the other Sans that much? Was Edge truly that… inadequate?

“bro.” Red reached out a hand to Edge’s shoulder. “i wasn’t going to our universe, i was trying to… go back to a few days ago. i was gonna warn everyone.”

“AND YOU WERE GOING TO DO THAT WITHOUT ME!” He gently put his brother back on the ground as he gripped his own arms. “WHY WOULDN’T YOU ASK ME?”

For a moment Red looked down at the floor guiltily, but then he appeared to realize something. “boss, how would i bring you? you don’t even have any determination…”

His brother’s sockets widened.

“WHAT ARE YOU EVEN TALKING ABOUT? DID YOU FORGET?! YOU *NEVER* THINK OF ME, DO YOU?!?”

Red brought a quivering hand to his mouth as he gazed somewhere off in the distance. “you have enough determination. *you* can do it.”

Edge blinked. “I CAN DO WHAT?”

His brother’s eyes snapped back to his. “i’m fresh outta determination. don’t ask me how, because i don’t got a clue. but *you*! you can go back in time and warn us!”

“What?” Edge stepped back. “YOU CANNOT BE SERIOUS.”

“why wouldn’t i be serious?! you can fix this whole mess! think about it!”

“I AM! THIS IS RIDICULOUSLY STUPID!”

Red stared, blinking slowly before a dark shadow crossed his face. “are you really that jealous of him?” he hissed. “you’d rather he be dead than in my life?”

Edge’s chest swelled up. “HOW CAN YOU EVEN SUGGEST THAT? SANS, YOU MAY NOT THINK I AM THE BEST MONSTER IN THE WORLD, BUT TO BELIEVE THAT OF ME? YOU MUST TRULY THINK I AM TERRIBLE!”

“then why?! why won’t you go back? give me one good reason!”

“BECAUSE I AM AFRAID OF LOSING YOU FOREVER, SANS!”

“so you are jealous then.”

Renewed rage radiated from Edge’s soul. “NO, YOU IDIOT! THINK ABOUT IT: DO YOU HAVE ANY GUARANTEE I WILL NOT JUST END UP IN OUR OLD UNIVERSE AT A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT TIME?”

“i – ” Red hesitated for a moment, his brows furrowed. “you can use it again if that happens.”

“WHAT IF I DO NOT HAVE ENOUGH DETERMINATION? YOU SAY THE MACHINE RUNS OFF THAT, SO WHAT HAPPENS IF I RUN OUT?”

“you can… get more,” he offered lamely.
“EVERYONE IS DEAD! UNLESS DR. ALPHYS MIRACULOUSLY MANAGED TO SURVIVE AND STILL HAS ENOUGH DETERMINATION TO BOOT, I WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO RETURN HERE!”

“still, you can – ” Red swallowed. “you can try.” He slowly dropped down to the floor as his body began to shiver once again. “we can stop this. all of this.”

Edge exhaled, trying to release the irritation netted in his bones. He knelt next to Red and grasped his hand, feeling the vibrations of his brother’s silent sobs traveling up his bones.

“Brother, I will do it. I will try it for you.” He gulped. “But it might not work, and then we’ll be apart, maybe forever. We will be alone.”

The statement hung in the air between them, and Edge hoped with every fiber of his being that his brother would stop to truly think this through. Leaving him behind was the last thing he ever wanted to do.

“i’m s-sorry,” Red mumbled. “i didn’t think about it, i just thought… fuck!” He slammed his fist against the machine. “this isn’t fair! none of this!” Tears choked his voice. “it’s not worth the risk of losing you too!”

Relief washed over Edge at the words. He was worth something to his brother. It was more than he had expected.

He leaned over and picked up Red, cradling him to his chest. His brother’s entire body quaked with emotion now, and he knew the reality of Sans’s death was hitting him hard.

“I know you want to cling to the hope that he will come back, and maybe he will. Maybe someone will reset. But brother, we must move forward. Sans is dead.” Red buried his head deeper into Edge’s chest. “Pretending that a reset is going to happen at any moment is just… not healthy! Especially since, from what you’ve told me, we don’t even know what a reset will entail for the two of us.”

“i know,” Red muttered into his sternum. “i know, i know. i … i loved him.”

“I wish I could see what you saw in him.”

His brother retracted himself from Edge. “he was… one of the best monsters i’ve ever met,” he choked out. “he treated me like i was worth it, y’know? and he… he made the best jokes, had the best smile…”

Red went on and on about Sans’s best qualities, and Edge made every effort to stop his jealousy from getting the better of him. To his surprise, as he listened he found that he was more intrigued than anything else. All the things his brother described of Sans were things that made Edge love Red. From the overprotectiveness when some asshole tried to mess with him, to the shitty jokes, to their mutual dependence on each other. It was obvious from the way his brother spoke that he really did love Sans just as much Edge loved Red.

“…and the way he wouldn’t shut up about the stars. just… everything was… i…” He hiccupped a sob as he nuzzled Edge’s chest. “i miss him, bro,” he whispered.

“I know.”

“i loved him.”
Edge held him tighter. “I know.”

Red’s hands dug into his back. “I can’t believe he’s gone. Just like that.”

His brother dissolved into tears, and as he lost complete control, Edge responded by gently massaging his spine. He was glad Red was finally letting his emotions out; his detached silence had been far scarier than anything else. With a pang, he realized that for so many years he had heard hardly a peep from his brother. Things really had been bad, hadn’t they? And all he had done was shut his brother down.

Well, some lessons had to be learned the tough way.

Over the next few minutes, his brother gradually stilled in his grasp. His shirt was completely soaked with tears, and the weight of Red’s skull pressed against his sternum, but he reveled in their closeness.

After Red remained motionless in his arms for a couple of minutes, Edge wondered if his brother had cried himself to sleep.

But as he stood up to leave, Red rasped, “Y’know, it’s funny. He and I were so scared that everything was going to reset. Now I’m afraid it won’t.”

“Sans,” Edge whispered. “Do you know what scares me?”

“What?”

“That I’ll lose you again.”

“You’re not losing me, boss. Promise.”

Edge kissed the top of his head as he brought himself to his feet. “Let’s go back upstairs then. You need to eat.”

“Heh. I’d offer to take us there, but, uh, I think I may have run outta energy.” His brother rubbed the back of his own skull. “Guess having food earlier wasn’t such a bad idea after all.”

Edge sighed. “Hide your head. Those reporters are like Temmies who have spotted a weak monster; they’re on you within moments.”

His brother pushed closer to his chest, nodding his assent to move. Edge summoned a bone to his hand, prepared to knock as many microphones and cameras out of the way as he had to. But as he stepped onto the front lawn, the newscasters thankfully kept their distance. The group was much smaller than before, and those that had remained shrunk under his fierce glare.

Good. He hoped he had scared them so badly that they would never come back. Enough was enough.

He stepped into the house and noted the eerie quiet that permeated throughout. Disappointment needled within his soul as he strode into the kitchen and was greeted with the sight of an abandoned pot of food on the stove.

“Did paps go to bed?”

“He must have,” Edge answered quietly as he deposited his brother in the empty chair. “Perhaps... I should go upstairs and get him. I had hoped to talk to him before he went to sleep.” He shook his
head. “But then again, maybe not. He has not rested much these last few days.”

“But then again, maybe not. He has not rested much these last few days.”

“he hasn’t?”

He waved the ghastly odor away from his nasal cavity. What concoction had Papyrus been cooking? It smelled like old shoes or maybe a festering piece of garbage from the Dump. He placed the pot next to the sink and went to the refrigerator, searching for something edible.

As he rifled through the containers, Red murmured, “you mean that’s how you acted before you fell down?”

It took Edge a moment to reorient his mind from the contents of the refrigerator to the topic of the question, and when he did, his soul sank. He hated to admit it, but this version of himself seemed so much stronger than him. But every monster had a limit.

“Yes. Yes, I suppose so. And I will admit, I am worried about it.” He pulled out the container of spaghetti that he himself had made a few days ago. After giving it a whiff, he put the food in a pot and cranked the temperature up to its maximum setting.

In his peripheral vision he saw his brother push the chair back from the table. “maybe i should go –”

“You WILL NOT!” Edge barked. Realizing that he had perhaps been too harsh, he cleared his throat and said in a much softer tone, “You did not even have the energy to teleport us here. What makes you think I will let you go up there without eating first?” He stirred the pasta that was already sizzling and popping due to the extreme heat. “I will get him as soon as you are fed.” He scowled at him. “No excuses this time. You will eat.”

“i’m not arguing with you about that,” Red mumbled, his voice barely audible. From the way he was leaning against the wall, his body sagging with exhaustion, it was obvious he was more drained than he was letting on. That, or he was reverting to his emotionless state from earlier. Hoping to avoid repeating that, Edge hurriedly scooped the noodles into a bowl and brought it to his brother.

Red took a bite and scrunched up his mouth. “it’s all burned on the outside, but cold on the inside.”

“No complaints! You will eat every last bite.”

Grumbling under his breath, Edge watched over Red as he slurped down his meal. When he was done, his brother stifled a yawn and returned to resting against the wall.

“can hardly keep my eyes open.”

Edge hefted him into his arms, and announced, “Bed time. No complaining about this either!”

Red nodded and relaxed his body as Edge carried him upstairs.

After ensuring that his brother was tucked soundly in bed, Edge only left the room when heard Red’s gentle snores. He went straight to Papyrus’s room, and as his fist hovered over the door, he could hear the stifled noise of something heavy sliding against the carpet. What could he possibly
be doing?

When Edge finally knocked, he heard Papyrus release a shocked “NYEH!” and it took the other skeleton a few moments to open the door. When he finally did, he cracked it open only a little and cautiously peeked his head around the corner. A guilty expression adorned his face as he eyed Edge up and down.

“Y-YES?”

“ERR… IS EVERYTHING OKAY IN THERE?”

“YES, MOST DEFINITELY!” Papyrus squeaked as he averted his gaze. “I AM JUST… RESTING!”

Edge folded his arms across his chest.

“W-WHAT DID YOU WANT?” Papyrus asked.

“I WAS HOPING TO TALK TO YOU.”

“I AM… VERY BUSY RIGHT NOW.”

“…RESTING?”

“YES. RESTING. RESTING A LOT.”

Edge sighed in exasperation. “WELL WHEN YOU ARE DONE ‘RESTING,’ WILL YOU PLEASE JOIN ME DOWNSTAIRS? I WOULD REALLY LIKE TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT THE RESETS AND SANS.”

Papyrus didn’t say anything for a few seconds. It was only when Edge cocked a brow at him that he slowly inclined his head, hesitation and guilt spelled across his features.

“AND PLEASE BE QUIET WHEN YOU ‘REST.’ MY BROTHER NEEDS TO GET SOME SLEEP.”

Papyrus shrugged behind the door, as if a child caught in the act of doing something wrong. “Okay,” he whispered.

With a deep exhale, Edge left him and went downstairs, his bones creaking with exhaustion as he sat on the couch. He pulled out his phone and checked the time. Ugh! This day was dragging on forever and it wasn’t even ten in the morning! He hadn’t gotten the best sleep these last few days himself. Better than the other two, to be sure. But still, only a couple of hours here and there. After all, the determination in his soul kept him running a lot longer than the others.

Plus every time he fell asleep he was plagued with nightmares. Dismembered human bodies. Burning wreckage. Undyne’s decapitated head falling to the ground. It was never enough to scare him awake, but he always woke up sweaty, anxious, and feeling unrested.

After the events of today, he was so tired he could hardly stand it. He felt his eyes droop and his breathing slowed. At first he tried to fight it off; it was too early in the day to be napping. But in the end, he reasoned that he be a hypocrite if he told his brother to sleep but refused to do so himself.

Besides, Papyrus would wake him up later. The other skeleton had promised to speak with him. And if his other self was anything like him, he’d come downstairs and uphold his oath.
A booming knock startled Edge awake mid-dream, and he nearly fell off the couch from the shock. For a few seconds all he could do was sit there and clutch his heaving chest as he tried to pull himself out of his nightmare where he had been strapped down by a dark figure. He nearly summoned a bone attack when another loud knock resounded through the house.

THOSE. FUCKING. REPORTERS.

Edge threw himself from the couch, catching a glimpse of his brother as he came out of his room, his hands rubbing the sleepiness from his sockets. After preparing a few well-worded insults to scream at the newscasters, he flung open the door, prepared to let his anger loose.

He nearly slammed the door shut when he saw who stood on the front step.

What was Captain Undyne doing here and why was she accompanied by the Royal Guard and the police officer from yesterday? A tremor of fear ran through his bones.

Undyne’s good eye was puffy and watery, as if she had recently shed tears or was about to. Besides her eye, however, there was no indication that she was anything but business. She stood with her back erect, her brows drawn in seriousness, and a deep frown etched on her features.

“Are you the skeleton known as Edge?”

She very well knew his name, as they both knew. “YES? WHAT DO YOU WANT?”

With a heavy sigh, she nodded to the rabbit monster who, to Edge’s dismay, procured a pair of handcuffs from her belt.

“Under the authority of the Royal Guard, and by a warrant issued by royal magistrate, you are under arrest for assaulting two humans, threatening to assault several more, and for disturbing the peace.” When Edge took a step backwards, Undyne tilted her head forward, casting her face in deep shadow. “Should you choose to resist arrest, you will face more charges. Not to mention – ” She pointed over her shoulder to the group of reporters behind her. “– your every action will be caught on these cameras. These cameras that are broadcasting to millions of people across the world.”

Edge got the message: come quietly to make this easier for the Guard and for himself. For a second he was half tempted to disregard the warning and try to escape. But he knew it was foolish. The whole world would see what he had done, and if Papyrus and Red were already on the police officers’ radar for the crap at the Embassy and the murders, this would only make things worse for them. Besides, he had the feeling that, like his own universe’s version, this Captain Undyne was no one to trifle with. Who knew what injury she would inflict upon him should he try to run?

So even as his brother came flying down the stairs behind him, yelling his name, Edge extended his wrists to be cuffed. “There has been a misunderstanding, I assure you.”

The Royal Guard clasped the restraints around him, a grim look on her face. As Undyne maneuvered him to walk in front of the three of them, he took note of the swelling congregation of reporters that had returned to their house. Their cameras glinted in the sunlight as they fixated on Edge’s escort to a line of five white cars parked on the grass. Several other Royal Guards and police officers created a perimeter around the cars and kept the journalists at bay as they attempted to get closer. Undyne pushed him to the middle car marked “RG0001” as the newscasters’ buzzing filled the clearing.
“hey! what the fuck are you doing?!”

Cameras sparkled as they turned towards his brother who came running up from behind them. Undyne swore under her breath.

“You fucking assholes already got sans! let my bro go now or i’ll blast the fuck outta all of you!”

As Undyne forced Edge into the back seat of the car, he hissed to her, “Stop him before he makes an even bigger mess of things.”

She slammed the door, leaving Edge by himself in the cramped quarters. As he gave a cursory glance around the car, he saw that a metal fence separated the front seats from the back. He was caged.

Edge arched his head to peer out the back window so he could get a view of Red as he nearly collided with her. Though he could not hear anything, he could tell that his brother was arguing with her, pointing wildly at the car as his eye glowed with red magic. Undyne bent next to him and placed a hand to his shoulder before saying something. Some of Red’s fury dissipated as the two of them exchanged words. They talked with each other for no longer than a minute before she stood up abruptly and left his brother glowering after her.

When she got in the car, she waved to the other drivers as she turned the ignition. The cars rolled forward, following each other through the valley with only a few feet of space between them. Edge watched as the horde of reporters converged upon his very desolate-looking brother. As the car dipped over the hill, blocking his view of the house, he turned around, his soul hollow. He could only hope his brother would have the strength to deal with this disaster without him.

“Don’t worry.” Undyne was staring at him in the rearview mirror. “I told him to get a lawyer. I’m not having these jackasses take advantage of you guys.”

“AREN’T YOU THE, AHEM, ‘JACKASS’ FOR ARRESTING ME?”

“Are you kidding me? You think I would’ve arrested you for this garbage? You didn’t hurt anyone, and I don’t blame you one bit for losing your temper like that.” At Edge’s confused expression, she explained, “The reporters. They’ve been camping outside my house too, you know. They keep asking me if I’m going to step down, or if I can disclose information about the attacks, and all sorts of bullshit.” She gripped the steering wheel more tightly. “One of the assholes even asked me if I had an alibi the night Alphys got killed. CRETINS!” Edge jumped at her sudden loudness. “ALL OF THEM!”

“IF YOU ARE NOT UPSET THAT I ATTACKED THEM, THEN WHY ARE YOU ARRESTING ME?” he asked coolly.

“Come on, I thought Papyrus said you used to be a Royal Guard. Did you guys have different standards or something?”

He curled his bound fists. “WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU EVEN SPOKE TO PAPYRUS ANYWAY?”

Undyne bore her pointed teeth. “I’ve been… a little busy if you haven’t noticed.”

“HMPH. WELL, I FOR ONE THOUGHT THAT YOU TWO WERE CLOSE. YOU CERTAINLY SEEMED IT LAST WE MET. BUT I SUPPOSE I WAS WRONG.”

“What are you even talking about?! We’re friends! Best buds!”
“I HAVE NEVER TRULY HAD A FRIEND BEFORE, BUT I DOUBT SOMEONE WHO CONSIDERED PAPYRUS THEIR FRIEND WOULD LEAVE HIM TO WALLOW IN HIS PAIN AS YOU HAVE.”

He knew he was laying the guilt on thick, but after her negligence over the past couple of weeks, he didn’t care. His comments must have made their mark because Undyne averted her gaze from the mirror and the two of them sat in silence for some time. It was only when the cars crossed onto the dirt road leading to the city that she spoke again.

“Fine, I’ve been avoiding him, okay?” she announced as the car bounced up and down along the gravel. “I don’t want to talk about this if it’s alright with you.”

He rolled his eyes. “FINE. GO ON THEN. WHAT WERE YOU SAYING BEFORE?”

“I don’t know, what we were even talking about? Oh right, why I’m arresting you. Well, Edge-man, if someone breaks the law, we arrest them here. Even if they are a friend of a friend. No special favors! Everyone’s got to face justice! Besides,” she added almost guiltily. “Those humans are not about to let you go free.”

Edge huffed. “SO MONSTERS HERE CONTINUE TO BOW TO HUMANS, I SEE. DESPICABLE. IN LIGHT OF EVERYTHING –”

“In light of everything? Edge, have you seen the news recently? Asgore – who, by the way, isn’t in the best of health these days – is trying his best to stop the humans from blowing us to hell and back. They’re got tanks here!”

“I SAW THEM, YES.”

“Then you should know we’re on the brink of war.” She shook her head. “You don’t know how lucky you are. Did you know that I had to convince the magistrate issuing your warrant not to rope in murder charges on top of your assault crap? These humans are pissed! And after the whole fiasco with Sans, they’re desperate to blame someone else.”

“MURDER CHARGES? THEY ARE BLAMING ME FOR THE MURDERS? OF WHOM?!”

“Who do you think?” she asked, stone-faced.

“What evidence do they have of anything like that?! I was with my brother the whole time!”

She chewed on her lip, drawing a pinprick of blood with her sharp teeth. “Look, I could lose my job for saying this, but I guess I owe it to you after leaving the three of you hanging. You know that witness for the officer’s murder?”

“Yes, the witness who apparently could not give enough details to exonerate Sans before his arrest?”

“Hey, that witness wasn’t the person who fucked it all up, that was the police officers’ fault. They ignored all protocol to arrest Sans because they didn’t want the Royal Guard to protect him.” She huffed. “The idiots messed everything up for themselves, and for us Royal Guards too.” She waved her hand in dismissal. “Anyway, that’s not the point. The point is that the witness is the one who has put a target on you. She said a skeleton with big scars on his face killed Officer Hansi and Punk Hamster. Now who around here do you think fits that description?”

“That is it?! One witness, who probably cannot tell one skeleton from
“Dude, calm down! How do you think I convinced the judge to reject the request? It’s not good evidence considering we haven’t ruled out any of the other skeletons in the city.”

His respect for Undyne grew tremendously. If she was under public scrutiny for her role in this whole mess, then it must have taken a lot for her to step in for him. Especially given that she didn’t know one thing about him. He vaguely wondered how many skeletons there were in the city. Back home, they were not a common species of monster. How many skeletons were out there with scars like his?

“But let me tell you, you aren’t doing any favors by going around and attacking humans. The magistrate was willing to listen, but public pressure is going to force their hand before long. And believe me, these humans are looking for any excuse to – WOAH!”

The car in front of them abruptly screeched to a halt right in the middle of the dirt road. Undyne slammed on the brakes, and the car slid across the gravel for a couple of seconds before it stopped just short of the other vehicle’s bumper. Edge fell forward, his head smashing against the metal cage in front of him. Before he could push himself back into his proper position, something hit the back of the car with a deafening crunch.

The force carried them forward so that they collided with the Royal Guard vehicle in front of them. Edge was sent sprawling to the floor… or it would have if the space between the front and back of the car wasn’t so narrow. Instead, he found himself dangling above the floor, his body wedged between the leather seats and the metal barrier. His head was spinning, unable to perceive anything that was going on around him as the vehicles skidded across the rocky road. It was too much to process, too much for his senses.

At some point he must have blacked out because when his mind finally caught up with his surroundings, the car was no longer moving. He was still stuck between the seats, his head smashed against the door. His mind was all fuzzy and his bones ached from the impact.

Distant, muffled shouts, interspersed with radio static, sounded through the car. Although he couldn’t understand the words, the panic in their voices spurred him to liberate himself from the space between the seats. As he sat up, his vision swam as spikes of pain shot through his skull. He cradled his forehead as he waited for the throbbing to pass.

“NO!” called out Undyne from somewhere in the distance. “PUT HER DOWN!”

Edge tore his hands away, his eyes darting towards the front seat. It was empty. The hood of the car had been crunched upwards and it was now jutting into the now-broken windshield. Shattered tempered glasses lined the dashboard and leather seats. To his horror, there were smatters of wet blood smeared along the steering wheel and across the driver’s seat.

“YEAH! Take that you piece of –!”

Just as Edge was about to turn to his left to peer out the window, he blinked and found himself holding his skull as bolts of pain pummeled him once more. He rubbed his sockets, trying to clear his vision. What? He hadn’t even felt himself move to this position. Had he blacked out a second time?

“NO!” cried Undyne again. “PUT HER DOWN!”

A chill ran deep up Edge’s spine. Hadn’t she just –?
Out of the corner of his eye, there was a flurry of movement. Panic gripping at his soul, Edge jerked his head to the left. Another car abutted the door, blocking his line of sight but for a tiny sliver of the gravely road. Glowing blue spears were flying through the air, aimed at a spot just out of view. As he scooted towards the window to see better, Undyne came sprinting down the middle of the lane, one of her summoned spears at her side. Her bloodthirsty battle cry reverberated through the open space.

“Stay still, you!”

A loud boom echoed through the clearing, vibrating Edge’s skull. A uniformed human ran up behind the captain, aiming a pistol in the same direction as Undyne’s spears.

Edge needed to get out of here. Now. Clearly someone was attacking them and he would be damned if he sat back and watched the battle from the sidelines. With his bound hands, he wrestled with the door handle. It was to no avail. The door was locked from the outside, doubtless to prevent prisoners from escaping. Not that it mattered anyway; the other car that had crashed into them obstructed the exit.

Maybe if he could pry this metal cage open, he could climb out the front. He gathered his magic to his hands and –

“AAH!”

Sharp shocks of pain suddenly assaulted his body. A deep burning sensation coursed through his arms and rushed through the rest of his body. It was like he was vibrating all over, and he swore that he must be rattling from the intensity of it all. In the back of his mind, he recognized this pain: electricity. He needed to stop his magic before this killed him. But for what felt like a whole lifetime, he couldn’t do anything.

The moment he was able to gather his mind enough to stem the flow of his magic, the sensation mercifully stopped. He doubled over as the lingering effects of the electricity wracked his body. Stupid. So stupid. He should have recognized the magic suppression device-armed cuffs from his days spent training under Undyne.

“WATCH IT!”

Edge slowly lifted himself up so that his chin came to rest on the window sill. As his eyes found Undyne still standing in the middle of the road, seemed to slow to a crawl.

She was gazing wide-eyed at that same spot as before, her head tilted slightly towards the sky. The human that had run to assist her was slumped face-first on the dirt next to her. As Undyne turned, clearly preparing to run away, a large shadow closed in on the two of them from above.

Before Edge had a chance to hazard a guess at what was happening, one of the other cars went soaring through the air and tumbled on top of Undyne and the human with a loud crunch. As the momentum carried the vehicle forward and out of his line of sight, bits of metal and gravel rained down on the stationary cars, plinking against the roofs.

Edge sat stunned, unable to tear his eyelines from the spot where Undyne had just been standing. The captain was under there. She couldn’t be alive. Not after that. She was dead. Again. His soul was convulsing so violently that it was making him feel sick. He thought back to his captain’s limp body, devoid of any head, falling to the ground before turning to dust. That’s all she was now. Dust.
Suddenly, the car that had been lodged against the door was pushed aside with a loud grating noise. From what, Edge couldn’t tell. But now that the vehicle had been moved, his view of his surroundings was unobscured. The crushed and smoking wreckage of the thrown vehicle was not too far away.

He rushed to the door, clambering at the handle once more. Maybe it wasn’t as bad as it appeared. If he could get out of this car, then maybe he could save her. He had escaped from these handcuffs once before, back in his home universe. But it had taken some time, and he didn’t have that luxury now. He located the compartment on the side of the handcuffs, raised his arms back, and –

Before he could attempt anything, something unseen cracked the window open, sending broken glass everywhere. The force of whatever had shattered the window sent Edge flying backwards, and his already-injured head cracked as it banged into the other door.

“**FUCK!**”

Dazed by the blow, Edge barely registered that something long and black was wrapped around his feet before he was yanked unceremoniously through the open window. His skull scraped roughly along the car before he was slammed down onto the gravel, knocking the wind out of him. For a moment, all he could see was the blinding light of the sun as it hung high in the sky. But as he tried to catch his breath, an imposing and dark figure came into view, hovering over him.

Stark white bone. Dark, void-filled eye sockets with tiny red pinpricks for eyelights. Long, gaping scars extending vertically across his face. A gaping mouth that curled oddly at the corners.

Edge sputtered wildly, scrambling to get off the ground and to get as far away from this skeleton as he could. He didn’t fully know why he needed to run, or why he didn’t want to look at this skeleton’s face. But every instinct within him was telling him that he was dangerous and that he had to do whatever it took to escape him. **NOW.**

When he tried to get to his feet, he realized that something was keeping him tethered. He peered down at his lower half and saw shadowy tendrils snaking in between his fibula and tibia, traveling up his femur, and weaving around the inlets of his pelvic bones. They tightened around him, their texture somehow soft and rough at the same time, like sharp feathers in an uncomfortable down pillow.

There was something not right about them. It was as if they didn’t belong in this bright, sunny universe. As if the light couldn’t penetrate their dense darkness. Staring at them made his vision flicker, and he couldn’t stop himself from squirming under their touch. They hurt and felt good at the same time and it wasn’t right, wasn’t right, wasn’t right!

And they were quickly encroaching upwards.

“**NO! NO!**” He kicked ferociously, desperate to remove the intruding appendages as they coiled around him. “**GET OFF!**”

But despite his efforts, the shadows held fast, encasing every bone and lacing into every opening. He glanced up at the face – that horrible, horrible face – and shot the skeleton a resentful glare.

