### What Are Friends For

**by** [IchikoWindGryphon](http://ichikowindgryphon.deviantart.com)

#### Summary

Undyne and Papyrus are the best of friends. But when Undyne learns Papyrus's greatest secret, it pushes their relationship to the brink. Things only get worse as she learns of the skeleton brothers' traumatic past, and the horrors of Dr. W.D. Gaster.

#### Notes

This story started as a comic, but became much too large for me to feasibly do. For those interested, you can find it here:

http://ichikowindgryphon.deviantart.com/gallery/57587683/WHAT-ARE-FRIENDS-FOR

(MAJOR SPOILERS obviously. Don't read unless you want the first couple of chapters spoiled for you.)
Blaster's Outta the Bag

WHAT ARE FRIENDS FOR?
CHAPTER 1: The Blaster's Outta The Bag

Mount Ebott was, to say the least, an enigma.

It was by no means a grand or magnificent mountain in any regards. In fact, it was quite average. Its slopes were gentle with the occasional rocky cliffside. All of its faces were dotted with evergreens and a vast array of shrubbery. It would take an experienced hiker a little under a week of leisurely walking to reach its modest summit.

Even so, no one dared approach it.

It was rumored to be cursed. Those who dared to face its slopes were never seen again.

The rumor’s origin dated back hundreds of years, to a tale long forgotten. A tale of a terrible war that ravaged the lands. A tale that ended with the heroic conquest of the humans and the permanent banishment of the terrible hideous monsters to live deep deep within the earth forever.

And so, deep deep underground, for many many years, monsters have lived in a tentative peace, holding their breath for a freedom just beyond their reach.

Deep deep underground, the monsters went about their days, bearing a grin despite the heavy sentence that hung over their heads, smiling and laughing to ward off the feeling of claustrophobia and helplessness.

And it was on any average day that two monsters engaged in a rather spirited cooking session.

Deep deep underground there was an immense and beautiful cavern that snaked and slalomed for miles, lined with glowing crystals and flowing rivers and beautiful blue flowers. The cavern was known to the locals as Waterfall, home to the Tem Shop and to many aquatic monsters. It was quiet and serene, the calm cool caves perpetually glowing a pleasant shade of blue and green.

Well, all was peaceful save for one corner of the caverns.

Inside a rather fishy looking home, shouts and taunts and yells of triumph and frustration rang clear across the tunnels, in no thanks to the echo-y effects the caves themselves provided. The fish-like house was home to the Captain of the Royal Guard, Undyne, the Spear of Justice. And she wasn’t alone.

Inside, the fish-like woman was partaking in a cooking session of immense ferocity. And by her side was a tall and limber skeleton clad in his signature white and gold armor, a red scarf draped heroically across his neck. The two were currently hunched over a large bowl filled with what one would assume to be edible food products. Undyne herself was currently clutching a glowing spear in hand, a crazed gleam in her remaining eye and her lips pulled back in a terrifyingly toothy grin.

“And what do we do next, my prized pupil?!” she shouted to her compatriot.

“And now we add THE SAUCE!” the skeleton responded with much enthusiasm. “But, e-gads! We haven’t made it yet!”

“WELL THEN WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?!” Undyne screeched, throwing her spear at the wall, which broke a shelf cleanly in two, sending a variety of vegetables falling onto the countertop where they worked. “MAKE THE SAUCE!”

“NYEH!!!” Papyrus shouted with renewed vigor. Lifting his hands in the air, he summoned no less than five bones, all which hovered for a moment before they struck down, pummeling the vegetables
into a messy pulp. Juices sprayed everywhere, covering the duo head to toe. By the time Papyrus was done pummeling the veggies, there was more goop on the walls and floor than on the counter. But that didn’t deter the skeleton in the slightest as he grabbed the bowl full of noodles(?!?) and scraped whatever he could off the counter and on top of the noodles(?!)

Papyrus proudly laid the bowl before both of them. They both made eye contact for a brief instant before they summoned their attacks; a spear for Undyne, a bone for Papyrus, and with unmatched passion they began to stir vigorously.

“HARDER!!!” Undyne screamed.

“YES MA’AM!” Papyrus cried, his stirring bone becoming a blur of white. Noodles and sauce alike splashed and sprayed everywhere, but he didn’t slow. In fact, now that there was less stuff in the way, he was able to stir faster!

“HARDER!!!!” Undyne yelled louder.

“I’M STIRRING AS HARD AS I CAN!”

“IT’S NOT HARD ENOUGH! GIMMIE THAT!” Undyne ripped the bowl out of his gloved hands and stabbed her spear repeatedly into the mix, all while screaming her battle cry at the top of her lungs.

“NNNGGHHHHAAAAAA!”

And with that, the dish was complete.

Before the strange duo rested a bowl, cracked and chipped from abuse, filled with spaghetti. The noodles were an odd green color, and covered with a slurry of pummeled veggies and whatever else Undyne had decided to throw on top of it for flavor, including but not limited to: a few crabapples, rocks, fish bones, and a pinch of Temmie Flakes.

“YEAH! Now that’s what I’m talking about!” Undyne cheered.

“We did it!” Papyrus triumphed. “We made the spaghetti! And we didn’t even set the house on fire again!”

As if the words invoked Murphy himself, the pile of noodles abruptly burst into flames.

Undyne barely had enough time to stare at the noodles in utter disbelief before Papyrus whipped into action, pulling out a fire extinguisher from seemingly nowhere and dousing the flames in white foam. The fire was put out as quickly as it started.

“A fire extinguisher! Good thinking!” Undyne complimented.

“But of course!” Papyrus said, puffing out his chest. “It is a necessity for a future Royal Guardsman to be prepared for anything! And … well … seeing as all of our past training sessions ended with something on fire, I thought it would be a good idea,” he added a bit more sheepishly.

“Ha! I like your initiative!” she said, giving him a hard slap over the shoulder. Papyrus rocked on his feet from the force of the blow, but his grin remained undiminished. She smirked, holding up the bowl, now frothing over with white foam. “Look! It’s a snow poff!”

“If that is a snow poff, then it is the most slushy, most goopy, most smelly snow poff I have ever seen!” Papyrus said with mock disgust. Even though he had no nose, Undyne could practically see
him wrinkle a non-existent one at the sight of the mush in her hands.

She held it out to him. “I dare you to eat it,” she grinned mischievously.

“What?!"

“I dare ya. I double-dog dare ya.”

“Well I … I DOUBLE-double dog dare YOU to eat it!” Papyrus countered.

“You won’t eat it cuz you’re scaaaaaaared,” Undyne crooned. “Admit it, you’re just a boney scaredy-cat!”

“What?!” Papyrus exclaimed. “I, the GREAT Papyrus, am afraid of nothing!”

“Scaredy-cat!”

“I am not scared!”

“Then eat it! EAT IT AND PROVE YOURSELF TO BE THE BRAVEST BAG OF BONES THAT HAS EVER ROAMED THE UNDERGROUND!”

“NYEH!”

With that, Papyrus grabbed a nearby fork, plunged it into the slush, and with one decisive movement, plunged the forkful of not-spaghetti into his jaws. His face scrunched up into a contorted mess, his eye sockets squinting shut and his teeth grating against each other hard enough to break them. He stood there, twitching and gagging for a full minute before he doubled over into a coughing fit. His fist pounded against the countertop as the ungodly taste of the slurry crashed against his pallet.

Papyrus, after gagging and coughing and slurring a string of unintelligible gibberish from his teeth, stood proud and tall, shaken from the experience but proud to have triumphed.

“Holy carp I didn’t think you’d actually do it!” Undyne said in shock. She laughed. “You are the craziest skeleton in this whole place!”

“A proud feat indeed! Even if there are only two of us! Nyeh heh heh!” Papyrus laughed, his laughter interrupted by another coughing bout. He cleared his throat and straightened himself, flinging some left-over vegetable slush off his armor. He was going to need a long shower after all this. “So, Captain Undyne, has my demonstration of unwavering bravery in the face of unimaginable edible horror convinced you to let me be a member of the Royal Guard?”

Undyne’s smile faltered for a moment. An uneasy laugh escaped her lips as she nervously brushed a strand of crimson hair out of her face. He always asked. His persistence was admirable, his dedication second-to-none.

But even with all his strength, even with all his magic prowess, with all his courage and skill and bravery …

It didn’t lessen the fact that he was the kindest, nicest dork on the planet, and Undyne could never put him in the line of danger. However much he begged and pleaded, however much he practiced and honed his already flawless magic, she could never let him join. And it broke her heart.

She was stalling. She had been stalling for months, honestly. Always deflecting and making excuses, tugging him along in her pathetic attempts to keep him entertained while she struggled with just HOW to tell her friend that his biggest hope and dream would never come to fruition. Every time she
tried to tell him, her mind imagined his face falling with utter defeat, or him breaking into racking sobs, or, worse yet, Papyrus running to his brother Sans and then her having to deal with HIM. She could never place her finger on exactly why, but he always gave her the creeps.

And every time, she deflected and stalled. Next time, she would say to herself. Next time I will tell him.

Well today marked about the 45th “next time.” It was time to put an end to this.

Her friend deserved—needed to know the truth. She turned, and looked straight at Papyrus, steeling herself. She was the Captain of the Royal Guards, god damn it, she could take on a dozen soldiers at once, she could certainly handle dishing out some bad news.

“Papyrus,” she said with a firm voice. Papyrus, who had been poking curiously at the remaining noodle mess, turned to her, rapt with attention. “I’ve been thinking.”

“Yes?” he asked eagerly. His eye sockets widened and practically glimmered with hope. He leaned forward anxiously, hanging on her every word.

“That maybe … you …”

He leaned closer, his eagerness and innocence as palpable as the vegetables that still clung to her shirt.

She hesitated.

She couldn’t do it. She just couldn’t. Her hands balled into fists, which shook with anger. Damn it.

“Yes?” Papyrus probed.

“Papyrus …” she said. A sudden idea came to her, and she leaped into action. “I THINK THIS CONCLUDES OUR COOKING TRAINING AND WE SHOULD MOVE ON TO SOMETHING ELSE!” she yelled at the top of her voice. The sudden change in her attitude and volume completely threw Papyrus off-guard, who lurched backwards, knocking the bowl to the floor with a loud crash. “TOO MUCH OF THE SAME TRAINING MAKES YOU STALE AND WEAK!” She reached forward, clutching his skull and pulling him close, his cheekbone pressing against her own scaly skin. “So we’re moving on to a new training called ‘I’m Gonna Sneak Up And Stab Ya In The Butt.’”

“But I don’t have a butt!” Papyrus protested.

“IRRELEVANT!” Undyne cried, throwing her hands in the air, and consequently, throwing Papyrus halfway across the kitchen with a panicked “NYEH!” “Your ass will be mine, whether or not there is flesh to claim!” She stood tall and proud, looming over Papyrus who had fallen flat on his rear. “So, bone-brain, do you think you can be diligent enough to counter my surprise attacks?!”

“Oh ho ho!” Papyrus laughed, a mischievous spark in his eyes. “You dare challenge the Great Papyrus?! You will NEVER sneak up on me!” He sprung to his feet, and ran out the door at record pace. “I will be forever diligent! Sleeping with both eye sockets open! Because I don’t have eyelids to begin with! Nyeh heh heh heh!”

And with that, he had raced out of the caverns and was probably halfway to Snowdin, knowing just how fast he could move.

Undyne watched him go, a flood of relief, and regret, washing over her. She slumped against the
front door frame, massaging her eye. “Oh man, what am I doing?” she muttered.

Seems like today marks the 46th day of “next time.”

The day would come, some time or another. She couldn’t put it off forever, however much she wished she could. It’s not like she hadn’t entertained the idea of making him a “guard” and only assigning him light duty, but that to her seemed like an even greater betrayal. And knowing just how worked up the Underground could get around a human encounter, King Asgore would no doubt demand ALL hands on deck, so he would be called to action regardless. She had lamented about her dilemma to her king several times, and each time he would listen patiently, nod, and offer the same fatherly advice.

“He must be a very good friend if you care for him so deeply,” Asgore had noted. “And if he is as great of a friend as you say he is, then he will understand. He will be disappointed, that goes without saying, but he will understand, and forgive you, and he will move on.”

It was great advice, but Undyne was really not looking forward to Papyrus’s “disappointed” face. God, she didn’t think she had EVER seen Papyrus sad about something, much less disappointed. And she knew it’d kill her to see him like that.

She stood there, deep in thought for a long time. A smile crept across her face, her lips pulling back into a great toothy grin.

A spear appeared in hand, and she let out an evil little laugh.

Undyne then began to give chase after her quarry. Won’t be able to sneak up on him, eh? She liked a good challenge. “Who knows!” she muttered to herself as she raced through Waterfall’s caves. “This could be fun!”

In a cozy home in Snowdin, a short squat skeleton was dozing on an unusually spongy sofa, springs sticking between his ribs and the seats perpetually lumpy. He didn’t mind though; he actually found that if he arched his back ever so slightly and tilted his head 5 degrees to the left, the sofa became quite comfortable. The TV was playing one of Mettaton’s cooking shows, not that Sans was paying attention, really, but the constant crescendo and dramatics of the robot’s voice provided some nice background noise for him to simply drift. He shifted to pull out his cellphone from his hoodie pocket, prompting a spring to prod his thigh bone. Papyrus would be home soon-

The door burst open with a mighty BANG.

“SANS!” Papyrus exclaimed at the top of his voice.

Speak of the skeleton.

“Hey bro,” Sans said lazily, not even flinching from his spot. “Back from Undyne’s? How was it?”

“IT WAS GREAT!” Papyrus exclaimed, leaning over the couch to look at his brother. He was beaming, his grin splitting his skull in half with overflowing joy. “My training is progressing! We have moved on to counter-stealth training!”

Sans paused. “Really?” he asked. This was . . . new.

“It is only a matter of time before our training completes and I become the newest member of the Royal Guard!” Papyrus boasted. He was jumping up and down excitedly. Undyne had never given him anything other than cooking lessons after her initial warrior training.
This new development made Sans … uneasy. His eye sockets grew dark. What was she playing at?

“I must be forever diligent!” Papyrus went on, crouching behind the couch and shifting side to side suspiciously. “She could strike at any moment! Attack without warning! I must be CONSTANTLY VIGILANT!” He paused, looking to the door. “Good thing she HATES the snow! She’d never attack me here! Nyeh heh heh!”

He leaped from his hiding place and back to the front door. “Now, I must attend to my puzzles. And you have sentry duty in half an hour!” he reminded Sans. “Don’t be late, you lazybones!”

Sans waved him off with a grin. “Don’t worry! I’ll be there,” he assured.

“I mean it! I’ll be checking up on you!” he warned sternly. His mood changed from overbearingly motherly to excited as fast as a light switch. “Today’s the day, Sans! I can feel it! I will capture a human!” And with that, he slammed the door closed and went on his way.

Sans sat there, letting out a deep sigh. Undyne was doing no one any favors leading his brother along so cruelly. He had confronted her about it before, and she made him promise not to tell Papyrus. She insisted it was her place to tell him, not Sans’.

Sans hated making promises, but Undyne had a point.

That didn’t make the whole situation any easier for any of them, however. He sat back into the sofa, staring ahead, his gaze not quite landing on the television in front of him.

“Jeeze, Undyne, why are you torturing my bro like this?” he muttered.

Papyrus pranced through Snowdin town, hardly a care in the world. The townsfolk were going about their business, some milling to and from Grillby’s, some heading to the store or library. A gaggle of monster kids were engaged in a spirited snowball fight, to which Papyrus watched for a moment with great amusement. It cheered him to see the Snowdin residents happy and busy. That was always a good thing. He waved a friendly hello to the brown bear that always stood outside Grillby’s, he greeted the resident snow bunnies with a firm handshake (however much she protested it wasn’t necessary. Balderdash, he had replied.) He even had time to listen to one of Snowdrake’s terrible puns.

“Haha, not nearly as bad as my brother’s!” Papyrus said, patting the drake on the head. “Maybe one day your puns can be as terrible as his!”

For some reason, this cheered up Snowdrake and he walked off, beaming.

He crossed the bridge that led out of the town and into the expansive evergreen forests. This was where the Royal Guard dogs set up their posts. He passed Lesser and Greater Dog, who he both greeted with lots of pettings and reassurance that they were both very good dogs. Oh yes they were. He passed Dogamy and Dogaressa, who greeted him with a sniff.

“Smells like bones!” Dogamy exclaimed.

(Smells like spaghetti!) Dogaressa commented.

“(Hiya, Papyrus!” they greeted in unison.
“Good morning to you two!” Papyrus waved. “Keep a nose out for humans! I can feel it in my bones! A human will come today!”

“We will keep the nose to the grindstone!” Dogamy saluted.

(Ensure to throw us a bone once in a while, too,) Dogaressa added.

Papyrus smirked, and headed off. He failed to notice the suspicious fish woman that was stalking him from beyond the snow banks.

From her hiding spot, Undyne readied her spear. She grinned, and with all her might, hurled it at the skeleton’s feet.

The spear sailed, the magic blade cutting through the air like a knife. The sound of the spear slicing the frosty air alerted Papyrus, who managed to duck and roll out of the way at the last second. He stared at the spear, which was buried deep into the snow where he had stood just seconds before.

Undyne raced from her spot, laughing maniacally. “Yes! That’s right! Stay light on your feet! Always be ready to move!” She summoned more spears, which hovered behind her threateningly. “Catch yourself flat-footed, and you’re dead! Fuhuhuhuh!”

Papyrus jumped to his feet, summoning a bone in each of his hands. “Ha! Undyne! Didn’t I warn you?” he taunted. “I, the GREAT PAPYRUS, will NEVER be caught off-guard!”

“Oh yeah?!” Undyne challenged. “Then brace yourself for some sparring!” She launched her spears at Papyrus.

He charged, grinning with purpose as he easily dodged and deflected the spears with his magic bone attacks. A spear launched straight at him was blocked with a wall of bone. Papyrus waved his hand, and a line of bones, some blue, some not, launched themselves at Undyne. She jumped and maneuvered through them like water, careful to remain still when a blue bone touched her. They would pass through her like an icy chill, and she shuddered them off, attacking with renewed ferocity. Spears clashed against bone, both of them ducking, dodging, diving and dancing through the flurry of attacks. The two of them were easily matched, Undyne with more fine-tuned practice and unmatched ferocity, and Papyrus with his flawless execution and a never-ending stream of attacks.

They clashed, Undyne with a spear in hand slamming against Papyrus, who blocked her blow with a blue bone as long as her own spear. Their make-shift magic weapons clashed and banged together, sending out a shower of blue and green sparks. Undyne’s magic sparked beneath Papyrus’s feet, who had managed to notice with a second to spare as he jumped into the air, avoiding the mess of spears that exploded beneath him. As he landed, he whipped out his hands and an intricate maze of bones rocketed towards the Captain. Papyrus liked patterns and tricks, and Undyne spotted a thin opening in the attacks. She snaked through the seemingly endless wall of bones with hardly a scratch before pouncing on Papyrus, swinging out her legs and delivering a decisive kick to the side of Papyrus’s knees. He wobbled, the blow taking him way off balance, and with another swing of her spear, he was flat on his back, staring down a long and deadly spear thrust into his face. He winced uneasily.

“Fuhuhuh!” she laughed, catching her breath. “I got ya now! Admit defeat, ya spiny bonehead!”


Undyne arched a brow in confusion. Then, she felt a shadow cover her, a feeling of dread creeping
down her spine. She looked up. Hovering right above her was a massive twenty-foot long bone. “OH MY GOD, PAPYRUS!” she exclaimed. Papyrus could barely hold back a fit of laughter. But she relented, her spear disappearing as she held up her hands in a sign of surrender. “Alright, alright, you win!” she admitted. “But that was a dirty little trick right there.”

Papyrus continued to chuckle. “Well, the Great Papyrus cannot be so easily defeated!”

“I’m blaming it on the fact that you can’t get cold,” Undyne said with a shiver. She didn’t even grab anything before she had raced over. Into Snowdin. Which she knew was perpetually freezing. Yeah, not a bright idea.

“Oh my God, Undyne, you don’t even have a coat!” he exclaimed in horror. He began untangling his scarf from around his neck.

“Papyrus, I’m fine,” she assured. No, that was a lie, she was goddamn freezing but she wasn’t exactly staying around for much longer.

He was having none of it. “No! This is unacceptable!” He draped his scarf around Undyne’s neck and bundled her up as best he could. “You must be absolutely chilled to the bone!”

“Sans would be so proud of you,” she smirked.

“What are you talking about?” he said with mock offense. “I have way better jokes than he does!” Satisfied that Undyne was bundled up as best as could be with a simple scarf, he began to shove Undyne back towards Waterfall. “Now get on home before you catch yourself a terrible cold! And I, the Great Papyrus, will be forced to come over there and make you some spaghetti soup!”

“I don’t think there’s such a thing.”

“BLASPHEMY!” he cried. “I will then MAKE it a thing!”

“You’re so sweet,” she said. Her eye caught sight of the trail of snow she was creating as Papyrus pushed her. “You can stop pushing me, now. I can walk, you know.”

Papyrus relented, and they walked for a bit back towards the town. Undyne tugged at the scarf wrapped around her neck. Now that she thought about it, she couldn’t remember the last time he had taken the ratty old thing off. He had it since practically the day they met, and probably for way longer than that. Seeing him without it was very odd.

“You sure you want to give me your scarf?” she asked. She felt kinda bad for having it; it was obviously a deeply loved possession of his.

“But of course!” he dismissed. “Surely you need it now more than I do!”

“It is really warm,” she said to herself. The scarf was old and its ends were frayed and had a spattering of holes at both ends, but the thing radiated heat like it was made of fire. It did help ward off the chilly weather, which she was thankful for.

“And you can give it back when we see each other tomorrow for training!” Papyrus pointed out. “I trust you to keep it until then.”

“Thanks, Pap, you’re the best,” she said.

He laughed. “I’m not called the ‘Great’ Papyrus for nothing!” he said. He turned and went on his way deeper into the forests. “Now, I must attend to my puzzles! Later!”
“See you later!” she waved, and watched him disappear into the heart of Snowdin’s forests. But she didn’t leave quite yet.

Warmed, and with a burning sense of determination, she summoned a spear in hand. She laughed.

He would \textit{NEVER} suspect a surprise attack five minutes later!

---

“OH NO!” Papyrus cried out in anguish.

This was terrible. Dreadful, horrible, absolutely awful!

“This … this cannot be! This \textit{CANNOT BE}!”

He collapsed to his knees, fists clenched and shaking to the heavens above.

“How can fate be so mercilessly cruel?!”

Before Papyrus, on the snowy trail that lead from town to the sealed doors of the Ruins, the way was blocked by a massive, impassible wall of snow.

A recent avalanche from the nearby hills must have caused the blockage, and due to the path being surrounded by dangerous landscape; an unstable cliff to one side, and an equally dangerously unclimbable mountain on the other, there was no easy way around. The path had been hard enough to come by, and this sudden travesty put everything off kilter.

“How will anyone get to town?! HOW WILL ANYONE GET TO MY AMAZING PUZZLES?!!?” Papyrus wailed. He stood, eyeing the massive snow poff in front of him. No, he wouldn’t give into despair! He was the Great Papyrus, he will not be so easily defeated by frozen water of all things! Clenching his fists, he puffed out his chest and heroically approached his quarry.

“I will not allow your continued existence to plague the residents of this land!” he bellowed. “Prepare yourself, giant snow poff! For I, the Great Papyrus, will defeat you!”

Calling upon the very essence of his soul, a magic bone attack materialized in his hand. He gripped the bone tightly between his fingers, arching his arm back, and with perfect form, he launched the bone straight in the middle of the snow mound.

“NYEEEEEEEEEEEEEH!” he cried, heaving the bone attack with all his might.

It plopped flaccidly against the snow, the bone piercing straight through the pile with hardly any impact.

Papyrus placed his hands on his hips. Hm.

Well, nothing that a few dozen more bones couldn’t fix! With the fury of the raging magma pits in Hotland, he sent bone after bone plummeting into the snow pile, each piercing deep but doing nothing to lessen its structural integrity. He must have stood there for no less than five minutes, five minutes solid of flinging bone after bone after bone.

And yet the snow monstrosity remained unmoved.

Papyrus let out a groan of frustration. “AGH! This is getting me nowhere!” Bone attacks certainly weren’t working. What else could he possibly use to blast this snow poff-

\textit{Blast.}
Papyrus paused mid-thought. He chanced a wary look at his surroundings. There was no one for a good distance. Far from Snowdin Town, far from anyone who lived outside the village. He was alone.

And this thing wasn’t going to move without a bit more *fire power*.

Papyrus grinned. He called forth a very different power he possessed, one he had kept a strict secret for many years. Orange magic crackled around him, the magic burning through his bones like fire, and he felt his power unleash.

His smile grew. It had been a long time since he had used this power. It was long overdue.

Papyrus wasn’t exactly a hard guy to find. Stealth and subtlety had never been his strong suits, or suits of any kind for that matter.

Undyne was crouched behind a snowy outcropping, not far behind the skeleton. He was currently facing down the biggest snow poff Undyne had ever seen, with little success. It was actually quite funny watching him flail against it, but she remained hidden and quiet, waiting for the perfect moment to strike.

After his initial attack, he paused, taking a step back and eyeing the snow pile with a look Undyne couldn’t quite place. He was smiling, but there was something about his smile that didn’t seem quite right. Like he was hiding a secret.

Papyrus rolled his shoulders, flicked his wrists, and hunched over slightly into a … weird sort of battle stance. Undyne watched, curious. Was he going to try another attack?

That’s when she saw orange energy spark around him, dancing across his bones and covering him head to foot in a static glow. This completely threw Undyne off. She knew all about Papyrus’s blue magic but never before had she seen him use orange-

A loud *SNAP* broke Undyne from her train of thoughts.

She looked at Papyrus. And had to slam a hand to her mouth to keep herself from screaming.

Something was wrong, something was horribly wrong. Papyrus was hunched over. A ridge of bony spikes running down his back protruded from his armor.

*What the fuck?*!

What was going on?! What happened?! Where did they *come* from?!

Undyne barely had time to even think about it before she noticed the rest of Papyrus looked … *wrong*. Oh god, what was happening to him?!

The cold air was split by an endless series of *cracks* and *pops*, all emanating from the skeleton. He was *changing*.

His clothing melted away, revealing his changing skeletal structure. It all happened so fast, so quickly Undyne could barely register in her mind what was happening. His fingers and toes now bore sharp, wicked talons. His ribcage expanded and elongated, his shoulder blades shifting and popping out of place. The bones in his legs shifted, cracked and snapped into new shapes, forcing
him to all fours. A tail—a goddamned tail—grew from the base of his spine and lashed around him like a whip. From his head grew curved horns, protruding from his cheeks and forehead. His skull lengthened into a muzzle, his teeth growing large and sharp. Fangs jutted from his skull and grew past the length of his jaws. His eyes blazed orange throughout the change, growling as he grew in size and into a new monstrous shape.

He no longer resembled the skeleton Undyne had known for so long, but a great dragon behemoth. Papyrus—if it even was Papyrus anymore—stomped on the ground, blue mist seeping from his fangs, and he gave a mighty roar that shook the mountainside.

Undyne had just witness her best friend transform into a goddamn dragon.

She couldn’t move. Her brain refused to register what had just happened.

Clueless to Undyne, the bony dragon crouched into a downward dog stretch, letting out a gentle groan as his bones stretched. He shook himself, standing upright on all fours and calmly approached the snow mound. His jaws opened, blue energy building in his jaws with a soft whine. The magic swelled, the sound growing higher and higher in pitch, until the beast's jaws completely unhinged and fired a beam of magic straight ahead, obliterating the snow mound. And like that, the path was clear, and Papyrus let out a celebratory bark.

This proved to be the tipping point for Undyne. First, she had watched her friend transform into a dragon. And now, she had watched her friend-turned-into-dragon fire a goddamned laser out of his mouth.

The gears in her head, which had been slow to process all of this, finally choked up a half-baked resolution to everything she had just seen. She dropped open her jaws, and screamed at the top of her lungs:

“WHAT THE FUCK, PAPYRUS?!?!”
“WHAT THE _FUCK_, PAPYRUS?!?!”

Several things happened at once.

One such thing was that Undyne’s sudden outburst snapped her brain back to full functionality, and she realized with utter horror that shouting was probably the **worst** thing to do in this situation and promptly slapped her hands over her big fat mouth.

The other thing was that now-dragon Papyrus leaped a good five feet in the air, having been scared silly by the sudden outburst.

He spun, and stared wide-eyed directly at Undyne.

Undyne stared right back at him, frozen.

They stared at each other for a good long while, each of them trying to figure out what to do.

Papyrus was the first to react. He emitted a very low and pitiful whine, spun 180 degrees, and raced in the opposite direction as fast as a bolt of lightning.

“HEY! WAIT! PAPYRUS!” Undyne shouted after him, scrambling from her hiding spot. Her feet were slow and dredged in snow, causing her to flail around like a fish out of water (a very appropriate metaphor) She strung out a low rambling of curses as she removed herself from the snow banks and chased after her friend, who had all but disappeared into the distance. She let out another string of profanities under her breath.

“PAPYRUS, GET BACK HERE!” she screamed.

She ran full-tilt after him. He had run through the now-cleared trail towards the edges of Snowdin, where the population was sparse and the fur trees grew thick and tall. He suddenly veered off the path and straight into the heart of the forest, Undyne hot on his heels as he weaved and bobbed through the thicket of trees with insane agility. He was incredibly fast, his long limber legs propelling him forward at speeds Undyne didn’t even know was physically possible. She had lost him several times, his bleach-white bones blending in perfectly with the surroundings. Undyne only managed to find him again when sudden movement between the green pines gave him away. But he was steadily getting further and further away, the time between her losing him and finding him again getting steadily longer. But Undyne was persistent, and put on a burst of speed, slowly gaining on his tail.

“PAPYRUS, STOP RUNNING AWAY, DARNIT!” she called out to him. “GET OVER HERE SO I CAN KICK YOUR ASS!”

Papyrus spared a glance behind him, his eyes wide and terrified. And then, he somehow found a way to run even **faster**, speeding off and leaving nothing but a dusting of snow in his wake.

Undyne slapped a hand over her face. Because of course threatening to beat up your friend would make them stop running from you.

But the gesture put her mind at ease. It proved that it was indeed **still Papyrus** in there. It wasn’t just some horrible beast he had suddenly and inexplicably transformed into, **it was him**.
That only raised more questions. How long had he been able to do that?! What was that thing and why had he never told her about it?! She had never heard of a shape-shifting monster before, in fact she didn’t think they even existed. But why could Papyrus transform?

And why didn’t he tell her?!!?!!?

Undyne shoved her furious thoughts to the side. More time for those later. Right now she had to find the sonofabitch.

She kept running, but by now the distance had grown so great between them she could barely see him anymore. The trees were getting thicker, the wilderness growing more feral with each passing step, forcing her to tear her remaining eye off her target and on her surroundings, giving him precious seconds to slip away into the blinding whiteness.

“God damn it!” she cursed between gasping breaths. She was sucking the freezing air between her teeth, having run at full speed for a few good minutes until she was forced to stop. Papyrus had vanished. She lowered her head to kick something, when she saw footprints in the snow.

Ok, more like paw prints, but they were definitely his. Large, skeletal, with huge gouges where his claws had dug in. She looked up to find the next set of tracks, counting a good three paces from the first set of prints to the next. Papyrus had one hell of a stride. A thin line trailed in the snow between his prints from where his tail had skimmed the surface of the snow. Definitely his.

She grinned. It didn’t matter how far or how fast he ran, she could track him. Wherever he went, she could follow him. She kept a brisk pace and followed the telltale tracks.

“Finally, the snow’s good for something,” she chuckled to herself. She gripped the scarf around her neck. It was still warm, and if she was honest with herself, it was the only thing that had kept her going this long. The trees did a wonderful job at abating the stinging wind but the air itself was like a dagger to her lungs every time she breathed. Her wet scaly skin was not designed to store heat and she quickly became cold in these wintery lands. Nothing but sheer will (and a bit of anger directed at her boney friend) kept her trudging on.

She heard rushing water ahead. Following the tracks, they stopped abruptly at the large turbulent river that ran all the way through the Underground. Undyne did a double take. They had reached the river?! From where they were?! They had to have ran at least five miles to get there!

Well, now that she thought about all the running they did, that was entirely feasible.

She looked back down at the tracks. The tracks led up and down the river bank in a circle a few times and then they just . . . vanished.

She stared harder. No, that couldn’t be right. She went over the tracks again. He went up the river, doubled-back a few paces later, turning around again. He faced straight towards the river.