“**NOW, NOW, PAPYRUS. ENOUGH OF THAT NOW.**” The voice was all wrong. It was as if the words were grating, screeching, echoing when they shouldn’t. And to his terror, it was somehow strangely familiar. He wanted to clutch at his head to try to muffle the noises, but the shadows had now trapped his arms and chest too. They were climbing up his neck, and were closing in on his mouth now.
He tried to summon a wave of bones to fling at the skeleton, but the effort sparked fresh waves of electricity that bit at his every bone. The current must have traveled to the unknown monster because the tendrils jerked, tightening their grip around Edge so that it felt like all the air had been driven from him. He couldn’t think, couldn’t move.

The shadows suddenly lifted him high into the air and threw him to the ground. The last thing Edge was aware of was the loud cracking noise that was his skull hitting the dirt road.
Chapter Notes

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulssex.tumblr.com. You can also find soul sex and Papby reblogs if that's your thing.

- Okay, I just want to say that I am so sorry for the long delay on this chapter. x_x I have had a REALLY rough month, and unfortunately, a LOT of the content in this chapter reflects a lot of stuff going down in my life. Yes, I had this chapter planned out for a LONG time before this, so it was just a case of VERY bad timing. Updates might be sparse in the future. Or there could be a bunch coming out at once. It really depends on my mood and real life stuff, sorry D:
- I don't even know if anyone is still interested in my story beside my friends. xD It appears as if a lot of people are leaving the fandom. u_u

Additional tags for this chapter: Dealing with character death, character death, suicide, mentions of Sansby (kinda?), missing person
(If I forgot anything, please let me know!)

* PEPYS PEOPLE GUARD | WRONG PEOPLE AUTMN HANDKERCHIEF GIVE FORECASTLE | FRIEND HALFPENNY | FRIEND CASTLE [APOSTROPHE] ISLAND | CASTLE FORECASTLE GUARD GIVE | WRONG HOUR BREAD CASTLE | CASTLE HOUR GIVE PEPYS | ISLAND BREAD PEPYS | BREAD DEBT PEOPLE GUARD CASTLE | ISLAND BREAD PEPYS FRIEND AUTMN GNAW | PEPYS PEOPLE GUARD FORECASTLE | WRONG FRIEND ISLAND HOUR GIVE ISLAND | PEOPLE GUARD CASTLE | CALM PEOPLE GUARD HANDKERCHIEF.

Papyrus strode from one end of his room to the other, as he had been doing for some time. It stopped him from thinking too much, which was exactly what he needed. He needed a distraction. Something constructive.

But the house was clean. The laundry was washed, the carpets were vacuumed, and the windows were spotless.

The one place that required any work was the kitchen and he had no desire to go back down there. At least not while the other two were down there. He had left the moment Edge had gone to the basement.

It was painful to admit, but it was too much to be around them right now. He had gone downstairs last night and when he had seen the pair of them together on the couch, it had physically hurt to
look at them. His soul had felt like it was cracking. Only after he had escaped to the kitchen and had cooked a couple of meals had the throbbing in his soul diminished.

Why did Red and Edge get to do that? Why did they have to cuddle so much around him? Why did they flaunt their closeness like that? They got to depend on each other, to comfort each other, to love each other, while Papyrus…

Papyrus had no one.

He stopped pacing and stared down at his trembling hands.

It was painful to admit, but he was alone. No one wanted to be near him. Undyne wouldn’t message him. She was too busy and important for him. Alphys was gone, and he truly wished he could sit down a lose himself in an anime with her. Or even just talk. And even though Papyrus loved him, Red seemed to be quite upset with him as of late. When Red wasn’t arguing with Papyrus, he was ignoring him. Papyrus wondered if he was being too clingy.

Edge was the one person that seemed to pay him any attention, and Papyrus knew that it was more out of obligation than anything else. Papyrus had noticed how his lookalike was devoted to upholding honor and loyalty more than anything else. It was admirable, and Papyrus really liked that about him, but it meant that Edge’s attentions were little more than an extension of that sense of responsibility. He didn’t consider Papyrus a friend. Not really.

No one was his friend. No one loved him. The only person that had ever truly loved him was gone.

Papyrus clenched his hands together and choked back tears. He couldn’t cry. Crying would be admitting that Edge was right. That Sans would never return. That there would be no reset. That Papyrus would be alone forever. Papyrus needed to hold onto that hope or he’d… he’d…

He squeezed his eyes shut. All he wanted was a hug from Sans. It was so hard waiting for the reset. So, so hard. It was taking every little bit of his strength to hold out for his brother.

A small voice in the back of his skull asked why he had to hold out. If it was all going to reset anyway, then…

He gulped. What was he doing? He needed to stop thinking so much and keep moving. It helped him forget everything.

Aimlessly pacing wasn’t really helping all that much though. He required a goal, a destination, anything. But the house was clean, he didn’t want to be around the other two, and the reporters were waiting outside, blocking his escape. Besides, he was sure Edge, out of some sense of duty, would stop him from leaving or insisted he go with him if he attempted to leave. Papyrus wanted to be alone right now.

Alone like always.

His eyes darted towards the desk by the window as another ugly thought crossed his mind.

---

Red slammed the door in the reporters’ faces as they converged upon him. Without hesitating, he rushed to the living room table. Papyrus had created a small shrine of sorts there. Undyne’s apology flowers for Red were a wilted mess in the center. Next to them was a framed photo of Sans standing in front of a lake, a hint of a smile on his face. Underneath a pair of googly-eye glasses was a rudimentary map drawn on a tattered piece of notebook paper.
Red grabbed the last item and hurriedly dialed the first phone number he saw next to a crudely sketched building labeled “#1 CHOICE – SPECIALIZES IN CRIMINAL AND HUMAN-MONSTER LAW!” He didn’t know why Papyrus had decided to keep the list of attorneys from the other day, and he didn’t know why he put it here with this mish mash of stuff, but he was thankful for it.

A few minutes later, the lawyer, who sounded excited albeit somewhat impatient, assured Red that they would get down to the Royal Guard Headquarters and speak with Boss and those in charge. They agreed to meet down there and discuss payment details after they secured Boss’s release. The lawyer was doing him a favor by not charging upfront, though it was clear it was because they wanted to take on the case for the publicity. As soon as he had mentioned his relation to Sans, the attorney was falling over themself to represent Edge.

Red had no clue where he was going to get that money, but he wasn’t going to let the humans bully his brother like this. Not after what happened to Sans.

As soon as he was off the phone, he shouted, “papyrus! get your tailbone out here! it’s an emergency!”

Red rushed to the laundry room and grabbed his hoodie. There was a good chance he’d be on camera today, and if what Undyne had whispered to him was true, the world was going to be scrutinizing his every move. For his brother’s sake, he’d have to do his best to look good. He wiped at an old mustard stain fruitlessly.

When he was done making sure his jacket was as perfect as it was going to get, he shot a glance towards Papyrus’s door. Papyrus still hadn’t come out.

“papyrus!”

Yet again, he received no reply. He wondered if Papyrus had finally fallen asleep after days of staying awake. Perfect timing.

Grumbling to himself, Red walked to the door and turned the knob and discovered that it was locked.

“paps? why’d you lock the door?” When Papyrus didn’t respond, he called out, “i’m coming in!”

He teleported into his bedroom and was greeted with an odd sight. Papyrus’s desk had been pushed to the middle. The wires were stretched taut between the computer and the power outlets. A warm summer breeze blew inside from the open window. He rushed over and looked down the side of the house, but saw only the surrounding forest. There was no sign of Papyrus.

Red tried to ignore the nervous fluttering in his chest. Papyrus had probably gone to the store and had wanted to avoid the reporters. He couldn’t blame him for that.

But if that was the case, why hadn’t he told anyone? Red removed his cell phone from his pocket. One new text message. It wasn’t from Papyrus, but from a random number.

* You are receiving this message because of your contact with a member of this group. Come to our meeting tonight to discuss humans, Asgore, the Royal Guard, and unfair treatment of monsters under the human’s dictatorship. 7:30 tonight at Grillby’s. Be careful who you tell.

Like he gave a shit about that. He dismissed the text and called Papyrus’s phone. A loud buzzing filled the air and after a few seconds of searching, Red found Papyrus’s cell phone on the nightstand.
And right next to it was a note that simply said, “SORRY, I WILL RETURN.”

Red stared at the paper. What did that mean? Had Papyrus left for the store? Or… somewhere else?

Uneasiness spread throughout Red’s soul. If Papyrus had gone to the store, why hadn’t he texted Red? And why leave a note like that?

Red was breathing quickly now. He pressed a quivering hand to his sternum to calm his soul.

There was no need to worry. Papyrus was just… getting groceries. He wouldn’t do anything stupid. He so much stronger than Red or anyone else he had ever met. Stronger even than Boss, though he’d never admit that to anyone.

Still, every fiber of his being was screaming at him to find Papyrus. Red couldn’t help but think back to his earlier conversation with his brother. Maybe he should search for Papyrus. Just to make sure he didn’t want help.

He pulled out his phone and texted the attorney at the cell number they had given him.

* when you talk to my bro, tell him i need to find paps. he’s off somewhere and he didn’t say where. if my bro gets mad, tell him i’m real sorry, but i’m worried.

He didn’t bother to wait for a reply. He arrived outside the closest grocery store, which was out in the countryside, not too far from home. When the storeowners informed him they hadn’t seen Papyrus recently, Red decided to sit outside the building until Papyrus showed up. It only took five minutes of waiting before he couldn’t stand still any longer. He teleported down the path they usually took to and from the store, hoping to intercept Papyrus somewhere along the way.

When he caught sight of the reporters standing next to their home, he stopped in his tracks. Papyrus must have gone to another store. That made sense. He had probably wanted to jog on the way there, and for the best workout, that meant going to a store in the suburbs or the city.

Red’s soul fluttered in his chest as he appeared at the store in the center of Very New Home. When he didn’t find him, he tried another. Then another and another.

After his eighth grocery store, Red wasn’t sure what to do. He knew he was being stupid and that Papyrus probably went out for fresh air somewhere, but… if he wasn’t at a store, where was he?

Maybe his job? He teleported to the tourist site. A heavy silence washed over him as he materialized outside the breakroom. The whispering trees were the only source of noise in the area. Every business was closed and the place was completely empty. As he moved around the complex, he saw signs plastered everywhere that read ‘Due to recent events, the Royal Guard has reallocated resources elsewhere at this time. Please contact the Human-Monster Relations Department for more information and reopening dates.”

By the time Red had finished combing through the tourist puzzle areas, he was in a real panic. The sun was setting fast and he had no clue where Papyrus was.

He went back to the house to make sure no one had come home. No sign of Papyrus or Boss.

He returned to three of the grocery stores to check again. Nothing.

He finally went to random locations within the city, asking the few monsters he came across if they had seen Papyrus. No one had.
By the time he crossed into the eastern district, he realized he was in real trouble. Papyrus had to be somewhere, but Red couldn’t search the entire region on his own. And if… if Papyrus was… was… then…

He swallowed. Finding Papyrus soon was a good idea, if only for Red’s own health. But to do that, he’d need help.

He sat underneath a streetlamp near one of the grungy warehouses and pulled out his phone. Six new messages. Eight missed calls. All from the attorney. He had been so engrossed with finding Papyrus, he must have never noticed his phone buzzing.

* That is fine. Should I expect him to get angry?

* I’m at the RG’s intake office. The Guards aren’t disclosing any info. about your brother and do not seem to have custody of him. Are you sure the humans didn’t arrest him?

* Was this a prank? No one seems to know who or where your brother is.

* Never mind. Sorry for that last message. Call me immediately. Info. too sensitive for writing.

* My phone is dying. Call soon. Need to discuss your brother’s situation.

* Phone at 1% so please call me at my work number before 7PM. Undyne and car located.

Red’s phalanges clattered against the phone. What did that mean? Had they met with Boss or not? It was 8PM already, but he called the attorney’s work phone. There was no answer. He tried two more times before trying their cell number. The voice mail message played right away.

“fuck,” he muttered to himself.

He wasn’t sure what to do. From the sounds of it, Boss had gone missing for a while, but the attorney had found him somewhere. Red wondered whether his brother was at the police department or with the Royal Guard. He had to get in contact with someone who knew what the fuck was going on.

His fingers still trembling, he brought up Undyne’s contact information and called her. She would be able to tell him everything, and he could also ask her for help to find Papyrus.

But it went straight to voice mail. And yet again, when he called a second time there was no answer.

“god dammit!” he screamed, causing a nearby homeless mouse monster to jump in fright. They scurried away into the dark alley, knocking into the garbage cans that littered the sidewalk.

If Undyne wasn’t going to answer, then he’d have to ask someone else. Maybe Toriel. Last time they had spoken was at the medical tent. He wondered if she had been keeping herself busy with volunteering at a hospital or something. For all he knew, she was helping the king out with this whole mess.

He called her. For fucking once, it didn’t go straight to voice mail. It rang and rang and rang until…

“Hello, this is Toriel. I cannot come to the phone right now, but please leave a message ~”

He wanted to throw his phone in the nearby dumpster, but instead he clenched it tighter in his hand until the beep signaled his turn to speak.
“toriel, it’s me, red! call me back right away, okay? my bro got arrested, my lawyer won’t pick up the damn phone, and paps is missing. i got no fucking clue where he is and i’m scared. i think he might’ve gotten himself into trouble or something, i don’t know. please, please call me back as soon as you hear this.”

He hung up and called her back immediately, unwilling to wait long enough for her to even listen to the message. She, of fucking course, didn’t answer.

As he scrolled through his recent messages, it hit him then that he had no one to turn to. Everyone that he could usually depend on was either missing or dead. Apart from his attorney, the last person to contact him was the random number asking him to join the anti-human meeting at Grillby’s.

He stared at the text. Grillby. Maybe he would…

There was no one else he could think of. And if it was true that anti-human monsters were there tonight, maybe they’d help find Papyrus. Even if Grillby refused to help, so many of the regulars there had been friendly with Sans. Maybe they’d extend that same courtesy to him, or at least to Papyrus.

He didn’t have Grillby’s number. Even if he did, he suspected Grillby wouldn’t answer him anyway. Direct contact was the best method.

He inhaled deeply and teleported outside the restaurant. The smell of smoke, dust, and death filled his nasal cavity, and he nearly choked on the sickly stench. The memories of the day of the explosion filled his mind as he glanced around the unlit area. Here and there he saw the images of the injured and dead he had seen. He could almost feel the raging fires on the surface of his bones. The unending screams were echoing in his skull.

He squeezed his eyes shut and tried to drown it all out. There was still dust and ash everywhere, but it was from the fire. No dead humans. No limbs or blood. The Guard had said that they had recovered everyone’s remains. He was safe and no one was here. The dead silence reinforced that.

It was eerily quiet given that there was supposed to be a bunch of monsters gathering here. He cracked open his eyes and peered at the restaurant. The building was shockingly intact. Only a single metal beam was jutting from the roof. He wondered if someone had fixed the damage with magic. Sans used to talk about how he used to volunteer for that sort of stuff when he had first reached the surface. It would be…

He stopped himself. His soul was scrunching with pain. With everything else going on, he wouldn’t be able to function if he reminisced about Sans right now. And if Sans were here, he’d want Red to find Papyrus more than anything else.

Armed with this thought, Red stepped closer to the building. The moment he approached the door, he saw a magical barrier, previously invisible, humming along the edges of the restaurant. For a second, the faint glow distracted him. As he turned to the right for a better view of the wall, he started.

He was not alone. A black bull monster loomed over him, though his dark fur made him blend into the shadows. Red’s eyes were drawn to the other monster’s sharp horns. They would make quick work of Red if he gave the bull a chance. Instinct sent a bone to Red’s hand. He bent his knees, ready to fight the hulking figure. Tendrils of magic were flowing freely from his right eye as he glared the monster down.

The bull wasn’t upset, but rather appeared surprised. He tilted his head at Red curiously.
“The bar’s closed.” Red had expected him to have an intimidating voice, but he was soft-spoken. “The whole area’s closed actually.”

Red tightened his grasp around the summoned bone. “then why did someone tell me there was a meeting here tonight?”

The bull looked him up and down. “You new? Who invited you?”

Red had no clue who the fuck invited him. “does it matter?”

“I guess not.” The bull shook his head wildly, his ears twitching. “You’re late though. The meeting started half an hour ago.”

Red shrugged. When he didn’t give any further response, the other monster sighed and pushed the front door.

“Just don’t cause trouble.”

As the door swung open, the sound of boisterous patrons escaped the bar and echoed throughout the area. Warm light poured from the restaurant, illuminating the seemingly impenetrable darkness. A throng of monsters had amassed at the entrance, their backs turned towards the doorway.

For an instant, Red was reminded of those bitter cold nights in his universe. The heat and activity from Grillby’s had always offered such a stark contrast to the Snowdin’s icy silence. Outside, anyone could ambush a lone monster. Inside meant food and forgetting your worries over a drink or a game of poker.

The similarity didn’t encourage Red. Like in his old universe, entering Grillby’s was stepping into the lion’s den. The temporary trust of a card game wasn’t all that strong when one sat down with known enemies. The same could be said for tonight.

He took a large breath and strode inside. The door shut gently behind him as he edged towards the mass of monsters blocking his way. Everyone’s attention was fixated on the center of the room. Monsters were shouting from there, but Red couldn’t see who; everyone in the back was so tall. All he could see were legs and other appendages. He couldn’t even spot Grillby, despite how brightly he burned.

“— and I say we march down to the Royal Guard and take control! Undyne’s in the humans’ pockets as much as Asgore, and I know most of the Guard doesn’t want to take it anymore!”

Red pushed between a pair of monsters as the rest of them shouted in angry agreement with the speaker. Grillby was sure to be at the counter, he just had to get there. Then he could pull him to the side and explain. There was a chance Grillby could convince at least a handful of these monsters to help him.

If Grillby was willing to listen.

“Don’t be stupid,” someone else chimed in. “It’s not Undyne’s fault, and violence isn’t going to solve a thing! We’ve got to do this peacefully —”

“Peacefully ain’t getting’ us nowhere!” cried out a third voice. “All it got us was a cancelled memorial and an army rollin’ down the streets in tanks! We can’t —”

“’scuse me,” Red mumbled as he pressed towards the heart of the room.
“Hey, was that Sans’s cousin?” someone asked in a carrying whisper.

Red cringed.

“Yeah, I think so. Damn.”

“I know. Poor guy.”

Red felt monsters tracking him as he continued forward. Several monsters even turned to face him as he approached. Every time a monster’s eyes met his own, their eyes widened in recognition. All he could do was shove past them and hope that the speakers would recapture their attention.

As he reached the periphery of the crowd, he spotted Grillby. His eyes were trained on the shot glass and towel in his hands, but Red could tell he was listening intently to the anti-human monsters. Red slowly skirted the front edge of the group as he made for the bar.

A loud yelp through the other monsters’ chatter. “Oh my god, Sans!?”

Red jerked his head towards the source of the noise as a thick silence permeated the restaurant. Even as all eyes turned towards him, he knew immediately who had called his name; Doggo was standing on the other side of the room, gawking at him. As the two of them made eye contact, realization washed over Doggo’s face.

“Sorry, Red.” Doggo’s voice was choked with tears. “I thought –”

Red murmured, “it’s okay.” He stuffed his hands in his pockets and hunched his shoulders. Sweat streamed from his skull as everyone focused on him. All he wanted to do was disappear before them.

A demon monster standing in the nearly-empty center of the room gave him a sad smile. “You’re Sans’s cousin, right?” It was one of the speakers from earlier. “What brought you here?”

A sudden heat flared from behind Red.

“What the hell are you doing here?”

Both the demon monster and Red flinched from the ferocity in Grillby’s voice. When Red turned back towards the counter, he reflexively took a step back. Grillby’s body was extended far more than Red have ever seen before – this universe or his own. His flames twisted and popped erratically, sending sparks flying upwards. The heat pouring from him was making more than only Red swelter; many were pulling at their collars and those closest to him were quickly scampering away.

Red gulped. “heya grillby,” he said lamely. “i, uh, was hoping to talk to you.”

“No. Get out.” Grillby crackled loudly. “Get out and don’t ever come back here.”

The other monsters whispered amongst themselves as Grillby stared Red down. Red knew he should leave, but he held his ground.

“no. i need to talk to you.” He clenched his fists and added, “you know, i lost sans too. i got every right to be at a place like this.”

“And you thought showing up here would be a good idea? Did you come to spit in my face?” He scoffed. “You’re petty.”
“petty? me? that’s a laugh, coming from you.”

The restaurant went silent again.

“do you think i came all the way over here to get into a pissing match with you?”

“Why else would you be here?”

“it has nothing to do with you or sans.” Red shook his head. “no, that’s not true. it has everything to do with sans.” He took a deep breath. “papyrus is gone.”

Doggo was the one that replied. “What do you mean ‘gone’?” he asked, his voice hollow.

“he’s missing, and –” His voice cracked. “i don’t know where he is. he left a note that said ‘sorry’ and he’s been missing practically all day.” He hugged his own arms as tremors overtook his body. “i don’t know what to do. i’ve been looking all day and i can’t find him. i can’t search the whole fucking city by myself.”

His hands were digging into his arms roughly.

“Papyrus wouldn’t do anything like that,” Doggo said.

“i thought the same, but –” His voice caught and he couldn’t stop himself from letting out a sob. “sans is dead. he’s dead and… paps and i, we’re not okay.”

His face warmed at the admission. He shrugged his shoulders up to hide his face behind his hoodie. Tears fell to the ground as he cast his gaze downwards, trying to avoid everyone’s penetrating stares.

“sorry. i’m so sorry.”

It was bad enough that he was being so emotional, but to fall apart in front of everyone else? He was weak.

He felt a hand lightly grip his shoulder from behind. It was a tall, green slime monster he had never seen before. Tears clung to their eyes and they had a doleful expression on their face. Others nearby were looking at him similarly.

A soft sizzling noise sounded through the room and grabbed Red’s attention. Grillby’s flames had died down considerably, though he was still staring Red down.

“When did you last see him?” Grillby crackled softly.

Red dropped his arms to the side. “this morning after… well, after we had an argument.”

More like after the two of them had completely lost their shit over resets, but he wasn’t about to say any of that.

“And you need our help?”

“yeah, i – i don’t know the city too well and if we can find him…” He wiped his face with the arm of his jacket. “i just don’t know where his skull is at.”

“Okay.”

“okay?”
“I’ll help you.” Grillby walked around the counter. “Tell me where you’ve looked.”

Red blinked. “really? just like that?”

“If you say Papyrus needs help, then of course I am going to help. Sans would never forgive me if I sat idly by while his brother was in trouble.”

“Papyrus is my friend,” announced Doggo. “We can’t ignore him when he’s in pain like this.”

The demon monster nodded. “Everyone knows Papyrus has always been there for when we’ve needed help. And we know what he’s going through. We’re all hurting. If there’s something we can do to help him, we should. This meeting can wait another day.”

There were murmurs of agreement. Someone began barking orders and dividing up the crowd into teams.

“This group will head to Lower Side. Don’t forget to check the parks and ask anyone you know if they’ve seen him. You five go to Temper Heights. Your guys can climb, so you –”

Even though tears obscured Red’s vision, he could still see the bright flames flickering as Grillby sidled up to him.

“thanks,” Red mumbled, wiping at his face.

“Yes,” Grillby replied shortly. “I am… sorry about my reaction earlier.”

Red shrugged. “we don’t like each other. i know we got a ‘i’ll keep outta your way, you keep outta mine’ type deal, but i was desperate.”

“That wasn’t it.” When Red cocked a brow at him, Grillby sighed and explained, “I didn’t like you, that’s true. But that wasn’t why I told you to get lost last time, and it’s not why I told you to leave tonight.”

The familiar anger from a few weeks back rekindled in his soul.

“then why?”

Grillby’s flames shrunk a bit. “It was a promise Sans made to me. About dating others.” He glanced away. “And I genuinely thought you were bad for him. You had all these issues he talked about. He wasn’t healthy enough to be with you and you weren’t healthy enough to be with him. Or so I thought.”

Red’s soul squirmed. He wasn’t convinced that it hadn’t been true.

“It’s too much to discuss right now. Sans is – was – complicated. We were complicated.”

“yeah. same here, buddy.”

Grillby’s fire spluttered for a second. “Don’t.”

“don’t what?”

“Say that. ‘Buddy.’ That’s what he’d say.”

Grillby folded his arms across his chest and several tiny wisps of smoke gushed from his face. Red wondered if that was the equivalent of crying.
“It’s why I got upset earlier. You look so much like him. You even act the same way as he used to. Back when we were young.” He sighed sadly. “I can’t believe he’s gone.”

Red scrunched his eyes shut. “was just saying the same thing this morning. i miss him.”

Quiet fell between them. Red stood there, listening as the other monsters bustled about. He wondered how long he could lose himself here, ignoring the rest of the world.

“Hey, you two!”

Red exhaled, knowing the statement was directed towards him and Grillby. He opened his eyes and saw the demon monster from earlier marching their way.

“Have you been assigned anywhere?”

“No,” Grillby said. “Where do you need me?”

“Oh, go with a rural team for sure. They’re shorthanded there and you’ll light the area up really well.” Grillby nodded and rushed over to the group she indicated. “Now you –”

“i’m going to the rural area too. by myself.”

“By yourself?”

“yeah, i can… well, i can cover more ground on my own, trust me.”

Teleporting monsters left and right would drain his magic so much faster than if it was just him. And he wasn’t about to wait around for the rest of them.

“Oh, then, you get the northern region. You know that area well?”

“about as well as the rest of the area.” Which he basically didn’t know at all.

She gave him her cell number. “Call us if you find him. We’ll do the same for you.”

As the mass filed out of the bar, several monsters, including Doggo and Greater Dog, shot Red concerned looks. When the restaurant had finally cleared out, it felt cold and dim.

Red breathed deeply. With all these monsters on the lookout for Papyrus, he should probably get over to the Royal Guard and check on his brother. But he just had to hope that the attorney had done their job. He didn’t think he’d feel okay until he saw Papyrus in front of him. Until then, Boss would have to wait. Papyrus was his number one priority.

He took a moment to collect himself before appearing in the countryside.

It was dark. Much darker than Grillby’s or any part of the city he had searched. The moon was almost full, but it wasn’t nearly bright enough to see the ground in the amount of detail he needed. As he traveled up and down the hills, he had to use both his phone and magic to light up the area. He had to be able to see Papyrus if he…

Red tried not to think about it.

The continued use of his magic drained his diminished reserves quickly, and he found himself stumbling even on flat ground. He stopped teleporting every hundred meters and walked instead, but even that wore him out.
After an hour of rifling through the area, Red was utterly exhausted. He tripped on his own feet and fell flat on his tailbone. Unable to muster the energy to get up, he dismissed his magic and lay on his back. His chest heaved painfully as he held his phone up to the sky. He hoped that the others had gotten lucky and had found Papyrus at some restaurant somewhere in the city.

No such luck. There were no new messages.

He dropped his arm to the ground. “damn.”

He needed to get up and keep looking. Or go to the Royal Guards and demand to see his brother. He couldn’t lie here like a lazy asshole.

But that was all he wanted to do. Lie here and stare at the stars. Like yesterday morning in the bedroom. Sans would have enjoyed doing that with him. In fact, everyone Red cared for seemed to like it.

Red wished the four of them had been able to do that together. Maybe at that spot by the lake. Papyrus loved that area. He had said it was the best place for stargazing. Red agreed. It was quiet, secluded, and beautiful.

Red flew to his feet.

The lake.

It wasn’t in the northern area, but… the lake was huge. Even if other monsters were searching that area, they may never find that spot. There was no harm in checking. It was better than sitting around here.

His feet sunk into the mud as he entered the clearing. It was as peaceful as last time. The moon shone eerily over the lake, illuminating the still waters. The surface was like a mirror; it was so smooth that it reflected the surroundings perfectly. Unseen frogs’ deep-throated calls echoed across the lake. The stray branches and downed trees from the storm from a couple of weeks back had remained untouched, though many of the leaves had since died or drifted away.

And in the middle of the clearing, a few feet away, was Papyrus. He was lying on the ground, completely unharmed, with his eyes shut. The most peaceful expression had settled upon his face, and it appeared as if he had fallen asleep.

“oh thank god,” Red exclaimed as he pressed a hand to his sternum. “oh paps, you’re alive.”

“Sans?” Papyrus cried out softly. “Sans, is that really you?”

Red’s soul twisted. “paps, no. it’s me.” He swallowed. “it’s red.”

“Oh.” Red had never heard anyone sound so disappointed in his life.

“papyrus, what’re you doing out here?” He went to Papyrus and dropped to his knees, allowing the mud to soak into shorts. “i’ve been lookin’ everywhere for you all day.”

Papyrus whispered, “I – I needed some time to myself.”

“you’ve been gone for hours! and that note you left! you scared the shit outta me!”

He expected Papyrus to open his eyes and reprimand him for his bad language, but he continued to sit there, completely motionless.
“Sorry.” He sounded so quiet, as if he was barely awake. “It is so warm and comfortable here. I cannot make myself get up.”

Red was shivering. It was so much cooler down by the lake. Maybe it was because he was drenched in so much sweat, but “warm and comfortable” were the last words he’d use to describe this place at the moment.

“it’s okay, i get it. i used to fall asleep in the weirdest places back in the underground. but we really should get home. it’s real late, and i really gotta talk to boss. he’s in trouble.”

Papyrus remained still and didn’t respond. Red knew he was being shitty.

“look, i’m sorry for making those jokes earlier.” He wrapped his hand around Papyrus’s arm. “and for treating you like such shit lately. you didn’t deserve it.” He sniffed. “you don’t deserve any of this.”

“That is okay.”

“it’s not okay.” He squeezed Papyrus tightly. “you don’t do that to the monsters you love.”

Papyrus didn’t respond immediately, and when he did, he almost sounded like a child. “You love me?”

“What? of course i love you.”

“I thought… you only loved Sans and your brother. That Sans was my only friend.”

Red stared at Papyrus. “paps, i love you so much.” He tried his best to impart the weight of his words so that Papyrus would believe him. “i don’t know where i’d be without you. and there’s so many monsters that care about you, that love about you. there’s at least fifty of them searching for you now. more even. they heard you were missing and they flipped.” He thought he must be hurting Papyrus with how firmly he was gripping him. “so don’t say sans is your only friend.”

“I wish you had told me sooner,” Papyrus whined.

“What? about the others? you thought they hated you or something? come on, i’ve always been in awe of how many friends you have.”

“No, that you love me.”

Red sat up straighter. “what, i never said that?”

“No.”

He scooped Papyrus’s skull into his lap. “i’m sorry, i guess i thought it was obvious.” He kissed Papyrus’s forehead. “i love you, paps, and i’m sorry i was too shitty not to say it before.”

For a few moments, all he could hear was the sound of the frogs croaking.

“i know you miss him. sans.” He rubbed Papyrus’s shoulders. “i do too, but we should –”

“It does not matter. I will see him in the next reset.”

“come on, we can’t –”

“Next time,” he sighed. “Next time all of us will do better.”
Red wrapped his arms around Papyrus’s chest and snuggled him closer. “let’s get up and go home, paps. please.”

“No, I don’t want to. I am so warm.” His voice was growing softer. “Tell me a bedtime story. You can take me after.”

“paps, come on.” But Papyrus didn’t move. “i don’t even know any stories.”

“Fluffy Bunny.”

“i don’t know how it ends. i fell asleep before you finished, remember?”

“That is okay. The… Great Papyrus… likes different… versions…”

It sounded like he was falling asleep already.

“okay, but promise to let me take you home as soon as i’m done.”

“Promise,” he whispered.

Red thought back to the story. It wasn’t that long ago, but he had been so sick when Papyrus had told it to him. He couldn’t remember it all.

He embraced Papyrus as he peered up at the sky.

“fluffy bunny was a rabbit and he didn’t like carrots. all the other rabbits hated him because of that. oh, and he liked peek-a-boo, but the other rabbits laughed at him ‘bout that too. they kinda sucked.”

Papyrus was breathing so slowly.

“fluffy bunny decided to run away. he found a new farm with turnips. the rabbits there were so much nicer and they loved to play peek-a-boo. it was good for a while. everyone was real happy. then the farmer got mad when all their crops were gone. so the farmer grabbed all of fluffy bunny’s friends. he didn’t know what to do.”

Red couldn’t remember what happened next.

“so, uh… fluffy bunny hopped up to the farmer and bit their ankle. all the rabbits got loose and they ran away to a new field. it had turnips and peek-a-boo and fun, and it was way more kickass than any of the other fields. they lived happily ever after.”

Red squeezed Papyrus again. “the end, papyrus. you awake?”

“Yes.” He was speaking so quietly, Red almost couldn’t hear him over the frogs.

“okay, it’s time to get up and go.”

“Can’t.”

“what do you mean ‘can’t’?” He shook Papyrus. “come on, you promised.”

“Sorry, can’t… feel myself.”

Red gawked at him. “what do you mean?”
“Can’t feel… anything. Haven’t… whole time. So… warm…”

Red’s soul pounded violently in his chest. “what? what does that mean? paps?”

“Sorry… next… re… set…”

His voice trailed off. Red hugged him tightly to his chest, suddenly scared.

“paps, what’re you talking about? come on, let’s go home!”

Red leaned onto his knees, readying himself to pick up Papyrus and take him home.

But suddenly Papyrus’s weight was gone. Red snapped forward and lost his balance. With nothing to cling onto, his hands slammed against his own chest as he fell to the ground.

Red couldn’t understand. Had Papyrus gotten up? Where was he?

He looked around and saw nothing. No Papyrus standing over him.

So… warm…

No, no, no, no, no.

This wasn’t real. This wasn’t happening.

He glanced down at his lap and quickly averted his gaze towards the sky. His breath came in sharp gasps, and he felt dizzy. The sky was twirling before his eyes. The weight of Papyrus’s dust was so light he almost couldn’t feel it. He could hardly feel anything.

He needed to get away from here. From the surface. From everything. He needed something. Or someone. He needed Papyrus.

His eyes latched onto a meteorite as it skimmed across the night sky.

What was it that humans said? When someone sees one, they were supposed to make a wish?

Red snapped his eyes shut and made his wish.

“i wish this would reset. please, please reset.”
What Is the Average Air Speed Velocity of a Laden Swallow?

Chapter Notes

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulex.tumblr.com. You can also find soul sex and Papby reblogs if that's your thing.

FANART

- Mk-doodles drew the last scene from Chapter 39 with Red. ;^; It looks amazing and so, so sad! D: You can check it out here!
- Donnapaella also drew the last scene from Chapter 39 with Red and Papyrus. They capture the moment really well. ;^; You can find it here!

NOTES

- I'm so sorry for being so far behind on replying to comments! I'm going to try to make a dent in them as soon as I can! Thank you SO much to all of the wonderful comments, asks, and messages. You guys are seriously why this fandom is so amazing. *glomps you all*
- Alternative chapter names: “Holy Shit There Are Forty Chapters of This Nonsense”; “Watch Out, Skellies! Satan Is Gonna Get You!”; “Pacha, Kuzco, and Chicha is My Real OT3”; “Jost Maximilian von Bronckhorst-[REDACTED]”; “Gaster Says ‘We’ But Who Is He Referring To?”

Additional tags for this chapter: Papster, Molestation, Sexual Touching, Forced Science Experiments, Imprisonment, Sensitive Bones, Noncon? (it's non-consensual, but doesn't amount to sex beyond bad touching), Body Horror
(If I forgot anything, please let me know!)

* Wnil owlml ildfe bqirl qeruw.

For number, see above question.
A=0, B=2, C=4, …

Pain. That was the only thing Edge felt. He was drowning in it, choking on it. It was as if someone had split his skull down the middle and left him for dust.

Everything a messy blur of colors. Someone was speaking to him, but the sound was distant and distorted, as if he were underwater. The world was tilting, falling apart. He heaved forward, reaching out desperately for something to hold onto. As his hands found purchase on something warm and soft, he clenched his eyes shut and curled into a ball, whining softly as the pain overtook him.

A sudden iciness bit at Edge, freezing him to the marrow. His bones clattered against a cold, hard surface and his skull ached, though thankfully nothing like before. Still, he took several deep breaths in an effort to dispel his throbbing headache before he slowly blinked his eyes open.
Although it felt as if no time had passed since the accident, he must have passed out at some point because he didn’t recognize where he was. His face was centimeters away from a wall made of grey stone. He twisted around to get a better look, and his sweaty bones slipped across the surface. Someone had unclothed him. He had a feeling he knew who that someone was. A sharp chill, entirely unrelated to the temperature, ran up his spine.

The walls were so close to him that if he sat up, he would probably hit the ceiling if he didn’t hunch over. He lifted his head, casting his gaze down, and sighed in relief. Iron bars stood where his feet would sit were he not hunched in on himself.

He brought his hands to his forehead and sucked in a breath. It was so cold, and he hurt so badly. But he needed to move. Someone had captured him. That skeleton with the voice. God, he felt sick just thinking of that voice. He needed to get himself together and escape before that man came back.

It was that thought that drove him to his knees and made him scuffle forward. His bound hands complicated matters, making it difficult to move even the short distance to the door. As he crawled, his vision tilted, he could only try to blink away the dizziness. His bones painfully clanked along the walls as he shivered from the cold.

When he finally made it, he collapsed against the bars, out of breath and lightheaded. As he rested, he peered outside and took in his surroundings.

Wherever he was, the room was huge. To his right and left were walls of what appeared to be cages identical to his. But the wall directly opposite him captured his attention. It stretched upwards for several stories, traveling so high up that he couldn’t see the ceiling from where he sat. Large, heavy beams leaned dotted the room, holding the expansive structure up. As far as he could tell, the wall was unmarked by windows or doors; the only source of light came from the bright white lights from overhead.

Though it was hard to make out from where he sat, he thought he saw an overflowing pile of brightly colored metal stacked up against the wall. Some of the colors and shapes reminded him of Mettaton’s robotic husk. Whatever the objects were, they were glossy and eye-catching.

His eyes drifted to the open space immediately in front of his enclosure. The area was clearly set up as some sort of makeshift medical bay. A gurney, padded with off-white leather, stood beneath several oversized surgical lamps. Not too far away was a stainless-steel table covered with a variety of medical instruments. Hefty-looking metal tools, syringes, empty lab glassware, and other objects glinted malevolently under the fluorescent lights.

He craned his head to the left and more closely inspected the cells there. Even with his neck leaned as far to the right as possible, it was impossible to see them all. There had to be hundreds.

They weren’t empty either. As he searched the wall, he spotted the occasional patch of fur here and there, jutting out from between the bars. When his breathing finally calmed, he heard the other monsters’ sniffling and breathing echoing oddly in the spacious room. He wondered how many were trapped here alongside him, and for what purpose.

He knew better than to call out to them. That sort of behavior would likely only invoke the wrath of his captor. He had witnessed that firsthand in his universe. Undyne had dealt out harsh punishment to anyone that made even the slightest of noises afterhours… or upon those that tried to escape.

Escape. That was what he had to focus on. He needed to get out of here before that unnerving skeleton came back. The exit had to be nearby.
His eyes darted to the right to the other wall of cages. But when he actually looked them straight on, he realized that they weren’t cages at all.

The wall consisted entirely of shelves. There had to be at least twenty rows of them, perhaps even more. They towered high over him, and he couldn’t get a good enough angle to see how tall the wall stretched.

Unlike the wall to his left, there were no signs of fur, scales, or flesh. But they weren’t unoccupied. Dim white lights lined them, casting an eerie glow over the right side of the room. They were more than “white lights.” They were monster souls, captured and suspended in glass cylinders. And as far as he could tell, they filled the shelves from top to bottom.

Edge was slightly nauseous. He couldn’t comprehend it. How were there so many boss monster souls in one place? Had the mysterious skeleton defeated that many? Just how powerful was he?

Upon further reflection, it made no sense. Even boss monsters’ souls disappeared after a time. He could still remember Queen Toriel’s soul shattering to pieces before him like a fragile piece of glass. Plus, there was no way there were that many boss monsters here. Not even in a world like this where no one had to fight for survival.

That meant they were probably normal monster souls, all trapped here. He didn’t know how someone had captured their souls, but there they were. Someone had murdered them. The power and strength that person had after killing so many had to be immeasurable.

Edge needed to leave. Now.

There was no door in sight, so he could only presume the exit was somewhere along his own wall. He hated to create an escape plan based off an assumption, but he had no other choice.

The first thing he had to do was get these handcuffs off. If he could gain access to his magic, he’d be able to use his bone attacks to break free. He scrutinized the iron bars. Yes, with enough force, the metal would bend. Getting the cuffs removed, however, would be much trickier.

He had done it once before, but the process had been excruciatingly long and painful. This time was sure to hurt even more; his skull still felt like it had recently been cleaved and his bones were still sore from his continuous shaking. But he had no choice. He wasn’t about to let that other skeleton harvest his soul.

After quickly pinpointing the compartment containing the magic suppression device, he lifted his arms as high over his head as they could go in the cramped space. With a deep breath, he slammed the mechanism against the wall while simultaneously calling upon his magic. A sharp jolt of electricity ripped through his body as the contraption crashed into the stone. Although he cut the magic off after no more than two seconds, the device had already taken its toll on him.

He collapsed to the ground, gasping desperately as needles of pain shot up his bones. Every inch of him tingled, and his vision wavered before him. On the upside, he was no longer cold. Perhaps more importantly, though, was that the pain in his skull had intensified once again.

It had taken Edge twenty-three attempts to break the contraption last time. Twenty-three agonizing jolts of pain. Twenty-three glances with death. Under Undyne’s watchful eye, he had spread those attempts over a month. In the end, he had done it. All it had taken was the right amount of pressure as the electricity activated and the device had broken before him. His subsequent escape attempt, however, had been far less successful.
After a few minutes of rest, he sat back up, his body protesting the entire way. He ignored the pain. There was no time to waste; he didn’t have a month to do this.

With his body trembling fiercely, he tried again. He grunted loudly, his concentration faltering, as electricity stole through him once more. He couldn’t stop his magic in time. It was too much. The electricity coursed through him, ripping through his soul like a knife. When he was finally able to shut his magic off, a shout of relief escaped his mouth.

“Whoever that is, shut up!” someone unseen hissed, their voice reverberating through the room. “You’re going to bring him back here!”

Edge ignored them and sat up straight. Although his chest was heaving and he had by no means recovered, he aimed his hands over him and –

There was a quiet popping noise and Edge’s cell was cast in dark shadow. He looked towards the cage entrance and found himself staring the ominous skeleton straight in the eye. Panic gripped at his chest and, without realizing he was doing it, he scurried to the back wall, tripping over himself as he went. The skeleton’s void-filled eyes followed him.

“GOOD EVENING, PAPYRUS.” Edge clawed at his forehead uselessly with his bound hands, trying to block out the grating voice. “WE SEE YOU’VE WOKEN UP. HOW IS YOUR SKULL?”

Edge peered through the gaps in his fingers and saw that the other skeleton was grinning broadly at him. The smile sent a shiver up his spine, and Edge wanted nothing more than to wipe it off his stark white face. Even though his bones were screaming in pain, he aimed a kick at the bars. To Edge’s surprise, the other monster didn’t flinch. His smile, however, had evaporated. Mission accomplished.

“AH, YOU MUST FEEL MUCH BETTER THEN.”

Crimson red eyelights flashed inside the skeleton’s sockets and a droplet of white liquid dripped down his cheekbones. Edge looked closer and realized the scars around his sockets were getting wider. Somehow he was melting.

“THAT’S GOOD,” the other skeleton continued. “WE CAN BEGIN NOW.”

He unlocked the door. Edge’s soul raced and for a moment he wondered if perhaps he could physically attack the other skeleton and run for the door. He sat still, waiting to see if there was an opening in the other monster’s stance that he could exploit.

His hesitation cost him. Before he could even begin to form a plan of action, shadowy tendrils flew inside the open door and wrapped around him. Edge pushed back on the magic, loathing its odd, scratchy texture. But it was no use. The shadows forced him to curl in on himself and dragged him out of the chamber into the open air. He was dizzy with fear as the other monster slowly lowered him onto the gurney in the center of the room.

“WE’LL HAVE YOU KNOW,” the man said as his magic strapped Edge to the table. “IT WAS VERY GRATIFYING TO CONFIRM YOUR EXISTENCE.”

A slender tendril broke the chain between the cuffs as another pair pulled his arms to his side. Seconds later, brown leather restraints were fastened around his wrists, binding him to the stretcher.

“IT TOOK US QUITE SOME TIME. WELL, MORE TIME THAN USUAL ANYWAY.
ANOMALIES ARE USUALLY EASY TO TRACK DOWN.”

Edge ignored him. He didn’t want to encourage him to talk. That voice made him sick. Everything about the other monster made him sick.

“WE ASSUMED YOU WERE YOUR BROTHER AT FIRST.”

As the squirming shadows finished securing Edge to the stretcher, the other skeleton wheeled the table of medical tools closer. He placed a soul analyzer to Edge’s chest and turned it on, allowing a low hum to fill Edge’s skull. As the device processed Edge’s soul, he peered into the monster’s face. The red eyelights had vanished and his face was no longer melting.

“YES, YES, IT APPEARS YOU HAVE RECEIVED SOME DETERMINATION.” He removed the soul analyzer and scrolled down the results. Without looking up, he continued, “AS WE WERE SAYING, WE THOUGHT YOU WERE YOUR BROTHER. THE SPIKE OF ENERGY YOU CREATED WAS NEARLY IDENTICAL TO WHEN HE HAD FIRST ARRIVED. WE HAD THOUGHT THAT HE HAD SOMEHOW RECEIVED A DOSE OF DETERMINATION AND HAD TRAVELED BACK TO YOUR UNIVERSE.” The other monster chuckled when Edge’s eyes widened. “YES, WE ARE AWARE YOU ARE NOT MY PAPYRUS.”

The other skeleton languidly trailed a hand up Edge’s naked femur, his fingertips lingering along the inner part of the bone as he went higher. Edge pushed against his restraints, doing his best to ignore the growing pit of terror in his soul.

“DO NOT TOUCH ME,” Edge spat out, unable to remain silent any longer. He was on the verge of vomiting and he had to stop this man from touching him at all costs. “YOU DISGUSTING, VILE, HUMAN-LIKE –”

The other skeleton was suddenly inches from his face. He pushed a finger to Edge’s mouth and pressed down forcefully. There was no mistaking the way his eyes flashed bright red now.

Venom in his voice, the other skeleton hissed, “LET’S NOT SAY THINGS WE’LL REGRET, HMM?”

Edge couldn’t repress his shudder. “WHO ARE YOU?”

The monster laughed derisively. “SO YOU DON’T REMEMBER ME AFTER ALL. WE WEREN’T SURE AFTER SEEING YOUR DETERMINATION LEVELS.” He snapped a glove over his hand. “MY NAME IS DR. GASTER, THOUGH THERE IS NO NEED FOR FORMALITIES. WE WILL BECOME INTIMATELY FAMILIAR WITH EACH OTHER SHORTLY. YOU MAY DROP THE TITLE.” He stroked Edge’s cheekbones with his gloved hand. “IT IS A PLEASURE TO MEET YOUR ACQUAINTANCE. OR REACQUAINTANCE, AS THE CASE MAY BE. HMM,” he said, a smile creeping on his face. “WE ARE NOT SURE IF MEETING ANOTHER VERSION OF A MONSTER IS THE SAME AS MEETING THEM OR NOT. MULTIPLE UNIVERSES DO MAKE FOR INTERESTING LINGUISTICAL DILEMMAS.”

Edge’s soul was frozen in his chest. It wasn’t possible. None of this was possible.

“Gaster,” he murmured under his breath. It hurt his head to say the name, as if his entire being rejected the monster standing before him. Every instinct told him to get as far away as soon as possible. It was the same effect as when his brother spoke of the doctor, but multiplied a hundredfold.
“YES, THAT’S RIGHT.” Gaster walked to a point a couple of meters away and paused, his eye sockets completely dark and staring blankly into space. After a few seconds, he returned to the table, a smile on his face. “NOW ENOUGH CHITCHAT, THERE’S WORK TO BE DONE.”

As the doctor bent over him, Edge thought back to his last conversation about Gaster. His brother had spoken of Sans and… that horror the vile monster had unleashed upon him. And from what Gaster had just told him, this was the very same skeleton. From this universe.

Edge gagged as his soul threatened to push excess magic through his throat. Gaster smirked as Edge breathed rapidly, trying his best not to throw up. There was no way he could get sick now. Not when his life depended on having adequate reserves of magic.

The doctor held measuring tape to his limbs. Here and there, he drew dotted lines and numbers on Edge’s bones in blue ink. He hummed happily under his breath as he worked his way up and down his body. Every now and then the Gaster’s hand brushed softly against Edge’s bones, lingering on his more sensitive parts. Unwanted pleasure trickled up his spine as the doctor’s fingers swept across his ribs.

Edge’s vision was spinning. He grit his teeth as the same thought played over and over in his mind: “Not again, not again, not again, not again.” Unfamiliar images of a solid, undistorted Gaster bending over him flashed before him. He could almost feel the doctor’s body splayed over him. He clawed the leather beneath him, trying his best to ignore the tricks his mind was playing on him.

But when Gaster slowly toyed with Edge’s sacrum holes, he couldn’t handle it. He reflexively called on his magic. Electricity flowed through him, and though it sent that familiar pain through his bones, it also caused Gaster to tear his hand away. Edge cut off his magic, and although he was barely conscious after electrifying himself, he was satisfied to see that the doctor’s smile had disappeared yet again.

That was until Gaster’s hand wrapped around Edge’s neck, choking off his airway.

“DO.” His fingers dug fiercely into his vertebrae. “NOT.” He increased the force, and Edge spluttered. “DO.” Tighter. “THAT.” Edge wondered if his spine was about to crack. “AGAIN.”

Gaster finally let go, leaving Edge gasping for air. Tears spilled from the corners of his sockets as he watched the doctor’s ghastly face hover before his own.

“THIS DOESN’T HAVE TO BE ALL PAINFUL, PAPYRUS.” He traced his fingers along Edge’s jawline gently. “I HAVEN’T HAD ANOTHER SKELETON SINCE SANS, AND MMM,” he hummed, closing his eyes. “HE WAS SO WONDERFUL. SKELETONS ARE GRACED WITH EXCEPTIONAL EXPERTISE IN THE ART OF SEX, I’VE FOUND. I CAN STILL FEEL HOW TIGHT SANS FELT AROUND ME.” He reopened his eyes and gazed down on Edge fondly. His face was drooping again and drops of liquefied bones splattered onto Edge’s collarbone. “I’M SURE YOU’D FEEL JUST AS GOOD.”

No. Edge couldn’t do this. With sudden and violent force, he threw up. Gaster, who had still been cradling Edge’s face, drew his hand backwards. His eyelights glowed crimson. As the doctor opened his mouth in obvious fury, Edge screamed out, unable to contain his own emotions.

“DO NOT FUCK WITH ME! IF YOU ARE GOING TO HARVEST MY SOUL, JUST DO IT! NONE OF THESE GAMES, YOU SICK FREAK! I’LL LET THE HANDCUFFS KILL ME BEFORE I EVER LET YOU FUCK ME AGAIN! EVER!”

Gaster stared at him a few moments before bursting into a fit of laughter. Edge openly cried now as
rage swelled in his soul. What he would do to blast this repulsive creature into pieces…

“SORRY,” Gaster said as he wiped away his tears. Edge noticed that the doctor’s hand appeared to be melting. “EVERYTHING ABOUT THAT STATEMENT WAS MUCH TOO FUNNY.” He sighed happily. “WE MUST SAY, WE LIKE YOUR FIGHTING STYLE. PUNKY WAS FAR TOO DOCILE, AND I WILL FREELY ADMIT SANS WAS AT HIS BEST WHEN HE FOUGHT BACK.” He snickered. “BUT ALAS, YOU’RE RIGHT. THERE’S WORK TO BE DONE. WE CAN PLAY LATER.”

Gaster pulled away and strode to the shelves in the direction of Edge’s feet. He pushed a few buttons and a mechanism climbed a beam to a row some feet up.

“AND HOW WILL YOU PLAY WITH ME IF I’M ONLY A SOUL?” Edge taunted. The moment the question fell from his mouth, he wished he could take it back. Now that he knew how sensitive souls were, he could think of several ways Gaster could “play.” He shuddered at the thought that he would find no peace even in death.

“WELL, YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT ASSUMPTIONS. IF WE HAD WANTED YOUR SOUL, WE WOULD HAVE HARVESTED IT THE MOMENT WE CAPTURED YOU.”

Someone from one of the cages whimpered loudly. Gaster seemed amused by the sound.

“THEN WHAT IS IT? WHAT DO YOU WANT?”

Gaster’s face went serious. “MANY THINGS.” He turned around, watching the machine as it lowered downwards. Edge followed his gaze, eyes widening as he saw what it carried. “FIRST AND FOREMOST, YOU’LL BRING YOUR BROTHER HERE. HE’S NOT MY SANS, BUT I AM EXCITED TO SEE HIM AGAIN ALL THE SAME. NO, WE BOTH ARE.”

Edge’s eyes snapped back to Gaster as his soul boiled red hot. “YOU WON’T FUCKING TOUCH HIM, YOU REVOLTING –”

Gaster slammed his hand down on the shelves with a thunderous smack, cutting Edge off.

“MY OTHER REASONS ARE FAR LESS SELFISH.” He grabbed the cylinder that the mechanism had retrieved. “YOU HAVE DETERMINATION PUMPING THROUGH YOUR SOUL.”

Edge’s eyes traveled back to the soul container as Gaster approached the stretcher.

“What of it?”

Gaster’s mouth twitched. “NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN TESTING THE EFFECTS OF THESE – ” He held out the yellow human soul in front of him. “ – ON A DETERMINATION-FILLED MONSTER SOUL.”

Edge wanted to scream. No, he couldn’t touch that thing!

“WE WOULDN’T HAVE GONE TO SUCH EXTREMES TO ACQUIRE YOU IF WE HAD BEEN ABLE TO INJECT ANOTHER MONSTER WITH DT. AFTER ALL, YOUR BROTHER WOULD’VE COME TO US ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.” He unscrewed the top of the capsule. “BUT DO YOU KNOW HOW RARE RED HUMAN SOULS ARE? WE HAVEN’T BEEN ABLE TO LOCATE A SINGLE ONE!”

He set the container next to Edge’s skull. Edge wanted so badly to get away. It was too close. If it
“WELL, NO RED SOULS FROM HUMAN CHILDREN IN ANY CASE. WE’VE COME ACROSS TWO ADULTS, BUT THE CAPSULES DON’T WORK WITH THEM. ONLY KIDS AND MONSTERS. IT’S A PERPLEXING PROBLEM.” He sighed and put his hands on his hips. “WE HAVE FORTY-TWO OF THE DAMNED THINGS, AND NOT ONE DETERMINED SOUL IN SIGHT.” He shook his head as he backed away from the gurney. “A PITY.”

Forty-two. He had killed forty-two children. Edge had nearly fallen down over killing one. And Gaster had killed so many monsters. He had filled the shelves with their souls. Edge couldn’t even begin to count them all.

There were no words.

“How is this less selfish? How could you do this? How can you kill so many? How?”