And they were gone.

Her eye bulged in realization. Did he seriously jump into the river to avoid her?! She knew he could swim, albeit very poorly, but this river was not one you would swim in carelessly, especially here. The currents were strong and sharp rocks broke the waves all up and down its length. Papyrus, as desperate as he was to avoid her, wouldn’t be so foolish as to throw himself into a freezing deadly river.

Dear god, she hoped he wasn’t that stupid.
She reassured herself. Papyrus was a goof, and naïve, but he wasn’t stupid.

But then where the hell did he go?!

She raced up and down the river bed. Perhaps he only went into the river a little and walked through the water up or downstream to elude her, that’d be using the ol’ numbskull. But she found no tracks emerging from the river.

Maybe he jumped? Like really far?

No tracks leading away anywhere within the vicinity.

She roared out in frustration. The trail had gone stone cold.

“GODDAMN IT, PAPYRUS, WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU?!” she roared, throwing her fists in the air. She kicked a nearby mound of snow. “I SWEAR TO GOD, WHEN I FIND YOU, I’M GOING TO KICK YOUR ASS!!!! YOU HEAR ME?!?? I’LL KICK YOUR ASS ALL THE WAY TO THE GODDAMNED MOON!!!”

She let out another furious screech, hurling her magic spear at a nearby tree, knocking all the snow off it. Expended, exhausted, and absolutely frozen, she trudged back to Snowdin village.

Undyne was beyond furious. She was going to get some answers, goddamn it.

And if that meant wringing them out of that fat lazy skeleton Sans, then by god, she’d do it. To hell with however much he creeped her out. If anyone would know anything, it’d be him.

Fire burning within her, she set off.
and there.

Perched haphazardly up a very tall tree was Papyrus, claws dug deep into the bark to keep his large frame firmly lodged into place. His tail provided a bit of assistance, too, as it curled around the trunk much like an opossum’s, with about half the dexterity. It was more whip-like than prehensile, anyway.

He managed to scramble about thirty feet up the tree before Undyne had reached the river, to which he froze in place and held his breath, barely daring to breathe with her so close. She had searched quite thoroughly and had eventually given up, but not without throwing the mother of all tantrums.

Papyrus had absolutely no doubt in his mind Undyne would thoroughly throttle him when she found him.

He whined.

<<Oh, dear, I am in so much trouble>> he whimpered to himself.

---

Sans lazily opened one eye, his vision slowly coming into focus. Well, he didn’t mean to doze off, but hey, here he was. He pulled out his cellphone. He was due to start sentry duty in five minutes.

He couldn’t help but smile a bit. Hey, maybe he’d actually manage to get to his station on time today! That’d certainly make Papyrus happy. Sans stretched, his bones popping and creaking almost sickeningly as he flexed, and he hopped to his feet.

His hand barely skimmed the surface of the front door knob before the door exploded open. Charging face-first through the threshold was Papyrus, eyes bulging from his sockets in terror. “SAAAAAAAAAAAAANS!” he screamed, plowing his poor brother right over. Sans haplessly fell to the floor, but Papyrus’s quick reflexes grabbed him midair. He then proceeded to lift Sans to eye-level and began to scream frantically in his face.

“OHMYGODSANSYOUHAVETOHELPMEIT'SUNDYNESHEFOUNDMESANSOHGOODLORD"WHOA, slow down, bro,” Sans interrupted his mad rambling. “I cannot understand a word you are saying.”

Papyrus put him down, albeit a bit roughly. He spun in circles, wringing his hands. Papyrus still looked very panicked, but he forced a few deep breaths to at the very least form comprehensible sentences.

“It’s Undyne!” he cried. “She saw me!”

Realization dawned on him, remembering how his brother told him about Undyne’s new “surprise attack training.”

“Oh, is that it?” he sighed with a bit of relief. For a second he was worried it was something serious. “So I guess she caught you by surprise, huh?” he laughed with a wink. “Wasn’t that the point of her new training-?”

“NO, SANS, YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND!” Papyrus wailed. “UNDYNE-“ Orange energy crackled around his skull, which then shifted to his beastly form. <<--SAW ME!!!-->
“OH.” A new sort of realization dawned on him.

Undyne had seen Papyrus in his Blaster form.

This wasn’t good.

This was the definition of **not good.**

“What are we going to do?!” Papyrus moaned, eyes brimming with crocodile tears.

Sans mind quickly whirled, playing out the worst case scenarios one right after the other. What would she do to him? Question him? Confine him in jail? **Torture?!!**

But as his mind raced to think of something, a new more immediate threat came to mind.

“Wait a second,” he said slowly. “Undyne just saw you turn into a Blaster, and your **first immediate thought was to run straight home?!** Don’t you think that’d be the first place she’d **look** for you?!”

Papyrus’s eyes bulged. “Um.”

They were interrupted by the thunderous crack of the door being kicked down by a mighty boot.

**“SANS HOLY FUCK!”**

Undyne’s voice rang loud and clear throughout the entire house, making both skeleton brothers freeze in horror. They slowly turned and stared at her.

She stared back, her hard gaze landing on Papyrus. She didn’t even register Sans giving her a dagger-like glare with a blue pupil for cursing so foully in front of Papyrus.

All that mattered was Papyrus.

**AND KICKING HIS ASS.**

She screeched, Papyrus screamed, she leaped halfway across the room and tackled him, the both of them still screaming. She grabbed Papyrus around the chest, still screaming, and lifted him into the
air, Papyrus’s screaming only growing louder, and she performed a perfect suplex, slamming him hard on the floor. Papyrus, momentarily dazed, couldn’t move as Undyne jumped up and launched herself off the couch to perform a finishing body-slam.

“TIME TO DIE,” she seethed.

PING.

Her soul glowed blue, and she stopped mid-air, Sans’ blue magic keeping her aloft. She flailed wildly a bit, finding no purchase in mid-air, and had to settle for an angry glare back in the direction of the squat skeleton.

Sans, eye glowing blue, sauntered up to her, looking none the less miffed about her sudden rampage.

“Ok, Undyne, I know how much you like beating up my bro here,” he said coolly. “But I can’t help noticing you’re a tad aggressive today. So, uh, what’s up? Besides you, of course.”

Undyne was too enraged to even acknowledge Sans’s hideous attempt at a pun. “WHAT’S UP?! WHAT’S UP?! I’LL TELL YA WHAT’S FREAKING UP!” she shouted. “You two have been hiding this from me for years, haven’t you?!”

“What are you talking about?” Sans asked cluelessly.

“STOP PLAYING INNOCENT!” She pointed wildly at Papyrus, who sank back to the floor under her accusatory gesture. “I just saw your brother here turn into a freaking bone dragon!”

“Hm, wow.” Sans replied. His expression didn’t change, didn’t even flinch from his usual carefree smile under the accusation. He cocked an eye ridge. “So exactly how big was that boulder you dropped on your head?”

“Oh my god, Sans, I am not joking around here!” She thrashed wildly, but thanks to Sans’ magic, she didn’t budge an inch from her spot in the air, which only fueled Undyne’s already brimming rage. She hissed between gritted teeth. “Alright, first of all, do you mind putting me down?!”

“Do you promise to stop beating up my bro?”

“Fine! Yes! Now put me down!” she snarled. Sans obliged, his blue magic vanishing and Undyne fell uneasily to her feet. She rose, dusting herself off, and glared at the two of them. Papyrus was looking rather intimidated, more so than usual, but Sans was putting on his usual smiley face, which Undyne could never read. All she knew was that she couldn’t stand it when he looked at her like that.

“Now, I don’t know what the fresh hell is going on, but I know what I saw!” she said. “I saw Papyrus shape-shift! And neither of you are going to convince me I imagined it!”

Sans let out a laugh. “Come on, Undyne, that’s crazy. When’s the last time you heard of a shape-shifting monster? They just don’t exist.”

“Apparently they do!” Undyne spun, staring straight at her friend. “Right, Papyrus?!”

Papyrus fumbled for words, his hands knitting themselves together anxiously. “Um, uh . . .” he stuttered.
Sans interjected for him. “Of course they don’t.”

“ENOUGH! Stop lying to me!” Undyne yelled, clutching her head. “You both are going to tell me the truth! Right now!”

“Heh heh heh heh.”

Sans’ laugh was devoid of any humor, the laugh forced and cold. Accusatory. He stepped forward, the white pupils that usually adorned his sockets fading from sight, leaving nothing but hollow, haunting pits of darkness that bored themselves straight at Undyne.

An unsettling shiver rose up her spine.

“Oh, that’s real rich, coming from you.”

Undyne could feel an unpleasant chill on the back of her neck, and it wasn’t from the wide open front door. “What are you talking about?”

“Well, I mean, it’s so obvious best friends always tell the truth, don’t they?” Sans said. His smile grew tight, his eyes still dark. “They would never think about lying to their buddy. No matter how much it would hurt them, no matter how hard the truth is to say, you always tell it. Right, Undyne?”

She stiffened, her hands balling into her fists.

“Even if it’d destroy them, you tell the truth. Even if it’d crush their hopes and dreams, you NEVER lie to them. I mean, it’s not like someone would have a good reason to keep something secret.” He leaned forward. His smile was almost a scowl. “Isn’t that right?”

*Damn that son of a bitch,* Undyne thought. Her teeth ground together, her fists shaking. But was that anger she felt . . .

Or was it guilt?

She wasn’t so sure herself.

“I CAN’T TAKE IT ANYMORE!” Papyrus shouted.

Undyne and Sans both jumped, the tension between them dissipating at the sudden outburst.

“You’re right, Sans!” Papyrus proclaimed.

“What?” Sans said stupidly.

“You are absolutely right! Everything you said rings loud and true! What kind of horrible friend am I?! To lie to my very best friend all these years? Well no more! For I, the Great Papyrus, will-!”

Sans grabbed his arm, interrupting him. “Hey, bro, can I talk to you in private for a sec?” he said quickly.

“Oh, no you two don’t!” Undyne objected, but Sans wouldn’t hear it. Her soul pinged blue with his magic yet again, and she was shoved out the door, much to her dismay.

“Now you wait out here while us skele-bros have a bit of a chat,” Sans said.

“Wait a minute here! Don’t I-?!” she spun, ready to barge right back in, but Sans conjured a wall of bones that completely blocked the doorway. She kicked it, but the barrier remained unobstructed.
“Damn it!”

Inside the house, Sans directed Papyrus back to the kitchen, out of earshot of Undyne. Sans’ smile fell, revealing a very rare expression of anger.

“Papyrus, you cannot be serious about telling her!” he said.

“Well, why not? She’s my friend, and I trust her,” Papyrus countered.

“You know why we can’t tell her! Why we can’t tell anyone!”

Papyrus huffed, waving his hand. “Yes, yes! I know why! But it’s been years! And . . . it’s been so hard keeping this all to myself for so long.” He rubbed his arm, looking pleadingly down at his brother. “Wouldn’t it be nice if we had someone to share this with?”

“You’ve got me, don’t you?” Sans offered.

“But you never talk!” Papyrus exploded. Sans recoiled. “You never offer me any explanation or any reason other than we have to! Have to what?! Hide and live in fear for our entire lives, trying to hide part of who we are simply because you say so?!”

“That thing is not part of us!” Sans protested.

“YES IT IS AND YOU DAMN WELL KNOW IT!”

There was a heavy silence in the air. Sans himself was at loss for words. He had never seen Papyrus so . . . so furious.

“And it’s not like I haven’t tried talking about it with you!” Papyrus went on. “But every time I try to bring it up, you shut me out and you shut down! You avoid the whole issue altogether and wave me off, always telling me you’ll explain later when I’ll understand! It’s been ten years, Sans!!! Am I not old enough to understand yet?!”

All of Papyrus’s frustration, all the years of stonewalling and avoidance and all the years of unanswered questions . . . it had reached the tipping point and Papyrus himself could not stop the stream of angry words that flowed from his mouth.

“You have NEVER given me any straight answers about ANYTHING! At this point I don’t even know what I am! And the worst part is knowing you know everything but you decide to keep everything from me anyway! And you expect me to be ok with it! Don’t I deserve answers?!! Don’t I deserve to know?!”

Sans faltered. “Papyrus, you really don’t want to know-“

“Isn’t that for me to decide?” Papyrus interrupted. “I am not a child anymore, so stop treating me like one! Or do you think I’m too dumb to understand? Is that it?”

“What?! Of course not! Don’t be ridiculous!” Sans shot back.

“Then why?!”

“Because you do not need to know. No one needs to know!”

“That is not an answer!” Papyrus stomped his foot, and orange magic crackled around them like lightning. Sans flinched, shielding his eyes from the bright flashes of magic. Papyrus’
right eye radiated with orange light.

Not a good sign.

“Why are you so afraid of this?! What are you so afraid of that you can’t even tell me? Isn’t that what brothers are for?” Papyrus ranted. Angry tears filled his eyes, stinging him and burning the back of his throat. He hated crying, but his emotions were at an all-time high. Everything was spilling out. His anger, his frustration, all the guilt and fear and anxiety and *everything* he felt over the years were now all on the table. He took several deep breaths, forcing himself to calm down. His soul still burned and ached with anger, but he wouldn’t lay it all out on Sans. He didn’t deserve that.

“Family means we share things,” Papyrus went on. Crying had helped calm him down, and he blinked whatever tears remained away. “We share food, we share the same house, sometimes we even share beds when we have bad dreams, and that means we share secrets. Sans, I know you keep things from me. You keep secrets and steal away to Grillby’s for drinks and you hide yourself in the basement for *days*. And you don’t tell me because I know we can’t always tell each other the truth. Some things we keep to ourselves and that’s ok. But not *this*, Sans. It’s . . . well, it’s too *big*. Please, don’t shut me out. Not from this.”

Sans had nothing to say. He didn’t know what to say. He kept silent, his eyes dark.

It’s not like he hadn’t tried. He had told him, several times in fact. It always went the same. Poorly. Eventually he just stopped because what good would it do?

Everything would reset and he’d forget everything. It was pointless.

He had explained the resets, too, multiple times. With the same results.

It was all so *pointless*.

So Sans said nothing.

Papyrus let out a frustrated sigh at his silence. “Well, there’s one thing I *do* know,” he went on. “Undyne saw me. There’s no question about that. She knows what I am. And nothing we say is going to convince her she didn’t see what she did. She’s too stubborn and too determined and she isn’t going to give up until she gets answers. We can’t pretend it didn’t happen.”

Papyrus placed a hand on Sans’ shoulder, and looked at him. His gaze practically begged and pleaded for him to listen. And, reluctantly, he did.

“Sans, *please*. We don’t have to be alone with this. We don’t have to be afraid of this. We don’t need to keep lying. Wouldn’t it be nice if we didn’t have to lie to our dearest friends?” He pulled his hand away, and subconsciously began to rub his left arm. “I know it’d help me.”

Sans winced at the gesture. “Now that’s a low blow.”

Papyrus quickly released his arm. “I . . . I’m sorry, I didn’t-“

“It’s ok, I know.”

“But . . . will you think about it?”

Sans sighed deeply. As much as he hated to admit it, Papyrus had a point. Undyne would not stop until she had some sort of resolution to this great new mystery. She would never give up.
There really was no other option.

“Fine,” he muttered. “You can tell her.”

Papyrus jumped. “R-really? You mean it?”

Sans nodded.

Immediately, Papyrus brightened, his grin wide and genuine. He picked up his brother in a great big hug and swung him in circles a few time, brimming with delight.

“Oh Sans! Thank you thank you thank you! You made the right decision, don’t you worry!”

“Just her, though, ok? I don’t want the whole Underground to know,” he winced. As happy as his brother was, he couldn’t share his joy.

This wasn’t something anyone ever knew, save for a certain bartender. But he wasn’t exactly the chatty type.

Undyne, on the other hand . . .

He couldn’t help but fear the worst. What if the whole Underground did find out? What then? This was a terrible unknown and he had no idea how to deal with this.

Papyrus was already at the door, waving Undyne inside. Sans dismissed his bone attack, and the three of them stood in the living room, Papyrus’s arm slung around Undyne’s shoulder.

“This will be great, I just know it!” Papyrus was saying. Sans was only half-paying attention. “We can talk about this whole thing and then we can have some good laughs over how scared we were!”

Sans put forth his usual smiling mask. “Nah, just you. You do enough talking for the both of us.”

Papyrus’s smile fell. “You’re not going to stay?”

“Heh, nah. You two have held me up long enough. I’m late for work now! My boss is gonna be super mad at me.”

Undyne spoke up. “Um, Sans, I’m your boss. And if you wanna take a sick day, I wouldn’t mind.”

“And now you’re trying to make me play hooky? You’re a terrible influence!” He picked up the pieces of the battered-down door using his blue magic and fitted them back together like a jigsaw. “Welp, I gotta get going. You two have fun.”

“Sans, wait-“ Papyrus urged.

The door slammed shut with a deafening thud. Undyne and Papyrus were left standing in the room in stunned silence.

“He used work as an excuse to get out of talking,” Papyrus muttered, rubbing the back of his neck. “I guess I should be sort of proud of him for actually trying to do his job.”

Undyne and Papyrus sat on the lumpy green sofa, both of them holding mugs of tea. Undyne had a sea-blue mug with a fish skeleton painted on the side (Papyrus had found it in the trash and kept it
handy in case Undyne ever visited) Papyrus, on the other hand, had a black mug with white text that read “BAD TO THE BONE.” Two bones made an X underneath the text.

The both of them sat in uneasy silence. Papyrus nervously fidgeted in his seat, partially out of a poor attempt to quell the writhing feeling in his non-existent gut, and partially him trying to find a comfortable sitting position.

Undyne, on the other hand, was sitting stone still, glaring hard at Papyrus. She sat with one arm draped over the back of the sofa, her back leaning up against the far end of one side. She had a foot crossed over her knee, which bounced up and down rapidly. They had sat there in silence for goodness knows how long. Her patience was wearing thin.

Papyrus cleared his throat, and she jumped, leaning forward ever so slightly forward in anticipation. He fumbled for a bit, then managed to choke out a sentence.

“Would you like some more tea?” he offered.

Undyne resisted the urge to make a smart retort. “Papyrus, this is my third cup of tea,” she said pointedly. Her mug was still full with borderline-lukewarm tea. “I think I’m good.”

“Oh, ok,” he said in a tiny voice.

They lapsed back into silence.

Undyne clicked her teeth. “So are you gonna talk or what?” she snapped.

“I-I am! I mean . . . I will!” Papyrus stuttered. He gripped his mug tighter.

“Well . . . you’re not.”

“I know, I know!” Papyrus said. He dropped his gaze. “It’s just hard, you know? I thought I was ready for this! I was so ready and so sure to tell you everything! But now that I have to . . . His voice lowered almost shamefully. “I can’t find the courage or the words to say what I have to.”

As much as Undyne was dying to hear the truth, she reminded herself to be patient. This wasn’t easy for him, that much was obvious. So she jump-started the conversation.

“But I was right, wasn’t I? You are a shape-shifter.” It wasn’t a question so much as a declaration.

“Y-yes! I suppose I am!” Papyrus said, a bit of his confidence returning. “I can turn into a ‘bone-dragon’ as you put it, but the technical term is actually ‘Gaster Blaster!’”

“‘Gaster Blaster?’” she repeated. That was . . . well that was certainly odd. What was a Gaster? “How long have you been able to turn into one?”

“Oh, since I was very young! I gained that ability a few years after I was created.”

Created?!

Undyne chose to ignore his weird choice of phrasing for the moment.

Ok, so it seemed Papyrus was better at responding to questions rather than explaining things outright all on his own. All the better, then. So she kept the questions coming.

“So why all the secrecy?” she asked. “Why keep this to yourself after all this time?”
“It’s kinda hard to say, to be honest,” Papyrus said. His voice grew softer again, and he diverted his gaze to the untouched tea in his mug. “Sans says it’s for the best. Maybe some people would be afraid of us. And people would ask all sorts of questions. And my brother Sans, well…” His gaze grew dark. “He really hates answering questions.”

Undyne nodded, recalling the brothers’ conversation mere minutes ago. She couldn’t hear what they were saying, but she could definitely hear loud angry voices. It hadn’t been a happy conversation.

“Why doesn’t he like to talk about it?” she urged.

“I wish I knew. Like I said, he doesn’t like to talk.” There was a note of frustration in his voice.

She thought for a minute. “Does that mean he can turn into a ‘Gaster Blaster,’ too?”

“Oh course!” Papyrus responded almost immediately. It took a second for it to dawn on him what he had just said and he blanched in terror. Undyne couldn’t help but let out a laugh.

“Papyrus! Don’t you worry! I won’t tell anyone!” And she meant it. “I know this is a huge secret for the both of you, and I swear to you, on my honor as Captain of the Royal Guard, I won’t tell anyone.”

This put Papyrus at ease and he let out a gentle smile. “Thank you. That really means a lot to me.”

“I’m just happy you could share this with me,” she said.

“And I’m happy to finally share this with someone!” Papyrus said. “It feels like such a great weight has been lifted! Knowing there’s someone I can talk to really feels great! And I’m erm, happy you’re not trying to kill me for keeping it a secret.”

“Well, you’re not out of the woods quite yet,” she grinned wickedly, slapping him on the shoulder. “I’m going to make you run laps for weeks.”

“Fair enough,” he chuckled.

“I’m just having trouble thinking of a good reason why Sans wouldn’t want anyone to know,” she said, scratching her chin. “I mean, yeah, there’s never been a shape-shifting monster before, but there’s plenty of weird things down here! There’s a monster that’s literally a talking hand! You can’t tell me a bone-dragon is weirder than that!”

They both laughed.

Undyne thought of something.

“Does it hurt to . . . turn into that thing?” she asked timidly.

“What? No way!” Papyrus responded, looking half-way offended. “It’s incredibly easy and painless to shift forms!”

“ Couldn’t fooled me,” Undyne muttered. Even though the transformation had taken mere seconds, it still sounded horrible. She remembered the terrible sound of cracking and grinding bones. Just thinking of it again made her queasy.

“Of course I, the Great Papyrus, have perfected transforming and can do it at a moment’s notice! I can even change partially if I truly wish to!”

Yet another thought occurred to her. “Can I ask a question?”
“You already have! Nyeh heh heh!” Papyrus laughed. “But fire away!”

“Can you do it again?”

Papyrus raised an eyebrow. “You wish to see me change?”

“Yes please.” Undyne said, giddy with excitement. Seeing him at a distance was one thing. But being up close and personal would be something to behold.

Papyrus shared Undyne’s enthusiasm and jumped up from the couch, taking several steps back from her. He had never been able to show off to anyone before! He waved his arms around him grandly.

“Stand back, dear citizen!” he boomed in a showboating voice. “For I, the Great Papyrus, shall now transform into a grand and magnificent beast, far larger than any monster you have ever seen before!”

“Oh my god, just do it already!” Undyne cried, pounding her fist on the sofa.

“If you say so!”

Papyrus flexed, and the familiar orange magic surrounded him, crackling and fizzling along the length of his bones. His armor melted away into nothing, and Undyne bore witness to Papyrus’s incredible transformation. He seemed to have purposely slowed it down so she could see everything; the way his hands lengthened to paws, how his jaws jutted out into a muzzle, the way his horns grew and curved out from his skull, everything. His newly-grown tail snaked behind him, swinging back and forth excitedly, and he fell to all fours, his own eyes level with Undyne’s. And he was looking down at her.

Undyne gaped at the behemoth before her. He was huge; his shoulders stood higher than Undyne herself and Papyrus’s long neck would easily give him a few more feet of height. A ridge of sharp boney spikes ran down his back, from his shoulders to his tail. He looked at her in anticipation, head slightly cocked.
“Oh my god . . .” she breathed. A huge smile broke across her face. “THIS IS SO FREAKING COOL!” She grasped his massive skull in her hands, and he let out a little yip of delight, pleased at her reaction.

She tilted his skull this way and that, taking in every detail, every mark, every tooth, committing to
memory every single groove on his awesomely-shaped skull. She pried his massive jaws open to have a good look at the fangs that adorned his mouth. The canines were bigger than her hand! And now that she was getting a good look at his jaws, she saw the bottom jaw was bisected, cut perfectly down the middle to form two halves. She was too wrapped up in her own excitement to give it much thought.

“Hahah! Just look at these chompers! And I thought my teeth were sharp!” She turned his skull again, getting a better look at the five horns that adorned his skull. The pair over his eyes were the largest, which she gripped firmly in her hands. They were so large her hand could barely fit around them!

“LOOK AT THESE HORNs!” she cried, rattling his skull, much to Papyrus’ chagrin. “Can you bust a boulder with a single head-butt?!”

Papyrus let out a soft bark and a garbled string of sounds, but Undyne couldn’t make sense of it. No matter, she wasn’t expecting him to actually answer him.

Her “examination” of the Gaster Blaster continued with enthusiastic frenzy. Undyne poked, prodded, pulled and tugged at every part of him, closely examining him from snout to tail. She admired the lethal whip-like appendage, reveled in the sharp deadly claws that adorned his digits, gawked at the range of spikes emerging from his spine. Through the whole thing, Papyrus remained motionless, although more out of fear of hurting his friend from making a wrong move than out of actual patience. But he couldn’t help but feel a nice warm fuzzy feeling in his very soul.

Undyne was taking this all remarkably well! What exactly had Sans been so afraid of?

Undyne picked up his front left paw, gleefully looking over his claws. As she turned the paw over in her hands, her eye caught sight of something shiny catching the light.

She paused. Bones certainly were not shiny. She looked closer.

There, on his ulna bone near his wrist, was a small rectangular plate, firmly attached to the bone. It read:

'95 WDG

WPX-01B-P

She furrowed her brow in confusion, drawing the arm closer to her.

“What the hell is this?” she said.

Without warning, Papyrus yanked his arm back and he skittered away from her, hand drawn close to his chest protectively. Orange magic sparked around him angrily as he shifted back to his skeleton form. His eyes were wide and frightened.

Undyne withdrew, watching him change. The other changes were effortless and fluid . . . but this change was much more . . . unstable. The changes were happening sporadically and violently, a far cry from the fluid change she had just seen. Even still, Papyrus showed no sign of discomfort or pain. He simply stood there, in some sort of half-way form. His back was pressed against the wall, still clutching at his arm with a clawed hand, his tail wrapped around his leg.

“ . . . Papyrus?” she called out to him uncertainly.

Papyrus attempted a smile, his teeth a bit sharper than they should be. “Heh heh . . . it’s nothing to
worry about!” he said shakily. “J-just some s-silly little thing-“

“Papyrus,” she pressed.

He hesitated. Then, very very slowly and very very deliberately, he removed his glove. Eye sockets clenched closed, he held out his arm for her. She took it without a word, her fingers running over the strange plate embedded into his wrist.

“What . . . what the hell is this?” she asked, torn between anger and horror.

<<Bad memories,>> Papyrus said, speaking an alien tongue.

Undyne arched her brow, completely caught off guard by the strange language Papyrus spoke. “What?”

Papyrus didn’t look at her. His gaze was fixated on the plate. His breath had grown ragged and shallow. “Undyne . . . a long time ago . . . I was created in a lab.” He inhaled sharply, bringing a hand to his forehead. “But I can barely remember anything! My memories are so scattered and fuzzy! And I can barely make sense of what I do remember, and it’s all so terrible and dark and-“

“Whoa whoa whoa, slow down,” Undyne urged. “What do you mean you were created in a lab?!”

Papyrus still didn’t look at her. “I was created in a lab,” he repeated simply. There was no emotion in his voice.
Oh, cripes, was Sans really so lazy he had completely neglected to inform his brother where monsters came from?!

“Look, that makes zero sense,” Undyne offered. She could already feel herself blushing. “Did Sans ever give you the . . . the Talk? About the Whimsums and the Snowdrakes? You know . . .” she gestured a bit. “When two monsters love each other very much, they get together and make a baby. Is any of this ringing a bell?”

“Not me.”

The firmness and the resolution of his tone made Undyne stop cold. She looked at him, trying to read him. He was serious.

Dear god, he was completely serious.

Papyrus lowered himself to the floor, gripping his knees tightly to his chest. Undyne sat beside him. His gaze drifted very very far away, focusing on something a thousand miles away. And he began to talk, very slowly, and very deliberately, in a low tone that completely put Undyne on edge.

“Many years ago, I was created in a lab,” he began again. “I remember a room that was nothing but cold and grey. I remember tests. I remember needles. A lot of needles. I remember being hurt . . .” He paused, shuddering. “I remember . . . I remember HIM.”

“Who?” Undyne pressed.

“The monster that created us.”

Papyrus could never forget that face. No matter how hard he tried, that face always resurfaced in his darkest nightmares. A skull-like face with dark glaring eyes. A face with two terrible scars running across his face, one reaching from his right eye to the top of his skull, one running from the left eye to the corner of his tightly-drawn mouth.

He could never forget the face of Dr. Gaster.

He lapsed back into silence, his mind tracing back to the scattered collection of memories he had.

Undyne broke the silence. It terrified her to see Papyrus so distraught. It shook her to her very core to know something heinous had happened to her dear friend. But she had to know. By God, she had to know.

“What else do you remember?”

“I remember . . . w a k i n g u p . . .”
What else do you remember?

I remember...

...waking up...
The Good Doctor

Chapter Summary

We travel to the past to meet Dr. Gaster, and learn of his horrific experiments.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter contains physical abuse and trauma.

Apologies for the delay on this chapter! This one was tough to write for a lot of reasons. I hope to get the next installment out a lot quicker!
Year: **95

Entry Number: [REDACTED]

TEST SUBJECT B HAS AWOKEN FROM STASIS.

In the center of Hotland stood a grand and imposing building. Its walls were plain and white, clean and devoid of any details or decoration. The building radiated efficiency; no feature was without purpose, no embellishment was made for the sake of aesthetic appeal.

It was the famous laboratory of Dr. W.D. Gaster, a renowned scientist that every monster in the Underground knew the name of. He was, after all, the one who created the CORE, harnessing the untamed fury of the magma pits and the strange magic that filled it to provide electricity to every
corner of the Underground.

The time was 11:47 P.M. Many monsters have already retreated to their homes for a peaceful night of slumber.

But not Dr. Gaster.

He stood in the very lower levels of his laboratory, which few monsters even knew existed. Hidden deep beneath many floors and a network of maze-like halls and thick doors tightly locked shut, the doctor tended to his current experiment.

Currently, he was situated outside a stasis chamber, carefully monitoring the readings a dozen monitors and light switches provided him. Everything was within normal limits, the test subject was steady and stable. Steady, stable, and *active*.

Through a thick pane of glass, Dr. Gaster peered over his square spectacles and into the stasis chamber, where a tall limber skeleton floated in a suspension tube. The skeleton stood approximately five feet tall, and had been quiet and still since its conception, but finally, it seemed to have woken up. The subject twisted its head this way and that, taking in its blurry surroundings and frantically pawing at the glass tube it was confined in. Gaster began taking notes.

**INITIAL OBSERVATIONS: SUBJECT SHOWS SIGNS OF NERVOUSNESS AND ANXIOUSNESS. HE SEEMS CONFUSED BY ITS SURROUNDINGS AND DOES NOT UNDERSTAND WHERE IT IS.**

Gaster studied the skeleton for a bit longer. True, it seemed to be very confused and flustered. It tapped on the glass experimentally from time to time, as if looking for a way out. It studied the room with almost childlike curiosity, staring at the strange lights and equipment that littered the stasis chamber with a critical eye.

The doctor was looking for signs of sentience, but it would be difficult to determine that until he approached and studied the construct in person. It *did* seem to have a bit of personality; even though initially its movements were frantic and agitated, it seemed to have calmed down and now moved more deliberately; its tappings on the glass more experimental and not so desperate.

Gaster frowned.

**I AM PROCEEDING TO DRAIN THE STASIS TUBE. STAND BY FOR READINGS OF COORDINATION AND PHYSICAL CONDITION.**

With a few swift taps upon the keyboard, Gaster initiated the drainage sequence. A red light blared within the stasis chamber, causing the subject to flinch at the noise. Bubbles blossomed from the bottom of the tube in a furious froth, further panicking the subject. It pitifully clutched at its head as the fluid slowly seeped out of the chamber, leaving the subject standing on rather shaky legs. It groped for purchase, finding none on the slick glass, but managed to brace itself against the glass with its arms.

**AS EXPECTED, THE SUBJECT IS UNSURE ON ITS LEGS AND WILL TAKE A MOMENT TO ADJUST TO LIFE OUTSIDE OF SUSPENSION. THIS WILL BE THE FIRST TIME THE CONSTRUCT HAS EVER USED ITS LEGS ON ITS OWN, AFTER ALL.**

Gaster sat back and watched for a moment. Thankfully, it seemed to be getting the hang of using its legs, and after a few minutes, was able to stand on its own with minimal support. Its knees rattled for...
a bit, but it would have to do. Gaster looked back at the clock mounted on the wall.