“As we’ve always said, sacrifices have to be made. What is a few hundred monsters when we can have the surface to ourselves? When we can have revenge?” Gaster grabbed a long pole and balanced it in his hands. “The solution is apparent to those with enough experience in warfare.” He sighed. “But not everyone is strong enough, nor as determined as we are to take the proper steps.”

He extended the pole between him and the soul.

“You’re mad,” Edge spat, knowing what he was saying would invoke Gaster’s wrath. “Absolutely mad.”

“Not mad.” Gaster grinned. “Just filled with determination.”

The doctor knocked the container over, and out spilled the soul. For a brief second, it floated over Edge, its humming quiet but mesmerizing. Then, with a painful lurch, Edge’s own soul burst from his chest.

Edge couldn’t comprehend anything. Nothing could have prepared him for this. Yellow light blinded him. He didn’t know what was happening to him. His mind was a white flash of pain. It was so much worse than the electricity, or his skull injury, or even his punishment from Undyne. All of it combined couldn’t hold a flame to the agony he was feeling as his body convulsed violently.

His limbs cracked. Stretched. Reformed.

Every inch of him was dissolving into dust. It had to be. No one could endure this much and live.

And as suddenly as it had begun, it ended. Edge gasped desperately as he collapsed on the gurney in a heap. Something sharp stabbed into multiple points along his spine. He cried out, arching his back into the air once more, his limbs trembling. Every bit of him felt like it had been scorched.

“Amazing!” the doctor shouted as he rushed over. “What a spectacular form! Very bird-like, though the tail is a fascinating addition! And are those spikes along your back? Wonderful!”

Tail? Spikes?
As Gaster pulled out a camera, Edge lifted his head against the restraint and cast his eyes downward. Everything he could see was utterly wrong.

His pelvic bone was narrower, and sure enough, between his legs sat a series of vertebrae that extended into a long tail. The base was thick and tapered into thinner bones as it went lower. He couldn’t tell exactly how small the vertebrae got since his tail spilled over the end of the table and out of his line of sight. When he tried to twitch the bones, nothing moved, though a wrenching pain ripped through him.

It wasn’t the only thing that had changed. An elongated, talon-like bone extended from the end of his upper arm. When he bent his arms, he couldn’t stop the whimper that fell from his mouth. The bones had transformed completely. His humerus was stunted, considerably shorter than any other skeleton’s he had ever seen. At the bottom of ulna and radius, where his hands would normally be, was an entirely new bone. It bridged the gap between his regular arm bones and his hand bones. The tips of his fingers were dangerously sharp, but when he flexed them, they felt weak, as if they might fall off at any moment.

“Yes, your skull is elongated as well.” Gaster had measuring tape wrapped around Edge’s forehead. “What a peculiar sense of justice. So complex. But it’s probably the DT complicating it, of course. Oh, how we wish we could compare this to a pre-determination form.”

“It hurts.”

Edge’s face burned at the admission, but he couldn’t help it. His back had slowly lowered back into the stretcher. The unseen spikes on his spine were burrowing into him and were causing the worst headache. He couldn’t fathom living like this for the rest of his life. Everything hurt so badly.

“Let me off here,” he demanded. “It really hurts.”

Predictably, Gaster ignored him, continuing to take measurements and eventually pulling out a camera. All throughout his examination, Edge’s body burned with both pain and utter hatred for the other skeleton. As Edge quivered and groaned, Gaster enthusiastically took notes, indifferent to his pain.

And at times, the doctor was more than indifferent. He inspected Edge’s tail with fascination and was none too gentle with his treatment. Edge wanted nothing more than to hide his face when he released a low moan as Gaster scraped along the sensitive vertebrae. Gaster was happy to dig his fingers fiercely into Edge’s tail vertebrae as soon as he discovered the humiliating mixture of pain and pleasure it caused Edge.

Edge’s magic stirred below as the ministrations went on for far too long. He threw everything into stopping himself from forming anything. Nothing would be worse than inviting this atrocious man to molest him further. He didn’t know whether it was because of his magic suppression restraints or through sheer willpower, but he was thankful when, after several minutes, nothing manifested below.

After what must have been hours, Gaster stepped away and placed his notes and camera in a small black container. When he was done, he loomed over Edge with a curious expression on his face.

“Hmm? Should we do green next or add another?” Gaster shook his head and sighed. “I suppose you’re right.” Edge, for the life of him, could not understand who the doctor was talking to. “We might as well get a baseline for each.”
Gaster abruptly stilled, his eyes staring unseeingly into the distance once again. It appeared as if he was thinking hard about something, and Edge could only guess at what. Suddenly something inside Edge reeled. For a split second – so fast he wondered if he imagined it – there was a double image of Gaster: one standing near him and another standing a couple meters away. Edge blinked and found himself staring at the doctor in the second position.

He felt different. No, not different. Like himself again.

He looked down. His arms were normal. He had no tail. His hips were properly wide. The spikes had disappeared.

Edge knew what happened immediately. There was no other explanation for it: Gaster had loaded. This was the man that had scared his brother into hysteria. He had suspected before, but this was confirmation. The doctor could time travel. God, he could time travel.

Edge’s soul twitched in dread as Gaster walked briskly to the shelves.

“DON’T. NOT AGAIN.” Edge didn’t want to beg, but he had to stop him. There was no way he could handle another round. “PLEASE, IT HURTS TOO MUCH.”

Gaster paused, tilting his head toward Edge with a shocked expression that quickly turned into one of sadistic delight.

“OH, SO YOU CAN REMEMBER. LOVELY, THIS WILL HELP OUR RESEARCH. AND IT WILL MAKE FOR SO MUCH FUN.”

“PLEASE, I AM SO TIRED.” He wasn’t lying. His body ached, and his mind hurt even more. “LET ME REST, PLEASE.”

Gaster chuckled. “OH, BUT THE NIGHT IS YOUNG, PAPYRUS. AND IT IS GOING TO STAY YOUNG FOR A VERY LONG TIME.”
Snap out of it. Come on. Wake up. Red had to wake the fuck up. He couldn’t sit here anymore. It was time to get up.

He gasped violently, sucking in the dew-laden air.

An overwhelming sense of grief and helplessness engulfed Red as he slowly blinked back to consciousness. For a few minutes, all he could do was choke and splutter as awareness slowly returned to him.

He was a disaster. The chill morning air had left him shivering on the lakeshore. Mud had soaked his shorts down to the bone, leaving his legs and pelvis unpleasantly wet. His back ached from the uncomfortable position he had left himself in. It felt as if a tight band was constricted around his chest, binding him to this horrible reality.

Guilt overtook him. His bones rattled from the weight of it. A curtain of unconsciousness threatened to drag him back down into the inner recesses of his mind, but he couldn’t. He dug his fingers into the earth, focusing on the cold wetness that drenched him.

Stay here. Don’t go back. Boss was here. Boss was alive.

He cast his quivering eyelight over the area, desperate for something to concentrate on. It was still
dark out. Even darker now that the clouds had cloaked the night sky. A dense quiet had fallen over the clearing. The frogs' chorus had disappeared and there was no sign of any other wildlife in the area. He was alone. Painfully alone.

How long had he been sitting here? In the back of his mind, he knew the answer was important. But for the life of him, he couldn’t think of why. Time was one big joke. A joke with only one punchline: a reset.

He choked on a sob.

Boss. Don’t forget Boss.

It took him far too long to gather the strength to haul his phone from his pocket. His sweaty hands grappled with the surface and it nearly fell to the ground. He turned on the screen and the light pierced the intense darkness, blinding him. He squinted his eyes, trying to see past the fogginess of his tears. The screen was shaking so much, he couldn’t see anything. In fact, everything was shaking. His body was clattering loudly from the force of his shuddering.

He hugged the phone to his chest and took a deep, rattling breath. In. Out. In. Out. He couldn’t zone out again. Focus. Focus.

He didn’t stop trembling, but after a couple of minutes he could clear the wetness from his sockets. This time when he looked down at his screen, he was able to make out the text.

There were seven missed calls. But more importantly, it was 4AM.

He had sat in this clearing, out cold, for hours. Hours.

In response to this revelation, he sat there for a few more minutes. He sucked in the cool morning air, sending sharp stabbing pains through his ribcage.

What was he doing? He couldn’t sit here forever. His brother needed him. And he needed his brother. More than anything in the world.

That was a lie. He needed more than his brother. He needed Sans. He needed Papyrus. He needed all three of them hugging him. He needed to be comforted by their presence as they sat in their warm, cozy house. They would protect him from this endless nightmare.

No. He couldn’t waste his time on shit like this. If he wanted it so badly, he needed to get off his ass, get his brother, and get back to them.

With that thought, he climbed to his feet, ready to teleport to the city. That was until he heard the gently whisper of Papyrus’s dust spilling from his lap.

“no, no, no!”

The tension in his chest strengthened as he fell to his knees, grasping frantically for Papyrus. Already some of his dust had soaked into the mud. He clawed into the ground and hurriedly scooped the horrifying mixture of Papyrus’s remains and earth into his pockets. Nausea crept into his soul with every handful, but he couldn’t stop. He had to make sure he got all of him. It wasn’t long before his jacket was weighed down and his pockets were filled to the brim.

He pulled out his phone and turned on the light. There was no sign of any more dust; either Red had gotten all of him or he had dissolved into the ground.
God, he was going to be sick. He tried to brush off the tears that clung to his face, but he only managed to smear dirt on his cheekbones.

He scrambled to his feet again.

“i’ll come back,” he promised. “one way or another, i’ll come back.”

He clenched his fists and teleported to the center of Very New Home. It was still dark out, but the lights of the city were as bright as ever. Other people were walking near him, jabbering loudly about whatever inconsequential thing. He marched down the sidewalk, trying to think past the fogginess in his mind.

The Royal Guard was headquartered somewhere down this road. He’d run into it, and when he did, he’d get his brother and leave.

That was the plan. Fuck this timeline. He had to go back and fix this. Fix his mistakes.

I wish you had told me sooner.

He clutched his sternum.

Screw playing by the humans’ rules. In fact, screw the humans altogether. He needed the determination from one of their souls. That way Boss and him could get out of here and –

His shoulder grazed past a human’s as they crossed paths on the sidewalk.

“Hey, watch it, buddy!” they yelled after him.

Red hunched in on himself and quickened his pace. How the fuck was he going to take a soul? Kill them? Sweat poured from his skull at the thought. Images of death replayed in his mind. The wolf monster dissolving to dust before him. The crushed remains of a human under the ashy wreckage of the explosion. Unseeing eyes staring blankly into the air.

He couldn’t do it. Never like that.

But he had to get DT. Somehow, somehow. He couldn’t get left behind. Not in case something went disastrously wrong. But how was he going to get determination? A human wasn’t just going to let him have their soul. What was he going to do, go up to a human and ask?

He stopped in his tracks. Frisk. They had determination. Sans had said they were packed with it. They would give it to him if he asked.

He nearly went to them right there, but he had to stop himself. His brother first. He was waiting for him and Red was already right on his doorstep.

Literally. His feet had led him to a building emblazoned with the Royal Guard’s logo. Guards and other monsters were strolling in and out of the brightly-lit headquarters. Without further hesitation, he marched to the door, taking note of the tiny cameras that mounted the entrance. He pressed inside, trying to hide his face behind the hem of his coat.

Monsters were packed into the waiting room like sardines in a tin can. Many sat uncomfortably in grungy plastic seats, pale and sweaty under the white lights. Others lined up in a seemingly endless queue that led to a glass enclosure against the right side of the room. On the other side of the transparent wall, guards typed notes on computers as they listened to monsters’ reports. Their eyes were glazed over in apparent boredom.
Red didn’t know where to start. He hadn’t expected so many monsters to be here. Where did the line start? What would he even ask when he got up there? Maybe he should have called the lawyer. Suddenly he recalled the missed calls from earlier. He was halfway to his phone when he stopped. The lawyer would probably get the blame once he and his brother disappeared.

He shook violently at the thought, but he didn’t know why. His actions in this timeline didn’t matter. He could do whatever he wanted and no one would get hurt.

No one but him.

“Is everything okay?” said a soft voice from immediately behind him.

Red started. He promptly lost his balance and fell flat on his ass with a loud smack. He turned towards the source of the noise, his movements jittery. A green-tinted ghost was gazing down at him in concern. A Royal Guard badge was pinned to their torso.

“Do you need help with something?” The ghost’s voice was lilted with worry. “You seem… lost?”

They were scrutinizing him intensely and when Red followed their gaze, he could see why. Now that he was under proper lighting, he could see just how trashed he was. Mud and dust caked his hoodie. It looked like he had just gotten back from killing a monster and burying the evidence.

Isn’t that what he had done?

He tried to cover the sickening display, desperate to hide his sins. As he moved he caught sight of something else. A pile of Papyrus had spilled onto the floor from his tumble. He could feel the beginnings of hysteria creeping into his skull as he shakily shoveled Papyrus back to his pockets.

“fuck, fuck, fuck. please, god.” He couldn’t believe he had dropped Papyrus like this.

“Sir?” The ghost was clearly on edge now.

“i –” Red gulped. “where’s my bro? where’s papyr–” No, no, no. “boss? where’s boss?”

“Sorry, who?”

“god fucking dammit!” he screamed, slamming his fist onto the tile. The rest of the room went silent. “where’s – fuck, what do you call him – edge! where’s edge?! where’s my god damn brother?!”

The ghost appeared stunned. He was so close to losing it and tearing through the building to find Boss himself. Desperate for the them to understand, he reached up and tried to clasp the ghost’s chest. He phased right through them and nearly fell once again.

“i know he’s here!” he shouted. “or fuck, maybe the police have him, i don’t know! just – please! i need to see him!”

“You’re Red?”

A flash of relief struck Red. They knew his relation to Boss.

“yes, yes! please!”

The ghost nodded, though their eyes were not on Red but somewhere behind him. He snapped his head around and was shocked to see an overly-tall blue loox looming over him.
“I’ll escort you to the back,” she commanded.

Red clambered to his feet. “he’s back there?” he asked hopefully as he wiped his face of tears.

She frowned at him and motioned him towards a door. He trailed behind her, his soul pounding in his chest. As he passed the throng of monsters standing in the queue, he felt their gaze linger on him. He had to wonder what they were thinking. Did they see the dust coating his clothes? He nervously crossed his arms in front of him, trying to block their view. Not that it mattered. He and his brother were out of here as soon as he could make physical contact. If they saw, what would they do?

But the thought of everyone seeing the proof of his absolute failure made him feel ill.

The loox guided him to a room packed with desks, each manned by a distracted and harried-looking Royal Guard. Many of the guards appeared morose and tired, but Red didn’t have time to dwell on it. His escort was whisking him through the maze of workspaces at full speed. Soon he found himself standing next to a large desk that was overflowing with piles of papers. A large grey elephant monster sat there, completely engrossed in their work.

For a moment, he thought he was going to be sat at the chair at the desk. However, the loox merely prodded the other guard and nodded towards Red. The two of them quickly ushered him to another, much smaller room. It was completely empty save a plain wood table and three fold-up chairs. There were no windows, and the only source of light came from a small lightbulb mounted above the table.

Red planted himself on one of the chairs. His tired bones welcomed the chance to rest even on the uncomfortably stiff metal. He was surprised when the loox sat to his right and the elephant moved to the chair straight across from him.

“What? aren’t you getting my bro?”

He glanced towards the door. Maybe the ghost from the entrance had gone to get him. The elephant monster cleared their throat, drawing his attention back to them.

“Hello.” Their voice was sonorous and soothing. “I’m assuming your name is Red?” When Red nodded, they continued, “I’m the interim captain of the Guard. It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance.” Something about their introduction seemed off, though he couldn’t tell what. “Can I ask you a couple of questions before we discuss your brother? Off the record.”

“Discuss? you mean you’re not bringing him here? do the humans have him or something?”

The two guards exchanged meaningful looks.

“Have any of the humans approached you?”

Red blinked. “no? i mean a guard and a human stopped by the other day, but i haven’t spoken to any since then.”

“Why do you think they have him then?”

Why did he think that? “the fucking lawyer said the police might have him, i don’t know.” It felt like a lifetime ago. “nothing they said made sense and i can’t get in touch –” He smashed his face with his hand. “what the fuck are we even going on about? i wanna see my bro now.”

They ignored him. “Are you sure no one approached you?”
“look, i just said no.”

“Not even this human?” They pulled a piece of paper from their pocket and pushed it across the table. It was a photo of a human. At first Red only glimpsed at it, sure he hadn’t seen them. But he had to do a double-take.

It was the pale human with black hair from before. Just like when he had last seen them, Red’s attention was drawn to their unnerving, void-filled eyes. They were standing on the sidewalk in front of Grillby’s, their posture rigid. A mouse monster sat at their side, watching them with – what was it? Awe? Reverence? Fear? Red couldn’t tell.

“You recognize them?” the loox asked, excitement coursing through her every word.

“i –” Red gulped as he stared at the photo. “i’ve seen them around, but i don’t know them or anything.”

“Are you sure?” the captain asked.

“i mean… i saw them take a photo of me once. when i first got to this univ– the surface. and one other time when – ” He held back a gasp. “i saw him with punk hamster once. outside the embassy. i think he… hit him? it was hard to tell.”

The loox jumped up from their seat. “I knew it!”

Red stared after her as she did a jig. His irritation was growing by the second, and he was getting real fed up with this whole number.

“What does this have to do with me? where the fuck’s my bro?”

The captain frowned at the loox who immediately stopped dancing.

“Sorry,” the elephant monster said as they angrily motioned for the other guard to sit down. “We’ve been working to clear your brother’s name. And the name of every other skeleton in the city.” They nodded towards Red. “The police are intent on blaming monsters for this whole fiasco, so we’re trying to get the evidence to prove them wrong. Your brother was at the top of their list for a while thanks to that witness testimony that they only bothered to half-listen to.”

Red hadn’t missed what the captain had said. “you said he ‘was’ at the top of their list? you cleared his name?”

The guards’ expressions grew grim and a heavy silence permeated the room. Red’s soul hammered as he glanced between the two.

“What?” Did the humans have him? He didn’t know how he’d bust him out if that was the case.

“Your brother… was involved in an incident.”

The words slammed into him like heavy blows. His head spun.

“I don’t think you’ve heard about –” They swallowed nervously. “– former Captain Undyne?”

They waited for a response but Red didn’t speak, move, or otherwise try to communicate. He was staring unseeingly at the photo. He didn’t want to hear this. This couldn’t be possible. “Former” captain? God, that meant she was… And his brother had been with her… His soul twisted as he waited for confirmation of what he already knew.
“At approximately two o’clock in the afternoon yesterday, someone attacked our convoy. We don’t know who, why, or how exactly. When we arrived, there were –” Their voice cracked and they had to clear their throat before continuing. “There were no survivors.”

Red’s hands gripped the edge of the table, his fingertips carving into the surface. “he’s dead,” he whimpered. His bones wouldn’t stop clattering. “fuck, he’s dead.”

“Now, we don’t know that,” the elephant said quickly. “We’re still investigating the scene, but the wreckage is a little…” They took a big breath. “Well, it’s messy. We haven’t found your brother’s dust. And we’ve found everyone else’s. The police see that as a sign he’s working with the assailant, but we’re –”

Red stood up, sending his chair flying backwards and causing the other monsters to flinch. “he didn’t fucking do shit! my brother hasn’t even been in this universe! how the fuck would he be working with anyone, god damn it! he’s – he’s –”

God, if his brother wasn’t working with the attacker, then he really had to be dead. Like everyone else. How could they all keep dying?

He cradled his head in his hands. If he had been there, maybe he could’ve saved him. Just like Papyrus. If he had only gotten his shit together and paid fucking attention.

I thought… you only loved Sans and your brother. That Sans was my only friend.

The other monsters were talking to him, but their words were an indistinguishable blur. His vision flickered, and a double image of the other two monsters flashed before him. Everything was fading to black. He couldn’t breathe. His chest couldn’t move fast enough and his soul was in too much pain. The tight band across his ribcage was unbearable.

He was going to lose it. This was it. This was the end. He couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t breathe, dammit.

Something shook his shoulder. He found himself hunched over on the tile floor, his entire body coated in sweat. Someone was shouting urgently nearby, but he couldn’t concentrate enough to hear their words. A hand pressed into his shoulder, holding him in place.

“It’s okay,” a deep voice soothed. “We’ve got you.”

Everything about the reassurances reminded Red of Sans. The gentle weight on his arm. The rich, calming voice. The gentle reminder that all was okay. That he had Red. That Red had him.

He longed to stay here and be comforted by this other monster. More than anything else, he wanted to pretend that it was Sans. He could get wrapped up in Sans’s arms and sleep this whole thing off.

That wasn’t happening. It would never happen again if he couldn’t move.

He pushed the hand off him and got to his feet. Dizzy and trembling, he nearly tripped over himself. Someone was calling his name, but before anyone could stop him, he vanished.

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[noncon scene begins here]

Edge wanted to scream. He burrowed his fingers into the leather padding beneath him as fiercely as
he could. His attention was drawn to the supple texture. The overwhelming intensity of the surgery lights. The smell of the latex gloves that had been discarded next to his head.

He focused on anything but what was happening to him.

He didn’t want to hear the slap of Gaster’s body against his. Nor did he want to feel the press of the other skeleton as he drove deeper and deeper inside him. And he certainly didn’t want to see Gaster’s face as he came for the fifth time that night.

Was it the fifth time? Maybe the sixth? Edge was losing track of time. It was all blurring together.

But at least Gaster wasn’t holding his soul this time. At least he couldn’t feel the doctor’s fingers tearing into the core of his being. At least Gaster’s lust and pleasure weren’t pouring into Edge as he goaded him into fighting back. After the last few times, it was a blessing to be able to block it all out.

Almost all of it.

“Have you finally – mmm – stopped fighting?” Gaster taunted. Edge let out a muffled grunt as the other skeleton picked up his speed, trying to ignore the horrific pleasure that stole through his body. “I’m disappointed, Papyrus. I thought you’d last longer than this.

Edge stared at the ceiling as every inch of him was assaulted. Yes, he wanted to scream. But that would only make things worse.

[noncon scene ends here]

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Red pounded on the front door relentlessly, offering no time in between knocks for anyone to answer. A mixture of anger, sadness, and above all else, desperation coursed through him. He was so consumed by his emotions that his magic poured from his eyesocket. His entire body was quaking from it all and he couldn’t quite catch his breath. Everything was spiraling out of control.

He had to do this. For his brother. For Papyrus. For Sans.

The lights flashed on in the house as he rudely awakened its inhabitants. Even then, he didn’t stop his frantic knocking. He needed them to answer. Now, please, god.

When the door finally cracked open, he was surprised but relieved to see Frisk on the other side instead of Toriel. They were wearing pajamas but they seemed wide awake.

“What’s going on?” They sounded relieved. “Are you here because of the –?”

Red seized the kid by the shoulders and shook them wildly. “Kid, you gotta help me!”

They gasped and tried to take a step back. Red squeezed his phalanges into their arms so they couldn’t move.

“What’s going on?” They looked him up and down and their eyes widened as they took him in. “Are you okay?”

Red’s soul constricted. The world tilted before him, and he tightened his grip to steady himself. He couldn’t think about how he felt, how he was not okay, how he was never going to be okay. He’d fall apart right here. Instead, he had to focus on his goal.
“n-never mind that. i need to see your s-soul.”

They tried to move backwards, but were stopped again. “What? What are you talking –?”

“i n-need it, okay?! i gotta go b-back! i gotta go back before this all went to shit!”

“My soul?” Their voice was strained with tension. “I don’t understand.”

He knew he was a babbling wreck and that he made no sense. His head was all fuzzy. It was so hard to articulate himself. He took a stuttering breath and tried again.

“f-fuck, i d-don’t mean your soul, i –” He shook them again. “i need your determination, frisk! they’re all dead and i gotta get back there. i-if i have the dt, i can use the machine! please, come on!”

Everything about him was going to pieces. He could feel it. It was so hard to keep his head together enough to even talk right now.

Frisk’s chest radiated with red light. Was this kid seriously about to attack him? He had never done battle with a human before, but if it came down to it, he’d defend himself. But god, it wasn’t what he wanted. Shit, he needed to slow down.

“frisk, don’t! f-fuck, i know i’m n-not makin’ sense!” His fingers burrowed into their arm. “lemme start from the begin–”

“Unhand my child this instant!” came a sudden shrill voice.

Before he had time to process the sudden interruption, a burst of flame magic erupted at both their feet. As Red jolted at the unexpected heat, his grip loosened. Frisk jumped backwards and promptly ran around the corner. Desperate to set things straight, he rushed into the house.

The kid was eyeing him guardedly from behind Toriel, who stood in the doorway of the other room. She was a real mess. Her fur was matted oddly on one side, as if she had been sleeping on it for far too long. The lavender nightgown she wore was smattered with stains and Red had to wonder when she had last washed it. Like him, she was trembling all over, and looked ready to fall over at any moment.

Regardless of how scruffy she appeared, her face said she was ready to kill. Her brow was contorted with anger and a flickering ball of fire hovered over her open palm.

“Don’t come one step closer.”

Although her voice was impregnated with resolve, she promptly dissolved into a coughing fit. Her flame sputtered into nothingness as she hacked forcefully into her hands. Speckles of red splashed out, staining her white fur red.

“fuck, fuck! are you okay?!”

He wanted to go to her, but Frisk was staring at him dubiously from across the room. The red glow had intensified and Red was convinced they’d engage in battle if he moved. They rubbed their mother’s back as she heaved uncontrollably.

“shit, you’re still sick!” He pressed the heels of his hands into his sockets as he knelt to the floor. “sorry, i just – fuck!”
How long had she been sick anyway? Coughing up blood was not a good sign for fleshy monsters, he knew that. But wasn’t she a boss monster? He thought they were tougher than that. But god, if she was seriously sick then was she about to die? God, was everyone around him going to die?

Toriel found her voice, though her words were punctuated by her panting. “What – are – you – even – doing – here?”

“i wasn’t – i need to talk to f-frisk! fuck, sorry, i –”

“If you have something to say to Frisk –” She coughed again. “ – you talk to me first. And you don’t attack them!”

“i didn’t a-attack them, i was –”

“Then what were you doing?” she rasped.

“i don’t –” He swallowed. “i don’t know.”

“You look horrible.” Her expression relaxed as her eyes roved over him. “Have you been rolling around in the dirt? And your face! You look exhausted! Red, when was the last time you slept?”

Sleep. He barked out a humorless laugh at that joke. Fuck, if he fell asleep he’d probably never wake up.

Tell me a bedtime story.

“You should rest.” Toriel said warily. “Does anyone even know you are here? Maybe I should contact Papyrus.” She dug her phone out of her gown’s pocket.

Red’s voice caught in his throat. He clutched his head, his fingertips dragging into his temples.

“stop,” he begged. “p-please don’t.”

“Come inside at least.” She hacked into her arm a couple more times. “Frisk will make some cocoa, and we can talk.” She shut her eyes, and when she continued her voice warbled. “I know you are just as upset as I about the memorial cancellation. I have had trouble sleeping as well.”

He balled his hands into fists. God, she wanted to talk about Sans. No, no, no. He couldn’t do this. If he just got some determination, he could actually see Sans again. He didn’t know what to say to her.

Before he could even think of anything, Frisk spoke.

“Red, whose dust is that?”

Their voice was barely above a whisper, but the words echoed loudly in Red’s skull. He peered down at his dusty clothes. The evidence of his failure was all over him. He wiped at his pants frantically. The jarring movement caused some of muddy mixture to fall from his pockets to the floor.

“n-no, p-papyrus,” he croaked out. “i’m s-so sorry.”

Toriel’s sharp gasp caused him to glance upwards. She was covering her mouth with her hand and her legs were quaking violently. Frisk’s eyes were brimming with tears. They clutched their mother, the light of their soul finally fading away. The utter shock and horror on both their faces pierced him to the core.
“he – it’s all my f-fault – i couldn’t – i couldn’t s-stop it.”

The world was spinning. He could’ve stopped it. If he had only paid attention.

“he f-fell down. i-it’s all my f-fault. god, they’re all dead and it’s all my fault. i-i have to f-fix this. i have – it’s all my – it’s all – it’s my fa–”

It felt as if the invisible band across his chest was choking the life out of him. He was breathing so fast now it was hard to string together a thought. His guilt was smothering him. Everything was distorted and broken. He needed to go back. He needed his family. He needed… needed…

Toriel’s voice echoed in his head, but it was muted and warped. Everything was turning to black. He was falling far, far away. Vaguely, he felt himself smack hard onto the ground, but he felt detached from it. Like it was happening to someone else. Anyone else. Not him. He didn’t want to feel anything.

But he did. He felt that pressure around his ribcage get tighter and tighter, overpowering him completely. He felt his bones shuddering with the force of his remorse. He felt the world crumbling away beneath him.

---

Red was pleasantly warm. His mind was stuck on the sensation. It was so different from anything he had felt these last few days. Even though he didn’t deserve it, he reveled in it.

He twitched his limbs. A fuzzy blanket swaddled him, as if he were a child. It reminded him of when he was real young and still had a house with his parents. Back when Boss had been a babybones and would cry all night for attention, he’d pass out at the crib telling him stories. The next morning Red would always find himself in bed with a blanket wrapped around him.

His soul panged for his brother.

He didn’t want to wake up. Staying here and pretending nothing had happened was so much easier.

But already his conscience was nipping at him, urging him to wake up and confront Frisk. He sighed and allowed his eyelights to manifest.

He was in a cozy little room filled with bookcases lined with tiny knickknacks and books. Several potted plants were stuffed into the corners. He had been placed on a large floral print couch that sat across from an old television. It had been forever ago, but he recognized the room; he was in Toriel’s house.

Sunlight poured over him from the nearby window, heating every inch of him. It was tempting to fall back asleep, but as his eyes blinked slowly, he heard raised voices from the other side of the couch. They were too muffled to make out, but whoever was speaking sounded agitated.

He was loathe to move – his aching bones were so comfortable lying here – but he had a feeling he needed to get moving. With great reluctance, he sat up on the couch. His body felt weak and strong simultaneously, like he had just gotten over an illness. He felt better than before his meltdowns, but nowhere near where he should be. Still, at least he wasn’t shaking all over like he had been the past however many hours.

He slowly untangled himself from the blanket. Someone had removed his hoodie and bathed him. His hands were free of mud and dust, and he was cleaner than he had been in weeks.
“You’re awake.”

Frisk was crouched on the ground near the room’s entrance. They were teetering on their tiptoes and staring at him uneasily. Their eyes darted towards the door and then back to him. They looked ready to run away.

“yeah,” he rasped. “what’re you –?”

Frisk put a finger to their mouth. They put their ear to the door for a few seconds and then withdrew, frowning.

“The Guard is here,” they whispered. “They want to bring you in for questions, but Mom’s keeping them out until you wake up. I think they’re still arguing about it.”

“the fuckers. i already told them everything.”

“They’re scared of not listening to her.”

“Well, i’d be scared of the fucking ex-queen too.” He shifted his weight. “i was scared of her.”

“They’re not scared of her. They’re afraid she’s going to use her magic and get hurt.” They rubbed their arm absently, looking suddenly scared. “She’s really sick.”

“i saw.” He sighed as his soul twitched with guilt. “i really fucked up earlier.”

Frisk walked over and sat next to him. They placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder.

“Forget about that. She’s getting better, all the doctors said so.” They didn’t sound entirely convinced, but they pressed on hurriedly, “I really need to talk to you about last night.”

He squeezed his sockets shut. “i can’t talk about it, frisk.”

“I –” They swallowed. “I wasn’t talking about him,” they whispered.

“then what?”

“I kept calling you last night, but you wouldn’t pick up.” They sighed morosely. “I guess I know why now, but still… What’s going on? Who’s loading?”

Red jerked his head and stared into their eyes. “loading?”

Was the kid really talking about –?

Frisk nodded. “It started yesterday at around two. There had to be at least a three minute jump, and no one noticed it!”

“two in the afternoon?” The same time that the Guards had been attacked.

They nodded again. “Then a few hours later, it started happening again and it went all night.”

“all… night?” He couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Someone was loading…

Frisk gripped their knees. “I can’t tell how long it lasted, but there were at least fifteen loads I think. I don’t know for sure, I lost count. The big ones were… maybe an hour each? They could’ve been longer.”
“holy fucking shit.”

Someone was time traveling. He already knew they were out there, but this was something altogether different.

“I thought that’s why you showed up this morning. You, well, kind of lost it. You kept talking about dt, so I thought maybe that’s why you were here. It was hard to tell what you were saying.”

“no, i –” He dragged his hands down his cheekbones. “i needed it for the machine, not this.” His bones rattled as he stood up. “someone’s time traveling through this shit,” he said to himself. “what the fuck.”

Someone was loading at the same time that his brother went missing. Someone was loading a week after a massive explosion. Someone was loading when everything was going to shit. This couldn’t be a coincidence.

“You said you were keeping track of it. You said it at the party.”

Red paused, trying to understand what Frisk was talking about. “Papyrus’s birthday?” It felt like an eternity ago.

“You said not to worry, remember?” Their voice was taut with emotion. “You said.”

“we were tracking it, yeah. but… alphys died. and then everyone else did too.”

How could he have gotten so distracted? It was so obvious now that he was sitting here. Why hadn’t they checked the anomaly detectors? God, the last time he had checked them was when Sans and him had…

His soul lurched.

“i’ve gotta get to the lab. we put up cameras, for fuck’s sake.”

He was strong enough to do this much at least. It was unbelievable that he had left this shit for so long. And if he went back in time with the machine and someone fucking loaded, what the fuck would that mean for him? Would the timeline get fucked up?

Frisk stood up straight, their expression determined. “I’ll go with you.”

Red froze. “kid, no. it’s bad enough the guard’s on my ass. if you go missin’, i’ll have the god damn queen after me.”

“Red, come on, I’m –”

“no. stay here, i’ll come back when i have solid info. text me if there are any loads. i can’t sense ‘em anymore.”

Frisk folded their arms against their chest. “I’m supposed to watch you to make sure you don’t leave.”

Red cocked a brow at them. “you saying you’re gonna rat me out?”

“No,” they sighed, dropping their arms to their side. “But don’t leave me out of the loop. I’m not a just some kid. I’m the one who freed the Underground, remember?”

He scoffed. Frisk puffed up, staring daggers at him.
“okay, okay,” he said, waving his hand dismissively. “i’ll keep you in the loop. i just want you to stay safe, kiddo.”

They rolled their eyes.

Sighing, he stood up and spotted his phone and hoodie on the coffee table. He reached out for them, but paused. The jacket was spotless. For a moment, he thought about asking Frisk where Papyrus was, but he knew he wouldn’t be able to utter the words. He would have to trust that Toriel put him somewhere safe.

He put on the hoodie and turned towards Frisk. “i’ll text you if we need to meet, okay?” He hesitated for a moment, suddenly unsure if Frisk would agree to his plan. “regardless of what i find out, i still need to talk to you about giving me dt. i, uh, really need to use it. but that can wait until i figure this out.”

They nodded. “That’s fine.”

Suddenly, there was a loud but muffled voice from the other side of the door. It sounded like it was getting closer.

“Go before they come in here,” Frisk hissed.

Red didn’t hesitate; he teleported away immediately. The automatic lights flickered on as he appeared in the lab. Open boxes and overflowing filing cabinets were labeled with large “Royal Guard evidence” stickers. Apparently the investigation had been postponed because there was no sign of any other monster. The stillness was unsettling.

Red ran to the computer, removed the large sticker that covered the monitor, and booted up the tracking software. His soul stuttered as the results printed out.

TIME ANOMALIES DETECTED

149 NEW DETECTIONS

Holy shit.

The detections were dated back to weeks ago when the two of them had last accessed the software. Every night, from midnight to two in the morning, there was at least one minor hiccup in the timeline. Then, starting on the date of the attack on the embassy, the anomalies increased in both intensity and frequency.

He scrolled to the most recent detections. A large chunk of them were within the last twenty-four hours. And of those anomalies, many of them were within five minutes of each other. All originated from the same area on the edge of the eastern district. Looking back over the rest of the records, most of the minor hitches in the timeline were from the same detector, and they weren’t limited to nighttime either. These had to be what Frisk and Sans called “saves” because there was no way the three of them would’ve missed the signs of time travel otherwise.

And, of fucking course, there were no cameras in the area. They had given up recording that district in lieu of getting more footage of the downtown area. That’s where all the activity had been. It had been the smart decision, they had agreed.

The downtown area. He scrolled through the list. Sure enough, leading up to the day of the explosion were a series of major time anomalies. He opened the footage from a dozen different cameras. After setting them to a timestamp on the night before the attack, he played them all
simultaneously.

At first there was nothing. The sidewalks were packed with human tourists and monsters going from store to store. Suddenly there was a strange blip across all the devices. He paused them all, scrutinizing each frame, and there! He saw them. The human with the haunting eyes. They were standing in front of the hotel with their hand outstretched, as if grasping at something invisible.

He unpaused the videos. The human stood there for a couple more seconds and then turned down an alleyway. They wasted no time in going to the end of passage and crouching behind a dumpster. One of the cameras was pointed directly at him, and Red was able to see just how off the human appeared. They held themselves far too rigidly, their eyes sent shivers up Red’s spine, and the way they smiled was downright creepy.

Within thirty seconds, a human exited the embassy. Red’s soul froze. It was the police officer that had been murdered. He watched the void-eyed human carefully, fully expecting them to immediately take her out. After all, it was the right time and the right place. Why else would they be there?

But instead they merely watched her as she leaned against the wall and lit a cigarette. She stood out there for several minutes, occasionally glancing at her cell phone.

When she finished her cigarette, she visibly sighed and flicked the butt away. She started to head back inside the embassy, but stiffened as a new figure approached the alleyway.

It was Punk Hamster. The furred monster was trembling from head to toe, and several wounds marked his body. As he walked, his eyes shifted, skating over the darkened alley. He was extraordinarily jumpy and jolted horribly when the officer took a step towards him. It was as if he was expecting an attack.

Although there was no audio, it was clear as day that their meeting had been arranged. They wasted no time in greeting one another. Punk Hamster immediately opened up their backpack and shoveled handful after handful of papers to her. He was so shaky that he dropped several documents on the ground. As the two of them bent down to pick them up, things went terribly wrong.

Static crept into the corners of the footage. At the same time, the image distorted and became wispy. Everyone appeared slightly transparent, as if they were ghosts. Instead of one solid image, it was as if there were two of everything. Each of the duplicates moved ever-so-differently from one another. It was as if the recording was picking up each of the figures taking a slightly different path.

One image was of the black-eyed human flying out from behind the dumpster. They thrust long, slender tendrils of magic at Punk Hamster and slammed him to the ground as the magic wrapped around his legs. Although Punk shot several grain-shaped bullets at the human, they easily dodged them.

In the meantime, however, the officer’s soul had manifested in front of them. The orange light burned brightly, illuminating the alleyway. She drew a pistol and wisps of orange surrounded her and her weapon as she pulled the trigger. There was a spark of gunfire and the assailant fell to the ground, clutching at their chest.

The other image was far worse. Rather than attack Punk, the mysterious human didn’t reveal themself. Instead, their body began to quake and convulse. Horror surged through Red as black tarry liquid, speckled with stark white spots, spilled out from the unknown human’s every orifice. It was as if they were vomiting and bleeding dark wax onto the alley floor. Their body deflated and
their face hollowed out until they appeared shriveled and dry. It was so fast, too; within seconds, the human was lying lifelessly on the floor, drenched in the murky liquid.

The process must have been noisy because the other two reacted as soon as it began. Punk hid behind a cardboard box while the officer dragged out her gun. She scuffled to the end of the alley, edging closer and closer to the dumpster.

It was at this point that the ghost image of the officer shooting the other human ended. The static faded away, and the video became solid once more.

That was when the pool of inky goo abruptly transformed.

Black spikes shot forward, piercing the officer’s hands, legs, and neck. Her mouth twisted into an obvious scream, but it took only moments before the opening was stuffed with the tarry substance. The shadowy magic was quickly wrapped around her limbs, driving violently into her skin.

One moment the officer was flailing and kicking, and the next her body was rent in half. Red flinched from the sight, a wave of nausea rolling over him from what he had witnessed.

He opened his eyes after a few seconds. Somehow in the amount of time he had shut them, the tendrils had gotten ahold of Punk. They were bashing him against the wall of the embassy with increasing force. It wasn’t long until an explosion of dust fell over the alley.

Red sat stunned. No wonder the humans had been hell-bent to track down the officer’s killer. The grisly scene was obscene. In all his years in the Underground, he had never seen anything so barbaric. And to think that this human had done this intentionally.

But they weren’t human, were they? The black magic was coagulating together to form a looming figure. The speckles of white pooled along the very top and around the limbs. Something about the way they were shaped was oddly familiar. A knot grew in his chest. It almost reminded him of…

The figure turned around, revealing the smug grin of the man he had never wanted to see again. His eyes were melting, and his face was lopsided, but there was no mistaking him.

It was Gaster.

Red fought for his breath as he watched the skeleton smile at the remnants of his victims. Within a blink, the doctor was suddenly in the frame of another camera situated at the far end of the alley. Gaster stood next to the wall of the embassy, inspecting it carefully. Within seconds his body liquefied once more and he disappeared into the building’s ventilation system.

It hit Red then: Gaster was in the embassy the night before the magical bombs went off. The color of his magic was purple and black. Just like the smoke from those awful fires. And he clearly had no problems with murdering whoever he wanted as mercilessly as he could.

And the time travel. Was that Gaster too? The idea chilled him to the bone. There would be no talking him into resetting if that were the case. The Gaster he knew would lord his power over everyone.

But was this the Gaster he knew? It was far more likely to be the version from this universe. The one who had tormented Sans for all those years. His soul boiled with rage at the thought.

This was the man who had done it all. Gaster had bombed them. He had caused all that carnage. He had harmed all those people.
The cat monster. All the monsters who had been near or inside those buildings in the downtown district.


Red threw his chair halfway across the room, allowing his fury to take hold of him. Papers went flying across the room as he slammed his hands on the desk violently. His eye was brimming with magic, and he wanted nothing more than to summon a blaster and fuck up the lab. Hell, maybe he could erase the evidence of Alphys’s death too. And while he was at it, he’d blast away the computer that showed the source of all this fucked up shit.

Or maybe he could fucking tear Gaster apart.

He brought up the location of the time anomalies in the eastern district on the tracking program. After consulting a few images of the streets, he teleported to the area.

It wasn’t the best part of town, that much was clear. Stray bits of garbage lined the sidewalks and barbed wire fences surrounded the nearby industrial warehouses. Homeless monsters picked through nearby trashcans for food and clothing, reminding him of his days spent in the Dump. As he breathed, he could almost taste the fumes and dirt in the air.

He hid behind a dumpster and spotted the time anomaly detector he had placed on the roof of the building close to him. This was it. Gaster had to be in one of these buildings. Why else would there be anomalies here every day? It was only a matter of finding the right one. That, or he could wait for him to come out to save, wherever that spot was.

He gazed over the area. If he was going to find this fucker, he needed to be cautious. And he was going to find him. After all the pain and destruction, there was no way he was going to just sit back and let him get away with this. For his family’s sake, he was going to tear this asshole apart and figure out how the fuck he was loading.

Red consulted his phone. No new messages. That meant no loads. He remembered his promise to Frisk and typed out a text.

* i think i found out who is doing this. let the guard know that he’s a sick motherfucker in the eastern district at the corner of Tem and Flex. you don’t come here. i’m don’t wanna alert him and if i see you i don’t know how i’m gonna avoid that

* oh and don’t forget to let me know if there’s a load

He put down the phone just as a large semi-truck pulled up to a driveway across the street. A gate slowly opened and allowed it in. As the vehicle crawled to a stop outside the oversized warehouse, a group of monsters exited the building and rushed to the truck. He recognized one or two of them as Punk Hamster’s friends.

But more importantly, he recognized what they lifted out the back of the truck. The vehicle was packed from top to bottom with Alphys’s robot parts. He felt queasy as he realized that the fucker must have been behind that as well. Somehow they must have gotten her shit and killed her. How many deaths was this disgusting monster responsible for?

The monsters were carrying the mechanical parts into the warehouse, where the asshole had to be.

Red needed no more proof. He got out his cell, ready to dial Frisk’s number when –

With a loud clunk, something hard hit him on the back of the head. His vision darkened as he hit
the pavement.
Would Orange Chicken from Panda Express™ Prevent Scurvy?

Chapter Notes

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulsex.tumblr.com. You can also find soul sex and Papby reblogs if that's your thing.

NOTES

- Phew. Sorry it's been so long since my last release. I had a few other giftfics to write. You can check them out on either tumblr or AO3. I've even started another couple of multi-chapter fics in the meantime.
- There are 2-4 chapters left in TLY (depending on whether I split the chapters or not). I'm gonna try to get it done before its anniversary (April 1st) :3
- This chapter is a bit on the shorter side (for this fic) because I split this chapter up. :3
- Alternative chapter names: “Sadly, a Plane Is Not a Restaurant”; “I Spilled Hot Grease All Over My Chest. No, That Isn’t a Euphemism”; “Have You Glomped a Shark Today?”; “We ROT All Over as Many Times as There Are Skulls”; “But Then We Play Base64 on Our N64!”

Additional tags for this chapter: Discussion of past character death, discussion of past character rape, discussion of noncon/rape, nonconsensual surgery, surgery while awake, infodump, forced imprisonment, minor body horror (goopy gaster), discussion of past Sanster, discussion of past Papster, experimentation

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Loud voices, indistinct and incomprehensible, echoed strangely in Red’s skull. They clawed at his mind, urging him to wake up. And he wanted to open his eyes. No, he needed to. It was clear that something important was going on given the urgency imbued in those voices. But he couldn’t. An intoxicating numbness had swallowed him, weighing his bones to absolute immobility. Every time he attempted to lift his eyelids, a deep lethargy overtook him, and he was once again lulled into a shallow sleep.

Maybe that was for the best. It had been such a long time since he had gotten real rest. And he was really, really tired...

And then a voice broke through the fog.

“– HIM GO! I SWEAR, I WILL DO ANYTHING! JUST STOP THIS AT ONCE!”

Red latched onto the words unlike any of the other voices he had heard before. His soul reveled in the familiar rasp. Boss.

A shrill clanging noise sounded, and was instantly followed by a loud humming zap. His brother cried out wordlessly, his voice dripping with pain. The odd noises prompted Red to take another stab at waking up. Hopefully his brother hadn’t fallen down the stairs or something. Whatever had
happened, Red needed to pull it together and help his little bro out.

Though he wanted to wake up, he didn’t expect anything to be different from his last few attempts. Yet something must have changed from last time, because when he ordered his eyes to open this time, it worked.

It worked, alright. Inches from his face were a series of blazingly bright lightbulbs. Pain lanced his skull as the light bored into his sockets, and he had to squeeze his eyes shut before it overwhelmed him. Even then, some of the brightness permeated his skull. Plus his face was so damn warm, he could hardly handle it. He wasn’t sure how the hell he had slept through this for so long.

And he wasn’t sure how it had happened in the first place. Ugh... Had Papyrus fixed the light in his room while he had slept? No, that made no sense. There were so many bulbs and they were so close to his damn head. How the fuck...?

He tried to lift a hand to cover his face, but something bit into his wrist, stopping him an inch above the bed. What? Though the lights blinded him, he squinted his eyes open. It didn’t help much; he just couldn’t see with them so close. He experimentally raised his hand and felt the material chafe his bone again. It was hard to tell, but it felt like something was pinning him to his mattress.

God, his brother’s techniques were getting good. But why couldn’t he remember agreeing to this? He mutely struggled against the restraints, his every movement slow and painful.

As his eyes slowly adjusted to the lights, his mind grappled with everything he was feeling. Something was undeniably wrong. It went beyond any sort of uncomfortable sex roleplay. Some unseen anchor weighed down his soul, making everything slow and heavy. It was almost like the days when he had trained Boss on blue magic. They had taken turns practicing their gravity manipulation, and it had led to some interesting sensations. He shifted his head, trying to get a better view of his chest.

He sucked in a sharp breath. Forget the weight on his soul, his skull was killing him. It felt as if something was drilling a hole into his right temple. Or maybe he had just hit his head real hard. He couldn’t really figure it out.

Whatever had happened, it was affecting his entire body. He just couldn’t fucking think! And he knew there was something he needed to remember – something real important. But his thoughts were fuzzy and disconnected. Every time he tried to think of a solution to getting out of his fetters, his mind would get caught up and freeze.

There was another clanking noise and subsequent electric zap, and as his brother released a strangled shout, it hit him: wasn’t Boss supposed to be dead?

“bro?” he croaked, his tongue slurring the word as if he were drunk. “is that really you?”

There was a brief but dense silence, and then –

“BROTHER!”

Red opened his mouth to respond to Boss, but was shocked into stunned silence as the bright lights were suddenly moved from his face.

“w-what?”

For a few moments his vision was marred with white spots, and he couldn’t see a damn thing. He
tried to brush them away from his sockets only to remember that he was still tied down. How the hell had he already forgotten? He shook his skull slightly to clear his head, but there was still something attached there. God, what was wrong with him?

“I WOULD STAY STILL IF I WERE YOU.”

Red inhaled sharply, a harsh chill zipping down his spine. That voice… The sound of it conjured up all sorts of terrible memories, both old and recent. Determination pumping into his soul. Blasters tethered to his magic. Gaster slaughtering the police officer and Punk Hamster.

He recoiled as the doctor’s blurred face came into view, sending a bolt of pain through his body.

“If you move too much you’ll hurt yourself.” As Red blinked the remnants of the bright lights from his eyes, a wicked grin appeared on Gaster’s face. “We’d rather not have to load because you’ve impaled your soul.”

What? Red glanced downwards. He was lying on a gurney, and had been stripped of his clothes. Gaster had clearly been busy while Red had been out because not only was bound to table by leather straps, but his soul had been taken from his ribcage and placed on his bare sternum.

A shiver ran through his bones at the thought of Gaster – this horrible, disgusting leech of a monster – touching the most intimate part of him. And he must have been holding his soul for a long time because jutting from it was a needle that dug deep inside the organ. Red could feel the metal hitting against the inside of the walls, making him feel sick. Attached to the needle was a long, narrow plastic tube that weaved across his lap. The line ended at an IV bag which dangled from a nearby metal pole.

Somewhere in the background, Red heard Gaster say something. He was too lost in his own muddled thoughts to understand him. It wasn’t until something soft grazed the top of his skull that he returned his attention to the doctor.

“What?” Red realized how gentle his voice had been. He cleared his throat and tried to adopt a venomous tone. “Let me – ” It still came out slurred and soft. He shook his head, but that only resulted in more pain. “Let me go.”

“Why would we do that? You just got here.” Gaster reached a hand to Red’s chin and gently rubbed it. “And oh, how long we’ve waited for you, sans. We knew you’d show up after we took your brother, but I must admit I was quite disappointed that you didn’t find me sooner.”

“I – stop it, don’t fucking touch me,” he spat out as he shifted his skull. His mind was so damn fuzzy that it took him a few seconds to take in the rest of Gaster’s words. “Wait a sec, you’ve been... waiting for me?”

“Yes. Well, waiting for you and, at the same time, not you. You’re not my sans, rest his soul.” He took his hand away from Red’s face, using it to cup his own cheekbone as his mouth opened into a wide, dripping grin. “But you will become my sans soon enough.”

It took a moment for his words to sink in, but when they did, rage filled Red’s soul. This fucker was calling Sans his? After all that shit he had done... After killing him!

And he said it all with the biggest shit-eating grin Red had ever seen. He was going to tear that disgusting smile from Gaster’s face.
But as the beginnings of Red’s magic sparked in the air, something went horribly wrong. Sharp bolts of electricity shot up his arms, ripping into his body and assaulting his soul. When the sensation finally died away, he was left panting, tears clinging to the corners of his sockets. He glanced at his arms and saw that magic dampeners were wrapped around his bones. There wouldn’t be any magic with those damn things on.

“TSK, TSK. NONE OF THAT NOW. DIDN’T YOUR UNIVERSE’S VERSION OF MYSELF EVER TEACH YOU NOT TO USE MAGIC AGAINST HIM?”

“fuck you.”

Gaster smirked as he wiped at Red’s tears. “IN DUE TIME. BUT BEFORE I GET THERE, WE SHOULD GET UP TO SPEED ON YOUR MEDICAL HISTORY. WE NOTICED THAT, UNLIKE YOUR BROTHER, YOU’RE LACKING DETERMINATION.”

Red’s soul constricted. His brother. Oh god, this asshole had Boss. He flicked his eyes around him, suddenly aware that he had never even taken in his surroundings. As he glanced around the room, he couldn’t comprehend what he was seeing. Were those... fucking cages? And... my god, were those souls? How the fuck had Gaster gotten so many of them?!

Sharpened fingers dug into Red’s arm, drawing his attention back to the doctor.

“WELL? HAVE YOU EVER HAD DETERMINATION TREATMENTS?”

“yeah, when i was fucking kid.” His mind was slowly returning to normal, but as he spoke, he stumbled over every word. “sick fucking bastard, making me go through that.”

“INTERESTING.”

Gaster wrote down a note on a notebook he held. Wait, god... why the fuck was he cooperating with this asshole?

“what’s it to you anyway? not like it makes a fucking difference.”

“BUT IT DOES. WE’VE BEEN WONDERING IF OUR SAVES AND LOADS HAVE AFFECTED YOU IN ANY WAY.”

Red blinked a few times, his mind struggling to understand what Gaster had said. “so it has been you time traveling, how the fuck –?”

Gaster interrupted with a bark of laughter as he strode to a tray of medical instruments. The noise sent a wave of fury through Red’s soul.

“What’S IT TO YOU ANYWAY?” Gaster said as he held surgical forceps up to the light. “IT IS NOT AS IF IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE.”

Red clenched his fists as his words were thrown back at him.”

Gaster sighed. “BUT WE SUPPOSE WE CAN SHARE WHAT WE KNOW WITH YOU. IT MATTERS LITTLE TO US.”

He walked back to the bedside, pulling the tray alongside him. As Gaster adjusted the surgical lights to bear down on the gurney once again, Red eyed the number of disturbingly familiar instruments that he had brought with him.
“WE DO NOT KNOW THE EXTENT OF THE EXPERIMENTS THAT – ” he struggled for a moment. “ – I PERFORMED ON YOU BACK IN YOUR UNIVERSE, BUT IN THIS UNIVERSE, I HAD DEVELOPED SEVERAL THEORIES ON TIME TRAVEL.” He pulled a stool next to the bed and sat down. “AFTER MY SUCCESS WITH SENDING SANS AND SEVERAL OTHER MONSTERS TO THE FUTURE, I WAS READY TO TRY IT MYSELF.”

He rolled to the head of the bed and stared intently into the side of Red’s skull. Suddenly Red was all too aware that his head was pulsing with pain. There was something there, attached to his right temple. He could fucking feel it there. What the fuck had Gaster done to him?