It was already late, but he has pulled a number of all-nighters before. Today would just be another very, very late night.

No sense putting it off any further. He rose, and strode into the chamber.

The subject immediately started at his entrance. Gaster approached the tube, staring long and critically at his creation.

The construct looked back at him with wide curious eye sockets. It tilted its head to the side a bit. Then, it waved.

Gaster frowned. He took a breath between clenched teeth and reached for the control panel to the tube itself and typed in the commands to open the tube. Valves and pipes hissed angrily as pneumatics and hydraulics alike chugged together to lift the glass barrier. The skeleton inside wobbled unsteadily for a moment.

Then fell face-first on the floor right at Gaster’s feet.

It would have been amusing at a very different time.

The construct groaned, rubbing its head. “Aaaaaagh, that hurt . . .”

Gaster’s frown grew into a scowl. It could talk. This complicated matters greatly.

Gaster felt his skeletal hands clench into fists. What had he done wrong? He was certain he modified the serum to prevent such unnecessary developments. He had run the numbers, he had synthesized dozens of combinations, why did it not work?!

He forced another long, slow breath. No matter. He would work through this complication just as he had with the first subject.

The subject was speaking to him again. “Who are you?” it asked. It paused, thinking. “Who am I . . . ?”

Gaster ignored it. Although still brimming with anger for his newest experiment being a blatant failure thus far, a true scientist always knew how to turn a problem into an opportunity.

After all, if it could speak, it could understand instructions. And with the proper attention, instruction, and orders, any inborn behaviors could be relearned.

With the proper attention, he could make this construct obedient, and fulfill its purpose to perfection.

Gaster pulled out some medical scrubs for the subject to wear. <<You are my creation,>> he said. <<And you will do as you are told. We have much work ahead of us. Now put these on, and follow me.>>

The subject took the garments warily. “Ok . . .” It slipped the shirt over its head, slipped the pants up to the waist and drew the drawstring tight. The scrubs were perhaps a size or two too big but they would serve their purpose adequately.

<<Quickly now, we do not have time to dawdle,>> Gaster pressed, already turning to exit the room.
“Ok, I’m coming!” It stood, taking a hesitant step forward. Suddenly, its knee gave out and it collapsed onto the floor pathetically. It quickly recovered, standing again, only to fall over backwards.

Gaster sighed.

“I-I got it!” the subject said. “Just . . . gimmie a moment.”

When he fell a third time, Gaster’s patience had grown dangerously thin. Gaster waved his hand, pinging the subject’s soul blue, and with another gesture, the construct began to hover in midair. The subject was taken by surprised, flailing about yet again, but calmed when it realized it was in no immediate danger. Gaster made his way out of the chamber and down the expansive laboratory hallways, with the subject in tow.

“How are you doing that?” the subject asked.

<<Magic,>> Gaster responded simply.

“Can I do that?”

<<If not that would prove to be another hideous disappointment.>>

“What?”

<<Never mind.>>

“Where are we, anyway?”

<<You are in my laboratory.>>

“What’s a la--labradory?”

This was interesting. Subject B knew how to speak, how to form comprehensive sentences, yet it was clear he lacked knowledge of certain areas. What exactly did the subject know and not know? He’d have to do much extensive testing to find out.

Gaster decided to sate the subject’s curiosity. It certainly wasn’t hurting anything, and it was beyond obvious it would be very curious.

<<A laboratory is where scientists do experiments.>> He decided to keep his answers short and simple.

“Oh! So that makes you a scientist!”

<<That is correct. I created you.>>

“Oh. Do I have a name?”

<<You are Subject B. You do not get a name.>> Gaster explained patiently.

“Why not?”

<<People have names. Monsters have names. You are neither of those. You are a thing, and thus, have no name.>>

“Oh, ok . . .” It paused, its eyebrows scrunched down in concentration. “Where are we going?
What are you doing? Why is your face so funny?"

Gaster narrowed his eyes. <<Stop talking.>>

They had reached their destination. Along the grey tile corridor lined with nondescript doors they had finally reached one particular door marked 022. Gaster pushed it open to reveal a sizeable examination room. The usual stainless steel amenities filled the room; a chair, a desk, a table, a sink, and a wide variety of countless tools and equipment. One side of the room was full of bookshelves which were packed to the brim with textbooks and binders and folders.

“Wowie! This place is neato!”

<<This is one of my many lab stations. We will be doing a variety of exams here.>> He released Subject B from his magic grip, and it wobbled for a bit before finding its feet. With another wave, Gaster grabbed a folder off the desk and it floated into his hand. <<I will be doing a thorough physical examination of your physiology and your soul make-up, and then onto a cognitive test since you can speak,>> he added with a note of bitterness.

Subject B stared at him cluelessly. It obviously had no idea what he was talking about. Gaster sighed.

<<I have no idea why I’m bothering to explain any of this to you,” he muttered, massaging his temples. <<You will do as you are told. Is that understood?>>

Subject B nodded. “Um, ok.”

<<Then let’s not waste any time. Sit on the table over there.>>

Dr. Gaster began the exam with the basics; height, weight, examining every bone and every joint for defects or anomalies. All clear. He muttered under his breath to himself as his inspection progressed.

<<Bones are strong and healthy, absolutely no signs of damage or degradation, the growth serum has accelerated the subject’s age and height to what can be estimated to be ‘pre-teens.’ Subject B will most likely grow a bit more still. All vitals are strong and stable. Subject B proves to be in perfect physical health. Moving on to soul calibrations.>>

“Who are you talking to? Are you talking to me?” Subject B asked.

<<I am talking to no one. Talking out loud helps me think.>> Gaster explained patiently.

“Ok. It sounds like everything is going very well!”

<<It would be even better if you remained silent.>>

“Sorry.”

Gaster said nothing as he pulled out a sizeable rectangular piece of equipment, about the size of a clipboard and maybe five times as thick. Three wires hung from a selection of ports which Gaster attached to Subject B’s sternum, clavicle, and over its fourth rib where his soul’s center would be. He turned the machine on, and the screen flickered to life, taking only a moment to boot up before it began to take readings. Subject B’s soul began to glow a bright blue color as the readings were taken, the soul thrumming with magic strong enough for Gaster to feel it, even standing at a distance.

That was good news.
Gaster tweaked a dial here and there, typed a few more commands, and a steady stream of data began to flow, forming a live graph of magical energy readings. Gaster couldn’t suppress an expression of shock striking across his features.

These readings, if proved to be correct, surpassed his most optimistic expectations.

His first subject had proven to be incredibly strong, if pitifully fragile, but already Subject B was proving to be superior in every way. He was already 20 times stronger than Subject A, based on the readings alone.

This was very good news. Perhaps Subject B was not as much of a failure as he expected.

Gaster picked up a clipboard and began to write down the numbers in a frenzied scrawl only he could decipher. The make-up of Subject B’s soul proved to be fascinating. The majority of B’s soul composition was BLUE magic, like the doctor's own, but there were hints of orange magic, remnants from the human element that B was comprised of, no doubt. Gaster was unsure how this orange magic would manifest, if at all, but it would be prudent to observe closely.

As his pen scrubbled furiously, Subject B remained silent and observant, if not perhaps a bit . . . nervous?

Gaster had only been in Subject B’s presence for a couple hours at most, but he already knew that expression all too well. It was the expression of someone who wanted to ask a very important question. Gaster sighed.

<<Do you have something to say, Subject B?>> he asked.

“Erm, yes . . . sorta . . .” it rubbed its arm nervously. “You said you created me, right?”

<<That is correct.>>

“So . . . so does that mean . . . does it . . .” Subject B cleared its throat, and looked up at Gaster, its expression innocent and hopeful. “Does that mean you’re my Dad?”

Gaster froze.

His breath caught in his throat. It felt as time itself stopped as his mind attempted to comprehend what he had just heard.

It had called him “Dad.”

IT had CALLED him “DAD.”

Fury unlike anything Gaster had felt in eternity welled up within him. His eyes sparked and crackled with blue magic, emitting the room in an eerie glow. His right eye seared as magic flooded his socket, but his fury blinded him from the pain.

<<Let me make something abundantly clear,>> Gaster seethed between clenched teeth. He lurched forward, grabbing Subject B by the collar of its shirt and pulling it close. <<You are nothing but a tool for me to use. You are not worthy of a name, you are certainly not worthy of a family!>>

Gaster threw it back against the table and pinned it with his blue magic.

<<And now you have forced me to accelerate my experiments even further. I had thought that with
conditioning and patience I would suppress any notion of will but it seems that you are leaving me with no choice.>>

“W-what are you talking-?”

<Shut up.>>

Gaster grabbed a drill, fitted it with a Phillips bit, pulled a handful of screws from a toolbox drawer.

<<There will be absolutely no misunderstandings of our relationship. You will learn, one way or another. You will learn that your entire existence is thanks to me. Everything you are, everything you will ever be, belongs to me. You were created here, and you will die here. For the good of all monsterkind.>>

Gaster lifted him in the air and forcefully threw him into a chair. The same chair he had used for more . . . violent experiments with Subject A. The chair had thick leather straps on the arm rests, leg rests, and around the chest and neck level, all which Gaster proceeded to strap and buckle down tight accordingly.

Subject B began to panic. Its breath grew fast and ragged as it helplessly watched the doctor restrain him down so tight he could barely move, barely breathe. Its bones ached as the tough leather rubbed against his bones.

“Did . . . did I say something wrong?” it asked with a breathy voice. “Wh-what are you doing?! What is all this?!”

Gaster ignored him. He had the wrong size screws. Where did he put the ¼ inch ones?

“If I made you mad, I’m sorry! I’m so sorry please I really am! I didn’t mean to make you mad! Just please tell me what I did wrong and I’ll never do it again!”

Gaster’s breath grew funny for a moment.
“Please! Please just answer me! What did I do wrong?! Why are you mad at me?!”

Ah, there they were. Gaster picked them up with trembling hands.

“You’re really starting to scare me . . .” Subject B whimpered.

Gaster shook for only a moment before he collected himself. He picked up a small metal plate off a nearby tray. It was light, thin, curved ever so slightly to fit the curvature of an arm bone.

<<Perhaps you are not as foolish as I initially believed.>> Gaster observed. He stepped over to Subject B’s side, placing the plate carefully over its left ulna bone. A perfect fit.

He readied his drill.

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ME?!” he cried.

Gaster took a breath. <<This procedure was . . . inevitable. Do not move, or I may snap your bones.>>

“NO-!”

The drill clicked on, a whine filled the air, and the screw drove straight through bone with a sickening grinding sound. A screech of agony split the air.

Subject B thrashed and writhed, but the straps were too tight, too secure to allow for any movement. He banged his head against the chair, dug his fingers into the armrest, contorting in any way he was allowed.

The whine ceased as the screw was securely fastened. One down.

Subject B was sobbing, tears streaking from his eyes.

“Yes, please please please stop. It hurts, oh god it hurts so much, please stop please . . .” he wailed.

Gaster shook yet again, but stilled himself. He grabbed another screw, placed it, and readied himself.

<<Hold still.>>

The whine of the drill once again sounded, and it was accompanied with the shrill cries of utter agony. He begged, he thrashed, he cried and pleaded and screamed for someone to save him. Anyone. Anything.

Anything at all.

B U T  N O B O D Y  C A M E

Year: **95

Entry Number: [REDACTED]

FIRST DAY OUT OF SUSPENSION, AND SUBJECT B HAS PROVEN TO BE . . . PROBLEMATIC.
Gaster paused his entry to take a sip from his mug with a hand that refused to keep still.

**NEVERTHELESS, I DID NOT LET ME DETER ME FROM DOING WHAT NEEDED TO BE DONE. I HAVE INSTALLED B’S PLATE A BIT AHEAD OF SCHEDULE. IT WAS A NECESSITY TO DEMONSTRATE TO SUBJECT B EXACTLY WHAT POSITION HE IS IN.**

**I DO NOT CARE IF HE HATES ME. I DO NOT CARE IF HE NEVER FORGIVES ME. LET HIM YELL AND SCREAM AND CURSE MY NAME TO HIS SOUL’S CONTENT. I WILL TAKE IT. I WILL ENDURE.**

**FOR THE GOOD OF ALL MONSTERKIND.**

Gaster took another pause as he recalled the events of just moments ago. Since the plate had been . . . successfully installed, it was clear that he—Subject B—was in no condition to continue the exams Gaster had lined up. So Gaster had placed him—*it—did it really matter?—*into a holding cell. He would let him recover. Subject B would need his strength for what was to come.

**SUBJECT B SCREAMED AND BEGGED FOR ME TO STOP. BUT I DID NOT HESITATE. NOT EVEN WHEN HE BEGAN TO APOLOGIZE**

Gaster took a breath.

**BUT I DID NOT HESITATE. NOT EVEN WHEN HE BEGAN TO APOLOGIZE. I DID NOT LET MY EMOTIONS DISTRACT ME. I AM DETERMINED TO SEE THIS PROJECT THROUGH.**

In his personal office, secluded and completely alone, he let his eyes wander the familiar and comforting space. Books stacked neatly in shelves, covering a vast majority of the wall space. Papers and notes were hung in a controlled chaos behind the glowing monitor of his computer. He even allowed a few photos to be hung between the shelves and his notes. Some sat on his desk next to his favorite coffee mug and pen holder.

His gaze drifted to one wall, devoid of any books or photos or anything. Save for one thing.

A uniform, hung on a wooden rack behind a pane of glass. A uniform he had worn in a war many, many years ago.
His eyes blazed with magic. With determination.

He ignored the stabbing pain that inflicted his right eye whenever he invoked his magic.

I AM MONSTERKIND’S ONLY HOPE. ONLY I CAN SAVE US FROM THIS ETERNAL HELL. I WILL STOP AT NOTHING TO SAVE EVERYONE. THERE IS NOTHING I WILL NOT DO FOR THE GREATER GOOD. I AM GOING TO GET US OUT OF HERE. I WILL SET US FREE, WHATEVER THE COST, WHATEVER THE PRICE I MUST PAY, I WILL DO IT.

I WILL NOT FAIL.

Gaster’s magic burned brighter.

I WILL NOT FAIL MONSTERKIND EVER AGAIN.

Visions of battle filled his mind. Images of blood-soaked soil, of war-torn lands, of dust and smoke and smog that choked the air. Visions of him, standing alone, surrounded by a sea of dust from his fallen brethren. The sky painted a hellish red, as if the blood had soaked the air itself. The world burned.

I WILL NOT FAIL.
His arm ached.

Subject B (that’s what he was called, right?) massaged his forearm, his phalanges and joints catching on the edges of the little metal rectangle that protruded ever so slightly from his arm. It had hurt a lot, it had really really hurt. The initial fire and agony of something cold and sharp piercing his bones had faded but his bones still throbbed. He wished he had something to lessen the pain.

He contemplated that little metal tab. It had writing on it, but it didn’t make any sense. 95 what? What was WDG supposed to mean? It certainly didn’t spell anything. And the last string of letters and numbers were so confusing Subject B didn’t even attempt to decipher it. Just looking at it made him dizzy.

(Or was that still nausea from the recent trauma?)

But why? Why did the scientist put it on his arm? What purpose did it serve? What did it mean?

He furrowed his brows. He was certain the letters and numbers on the little plate meant something, but he had no clue as to what. If only he had a clue, or a code. Then he could solve it! But for now all he could do was grumble at the enigma.

That still left a few other big mysteries to ponder about. Subject B knew that what he had said greatly angered the scientist. But it was a harmless question, wasn’t it? And it made sense, didn’t it? If you make something, that kinda makes you a dad!

Right?
So why did he get so angry? Was it only anger?

Or was it also something else? Did he dare believe himself when he, for the briefest of instances, see *fear* in those scarred eyes?

Subject B shook his head. Another mystery he wasn’t certain he’d ever be able to solve.

For now, he focused on the plate. It was secured by four tiny metal screws. He frowned.

He didn’t like it.

He tried to dig his fingers between the plate and metal, but he could find no purchase. His tips simply slipped over the edges. He grumbled again.

He wanted that darned thing off!

He started gnawing on it. Maybe teeth would work better!

He bit down hard on the metal, and a fresh jolt of pain shot up his arm. “Agh!” he cried.

Ok maybe biting wasn’t a good option either.

“*I wouldn’t do that if I were you.*”

Subject B jumped at the sound of the new voice. It was low, spoken in a deep monotone. Subject B twisted around his relatively small metal cell, but there was no one there. He looked behind him.

He hadn’t noticed it before, but there was a small window with metal bars. And in that window was another skeleton. His jaw and cheekbones were round, quite unlike B’s more angular features. His large eyes looked very tired, and his mouth was pulled into a tight grin. That grin grew the slightest bit as B spotted him.

“*Heya.*”

“*Oh! Hello there!*” Subject B exclaimed excitedly. He thought he was all alone down here! Oh this was wonderful! Now he could have someone to talk to and not be so lonely! He quickly clambered up on his “bed” (really, it was little more than a metal table with a filthy cloth on it) to be eye-level with the other skeleton. “*It is so nice to meet you! I was worried I would be all alone down here!*”

“*Wish I could say the same, buddy,*” the skeleton replied. He sounded so . . . *sad*. “*I’m sorry, I really am.*”

“What do you mean?”

“I didn’t really think he meant it when he said he was making a ‘back-up.’ Heh, shows me, right?” He paused, the small white pinpricks in his eyes casting downwards.

“*Back-up?*” Subject B repeated incredulously.

“*Y’know scientists. Always gotta make back-ups and redundancies in case their fun little experiments went screwy. I guess there were one too many close calls with me. So here you are. Created for the sole purpose of being ripped apart, slapped back together, only to be torn apart yet again,*” he said bitterly.

“You’re not making a lot of sense . . .”
“Short of it?” the skeleton said. “Welcome to Hell.”

Subject B did not like that word. There was a certain ambiance to that word that filled his very core with dread. He shuddered involuntarily.

“I still don’t understand,” he said with a shake of his head. “Who are you?”

“Not who. What. I am subject A,” he stated. “We’re not monsters, just toys for the doc to play with. He’ll, heh, drill that into you pretty quick.”

“So it seems,” Subject B said somberly, looking at the plate on his arm.

Subject A nodded his head in the plate’s direction. “Y’see that bit on your arm? That’s your label. Scientists love to label all their lil’ experiments. Try to tear it out all you want, but I warn ya, pulling it out hurts worse than having it put in.”

Considering the trauma Subject B went through when it was installed, he highly doubted it.

“And even if you do tear it out, the doc will just slap a brand new one on you.”

Realization struck Subject B. “That’s what you did, isn’t it? Ripped out your plate?”

“Yup,” he nodded. He laughed hollowly. “It’s hilarious, you know? I thought if I ripped it out enough times, the doc would just get sick of making me a new plate and drilling it in. So I kept ripping them out. I uh . . . I got really hurt. It was really stupid. The pain is . . . was . . . well . . .” he trailed off. “Point is, I was right. But that’s the really funny bit. The doc got tired of putting plates on me.”

He lifted up his left arm for Subject B to see, his eyes going hollow and dark.

“AND INSTEAD HE GRABBED HIS DREMEL AND CARVED MY LABEL INTO MY BONES.”
Subject B’s hand flew to his mouth to suppress a scream.

“Heh, not something I’d recommend,” Subject A finished. The light in his eyes did not return.

“That-that’s horrible!” Subject B cried. “Why is he doing this to us?!”


Subject B couldn’t see it from where he was situated, but Subject A looked directly into the far corner of his cell, where a small camera was stationed. Subject A gave a wry grin and waved at the camera. He knew the doc was watching.

And a few stories away, a few rooms down the hall, Dr. Gaster watched the interaction from several monitors. Dr. Gaster grimaced at the gesture.

He knew this was a dangerous gamble, putting both subjects in adjacent cells, but this served a more important purpose. Should things play out as Gaster expected, it would make control over his rebellious subject easier.

“Personally I think he gets a sick kick out of torturing us,” Subject A said, staring directly into the camera with empty eye sockets.

Gaster frowned.
“But . . . but he can’t just be hurting us to hurt us, can he?!” Subject B protested. “There has to be a reason! It just doesn’t make sense!”

“A lot about the doc doesn’t make sense,” Subject A dismissed, but he paused, thinking. “But . . . you’re right. He’s planning something. He doesn’t talk to me much but he likes talking to himself when he takes notes. So I hear a few things.”

Subject B nodded, remembering how Gaster had spoken to himself during his examination.

“He’s trying to break something. Some sort of . . . wall? No, not wall. ‘Barrier.’ That’s it. The word he used was ‘barrier.’”

Subject A paused.

“He’s making us into weapons.”

“What?!” Subject B exclaimed. “W-weapons?! But I don’t want to hurt anyone!”

Subject A said nothing for a moment.

“Just get some sleep,” he finally said. “I’m sure the doc has plenty in store for us tomorrow.”

<<Indeed I do,>> Gaster murmured. On the desk before him, he had roughed out some preemptive calculations.

And the numbers proved to be very, very interesting.

<<Until tomorrow,>> he said, shutting off the monitors and retiring to his own office.

There was still much work to be done.
Dr. Gaster continues his experiments, and is haunted by the demons of his own past.

The sky bled.
The earth was nothing but a desolate wasteland, fogs of dust and ash wafting through a howling wind.
Red. Everything was red.
Gaster dug his hands into the soil, feeling blood and tears and the remains of his comrades, his army, his friends. All gone. Everyone was gone.
Nothing but dust in the wind, scattering to the far reaches of the burning hellscape.

FAILURE.
The word echoed in his head, a deafening din above the cry of the wind. Gaster clenched his eyes shut, feeling his stinging tears race down his face.

FAILURE. WORTHLESS FAILURE. MISERABLE, PATHETIC FAILURE.

On his knees, he wept. His uniform, tattered and bloody and dusty, felt like it weighed a hundred pounds, burdened with the weight of grief and despair.

YOU COULD NOT SAVE THEM. YOU WOULD NOT SAVE THEM.

Gaster shook his head. <<No no no no . . .>> he whispered to himself. Why couldn’t he stop crying? <<I didn’t mean for it, I didn’t mean for this to happen . . .>>

His hand found purchase on a piece of fallen armor, embellished with the Delta Rune. He held it close to his chest, the tears refusing to lessen.

<<I tried I tried I swear to the Gods I tried! I did everything I could! I couldn’t . . . I couldn’t . . .>>

YOU TRIED BUT YOU FAILED TO DO. YOU COULD HAVE SAVED THEM BUT YOU REFUSED.

Overcome with grief, all he could do was lay in the dust of his army and weep. The voice did not relent.

THE FATE OF ALL MONSTERS RESTED UPON YOUR HANDS BUT YOU DID NOTHING. MONSTERS’ SUFFERING IS YOURS AND YOURS ALONE TO BLAME.

<<Please . . . I tried. I tried I tried I tried I didn’t want any of this to happen.>>

He wanted it all to just end . . .
A flash of red, the brightest and deepest red Gaster had ever seen flooded his vision. He heard a cruel and haunting laugh, a hellish figure with a grotesque grin contorted across its face. It laughed and laughed and laughed as he saw nothing but red. A dagger rose, and fell upon him like an executer’s axe.

He screamed as his body was torn apart

There was nothing but pain . . . . .

Gaster woke with a start.

Red, red, red, all he saw was red. Red of the blood of the fallen, red of the demon that haunted his nightmares, nothing but red—

He forced himself to shut his eyes.

I am here. I am here. This is real. This is home.

Gaster grasped for anything within reach, his hands finding purchase on the edges of his desk, and he gripped it for dear life.

This is real. I am here. I am not there. I am Dr. Wing Dings Gaster, and I am here, in my laboratory in Hotlands.
He took a breath, his eyes clenched firmly shut.

This is real.

This is my desk. I am in my lab. I am in my office, I am not there.

His breath slow, and he felt himself calm. The voices were silent.

He opened his eyes.

The room around him was cast in a blue glow. The magic glow of his eyes was strong and steady (and causing a hellish pain in his right eye) and as he focused himself, as he calmed himself, the glow faded.

He sighed.

He wished he could say such haunting nightmares were a rarity. He massaged the ridge between his eyes, where his nose would be if he had one.

The computer monitor before him glowed brightly, still opened to the word processing document he had been keeping records of all his experiments on. His eyes fell to the little clock on the computer.

8:14 am

He started. Had he really been out that long? Had he really fallen asleep right here at his desk? He grabbed the computer mouse and double-checked the time stamp on the document to see when he had last saved the file.

3:26 am

Gaster folded his hands together on his desk. Perhaps he should start attempting to adhere to a more regular sleep cycle. He shook his head.

The night had given him no rejuvenation nor rest. His limbs felt like lead and his head still pounded from the strain of the nightmare.

That was not important. He had work to do.

Gaster lifted himself from his chair and strode to the break room, where he began to fix himself a pot of coffee. As the coffee brewed, he retreated back to his office and unlocked one of the desk drawers that contained his more personal items.

He pulled out a small container of pills that read “RISPERIDONE.” He took two.

By the time he returned to the break room, the coffee was finished and he poured himself a large steaming mug of it. Still as hot as the magma of Hotlands itself, Gaster took a long pull. It was terrible.

But now he was substantially more awake and alert. It was time to get to work.

Filled with purpose, Gaster grabbed various folders and notes from the office and made his way down to the lower levels of his lab, unlocking each door with either a hand or eye reading. The doors would open for him and him alone. He approached the cell where he had thrown Subject B into the night before. It swung open with a wave of Gaster’s hand.

Subject B was already away and jostled to attention at his sudden appearance. He stood awkwardly,
unsure whether to say or do anything.

Gaster spared him the mental output. <<Follow me,>> he ordered.

Subject B complied without resistance.

Gaster led him down the halls to another examination room. He still had a few more exams he needed to complete before the physical tests could be conducted.

First and foremost was a bone extraction. Once again, Gaster was forced to confine Subject B to a chair, strapping him in tightly to ensure he did not move. Subject B, being found in a familiar place, began to panic. His breathing accelerated, practically wheezing between clenched teeth. His bones rattled, fingers digging into the arm rest with enough strength to crack his own bones. Gaster ignored him, instead preoccupying himself with readying the instrument used to take a sample of the bone-

He stopped when he saw Subject B’s eyes.

His right eye was glowing a vibrant shade of orange.

How fascinating.

Gaster continued to pretend to ready the instrument, and Subject B continued to rattle and shake, on the verge of having an anxiety attack, most likely. Gaster set the intimidating looking tool on the tray beside the chair and pulled out another rectangular monitor very similar to the one Gaster had used to measure Subject B’s soul. He held the monitor up to Subject B’s eyes. With a click of a button, the monitor sprang to life and dialed in on Subject B’s magical readings, registering the orange magic radiating from his eye.

The numbers were very, very interesting.

Gaster put the monitor aside for the moment, thinking long and hard.

Subject A had remnants of yellow magic within his soul, but they barely registered in any of his readings. It took very long and exhaustive testing just to find it. But it was apparent Subject B’s secondary magical energy was much more prominent. More potent. It was strong and present enough that Gaster had no doubt that Subject B could utilize orange magic as well as blue.

This was promising.

Subject B, noticing his hesitance, allowed himself to relax the slightest bit. But he remained silent, afraid of saying or doing anything to set off the doctor yet again.

Gaster jotted down some notes. He’d add it on to the list of test to complete.

But for now, the extraction.

He took up the drill, and it sprang to life with an electric whine.

Subject B’s eyes blazed furiously as the sample was taken.

The weeks passed in similar fashion. Start the day with the usual examinations and tests on the constructs, break ever so often in mid-morning to check on the CORE, and then right back to work
with the constructs.

The CORE, thankfully, was behaving. He had spent many years stabilizing its volatile nature, and had finally gotten it to the point where the CORE was mostly self-sustaining. Before he had to resort to constant fire-fighting (sometimes that phrase was used quite literally) and working at a break-neck pace to keep the power source from causing a catastrophic explosion.

There was something very strange about its nature, no doubt due to the effects of the barrier creating an effective closed system. Everything was contained within the Underground. The implications were staggering; some theories he had only given passing thought would not only be plausible, but possible. No energy lost, only converted in an infinite loop.

A long time ago, when he had discovered this revelation, it had been quite an exciting time. But theory and application were two very different things. After . . . a number of horrific failures and one too many close calls, he realized he severely lacked the resources he needed to study the CORE further.

So he decided to focus on something more tangible. Something he was more familiar with.

Creating weapons.

Gods above knew they would need them when the barrier fell.

So far the experiments on the constructs were going as well as Gaster dared to hope. There were . . . complications, and there were times where Subject B tested the limits of his patience, but his second construct was infinitely more obedient than Subject A. If only because he feared the doctor so.

All the better, honestly.

And even after all this time, Subject B would still ask questions. So many goddamn questions.

“What’s this? What’s that? What are you doing? Why are you doing this?”

Aggravating, really.

Gaster checked off the list of experiments to perform. He eventually relented and gave Subject B a cognitive test, if only to sate his own curiosity. It was a standard test, with reading comprehension, arithmetic, basic analysis questions, and general knowledge.

He received back an answer sheet full of meaningless dribble.

Gaster furiously crumpled up the sheet and tossed it.

Well, not that it mattered, anyway. For Subject B’s true purpose, he didn’t need to be smart.

Speaking of which, it was time to start testing Subject B’s magical capability.

Once again Gaster led Subject B down the long cold halls of the lab, going to a room he had not used in quite some time. The room was very large, twenty paces by twenty paces. The floor was divided into several sections with colorfully-painted lines. On the far wall hung several circular targets.

This was a training room.

Gaster gestured to the targets. "A monster is its soul, and a monster’s SOUL is pure magic, to explain it in simplest terms. Magic is simply an extension of oneself, taking the very make-up of
one’s being and creating a magic attack that represents that monster accordingly, like so.>>

Gaster waved his hand, and several bones appeared in mid-air behind him. A flick of his wrist, and the bones shot towards the targets, each one hitting a target dead in the center. Subject B’s jaw dropped.

Hm, so even after all these years, he still had it.

“Is that what you’re going to make me do?” he asked.

<<Correct. I want you to do what I have just done. I want you to summon a bone attack.>>

Subject B nodded, stepping towards the targets. He extended his hand, brows scrunch tight in concentration. He raised his hand, palm facing the targets. Leaning ever so slightly forward, he focused on the targets in front of him. His hand shook slightly as he poured every ounce of his will into summoning his bone attack.

Gaster stood by and watched patiently. This same task took Subject A a full week to accomplish. He’d be here for a while-

Subject B’s hand was glowing.

It was faint, so faint Gaster had almost missed it. But in the stark white room, and illuminated against B’s bleached bones, the tell-tale blue glow of magic was too easy to spot. The glow slowly intensified, and Subject B spotted it too. Encouraged by the progress, he strained harder, focusing, pouring every ounce of energy into the light forming in his hand.

And just inched from his bony fingertips, a shape began to form before him.

*Impossible.*

But there it was. It was weak and flickered in and out of existence but it was there. A bone attack. Gaster could feel his soul swell with anticipation, with excitement, with *pride*.

This was . . . extraordinary. Not even in his most optimistic calculations could he have ever predicted this.

Subject B, with what remaining focus he had, propelled the bone forward through the air. It didn’t even make it halfway across the room before it dissipated, but that hardly mattered to Gaster.

If Subject B could do this, then the possibilities were endless. How strong was his magic? How potent, how precise! Gaster’s head spun just thinking about it.

Subject B, in the meantime, looked rather disappointed. “It didn’t even make it to the target,” he muttered despondently.

Gaster had to hold back a laugh. If only he knew!

<<It seems we have much to do, then,>> Gaster replied. He couldn’t hold back a small grin.

And Subject B took notice.
Gaster was ashamed to admit it, but he took up the role as magic teacher rather enthusiastically. And it was no help that Subject B was just as enthusiastic to learn about magic as he was to teach it. Subject B, despite his abysmal cognitive results, was remarkably quick. He picked up on certain techniques and methods with prodigious speed, and within days was able to summon bone attacks with hardly any effort.

Even blue bone attacks proved no obstacle for him. Although it took him a while to understand their nature (it *does* go against every instinct to let something hit you, after all) Subject B mastered blue bone attacks just as quickly as normal bone attacks. In no time at all, bone attacks were second nature.

Of course, magic attacks were second nature for monsters, but there was always a long developmental period to get there. Subject B seemed too impatient to wait so long to develop his magic.