“IT WAS, UNFORTUNATELY, THE WRONG DECISION,” he said as he pressed a hand to Red’s skull. “I ENDED UP TRAVELING FORWARD IN TIME, BUT FAR FURTHER THAN I HAD PLANNED. AND THERE WERE UNEXPECTED EFFECTS.”

As he spoke the last words, Gaster’s face drooped. At first Red wondered if the doctor was having some sort of episode, but then drops of white goo trailed off his skull. They splattered onto the gurney with a quiet plopping noise. Red jerked, scared to touch the substance. But Gaster’s hold prevented him from moving, and spatters of the bone fell onto his face.

“WHEN I CAME OUT THE OTHER END OF THE MACHINE, THE WORLD WAS... DIFFERENT. THINGS HAD, OF COURSE, CHANGED, BUT IT WENT BEYOND THE NORMAL PASSAGE OF TIME. IT WAS IF I WAS STUCK IN SOME OTHER WORLD, DISTINCT FROM – AND YET THE SAME AS – THIS ONE. ALL THE COLORS HAD GONE, AND I COULDN’T INTERACT WITH ANYTHING NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRIED. SO MANY IMAGES OVERLAPPED OVER ONE ANOTHER, PLAYING OVER AND OVER IN MY VISION. SO MUCH NOISE, SO MUCH AGONY.”

Gaster clutched his head, his face a goopy mess. Red’s soul was demanding him to run as far away from this monster as he could. Unlike his own version of the doctor, it seemed like this Gaster didn’t have full command of his abilities. His eyelights were fuzzy and flickering, as if they were in danger of guttering out at any moment, and his body wouldn’t stop melting.

But after a few seconds, Gaster took a deep breath. His body smoothed and returned to its original state.

“I WILL ADMIT THAT IT NEARLY OVERLOADED MY SENSES.”

Red’s arms clanked against his metal cuffs as he shivered uncontrollably. Though Gaster had reshaped his body, the aura around him was so discordant and malevolent that Red wasn’t sure the danger had truly passed.

When Gaster spoke, his voice was emotionless. “IT WAS ONLY WHEN THE HUMAN FREED THE UNDERGROUND THAT THINGS CHANGED. THE NOISES QUIETED AND THE IMAGES DIED AWAY. NOT COMPLETELY, MIND YOU. EVEN NOW I CAN SEE AND HEAR THEIR WHISPERS. BUT IT WAS QUIET ENOUGH THAT I COULD FINALLY ANALYZE WHAT WAS GOING ON AROUND ME.”

He shook his head before raising the forceps to Red’s skull. As the doctor tugged at something attached to the delicate bone, Red’s breath caught in his throat. He gripped the leather beneath him, his vision blurring. Gaster continued to speak, though Red was so engrossed in whatever the doctor was doing that he missed most of his words.

“ – AND THOUGH – MANAGED TO TELEPORT – BUT WHEN – TO THE SURFACE – TO MY OLD HOME – AND THAT WAS WHEN I SAW THEM. THE MONSTERS.”
Suddenly the pain passed. With a soft clank, Gaster placed something thin and bloody into a medical cup filled with a transparent solution. As soon as the object touched the liquid, the blood began to bubble and dissipate, leaving behind what looked like an unblemished piece of bone. Red gasped and spluttered, feeling lightheaded and dizzy. As he stared at the bone, it hit him – for some reason, Gaster had taken a piece of his skull.

“I COULD NOT BELIEVE MY EYES,” Gaster continued as he set the forceps aside. “MONSTERS? ON THE SURFACE? I NEVER IMAGINED THAT ASGORE WOULD BE ABLE TO COLLECT ALL THE SOULS.”

Gaster held a suction tool to Red’s temple. Red watched dazedly as blood went down the clear tube and out of sight.

“I WAS TRYING TO GET A CLOSER LOOK AND THAT WAS WHEN I SAW THEM – A HUMAN CHILD. JUST OUTSIDE THE GROUP, STALKING ITS PREY.”

“prey?” Red snorted, though the movement made him sick. “you gotta be fucking kidding me. it was a fucking kid.”

Gaster sighed, a patient smile on his face.

“WE THOUGHT YOU’D KNOW BY THIS POINT THAT HUMANS DEVELOP AN APTITUDE FOR KILLING AT A YOUNG AGE. AND I WAS NOT ABOUT TO LET THEM SLAY WHAT WAS CLEARLY A SCOUTING PARTY TO THE SURFACE.”

His smile transformed into a contemplative frown.

“I ATTEMPTED TO ATTACK THE CHILD, BUT THE MOMENT MY MAGIC MADE CONTACT WITH THEM, SOMETHING HAPPENED. I THINK THEY WERE WAITING FOR ME. WAITING FOR SOMEONE WILLING TO DO WHATEVER IT TOOK TO SET THINGS RIGHT AND PUT HUMANITY IN ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE.”

“What? who was waiting for you? the fucking kid?”

“CHARA.” The name made Red’s soul freeze. “THEY GIFTED ME WITH THIS ABILITY TO SET EVERYTHING IN MOTION. WE SHARE A COMMON GOAL: TO REVEAL HUMANITY’S TRUE NATURE TO MONSTERKIND AND THEN EXTERMINATE THEM FOR GOOD.”

“are you even fucking listening to yourself? humanity didn’t do shit, you did! you attacked the embassy, you killed thousands of people! how the fuck can you blame humans for that?”

“YOU DON’T SEE THE FOREST FROM THE TREES, SANS.”

“What fucking forest don’t i fucking see? you created your own damn problem!”

“DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY MONSTERS’ LIVES THOSE HUMANS TORE APART BEFORE WE PUT OUR PLAN INTO ACTION? THEY FORBID US FROM LEAVING THE REGION AND DETAIN ANYONE THAT HAS. AND IT HASN’T STOPPED EITHER! INSTEAD OF KEEPING US STUCK UNDER MT. EBBOT, WE’RE TRAPPED JUST OUTSIDE IT.”

“and that gives you the fucking right to kill so many fucking people? i mean, shit, you killed your own kind!”
Gaster shook his head and refocused his attention onto the surgery. He quickly unraveled a long, thing tube and pushed it into Red’s skull through the temple. As the foreign object poked inside his wound and itched at his right eye socket, Red groaned. Within seconds, the vision in his right eye disappeared entirely.

“WE KNEW WE EXPECTED TOO MUCH OF YOU TO UNDERSTAND,” Gaster said, pulling his hands away. “YOU WERE ALWAYS SO MUCH OF AN IDEALIST.” He tenderly brushed a gloved hand along Red’s shoulder, leaving behind a trail of blood. “BUT THAT’S WHY I’VE ALWAYS LIKED YOU – SUCH A FIGHTER’S SPIRIT. AH, IT’S SO WONDERFUL TO HAVE YOU AGAIN AFTER ALL THESE YEARS.”

“you never had me in the first place, buddy.”

“WELL, MAYBE IT WASN’T ME EXACTLY, BUT I HAD YOU NONETHELESS. IN THE END, YOUR MAGIC DOESN’T KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN UNIVERSES. NOT IN THAT REGARD.”

“you’re fucking disgusting. my gaster might’ve been a shithead, and he might’ve done things that i never agreed to, but never he never did that. not even he was sick enough to do what you did to sans.”

Gaster tilted his head, a smile alighting his face. “NO? HE ONLY WENT AFTER YOUR BROTHER THEN?” He shrugged. “DIFFERENT PREFERENCES, I SUPPOSE.”

Red’s mouth went dry. “what?”

“WELL, LAST NIGHT HE WOULDN’T STOP SCREAMING ‘NOT AGAIN’ WHEN I TOOK HIM. I ASSUMED THAT WAS WHAT HAD HAPPENED. AM I WRONG?”

Nausea gripped Red’s soul. He ignored the implication that Boss – his baby bro that he had sworn to protect with all his life – had been touched by Gaster in their universe. Something within Red told him that he had to put it out of his mind right now. Instead he focused on the doctor’s other words.

“you... took him...”

Somewhere in the distance he heard a small sob. Boss.

“you sick bastard!” Red screamed as he desperately pushed against the restraints, ignoring the pain that surged through him. “i’ll fucking murder you for laying a finger on him, i swear to fucking god!”

Sighing, Gaster stood up and removed his gloves. “WE VERY MUCH DOUBT THAT, BUT WE WILL SAY IT IS AMUSING TO SEE YOU GET RILED UP OVER IT.”

“freak! you disgusting, lecherous, shit-eating asshole!”

“SUCH LANGUAGE.” He held the cylinder containing the bone fragment up to the light.

“i’ll show you more than language once i get off this fucking table!”

“AH, OF COURSE YOU WILL.” A burst of magic crackled in the air, and a single black tendril extended from Gaster’s shoulder. “BUT THAT WON’T BE HAPPENING ANY TIME SOON. WE HAVEN’T HAD ANY FUN WITH YOU YET.”
“fuck you!”

Gaster shook his head as he chuckled. Red eyed the undulating, shadowy magic with unease and quickly considered his options.

“at least –” He hesitated, his soul screaming at him to stop, but he pressed on. “at least let boss go. it’s me you fucking want, so... so do that for me. i’ll let you do whatever you want. quietly. i won’t put up a fight.”

It was a lie, but if his brother could get out of here... Even if Boss was only temporarily safe from the doctor’s touch...

Gaster laughed derisively. His magic stretched across the room, weaving and pulsing as it went. Red tried to follow its path, but with one eye out of commission, his peripheral vision was shot.

“IF WE HAD ONLY WANTED YOU, WE WOULD HAVE TAKEN YOU ANY TIME WE HAD WANTED. IT WOULD’VE BEEN EASY ENOUGH WITH YOU AND MY SANS LETTING YOUR GUARD DOWN IN THE LAB EVERY OTHER DAY.”

“so why didn’t y–? wait. what the fuck did you say?” Realization hit him full force. The videos. “you were the one who set up the cameras in the lab.”

Gaster snorted. “NO, THAT WAS THE HUMANS. THEIR GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN WATCHING ALPHYS FOR QUITE SOME TIME. WE MERELY INTERCEPTED THE FEED.”

At the mention of Alphys’s name, fiery hot rage boiled in Red’s soul. “it was you.”

“HMM?” Gaster’s magic returned to him, carrying a large metallic box.

“you killed alphys.”

“AH, THAT.” He opened the container and revealed a variety of objects, ranging from soul containers to data-filled papers to bars of chocolate. “UNFORTUNATELY, WE HAD NO CHOICE. SHE HAD DISCOVERED WHERE WE WERE SENDING THE DATA.” He placed the bone fragment inside the box and snapped it shut. “WE COULDN’T ALLOW HER TO LEAD THE AUTHORITIES TO US WHEN WE WERE SO CLOSE TO ACHIEVING OUR PLANS.”

“fuck you! you sick, perverted –”

“YES, YES. YOU’VE ALREADY SAID THAT. PERHAPS IF YOUR INSULTS WERE A BIT MORE CREATIVE, WE’D ALLOW THIS TO GO ON A BIT LONGER.” Gaster stood up, setting the box to the side, and marched to a point in the middle of the room. “HOWEVER, IT IS TIME TO GET TO WHY WE’RE REALLY HERE.”

“what? to fuck me?”

Gaster ignored him. His hand was held aloft, and his eyes were staring emptily into the air. For a moment, the room was silent and still.

Then, everything shifted. Not by much, but enough that Red’s sight struggled to accommodate the strange change. He blinked rapidly, trying to right his vision. It was almost as if his eyelight had flickered for a moment. Yet his vision was not the only thing unaffected. He suddenly found himself gasping, his chest heaving as if he had just run a couple miles. And undercutting all of these sensations, was the feeling that everything was... off.
Gaster returned to the gurney, a pensive expression on his face.

“DOES IT STILL HURT?”

“what?” Red said between breaths. Everything fucking hurt. What the fuck was Gaster on about?

“YOUR SOUL. DOES IT STILL HURT? WE WANT TO MAKE SURE THE ROBOT IS EQUIPPED FOR IT BEFORE WE INTRODUCE ANY HUMAN ELEMENTS.”

Red blinked. “robot?” He glanced around the room with his good eye, and sure enough, there it was. One of Alphys’s robots, fully assembled and stand just a few meters away. The garish pink color was blindingly obvious; he wasn’t sure how he had missed it before.

Gaster’s eyes shot to Red’s face. “AH. THAT’S RIGHT. YOU HAVE NO DETERMINATION, SO YOU WON’T REMEMBER.” He sighed and took out his notebook. “WE WERE HOPING TO GAUGE YOUR REACTION ACROSS LOADS. NO MATTER.”

As he put a pen to the paper, a low buzz suddenly filled the room. At first Red wondered what horror Gaster was setting up for him next, but then he saw that the doctor had paused as well. After a few seconds, he walked to a cardboard box some meters away from the bed and dragged out a pair of pants. Red’s pants.

It was all too obvious what was making the noise now.

“gaster, tell me what you’re doing with the robot,” he said, trying to keep the desperation from his voice. He needed to distract Gaster. Anything to keep him from digging into his pockets. “come on, doc –” He put all the derision he could in the word to try to draw his attention. “ – why don’t you tell me what your big plans are?”

But Gaster disregarded him, and to Red’s disappointment, he pulled out the cell phone. It was no longer vibrating, but even from here Red could see it was lit up with notifications.

“WE FORGET SOMETIMES THAT THESE THINGS EXIST NOW. WHAT AN OVERSIGHT. OH WELL. WHAT IS YOUR PASSCODE?”

Red clamped his mouth shut.

“AH, NEVER MIND. WE’RE SURE THAT IT’S SOMETHING EASY. PROBABLY YOUR BROTHER’S BIRTHDAY.”

Red’s sockets widened. He opened his mouth to offer a string of fake passcodes, but it was too late.

“OH. IT WAS THAT EASY. HOW TOUCHING. WE ARE SURE YOUR BROTHER APPRECIATES IT.” Gaster pressed his fingers to the screen, his eyes darting every which way as he read whatever was on there. To Red’s horror, the doctor murmured, “WELL, WELL, ISN’T THIS INTERESTING.”

Shit, shit, shit. Who had contacted him and what had they said?

“YOUR FRIEND FRISK – ” Fuck! “ – WANTS TO LET YOU KNOW THAT THE GUARD IS ON THEIR WAY. AND THERE’S ANOTHER MESSAGE ASKING WHEN YOU TWO ARE MEETING.” He laughed. “WE DIDN’T REALIZE YOU WERE TAKING A LEAF OUT OF MY SANS’S BOOK. HOW MANY MONSTERS ARE YOU COURTING?”

“fuck off, you piece of shit.”
Gaster was still reading the screen. “OH, NOW WHAT IS THIS? YOU ASKED THEM TO KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR LOADS AND SAVES? AH, HOW PRECIOUS. THERE’S SOMEONE ELSE THAT CAN SENSE OUR ABILITIES?”

“no, hold on, you got the wrong idea! they’re just a kid! a kid with a healthy imagination.”

Gaster’s grin grew impossibly wide. His face almost looked like it was cracked in half.

“A CHILD THEN? IF THEY CAN SENSE THE LOADS, THEN THAT MEANS THEY’RE FULL OF DETERMINATION. AND THAT MEANS THEY’RE MOST LIKELY A HUMAN.”

“no,” Red yelled. “you’ve got this all wrong!”

“WE DON’T THINK WE DO, ACTUALLY. HOW WONDERFUL! WE KNEW WE’D FIND A DETERMINED SOUL EVENTUALLY. IT WAS JUST A MATTER OF TIME.”

“no, you’re wrong! it’s just a monster kid!” he lied. “they went through some shit when they were baby. they ended up getting a full dose of dt!”

“JUST AS WELL. WE NEED DETERMINATION-FILLED MONSTERS FOR EXPERIMENTATION.”

“dammit, no!”

“WORRY NOT, SANS. IT’S BETTER TO HAVE THEM IN SAFE HANDS BEFORE THE WAR FULLY BEGINS. SPEAKING OF WHICH – ” He cocked his head. “THE GUARD IS PROBABLY HERE BY NOW. WE’LL HAVE TO DEAL WITH THEM. BUT HOW ABOUT WE SEND A QUICK MESSAGE TO YOUR FRIEND FRISK FIRST? AFTER ALL, THEY ARE SO ANXIOUS TO MEET WITH YOU!”

“please, come on! they don’t deserve this shit! they’re just a kid!”

Gaster walked to the IV bag and adjusted a knob on the pole. Translucent liquid poured into the long tube.

“HUSH NOW, WE CAN PLAY MORE LATER.”

“don’t fucking do this!” he roared, pushing against his restraints. “they don’t have a clue what’s going on, i swear! i fucking –”

Red gasped as an iciness entered his soul. His body quaked violently as the chill spread throughout the organ. Then, his body stilled. It was bizarre. Though his soul was so cold, the rest of his body was warming up pleasantly. He blinked, trying to rid the fuzziness that was once again gripping his mind, but it was no use. Already his thoughts were failing to form properly.

“GO TO SLEEP, SANS. WE HAVE WORK TO DO.”

Red moved his head, jostling the tube that extended into his skull. The resulting rush of pain made his soul convulse. He grabbed onto the feeling, desperate to stay awake, desperate to stop Gaster.

“no, please,” he said, his words slurring once more. “god, no. no, no, nnnnoooo...”

He needed to wake up. Frisk... Boss... Everyone...

But he couldn’t fight it. Within seconds, he was out.
Chapter Notes

If you want to reblog this on tumblr, my url is http://undertailsoulsx.tumblr.com. You can also find soul sex and Papby reblogs if that's your thing.

NOTES

- I know I’m gonna get comments about it, so lemme confirm ahead of time: no, Gaster did not actually kill to get the ability. Edge just misinterpreted the story.
- I can't decide if there is gonna be 1 or 2 chapters left. *fingerguns* Almost done though.
- Alternative chapter names: “The Latent Heat of Fusion for Watermelon is 311 kJ/kg”; “I Wanted to Split This Chapter to Make a Final Monty Python Reference, But I'm Too Weak”; “Do You Think Red Might Be Saying Something Important in His Half-Dazed State?”; “Second, Keyed Caesar! But Shift 1 and Don't Forget Red's Mumbling!”; “Third, Vigenère Autokey”; “That Mumbling Is Still the Answer!”

Additional tags for this chapter: Discussion of noncon, body horror, gore, blood, broken bones, character death
(If I forgot anything, please let me know!)

* Rti qwbhic'v fdaxygm Lwbrox jzc igopl werxj Xfngd.

Edge lay flat on his chest, his chin resting atop his folded arms. Fatigue pulsed through him, weighing his body down and seeping into his sockets. It came as no surprise after the arrest, the fighting, the failed attempts to break his suppression device, the torture, everything. All he wanted was to close his eyes and doze off. It would feel so good to replenish his energy.

But there was no sleep to be had when Gaster was here, mere feet from his brother. And after the last load, Edge knew there would be no rest for any of them. There was no forgetting the way Red had convulsed and screamed as his soul had been extracted. Even when the organ had been transferred to the robot, Red’s body had kept jerking all over the place. Edge had sat in his cage, on the verge of vomiting as he had witnessed the torture.

Thank god his brother hadn’t remembered. Only Edge would live with those horrific memories. Well, only he and Gaster.

Edge watched through the cage bars as the doctor called his cronies on a handheld radio. Even as he informed them of the impending attack on their headquarters, his voice held no trace of panic. He simply ordered his subordinates to their respective places, his tone even. It was as if this was no more than some minor inconvenience. A tiny bump in the road. Insignificant.

Edge hated him for it. He couldn’t wrap his mind around how someone could not care about all the lives he was destroying. Oh, he had tried to adopt a similar air of indifference back in the Underground, but it had been little more than an act. A play that he had put on for the world... and himself. Gaster, though, was more than serious about this whole thing. He was a soulless bastard.
The doctor set down the walkie talkie and strolled to Edge’s cage, a crooked smirk spreading across his face.

“STILL AWAKE?”

Edge glared at him but kept his mouth firmly shut.

“If we were you, we’d get some sleep. We have much in store for you when we get back.”

“Fuck you,” Edge rasped.

Gaster raised his brow, and a shiver ran up Edge’s spine.

“We could make you sleep. A small tranquilizer wouldn’t interfere with our experiments too much. But we’d rather not wait for it to wear off.” He cast a glance towards Red. “Besides, who knows what would happen to your brother while you were under?”

“Don’t you fucking dare.”

Gaster inclined his head. “Then you’ll sleep.”

Edge nodded, feeling no remorse from the stark lie.

“Good. We’re glad we don’t have to resort to such measures. Now get some rest. The cameras will tell us how much you get in the end, so no lying about it when we return.”

Edge swallowed. Cameras? How many of those were set up?

With a small sound, Gaster disappeared. Edge clenched his uninjured hand. The bastard was probably bluffing. It was his way of maintaining control even when he wasn’t here. Captain Undyne had employed similar tactics and it had driven some of his fellow Guards mad with paranoia.

Edge wouldn’t be fooled. Whether or not Gaster was really spying on them didn’t matter. Either way the pervert planned to hurt the two of them, as he had just admitted. Edge wouldn’t sit around and wait for him to touch his brother.

He crawled to a half-sitting position, his skull rattling against the cage ceiling painfully as he quivered violently. His soul tightened as he stared down the wall in front of him. He just had to keep reminding himself that he could do this. It was going to hurt, but he could do it. He had done it before. All he needed to do was time it right. With the handcuff chain broken, it would be easier to do it. Focus.

He repeated the mantra to himself over and over again before he swung down, releasing his magic as the suppression device’s compartment slammed into the concrete. Even before he hit it, he knew he had failed; his reflexes had just been too slow. Electricity ripped through him and his limbs went painfully rigid as he collapsed.

After a couple seconds, he was able to stop the flow of his magic. Though he was trembling and his soul ached, he took a deep breath and tried again.

And again.
And then again.

At the end of his fourth attempt, he couldn’t stop his magic in time. Volts of energy clawed at his body, clouding his mind. After what felt like forever, he fell to the floor in a heap and blacked out.

When he woke up next, he drew in a quivering breath and let loose a dry sob. Everything hurt, from his skull to his toes. The sound of his body clattering against the concrete echoed loudly in the cramped space. There was no holding back any movement now; he was simply too weak to stop his shaking. And after all that happened over the countless hours, it was no surprise. He wanted to give into Gaster’s demand and sleep. Anything but go through this torment over and over again.

At the thought, determination raged through him. No. His brother needed him. Lying here, waiting for the bastard to wreak havoc upon them, would do nothing to help. And his brother was the only thing that mattered. Edge had to stop him before the pervert did lasting harm to him. That unforgettable harm that went right to his soul.

Lingering in the back of his mind, he could still feel the doctor’s hand kneading his pelvis, his accursed voice taunting him from above.

He shook his head quickly and cast a glance out towards his brother. He was still out, his chest rising gently as he slept. Just knowing that he was nearby filled Edge with a renewed sense of purpose.

This was it. He had to get this right. Who knew how long Gaster had been gone? After passing out, Edge couldn’t be sure. The bastard could come back any second, ready to terrorize them again.

Edge’s eyes bore into the wall. If he angled his arm differently, maybe he could time it better. He adjusted his position, inhaled deeply, and counted down.

3

2

1

The mechanism crunched against the surface as he loosened a torrent of magic from his soul. He squeezed his eyes shut and braced himself, fully expecting the energy to rebound once again.

But nothing happened. He creaked open his sockets and stared at the magic suppressor. The device was emitting a narrow trail of smoke, and right in the middle were several dents where it had knocked against the concrete repeatedly.

For a few seconds, Edge sat there, his mind struggling to comprehend what had happened. Not daring to believe what he was seeing, he tentatively tried to summon the tiniest of bones – no bigger than his smaller toe phalange. His soul warmed and the air tingled with energy as the bone manifested in his hand.

It had worked. My god, it had worked.

His eyes darted to the cage door. The metal mesh was solid, but with enough force he could break through. He pressed against the back corner and fired a wall of thick, heavy bones. As they smashed into the wire, they crunched and splintered into hundreds of tiny pieces.

Edge cringed at the noise. If Gaster hadn’t been lying about the cameras, then he’d be coming back
any second now from that clamor. And, unfortunately, the door was still intact. It was dented and damaged, yes, but still standing. One more solid hit down the center and he could probably blast a gaping hole into it.

With a slow breath to steady his shaking hands, he conjured up three oversized bones and aimed them at the entrance. He watched with gratification as the door blasted outward, leaving behind an opening large enough for him to crawl out.

However, his satisfaction was short-lived. He leaned against the wall, panting as his head swam. One thing was certain: Gaster had not been lying about him needing rest. His soul was screaming for him to either eat or sleep before he passed out. He could do neither. The longer he sat here, the less time he’d have before the pervert came back and prevented him from leaving. And even if he dusted in the process, he was going to get his brother out of here.

So he ignored the pain. Even as his soul groaned with exhaustion. Even when his naked body scraped against the broken metal. Even as he fell from the cage to the ground. Even as his legs gave out beneath him.

The pain was nothing compared to what he’d feel if his brother had to endure half of what Edge already had.

By the time he was able to drag himself over to the gurney where his brother slept, he was a sweaty and rattling mess. He gently tugged at the tubes attached to Red, hoping to everything that he wouldn’t accidentally kill him as they were disconnected.

When his brother’s soul was finally free, Edge tucked it into his ribcage, shielding it from the elements. He took it as a good sign when he released the organ and it levitated beneath Red’s sternum instead of falling down.

As he unfastened his brother’s restraints, he whispered, “Sans, wake up!”

Red sat there, unresponsive.

“Wake up! We need to get out of here!” He pulled out the tiny bone he had summoned earlier and pressed it inside the handcuffs that his brother wore. “Gaster will be back soon, so get up!”

There was a tiny click and the magic suppression device was off. With his brother finally free from all confines, Edge shook him. Still, there was no response.

Out of breath and aching too much to stand, Edge slid to the ground. If he was going to carry his brother out of here, he needed to take a quick respite. That was if he even had that option. His eyes flicked around the vast room, trying to pinpoint an exit. There were no doors to be found. He spotted a few windows, but they were at least ten meters above them, likely more. Maybe if he grabbed Red and used a wave of bones to lift them up...

Suddenly, the world shifted.

He blinked and found himself standing over his brother. Somewhere in the distance came a shrill shriek.

“DAMMIT!”

Edge punched the stretcher as uncontrollable fury whipped through him. His brother bounced slightly on the bed from the impact, but otherwise remained immobile.
Not that it mattered. How the hell was he supposed to get out of here if Gaster had time travel? All it took was a single moment and he’d find himself back here, right under the creep’s control. He grabbed Red by the shoulders and shook him again.

“PLEASE!” he yelled, abandoning all attempts at secrecy. “WAKE UP!”

“whehhaaja,” his brother mumbled.

Edge gasped. “YES! WAKE UP!”

His brother peeked open a socket and muttered another incoherent and garbled word. There was another scream, closer this time. Edge glanced over his shoulder, sure he’d find Gaster lurking in the shadows behind him. But they were alone.

“PLEASE, HE WILL BE BACK ANY MOMENT, SANS!”

“muurmashhh aagnhnhn.” His brother closed his eye.

Fuck! If Gaster came back, he’d be powerless to defend himself. And he always would be – the bastard was too strong. Even if Edge wasn’t on the verge of dusting from lack of energy, he’d be too weak to fight him. Unless he had some sort of way to restore his energy beyond normal levels, he’d be...

He stared at the wall of souls to his right. If he could absorb even one of them, he’d stand a chance, if only for a second.

And if he could get more than one...

Earlier Gaster had forced two upon him at once. He could still feel the specter of the power that had coursed through him from that load. It hadn’t been nearly enough to hurt the doctor – and in fact, he had laughed at his paltry attempts – but after his body had adapted to the transformation, he had felt rejuvenated.