And then, after his great success with normal attacks, Gaster moved on to blue magic. He once again brought Subject B to the training room, and instructed him to stand at the far end of the room.

Gaster waved his hand, and pinged Subject B’s soul with blue magic. Subject B let out a small cry of shock as it suddenly felt like he weighed a hundred pounds more. He wobbled a bit, almost forced to his knee, but he kept his footing. His soul glowed brilliantly.

<<This is blue magic,>> Gaster said. <<Do you feel it? I have been told it leaves a peculiar chill in one’s soul when they are affected by it.>>

Subject B nodded. “Yeah, almost . . . cold? But not. It’s weird. It’s the same magic you used on me when I was bo-I mean, when I woke up,” he coughed. “Why do I feel so heavy?”

<<A common misconception is that blue magic is telekinesis. In actuality, blue magic distorts a person’s, or object’s, gravity. It’s easy to confuse the two but there is a distinct difference. The reason you feel so heavy right now is that I am using my blue magic to increase your gravity, making you feel much heavier than you really are. It’s useful for encumbering your opponents and keeping them perpetually off-guard.>> He waved his hand, and now Subject B was flown upwards.

Keeping a careful hand on his magic, Gaster eased his grip on B’s soul so that his “fall” to the ceiling was slowed, giving him ample time to reorient himself. Subject B now stood on the ceiling, completely bewildered.

<<And now I have inverted your gravity. Your “down” is my “up.” I can manipulate your gravity across all three dimensional axis, flinging you in any direction I choose.>> He reached out with his magic again, and carefully lowered B to the floor. <<As you can imagine, mastery of this skill can lead to endless possibilities and implementations.>>

“Like finally being able to itch that really annoying spot on your back!” Subject B interjected.


Subject B got into his battle stance. His feet were planted firmly on the ground, his stance wide and low, shoulders square, he reached out with his magic. The familiar blue glow encompassed his skeletal hand and Gaster could feel that magic reaching across the room, searching.

Like ice, the blue magic touched his soul, its tendrils gripping around his very core and piercing deep into his being. He felt the magic, like a chill rattling something deep within him, a feeling he could not describe as suddenly the blue magic took hold. He failed to repress a gasp as he felt a terribly great weight press on him from all sides. His knees buckled ever so slightly as he felt himself grow...
heavier and heavier. Looking down, he saw his soul glowing that familiar blue light.

<<Incredible,>> he breathed.

Subject B relaxed, his grip fading and the blue glow vanishing. “Are you ok?”

This time, Gaster didn’t hold back. He laughed. <<Never better,>> he grinned. <<Now, since you’ve shown such promise, how would you like to learn your special attack?>>

“Special attack?” Subject B parroted, confused.

This was a bit too much too soon, but Gaster was eager to see the limits of his magic. So much potential! What was the harm teaching this technique so soon, if he had already shown mastery of all other attacks so quickly?

Gaster stood straight, and pulled from a very different part of his being. This attack was . . . unique in many ways. Its nature was violence and anger, and summoning the attack required tapping into such strong and violent emotions. Gaster was lacking in none of these, and summoned his special attack.

Behind him, two skulls materialized out of thin air. The skulls were beastly and hellish, their maws ringed with ferocious teeth, their head adorned with wickedly sharp and curved horns. Their eyes had rings of white light, pupils that stared at nothing. They hissed and growled as they floated
behind Gaster, awaiting instruction. Subject B fumbled, startled at their appearance. He took a step backwards.

<<These are weapons of my own design.>> Gaster said, placing a hand on the skull beside him. <<Powerful, organic cannons that fire a beam of pure magic to inflict devastating damage. You have shown excellent control and mastery of all of your other attacks, so it stands to reason summoning these cannons will be just as easy for you. I want you to summon one now.>>

Subject B nodded. “Erm, ok, let me try.”

<<Before you do, there is something you should know about this attack.>> Gaster warned. Subject B paused, listening. <<This attack derives its power from anger and other strong emotions. Fuel your anger and hate into summoning the cannon, and it will appear.>>

Subject B hesitated.

Gaster stood by patiently, although a bit off-put by the subject’s reluctance. What was he waiting for?

“I . . . I don’t know if I can do it, then,” he finally said.

Now it was Gaster’s turn to be confused. <<What do you mean?>>

“If I have to be angry to summon the attack, then I can’t summon it. Because I’m not angry.”

Gaster frowned. <<How are you not angry? How do you not hate, after what I have done to you? Do you not feel injustice for the cruelties I have done to you? Have you forgotten the pain I have so readily inflicted upon you?>>

“No. I remember. But I’m not angry. Just . . . sad.”

The doctor found himself completely at loss for words. He took a moment to read the construct. Was he serious? Or was the simply that delusional? <<And why do you feel sad?>>

Subject B shrugged. “I don’t know. I just do.”

Gaster collected himself. He felt . . . frustrated. <<Very well then.>> He pulled the spectacles off his face, placing them neatly in his coat pocket, then proceeded to shuck the coat from his shoulders. He folded it up, and placed it on the floor.

“What are you doing?” Subject B asked.

<<I am going to see if I can . . . assist you in summoning your special attack.>> Gaster said simply, rolling up the sleeves of his sweater. <<Throwing bones at stationary targets is one thing. But fighting against a real opponent, well, that will be a real challenge. I wish to see how you would fare against a living opponent.>> Gaster rolled his shoulders, and readied himself. <<Subject B, I want you to fight me.>>

“WHAT?!” he cried. “But what if—what if I hurt you?!”

<<I assure you, you are no threat to me. I am a very strong and experienced fighter. You will not hurt me.>> He let a little trickster grin dart across his skull-like visage. <<As a matter of fact, I do not believe you can even land a single hit on me. Consider this your challenge. Prove me wrong.>>

“Um . . . alright.” Subject B replied hesitantly. He took his stance, lifting his hands in front of his
Subject B darted forward. Bones appeared around him and they launched at Gaster. With practiced perfection, Gaster easily dodged each one, moving in a circular pattern around each attack. He ducked under the attacks that were aimed at his head and leaped over the ones that attempted to strike his legs. Subject B sent out waves and waves of bones, their patterns predictable and easily read. Gaster swerved and danced around those with grace, his feet never stopping, circling and pacing across the room. In an impressive feat, Subject B intermixed blue and regular attacks, which Gaster avoided in kind. Ducking and dodging, and standing perfectly still for when the blue bone attacks passed through him like a cold mist.

He grinned.

It had been far too long.

He missed this.

The years of training, all those hours spent perfecting his fighting style, it all came flooding back to him in a rush. His feet knew what to do without his mind telling them, his movements ones he had practiced a thousand times. He didn’t so much dodge as dance across the room, his movements fluid and strong. His hands always remained at eye-level, ready to block any attacks with his own bone attacks.

Subject B was putting forth an impressive effort, but he lacked any sort of method or form. His attacks were random but clearly telegraphed. Gaster knew what he was doing before a bone attack was even launched at him. He could see Subject B’s tells, the way he transferred his weight from foot to arm as he threw his attacks at him. He could even tell when B would use blue attacks or normal attacks.

And Subject B had yet to even use his blue magic. Well, that power was still relatively new, Gaster wouldn’t expect Subject B to use it in a sparring battle so quickly.

But now it was his turn. Gaster dropped to his knees and performed a spin kick, a wave of bones forming from his feet and shot towards Subject B. Subject B stumbled backwards, but couldn’t act fast enough as the bones hit his feet, tripping him and sending him to the floor.

Gaster stood over him. <<Come now>>, he said, almost taunting. <<Are you going to give up so easily?>>

Subject B grinned, hopping back to his feet. He flung his arm out, three bones launching themselves directly at Gaster. He barely had time to flinch out of the way as they whistled right past him.

Cheeky bastard, he almost got hit.

Gaster got into his offensive stance, hands at eye level, ready to strike. Feet planted firmly and wide, yet keeping the weight on his toes, ready to move.

Subject B mimicked his stance.

Gaster was impressed. Already Subject B was learning, perhaps without him even realizing it. He copied Gaster’s own moves, his own stance and style to improve his own attacks.

The results were indisputable.

With every attack Subject B grew more confident, more controlled. His attacks were not so
sporadic, although he did like to throw in an occasional sneaky attack here and there. Gaster found himself defending more often than attacking, which was an impressive feat in itself. Subject B kept on attacking, growing more confident, his attacks stronger and more ferocious.

Gaster couldn’t help but feel a note of . . . pride.

Through their sparring, Gaster could see glimmers of orange magic sparking in Subject B’s eyes. That determined look . . . that fighting spirit . . .

It was all so familiar.

And Gaster couldn’t help but be reminded of a dear friend. Of a time long ago, a time before violence and war, a time where they were all back on the surface and free. A time where he could waste the days away with a friend.

Grillby.

Gods, how long has it been?

He remembered the summers. The hot sun beating down on them, the fresh grass beneath his feet. Feeling the wind rush about him as he fought and sparred with his best friend. Grillby had used an old stick but Gaster preferred his own bones as his sparring weapon.

They would pretend to be knights and heroes from old tales, years before they were forced to become soldiers themselves. Gods, they’d spend hours fighting. Playing. Not a care in the world . . .

Gaster continued his assault on Subject B, launching his own series of attacks. A wave of bones here, a dashing of bones there. Subject B dodged them all. He was quick. Light on his feet.

He remembered Grillby’s wicked grin and the impressive fire magic he possessed. His flames burned nothing he did not wish, and not a spark ignited around them that Grillby did not command. Gaster had always been so impressed by his insane control . . .

Subject B summoned a bone in each hand, choosing to engage in melee combat. He struck down hard, and Gaster parried with a bone attack of his own. This was quite alright with him. Gaster always liked melee fighting.

Gaster would rain down bone attack after bone attack on Grillby, and Grillby would hold firm, slinging fire balls to deflect and counter every single bone Gaster had summoned. The two were such an even match, an unstoppable force when they worked in tandem.

Subject B and Gaster clashed, bones cracking against bones as they sparred.

Gaster remembered.

He remembered Grillby. He remembered the good times they had-
RED.

Everything was red.

Blood soaked the air and sky.

RED.

He was red. Covered in blood. The blood of his enemies. His own blood.

Grillby lurched towards him, bloody tears streaming from his eyes, blood streaming from his mouth. Gods, it was everywhere.

He reached for him, hand bloodied and raw. He gasped, he wheezed, blood spluttering from his mouth. He was choking, choking on his own blood.

He begged he pleaded.

HELP ME.

EVERYTHING WAS RED-
CRACK!!!!

Gaster was flung backwards, a sharp blow hitting him square in the face. He lurched backwards, a spider web of white-hot pain shooting all across his skull. He fell to his knee.

A hand instinctively ran to his face, feeling the fresh mark the blow had landed on him. Right between his eyes. The fresh wound burned. Like fire.

Gaster felt his eyes blaze to life.

IDIOT

His body shook, every bone trembled with uncontained fury.

IDIOT IDIOT IDIOT

Subject B stood not far off, stunned. His jaw hung open, daring to believe his eyes. “I... I did it!” he exclaimed. He bounced about giddily. “I did it! I really did it!”

YOU PATHETIC FAILURE. YOU ALLOWED YOURSELF TO BE BEATEN BY A CHILD.

A FUCKING CHILD, JUST HOW PATHETIC ARE YOU?

Gaster wheezed between grinding teeth. The floor reflected the burning blue light of his eyes.

“You didn’t think I could do it but I did! I did good, didn’t I?” Subject B continued, completely blinded by his own achievement. He failed to notice the magic sparking from Gaster’s entire body.

HOW COULD YOU BE SO WEAK?

HOW FAR YOU HAVE FALLEN. HOW CAN YOU EXPECT TO SUCCEED AT ANYTHING?

Rage, rage, rage. All he felt was uncontrollable RAGE.

Gaster lifted himself to his feet. The blue magic completely enveloped him. Like flames.

Subject B stopped dead. A cold chill of utter dread crept up his spine.

He knew that look in the doctor’s eye. He knew that anger. He knew that fury.

And he felt very, very afraid.

Gaster closed in on him, the magic surrounding him cracking and sparking like wildfire. Three cannons appeared behind him, hissing, snarling, gnashing their teeth. They fed off their master’s fury, they grew restless and anxious, ready to unleash all their power on anything. Blue energy welled within their jaws, the excess seeping between fangs in a blue mist.

Gaster closed in on Subject B.

The voices in his head growing louder, more furious.
HOW DARE HE

HOW DARE HE!!

PUNISH HIM

PUNISH!

MAKE HIM SUFFER!

MAKE HIM FEEL PAIN. LET HIM KNOW PAIN!!

Subject B scurried backwards, as far away as he could. Gaster did not slow. He looked for a way out, anything-!

But the only exit was directly behind Gaster. Behind the cannons. He was trapped.

He felt his back slam against a wall.

Nowhere to run.

Nowhere to hide.

The cannons’ jaws widened, the whine of magic building behind those terrible fangs.

MAKE HIM SUFFER. MAKE HIM BEG FOR DEATH!

NO.

Gaster raised his hand, the blue magic reaching to Subject B’s soul and strangling him. Subject B gasped. It felt like a mountain was crushing him! He hit the ground hard, his knees cracking against the tiled floor. The blue magic pulled him down. He felt so heavy. He tried to keep himself upright, his hands straining to fight back the impossible weight bearing down on him. His elbows rattled.

It was so heavy . . .

The cannons closed in.

THIS IS NOT HIS FAULT.

The cannons hesitated.

The weight . . . grew just a fraction lighter. Subject B’s elbows weren’t shaking so hard.

YOU CHALLENGED HIM, HE COMPLIED. HE IS NOT TO BLAME.

Inside the mind of Gaster, two sides were at war with each other. One, unbridled fury and rage. The other, calculating and cold. They raged against each other, pulling and tearing him apart. The voices were deafening.

UNFORGIVEABLE!

HE IS NOT TO BLAME.

KILL HIM! MAKE HIM SUFFER!
THIS IS NOT HIS FAULT.
YOU WERE DISTRACTED.
SHUT UP!
HE ONLY DID WHAT YOU ORDERED HIM TO DO.
STOP IT STOP IT SHUT UP SHUT UP
KILL HIM!!!
IT IS NOT HIS FAULT.
YES IT IS. KILL HIM!!! SLAUGHTER HIM!!!!
DO NOT BLAME HIM FOR YOUR INCOMPETENCE!


STOP THIS INSANITY.

IDIOT.

HE IS INNOCENT. YOU ARE UNHINGED.

FOOL.

Gaster closed his eyes.

REMEMBER WHERE YOU ARE. REMEMBER.

Gaster felt his hand drop to his side. The magic that surrounded him disappeared. The cannons vanished as swiftly as they came. The blue magic released itself of Subject B’s soul.

WHAT DID YOU ALMOST DO?

Gaster took a shaking breath. His hand covered his eyes. He shook in place, shoulders heaving in what anyone could have mistaken for silent sobbing.

But Dr. Gaster does not cry.

He forced several long breaths. He forced himself to regain his composure. He focused on the here and now. He focused on the tile beneath his feet, the cool sterile air of the lab. The cold whites and greys of the labs, the sounds of distant machines whirring.

He opened his eyes, and saw Subject B pathetically curled up into a ball in front of him, backed as far away as he could manage, pressing himself into the wall as if he were trying to phase through it. His eyes were wide and terrified. Orange magic sparked from his sockets.

Gaster felt . . . a deep sense of regret.

WHAT DID YOU ALMOST DO?

<<I . . . I apologize . . . >> Gaster whispered. <<I was distracted. You landed a perfectly good
blow. You did nothing wrong.>> Another deep breath. Subject B allowed himself to relax the slightest bit. The mad orange flickering in his eye had stabilized to a steady stream of light. <<There was no excuse for me to act so violently. I’m sorry.>>

Gaster’s gaze landed just above Subject B’s head.

<<Besides,>> he added with a gentle smile. <<I’d say our little experiment was a success.>>

Subject B followed Gaster’s gaze.

Above him, suspended in the air, was a skull-like cannon.

_His_ cannon.

He did it.

... 

So why did he feel such despair?

---

Gaster had ended lessons early that day and retreated to his office.

He needed to take notes. Record everything he had seen and what had happened.

The progress he made with Subject B was impressive.

... .

Gaster made no move for a pen or notebook. He did not boot up his computer and begin to type.

He sat there, still a bundle of fried nerves. His head buzzed. Ached. Everything ached.

He massaged his eye ridge. The spot where Subject B hit him still smarted. He sure wasn’t expecting to get hit.

But neither did he expect to have a Vision in the middle of goddamn combat.

He shook his head. That wasn’t a Vision. He should know better. The whole matter was laughable.

Really. Grillby, _bleeding_. He should be howling with laughter, laughing so hard tears stung his eyes.

Grillby did not _bleed_.

... 

He wasn’t laughing.

The whole experience shook him to his core. The Vision—the image—still burned in his mind. Grillby standing before him, bleeding and choking on his own blood. On the brink of death as he begged for help.

It wasn’t real. _It wasn’t real._
Grillby had emerged from the war alive. Not without his share of injuries, but Elementals could heal easily. Wounds healed. Scars didn’t last.

Gaster unconsciously rose a hand to the crack under his left eye.

Grillby was in Snowdin, running his very popular and very successful restaurant. He was fine.

*He was fine.*

...  

Gaster stood.

Gods damn it all, the feeling of dread and fear wasn’t going to leave him anytime soon. Better just check on him so his mind would be quiet for once.

Gaster centered himself. He focused.

The hour was late. If he recalled correctly, Grillby would be closing up shop right about now.

Gaster focused his magic and he *blinked.*

.

..  

...

..

.

The sharp wintery air of Snowdin greeted him like a slap to the face.

He exhaled sharply, his breath puffing in a cloud before him.

The lab was kept cool but it was nothing like the sharp piercing chill of the winter landscape.

He stood in the center of town, just a block away from Grillby’s. Stuffing his hands deep into his coat pocket, he strode down the empty streets. The streetlights illuminated the snow in a pale glow, flakes flitting softly in the air. It was quiet. Peaceful.

Gaster could see why Grillby would take to this place so much.

As he rounded the corner, he saw the neon glow of Grillby’s blinking on and off, on and off. As steady as a clock’s hand. And there was the man himself. A man made of fire, clad in a tan coat and a crimson scarf slung around his neck, he busied himself with locking up the restaurant as he prepared to head home for the evening.

Gaster allowed a breath of relief.

He knew Grillby was fine. He knew his oldest and dearest friend was in absolutely no danger. But seeing him in the flesh (so to speak) put his mind at ease.

He watched him for a bit. A guilty hand closed around his non-existent gut. God, when was the last time he had seen him? It had to have been months.
A part of him wanted to race towards him, greet him and waste the night away like good friends do. But he restrained himself.

Now was not the time to get so sentimental. He had done what he had came here to do. He needed to head back.

But he didn’t move.

If he didn’t get going now, Grillby would be sure to spot him and he’d probably force the doctor to come home with him and share gossip over some drinks.

He liked that idea.

Gaster stepped forward, and Grillby turned. Immediately the elemental’s face split into the biggest grin Gaster had ever seen.

A feeling of nostalgia flooded him. He couldn’t help but smile in kind.

“Do mine eyes deceive me?” Grillby called out mockingly. “Does the Great Dr. Wing Dings Gaster dare to grace me with his magnificent presence?”

<<Hello, Grillby,>> he called back. The friends approached and embraced. Grillby gave him a solid few pats on the back, the flames on his head crackling with warmth.

“Good lord, it’s been ages,” Grillby breathed. “How have you been? Here I was thinking you’ve fallen off the face of the earth!”

<<As you can imagine, being the Royal Scientist is quite a demanding job,>> Gaster replied. He couldn’t stop smiling.

“Well, come on then. I’m sure I’ve gotten an unopened bottle of Scotch we can talk over,” Grillby said, slapping him over the shoulder. “And then you can tell me all about it, you reclusive shut-in. I’m sorry, but I think you have gotten even paler since I last saw you. You need to get out and get some sun.”

<<Grillby, there is no sun down here,>> he smirked.

“Fine. You need to get out and get some glowing stone-crystal,” Grillby waved.

They walked back to Grillby’s home in relative silence, mostly just the two of them enjoying each other’s company. There was not much to be said, and they understood some things did not need to be said. They didn’t prattle in small talk. Gaster didn’t waste breath on asking how the bar was doing, since he full well knew what answer that was. And Grillby didn’t waste breath on pointless filler questions about the lab.

They waited until they were situated within the warm walls of Grillby’s house, both of them peeling off their snow-covered shoes and coats and seating themselves in the kitchen. Being a proud and distinguished chef, the kitchen was top-notch. Everything was a perfect stainless steel, polished to a shine, every appliance and utensil the latest model and kept in perfect order. Pots and pans hung neatly off racks, a collection of spoons and ladles hung beside them, the whole kitchen was incredible.

Gaster chuckled to himself. A far cry from the controlled chaotic of his own office, to be sure. And he was supposed to be the organized one.
Grillby poured the both of themselves some of the special Scotch he had salvaged from the dumpster. They toasted, and Gaster took a pull from the amber fluid. Grillby always knew how to find the best drinks. He let the liquid sit in his mouth for a moment, savoring the flavor, before he swallowed.

“So, what brings you by?” Grillby asked. “I . . . haven’t seen you in a while.”

<<I wanted to say hello to a friend,>> Gaster responded simply. <<And I know it’s been a while. The work I am doing is . . . delicate, to say the least.>>

Grillby hesitated, pouring himself more Scotch. “Gaster, it’s been over a year since I last saw you.”

<<A year?!>> The glass almost slipped out of his hand. Gods above, had it really been that long?!

“Yes,” Grillby said with a tired smile. “Although I guess if you’ve been around for as long as we have, time can get by you pretty quickly.”

Gaster shook his head. <<A year. Lord, Grillby, if you think I was intentionally avoiding you, I can assure you that is not the case.>>

Grillby laughed. It lacked genuine humor. “I wasn’t going to accuse you of such, no. It’s as you said, you’re a busy monster. Getting up into who knows what in that lab of yours.” He seated himself on a chair at the kitchen table. His gaze fell to Gaster’s hands. Gaster suddenly felt very self-conscious about them and tried to intertwine his fingers over the large holes in his hands.

“A ‘lab accident’?” Grillby asked. So much for not accusing him of anything.

Gaster sighed. He knew this would come up. He seated himself directly across from Grillby. <<I’m working on a theory. On constructing a means to break the barrier. I’m close, Grillby, I’m so damn close. If this works, if I’m right, I am going to get us all out of here.>>

Grillby looked very tired all the sudden. “Do you really expect me to believe punching holes in your hands is going to lead to our freedom?”

<<It’s more complicated than that.>> Gaster said.

Of course it is,” Grillby said, throwing up his hands. “Gods above, just what the hell are you doing down there, anyway?! I don’t see you in a year and when I do your hands are fucked up and you appear out of nowhere like a creepy stalker! So why, Gaster, answer me this, why did you show up today, of all days? Why today?”

Gaster opened his mouth to say something, but there was a hesitance in his voice. A twitch in his eyes, a certain look he could not repress, and Grillby knew. He let out a breath.

“Oh god. It was a Vision, wasn’t it?” he asked softly. It was a rhetorical question.

<<It wasn’t a Vision,>> he grumbled. He massaged his eyes. <<It’s beyond stupid. I was back in . . . you were in battle. You were bleeding for cripes’ sake. Bleeding! It’s ridiculous!>>

Grillby didn’t smile. “Gaster, this is serious. And it sounds like it shook you pretty bad. Do . . . do you need to talk with someone?”

<<I’m fine.>>

“You’re here. You clearly aren’t.” Grillby said firmly. “Look, please, as a friend, I have to ask
you. Are you alright?"

Gaster inhaled deeply, nodding. "Do not worry, old friend. I am alright. It was . . . disturbing. But it passed. I am alright now. And, he added before Grillby could say anything further. "I have seen someone. We meet every few months."

“That’s good,” Grillby nodded. He winked, a sly grin creeping across his face. “Lord knows you could use a good woman in your life.”

"Grillby."

“Man? Hey, I don’t judge.”

"Stop."

Grillby laughed, really laughed. And Gaster smiled, too. He couldn’t help it. It was infectious.

Grillby reached across the table, placing a hand on Gaster’s arm. “Look, whatever you are doing in that lab, I trust you. But I don’t want to see you get hurt.” His gaze dropped. Gaster nodded solemnly in knowing. “Every single monster in the Underground believes in you. They all know you’re doing your damnest. I just don’t want to see you lose yourself to this, ok?”

"I will be alright, don’t worry." Gaster assured with a smile. "And I’m not going to fail. If it’s the last thing I do, I’m going to set us all free."

Grillby didn’t smile back. “You know that burden isn’t yours alone to bear. We’re all in this together, and we’re gonna get out together, you hear me?”
<<I was the one that failed monsterkind in the first place>>

“Don’t say that.”

<<and I refuse to fail them again>> Gaster finished.

“It is not your fault.”

<<And what if it’s not? It doesn’t change anything.>>

“Maybe you’d stop beating yourself half to death every goddamn day over it,” Grillby snarled. “Lord knows you’re not helping monsterkind carrying around that mountain of guilt.”

<<It can be fantastic motivation.>>

“If it doesn’t kill you first.”

<<I will be ok.>>

“Says the monster with vivid flashbacks and holes in his hands,” Grillby muttered. Gaster’s gaze hardened. “And don’t say I don’t understand. I goddamn do, I was there, just like you. I get them too. And they . . . they can get pretty bad.”

Gaster looked away. <<I know.>>

“And I know you know. Which is why I’m so damn worried about you. Hardly anyone ever sees you anymore. I can’t help but fear the worst.”

<<Let me put those fears at rest.>> Gaster said. <<The work I do is demanding, and hard, and challenging. And sometimes I want to bash my skull in. But I assure you, it is not dangerous.>>

Grillby did not look assured, but thankfully remained quiet.

Gaster looked back down at the Scotch in his hands. <<I never fancied myself as a monster who took to liquor, but I actually like this drink. Maybe I should stop by again. Have some more. Who knows, maybe I’ll come over when the bar is actually open.>>

That got Grillby’s attention. His smile radiated relief and warmth.

“Thank you. It means a lot to me.”

<<Least I can do for an old friend.>> Gaster stood. <<It is getting rather late, and I am afraid I should retire for the night if I wish to get any proper work done tomorrow. You should get some rest too.>>

Grillby nodded. “Yeah. I suppose we should.” He escorted Gaster out, but paused just on the threshold of the door. “Wing Dings?”

He turned. <<Yes?>> It had been . . . some time since anyone actually addressed him by his first name.

“Do you still keep your uniform?”

Gaster nodded. <<I look at it every day before I sleep.>> he replied quietly.

“Yeah,” Grillby nodded. “Me too.”
The Hand of Death

Chapter Summary

The war against monsters and humans was far more brutal than you could have ever imagined . . .

In the confines of Gaster’s office, the doctor rummaged through his desk, pulling out a small red notebook from a hidden compartment in the topmost drawer. His fingers gently glided over the worn leather cover, leafing through the aged paper.

He had been advised that recording his thoughts down on something tangible and visible would help
lessen the stress and grief he felt even after all these years. Perhaps recording his emotions on paper would allow him to better understand himself, and in turn, help him cope.

He had used up over half the pages, his penmanship and strange language completely unreadable to anyone else but him.

Gaster picked up the pen, and began to write.

He wrote about the war, about his memories, his experiences.

It all came back to him, memories of so long ago, still clear and sharp as glass, cutting deeper . . .

. . .
. .
. .
. .
. .
. .
. .

THE WAR OF MONSTERS AND HUMANS

DAY 162

Twenty human soldiers huddled around a small campfire, studying the weathered map before them. Their leader, a tall and intimidating man clad in silver armor, pointed to a landmark circled in red ink.

“We are approximately five miles from the monster encampment,” he stated in a commanding tone. “This is where the Eastern army has set up base. The plan is to strike at night, when everyone is asleep. I will state this clearly and plainly so there are absolutely no misunderstandings. Our objective is not to kill as many monsters as possible. We have one target, and one target only.”

He paused, letting his words sink in. “We are here to kill the most feared monster in the entire army. We are here to killing the fire General.”


He nodded. That was the codename the human army had given the raging elemental beast. Not only was the fire monster an incredibly devastating warrior, but he also proved to be a master tactician. When the Firestorm General was in combat, he never lost.

Their king had deemed it an upmost priority that this General be killed.

So here they were, twenty of the best soldiers humanity had to offer. Each trained in stealth and in taking down monsters as quickly and as quietly as they could. This mission was too important to muddle.

“Kill as many monsters as you want, but our objective is the General,” the leader restated. “And if you can help it, find that walking corpse and kill him too,” he added with a venomous spit.

<<I can’t help but take offense to that statement.>>

The men jumped, twisting around. Behind them stood a towering figure. Pale, with dark eye sockets and a face that all too closely resembled a terrible skull. He sneered, arms crossed over his
“It’s Death’s Hand!” a soldier cried out. They raced to their feet, pulling out their weapons and crying out in rage as they charged.

Gaster’s eyes narrowed. The light in his eyes glowed blue.

A wave of his hands, and a shower of bones descended upon the assassins. Those who lacked helmets were instantly impaled, keeling over dead. Those a bit quicker to react raised their shields and warded off the bone attack. Gaster simply countered with another wave, bones shooting from the ground and striking the off-guard soldiers in the chest or stomach.

From the initial attack alone, fourteen were killed.

Six remained.

They charged, bellowing their battle cries, swords and shields raised over head.

Gaster rose his hands before his face, swiping and swinging and spinning around the wild and furious attacks. He struck quickly and precisely, a bone striking another soldier in the neck. He collapsed to his knees, blood pooling in his mouth as he choked on his own blood.

Five left.

Gaster spun, ducking underneath a wild sword swing. He kicked out with his feet, and the soldier stumbled backwards. Gaster raised his hand, and bones shot up from the ground. The soldier’s armor provided no protection from the barrage and he was struck down.

Four.

Three men stood before them, brandishing their weapons. Fury and focus glinted in their eyes, no thought given to their fallen comrades who scattered the earth around them. Gaster reached out to their souls with his magic-

Wait, where was-

A cry sounded out behind him. Gaster had no time to react as a sword was driven straight through his side. He gasped, seeing the tip of the sword protrude from his chest.

The soldiers around him grinned wickedly. Triumphant.

Gaster, however, was not impressed.

He turned. He glared at the soldier behind him.

The soldier’s face grew slack, then horrified.

<<You missed,>> Gaster said simply. A single bone through the skull, and he fell.

Gaster grabbed the sword out of the human’s hand and ripped it out of him. The three remaining soldiers gasped.

<<I think this has gone on long enough,>> Gaster said icily. He reached with his blue magic. The soldiers flung upwards, hovering for a moment high in the sky, struggling madly within Gaster’s magic grip.
Gaster clenched his fist, and the soldiers fell.

Their bodies cracked sickeningly against the hard earth.

For good measure, Gaster took the sword he had been impaled with and stabbed each of the fallen humans through the chest. Those who had not been killed by the initial attack were now thoroughly deceased.

Gaster stood, alone and victorious among the assassins.

He felt . . . empty.

Gaster approached the commander, rummaging through his knapsack for any information or orders. He found a few scrolls of paper, but it contained no information that monsters weren’t already informed of.

He sighed and hefted the sword over his shoulder. Killing humans was so messy. Blood stained his uniform. His newly-ripped and tattered uniform, that is. Gaster pressed a hand against the rip. The sword had pierced right between a pair of ribs. One inch higher, one inch lower, and he would have been seriously hurt.

One of the perks of being a skeleton, he supposed.

Gaster walked back to camp.

Gaster strode tall and strong through the monster camp. Small shabby tents were pitched in a messy grid, monsters of all shapes and sizes hurrying to and fro, some polishing armor, some sharpening weapons, other still moving around food and supplies. Gaster paid no mind to the busy hive of an army and simply strode past it all, making his way to the very back of the camp where a much larger and more decorative tent was staked. Unlike the uniform browns and greys of the foot soldiers, this tent was painted in reds, golds and purples, with the flag of the monster emblem waving proudly besides it.

Gaster ducked inside, ready to give his report.

<<General Grillby, I have returned from->>

He stopped dead. Inside the tent was a small gathering of monsters, all looking very formal and bureaucratic. Gaster didn’t recognize any of them. They were gathered around a table talking in low voices, but the voices were silenced upon his entry. Behind the gathering of monsters, Gaster spotted Grillby’s flames. Grillby peeked between the bureaucrats and gave him a small smile in greeting.

The other monsters did not share his warm welcome.

One monster, a large frog-like creature clad in crimson robes, sneered at him.

“What do you want?” he snapped. “Can’t you see that we are in the middle of something very important?!”

Gaster stuttered. <<I—I apologize, sir, I was unaware the General would be having company->>

“Then remove your presence from this place!” another monster piped up, this one a humanoid creature with red skins and a crown of horns. “You are not welcome here!”
“That is quite enough,” Grillby interjected sharply. Flames crackled angrily around him. The monsters around him cowered slightly. “Captain Gaster here is my friend and he will not be treated as such. Is that understood?”

The monsters nodded meekly. Grillby sighed.

“I was not expecting you to return so soon,” Grillby addressed Gaster. “Please, can you give us a few moments?”

Gaster saluted. <<Yes, sir. I apologize again for the disturbance.>> He slipped out of the tent, but not before he overheard someone mutter “Human filth” under their breath.

Gaster glowered as he waited outside. But he had been called worse by better people. Letting such petty insults get to him was beneath him. So he waited. The voices were too low and secretive for any eavesdropping, not that Gaster cared. Getting involved with politicians and their business was something Gaster tried to avoid.

The voices were angry, he could tell that much, but over what was left to the imagination. In time the monsters filed out, all looking angry and frustrated. None looked his way.

Gaster went back inside the tent. Grillby stood at the head of the table where maps and messages and notes littered its surface. Stratagems and marks pocketed the war map, and Grillby glared down hard on the parchment. A hand rose to massage his eyes.

<<Is . . . is this a bad time?>> Gaster asked timidly.

“No no no,” Grillby waved. He sat down, practically throwing his weight into the chair. His golden armor clanked loudly as he situated himself. His eyes never left the map. “Poor timing, is all. I wasn’t expecting the Council to be here today.”

Gaster’s eyes widened. <<That was the Royal Council?!>> Grillby nodded. <<What did they want?>>

At this, Grillby folded his hands in front of him, his elbows resting on the table. “Before that, please, take a seat, tell me how your mission went.”

<<Sir?>>

“For the gods’ sake, please do away with the formalities,” Grillby sighed tiredly. “I don’t give a shit if I outrank you. I am speaking to you as your friend, not your commander.”

Gaster seated himself. His own skeletal hands folded together, wringing together anxiously. <<Alright, my friend.>> He cleared his throat. <<Our scouts were correct; a party was heading in our direction in an attempt to assassinate you. Twenty soldiers, all heavily armed and well-trained. I intercepted them.>>

Grillby cocked an eyebrow. “And?”

<<They’ve been taken care of.>>

Grillby allowed a small smile. “I warned you to bring back-up.”

<<They honestly were no match for me.>> Gaster said with a soft grin. <<And I am doubtful they could have lasted half as long against you.>>
“In any case, well done,” Grillby congratulated. “What does that bring your kill count up to now?”

<<I don’t keep score,>> Gaster said lowly, eye sockets growing dark. <<I don’t take pleasure in killing humans or tallying them up like this war was some sick game.>>

Grillby paused, taken aback by Gaster’s sudden hostility, but nodded. “I understand. I apologize if I offended you.”

Gaster waved. <<It’s alright.>> he dismissed. The light of his pupil returned to his eyes. <<Now, what did the Royal Council want with you?>>

Grillby grew very serious and sullen. His hands folded before him, almost prayer-like, and he slowly closed his eyes. “The entire Western front has been wiped out. There are no survivors.”

Gaster’s jaw dropped. An icy hand gripped at his soul, dragging it to the very core of the earth. <<What?!>>

“Everyone. Gone. Every single goddamn monster out there was killed. Scouts came back. Nothing but a sea of goddamn dust.” Grillby pounded a fist on the table, angry sparks shooting from his hands.

Gaster fell back against his chair. <<That . . . that’s insane. There were->>

“Two thousand, three hundred monsters in that unit, yes,” Grillby finished coldly. “All of them. Dead.”

Gaster could scarcely believe his ears. The Western front was their strongest unit. The best and bravest soldiers in the monster kingdom had been on that line.

To think they were all gone . . . all reduced to dust . . .

It was unthinkable.

The magnitude of this loss was insurmountable. Not only had they lost an entire front, not only had they lost so many of their best soldiers, but now their numbers had been horribly dwindled. They had been barely managing with the forces they had. And now . . .

How could they ever hope to face humanity after such a catastrophe?

<<What do we do now?>> Gaster finally spoke. His words were faint. He could feel his hands shake. By the gods, his entire body rattled with the devastating news.

“That’s what we were discussing,” Grillby said. His voice took on his usual commanding tone, softly spoken but with a power behind it that demanded respect. “As you may have guessed, we need to replace the front as quickly as possible, if only to prevent the humans from taking our entire western lands without resistance. We can’t afford to be backed into a corner any further than we are now. We need a new General to take up the mantle of the fallen.” He paused, his fiery eyes finally landing on Gaster. “And that monster is you.”

<<Me?!>> Gaster started. <<General? Grillby, are you certain? I do not think->>

“You are one of our most respected fighters, with plenty of experience under your belt and a brilliant mind to back it up,” Grillby commentated. “You just came back from a mission, killing twenty humans single-handedly with barely a mark to show for it.”
Gaster cleared his throat loudly, toying at his ripped uniform. "Humans always go for the chest. Hard to receive damage when I have barely a body to speak of."

"Oh." Grillby noticed the tear. "Well . . . in any case." He rummaged together some papers. "Gaster, it is no secret you are one of our fiercest and bravest warriors. Monsterkind respects you, humans fear you. There is hardly anyone more qualified for the position of general than you. And besides," Grillby added with a wispy smile. "I think General Gaster sounds much better than Captain, don’t you think?"

Gaster was beside himself with disbelief. Did they really have that much faith in him? "I am honored, truly." Gaster said sincerely. "It will be a . . . monumental challenge, but if the Council thinks it to be the best, well, I will trust their decision."

"They did not make this decision lightly," Grillby assured. "They were quite impressed with your unique magic."

At this, Gaster grew guarded. "My ‘unique’ magic?"

Grillby shuffled the papers again. "They think your . . . particular skills can turn the battle in our favor."

Gaster let out a roar of frustration. "Damn the Ancients! Grillby, for all that is sacred, please do not tell me you told the Council, of all monsters-!!!"

"I said nothing!" Grillby said defensively, but Gaster interrupted him.

"How could you be so foolish?!? To wager the fate of this entire war on . . . on me?!" Gaster jumped from his seat, pacing back and forth, writhing his hands in anger. "You of all people should know my Visions don’t work like that!!!"

"I never once mentioned your Visions to the Council!" Grillby protested. "They already knew of it! From whom, I do not know, but—"

"But nothing, Grillby!" Gaster said. "If they are making me General for the sole purpose of hoping I can whip some miracle out of nothing, then I must politely decline!"

"Would you sit down and let me finish?" Grillby said. Gaster, still brimming with anger, reluctantly returned to his chair. His eyes blazed with blue light. "As I was saying, the Council already knew of your . . . your Visions. They came to me practically demanding for one. I of course told them, no, you can’t just whip up Visions on demand. But they were very persistent, and got angry with me when I refused to give them the answer they wanted."

Gaster sunk his face into his hands. "They’re waging the fate of every monster on a damned gambit . . . are we really this far gone?" he muttered.

"You must understand what this means. They are getting desperate. They’re looking for anything. Any bit of magic or any ounce of leverage they can find, and they’ll cling to it for dear life. To be frank, I’m surprised they didn’t come for you sooner." Grillby paused, his expression growing concerned. "If it’s not too much to ask . . . when was the last time you had a Vision?"

Gaster sighed, closing his eyes. For as long as he could remember, he had dreams that weren’t quite dreams. Intense episodes where he SAW things, felt things, knew things with such steadfast certainty. But the Visions came as they pleased. They came without warning or notice, happened at any time, and were as cryptic as they were random. Yet he staunchly recorded every episode, every minute detail in hopes of finding some sort of pattern or connection. Some way to control it.
He had no luck thus far.

From memory, he recited his last vision. <<My last Vision was approximately six months ago, before the war began. It occurred at evening, during my dinner. It lasted approximately twenty seconds>>

“Gaster.”

<<Sorry, sorry. Old habit. Ahem, well, the Vision was the flag of monsters burning in an empty field. A sword appeared briefly behind it.>>

Grillby nodded. Of course, he knew of this Vision. They hadn’t known it at the time, but it would be their omen for the great and terrible war that was to come.

“And nothing since?”

Gaster spread his hands apologetically. <<I am afraid not.>>

“You don’t need to apologize. Like you said, they cannot be controlled. I can’t say that it wouldn’t be nice if you could. Give us some sort of foresight in what to do in this damn war.”

<<No one wishes for that more than I do,>> Gaster said bitterly.

“In any matter, the offer still stands,” Grillby said, returning to business. “I firmly believe that you are an excellent fighter, a brilliant strategist, and more than qualified to fill the position. Will you consider the offer? Will you take up the mantle of General?”

Gaster thought for a moment. His eyes hardened as he felt a burning fire course through his proverbial veins.

The fire of determination.

<<General Grillby, consider it my greatest honor,>> he proclaimed.

“Then allow me to be the first to congratulate you,” Grillby said, shaking his hand. “General Gaster.”

Grillby was right. General sounded a whole lot better than Captain.

There was a brief ceremony to commemorate Gaster’s promotion. Even the king himself, King Asgore Dreemurr, made a special appearance. And behind him were the Council, the same five monsters Gaster had run into at Grillby’s tent. They still glared at him with contempt and . . . frustration?

Grillby himself had been the one to present the golden monster emblem, signifying his rank as General. Grillby pinned it to his chest, right over his heart would have been if he were human.

Grillby gave him a reassuring smile as he prepared the oath. “Sir Wing Dings Gaster, on this day, we commemorate your skill, your integrity, your honor, and your unwavering duty and loyalty to monsterkind. Today, you will be promoted to the position of General. Now, please repeat the oath after me. I, Captain Wing Dings Gaster.”

<<I, Captain Wing Dings Gaster,>> he repeated. His soul swelled with pride.
“Do solemnly swear, on my honor as General.”

<<Do solemnly swear, on my honor as General.>>

“That I shall uphold the laws of monsterkind.”

<<That I shall uphold the laws of monsterkind.>>

“I will protect the weak, and defend against any enemies. I will be a symbol of hope and determination.”

<<I will protect the weak, and defend against any enemies. I will be a symbol of hope and determination.>>

“I will stand strong and true against the face of adversity. I will be the hand of our king, Asgore Dreemurr, and protect our land and our people with all my soul.”

<<I will stand strong and true against the face of adversity. I will be the hand of our king, Asgore Dreemurr, and protect our land and our people with all my soul.>>

“To this I swear, before the gods above and before all here who witness me today.”

Gaster took a breath, his gaze flickering over the crowds. All eyes on him, eyes full of hope.

<<To this I swear! Before the gods above and all here who witness me today!>> he proclaimed.

<<I proudly, and humbly, accept the title of General.>>

Grillby saluted him. “Then henceforth, you cast away your title of Captain, and be known across the land as General Wing Dings Gaster. Congratulations, old friend!”

There was a polite scattering of applause, and King Asgore himself took the stage to give his royal blessing. The kindly king smiled down at him, beaming with pride.

“Congratulations are indeed in order, General Gaster. May you live long and serve monsterkind well,” Asgore said.

<<The pleasure is mine, Your Majesty.>> Gaster said with a bow. <<I swear I will do whatever I can in my power to bring victory to your name.>>

“Then perhaps it is high time for one of your infamous Visions, then?”

Gaster and Asgore both turned. Behind them stood the Council, looking just as skeptical as ever. They approached Gaster, but did not even grace him with a salute or a handshake.

Gaster calmly folded his hands behind his back. <<As I am sure you are aware, I cannot control the magic of my Visions like I can control my magic attacks. It is unpredictable and sporadic. I can assure you, if I had even an ounce of control over it, I would be doing everything in my power to save our kind.>>

“Would you?” one drawled. “I have heard that you were quite acquainted with the humans before this miserable war.”

<<I was an alchemy and magic teacher, that is true,>> Gaster explained casually. <<And some of my students were indeed human. And what kind of crime is that? We have merchants and farmers who did daily business with humans as well. Grillby himself was a cook for an inn whose clientele was mostly human. I do not see you harassing him for preparing dishes for our enemy in the past.>>
“It’s true,” Grillby interjected.

The Council waved Grillby away. “Has it concerned you at all that whatever you taught humans of magic has drastically turned the war in their favor? Every day humans grow stronger and stronger and yet we remain stagnant. Why can we trust you so readily when you have so eagerly befriended humans?”

<<If I’m not mistaken, did you not choose me to be General?>> Gaster countered.

“Only at the insistence of General Grillby. His story of your first Vision impressed us substantially. Many people owe you their lives.”

<<Thank you>>

“Many human lives,” the Councilman interjected, his eyes growing hard. “You saved a village of humans. Humans who are now slaughtering our kind.”

<<In my defense, Councilman,>> Gaster replied sharply. <<I was a child, barely ten years old. That was over fifteen years ago. And you dare to blame me for doing the right thing?! You dare to blame a child for saving innocent lives?! Just how delusional have you grown, Councilman?>>

“I think that is quite enough bickering,” Asgore interjected, glaring angrily at the Council. “General Gaster is not to blame for this war, if that is what you fools are attempting to imply. And I will certainly not allow you to further harass my newest General, one who will be sacrificing his very life on the front lines while you hide behind your stone walls and twiddle away on your quills!”

The Council blanched at Asgore’s fury.

“You are dismissed until further notice,” Asgore continued, his voice quiet but still furious. “My General and I have much to discuss.” With that, he placed a heavy hand on Gaster’s shoulder and steered him away. Grillby followed behind closely.

<<Thank you for that, Your Highness,>> Gaster said quietly. <<But I am not worth such hassle->>

“Nonsense,” Asgore dismissed. “You have always been a good friend. You have done much in the past, both in the war and before. You do not deserve to be humiliated by the likes of them. Now, we must plan our next move.” He guided Gaster and Grillby away from the ceremony and into another tent where, yet again, a war room had been set up. This one was substantially more complex and detailed, containing a hundred different maps, all marked with figures representing armies, flags locating key battles. There were many flags that were in the human’s favor. It was grim, to say the least.

“The humans are relentless and are aggressively pushing forward now that our Western front has been . . . eliminated.” A sad and tragic look flashed in his eyes. “We need you to stop them in their tracks.”

<<A monumental challenge, to be sure,>> Gaster replied sternly.

“Agreed in full,” Asgore nodded. “But to throw you on the front lines with no experience as a general would be a very poor decision to make, so I have decided that you and General Grillby will both be leading a new division to take back the west. We will be pulling about thirty percent of Grillby’s army and we have a full battalion of new foot soldiers fresh out of training, eager for war. You will both be in charge of leading this army.”

“And who will be in charge of taking over my position?” Grillby asked.
“A fine young monster by the name of Gerson,” Asgore answered. “He was leading the Northern army, but with the recent loss, he will be combining his forces with yours and will be leading a unified front against the humans.”

“Ah, Gerson, I know him,” Grillby said, stroking his chin. “I sparred with him in training. He’s a good warrior, and a wise choice.”

“I am glad you agree,” Asgore beamed. “Well, you have your orders. You will meet up with the new Western unit tomorrow and head to Meadowbrooke. The travel should take you about a week.”

Asgore’s gaze suddenly hardened.

“And if you meet any human forces along the way . . . show them the same mercy they have shown us.”

The two generals saluted.

“As you command, my King,” Grillby said dutifully.

The next day, Grillby and Gaster packed their things, loaded their supplies onto a few pack horses, and set off west, along with a platoon of three thousand soldiers. Young and inexperienced, but brave and good monsters all the same. Gaster only had to look at the fire burning in their eyes to know that these men would do whatever it would take to win the war ahead. Confidence in his army restored, he set off, as determined as ever.

His army. It was strange to say out loud. The metal badge hung heavily on his chest, the burden of responsibility and leadership weighing down his mind. Grillby must have noticed his unease and came to his side.

“First battle as General can be very nerve-wracking,” he assured. “But nothing about you has changed. You are still the fearsome warrior monsterkind respects and the enemy humans fear. And you have good monsters behind you. You have nothing to fear.”

It didn’t completely wash away Gaster’s uneasiness, but it helped quiet the nagging voices of doubt. He allowed a smile.

<<And behind you, I will always be there,>> Gaster assured.

The journey to Meadowbrooke was unusually quiet. This should have been a good sign but Gaster couldn’t help but feel uneasy the entire time. No forces were stopping humans from overtaking these lands.

So where were they?

A region-wide evacuation had been implemented after the fall of the western fleet, and thousands upon thousands of monsters flocked to the capital of monsters, Mount Ebott, leaving dozens of farming villages abandoned. Yet many remained untouched. Some showed signs of looting from passing monsters, but the fields remained intact. No signs of destructions, no streaks of ash from mass burnings.

In any other circumstances this would have been a monumental relief. If monsters could push the humans back, the lands would be free to return to, with nary a blade of grass out of place and plenty of food and good farming land.
So why did Gaster’s bones rattle with fear as he passed through the untouched farmlands?

“This is . . . troubling,” Grillby said out loud, confirming Gaster’s suspicion.

Gaster’s eyes scanned the landside. No distant smoke from nearby campfires, no signs of human soldiers . . . it sent a chill through his bones.

<<Are they so sure of victory they refuse to burn our lands?>> Gaster thought out loud. <<Are they so sure of our destruction they see no reason to wipe out our homes and resources?>>

“They are either incredibly foolish, or very certain of their victory,” Grillby replied. “And humans are not ones to so idly pass a chance at such an opportunity for destruction.”

Gaster nodded gravely. <<Well then, old friend, let us show them this was one very foolish mistake they have made.>>

The journey continued. On the third day, a scout reported smoke on the horizon, and a lot of it. The human encampment was only a two day’s travel away. They would meet the humans on the battlefield then.

The soldiers were anxious to say the least. This would be the first real battle for many, and many would die. It was inevitable. They all knew this, and they all came despite the price. All of them, ready to give their lives. All of them, ready to give their lives for the freedom of their people.

Gaster swore to himself he would not let his men down. Gaster swore, as he gazed over every face of his army, that he will not go down quietly. He will slaughter as many humans as he could, he will fight until he had nothing more left to give. Should the humans hack him apart, he shall spit in their eyes before drawing his last breath. As he turned to dust, he will make the humans choke on his remains.

This he swore to his men. He was just as ready to die for them as they were for him.

They set up camp for the night, Gaster tucking away into his own tent for quiet reflection and meditation. An essential for him before going into battle, he had found. Clearing his head and being totally focused made him the ruthless soldier he was renowned for.

A sharp rapping at his tent flap caught his attention. He opened a single eye, drawing a slow breath between his teeth.

<<Who is it?>> he asked.

A soldier peeked inside the tent. It was a young cat soldier, clad in the standard silver mail and chain armor. He shuffled inside, carrying a bowl of gruel in his paws. He nervously held it out for Gaster.

“Your dinner, General,” he said. “Courtesy of General Grillby, of course.”

Gaster accepted the dish with a grateful nod. <<Ah, thank you, soldier. But that was hardly necessary; I am quite able to fetch my own supper. The gesture is appreciated, regardless.>>

“Well . . .” the soldier rubbed his paws together nervously. “It’s because I wished to speak to you. I do not wish to impose, of course! I just . . . well . . .”

<<By all means, have a seat,>> Gaster said. The cat nodded, sitting down awkwardly on the tent floor. His tail swished back and forth uneasily. <<What’s your name, soldier?>>
“Callahan. Private Callahan, at your service,” the cat said, saluting. Gaster chuckled.

<<Well, Private, what seems to be troubling you?>>

“It’s not the war, if that’s what you’re wondering,” Callahan said. “I mean, of course I’m nervous, who wouldn’t be, but what I want to ask is this.” He took a deep breath. “Is what they say about you true? Can you really see the future?”

Gaster slowly closed his eyes, taking a breath and setting his food off to the side. He folded his hands together contemplatively. He could practically feel Callahan shrink away from him.

<<It is true that I have a unique ability that allows me to see glimpses of the future,>> Gaster began quietly. <<But it is a very fickle power, one that I cannot control in the slightest. And sometimes the Visions I have are too cryptic to decipher until they happen. If you are looking for reassurance or a prediction, then I am sad to say I cannot give you one.>>

“I understand,” Callahan said sheepishly. “But I’ve heard stories of what you did in Shepherd’s Grove. My uncle lived there, and he told me all these wonderful tales about what you did. I . . . just wanted to know if it was true or if he was being his usual exaggerating self,” he added with a weak laugh.

Gaster allowed a faint smile. <<Shepherd’s Grove was where I had my very first Vision. I was scarcely a lad ten years old when that happened.>>

Callahan’s eyes widened. “Only ten?! I could barely control my own magic at that age!”

Gaster laughed. <<In any case, I was only a boy when I had a very vivid and intense dream that the town was washed away by a terrible flood. It felt so unbelievably real that in my soul I knew it was real. So the next day I warned everyone of the impending disaster. No one believed me of course, but I was a very stubborn child and did everything I could to save the town. I spent days digging motes, I corralled all the livestock up to higher ground, and in a few days the town was hit by a massive storm. It rained for a week straight, and the river swelled far beyond its banks and would have swept away the town if I had not built those motes. Thankfully no one was killed, and we didn’t lose a single head of livestock. The town was saved, and I was hailed as a hero.>>

Gaster paused, growing more withdrawn. <<And of course when people learned of my Visions, they begged me for readings and predictions. And I could not satisfy their desires.>> He shrugged. <<It made no difference to me, it was simply a power of mine I learned not to draw too much attention to.>>

“That’s amazing!” Callahan said in awe. “My uncle was right about you.”

<<I dare not ask what other crazy rumors are floating around about me,>> Gaster said slyly. <<People might start to think of me as a respectable member of monster society!>>

Callahan cocked his head. “What do you mean by that?”

<<Ah, just a bit of nonsense is all,>> Gaster waved. <<Have I sufficiently answered your question, Private Callahan?>>

“More than enough, sir!”

<<Then go get some rest. The battle is only a few days away. You need to be as rested and as ready as you can be.>>
“Yessir!”

The day of war descended on them like a flood.

All too soon they were on the battlefield, armies lined up, stretching across the horizon. Humans on one side, monsters on the other. The monsters outnumbered the humans, the human army roughly 2,000 while monsters stood three thousand strong.

Gaster felt his fists clench. He and Grillby stood shoulder to shoulder, at the very front of the army, glaring hard at their enemies not even five hundred yards away.

The wind whipped past him, the banners of monsters cracking against the breeze. Armor rustled and clacked as their wearers shifted under their weight, swords and spears and all manners of weapons dancing in anticipation.

On the human line, three figures stepped forward. One was obviously the general, with his eloquent and golden armor and flowing red cape. Besides him was presumably his second-in-command, also supporting impressive armor but not nearly as elaborate as the general’s. The third was a page, who held aloft a white flag with a single red diagonal stripe. Gaster narrowed his eyes.

“They wish to speak to us,” Grillby noted.

<<Let’s not keep them waiting>> Gaster replied coolly. The two of them marched to the middle ground, carrying their own white flag in response. A temporary truce was called, so the generals could negotiate.

There was no pretense here. There would be no negotiations. Only threats, at best.

The human and monster generals met, taking a moment to look each other over before either spoke. The human general was someone Gaster did not know, but he knew the look of a weathered soldier when he saw one. This general did not earn his title lightly; scars on his face and hands (which were currently devoid of armor for the time being) were riddled with battle scars. His eyes were hard and cold, his mouth drawn tightly down into a frown. He held nothing but hatred for his enemies.

Gaster met his gaze, unwavering.

“You must be the Firestorm General that I have heard so much about,” the human said slowly, addressing Grillby. He turned to the skeleton. “And the Hand of Death himself. I’m honored. I am General Redstrike. I am sure you have heard of me.”

Gaster did not reply.

The human went on. “I’ve heard stories about your kind. Leaving nothing but destruction and flames in your wake. How you ravage our land and people mercilessly.”

<<Are you quite certain you are speaking of monsters and not your own kind?>> Gaster countered.

“The corpse does indeed speak!” Redstrike laughed. “But it doesn’t matter, does it, corpse? Doesn’t matter how we came here, all that matters is that you will not leave here alive. Goes without saying for you, revenant, but . . .” he trailed off.

“I will say this again, as I have said with all other past generals,” Grillby said. “This war can stop. The fighting and bloodshed and death can stop. All you must do is put down your sword and there can be peace.”
“Not on your life, demon!” Redstrike spat. “Not while our people live in constant fear of one of your monsters stealing the one thing most precious to us and using that power to kill us all!”

<<For your information, Redstrike,>> Gaster spoke up angrily. <<I have had countless opportunities to absorb your precious human souls. Countless men I have killed in war. And so has my comrade, and many of my soldiers! But we have not! Monsterkind has no desire for power, like humans do! We do not seek out death or destruction! We only wish to live!>>

“You are more foolish than I thought, then,” Redstrike sneered. “All those chances for power and you squandered them. Makes no difference to me, personally. Just that it’ll be easier for me to kill you.”

Gaster’s eyes blazed with blue light. <<Mark my words, human, shall I find you on the battlefield, I will kill you. I will then take your miserable soul, and use its power to wipe the world clean of your kind.>>

Redstrike spread his arms wide, grinning wickedly. “Then come for me, corpse! I will await you! And I shall be the one to strike down Death himself!”

Grillby and Gaster spun on their heels, retreating back to their armies, as Redstrike and his entourage returned to his own. Gaster’s magic burned brightly within him.

“I Lay waste to them,” Grillby said lowly. “They will show us no mercy, we will return in kind.”

<<It will be my pleasure,>> Gaster growled under his breath.

A weight hung in the air. Thousands of soldiers glaring down at their enemies. Hands gripped weapons, monsters coiled their magic within them.

The wind howled. Sweat poured from anxious brows. Shuddery breaths gasped between teeth.

A pause, a hesitance.

And with one motion, one wave of Grillby’s steady hand, chaos fell.

With a hideous battle cry, the armies clashed. They raced towards each other, two great tidal waves of bodies and steel and armor. They clashed, sparks and flames and magic splitting the air. Grillby swung his sword wildly, controlled and focused as he cleaved his enemies in half. Gaster summoned walls upon walls of bones, streaking from the sky and pummeling the human army like hail. With a furious bellow, Gaster threw himself into the fray, spinning madly as his magic shot in every direction, piercing and striking at any human in his wake.

He had one goal. One mission. Find Redstrike, and rip his cold black heart from his wretched chest.

Summoning a bone in each hand, he lashed out and clubbed the nearest human. The blow landed hard on the enemy’s skull, sending him crumpling to the ground. Two charged him, and with a gesture the bones flew from his hands and pierced the advancing soldier’s chest. Another pair of bones appeared in his hands, and Gaster set back to work.

Grillby himself was just as devastating as ever. Distancing himself from any monster allies, he unleashed the full fury of his flames. Like a hurricane, flames whipped and whirled around him, burning anyone who got too close. Waves of flames shot before him, incinerating lines of humans and they fell to the earth screaming in agony. And with his sword he cut their miserable lives short.

As they always did when they practiced, Gaster found himself fighting back to back with his friend.
The two of them fought with an unmatched fury, the blue light of Gaster’s magic interweaving seamlessly with Grillby’s orange flames. Together they pierced, burned, and slaughtered any human that dared to approach them.

Gaster’s uniform was stained red with their blood. His magic burned within him. Ever human he cut down, his will to fight grew. Every human that fell to his hand was another life closer to victory. And he pressed on, crying out with such ferocity it rattled the very earth.

The humans were being beaten back by the combined might of Grillby’s flames, Gaster’s fury, and the burning determination of three thousand monsters.

It took Gaster a few moments for him to notice the human forces were actually retreating. The humans grew sparser and sparser, and when the mass of bodies had thinned enough, he could see the remaining human army retreating back over the hills. They had done it!

Gaster charged after them. <<NOW! While they flee! Strike them down!>> he bellowed. More bones rained from the air, picking off any straggling humans. But a familiar fiery face appeared in his vision, stopping him in his tracks.

“We’ve won this battle, now we must regroup ourselves,” Grillby urged. “Many of our own have fallen, we need to tend to them.”

<<I suggest we push forward, finish them off for good!>> Gaster snarled.

“This is a common tactic humans sometimes use. What if reinforcements wait just beyond that hill? We would be charging right into a trap.”

<<And instead you’d wait and let them charge us while we cower and lick our wounds?>> Gaster said. <<If there are reinforcements, then all the more reason to keep on the attack! And if there are none, the humans have nowhere to run and we can wipe them out.>>

Grillby seemed to consider this for a moment.

<<I understand your hesitance. The lives of our men are a top priority. But what if I led a small elite force to flank the humans?>>

This got Grillby’s attention. Encouraged, Gaster went on.

<<Give me a thousand soldiers. We’ll circle around them from behind and press them on both sides. They’ll have nowhere to go.>>

Grillby did not respond instantly. He surveyed the remaining monsters. Not many had fallen in the initial attack, much to his relief. The army hesitated, some standing around, celebrating their victory, others cautiously scanning the horizon where the humans disappeared over the hills.

“That is a good plan,” he finally said. “Are you ready to lead your army?”

<<As ever, General.>>

“Then good luck to you, General Gaster!” Grillby turned to the monsters. “Men! We have achieved victory in this battle! The humans have retreated!” A cheer swelled through the crowds. “But we will not back down quietly! We shall charge forth and wreak havoc! Now, I need the Thirteenth Battalion to go with General Gaster! We will flank the human army! With him, quickly!”
The monsters sprang into action. They swarmed around Gaster, most of them covered in sweat but ready for more action. Gaster nodded to them.

<<We must move quickly. The humans are retreating. We must cut them off before they can regroup with more. Are you ready?>>

A ripple of nods and salutes, shouts of triumph could be heard, and Gaster knew he had nothing to fear.

<<These humans wished to see Death! So let’s give them Death!>>

Grillby watched Gaster lead the division away. Rounding up the rest of the troops, he pressed on.

The humans had put quite a distance between them. Even going at a steady marching pace, the humans could barely be seen on the horizon. He hoped with Gaster’s smaller force they’d be fast enough to cut them off.

The journey took them a little over a day, Grillby allowing his men to rest for the night and to patch up any wounded. He surveyed his army. They had lost approximately four hundred soldiers. While it was always tragic to see a monster fall, it was also a relief; Grillby was expecting a much higher fatality percentage. Perhaps this just proved the hardness of the monsters under his command. They would need it in the battles ahead.

The following day, the march continued. The humans couldn’t be horribly far ahead, could they?

The weather was chilly, and the wind only grew wilder as they marched on. Grillby’s foot crunched on something. He looked down.

It was a pile of dust.

He paused. How odd.

There were a few cries of exclamation, soldiers stopping dead in their tracks and pointing at the earth below them. Grillby focused his attention to their stares and gestures.

He hadn’t even noticed it before, but between the long blades of grass, the earth was covered in dust. A fine white powder that stretched as far as the eye could see. His men balked, blanched in horror.

There had to be the remains of hundreds, perhaps a thousand-

Grillby froze.

His heart grew very very cold. A chill settled into the very depth of his core.

Panic flashed through every inch of his being.

No.

Grillby strode forward, his pace quickening from a march, to a jog, to a sprint.

NO.

Dust, dust, dust. Everywhere, nothing but dust.
Dust of fallen monsters, strewn across the plains.

**NO!**

Grillby’s lungs burned as he gasped for breath, his legs pounding the ground beneath him. Behind him fluttered a trail of sparks and ash, his footprints leaving scorch marks in the grass.

*It couldn’t be, it couldn’t be, oh dear gods above, please, no!*

There! In the distance! A lone figure stood, slowly walking towards him. The sun illuminated his pale face, his gaunt features, shimmering off his badly damaged armor, but Grillby didn’t notice. Didn’t care! With a cry of relief he allowed himself to choke out a sob as he ran towards Gaster.

He stopped feet away, looking over his friend.

Gaster was covered in dust. His eyes were hollow and dark. No light shone in his eye sockets that were twisted with grief and insurmountable sorrow.

And in his core, Grillby knew. He looked at the haunted face of Gaster, he looked at the dust that coated him head to toe, he saw his battered armor, his ripped uniform that hung off his skeletal frame, he saw the marks and wounds of swords and axes on his friend’s arms and legs and Grillby knew.

Grillby could do nothing but hold Gaster as he threw himself against the elemental, wailing in anguish.

Dead.

All of them, dead.

In a single day, in a single attack . . .

Gaster’s army had fallen.
Gaster looked at his map, carefully scanning the terrain. A Whimsalot was at his side, acting as his scout.