Rejuvenation. Just what he needed.

And if he could absorb more than two souls, maybe he could do some true damage. Perhaps he could even steal the time travel power for himself.

His soul thumped. Gaster had said he had slain a child to get that ability, hadn’t he? A child. If all it took was killing the doctor, then... he’d have to do it. Even if it stripped away the last of his monsterhood, he had to protect his brother.

He ambled forward, determination rushing through him.

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Red’s mind slowly churned, edging away at the fog that clouded his thoughts. He knew if he could open his eyes, he could make himself wake up properly. But he wasn’t sure he wanted to. His brother was grunting somewhere nearby, his breath coming in labored gasps. If Gaster was doing what Red thought he was doing, then...

The sound of glass shattering stirred him from his thoughts. The fuck was Gaster doing?

And then Boss screeched.

Red’s sockets flew open, his soul pounding wildly. His vision was completely gone on his right
side, and though he tried, he couldn’t get his eyelight to manifest. Something had gone wrong with it.

His brother let out another wailing cry. Red shot upwards only to immediately collapse backwards, his head a spinning mess. He gripped his temples, trying his best not to topple off the side of the gurney as his vision spun.

Wait a second. Why wasn’t he tied down? He lay there as the epiphany slowly dawned on him: someone must have freed him.

Boss cried out again. Loud pop, pop, pop noises filled the air, reverberating through the oversized room. Red leaned up and carefully turned towards the source of racket. He couldn’t stop the gasp that escaped his mouth.

Near the wall of human souls, standing on all fours amid shards of broken glass, was his brother. Or at least he assumed it was his brother. It was definitely producing Boss’s pained shriek, there was no mistaking that.

But he was completely different. When all was said and done, the skeleton looked more like a giant cat’s than a human’s. His body had extended far beyond his usual height. Or rather, his body was still extending from the way his bones kept rupturing and reshaping. His toes was lengthened, his pelvis narrower, and the back of his skull flattened in a feline shape. Red was unable to tear his gaze away as the ribcage puffed out with a few more snapping noises and two long canine teeth grew from the monster’s mouth, extending over the bottom jaw.

It was only when the noises faded away that Red finally found his voice.

“boss?”

The creature twisted towards him, his sockets widened with shock. A bright green glow spilled from his ribcage, illuminating his features.

“BROTHER,” Boss said, his voice unchanged despite his transformation, “YOU ARE AWAKE.”

His brother leaned onto his back legs, and though he didn’t look stable enough to walk, he somehow managed. He inched forward, revealing a row of colorful human souls sitting on the ground behind him.

“oh my god. what the fuck did you –?”

He gasped as a shapeless black blob suddenly appeared between them. Rivers of white and black liquid oozed from the unidentifiable creature, spilling onto the floor. Red’s mind couldn’t grapple with what was happening; he was having a hard time processing what the fuck could be standing in front of him.

“DISTRACT HIM!” his brother bellowed as he dove back to the ground with a loud thump.

Red flinched at the amorphous figure. It was difficult to tell with how blended his features were, but he could make out two black eyes sockets amidst a melted glob of white. Gaster. The doctor was staring straight at Red, waves of anger pouring off him.

More glass crashed on the concrete. Although Gaster’s skull remained immobile, his sockets revolved around his head, disappearing from Red’s view to face Boss. His brother’s shouting began anew as more cracking noises filled the room.
“hey, shithead!” Red yelled, desperate to distract the asshole. “look at what i got for you!”

Red flung himself off the gurney, concentrating on conjuring a blaster. As he landed, the familiar hum of his magic permeated the air. Yet even as his attack manifested, his knees buckled from under him, causing him to crumple to the floor.

“fuck.”

Apparently he hadn’t recovered from whatever Gaster had done to him. He shook his head, pushing past the fog in his mind.

As he attempted to climb to his feet, something soft but itchy grabbed his forearms. Without thinking, Red let his magic fly. His blaster unleashed a ray of blinding light in the doctor’s direction, and the scent of burnt ozone filled Red’s nasal cavity.

The moment the odd texture unraveled from his arm, Red crawled to his feet and teleported to the wall of cages furthest from the doctor. It wasn’t a second too soon; as he disappeared, he felt a whoosh of wind blow against his spine from some unseen attack.

Red took a staggering breath and immediately turned around, blindly discharging a wave of bones in front of him. But Gaster was no longer in the same spot. Or at least, not all of him was. Globs of black and white goo were splattered in a zigzagging line, trailing to the far side of the room. The largest blob stood right next to the giant pink robot Red had seen earlier.

Convinced that Gaster was about to use the robot to fight, Red fired his blaster. As the beam reached him, however, something colorful spilled from the sea of black and white. A moment too late, Red realized what it was. Frisk.

As the kid fell from Gaster’s body, the blast collided with the two of them, their silhouettes the only thing visible in the overwhelming light. With Red’s aim, the doctor took the brunt of the hit, but that didn’t stop it from hitting Frisk.

The attack didn’t last long; Red had cut off the channel of magic as soon as he had recognized the kid. But the damage had been done. As the energy died away, Frisk collapsed backwards, smoke trailing from their body.

“kid!”

Red prepared to go to them, but he froze as a host of shadowy limbs exploded from Gaster, whizzing right towards him. At first Red wasn’t sure Gaster had complete control over himself; he easily sidestepped the few glopping appendages sent in his direction.

And then he heard his brother’s strangled wail.

Red’s gaze darted to where he had left Boss. His soul stuttered as he viewed his brother. He knew his right eye was kaput, but how the fuck had he allowed himself to tunnel vision this badly?

Boss’s bones had contorted into so many new and unusual shapes, he was completely unrecognizable now. He was at least five times his usual size, and still growing from the sound of the sharp popping noises that echoed through the warehouse. His skull almost looked like that of a blaster, though far narrower than any of the weapons tethered to Red’s soul. A long, sweeping tail extended between his legs and twitched wildly as violent spasms wracked his body. Lengthy, delicate-looking wing bones extended from his scapulae, stretching into the air as if Boss was trying to take flight.
But what had Red most concerned were the countless shadowy appendages wrapping around and snaking into his brother's ribcage. He watched with horror as one of the tendrils hooked onto Boss's lowermost rib and – snap! – broke it clean off.

“no!”

As Boss let loose a deafening roar, Red appeared before him and released a series of complicated bone attacks. Four, five, six of the appendages gave way to the assault. But even as they fell, writhing on the floor, there were at least a dozen more continuing to tug at Boss's body.

One of them even dragged something from his brother's chest. Something bright and cyan. A human soul. With a violent jerk, the tendril crushed the soul into a hundred pieces.

“AAAAAH!”

The cages rattled loudly as Boss slammed to the ground. Desperate to stop the onslaught, Red threw bone after bone towards Gaster's main body. The doctor redirected some of his limbs to attack him, but Red dodged their attacks, constantly teleporting as they got close. He kept moving, set on distracting Gaster long enough to give his brother a chance.

But Gaster wasn't keeping still either. The next time Red looked, the doctor was rushing across the room at an incredible speed, glops of darkness flying off him. Red gawked as an assortment of animal-like skulls popped into existence behind the oncoming mass. Blasters. Their maws filled with a blinding light. And every single one of them was aimed right for him.

With a crack, he teleported directly behind Gaster and turned his soul blue. Though his aim was true and the doctor slowed dramatically, Red hadn't counted on there being another fully-armed blaster aimed over Gaster's shoulder.

Red's magic reacted automatically. One of his own blaster's appeared in front of him and discharged a beam just as Gaster's did the same. The rays collided midair, exploding into countless tiny red cinders that sent a blazing heat through Red's bones.

By the time the blasters had dissipated into fragments, Red was already conjuring a dozen more. But even with Gaster's soul slowed, in the time it took Red to block the attack and summon them, the doctor was already on Boss.

Gaster's blasters hummed with intense energy, the light in their mouths reaching maximum capacity. Though his brother swept away several of them with his massive tail, with how spread out they were, there was no way to get them all. Red was only halfway across the room when the blasters attacked.

Boss unleashed an unearthly wail as the streams collided with his body. He kicked his legs out, clearly aiming for the blasters closest to him.

Red ordered his own blasters to attack. Now, now, now!

Even as the magic assaulted his brother, the shadowy tendrils continued to tear and rip.

He had to save him!

But in the blink of an eye, Boss went from thrashing and screeching to a silent pile of dust.

Dust.
Gone.

Dead.

Something inside Red broke.

Red’s blasters erupted, shooting uncontrollable torrents of magic at Gaster’s back. As the light closed in on the doctor, his sockets swiveled around his skull and a twisted, gaping smile appeared on his face. He didn’t need to use words to tell Red what he was thinking; it was clear as day: Red would never beat him.

He didn’t care. Even if he could never kill him, he wanted him dead. More than anything. For Boss. For Sans. For Papyrus.

The brightness engulfed Gaster, and Red wished with all his soul that this horrid man would die and never come back.

The world shifted.

Something was wrong.

At first Red thought it was a load – oh thank god, Boss was still alive, he was still here – but the image didn’t change. Gaster still stood in front of him, cast in blistering light. It was more like something had flickered. A little blip. It was subtle, but the world felt... different.

And then, as the last of his magic dispersed, a raging fire seized his soul. He stumbled forward, clutching at his chest as he fell to his knees. Every inch of him was ablaze with uncontrollable energy. It pierced him, gnawed at him. The fire drove to his most sensitive parts, to the very core of his being.

God, it hurt. He was crying out, grappling at floor, trying to fight the invisible force that was immersing his body in flame.

He was dying. Please, god, let him dust. Let him be dead so he’d never endure this again.

But he wasn’t dying. Something at the back of his mind whispered to him that it would be over soon. And he knew it would. He had felt this before when he was a kid. The burning. The pain. All of it.

Just as abruptly as it had come, the pain died away, though it left behind a lingering ache deep in his soul.

He woke up, his face smashed against the dirty concrete, drenched in sweat. Somewhere above him came a strange gargling noise that almost sounded like a clogged toilet. He scampered to his feet, his wet bones slipping and sliding on the black and white glops splashed everywhere.

Gaster was sprawled on the floor, his body loose and formless. Bubbles of sludge oozed from what Red could only assume was his mouth. It spilled onto the concrete, mixing with the dust that had settled there.

His brother’s dust.

Red was going to murder the bastard.

His magic solidified into three blasters. He took aim, ready to annihilate Gaster into bits and
pieces. Yet as he peered down at the sad excuse for a monster, he hesitated. Something about this was... wrong. His mind was still so foggy, but he had to think this through.

How the fuck was he going to bring his brother back if Gaster died? Would the asshole reset the world once his soul was shattered?

Red marched over to the misshapen creature.

“well?! fucking do it already!”

The two black spots that Red took for the doctor’s eyes peered at him. The monster released an indistinct but puzzled noise.

Red stamped his foot, spraying bits of Gaster onto his bare legs. “load, you fucking asshole! bring him the fuck back!” He clenched his fists, trying his damnest not to order his blasters to attack. “in fact, don’t fucking stop there! bring everyone the fuck back! reset, you pervert!”

Gaster gurgled again as he slowly extended a shadowy appendage upwards. Red readied his blasters, a soulbeat away from incinerating the useless lump. But the tendril merely wobbled in the air for a few seconds before it and the rest of Gaster’s body dissolved into dust with a gentle whoosh.

Red stared at the doctor’s remains, hardly believing what he was seeing. Still, he waited, bracing himself for the inevitable load or reset that was bound to disorient him.

But it didn’t. A few minutes passed and nothing had happened. The dust remained. The world remained. Everything was the same.

“no, no, no, no!”

This wasn’t happening. It couldn’t be possible. This bastard had fucking died with the time travel ability. He was gone. There was no bringing anyone back!

No. Wait. He shook his head, trying to fight the fuzziness in his thoughts. Gaster hadn’t been the solution in the first place. In fact, his only chance at setting things normal was still here in this very room.

He twisted around and saw that Frisk had remained crumpled on the ground. Even from here, Red could spot that they were lying in a pool of blood. He teleported to them and, taking care not to slip, knelt next to the kid and grappled their wrist. Their injuries were extensive, even beyond what Red had accidentally done to them. Accompanying the blaster burns that mutilated their skin was a gaping wound that stretched from their shoulder to their abdomen. Blood had seeped from it and had drenched the teenager’s shirt, staining it bright red.

Despite the ugly injuries, it almost appeared as if they were peacefully sleeping with not a care in the world.

But they weren’t sleeping. Red felt no pulse. They were dead.

He didn’t know when it had happened. Probably in the heat of battle. Or maybe when Gaster had taken them. They must’ve gone down with a fight because they had done some massive damage to the doctor; Gaster had arrived a sticky mess.

But there was no denying it: they were gone. Not even their soul had persisted. It, along with Red’s last hope, was gone.
The burning inside Red’s soul intensified, and a cascade of emotions flowed through him. He released a long, keening cry. There was nothing left for him. His last chance at going back was gone forever. Everyone was dead!

After a couple minutes of mindless mourning, he dug his phalanges into his arms, dragging him back to the present. No. This wasn’t the end. If he could find another determination-filled soul...

His soul twitched. Fuck, he’d probably find one in the collection here. Gaster clearly had a bunch of human souls, already harvested. There would be no harm in using any of these, not with the humans already dead. And the doctor was bound to have gotten a determination-filled one. He looked around, eager to find the soul.

But as he turned, he spotted something out of the corner of his eye. Halfway across the room shone a bright light. Though his soul had been set on examining the shelves, he couldn’t seem to move towards them. His mind was stuck fixating on the flickering object in the distance.

After his fourth failed attempt to pull him attention from it, he teleported closer. Upon arrival, he saw that although its radiance was extensive, the sparkling object was tiny – smaller than even his hand. He wasn’t even sure how he had seen it all the way from there, especially with only one working eye.

And yet, at the same time, he wasn’t sure how this could be the first time he had seen it. His gaze was drawn to it, his mind engulfed by its hypnotic glimmer. There was something... very strange about it. It was almost like a star that had fallen from the heavens.

A star. He recalled what Frisk had once said a lifetime ago.

*There were these little… floaty star things. Those were save points.*

Save points.

He reached towards the object and a channel of energy unfurled within him, tickling his bones. The way his fingers glowed from the yellow light was oddly satisfying. It was warm and tingly and oh-so-pleasant. His soul longed to get closer, to feel more of that peculiar sensation. He inched forward.

The sight of the save point filled him with determination.

Red blinked. Huh?

Before he could dwell on the unusual thought, a sudden outpouring of energy flowed from the light. It gushed around him, surged inside him, and anchored his soul. His bones were vibrating with such intensity, he wondered if he might turn to dust. Yet, when he looked, he found that he wasn’t actually moving at all.

The sensation passed abruptly. As soon as it did, Red snatched his hand back, his eyes widening as he gazed down at the star. Had he just... saved? Was it as simple as that? How the fuck...?

He whipped his head back towards Gaster’s dust. That burning from earlier. It had felt so familiar. Like determination flooding through him.

*BUT THE MOMENT MY MAGIC MADE CONTACT WITH THEM, SOMETHING HAPPENED. I THINK THEY WERE WAITING FOR ME.*

Chara.
Suddenly the world went dark. In front of him hovered two small points, both as odd and as mesmerizing as the save point. Hovering above them were two words – “continue” and “reset.”

Without a moment’s hesitation, Red’s arm snapped towards the reset option. Energy once again poured into soul, this time much stronger and more... intoxicating. A touch of giddiness permeated his mind and overwhelmed his senses. The beginning of a laugh stuck in his throat as his vision blurred around him.

The stream stopped. Red found himself face first on the floor once more. When he craned his head, he saw Gaster, a gurgling pile of goo again, but he was still alive.

If this was a reset, then he hadn’t gone back all that far.

“hey, fucker!” he yelled, rushing over to Gaster. “how the fuck do you go back to the beginning?! i wanna go back to before you fucked everything up, but the reset takes me back here!”

Gaster spluttered incoherently, flecks of black splattering onto Red’s legs, before the doctor dusted yet again.

“dammit!” He smashed his foot down.

Think. Think. Think.

He could go to Toriel.

Who was he kidding? Gaster had probably killed her when he had taken Frisk.

Maybe he could tell the Royal Guard about all this. Explain it from the beginning.

Ha! What would they do?

Or he could kill everyone. It would be easy. Just a quick snap and –

He blinked. What? Where the fuck had that come from? He thought some shitty stuff sometimes, but...

It would be easy though. All he’d have to do was use the souls Gaster had collected, put them in the robots, and unleash them. He’d get revenge for the police taking Sans from him, knock down the human-imposed borders, and set things in order for monsters. And, hey, if it didn’t work out like he had planned, he could reset. Simple.

He wrung his hands together, his breath catching in his throat. That... wasn’t right. It wouldn’t bring anyone back. No one at all.

And yet his mind was plagued by the thought. He should kill them. It would be easy. So easy.

He had to push past this. This wasn’t what he wanted. He focused on the here and now, on the things that he knew were true.

If he used the machine, he needed determination to go back.

It would be so satisfying to kill them. He could go back later.

And when he got his ability, it had felt like a full course of determination.

If he didn’t act now, he’d let them get away with murder. The scum didn’t deserve such luxuries.
He dug a finger into his arm, welcoming the pain that drew him from the ugly thoughts.

If determination gave him the ability to sense time travel, and if Chara gave him the ability to load and reset, then...

Then he should follow Gaster’s plan and rid the world of humanity.

Then he should go to the time machine and see if this ability – if Chara – had the same effects as determination.

Disappointment rippled through his soul.

That was it. That was what he had to do.

He gave one last glance at his brother’s dust. If he succeeded, he would see him again, alive and in one piece. All this destruction would be left behind, forever.

After taking a ragged breath, he teleported to the basement. It was exactly as he had left it – glass smashed, papers thrown everywhere, and blaster burns scorched into the walls.

He threw open the machine door and snatched the instructions. Within minutes, he had followed the procedures to a T and was sitting in front of the typing console. On the interface was the date he had decided ages ago – the day before Alphys died. His quivering hand hovered over the button, frozen by indecision.

If it didn’t work... If he died... If he somehow ended up back in his universe... If he fucked up and ended up as Gaster did, lost between past and present...

None of that mattered.


They were worth that risk.

He pressed the return key.

The door slammed shut with a resounding bang, and immediately the machine began to whir. Red held onto the arms of the chair and clenched his eyes shut as vibrations shook the machine. Inside, his soul was boiling with both rage and elation. Tremors wracked his body, and he could feel himself stretching, stretching, stretching until he felt like he was as thin as paper. It was exactly like last time, pain and all.

This time, though, he refused to scream.
Sans sidled up to the sink and placed the dirty dishes on the counter. As soon as they hit the surface, Edge snatched them up, furrowing his brow as he scrubbed at the plates. Now that Sans was so close to the other skeleton, his soul was racing. But he needed to speak his mind. It was now or never.

“hey, i wanted to talk to you about –”

Edge let out a sharp gasp as a plate slipped from his grip and crashed onto the floor.

“crap!” Sans exclaimed as shards fell across the tops of his feet. The remaining pool of spaghetti sauce sprayed everywhere. Sans sighed as he took in the state of his shirt.

“man, that’s gonna stain. did you get any on –?”

He stopped as he saw the expression of pure shock on Edge’s face. The other skeleton was ogling at his arms and hands, as if he were seeing them for the first time in his life.

“did you cut yourself?”

Edge jerked his gaze towards Sans, his sockets widening even further. Without warning, he clasped onto Sans’s shoulders and gave them a firm squeeze, as if trying to figure out if he was real.

“uh. you okay th –?”
Sans jolted as a piercing screech sounded from the other room.

“SANS!”

Edge took off through the doorway at top speed. Within seconds, Sans chased after him, his soul beating rapidly in his chest. By the time he got out there, Edge was already bounding up the stairs two at a time.

“RED, WHAT IS WRONG?!”

On the second floor balcony, Papyrus was holding up a screaming, thrashing, blank-eyed Red. Crap. A panic attack.

Just as Sans was about to teleport to them, a loud bang shook the room. A high-pitched whirring noise immediately followed, sending deep vibrations through his bones. He clapped his hands to his skull in a futile effort to block out the mind-numbing sound. The sensation was all too familiar: somehow, the time machine was in use once again.

He peered over towards the others. Edge was doubled over with his eyes screwed up tight and his mouth twisted into a frown. Papyrus had also dropped to his knees, but he had managed to hold onto Red, who continued to convulse in his arms. Red’s scream had reached a skull-splitting pitch, higher even than the time machine’s whirring. His eyelights were no longer missing, but were instead magnified several times their usual size, filling most of his sockets. From the way his face was scrunched up, there was no mistaking that he was in unbearable pain.

“red!”

Red’s eyes swung his way and for a moment, they held each other’s gazes.

And then Red turned to dust.

The shrieking and the noises from the time machine silenced all at once. Sans stared open-mouthed as his mind struggled to catch up. The time machine had been on. And then it stopped. Red was gone. One instant he had been there, the next he had... had...

“BROTHER!” Edge’s shout ended in a broken sob as he flung himself at Red’s remains.

Papyrus lifted his arms, his breathing becoming discordant as the dust sifted from his lap to the floor. He scrambled at the grey pile in desperation, horror outlining his features.

Then, as abruptly as Red had died, the dust disappeared.

Sans blinked. No, it hadn’t been a trick of the light. The dust had clung to Papyrus’s shirt, and now his clothing was spotless. The pile that had been at his brother’s feet was gone. Papyrus noticed it as well; he shifted his attention back to his lap, raising his arms and searching the area for signs of the remains.

Sans started as the front door crashed open with a loud thump. He twisted around and could hardly believe what he was seeing.

It was Red, very much alive, though worse for wear. He was completely nude and absolutely filthy. And Sans didn’t say that lightly; smears of brown, grey, and red were spread across his body. Blood dripped from a gaping wound that split the right side of his skull. His shoulders were sagging as if they were holding up a great weight and dark shadows hung under his sockets.
Sans immediately teleported to him, on the verge of tears as he took in his counterpart.

“red, oh my god, what in the world –”

He winced as Red slammed a hand to his humerus. They looked each other in the face, and Sans couldn’t stop himself from cringing. The injury was even worse up close. It was almost as if someone had cut away a part of Red’s skull. And now that he was inspecting him properly, he saw that one of his eyelight wasn’t working at all.

“you’re... alive,” Red choked out.

“w-what? that’s what i should be saying to you! what the hell happened?! did you just use the time machine?!”

But Red wasn’t answering; his eyes fluttered closed. With a grunt, Sans caught the other skeleton, nearly tumbling backwards from the hefty weight. As he tried to get a better grasp, his hand slipped and skated across Red’s bones. When he inspected more closely, he found that Red wasn’t entirely solid. Parts of his scapulae had somehow liquefied and were dripping all over the place. Sans’s mind flashed back to the last time he had seen the Amalgamates all those years ago.

“what the hell?”

He turned to ask Papyrus for help but instead found himself face to face with Edge. The scarred skeleton snatched Red from Sans and pressed him to his chest. Red’s body bounced up and down as violent sobs wracked Edge’s body.

“You did it,” Edge murmured through his tears. “You made it back.”

“WHAT HAPPENED?” Papyrus called as he shakily walked down the stairs. “I DO NOT UNDERSTAND HOW HE GOT DOWN THERE.”

“i dunno.”

Sans was too stunned to make heads or tails of it right now. He was more concerned about the way Red was bleeding and... melting everywhere. Even now, rivulets of white liquid flowed down his duplicate’s body, pooling on the carpet.

“we need to get him to a healer. i don’t think that he –” He swallowed. “i – i’m gonna go get tori. stay here.”

Upon appearing outside Toriel’s house, he immediately knocked on the front door. Since he expected Tori to take a bit to respond – it was almost her bedtime, after all – his soul jolted when the door flew open within seconds.

“oof!”

Frisk slammed into him, wrapping their arms around him in an enormous hug. Of all the things he had seen this evening, this was... well, it was definitely not the least expected. But he certainly hadn’t envisioned the kid, of all people, getting touchy feely with him.

Toriel walked into the entryway, a scowl transforming her features as she spotted Sans. She crossed her arms over her chest and leaned against the entryway wall, shaking her head as she stared at him. When she spoke, Sans could tell she was trying to hold back her cough.

“Frisk, what has gotten into you tonight?” She huffed. “Let Sans breathe. He isn’t going
anywhere.”

Frisk clasped on tighter. When Sans saw their face, he noted that tears were spilling freely from their eyes.

“you okay, bud?”

They sniffled and finally let go. “Where are the others? Are they okay?” They rolled the sleeves of their sweater over their hands and fidgeted. “They’re not hurt, are they?”

Sans’s soul dropped. There was no way this was a coincidence. Frisk knew something.

“how did you –?”

“Sans,” Toriel interrupted, her tone rife with wariness, “it is late. What are you doing here? If this is about the other day, we can –”

“no, no.” His thoughts were as far away from that embarrassing incident as they could get. “i would’ ve just left you a message about that. tori, something’s happened to red. frisk is right – he is hurt.”

Toriel straightened her posture. “You are serious?”

“yeah, he’s not looking too hot at all. please, tori, we can talk later –”

“You are right.” She rushed to Sans’s side and offered her arm for teleportation. “Personal matters can wait for later.”

He was ready to go, but the problem was that Frisk wasn’t letting go. They clutched his hoodie, insisting that they go to the house to see the others. At first Toriel argued with them, but Sans gave in almost immediately. He wanted to help Red as soon as possible, and standing around discussing this to death wasn’t going to help. Especially since Frisk was aware of something that he wasn’t. Better to bring them along.

When they appeared in the living room, he was expecting to find the others quietly waiting next to the couch or in the bedroom, watching over Red. So when he was instead greeted with the sounds of violent and hysterical wailing, his soul stuttered. Oh no... Red...

But his worries were unfounded. Edge stood in the center of the room, squeezing both Red and Papyrus to his chest. Between sobs, he screeched out, “YOU ARE ALIVE” over and over as he nuzzled their shoulders. When Sans examined them more closely, he noticed that Red’s sockets were open. His working eyelight was fuzzy around the edges, and with the way it flickered, he appeared as if he was on the precipice of passing out.

“what are you doing? put him down!”

Sans marched forward, his fists clenched at his side. With how injured Red was, he fully expected Edge to listen. What he did not anticipate was Edge picking up Sans and embracing him as well.

“YOU TOO! YOU ARE ALIVE!”

“put me down!” A touch of panic infiltrated his voice. Of all monsters that he didn’t want to touch him, Edge was the first on his list. Well, close to first. He tried to pry himself from Edge’s claws, but the other skeleton’s grip was ironclad.
“boss,” Red murmured sleepily, “put us down.”

Over the racket Edge was making, his quiet plea had gone unheard. Edge clung fiercely to the three of them, smashing their bodies together uncomfortably. Sans’s breathing quickened, his soul tightening as he desperately tried to think of another means of escape.

Thankfully, Toriel intervened.

“Papyrus?”

Edge’s crying stopped all at once as he stared at Tori. Distracted, his hold loosened, which allowed Sans to scurry away as fast as he could.

“That is your name, correct? Papyrus?”

Edge nodded. Apparently he hadn’t seen Toriel and Frisk when they had first appeared because he was now gawking at the two of them, seemingly unable to tear his gaze away.

“Would you set your brother down? I need to treat his injuries.”

Edge faltered for a second before releasing a frazzled-looking Papyrus. Then, with all the care in the world, he placed Red down on the couch. The moment Red hit the cushion, Toriel hurried over and unleashed a channel of green magic. Red groaned as the healing energies seeped into his skull.