<<Seems the terrain is on our side,>> Gaster muttered, more to himself than to his men. <<The humans have nowhere to go but through this pass.>> He pointed at a small marking between two great mountains. A river was just beyond the pass. <<If we can get to them before the pass, we can press them against the mountains. They’ll have nowhere to go.>> Gaster looked up from the map and scanned the surrounding landscape. Nothing but open plains as far as the eye can see, save for a mountain range just barely visible on the horizon. They had to get to those mountains, and soon. He rolled up the map, and handed it back to the Whimsalot. He saluted, and retreated back in rank.

Gaster peered over his shoulder. A thousand soldiers stood behind him. A thousand soldiers, strong and determined and ready for battle. He gave a nod.

<<Move out!>>

They marched. The plains were quiet, only the wind whistling between blades of grass and blades of steel. Gaster kept his eye sockets peeled for any signs of humans. The plains remained relatively undisturbed. Odd. The humans had to have passed through here, the grass should have been trampled and marred.

Did they take a different route? Gaster didn’t think so. This was the only place the humans could have gone. The surrounding land was nothing but mountains. They couldn’t have-

A shout alerted him. He spun around just in time to see a monster fall to the ground and crumple to dust.

Gaster’s heart lurched.

<<What-?!>>

He could barely utter another sound as dozens of monsters, like a wave, began to fall. Convulsing wildly before they fell, their bodies turning to dust as they crashed against the earth.

Gaster summoned a bone in each hand, his eyes blazing and bones rattling. What was happening?! What was attacking them?!

The soldiers, frenzied and panicked, pressed back to back, forming a crude circle as they readied their weapons, fending off against their unseen attacker. But still they fell, struck by something as blood gushed from wounds, armor crashing against each other as monsters continued to fall.

It was like his army was being attacked by phantoms! An invisible enemy slaughtering his men like hapless cattle! Panic began to surge within the general.
NO! I WILL NOT LET MY MEN DIE LIKE THIS!

Gaster’s eyes hardened, he stared down at the plains. The grass moving and whipping with the wind-

Only it wasn’t! It was moving in the wrong direction!

There! A shimmer! A refraction of light bent at an impossible angle!

Gaster didn’t think. He simply extended his hand and a wall of bones shot before him. They hit something hard.

A human soldier materialized out of thin air, grasping at the bone that protruded from his chest. He gasped and flailed weakly before he collapsed.

Realization. Cold, horrible, realization.

<<ILLUSIONS!>> he cried. <<THE HUMANS ARE USING ILLUSION SPELLS!>>

Now that he knew what the human filth were up to, Gaster turned to the fields and gazed hard at his surroundings. The tell-tale impossible refractions gave the hidden soldiers away, and now that Gaster knew what he was looking for, he could spot them coming.

Gaster, unleashing a hellish battle cry, released a storm of bones, throwing them in every direction and with unbridled fury.

Cowards! Filthy cowards!

His bones landed upon the humans. But more took their place.

How many were there?!

Gaster’s fury only grew. And behind him, his army was being slowly picked apart, one by one . . .

NO! I WILL NOT LET THEM DIE!

I WILL NOT!

I REFUSE!

Gaster’s eyes burned with rage, with fury, with uncontained magic coursing through every inch of his being. The ground beneath his feet scorched from the intensity of his magic, Gaster’s movements grew crazed and wild.

He had to fight!

He had to fight them back!

He will not let his men be killed by such cowardice!

A crack, and Gaster’s vision blurred. White-hot pain bloomed from the back of his skull, and he was faintly aware of the ground rushing up to meet him. His vision swam, a rainbow of colors and blinding lights. Everything felt heavy, his limbs seemed a million miles away.

Had to focus! Had to fight-!
Hands grabbed him roughly, forced him to his knees. The colors spun in his vision. Gods, his head ached. He fought against the restraining hands, but he felt so weak . . .

**NO!**

**FIGHT!**

**GET UP!**

**I WILL NOT DIE LIKE THIS!**

Gaster’s eyes burned.

**I WILL NOT DIE LIKE THIS!**

Gaster ground his teeth.

He summoned his magic to manifest in his hand.

. . .

No response.

Gaster looked at his hand, confused. He tried again to summon a bone attack.

Nothing.

What on earth-?

He looked up at his captors, their faces coming into focus. The illusion faded, he could see their smug disgusting faces sneering down at him.

And he saw purple sparks falling from the sky like snow.

Gaster furrowed his brows. What the hell was going on?!

The human soldiers kept him to his knees as they forced him to watch the sparks fall on his army. As soon as they touched a monster, they wobbled on their feet, confused and disoriented. It was like they completely forgot how to fight . . .

They were completely defenseless from the human army that swarmed around them and picked them off like vultures.

Gaster screamed. He screamed, he screamed, he screamed in rage. Red flooded his vision. He struggled, pulled and yanked from his restraints.

But he was so weak. So tired. Why couldn’t he summon his magic?!

He tried, again and again to make his magic manifest. Every time his attack failed to materialize, every time his blue magic refused to take hold on a human soul.

All he could do was watch, watch his army being torn to shreds.

Rage gave way to despair. He couldn’t do anything . . . he couldn’t fight, couldn’t move . . .

**USELESS!**
Tears burned in his eyes. Only a handful of his men remained. The rest, crumpled to dust, covering the ground like snow. His knees were covered in the powder of his soldiers. Brave monsters, ready to fight and die. Monsters he had led . . .

Reduced to nothing . . .

He tried, again and again, to reach with his magic. His head swam, his vision blurred.

He had to save them!

Had to . . .

. . . had to fight . . .

It was getting so hard to think . . .

HAD TO FIGHT

Couldn’t

He couldn’t

Gaster snapped his eyes shut, tears streaming from his eyes.

He was so

USELESS

He slumped against the hands that held him. He shut his eyes from the slaughter, he tuned out the sound of monsters screaming in pain as they were massacred.

USELESS!

Footsteps approached him. Gaster looked up.

A human face looked down at him, an evil twisted grin covering his face.

Redstrike.

Gaster snarled.

<<You cowardly bastard . . .>> he wheezed.

Redstrike lowered himself to his knee so he was eye to eye with the skeleton monster. He still had that sickening smile. How Gaster hated him.

“The wonderful thing about war is that there are no rules. Nothing matters other than claiming victory, in whatever form that takes,” he said plainly, as if speaking to a child. “You monsters and your magic, such an unfair advantage, don’t you think?” He turned to his soldiers and waved some forward. Seven hooded figures stepped forward. Unlike the armor-clad soldiers of Redstrike’s army, these men were dressed in colorful cloth robes.

Just like Gaster was.

They removed their hoods.
Gaster felt his soul grow cold.

“Your students have done a remarkable job, though. You really were an excellent teacher, despite your hideous form,” Redstrike sneered.

Time itself stopped. Gaster couldn’t look away. Couldn’t think, couldn’t breathe, couldn’t comprehend-!

Seven humans. Seven humans he had taken under his wing, taught them everything he knew of magic, encouraged and trained them. He had put his faith in them, given them hope of making a better world, a more peaceful world!

He . . .

HE TRUSTED THEM!

Gaster’s eyes burned brighter. Rage once again overtook him.

<<YOU TRAITORS!>> he screamed. <<YOU COWARDLY, FILTHY TRAITORS! BASTARDS ALL! I’LL SLAUGHTER YOU AND STICK YOUR SKULLS FROM PIKES!>>

Redstrike let out a bellowing laugh. “Such ferocity! No wonder you earned your title of Hand of Death! Well earned, I am sure!” He turned to the mages. “You trained a very clever lot! Figured out an illusion spell all on their own! And this!” he gestured to the purple shimmer in the air. “Completely negates magic! Which is why you can’t attack, and why you are undoubtedly feeling so weak and defenseless.”

Gaster ground his teeth. He hung his head. Redstrike once again lowered himself to eye-level.

“How does it feel, o Death? How does it feel to be so weak and powerless? Not unlike how us humans feel at the hands of you beasts-!”

Gaster swung his head back and firmly cracked his skull against Redstrike’s. Redstrike reeled backwards, clutching his bleeding nose.

“Bastard!” he swore.

One of the men that held Gaster struck him hard across the face.

“HE’S MINE!” Redstrike roared. The humans obliged and unhanded Gaster. The raging human general swung at Gaster, landing another hard hit to Gaster’s skull. He stumbled. Another hit landed on his sternum, and Gaster doubled over with a wheeze. A kick, and Gaster fell to the ground.

Redstrike didn’t hesitate as he landed kick after kick against Gaster’s ribs. He let out painful gasps with every blow, every hit like fire striking his body. Gaster couldn’t even scream in pain as the blows pushed every ounce of breath from his lungs.

He could feel his ribs cracking. He heard them bending and snapping with every blow.

The pain was unbearable.

Finally sated, Redstrike relented. He grabbed the skeleton by the collar of his uniform and hefted him to his feet.
“A great general knows many things,” Redstrike seethed. “He knows when it is right to fight, when it is time to retreat. He knows how to defeat his foes on the battlefield, and he knows how to destroy his enemies.” He spun Gaster around to look upon what remained of his army.

There were so few . . .

“A general knows that the surest way to crush the enemy is to thoroughly and utterly break its spirit!” A manic tone flooded his voice. “And that’s what we are going to do! I will break you, Death! I will make you beg for the sweet embrace of oblivion! I will make your kind beg for release!”

“And I will deny it to you!”

Once again, soldiers held Gaster’s arms behind his back, preventing him from moving. He addressed one of his subordinates.

“How many remain?” Redstrike inquired.

“One hundred monsters, as you commanded, sir!” the soldier responded with a salute.

“Very good! Bring one forward!”

Gaster struggled and pulled against the human’s grip. He burned and raged and pleaded for his magic to respond to his call.

But it didn’t come.

A human soldier roughly grabbed one of the monsters and dragged him forward. It was a canine soldier, large and intimidating and clad in steel. The humans removed the dog’s helm, and Gaster saw the weary and defeated look in his eyes.

<<Do not fear!>> Gaster called out. <<Be brave and strong! You must fight back!>>

The dog could only look at him with exhaustion in his dark and sad eyes. He could barely stand.

A kick and the dog was on his knees.

The humans brought out a wooden block. A large heavy-set soldier carrying an enormous battle axe approached.

The dog began to panic.

<<SOLDIER! LOOK AT ME! LOOK AT ME!>> Gaster pleaded. The dog tore his eyes away from the axe and stared, terrified and whimpering, at the general.

<<It will be alright! You mustn’t be afraid!>> Gaster said. He couldn’t keep his voice from wavering. <<You will be alright! You will be brave, and strong! You will be hailed a hero, and remembered by monsterkind! You will not die at the hands of cowards!>>

The block was put in place. Hands held the dog’s head down. The axe raised.

The dog cried out, panicked.

<<MONSTERKIND REMEMBERS YOUR SACRIFICE!>>

The axe fell.
Dust scattered in the howling wind.
And with the roar of the wind, there were cries of anguish and loss.
Gaster screamed.
Another soldier was brought forward. And again, Gaster was forced to watch as the axe fell.
Again and again and again and again and again
His army. HIS army.
Not like this . . .
Gaster stared each monster in the eye before they died.
Each monster looked at him, pleading, begging for a miracle.
But he could do nothing but watch.
Every soldier that was slain was like a dagger to his own soul. Every pleading and desperate cry for help twisted a white hot knife in his gut. Some were brave. Some spat and wrestled and struggled from their captors. Others were peaceful, and silent, resigned to their fate.
Others still had given up. Filled with nothing but despair. Unable to fight. Unable to defend. They could do nothing as they were dragged forward before their general.
All Gaster could do was speak words of praise and glory. For it was all he could offer his men.
<<Be strong, be brave!>> It became his chant. <<You will be remembered! You will not die in vain to the hands of cowards!>> His voice grew hoarse as he screamed to whatever gods may be listening. <<Your deaths will not be forgotten!>>
The axe rose and fell. Again and again. Like the pendulum of a clock. Again and again dust was scattered to the wind.
<<I will not forget! I will not forget . . .>>
The axe rose and fell . . . rose and fell . . .
UNTIL NOBODY CAME.
No one remained. There was silence. A stillness in the air as there was nothing left.
Nothing left but a monster general amongst a graveyard of ash.
Gaster felt tears flow from his eyes. His gaze grew haunted, hollow.
They were all gone . . .
Numb, defeated, Gaster shut off the outside world. He refused to hear the human voices, refused to react to the hands that shoved him to his feet. Refused to look the wretched general in the eye.
He didn’t even register the strike across his head. Or the second one.
He just wanted . . .
<<What are you waiting for?>> he finally spoke. His voice was weak and shaking. <<Just do it already. Kill me.>>

Redstrike grasped his skull, forcing Gaster to look him in the eye. And then, he laughed right in his face.

“You misunderstand me, corpse. You are not to die. Not today. You are to only bear witness to this victory in the names of the rightful rulers of this earth!”

Victory?! What kind of victory was this?!

“No, you will live, and you will retell this day to every corner of the monster kingdom! This is no war, corpse. This is extermination! Extermination of a scourge that has plagued this world long enough!”

Gaster dared to turn away. He dared to stare down the seven mages at the human’s side.

His students.

Gaster’s eyes narrowed. His cheeks were still wet. Was he still crying?

<<I remember your names,>> Gaster spoke. His voice was still a whisper, but even they refused to meet his gaze. <<I remember all of you. Cicero, Galen, Haraa, Istulya, Orion, Kaeylen, Maar. I remember your first lessons. Your first attempts at magic. I remember . . . being so proud to call you all my students.>>

They shuffled uncomfortably on their feet.

<<You were to be my legacy. My disciples to bridge the gap of humans and monsters. To be a beacon of peace and hope . . .>> Gaster shuddered, fighting back his emotions. <<But it seems I was a very poor teacher indeed if my lessons have taught you nothing!>>

He saw it in their eyes. Regret. Sadness. Longing.

And he felt nothing but despair.

<<Go on, now. May you live long and prosperous. May you be beacons of peace. May you live to tell the tale of how you slaughtered a thousand helpless monsters so cruelly! May you tell the tale of how you betrayed the one who taught you everything you knew! How you stabbed him in the back and reigned down destruction and death against a race who wanted nothing more than the chance to live!>>

“That is quite enough,” Redstrike sighed. “Leave him. We have a race to extinguish! Onwards, my soldiers! To victory!”

The soldiers dropped Gaster unceremoniously, and they marched off, many of them cheering and chanting uproariously. They marched away, singing of their victory. They kicked and trampled the dust underfoot.

And one by one, reluctantly, the mages marched off with them.

One paused for a moment. As if to say something. An apology? An excuse? Or perhaps a taunt?

But they said nothing, and disappeared within the ranks.
And Gaster was left alone, alone against a sea of dust.
And alone, he wept.

_All his fault . . ._

_It was all his fault . . ._

Grillby listened to Gaster’s story.

His whole army listened to the tale of the heart-broken general.

No one spoke. No one dared to breathe.

Some wiped away tears in their eyes, some attempted to stifle back sobs and cries of anguish.

The skeletal general recanted his story, eyes hollow and black, voice low and mournful.

His bones rattled.

Grillby himself was . . . lost. Completely and utterly devastated by the tragedy. By the insurmountable horror his friend had witnessed.

For the first time in a long time . . . he had no idea what to do.

When Gaster finished his story, he just stood there, a broken shell of a man who had grieved for hours and found nothing left to give to his despair. Grillby had never seen a monster so broken.

Redstrike had accomplished his mission. He had completely destroyed Gaster’s spirit. He had destroyed the moral victory of only yesterday.

What could they do to bring back hope to the general who had lost everything?

Grillby personally escorted Gaster to his own tent and ordered a pair of guards to watch over him. There was no telling what sort of state he was in now. But Grillby had a duty. He had a duty to his men and to his king. He needed to think, he needed to be rational.

But the wildfire storm welling within him wished for nothing but unholy vengeance and pain. He longed to slaughter the humans as they had slaughtered his own kind.

He ignored the fiery footsteps he left in his wake. He had never felt such . . . pain before. Fury at the enemy, devastation at the loss, grief for his friend.

It was overwhelming. He needed silence.

He needed release.

Far away from his men, far from anything at all, Grillby unleashed hell.

They called him the Firestorm General for a very good reason. He had earned that title.

He will be sure to show the humans the full strength of his fury.

Grillby took a breath, taking in the scorched earth around him. Nothing but black soot and ash for
fifty yards. Flames and embers still glowed against the ground.

Steam hissed between the crackling opening that was his mouth.

No, they will not roll over and die. No, monsters will not be the ones who will face extinction!

Grillby will see to that.

Despite Grillby’s desire for vengeance, they had no choice but to retreat back to Mount Ebott.

They simply did not have enough men to take on another full-scale battle from the humans. They needed to fight defensively, stake out a chokepoint and hold off the enemy.

They had picked a good spot. Here, their remaining numbers would be more than enough for whatever the humans could throw at them.

Or so Grillby hoped.

Gaster’s recollection of the purple snow concerned Grillby greatly. If the humans had a spell to completely negate magic, there was no way for them to even counter that. How humans had even discovered such a spell was beyond him.

But Grillby remembered those days before the war. The days Gaster had been such a wonderful, kind, and enthusiastic teacher. How he would beam and boast of his top students exceeding every expectation.

To have the very same students commit such an atrocity . . . Gaster couldn’t have taken that well.

Gaster had been . . . silent. He hadn’t spoken a word since his tale. He had barely eaten anything, despite Grillby’s constant insistence.

His eyes never regained their light.

Grillby and Gaster sat in their tent, preparing for whatever battle was to come. They had sent a message back to the capital to ask for more reinforcements.

It seemed monsterkind was stretched precariously thin. Grillby doubted they would get any.

Already monsters were retreating within the massive caves of the mountain. It was their only hope for escape.

Grillby pushed aside his emotions. He had to. He had to be the rock his army stood upon, the foundation for his army to depend on. He couldn’t afford to be distracted. He couldn’t let emotions cloud him.

But how could anyone expect that from him? Especially now, with his kind facing such terrible odds?

He couldn’t give up. He just couldn’t.

He looked at Gaster. Looked into those dark eye sockets. Hollow and empty. His face a mask.

“We make our stand,” Grillby said. “We fight. We do not give into despair. We do not succumb to
the darkness. If we do, then we will fall. We will not fall, my friend. Do you hear me? *We will not fall to the darkness.*"

Gaster didn’t respond.

After two days Grillby finally received word back from the capital. King Asgore had given the go-ahead for their plan and wished them luck. He expressed his deepest condolences for the monsters that had died and wished them nothing but glory and honor.

And on that same day a scout reported the advancing human army. Five thousand strong, heading straight for their position.

Grillby swallowed hard. They were far outnumbered. He hoped the mages were not in this army.

The fire elemental ordered his men into position. He put his archers and long-ranged magic users to high ground for a better vantage point and to provide support. His strongest and sturdiest soldiers took the front line, armed with heavy shields and wicked spears.

Gaster, even after all his silence and inaction, marched with Grillby to the front lines. His brows furrowed together in concentration as he turned his hollow eyesockets skyward, to the archers perched on the rocky mountains, hidden within the crevices and caves, perfectly positioned to inflict the most damage.

<<I will take position with the archers,>> Gaster spoke. His voice was quiet and low. <<My attacks will be most effective there.>>

Grillby spun. This had been the first time Gaster had spoken in days. He nodded.

“Gods be with you,” he saluted.

Blue light flickered in the skeleton’s eyes.

<<The gods had abandoned us long ago,>> Gaster replied hollowly. And with that, he was off, racing up the mountain face to take position.

Grillby had no time to respond before Gaster disappeared up the mountain. He had full faith that Gaster would fight til his dying breath, and then use that last breath to spit in the enemies’ eyes. He only prayed that he would not die today.

A sudden chill crackled through Grillby’s flames.

Could they even win this war anymore?

There was no chance for peace, no chance for negotiation. Humans had made their intent clear. They would not stop, would not rest until every monster was wiped out.

Their only choice was to *fight.*

Already the humans marched across the fields. Their numbers blackened the horizon, the sun glinting off steel blades and armor. Grillby readied his own sword, quelled the raging fires within him, ready to unleash his storm.

And upon the mountain, he saw flames of blue magic. Gaster was ready, and just as hungry for blood.

The humans wished to exterminate them.
But Grillby refused to go down easily.

Gaster gazed at the approaching army. He looked at the mass moving in formation over the plains.
And he felt his magic burn within him. He felt the rage and bloodlust boiling to his surface.
The faces of his men flashed before his eyes. The grotesque face of Redstrike burned in his mind.
And he saw nothing but red.
He called upon every ounce of magic he commanded, summoning hundreds upon hundreds of bones. The archers by his side readied their bows, other magic users like him coiling their magic within and waiting in anxious anticipation to release.

Closer the human army grew.

Flames from the monster line crackled forward.

Closer still.

Gaster’s eyes widened.

**RELEASE.**

With one motion, the bones rained down upon the humans, striking and piercing through armor. A wave of fire erupted from Grillby, scorching a line through the human ranks.

Gaster’s eyes blazed with blue light as he summoned wave after wave of bones. The human line was slowly falling.

But not fast enough.

The front lines clashed against each other.

Grillby was hard to lose in the fray. A swirling vortex of fire gave him away as he carved his own path through the ranks. And Gaster provided support, his accuracy second to none as he struck down any soldier who got remotely close to the elemental. Some humans had spotted them up in the mountains and began firing their own arrows, which Gaster blocked with his own bone attacks.

He couldn’t stay up here. He was exposed.

He descended to the front lines. Roaring in fury, a hailstorm of bones exploded forward.

He carved his own path in the fray. He had no mercy for the humans. He landed whatever blow he could, in the legs, in the stomach, decapitating hands and limbs.

He had no remorse for their screams of pain, felt nothing as they bled to death against the ground.

If anything, it provided him a hollow sense of . . . satisfaction.

Let them feel the pain he had felt. Let them experience the agony he was forced to endure.

He clubbed a human’s bottom jaw clean off its skull. The blow was not instantly fatal.
Let them *bleed*.

They called him Death, so let him become Death!

An earthquake of bones erupted from the earth, impaling dozens of humans. They screamed and thrashed before succumbing to their hideous deaths.

Gaster felt *nothing*.

Once again he found himself back to back with Grillby. Once again their magic intertwined in colorful flashes of blue and orange. Once again their skill and prowess proved unmatched as they slaughtered every human that dared approach them.

But the humans kept coming. They did not relent.

And as they fought, as time went on, the human crowds swelled. It was harder and harder to see their monster brethren through the throngs of human soldiers.

Dust crunched underfoot, swirled through the air with mists of blood and sweat. Gaster gritted his teeth.

They weren’t winning this battle.

But Gaster refused to give up.

Not yet.

Not when there were still so many humans left to kill.

Roaring with primal rage he summoned every ounce of magic he had and expelled it forward. The sheer raw magic that flowed through him burned, charring his arm bones black, but he felt nothing. Humans before him fell, but more came to take their place.

Gaster turned. Grillby was at his limit. His movements were slow and sluggish. His flames growing weaker and weaker.

They couldn’t keep this up much longer-

A soldier appeared from the ranks. A brute of a man, clad in nightmarish armor with spikes and wicked curves came charging forward. He lofted his mace, raised it high into the air to bring it crashing down on the fire General.

Gaster’s eyes blazed in fury.

There was no time to think.

No time to second guess.

No time to even speak.

He lunged forward.

Gaster threw his full weight forward, shoving Grillby out of the impending blow.

The morning star came crashing down.
And Gaster knew nothing more.

Sometimes, amidst the greatest tragedies, time can seem to slow. Time will slow to a crawl, and allow the person to fully comprehend their situation.

Grillby never saw him coming. Didn’t hear the heavy footfalls or the thunderous clash of armor as the human charged forward.

But Gaster had seen. Gaster saw him, and threw him from the line of fire.

He took the blow for himself. His body was tossed like a straw-stuffed doll across the field and crashed to the ground.

Bone shards littered the ground which quickly faded to dust.

He didn’t move.

Grilby stared, stared blankly and unfeeling at the impossibly still body of his friend. Everything stopped. Everything stilled.

There was no war raging around him. No roars or shouts or clashes of armies.

Only him.
And the one he had called his dearest friends.

Grillby stared. He stared, and within him, something broke.

No, something *shattered*.

Grillby reared back and unleashed a scream befitting that of a demon, a hellish battle cry of rage and pain. His flames unfurled in a storm, in a wave, in an absolute blaze that billowed forward in every direction. Flames impossibly hot that melted and warped metal on contact, flames that exploded like a great fireball and ravaging every inch of land and every inch of flesh they fell upon.

The humans retreated, running in a mad panic away from the firestorm. But many were caught and ignited on contact, falling to the ground and crumpling into charred remains.

Grillby screamed and screamed and let out every bit of flame he had left in him.

When he had nothing left to give, he collapsed to his knees, buckling hard against the charred earth. Black. Everything was black. A wall of smoke surrounded them, and from beyond it he could hear humans screaming for death.

He ignored it all.

Grillby turned to where his friend had fallen.

He was still there.

*Gaster was still there!*

Despite everything, Gaster had not crumpled to dust! He was still alive!

With what was left of his energy, Grillby reached out and grabbed his friend. He saw the wound the blow had inflicted upon him, and Grillby’s stomach churned.

“HEALER! I NEED A HEALER!” he cried out. He stumbled to his feet, forcing his tired legs to stand. He cradled Gaster’s frail body in his arms. He felt so light . . .

Bone shards still broke off from the wound under his left eye and turned to dust in the howling wind.

“HEALER!” Grillby called out. “PLEASE! ANYONE! I NEED A HEALER! BEFORE HE DIES!”

Grillby clutched Gaster’s body closer to his chest. His legs screamed in protest. Every step took every ounce of concentration, every ounce of energy he didn’t have.

But Grillby did not give up.

He will not give up on his friend.

---

The first thing he was aware of when he awoke was just how much everything *hurt*.

Every bone in his body groaned and ached. Every inch of him was sore and pounding. Especially his head.
God his head hurt.

Gaster let out a pitiful moan as he came to. He opened his eyes to a blurry and distorted world. He blinked several times, and very slowly the world came into focus. His vision seemed a lot more limited . . .

He raised a hand to his throbbing head and felt bandages wrapped tightly around his head, covering his left eye.

Ah, so that explained it.

It came back to him. The battle. The mace . . . coming down on him.

He felt an unholy eruption of agonizing pain, and then darkness.

Gaster shuddered. He . . . didn’t think he would have been able to survive that.

He tried to sit up, but he still felt weak, disoriented. He cursed under his breath at his own clumsiness as his body refused to do what he told it.

He was in a small cramped tent with a few other injured monsters, who didn’t bother to give him much attention. They all seemed to be resting, all of them in various states from moderate to on the brink of dusting. It was . . . harrowing.

A rustle at the entrance caught his attention and Gaster snapped around, prompting his vision to fill with a flurry of stars and sunspots. He rocked where he sat, smacking a hand to his head to keep himself from keeling over.

“Easy, easy, easy,” a quiet and soothing voice whispered in his ear. It was Grillby. “You’ve been injured pretty badly. Just take it slow for a moment.”

Gaster shook himself from his dizziness. <<I . . . I thought I died.>> he laughed bitterly.

Grillby’s features were sharp, concerned. “You almost did. Gaster, oh gods, Gaster I thought I lost you.” Without warning Grillby encompassed Gaster into a monstrous bear hug, a small wheeze escaping the skeleton as he did so. Gaster let out a small laugh as he patted Grillby’s back comfortingley. Grillby was shaking.

“I thought I lost you,” he whispered, shaking harder. “Gaster, I was so sure you had fallen down, I didn’t think you would ever wake up!” He squeezed harder before pulling away, giving Gaster a very firm scowl. “Don’t you ever scare me like that again, you bastard.”

<<Don’t plan on it.>> Gaster said with a small smile with no humor behind it. <<Taking a mace to the skull is far down on the list of things I want to do again.>>

The elemental nodded. “You saved my life and I can never repay you for that-“

<<And you don’t have to,>> Gaster said. <<I know you’d do the very same for me, my friend.>>

He patted Grillby on the shoulder. <<And these bandages?>> he said, jerking to his eye. <<Couldn’t get a healer to patch me up better?”

Grillby hesitated. <<The injury was . . . extensive. The healers did everything they could but all we can really do now is wait for it to further heal on its own.>> He paused again, hands twisting together as he tried to find the right words. <<The wound may never fully heal.>>
Gaster nodded thoughtfully. He didn’t expect to walk away from that unscathed, much less alive. Slowly and deliberately, he removed the bandages from his head. He saw Grillby wince before he turned away.

<<That bad, huh?>> Gaster sighed. Grillby only nodded.

Gaster braced himself. His vision seemed fully functional, at least. Everything was clear and sharp, so that was a godsend. Grillby wordlessly handed him a mirror to look over himself. Pausing for only a breath, Gaster took it and gazed upon his own reflection.

<<Oh . . .>> he breathed.

A massive jagged crack stretched from his eye socket to the corner of his mouth. Cracks riddled the socket itself and splintered up and down the length of the major fissure. Gaster put down the mirror before the sight made him queasy.

<<I . . . think I should put the bandage back on,>> Gaster said in a shaken voice. His bones once again began to rattle. Hands shaking furiously, he tied the bandages back around his head.

He was a master of magic. He understood how it worked, how it functioned. He could command it with unmatched perfection.

And even with all his training and prowess, Gaster knew he would be lucky if the wound healed at all.

Taking a moment to collect himself and push the grisly sight from his mind, Gaster turned his attention back to more pressing things. Mainly, the battle they had just fought.
<<What happened on the field?>> he asked. <<Did we win?>>

Grillby dropped his gaze and slowly shook his head. “We honestly didn’t stand much of a chance. The humans were too many. Too strong. We . . . we lost most of our army.”

<<I’m sorry to hear that.>>

“We were forced to retreat. We are now at the base of Mount Ebott. We will make our final stand here. It’s all we have left.”

<<Wait, Mount Ebott?>> Gaster clarified. <<But that’s a few day’s journey from where we were!>>

Grillby nodded. “Yes. You’ve been out for four days.”

Gaster dropped his jaw to protest or exclaim, but stopped himself. Well, it did make sense. An injury this severe would have put him out of commission for quite a while. But still.

<<Four days, by the gods above,>> Gaster muttered. <<And we’ve been driven back this far?>>

“What remains of monsterkind is at the base, or already hiding within the mountain’s caves,” Grillby acknowledged. “In all honesty Gaster . . . the humans may accomplish what they have set out to do.”

Gaster felt a hand twist his soul.

<<I am not going to let that happen. Not while I stand.>>

“I admire your conviction, but let’s not be too hasty here.” Grillby placed a hand on Gaster’s shoulder. “Don’t be so ready to die. I don’t know if my soul could bear losing you again.”

<<Same can be said for yourself, General.>> Gaster smiled. <<Speaking of which, don’t you have anything better to do than dote on a wretched corpse such as myself?>>

“Don’t call yourself that. And as a matter of fact, I have time to spare before I am meeting with King Dreemurr for plans to-”

At that moment shouts and screams arose from outside. Gaster and Grillby both jumped to their feet and raced to the entrance to the tent.

“What the hell-” Grillby started, but was cut off when he saw smoke in the distance. His flames grew low. “Oh gods . . .”

<<What?! What is going on?!>>

“The humans! They’re here! But they weren’t supposed to get here so fast! They were at least a day away-!”

<<That doesn’t matter now!>> Gaster interrupted. Already he was charging towards the smoke. <<We need to get everyone out of here! We need to fight them off!>>

“Gaster, your armor!”

<<Damn the armor I don’t have time!>>

Monsters raced past them, terror in their eyes. There were more civilians than soldiers. In fact, the
camp hardly looked like a military camp at all.

It looked like a refugee camp.

Women and children and old and weak streamed past them, making a bee-line for the cave. Whatever soldiers remained raced forward, ready to defend those who couldn’t defend themselves. Gaster broke free of the camp, ran shoulder to shoulder with the soldiers and peered out at their enemies.

His breath escaped his lungs.

<<Oh gods . . .>>

An army the likes of which Gaster had never seen spread before them. Soldiers in the thousands, more than Gaster had ever seen before, marched towards them. Their battle chants and footfalls were like thunder.

And at the head of the army was Asgore himself, trident clutched firmly in his paws and glaring down the enemy. His massive frame was a giant against the surrounding soldiers, his form towering and intimidating.

But in those intense eyes Gaster could see his fear.

There were so few monsters left. And so many humans.

Asgore looked at his army, and then back to the humans. He closed his eyes. The great weight of responsibility bear down on the mountain king.