For at least ten minutes, no one spoke except when Toriel asked the occasional question about the injuries and Red responded with grunts. At first Sans had expected Edge to hound Toriel with his own questions, or to break down into sobs once again. But the other skeleton sat back, allowing her to work in silence. Still, he acted as a distraction for Sans; between his nervous fidgeting and the wary glances he cast towards Toriel and the kid, Sans didn’t focus on the memory of Red dusting in front of him.

Finally, Toriel stood up, burning the blood from her paws with her fire magic. When she was done, she wrapped Red in a throw blanket, hiding his naked body. As soon as the covers were draped over him, he leaned into the cushion, his eyes half-lidded. Although his skull was healed, he was still covered in blood.

“I have healed the wound, but I don’t know what has happened to your eye. It won’t respond to my magic, and I do not wish to risk doing irreparable damage by trying anything more.” She nodded to Sans. “I believe we should accompany him to a hospital.”

Red waved her away and sleepily said, “nah, don’t do that. they got their hands more than full.”

Toriel clasped her paws in front of her. “Now, Red, that is –”

“WHAT DO YOU MEAN?” Papyrus interrupted. “WHY WOULD THEY HAVE THEIR HANDS FULL? HAS SOMETHING HAPPENED?”

“Not yet,” Edge replied quietly. Tears clung to his sockets, and he looked ready to break down any minute.

Frisk got there first. They hugged themself as a tiny sob escaped their mouth.

“kiddo, i’m so sorry,” Red rasped. He patted the couch, beckoning them to sit next to him. “i never meant for you to get hurt. the bastard – he got my phone, and – i’ll – i’ll –” Drips of white liquid dribbled down his chin.
Frisk wrapped an arm around his shoulder. “It’s not your fault. He tricked me and then – my soul – he took it, and –” They glanced at Toriel, tears cascading down their cheeks. “I – I – I couldn’t stop him from –”

Red inhaled sharply. “he got your soul?”

Frisk nodded and hugged him closer. An expression of intense guilt flashed across Red’s features.

“What is going on?” Papyrus demanded. “What are you two talking about? Who got your soul?”

“Gaster.”

Edge’s voice was soft when he said it, but the statement rang through the room louder than anything else had all evening. All eyes turned towards him. For a moment, all he did was stand there, his arms folded against his chest. But within the blink of an eye, he collapsed to the floor in a heap, his words coming out in a hyperventilating garble.

“b-bro.”

Red nudged Frisk aside, stumbled over to Edge, and enveloped him in a rib-cracking hug.

“I’m so s-so sorry, boss,” he cried out between sobs. “I’m so, so, so sorry.”

“Sans.” Toriel walked up next to Sans and rubbed his shoulder, drawing his attention from the emotional scene. “Are you okay?”

She was eyeing him with the same expression she wore whenever he was on the verge of zoning out. It was a fair enough assumption; his bones were clattering. Although he didn’t want to think he was in danger of losing himself from the mere mention of Gaster’s name, he couldn’t deny that it had happened before. He didn’t want to take any chances; he sunk onto the couch and took a moment to breathe.

“I’m fine. I just...” He swallowed. “Why’d you say that name?”

Red and Edge both swiveled their heads towards him, hesitation crossing their faces.

“Tell me what the hell is going on. Please.” He couldn’t keep the desperation from his voice.

The other two huddled together and continued to cry. Sans sighed, accepting that it would take them a few minutes to collect themselves before they could tell him anything. But a few seconds later, Frisk spoke up, explaining from the start. Sans listened intently, allowing him the opportunity to tell the story from start to finish. That was until Red claimed that Papyrus had fallen down.

“Okay, no friggin’ way.” Something deep inside him rejected the idea more than anything else any of them had said yet. “Paps would never fall down, you’ve gotta be – excuse my language – bullshittin’ me.”

“He’s not lying,” said Frisk. “Red came to our house... covered in Papyrus’s dust.”
Papyrus raised a hand to his mouth, his fingers clanking against his skull as he trembled uncontrollably. Even Edge appeared shocked, as if it were news to him also.

Red climbed to his shaky feet and gave Papyrus a hug. Though Papyrus returned the embrace, his forehead was drawn with uncertainty.

“paps, it’s all my fault,” Red muttered. “i’m so sorry.”

“H-HOW IS ANY OF THIS YOUR FAULT? HOW COULD YOU HAVE KNOWN THAT SOMETHING LIKE THAT –”

“stop. i should’ve known. i should’ve seen it.” He snuggled his head into Papyrus. “i never told you before, so lemme say it now: i love you, okay?” He squeezed him hard. “i love you so much. just as much as sans and boss. never forget that. please, please, please never forget it.”

“And I LOVE YOU TOO,” Papyrus said, patting Red’s skull. “BUT I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, NEVER DOUBTED, EVEN FOR A MINUTE THAT –”

“don’t.” Red held tighter. “don’t lie. no more lies, paps.”

Papyrus’s silence sent a lance through Sans’s soul.

“bro?”

His brother snapped his head upwards and, even as he averted his gaze, Sans didn’t miss the way his forehead wrinkled with guilt.

Oh my god. Sans smashed backwards into the couch cushion, unable to sit up straight. Papyrus had fallen down. How could his brother – his wonderful, enthusiastic, life-loving brother – have reached that state? Even if Sans had died, for Papyrus to have given up on everything... It was inconceivable, horrifying, soul-shattering...

Had Sans really been that oblivious about his mental state?

Edge cleared his throat and continued where Red had left off in the story. Somehow it got even worse from there. Gaster – Gaster – had been alive, had trapped the two of them, and had performed god-awful experiments on them. Edge’s sounded so hollow when he said it, and the details he added to the story... Sans gripped his legs to steady himself. It had to be true. No one could make up something like this. Especially not about a man that the universe had forgotten.

After Red finished off the story, silence reigned over them. Toriel clutched at her chest, her features distorted with emotion. Papyrus’s cheekbones were tinted with nausea, and Sans could hardly blame him. Even the strongest of monsters would get sick from hearing something like that. The other three were teary-eyed and exhausted. Especially Red. He looked ready to keel over any instant.

Sans, however, was wide awake.

“are you saying that gaster –” He couldn’t keep the hysteria from his voice as he said the name. “the gaster you just talked about – the gaster that raped me –” Edge flinched and cowered away. “ – is alive right now?”

Red’s eyes widened and a shiver of fear came over both him and his brother. It was all the confirmation that Sans needed.
“We need to contact the Royal Guard immediately,” Toriel said, her words imbued with authority. “If this so-called ‘monster’ is about to blow up the embassy and... kill Alphys and all these horrible things, then –”

“HE CAN TIME TRAVEL!” Edge cried. He dug his fingers into the carpet, tremors running through his bones. “THE GUARD CANNOT DO ANYTHING AGAINST THAT! NO ONE CAN!”

Edge’s breathing was becoming erratic, and he was showing all the warning signs of a panic attack. Sans could feel the beginnings of his own descent take hold of his mind. His eyelight sputtered as he tried to stop himself from going to pieces.

“no, that’s not true.” The way Red said it, without a specter of emotion, drew Sans’s attention. Though Red’s face was impassive, something about his demeanor sent a chill through Sans’s spine.

“i can time travel,” Red continued. “that didn’t stop when i used the machine. i can still see the save points. there’s one right outside the house. i can still feel that power. i can still feel them.”

“WHO?” Papyrus asked.

Sans knew, and from the expression Frisk was making, they did too. Chara.

Red cast a sidelong glance at Toriel. “never mind. the point is, if he can time travel, it doesn’t matter because i can too. but... i think it’s a moot point because i don’t think he can. i think he would’ve done it back there...” He trailed off, mumbling something to himself for a bit before he shook his head. “whatever the case, we gotta stop him.”

---

When Papyrus first called Undyne with the lead on the missing monsters case, she hadn’t believed him at first. It was a pretty farfetched story, and he had been known to fall for some tall tales before. Someone with the ability to time travel at will? A terrorist plot to bomb the embassy? She had figured it was one of the skeletons’ weird jokes or a story Papyrus had read one night.

But the more Papyrus explained to her, the more she had taken him seriously. Especially when it came to Alphys. Papyrus had some bad jokes in his arsenal, but he would never kid about something like that.

And there was something about the way Gaster’s name echoed in her head that made her scales crawl. Instinct told her to give her full attention to the skeletons, even if it did sound ridiculous.

So with the help of Punk Hamster – a snotty little dweeb, but a credible and more-than-willing witness – they had gathered enough evidence to get a warrant within 24 hours. The Guard had no issues with arresting the group of anti-human monsters who had been constructing a series of magical bombs on the premises. What gave them the most trouble was getting into the room that Red and Edge had talked about. In the end, they had to knock down a wall to get in there.

Upon entering the warehouse, she and most of her fellow Guards had thrown up their lunches. From the countless tortured and starved prisoners trapped in cramped cages, to the endless supply of souls, there was no end to the depravities that Gaster had committed. Nor was there any use in denying that Papyrus and the others had spoken the truth about the whole thing.

So when she visited Papyrus’s house later that evening, it was with none of her usual enthusiasm. Likewise, as Papyrus opened the door, everything about him was far more subdued than normal. It
was almost eerie how down he was. And he wasn’t the only one either. When she stepped inside the house, the other three skeletons gazed at her from the couch, wearing expressions fit for a funeral.

“Well?” Sans asked, draping an arm around Red.

Undyne took off her jacket and set it down right next to the apology flowers she had gotten Red last week. She was surprised to see that the blossoms had already started to wilt and die. The colorful petals were scattered across the table. She picked one up and rubbed it, focusing on the way it felt against her skin, before she answered Sans.

“We found the room that you talked about.”

“And?”

“And it was hell.” She sighed. “We got a handful of monsters safely to the hospital. And a lot of dust and corpses sent to the coroner’s.”

“And gaster, right?” Sans’s voice shook. “you caught him?”

Undyne turned around and saw the fury on Red’s and Sans’s faces. The pair of them had wanted to come to the warehouse alongside the Guard, but Undyne had insisted they remain behind, much to their disappointment. It hadn’t even been her words that had convinced them to stay here in the end; it was only at Papyrus’s and Edge’s behest that they had listened.

“There was no trace of him.”

Red slammed his fist on the arm of the couch, his good eye flashing red. “dammit!”

“ARE YOU SURE, UNDYNE?” Papyrus asked.

Sans’s eyelights flickered. “not even his dust?”

On the other side of the couch, Edge curled his legs to his chest. He was the only one that didn’t say a word. Instead, he stared emptily into the air.

“No. The only dust we found was either in the cages or –” She swallowed. “– or swept into a bin. No one else could get in or out, so I doubt he did that to himself.”

Red and Sans let loose a litany of profanities to describe Gaster. Undyne found herself agreeing with their choice insults, but held back from reacting. She was here on official business, after all, and she needed to maintain a certain modicum of professionalism. Eventually their fury petered out, and they trailed off into a dense silence that lingered over them for a few minutes.

Then, finally, Edge broke the lull.

“The cameras.” He continued to stare in space, his awkward position unchanged, even as he spoke. “You can check those to see when he was there last.”

“We haven’t inspected the entire place yet, but... so far we haven’t found any cameras.”

Edge rested his chin on his knees and mumbled, “Liar.”

Before Undyne had a chance to ask him what he meant, Papyrus put a hand on her shoulder, startling her from her thought.
THANK YOU, UNDYNE. I KNOW THIS WAS NOT EASY FOR YOU PURSUE, BUT WE ARE GLAD YOU DID.” He shook his head. “IF THE EMBASSY HAD EXPLODED, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN... NOT GOOD.”

Undyne frowned. “It’s my job – of course I’m going to take a lead like this seriously. But... Papyrus, Sans,” she said, her eyes darting towards the couch again. “You two really should have told me about this ages ago. I know you mentioned the time machine and them.” She pointed to Edge and Red. “But someone with the ability to time travel at will? That’s something I have a right to know – that the king has a right to know. I don’t know how long you kept this from us, but the way you guys have talked about it, it sounds like you knew for a while.”

Sans averted his gaze. “It’s a bit more complicated than that.”

“I’m sure it is. And you’re going to explain it from the beginning when I write up my report later.” She flashed her teeth at Sans. “No excuses.”

Sans’s eyelights flickered, but he nodded. Next to him, however, Red clenched a fist.

“i gotta be honest, i don’t see how it’s really any of your business how we found out about all of this.”

“It should be obvious! An ability like this is a security risk. Clearly, or half the city wouldn’t have been blown up!” She huffed. “Do you even know what the humans would say if they find out about these abilities?”

“nothing good, i’m sure. they’re fucking assholes.”

“Nothing good’ is the biggest understatement I’ve ever heard for a situation like this. This power will send us back to the Underground if we’re not careful.”

Red cracked his knuckles. “no, this power will prevent us from getting sent back to the underground. think of the advantages of having something like this!”

Undyne eyed him warily. That really wasn’t promising.

Papyrus seemed to agree. He wagged a finger at Red, his expression stern.

“ENOUGH, RED. THAT IS ENTIRELY UNNECESSARY. THE HUMANS WILL NOT SEND ANY OF US BACK TO THE UNDERGROUND AND WE WILL NOT BE USING ANY TIME TRAVEL ABILITIES UNLESS WE ABSOLUTELY MUST.”

Red hunched his shoulders, properly rebuked. “yeah.”

“Papyrus is right,” Undyne said. “We’re not getting sent back and that’s because we’re never letting them know about any of this. The only people that are ever going to know about this time travel crap are the people in this room and Asgore.”

“And Frisk and Toriel, of course.”

“Yes, and... wait, are you friggin’ kidding me? You told them?!”

“they already knew,” Sans spat. “i told you, it’s more complicated than you know.”

Undyne dragged a hand from her forehead to her chin and exhaled. “Okay, then we don’t let anyone besides them know. I’ll make sure they don’t say anything. I’m sure they won’t have an
issue – the Queen and her kid are good to their word. The real question is: are you?”

She gave them all the stink eye, which admittedly probably wasn’t as intimidating with only one eye. But it was the only thing she could do without resorting to real threats, which was the last thing she wanted to do with her friends.

Thankfully it was enough. To Undyne’s relief, Red nodded his assent, and the other three quickly followed suit.

“Good. I’d stay and chat some more about this, but I need to get back to HQ to deal with this garbage. The media is going to have a field day with this, I promise you.”

Edge jerked his head towards her, and for the first time this evening, they made eye contact. There was an emptiness to his expression that reflected the looks of the monsters they had just rescued from the warehouse.

“You won’t let them know about our involvement, will you?” There was a bite to his tone that told her he wasn’t actually asking, but was demanding. It wasn’t necessary and all it did was piss her off.

“No. We may mention Punk Hamster’s tips, but we won’t connect it to you guys. They don’t need to know you put us in contact or anything else you’ve said.”

Edge nodded and went back to resting his chin on his knees.

With that, she scooped up her jacket and bid them a good evening. As she got to her patrol car, she paused to inhale in the fresh mountain air. It was going to be a long night in the office, and a hell of a lot of paperwork. She really wished she could just stay here and relax. But duty called.

She sighed and opened the car door. Just as she was about to get inside, the front door of the skeletons’ house slammed shut. She was surprised to see Papyrus rushing out of the house, calling her name frantically.

“What is it?” she asked, climbing out of the car. “Is something wrong?”

“No, I –” He stopped a meter away and rubbed his arm. “I know it is inappropriate to ask, but you would not happen to have any extra Guards for patrol tonight?” He lowered his gaze and coughed. “Real Guards, I mean. Not Division One.”

It took a moment for the last line to sink in, and when it did, her chest twinged with guilt. All this time she had wondered if Papyrus had known he wasn’t really a part of the Royal Guard and had been relegated to tourism duty. And now that she knew for sure, she didn’t really have time to discuss it. Or maybe she just didn’t want to make the time. She chose to ignore the comment and answer his question.

“I don’t think there’s such a thing as an ‘extra Guard’ anymore, Papyrus. Not since coming to the surface. Everyone on duty is busy, and we don’t have enough to go around. It’s one reason why I’m working so late all the time.”

“I know.” He sounded so disappointed. “You’ve told me before. Most monsters leave after a few months. I was just... hoping.”

“Why?”

“Well, it is not that important, and I do not wish for you to worry at all about this. But I was hoping
that, perhaps as a tiny favor for your best friend, that, maybe, you could put one or two Guards on
duty near the house tonight. Just for a few hours. Not long at all. Maybe. Possibly.”

Undyne didn’t overlook the way Papyrus shifted his eyes, as if scanning the surrounding forest.

“It’s Gaster, isn’t it? You’re worried about him.”

“Not so much me, but the others.” Papyrus gently kicked at the dirt. “I know it does not look like it
from what you’ve just seen – they were acting so... put together while you were here – but they are
not doing well. Not well at all.”

“Well, they look like shit to me, to put it mildly.”

“Language.”

The way he said it was so... lifeless. That, combined with the dark shadows under his sockets, told
her that he wasn’t doing too good either.

“They haven’t been getting much sleep,” Papyrus explained. “For Sans, that is nothing new. He
has been getting poor sleep for weeks. I know that the other two haven’t slept since Red time
traveled, but...” He trailed off.

“Yeah, if the story they told was accurate, it’s probably been longer than two days for both of
them.”

Papyrus nodded and stooped his shoulders. “I do not know what to do.”

Undyne couldn’t blame them for not sleeping. After visiting that horror show of a warehouse
today, she was going to have nightmares. This Gaster guy had been a disgusting freak. And with
those two witnessing it firsthand...

“Listen, maybe I can get a couple off-duty Guards to come over tonight. As a favor.”

Papyrus broke out into a smile that didn’t quite meet his eyes. “Oh, thank you so much. If they
know someone is out here keeping watch, maybe I can convince them to sleep tonight.”

“And when was the last time you slept, Papyrus?”

He shifted his weight but didn’t answer.

“Make sure you take care of yourself too. I’d hate to know you were neglecting your health for the
others. You deserve better than that.”

If it was possible, he drew in on himself even more.

“Yes, I suppose.”

“No supposing, Papyrus. You do deserve it.” She sighed. “I’m really sorry that I haven’t been
around much. Alphys has been pissed at me about it too.”

“I have not been –” He struggled for a few seconds before forcing the word out “– ’pissed’ about
it. I have been mostly concerned about you.”

“And that’s your problem right there. You’re too worried about how I’m doing or how the others
are feeling. You need to take better care of yourself. I know they’re a mess right now, but don’t
forget that.”
“Yes. Red has been giving me similar advice.”

“Good! So he isn’t as much of an asshole as he looks!” Papyrus glared at her, and she thumped him on the back. “I’m just kidding!” she said, not entirely truthfully.

“But... Perhaps you are right. Maybe when we find Gaster, I, the Great Papyrus, will take a day to celebrate with the others. It would be... nice to have a break.”

“Now that’s a plan! And you know what, as soon as we sort out this Gaster mess, I’m going to set up a BFF-only day out. It’ll be just the two of us, out on the town!”

Papyrus’s mouth twitched. “The last time we did that, you drove your motorcycle into the lake.”

“YEAH! And wasn’t it awesome?!”

“Nyeh heh heh. I cannot deny it was very... eventful!”

“And the best things in life are eventful!” she said, pumping her arm. “So what do you say?”

“I say... that I would like that very much.” His smile faltered. “But please, focus on your job first.”

He glanced at the house. “For all our sakes.”

Undyne stood up straight and gave him the traditional Royal Guard salute, much to his shock.

“You know I won’t let you down, Papyrus. That bastard won’t see us coming!”

For a few seconds, he didn’t move or respond. Maybe he was too stunned? But then he grinned widely and engulfed her in one of his best hugs.

“Thank you. It means the world to me that you’re working on this.”

“HA!” She pried him off her and flashed him a toothy smile. “Who else would they get to work on this? I’m the best they have! Now get inside and promise me you’ll get some sleep! I’ll text you when the Guards are on their way.”

He nodded and waved goodbye before disappearing into the house. With him gone, she slumped into the driver’s seat, feeling the weight of her promise.

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The lake was quiet today. There were no boats to be seen and even the animals seemed sparse this afternoon. Red could only hear the waves crashing upon the lakeshore and the rustling of fallen leaves as a gentle breeze whipped through the clearing. He preferred it this way though. The peaceful ambiance, the scents of fresh pine and earth, the soft lighting... it made everything so much more manageable.

A particularly cold gust blew across his bones, and he huddled in his hoodie to escape the crisp autumn air.

He spotted a footprint in the mud and scribbled another sentence on his list.

“you almost ready?”

Red gasped, his magic springing to life automatically. As he got ready to fling a wave of bones around him, Sans dashed into his view, holding up his hands.

“woah, woah. it’s just me.”
Red took a few calming breaths and relaxed his magic.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to sneak up on you.”

don’t apologize. It was my bad. I was really focused and you just... surprised me.”

It was easy to sneak up on him these days now that he only had one eye. He rubbed at the blind socket in frustration, wishing in vain that the eyelight would miraculously return.

“Yeah,” Sans said as he joined Red on the soggy log. “We’re all easily surprised these days.”

He was trying to make him feel better; Sans and Edge had far worse problems with getting spooked than Red did, and the two of them only seemed to be getting worse. But Sans’s reminder only served to remind him of the reasons behind that. The knowledge that they’d probably never be over what happened to them dampened his mood. He didn’t want to be sad. He wasn’t even having that bad of a day.

He shouldn’t be sad, he should be angry. If he reset, he could give Gaster a piece of his mind. Blasting him away would be so easy, and he could do it with no consequences...

No. He flexed his hand over the notebook, focusing on the way the paper crunched in his fingers. All that shit about going back and killing people wasn’t him. That was Chara acting up again. Only his thoughts mattered, and he never wanted to see Gaster for as long as he lived.

Sans grazed Red’s humerus, stirring him from his downward spiral. “Hey, don’t worry. I promise I’m not looking.”

It took Red a few moments to realize what Sans was talking about. Warmth flooded his cheeks as he uncrinkled the page as best he could.

“Nah, that’s not why... I just... it was an accident.”

Sans shot him an understanding smile before gazing out over the lake.

“I think I’m done anyway.”

He peered at his list.

1. I see Gaster everywhere. I keep waiting for him to show up and hurt me and take everything away from me.
2. Every night I dream about someone dying, and every time I do, I feel like I might dust myself.
3. Chara might get control over me.
4. I’m going to die from this determination very soon.
5. No one loves me.

It was much shorter than last time. That was good. It meant he was getting better, right? Or maybe it was just because he wanted to get home before it got too late. The sky was already fading from sunset to twilight. He pushed the memories of his last nighttime visit here from his mind. Better not to dwell on that timeline. But that was why he was here in the first place, wasn’t it? To confront those reminders head on, like his doc said.

“Well?” Sans prompted.

Red stood up and walked to the water’s edge. With one final glimpse, he threw the list into the lake and watched as the inked words were lost to the depths. It was always oddly satisfying to see his
greatest fears fade into nothingness. He returned to his seat and began writing on a fresh page. Sans glanced away politely.

“hey, you can look.”

“nah, it’s –”

“i want you to look.”

Sans nodded and leaned on Red’s arm, peering down at the notebook. Red inhaled the chill air and focused on the task at hand.

The first item wasn’t hard; Red had written it dozens of times before and he’d probably do it countless more times.

1. gaster is gone. i don’t know where he went, but he’s gone. he won’t bother me again. i’m safe, and if i ever need to, i can load.

He had loaded a handful of times already. Whenever he saw an unknown shadow out of the corner of his eye, he’d pull up the last save point and inspect his surroundings. He just couldn’t help himself. Even with Edge and Frisk breathing down his neck about it, he couldn’t resist the temptation.

And, to be honest, he didn’t really care all that much. The promise of security was worth it.

The second item on his list was more difficult to tackle. No matter how many times he wrote it down, he never quite believed it.

2. no one is dying and no one has died. alternate timelines aren’t reality, and i won’t let them become reality either.

He exhaled as he finished penning the statement, happy to move on. The third item wasn’t all too bad. Usually he could keep their voice out, but at times, Red had to retreat into his own skull to escape the lure of needlessly using time travel.

3. i won’t let chara get control over me. they’re weak and i’m strong.

As he wrote the words, a tinge of dissatisfaction ran through his soul, entirely disconnected from how he truly felt. Good.

The fourth on the list... was impossible to believe. It was the reason why he wanted Sans to watch as he wrote the list. He wanted to admit how much trouble he was having with this, how much he hated what was happening to him. But he didn’t have the courage to speak his insecurities out loud.

4. yes, i’m going to die soon. but i can still live my life to the fullest in the meantime.

His handwriting came out sloppy; he was quivering too much. Sans squeezed his arm and nuzzled his shoulder.

“i know. i’m scared too.”

Red clutched at Sans’s hand and took a deep breath. “i don’t wanna go.”

It was only a matter of time. No monster could withstand this amount of determination for so long. The Amalgamates hadn’t even lasted a year after the resets stopped, and they had been given a fraction of the DT that Red had coursing through him. And no matter how much he tried to
discharge it, his soul kept replenishing it. Chara kept replenishing.

He felt his face starting to melt at the thought of it. With a shake of his head, he solidified his bones once more.

“we’ll be there, y’know?” Sans said quietly. “paps, your bro, me... you won’t be alone.”

“i know. i just... i hope it’s a long time from now.”

“yeah.”

They hugged each other in silence as the first stars of the evening shimmered in the sky. Frogs and crickets began their nightly chorus, their music livening up the clearing. Red couldn’t help but notice that even the evening creatures were quieter than his last visit. He supposed he should have expected it; after all, it was nearly winter.

As if the world heard his thoughts, a brisk breeze blew off the lake, chilling him to the bone. Sans shivered and cuddled closer.

“was that the last one?” Sans asked, hopeful. “you ready to go?”

“hold on, i got one more.”

The last item was the easiest, which was why he always tried to leave it for last. His eye flicked back to the footprint, which was nearly invisible now that the light was dimming. He remembered what Papyrus had said on the day, all those weeks ago. It was the thing he had told himself every day for the last few months, long before his psychiatrist had made him start this exercise.

5. boss loves me. papyrus loves me. sans loves me. all my friends love me. but more importantly, i love myself. and with time, maybe i’ll even love myself as much as they love me.

With that, he folded up the paper and put it in his pocket. When he got home, he’d put it with the others.

“you good now?”

“yeah.” Red gave Sans a skeletal kiss. “thanks for waiting.”

“heh.” Sans kissed him back. “that’s what i do best. laziness is my middle name.”

“well, mr. sans laziness skeleton,” Red said as he stood up and offered a hand to Sans, “how about we head home? i’m starved.”

Sans gripped his wrist and got to his feet. “well, it’s no wonder. you’ve been out here for ages.”

“It’s spaghetti night, right?”

“yup. edge has been talking it up all day. ‘you will never experience pasta like this!’ he keeps saying.”

“heh. i’m sure it’ll be an experience, alright.”

With a final sidelong glance over the lakeshore, the two of them teleported away, leaving the horrible memories behind to examine another day.
Chapter End Notes

This is the end of the fic. If it seems open-ended, it's intentional. Here's why:

1) I like ambiguous endings.
2) I may write a sequel one day. (No promises, but I do have ideas. Yes, it would explore the relationships between UF Paps and the other characters much more)
3) You have my express permission with this post to write a continuation as you see fit. Yes, I do not care if you go off your own ideas. I may one day write a sequel, so keep in mind that your fic will not be the official version, but if you want to continue this, I have no issues with this.

I want to thank every single reader that has clicked on my fic. Thank you SO much for sticking around. And to those that have stuck me since the beginning, you have my heart and soul. Thank you so much for being here for me :3

Works inspired by this one:

*Worth It, It's Worth It* by Mistress_of_Undertail, *Butterfingers* by PurrfectlySinful, *To Love Yourself (and your brother and his twin)* by Askellie (NadaNine)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!