“Our duty is to get as many monsters to safety as we can! To the mountain!” Asgore proclaimed. “We save as many lives as we can! Fall back!”

Gaster and the others retreated to the camp and began the evacuation. As he raced around the camp Gaster realized with horrible realization he was in no condition to fight. His head still throbbed with pain, his vision still swum, and even his magic was slow to respond to his command. His feet were uneasy, knees shaking as he escorted and assisted all he could to the caves.

They managed to get everyone safely inside just in time for the humans to descend on them like a swarm of locusts.

Once again, monsters and men clashed. Once again, magic and steel sparked against each other, igniting the air with cries and shouts. Gaster called upon his bone attack and a single bone feebly blinked into existence in his grasp. He threw it at the nearest human, and it bounced off him with hardly a dent.

Gaster couldn’t fight. Not like this.

Shamefully, he was forced to retreat. Grillby was at his side, fending off humans with his flames and swords.

The monster army was being pushed back. Pushed into the caverns of Mount Ebott. Spears and swords jabbed them back further and further, down the endless rocky depths. And at the very front was Asgore, still a fearsome presence as he rained down his magic against the advancing human army. With a thunderous howl he struck down dozens of humans with a single swing of his glowing trident, bearing his fangs and claws at all who challenged him.
He was, truly, the king of monsters.

But still they pushed, further and further. And seven humans stepped forward.

Seven humans Gaster knew all too well.

With a cry, Gaster raced forward towards his king.

The seven humans, in perfect harmony, raised their hands and magic began to swell within them, each of them surrounded by a blinding glow, each one glowing brilliantly.


Together their magic wove and weaved together, like a rainbow of threads, snaking through the air and through the ground. It crackled and sparked violently as the full effects of the spell were executed.

And with a thunderous crash, with a deafening boom, a beam of white magic exploded from the ground, creating a wall of pure magic.

Asgore stepped back, gawking at the wall before them. A wall that sealed them off from the outside world, trapping them within the mountain.

Gaster screamed in rage as he threw himself against the barrier. The magic burned him as he touched it, and threw him backwards harshly. Gaster pounded his fists against the wall, throwing himself again and again against the barrier.

And from beyond it, the seven mages stood. Watching him.

Again and again, Gaster clashed against the wall. Again and again, he was hurled backwards, the magic too strong, too powerful.

Exhausted, Gaster collapsed to his knees before the mighty barrier.

They were trapped.

Monsterkind had fallen.
The Choice

Chapter Summary

Gaster makes his choice. A bond is formed.

Gaster threw the little red book across the room.

He sat at his desk, shaking in fury. Shaking in a rage that had never subsided after centuries of being locked within this damned earthen prison.

This was supposed to help. This was supposed to make the pain go away. This was supposed to let the wounds of the past heal.

But all it did was tear them wide open and let the pain flow anew, fresh and blinding.

A dim blue glow illuminated the room and he rose a hand to his eye socket. His bony fingers felt over his scars, his battle wounds, and he remembered the pain. He remembered everything no matter how hard he wished to forget.

But he couldn’t forget. He WOULDN’T forget. He chose to remember. He had to remember why they were all down here in the first place.

They were trapped here because of his sentimentality, and his compassion, and his utter failure as a soldier.

No more, he had promised. No more, and never again.

And if it was the last thing he would ever do with his wretched life, he would get them all free.

And he would have his vengeance.

.

..

…

..

.

For days, for weeks, for months, Gaster had sat himself down in front of the barrier. He threw everything he had at it, all of monsterkind poured every ounce of magic they had into breaking the barrier. Surely with all their magic combined, it would fall.

When the dust had cleared, the barrier had not a scratch on it.

Gaster, overcome with grief and rage, remained. He remained, continuing to beat mercilessly at that wall. One by one monsters had left, despondent and broken. One by one they ventured off to explore their prison. And in time Gaster was alone.
Save for one fire elemental that never left his side.

“Please, Gaster,” Grillby pleaded. “There’s nothing you can do. You’re going to kill yourself if you keep this up!”

But Gaster refused.

So he stood there, throwing wave and wave of bone attacks. He stood there, pacing up and down the barrier’s length like the caged animal he was, examining every inch, every nook and crack and cranny for a weak point.

There was none. The barrier was solid and thorough.

He suppose he should have been impressed by such a feat.

Eventually exhaustion overcame him and he was forced to relent his attacks, choosing to sit in front of that damned wall. Grillby was right about one thing; attacks weren’t doing anything. He had to stop and think this through.

If there was one thing he was, it was an intellectual. If magic was not the answer, perhaps science was.

He spent many hours testing its boundaries. Of course he would bounce off the barrier if he approached it, and his attacks alone could not damage it. So the question was, could anything pass through it?

He picked up a nearby stone with his magic and threw it at the barrier. It bounced off.

He frowned.

He picked up the rock again, this time with his own hands, and threw it without the aid of his magic.

It sailed right through with hardly any resistance.

Interesting.

He tried again. He levitated a stick with his magic, and threw it, releasing the stick of his magic before it hit the barrier. The stick also sailed clear through the barrier.

Gaster paused, folding his hands behind his back and thinking hard. Magic couldn’t pass out of the barrier, but it seemed inanimate objects could pass freely.

He reached out with his magic, trying to levitate the rock just beyond the barrier. His magic extended to the barrier-

—and then it violently rebounded, sending a shock of magical energy singeing up his arm. He hissed in pain but quickly shook it off. Alright, so he couldn’t use his magic to manipulate things outside the barrier. Made sense.

He should take notes.

For the first time since the barrier had fallen, Gaster turned and walked away. But he promised to return.
Monsterkind’s numbers were dangerously low. A census was taken to see who had made it. Scarcely more than eighty thousand monsters made it. A fraction of their original numbers.

All who had not made it to the mountain before the barrier fell were no doubt killed.

Thanks to a preemptive evacuation and monsters already taking refuge inside the mountain, there were enough supplies, rations, and material to start some sort of settlement. No one was sure how long they were trapped in here, but ever the optimists, monster had decided to make do with what they had.

A few brave parties went out to scout the caverns, Grillby included, and they found a wealth of cave systems that went on for miles. A particular tunnel led right to the mountain’s heart, where magma boiled and bubbled only a few miles away.

It would be an ideal location to set up residents to quick and easy access to heat and fire, both essentials for a new civilization.

There was plenty of space, to be certain. But food and water would be hard to come by. Water was surprisingly not as scarce as Gaster feared, for the mountains had natural springs hidden within its depths. An underground river rushed and flowed through another section of the caves, crystal clear and cool. Many monsters rushed to its source, especially the more aquatic ones. And there they used whatever rock and scrap they could find to make their homes.

Gaster was not quite as eager to explore as the others. He was still dead-set on breaking that barrier, and discovering its mysteries. He grabbed a few supplies; quills and parchments and whatever magical spellbooks had been salvaged.

There were so few.

Gaster set up his own camp right next to the barrier, religiously taking notes as he continued to experiment. Inanimate objects could pass out of the barrier, but what could come in?

Gaster tied a rope to a stone and threw it across the barrier. It fell across its edge, as expected, and Gaster reeled the rope in. The rock was not hindered whatsoever.

Seems things could come in, as well.

What about living things?

This took a lot more time and patience. But Gaster set a trap. He made a noose, threw it across the barrier, and with practiced aim, threw scraps of meat and food within the noose. And he patiently waited.

He sat stone still for a solid day until his patience was rewarded. A wolf, in rather bad shape judging from its matted coat and ragged frame, approached the scraps. The food was too tempting to resist, and it cautiously approached.

And with one swift movement, Gaster wrangled the wolf and dragged it across the barrier, screaming and howling.

It too passed through the barrier with no sign of resistance.

And now Gaster was stuck with a very angry wolf. It snarled and nipped at him, baring its white fangs ferociously. Now there was one more test he wished to complete.
Gaster raised the wolf in the air with his blue magic, and threw it against the barrier.

It hit against the barrier hard, letting out a loud cry of pain as the magic burned it. The wolf fell to the floor, dead.

Gaster felt a twang of pity. Did he really throw the poor thing that hard? But upon closer examination, it seemed the magical backfeed from the barrier was simply too much for the wretched thing to handle and it died. Gaster placed a hand on its head in some miserable attempt at an apology. He looked over the beast, looked over its fangs and skeletal frame. A fearsome and noble creature, for sure.

Gaster tilted his head, thinking.

<<I may have use for you yet,>> he said to himself. He picked up the wolf corpse, and walked away.

<<Grillby, come with me quickly.>>

Grillby was roughly shaken from his sleep. He awoke to see two eye sockets staring down at him, two little glowing white pinpricks filled with an intense light.

“Gaster, what in the hells are you doing?” Grillby muttered. “It’s the dead of night!”

<<Never mind that. Come on, get up, you need to see this.>>

The urgency of Gaster’s voice shook the elemental awake and Grillby dragged himself to his feet. “What is it? Is it the barrier?”

<<In a manner of speaking,>> Gaster said. He didn’t wait for Grillby and simply took off back towards the mountain entrance. Grillby cursed under his breath as he quickly dressed himself and chased after the skeleton. His bleach white bones practically glowed in the dark, thankfully, so Grillby had no reason to fear losing his friend.

And by now, he practically had the path to the barrier memorized. He had taken countless trips back and forth to ensure at the very least Gaster was eating during his obsessive studies of the barrier. For all his intelligence, he seemed to forget that he needed food just as much as any other monster.

Gaster and Grillby approached the barrier. The black night sky flickered and warped through the magic, like swirling ink.

“You can’t even see the stars,” Grillby muttered. Gaster nodded stiffly.

<<I have created a weapon that I believe will be the first step towards destroying this damn thing once and for all,>> Gaster said. He stepped forward, rolling his shoulders and wrists. <<Stay back.>>

Grillby let out a very long sigh, but did as he asked. Every monster in the underground had thrown everything they had at it, what did Gaster hope to accomplish on his own?

Something began to materialize next to Gaster, pale and white. At first Grillby thought it was a bone attack, but it was much too large. Its shape was wrong.

It became solid, and Grillby fell back with a loud gasp.
It was a skull. A terrible beastly skull. A skull almost as large as Gaster himself with wicked horns and dagger-like fangs. It growled lowly as it hovered in the air.

“What . . . what the hell is that thing?!” Grillby exclaimed.

<<The answer,>> Gaster responded simply.

The beast skull opened its jaws, blue magic radiating within it. The magic built with a whine, the glow growing brighter and brighter until it was blinding. When it reached its peak, the jaws split open and a beam of pure magic shot from its maw, striking the barrier like lightning.

Its attack finished, the skull vanished.

Grillby stood there, shaking. What . . . what in the name of the gods had he just witnessed?!

Gaster paid no mind to the frightened Grillby. He simply walked forward, examining the barrier further.

And suddenly, he smiled.

And never before had Grillby felt such dread.

<<It’s damaged!>> Gaster exclaimed. <<The attack! It worked! I managed to do what every monster in the entire underground couldn’t! The barrier is damaged! Do you know what this means?!!>> Gaster raced to Grillby, clapping his hands hard on his shoulders. <<It means we can break it!>>

Grillby could not share Gaster’s enthusiasm. “Wing Dings, answer me this,” he said slowly. “What. The **HELL**. Was that.”

<<I constructed a new weapon,>> he said simply. <<Our magic alone could not even land a scratch. But I surmised that perhaps a construct infused with magic would be a better conduit. I used the skull of a wolf and infused it with my own magic to—>>

“For the gods’ sake, Gaster, listen to yourself!” Grillby roared. “This is not natural! This goes against every law that we abide by!”

<<And natural law will not get us out of here!>> Gaster protested. <<Playing safe and by the rules will not free us! And if sacrifices must be made, so be it!>>

“I’m not going to let you play god!”

<<And you will stop me?>> Gaster challenged. <<You will keep me from freeing our kind?!!>>

“There has to be a better way than this . . . this necromancy!”

Gaster stiffened at the word. <<If you have any other theories, by all means! But if you are going to do nothing but scold me like a child, then get out of my way!>>

Gaster shoved past the elemental and once again faced the barrier. The skull was summoned once again, and again it unleashed a hellish blast. Grillby watched for a moment before storming off.

The skulls were Gaster’s finest creations. The most powerful weapon in monster arsenal, by far, thanks to their unique nature. But they had their drawbacks. Gaster could only fire it a few times before he grew exhausted. The barrier was damaged, it was true, but only just. A tiny crack in a
mighty wall.
But it was something.
And Gaster was filled with determination.

“Pst, hey, are you awake?”
Subject A slowly came to, rubbing his eye sockets. He let out a miserable groan as he stretched out his stiff bones, cold and cramped from lying on the steel bed. He looked up at the window to see his fellow prisoner staring down at him.

“When did you get back?” he asked. “You were gone all day!”

“Just now. The scientist said the experiment . . . uh, it had some complications,” Subject B said, furrowing his brows. “I don’t think he was very happy with me.”

“He’s never happy,” Subject A snarled.

“That’s not true! When he was training me with magic, he was very happy!”

“Oh?” Subject A muttered. Subject B nodded enthusiastically.

“I saw him smile!”

“That just means he’s going to do everything he can to make you the worst weapon he can make.”

“Well, maybe. But . . . well, I think I’m going to be ok!” Subject A snorted. “I’m serious! I think I can get through to him!”

“The doc’s crazy. There’s no talking sense into him. He’ll just stick more needles in you.”

“Yeah . . . I know,” Subject B deflated.

This got A’s attention. He scurried to his knees, poking his head through the barred window. Subject B knelt on his cot, holding his arms. He was trembling. His bones were riddled with needle marks and burns.

“Jeeze, what did he do to you?” he said in horror.

“Complications,” B offered weakly. “Whatever the scientist was doing it wasn’t working. I couldn’t make sense of it. But it hurt.”

“Yeah, I know,” A said weakly. “Are you ok?”

B nodded. “He says he’ll try again tomorrow. He’s going to . . .” his brows scrunched together again, trying to remember. “He says he’s going to do the dee-tee experiment again tomorrow.
A’s soul twisted. DT experiments were never pleasant. They burned and scorched their soul, sometimes enough to even blacken their bones. A had his fair share of them and he knew he was in for many more.

And B had only started his . . .

A subconsciously rubbed his right eye. What sort of horrors would the doctor inflict on his brother-

_Brother._

A halted his train of thought. Where . . .

Where had _that_ come from?

B saw his expression and cocked his head curiously. “What’s the matter?”

A shook his head. “Nothing . . . just a stupid thought.”

“I won’t think it’s stupid. Promise.”

A let out a small laugh. “It’s just . . . we’re both stuck down here, right? And you’re my cell-mate, right? I just kinda. . . I dunno, thought of you as a brother.”

B’s eyes lit up. “Brother? What does that word mean? I like that word.”

“It’s hard to explain.” A scratched his head. “It means you’re related. You share kinship. Like, you come from the same parents and are family but . . . heh . . .” A laughed bitterly. “We can’t be related. Not really.”

B smiled. “I think we can be!”

A looked up at him.

“You’re right, you know! We’re both down here, together! We were both made by the same person, so that kinda means we’re related! And we’re both going through these experiments together! I’d say that’s enough to mean we share a kinship!”

B sunk into himself a little, looking just a tiny bit intimidated. “Would you . . . like to be my brother?”

A was completely caught off guard. He didn’t know what to say.

“We don’t need parents to be related! And we don’t need to be related to be brothers! I think having a brother would be a very nice thing! Because now we don’t have to be alone. We can get through this together!”

“Together?” A responded weakly.

B nodded, beaming. “Together! And I promise to be the best brother ever! If you’re feeling sad I will cheer you up! And if the scientist hurts you, I will heal you! We’re not going to be alone, not anymore!”

A was completely moved. He had been down here all on his own for so long. He had been facing day after day of nightmares, no end in sight and no spark of light in his darkest moments.

But now . . . now he wasn’t alone. Now there was _light._
And for the first time since A could remember, he felt *hope*.

“I . . . I would really like a brother,” A choked out.

“Then it is very nice to meet you, my brother!” B said, gripping A’s shoulder. “We’re going to get through this! Together!”

Together.

His *brother*.

And on that day, A swore to himself, swore to his new brother, to the only family he would ever have in this hell, he swore to protect him with everything he had.

.

..

...

..

.

Gaster wasn’t sure how much time had passed between the barrier falling and that fateful day.

He was, as usual, glued to the barrier, examining it with a critical eye. Despite the (very minor and relatively insignificant) damage he managed to inflict, the barrier had somehow managed to repair itself while he slept. Gaster cursed furiously under his breath.

If not for his current predicament, this would have been the most impressive feat of magic he had ever seen.

A self-repairing obstacle only proved to create further complications. They couldn’t just whittle it down over time, it had to be destroyed in one fell swoop.

But what power on earth could ever do that?

He sat and contemplated before the wall, legs folded beneath him and hands clasped in his lap.

It took him a moment to see movement beyond the distorted light filtering through the barrier.

Seven figures approached, all hooded and cloaked. Gaster rose to his feet immediately, magic humming at his fingertips. He didn’t need to see their faces to know who they were.

They stepped forward and cast away their cloaks. The seven mages stood before him.

His students.

Gaster’s fists shook.

<<What are you doing here?>> he asked thinly.

One stepped forward. The mage went by the name Maar. He was a handsome man, with piercing eyes and a strong frame and clothed in his signature red uniform. He was the unofficial leader of the septet. The red mage of determination.
“This was the soonest we could visit without causing suspicion,” he explained. He met Gaster’s fierce gaze without wavering, his expression one Gaster couldn’t quite place. “We needed to see you, and explain—"

<<Explain what?!>> Gaster hissed. <<Explain how you betrayed everything you stood for?! Betrayed the ones who had shown you nothing but kindness?! Betrayed me?! How can you possibly come here and offer me words of comfort after the horrors you committed!>>

“Please, Teacher,” another of his students stepped forward, Istulya, the green mage of kindness. She looked at him with her great big brown eyes, begging and pleading. “Please, you must listen to us. We had no choice in the matter.”

Gaster fumed. He paced back and forth across the length of the barrier, teeth grinding together and blue wisps of magic dancing off his trembling fists. <<You had no choice. No choice. Is that why you so helplessly slaughtered my entire army and forced me to watch?!>>

“That was unforgiveable. What Redstrike did to your army was cowardly and disgraceful.” This time, Kaeylen, the yellow mage of justice, spoke. “If we had known our spell would have been used for such treachery, we would . . .” She looked away. “We tried to stop all this. You have to believe us, we tried.”

<<I find that difficult to believe. With all your power, you couldn’t even find it within yourself to slaughter that bastard?!>>

“Let us speak.” Galen, the cyan mage of patience stepped forward. He was an intimidating man, tall with broad shoulders and fists that could snap an oak in half. But his voice carried an unnatural softness that, as his namesake proved, was full of patience. “We are risking much by coming to see you. Not just our lives, but the lives of our families.”

Despite Gaster’s anger, he held his tongue. Let us see what these cowards say to justify their treachery.

Maar once again spoke. “When there was talk of war, we wanted nothing to do with it. We wanted peace between the races, just like you—"

<<YOU ARE NOTHING LIKE ME>>

The seven mages all flinched at Gaster’s words, save Maar himself. His eyes never left Gaster’s.

“But Redstrike is as diabolical as he is savage and ruthless. He found our families.” At this, Maar lowered his head. They all did. “He kept them prisoner. He promised he wouldn’t kill them if we did as he asked. And if we refused . . .”

“He’d send us body parts,” Kaeylen said thickly. Tears brimmed her eyes. “Fingers, mostly. An ear once.”

“He’d keep them alive and torture them unless we fought. Unless we did as he asked,” Maar finished. “We . . . we couldn’t refuse.”

Despite everything, Gaster could feel no sympathy for them. Despite the obvious pain and sorrow burned into their features, Gaster remained unmoved.

<<Allow me to do some basic arithmetic then,>> Gaster replied coldly. <<Allow me to be generous and say he kidnapped both parents, perhaps a sibling. Three prisoners for each of you. Twenty-one human lives. Twenty-one humans are so very obviously worth more than the thousand monster lives
you helped slaughter!>>

“**HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT?!**” This time, Orion, the orange mage of bravery, stepped forward. Fury flowed through him, his orange magic crackling around his feet. “**HOW CAN YOU THINK WE DID NOT REGRET AND DREAD EVERYTHING WE DID?! HOW CAN YOU STAND THERE AND JUDGE US WHEN WE WERE FACED WITH AN IMPOSSIBLE CHOICE?!**”

<<**BECAUSE YOU STOOD THERE AND DID NOTHING AS YOU CUT MY BRETHREN DOWN BEFORE ME!!**>>

“**IF WE INTERFERED AT ALL, EVERYONE WE CARED FOR WOULD HAVE DIED!**” Kaeylen cried. The tears flowed freely now, but she stood tall and fierce despite them. “The spell wasn’t even supposed to work!”

<<What in the hells do you mean by that?! Who was responsible for the purple snow that negated magic?! Who was the one responsible for rendering us defenseless and helpless?!!>>

But he full well knew who was. He knew that purple magic when he saw it.

Haraa. The purple mage of perseverance. She clutched the scarf wrapped around her head. She refused to look at him as she stood there and shook with grief.

Gaster felt no pity for that wretched woman.

<<Of all my students, I would have never thought you were capable of such cruelty, Haraa,>> Gaster seethed. <<Never would I have thought the quiet little bookworm would be capable of genocide.>>

“I cast the spell! Direct your fury at me!” Maar bellowed. He stood before Gaster, his eyes glowing red with his magic. “She may have written it but it was my hand that cast the spell!”

<<You’re all guilty. **ALL** of you.>> Gaster said, continuing to pace. His magic burned footprints along the barrier’s edge. <<I don’t give a damn if they had your families. I don’t give a damn if Redstrike killed them before your very eyes! What I cannot understand is how you did nothing!>>

“We saved you, didn’t we?!” Orion protested. “We saved monsterkind from extinction!”

<<By imprisoning us within this damn cave?!>>

“Redstrike full well meant it when he wanted to exterminate monsters,” Galen explained. “He would have stopped at nothing until every last monster was dead. This was the only way your kind had even a chance to survive. Please, don’t you understand? Had we done nothing, everyone would be dead!”

Gaster paused. The fury and rage he felt could not be sated, could not be reasoned with. He knew this, and he didn’t care.

<<And now what? Are we to rot away inside this mountain, to never see the sun again? To never breathe fresh air or see the stars or ocean? What sort of life have you cursed us with to be cast away in the dark, to be forgotten?>>

“The barrier can be broken,” Haraa said. Her voice was a whisper, but everyone turned to see the timid young woman speak. “It’s not indestructible. In time, we can take it down. We swore, on our honor, that when humans could learn to love and live in peace, we will return and let all of you free.”
<<Humor me, mage. How can this barrier be broken?>>

“With the power of human souls,” she continued. “We used the very essence of our own souls to create it, and so with the power of seven human souls, the barrier can be destroyed.”

Gaster narrowed his eyes, taking in this new information. <<And what can pass the barrier, without destroying it?>>&

“Anything can enter it,” Maar said. “But it would take a being with a very powerful soul to pass out of it.”

<<In other words, a human. Or a monster with a human soul.>>

Maar nodded slowly. “That is true.”

Gaster let out a breath. He paced, back and forth. The mages watched him, silently. They watched, unsure whether to speak, or what sort of words they could offer to their former teacher.

Gaster was so very angry, but so very tired. This . . . burning hatred he felt inside him, the constant gnawing ache of vengeance and loathing was exhausting. But his soul bled and twisted from every horror he had witnessed. His soul thrummed and singed from the memory of fallen brothers, of the screams and cries of war. His eye burned from the scar, the jagged crack stretching across half his face like a gaping wound straight to his core. He lifted a hand to the crack and felt the sharp edges with his fingertips. It still stung. Still burned.

He was so tired of feeling so . . . hurt.

“Your eye . . .” Istulya said softly. Gaster was dragged from his daydreaming and turned to see the green mage pressing herself against the barrier, her face contorted with worry.

“Oh my stars, your eye. It looks awful.”

Gaster huffed. <<Hurts even worse.>>

Maar narrowed his eyes. “Redstrike?”

The skeleton allowed a gruff laugh. <<I would rather die than give the bastard the satisfaction of wounding me. No. No one but a simple foot soldier did this to me.>>

Istulya furrowed her brows in concentration. “I . . . I cannot heal you from here. But if you let me, I will return tomorrow! I will bring you medicine and anything you desire! Anything! Gaster, my teacher, my friend . . .” Gaster snarled at the word. “We swear to you. We swear to you, on our honor. We will free you. No matter how long it takes, no matter what we must do, we will free you.”

Gaster did not reply.

Maar turned to the mages. “Istulya has a very good point. Monsters must be trapped with frightfully few resources and material to live. We will gather what we can, and return.” He turned back to Gaster. “We will be back, tomorrow at noon. Until then, my teacher.”

The skeleton watched them go silently. As they disappeared over the distant hills, he surveyed the surrounding caves.

He had much preparation to do before tomorrow.
As promised, the mages returned. With them they led four strong horses with them, each carrying an abundance of food, supplies, and magical artifacts. Some of which Gaster had owned before.

As each basket was shoved past the barrier, Gaster scoured their contents and found many of his old things. His notes, his books, his vials and testing supplies, his entire alchemy kit . . .

He thought he had lost those things forever.

And Gaster was struck with a horrible twisting feeling in his gut. He held his prized journal close to his chest, flipping through the pages filled with his unique scrawl.

<<I . . . never thought I would see these again,>> he whispered. <<How did you find these?>>

Istulya beamed. “Cicero was able to find them! He managed to buy them off of black market vendors and soldiers who plundered your camps. We apologize if it’s not everything, but it was what we could salvage.”

Gaster was moved beyond words. <<You . . . thank you . . .>> he said weakly.

“It was the least we could do,” Cicero smiled. The blue mage of integrity continued to unload parcel after parcel. With what they were giving him, monsterkind had a fighting chance for survival.

It was almost too much for Gaster to take.

He didn’t know what to say or how to respond to such . . . thoughtfulness. What could he say? The brilliant and genius monster was struck silent by the humans’ generosity.

But was it generosity? Was it really? Or was it atonement? Perhaps a little of both.

“We know what we have given you today cannot begin to forgive us for our actions,” Maar said. “We do not expect you to forgive us. But we . . . all we want is for you to understand.”

Gaster closed his eyes and bowed his head. <<The very worst thing about all of this? I do understand. I understand entirely. You were forced into an impossible position. Fight or see your loved ones die. Do as you are commanded or else let innocents suffer.>> Gaster shuddered. <<I understand so completely . . . but I cannot free myself of this hatred I have inside me!>>

“The wounds are still so fresh,” Galen reminded him gently. “Such a grave injury upon your very soul will take many years to heal. And maybe it will never fully heal. But as long as you understand, that is enough for me.”

The mages nodded in agreement.

“But humanity will learn! Humanity will learn peace and kindness, in due time!” Istulya said brightly. “We will see to that!” She turned to Cicero. “We have one more thing for you, Teacher!”

Cicero stepped forward, holding a small parcel and carefully guided it across the barrier with his blue magic. Wordlessly, Gaster took it and opened it.

Inside was his uniform.

Gaster’s breath locked in his throat.
He stared down at it. The monster emblem bore into him, searing his eyes and burning him like the sun. His hands trembled horribly as he pressed a hand against the fabric of his tunic.

<<Where . . . did you get this?>> he whispered hoarsely.

“Redstrike,” Cicero said simply. “He found your uniform in the abandoned monster camp and wanted to make a mockery of it. So I stole it away.” He shifted on his feet. “I thought . . . perhaps you would like it back?”

Gaster was silent for a very long time. He knelt before the parcel, his hands gripping the cloth fabric. The memories came back. Burning. Floodling his vision. Filling his mind’s eye with nothing but red.

He heard their screams.

He saw them die.

Again and again.

He saw an axe fall.

Again and again.

**MONSTERKIND WILL REMEMBER YOUR SACRIFICE!**

Again and again and again and again and again and again

He saw them **DIE**.

**AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN**

Gaster clenched his eyes closed tightly, burying his head in the uniform. He was faintly aware of soft voices calling his name but it was lost in the din of Gaster’s mind as he heard the roar of war within him.

His bones began to rattle, filling the air with a terrible clicking sound.

And his eyes began to burn blue.

<<You . . .>> Gaster shook. <<You dare . . . you dare come here? You dare come to me and force me to bear witness to my humiliating failure?!>>

Cicero jumped forward, hands spread wide. “No! By the gods, never! I . . . I only wanted to return what is rightfully yours before anyone dared desecrate it!”

<<And what would you have me do with this?!>> Gaster jumped to his feet, eyes blazing. <<Perhaps I shall hang this above my bed! Be forced to see it every day! Every morning when I wake up, I will look at it! I will look at it and I will be reminded of humanity’s unbridled cruelty!>>

Cicero’s eyes widened in horror. “Gaster, please that’s not-!”
"EVERY MORNING I SHALL LOOK UPON MY UNIFORM, BLOODIED FROM
BATTLE, AND I WILL BE REMINDED!" he roared. "I will be reminded that as long as
humans walk this earth, there will be no such thing as peace!"

“You can’t believe that!” Kaeylen cried. “You have to trust—”

"It was our trust of humans that led to our downfall!" Gaster cried. "We trusted you! We
traded with you, befriended you gave you the clothes off our backs, trained and loved you and you
turned around and committed genocide!"

"THAT’S ENOUGH!" Orion shouted. He stormed forward, glaring eye to eye with the enraged
skeleton. “We are attempting to right the wrongs of our kind and make this world a better place! As
you taught us!”

"And such a fine teacher I was!" Gaster cried. His eyes burned. He felt a wetness upon his
cheeks. "Such an impressive feat to seal us away for eternity! And you dare come to me and ask
for hope and peace?! You’ve damned us!"

“We saved you! We are trying to help you!”

"The only way you can help me . . ." Gaster fumed. He reached with his magic. He felt his blue
magic coil and grip something just a few feet behind him. "The only way YOU can help monsters
now . . ."

Maar’s eyes blazed with magic.

"IS TO DIE!!!"

The world exploded into motion.

Just behind Gaster, hidden from view, was a fallen stalagmite, sharpened and chipped to a deadly
point. A rope was hidden in the dirt, just where Orion’s foot happened to be.

Gaster launched the stalagmite, straight and true. Orion didn’t see it coming.

There was no time for him to react as the deadly rock pierced straight through his chest.

A scream shattered the air.

Gaster grabbed the rope before Orion had even fallen to the earth and yanked with all his strength.
But Maar saw what was happening and rushed forward. With a slice of his magic, the rope was cut
and Orion fell just out of Gaster’s reach.

An orange light burned just above the mage’s chest, glowing brilliantly.

The soul scattered into a thousand pieces. And with it, Gaster’s only chance.

Istulya and Kayelen rushed to Orion’s side, collapsing around his bleeding body and weeping.
Istulya poured her magic into him, begging to the gods above. Gaster gritted his teeth. His magic
burned.

A skull materialized behind him, and with a mighty shout he poured his magic into the construct, the
magic a pure beam of light shattering against the barrier. The mages jumped away, terror in their
eyes as they saw the disembodied skull. Gaster screamed and screamed as the beam of magic
pounded against the barrier.
With nothing left to give, Gaster fell forward, the skull disappearing from sight. The mages stared.

And still, Istulya knelt by Orion’s side, her magic glow still surrounding his still and bloodied body.

<<Foolish child, have you forgotten my first lesson?>> he mocked. <<You cannot revive the dead with magic!>>

“To Hell with you!” Kaeylen cried. “To Hell with you, and may you burn there for eternity!”

Maar stood before them, furious. Red magic thrashed around him like lightning, eyes blazing. Tears streaked from his eyes.

“Coward,” he seethed. “You coward!”

<<Then come, my prized student!>> Gaster challenged, spreading his arms wide. <<Come, and face me down! I will rip your soul from your wretched corpse and use it to wipe your kind from this earth!>>

Galen and Cicero came to Maar’s side, holding him back but Gaster could see the rage in their eyes as well. They wished for his death as well.

The skeleton did not fear them. He felt no fear at all as the six mages stood before him, trembling with rage and grief.

“We would have saved you,” Maar said. “We would have saved you! But may you rot in your earthen prison! May your kind be forgotten and die, alone and in the dark!”

<<And I swear on your miserable lives I will get out of here.>> Gaster growled. <<I will get out of here, and I will kill you all! You hear me?!>>

He shook his fist at the heavens, blue flames swallowing him as he was consumed by his rage.

<<I SWEAR TO YOU, I WILL KILL YOU ALL!>>
Darker, Darker, And Darker Still

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the delay on this chapter! I was very busy with Comic Con prep! Now that it’s finished, I expect to write a bit more regularly now!

The years blurred together.

Gaster stopped keeping track of the days. They were all the same. No sun to distinguish night from day, no moon waning and waxing away the months, no seasons to tell of the cycles of the earth.

Many monsters fell in the few short years after the barrier fell. They had lost hope. What was the point of living in this prison? What was the point of wasting their lives away beneath the surface?

The mountain tunnels were covered with dust.

Even with Gaster’s grand revelation to break the barrier, it helped nothing. How could monsters ever hope to harvest the power of seven human souls? Would they simply wait for humans to stumble upon their cave?

This raised a greater concern. Anyone could enter. So what was to stop a platoon of human soldiers from storming the very mountain and slaughtering them all while they slept?

King Asgore arranged the Royal Guards, assigning Grillby as the High Commander of the Guards. Grillby dutifully took up the mantle. He led a squadron of monsterkind’s finest, including the young and enthusiastic Captain Gerson.

Most of his duties were resorted to peacekeeping. Tensions within the monster kingdom were one wrong move away from total anarchy. Brawls were weekly. Brawls between monsters that had fought together as brothers were more than Grillby cared to recount.

Soon, it became too much for the great Firestorm General.

A fight had escalated to bloodshed. Five monsters were killed in a furious rampage. Grillby was the one on scene, attempting to defuse the situation.

He saw the monsters die with his own eyes. He was the one who returned to the Capital to give his report, covered in dust, his eyes with an emptiness Gaster knew all too well.

That day, he resigned, was honorably discharged, and was not seen by anyone, save Gaster himself, for many weeks.

Those weeks had been . . . trying. For Gaster, but especially for the poor elemental.

“I keep seeing them die . . .” Grillby whispered. “Again and again. It won’t stop. Wing Dings, please, why won’t it stop?”

Gaster could do little to comfort his friend. For he too was plagued with the same dreams. The same nightmares.
Again and again.

Gerson replaced him, but felt unworthy to uphold the title of High Commander. He became the leader of the guards, under his current rank of Captain.

He was a fine soldier. A great monster, and with his hammer, he restored a tentative peace.

With much encouragement from Gaster, Grillby sought purpose and meaning in other things.

He had always been admired for his legendary cooking skills. He opened a small, warm restaurant in Hotland, not far from the Capital, providing much-needed hot and hearty meals for the weary and desperate.

But in time, Grillby relocated.

Gaster could see the haze in Grillby’s eyes every time he walked past the magma pools of Hotland. He saw him flinch and tremble as steam and molten earth sputtered from the volcanic core. He saw Grillby collapse in on himself, shuddering horribly, as the flames of Hotland reminded him all too harshly of the flames of war.

Gaster assisted him with setting up a new restaurant far from the nightmares of Hotland. A quiet, budding town of Snowdin, perpetually frozen and covered with snow and frost. Gaster feared for Grillby’s safety, but Grillby’s flames burned the brightest Gaster had seen in a very long time.

Gaster made sure to visit his friend as often as possible, whether to assist with running the shop or to simply grab a drink.

Those visits grew scarcer and scarcer as the years marched on.

For Gaster himself had a duty to attend to.

With the barrier the only thing on his mind, Gaster set off to work vigorously, setting up his own make-shift lab in Hotlands. From there he continued his endless experiments on the barrier, the magma caverns providing an ideal and practically infinite source of heat and power. Using his knowledge of steam engines, he was able to cobble together a very primitive generator from whatever scraps he could find in the caves.

It was clear extensive mining, lumber, and irrigation systems would need to be implemented before he could hope to build something more complex.

But for now he was content with the prototype laboratory. He would make improvements here and there, steadily improving his energy efficiency to nearly 98%. It was a feat Gaster was quite proud of.

His studies of the barrier led to other revelations. In one of his many scavenging excursions, he stumbled upon a group of young monsters huddled around a heap in the middle of the Waterfall caverns. A mound of driftwood, sticks, leaves, and stones cobbled together into a messy pile along with scattered trash, from rags to parchment to miscellaneous broken knickknacks.

Gaster immediately questioned where the trash had come from. The river, obviously.

*The trash came in through the river from somewhere!*

What if freedom was much closer than any of them realized? What if freedom was simply a short swim down the river?
Asgore himself recruited the strongest, fastest swimmer in the monster arsenal, a hearty and headstrong fish monster who went by the name Roah. Roah was eager to take up the challenge, making a grand show of preparing for his daring journey. He packed enough food and supplies for a few days, and with much bravado, jumped into the river and began to swim.

He returned one week later. The river stretched for miles, he said. It snaked and weaved endlessly. His meager supplies were not enough to last him the journey.

Roah prepared yet again, a bit wiser, a bit more wary. He was aware of the river’s cruel currents and its unbridled nature, and took extra precautions in preparation for his second attempt.

Again, with much jubilation, Roah dove into the river.

He was never seen again.

Speculations abound over what had happened to the poor monster. Some said the river’s wild currents claimed his life. Other thought he had become lost and wandered until his supplies ran out and his energy left him. Others, more hopeful still, said he found freedom and did not wish to return.

And skeptics retorted that perhaps he had found freedom, and humans had been waiting, and slaughtered him on sight.

Gaster urged Asgore to send another scout, but the heart-broken king refused to damn another life to the raging river.

Frustrated, Gaster retreated back to his labs.

The trash mound proved to be a crucial discovery, despite the tragedy. All sorts of things fell into the river, and into that little area. Technology Gaster could not have even dreamed of fell into his hands, and it was no challenge for the brilliant scientist to reverse engineer whatever gadgets and gizmos he stumbled upon.

With his discoveries, he brought electricity to the entire Underground. He learned to use the natural gases of the earth for heat and cooking. He invented devices to purify the water and preserve food. Monsterkind began to flourish within the Underground.

As the years passed, Asgore took a wife. She was a beautiful and kind boss monster, just as he was, and together they promised to restore hope, peace, and harmony. Monsters had no need to fear or despair, for they promised that as long as they ruled, no one shall suffer unnecessarily.

Gaster knew of the queen. Toriel had been a life-long friend of Asgore, long before the barrier fell. And as much as the union disgusted him, he was honestly surprised the king didn’t ask Toriel to marry him sooner.

He had voiced his disapproval for such a tastelessly exultant occasion. Was it wise for such a jubilant celebration in the midst of such tragedy?

“And that is precisely why it is so necessary!” Asgore had laughed heartily. “Monsterkind has never felt such despair and sadness! They must remember there is good in this world! They must remember what love and hope feels like! Without those things, my dear friend, monsters shall surely perish.”

Gaster was reluctant to admit Asgore had a point.
And to the incessant urging of Asgore, Gaster grudgingly attended the festivities. It was a grand celebration. No corners were cut, no detail was too small to be overlooked. Everything was extravagant and beautiful and full of color the likes of which monsterkind had forgot even existed.

And the newly queened Lady Toriel was a sight to behold. She was the envy of monsters everywhere with her beautifully pearl fur and a smile that reminded Gaster of the sun. She went out of her way to greet and make small talk to every monster she met, including Gaster himself. She approached him, took his skeletal hands into her own very large, yet soft and gentle, paws.

“Gorey has told me so much about you!” she said sweetly. “He says you are the most brilliant mind he has ever met!”

<<It pleases me greatly that our King thinks so highly of me, Your Highness,>> Gaster said with a small bow. <<And it pleases me to see King Asgore so happy. It has been a very long time since I’ve seen him smile so. I wish nothing but the very best for the both of you.>>

“Spoken like a true friend!” Toriel grinned. “As the royal scientist, I am sure you and I will do much business together!”

<<Royal scientist?>> Gaster parroted, confused.

Toriel looked shocked. “Well, of course! What else are you and your exquisite laboratory doing if not serving King and monsterkind? Has dear Gorey not even offered you a formal royal position?”

<<It . . . might have been something I overlooked,>> Gaster said sheepishly, rubbing the back of his neck. <<I simply just . . . built the lab without ever really thinking of being . . . an official.>>

“Well! Let’s take care of that, shall we!” Toriel clapped her hand on his shoulder and guided the very bemused skeleton through the crowds and straight to Asgore. They kissed and rubbed muzzles briefly before Toriel spoke.

“Our dear friend Wing Dings Gaster is the most brilliant monster in the whole kingdom, and has already proved his worth with supplying the whole Underground with power and technology we could never have dreamed of!” Toriel announced. “I say it is high time that Wing Dings receive recognition for his accomplishments, and a position within the Royal Court!”

“I thought that was already implied! But if we must make it official, then so be it!” Asgore said with a hearty laugh. He cleared his throat. “Doctor Wing Dings Gaster, I commend you for your service and duty to monsterkind, and from henceforth, you shall be named my Royal Scientist! Do you accept such an honor?”

Gaster allowed a small grin. <<I do, my King. I am in your service, until the end of my days.>>

“Then let us pray for a long and healthy life, my friend!” Asgore patted him on the shoulder. “And as your superior, and your king, your first duty will be to report to me every week for tea to discuss any progress or discoveries you have made.”

<<So it is spoken, so shall it be,>> Gaster bowed. Toriel once again came up to him and hugged him.

“It will be such a delight to work with you!” she said. But the festivities continued on, and soon they were dragged away to mingle with other monsters and to dance the night away under colorfully glowing rock crystals.

Gaster stole himself away for a drink. Grillby, of course, was in charge of catering and was giving
Gaster a very peculiar smile.

“My dear Majesty, shall I fetch my finest champagne to commemorate the most honorable of promotions, my Liege?” Grilly said with a dramatic bow.

<<Go shove that champagne cork up your arse, you fiery tart,>> Gaster retorted with a smile. <<If you continue to speak to royalty as such, I might be forced to sentence you to the stocks!>>

Grillby laughed. “Well, congratulations are in order, regardless!” He poured a few glasses of champagne. “Congratulations for finally being recognized for what you’ve been doing for the last several decades!”

Gaster smirked. <<Nothing’s changed, Grillby. Just me locking myself in my laboratory and doing the King’s bidding.>>

“And what does the king bid?”

<<I will not even grant such a stupid question with an answer,>> Gaster replied gruffly. His mood had been soured. <<I’m going to do what I swore to do the day the barrier came down. I’m going to break it, and free us all.>>

“A daunting task for anyone. Even you,” Grillby replied. He put a hand on Gaster’s shoulder. A lot of people were touching him today, it seemed. “But enjoy the party. Dance. Laugh. Enjoy yourself. Gods know I haven’t seen you smile since that damn barrier fell. I miss it.”

<<I will,>> Gaster said, and with a nod, Grillby walked off to attend to the food and drinks.

But not even a half hour later, Gaster was nowhere to be seen at the wedding dinner.

Grillby let out a heavy sigh.

Gaster considered himself to be an expert in many of the science fields. Engineering, mathematics, electrics, and physics. But something he had discovered that intrigued him greatly was theoretical physics.

Monsters had tried numerous times to find other ways out of the mountain, one of which was attempting to mine straight through the rocky earth. But it seemed no matter how long and how far they dug, the mountain went on forever. It completely bewildered even the most senior and experienced surveyors, who swore up and down their calculations were correct.

It seemed the barrier wasn’t just the singular wall at the mouth of the Capital. It completely surrounded them in every way and in every direction. Like a giant bubble.

And something very peculiar came wandering into Gaster’s mind one day. It was common knowledge that energy and matter were constant, and could not be created or destroyed. And with the barrier, it created, in simple terms, a perfectly closed system.

Everything was contained. No energy in, no energy out. This discovery intrigued Gaster so much he wondered . . .

Time was always perceived to be a straight line. Always moving forward, always in the present, a second passed was a second lost to history, a second ahead was an uncertainty.

What if it wasn’t that simple?
What if someone could step outside the barrier, what if someone could *step out of the system* and move within the time stream?

This would be his greatest achievement. Time travel! Not just science fiction, but theoretically probable and *possible*!

He set to work straight away. He began to build his finest creation, the Closed Operational Resource of Entropy building.

Or the CORE for short.

One thing Gaster had kept to himself for many years was that Mount Ebott was a wellspring of natural magic. Gaster himself didn’t even know that was possible. Magic was found within monsters, and very rarely in humans, but it was unheard of that the land itself was magic. Was it an indirect side-effect of the barrier, or had Ebott always been like that? Gaster couldn’t know for sure. The magic of Ebott was something Gaster had never encountered before; feral and wild and pure. And strong. The strongest source of magic he had seen.

He drew upon the wild magic of the mountain to fuel the CORE and built it tangent to his Hotland laboratory. It took many years, but the CORE came to fruition, and with it Gaster began to study the strange earthen magic.

What Gaster failed to realize was just how powerful and feral the CORE magic could be.

He should have taken precautions. He shouldn’t have been so careless. But blinded by his own ambition, focused solely on his theories, he failed to realize the CORE becoming unstable.

Gaster was in the reactor chamber when the CORE went critical, and exploded.

By all accounts, he should have died.

Shrapnel sliced the air like knives. Steel pipes and beams collapsed in on themselves. Gaster himself had been exposed to a horrendously high level of the CORE’s radiation.

Yet here he was, crawling out of the ruins of his lab, coughing away the dust, with hardly a scratch on him.

He felt his magic stir within him. Shaken by the event, he picked himself up and attempted to salvage the ruins.

The western section of the lab had been totally obliterated. The CORE was mostly destroyed. And although Gaster was relieved beyond words he survived, he still couldn’t stop thinking about how long and how hard it would be to rebuild everything.

*Good thing to know I have my priorities in order*, he thought uneasily.

Of course his friends and the King and Queen themselves rushed to his aid and fussed endlessly over him. Gaster was swarmed with well-wishes and was doted on like a child, much to his irritability, but he knew when it was best to give into his friends’ demands. Toriel herself oversaw Gaster’s recovery, even though there was nothing to recover from, so to speak.

She was currently standing over Gaster as he laid in one of the King’s guest bedrooms, surrounded by blankets and pillows stuffed with the softest feathers. It almost felt like the scientist was sinking in quicksand, the beds were so soft.
Toriel waved her hands slowly back and forth over the length of Gaster’s body, her healing magic tickling his bones as it seeped through every one of them. Like a warm fire he was coated in a pleasant haze, the feeling reminding him of a roaring fireplace, or a calm sunny day. In time, Toriel paused, bringing a hand to her chin and ruffling her brows in concentration.

“Well, on all accounts, you are perfectly healthy and fine. Not a mark on anything,” she huffed. “You are one very lucky monster.”

<<Agreed,>> Gaster muttered. He was half-asleep. The soft bed, the gentle touch of healing magic, it took all of his willpower not to succumb to sleep. <<It’s as I said, I am fine. By some divine miracle, perhaps.>>

“At this point I wouldn’t doubt that.” She seated herself on the bed, and Gaster forced himself to sit up. “But still, I insist you stay the night.

<<Is that necessary?>>

“It would certainly put my mind at ease. Should anything happen. I know sometimes, after severe trauma, the true effects aren’t seen until a few hours or days afterwards. Please, I insist. You’d be no trouble at all, I promise you.”

<<I don’t think you’d accept a “no” for an answer right now, would you?>> Gaster chuckled. <<As you wish. I will stay here for the evening. Thank you again for your assistance, my queen.>>

Toriel clapped her hands together. “Splendid! I will let Gorey know to put another plate out for supper!” She rose to leave, but hesitated. She cast a glance back over her shoulder at the skeleton, her expression one of concern and . . . perhaps empathy?

“My dear Wing Dings . . .” she said carefully. “Are you sure you are alright? Is . . . is your eye . . . bothering you at all?”

Gaster instinctively rose a hand to the terrible scar under his eye. Yes, ever since that day in the battle field his wound hadn’t healed in the slightest and left a great gaping hole on half of his face. He’s had his fair share of monsters staring and Grillby worrying over him, but he had learned to ignore it, and even carry the mark with pride. A testament to his resilience to the human scourge.

“It looks . . . Gast-ly.”

Gaster balked and Toriel let out a loud snort as she tried to keep herself from laughing.

“I . . . I apologize I shouldn’t be making light of such a terrible thing.”

<<I am fine, I assure you. It does indeed look ghastly but I do not suffer from it.>> he waved.

“If you wouldn’t mind . . . perhaps I can help.” She took a few small steps towards him. “I can try to heal it.”

He sighed. <<If you wish to try, then you may do so. I haven’t had any luck with it myself.>>

“Well then you certainly never tried healing magic from a boss monster!” Now filled with determination, Toriel seated herself next to Gaster and placed a hand just over his wound. Her red eyes began to glow with her magic, and Gaster could feel the familiar sensation of her magic flowing into him. It was warm . . . borderline burning now, and he winced slightly as the magic scalded the edges of the crack. The magic continued to burn, Gaster grinding his teeth in response to the ache, but a moment later Toriel finished and the burning sensation faded.
Experimentally, Gaster rose his fingers to the crack.

It was significantly smaller now. It still reached from his eye to the corner of his mouth, but what was once a massive fissure was now little more than a small crack.

Gaster froze. He . . . he seriously underestimated Toriel’s power. She managed to do what he couldn’t ever accomplish on his own.

<<I . . . thank you . . .>> he managed to choke out.

Toriel was beaming. “Come now, Dr. Gaster! Let’s have dinner!”

Gaster never thought he had ever eaten so much in his life. Toriel kept filling his plate with food no matter how much he protested and there was no way in high heaven he was allowed to leave the table until he had some of Toriel’s famous cinnamon-butterscotch pie.

Filled to the brim with a delicious meal, Gaster was all too happy to pass out on the guest bedroom, drifting off into a deep sleep . . .

.
.
.
.
He was nowhere.

Nothing surrounded him. To all sides was utter blackness. No floor, no walls. Just an endless void.

Before him stood a tiny monster. His back was to Gaster, but he could see the young monster’s pure white fur and the long floppy ears dangling from his head. The young monster wore a green and yellow striped shirt. Nothing more than a child.

The monster child flexed his paws, his shoulders heaving up and down in a . . . laugh? Gaster wasn’t sure.

He turned.

Gaster tilted his head. If he didn’t know any better, he’d have sworn that the child standing before him was a very young Asgore, but he knew that wasn’t the case.

(How did he know that?)

“Hello? Chara? Are you there?” he called out. The young monster looked straight at Gaster with deep red eyes, full of hope. “It’s me! Your best friend!”

The room went white. Blinding burning light. Gaster shielded himself, throwing arms in front of his face.

“A S R I E-”
“Gaster! Gaster, my dear, wake up!”

Gaster started awake. His eyes shot open and he practically jolted out of bed, earning a surprised outburst from Toriel. The room was bathed in the blue glow of Gaster’s magic. Gaster took several quick breaths before composing himself.

He was shaking, and covered in a cold sweat.

(Why was he so uneasy?)

Toriel was at his side in an instant. “Oh dear, are you quite alright?”

Gaster took another breath, closing his eyes and wrangling his magic under control. <<Yes yes, I am alright. I am sorry if I woke you.>> He opened his eyes. The blue light was gone. <<But . . . I think I had a Vision.>>

Toriel lifted an eyebrow. “A Vision? You saw something?”

<<Yes.>> God, how long has it been since his last? It had to have been ages. Before the war, even. He had gone years and years without one. What did this one mean?

“Would you like to talk about it?” Toriel asked carefully.

Gaster furrowed his brows. <<It wasn’t much. A young monster child was standing before me. He was wearing a striped shirt, that’s how I knew he was a child. He looked just like Asgore.>>

Toriel lit up, her smile crossing her muzzle and bouncing on the bed with glee.

“It was a boy?! That looked like Asgore?! Oh, please! Tell me more! I must know everything!”

Gaster hesitated for a moment. <<Erm . . . well, I do mean it when I say he was the spitting image of Asgore. White fur, floppy ears->>

He stopped dead, realization hitting him like Gerson’s mighty hammer.

His jaw dropped.

Toriel continued to beam.

<<My Lady . . .>> he said slowly. <<Did . . . did I just see the future Prince?>>

“Yes!” she cried, enveloping Gaster into a mighty hug. “It is true! I am with child!”

<<I . . . I . . . congratulations . . .>> Gaster muttered weakly. He was never very good at these sorts of things.

“Oh, Gorey and I were going to announce it soon! I don’t want to think we were hiding anything
from you! But oh, just think, my dear Wing Dings! Monsterkind will have a new *Prince*! Think of how monsters will celebrate! The Underground will be overjoyed!”

Gaster uneasily shifted himself within Toriel’s suffocating grip. "I am delighted to hear it," he said in a strained voice. "This . . . this is wonderful news indeed."

“And how very lucky you are to be the first one to see him! Before his own mother, even! I admit I’m a tad jealous!" She released him, clapping her hands on his shoulders. “Did you see anything else? What was his name? Oh, Gorey and I have some picked out! But which one should it be? No no no! Don’t tell us!” she interrupted before Gaster could speak. “If we don’t know, will he still go by the same name as in your dream? What if we were to choose a different name! Hee hee hee! Knowing the future is a funny thing!”

"If it’s any consolation, I didn’t catch his name," Gaster said. "But . . . does the name “Chara” mean anything to you?"

“No, why?”

"Your . . . um, future son was calling out for whoever this Chara was. They were friends, it would seem."

“Very mysterious! But that is good to know! Now I know he will have many friends! And why shouldn’t he!"

Toriel was beside herself with giddiness. The Vision gave her a promise. A promise of a beautiful son, an heir to the monster throne, hope for all of monsterkind.

Gaster, however, could not share her enthusiasm.

The Vision was, by all accounts, completely innocent. Just a small young monster looking for their friend, Chara. Whoever Chara happened to be.

So why did that name send a cold shot of dread creeping up his spine? Why did that name make his bones rattle and shake? What was so malicious about this Vision that it shook him to the pit of his soul?

He’d have to contemplate on that.

But he knew one thing for certain. This Vision was far more sinister than it appeared.

As for why, he could not know.

But for now, he decided the best thing to do was keep that part of the Vision hidden from the expecting mother.

The next day was spent with the King and Queen celebrating Gaster’s vision. Much fussing was had as they decided to expedite the announcement of the new Prince to that very day.

And of course, Gaster was invited to the ceremony. He was given the honor to be one of the speakers, but he graciously declined.

He was never very good at such events.

Just as Toriel predicted, monsterkind greeted the news with uproarious celebration. Tears of joy were wept and a grand party was thrown, with much dancing and drinking and more food than an
entire army could eat.

Gaster himself shied away from the festivities. But of course Asgore publically decreed him as the one to herald the good news so the poor skeleton was swarmed with monsters, begging for more.

“After all these years, another Vision! And such a magnificent one at that!”

“You must tell us everything you saw!”

“Will he grow up to be as great of a king as his father?”

“As loving as his mother?”

“Tell us more of the future!”

It took quite a feat of social deflections and fancy footwork to escape the commotion. But he found his way back home, to his lab, and sealed himself away. Letting out a breath of relief, he slumped to his private room. For all the time he spent in his laboratory, it only made sense to set up a bed and standard furniture for those all too often occasions where Gaster would be working for days on end.

He collapsed on his bed and fell into a deep sleep.

.

..

...

..

.

He stood, once again, in utter blackness. No walls, no floor. Just an endless void.

Before him stood a tiny little flower. It had bright golden petals, a white center onto which a make-shift face smiled happily up at him.

“Howdy!” the flower said in a cheerful voice. “It’s me! Your best friend!”

Gaster took a step backwards.

His bones began to shake.

The flower’s face contorted into a hellish grin.

“YOU IDIOT!”

Thorny vines sprang from nothing, unfurling madly as they sliced through the air. Several wrapped around his legs and arms, more wrapped around his chest and head. He screamed as they tightened, crushing him.

His scream was all he heard over the sound of snapping bones

And all he saw was RED
Gaster woke with a start.

His room was bathed in the blue glow of his magic.

A thunderous clicking sound filled the air. He smacked his hands over his proverbial ears. It was so loud it was almost deafening-

It was him.

His own bones were rattling violently. Gaster forced himself to still. He forced his breaths to slow. Air wheezed slowly between his teeth as his mind shook itself of the nightmare-

The Vision.

Gaster stared at nothing in particular.

Another Vision?! So soon after his last? It was unheard of. Especially now, after going so long without one.

And what the hell was it even about?! A talking flower?!

If Gaster didn’t know himself better, he’d say his mind was playing some sort of sick trick on him.

But his Visions were always right, in one way or another. Sometime in the future there would be this . . . evil talking flower.

Just thinking of such absurdity made him sick.

And once again he was struck by that familiar sense of dread. The same cold grip that tightened around his core when he had the Vision of the Prince.

It could not be coincidence.

So what was the connection? What was it supposed to mean?

He dressed, and sat himself at his desk and began to write. He ignored the early hour. This was much too important.

But what could it all mean? What did the Visions mean?

He hoped he could figure it out before tragedy struck. It had been a very long time since he had seen everyone so . . . happy.

He couldn’t let their happiness be taken away.

Not again.

Determination burned through him as he wrote, his office filled with the steady blue glow of his magic.
Months passed by very quickly, the queen steadily showing signs of her pregnancy. Monsters from all over flocked to see her, and every mother doted on her, bringing whatever gifts they could spare or fashion. She was always so gracious and humble, listening to every piece of advice and wisdom from monsters with little ones of their own.

The Underground held its breath in anticipation of the birth of their new Prince.

Gaster was anxious, to say the least. He was still no closer to uncovering the truth behind the Visions. One thing he noted was the similarities between the young prince’s and the flower’s words.

“It’s me! Your best friend!”

Was . . . the flower Chara? Were they “best friends?”

Gaster scoured every nook and cranny for any signs of flora that bared any resemblance to the one he had seen from the Vision. But no such flower grew anywhere in the Underground. Nothing so vibrant grew so deep beneath the earth.

Where had the flower come from?

And why was the flower so sinister?

The questions kept coming with no sign of answers, and it frustrated the scientist greatly.

But he had other Visions. They were coming very frequently now, at least three times a week. Sometimes it was only an image. Grillby’s bar. The King’s palace. The golden corridor leading to the throne room. The Wishing Room. Brief, flickering images that didn’t really predict much. Just images he had seen several times. Yet this time it seemed . . . new. Different.

It took him several weeks to realize the Visions were so different because the perspective had changed. He wasn’t seeing these places from his normal viewpoint, but rather as if he were two feet shorter.

Or about as tall as the young child he had seen in the Vision of the Prince.

He was seeing these places from a child’s eyes.

This was very strange. His Visions were always from his perspective. From his own eyes.

Why was he now seeing the world through those of a child?

Another mystery.

But the unrest the skeleton felt continued to grow. He could practically sense a great calamity descend on monsters.

But what was it?!

Gaster spent many days, weeks even, locked in his office, attempting to decipher the cryptic Visions. And yet the Visions kept coming.

These ones were much more detailed, their sinister nature much more apparent.

On a Tuesday, he stood at the edge of a waterfall, looking down at a yellow lizard monster he did
The poor monster was completely distraught, inconsolable. She contemplated throwing herself from that very ledge to the bottomless void below.

The Vision ended before Gaster could know what happened.

A week later, he stood face-to-face with a child. A monster? He couldn’t tell. But he knew it wasn’t human.

“There is nothing left for us here,” the . . . thing said.

Once again, a terrible coldness enveloped Gaster.

“Let us erase this pointless world, and move on to the next.”

Gaster wanted to move. To scream. Fight. Struggle. Something! He opened his mouth but no sound came out.

But he refused to give up so easily! He will not succumb to this nightmare!

Somehow, someway, a single word managed to emanate from his mouth. A tiny, weak, almost silent “no”

“No . . . ?” the creature repeated. It seemed amused. “Hm. How curious. You must have misunderstood.”

Its eyes went wide, turning a deep and bloody crimson.

“SINCE WHEN WERE YOU THE ONE IN CONTROL?”

The thing charged at him, laughing maniacally, and Gaster woke screaming.

He couldn’t sleep that entire week.

Desperate for something, he turned to his friend Grillby for help. He couldn’t take these endless nightmares!

<<I must know why they will not stop.>> Gaster pleaded. <<I must know why I am suddenly plagued with such terrible sights! Grillby, people will die!>>

The fire elemental could do little. With great discretion and secrecy, Gaster sought out every healer and medical doctor the Underground had to offer.

None could do anything for him.

With a cry of rage and frustration, Gaster once again sealed himself away.

And even still, the Visions were relentless.

He was in the golden hallway. A hand (THAT WAS NOT HIS HAND!) was pressed against a wound on his chest. He coughed up blood (HE DIDN’T BLEED) and he knew he was on the verge of collapsing to dust. He rose to his feet. He wasn’t as tall as he remembered.

“Welp, I’m going to Grillby’s,” he said in a voice that wasn’t his. His knees were about to give out. And very slowly, he shuffled away.
“Papyrus, do you want anything?”

The Vision ended as darkness consumed him.

He was seeing monsters die! He was watching everything he worked so hard for be destroyed!

He needed to figure this out! Whatever it took!

But the endless nights of nightmares began to take a toll on the doctor’s health. He could scarcely remember the last time he had a decent sleep. He could barely go three hours without being woken up by another nightmare . . . or flashback.

Fatigue was beyond obvious. He was found several times staring at nothing, his head bobbing up and down as he tried to stay awake. He was constantly forgetting things, supplies, equipment, reports, even meetings with Asgore. The King soon voiced his concern.

But what could Gaster tell him? That monsterkind was doomed and he had no answer?

No. He had to solve this. He had to figure it out.

One particularly long and stressful day, Gaster was performing regular maintenance on some lab equipment. His hand groped for his screwdriver, but it was missing from its usual spot. He muttered under his breath as he searched for it. Where the hell had he put it?

He remembered. He brought it home. He needed to repair some old shelves and had taken it out of his tool box. It was sitting on the kitchen table. Right next to the forgotten coffee mug and the breakfast he barely touched. He saw it so vividly.

He reached out and grabbed it-

The world suddenly turned a bright shade of blue, and Gaster rocked on his feet, stars filling his eyes.

He blinked.

He was in his lab.

The screwdriver was in his hand.

He stared.

<<What the fuck?>> he muttered to himself.

How . . . how did he get that? Wasn’t it at home?

Or were his memories simply getting fuzzy from fatigue? Did he simply think he brought it home but it was right there? But he could have sworn-

Gaster shook his head. <<I desperately need some sleep,>> he reassured himself.

The doctor tried to ignore the screaming red flag that waved in the back of his mind.

The bar was empty. The lights dimmed. It was solemn. Cold and quiet, like a graveyard.
He had gotten everyone he could to safety. He escorted every monster in Snowdin down secret backways and passages, rushing old and young alike to the Capital.

There, they would be safe.

He hoped.

He finished locking up his bar, cleaning, busying himself.

Why was he bothering?

There was . . . no one left.

All the Guards were dead. Dust.

Because of that thing,

At the very least, he could buy them time.

The door creaked open. He turned, his flames sparking violently.

“. . . we’re closed . . .” he hissed. His fists clenched. He stepped out from behind the bar. Every step summoned a flurry of sparks from his feet, charring the wooden floor. Slowly, the embers caught, and the bar was slowly consumed by his flames.

(His flames?!)  

“But since you killed Sans . . . since you killed everyone . . .” He rolled up his sleeves, flicking his wrists and cracking his neck. The flames grew brighter. Hotter.

His fists rose in front of his face, the instincts of a long-suppressed warrior rising to the surface.

“I’LL SERVE YOU!”

He charged forward. A knife glinted in the attacker’s hand. It rose, and fell, slicing him in half-  

Gaster woke screaming.

He jumped from his bed, his magic a blue wildfire around him. He didn’t need to be some genius to know what that Vision was!

Grillby was in danger! Grillby was going to die!

**HE NEEDED TO GET TO THE BAR! NOW-!**

The blue light consumed him.

Gaster’s vision was filled with stars. He stumbled on his feet. He was so very dizzy. His bones tingled with a strange magic.

He blinked. He saw Grillby’s bar. He saw empty chairs and tables, all neatly cleaned and polished, folded away for the night, ready for customers in the coming day.

Gaster froze.

He looked around the room. It was exactly as he remembered it. Nothing was out of order or
misplaced. No glass was missing from the shelves, not a single bottle was out of place.

This . . . this wasn’t a Vision, was it?

But how could he be here?! He was in his bedroom, wasn’t he? Yes, of course he was, this must be . . . some sort of distorted memory! He couldn’t be here! He was daydreaming! That’s it! He was in his bed, simply thinking about Grillby’s bar-

A glass shattered behind him and Gaster spun. Grillby stood behind him, frozen in terror. His jaw dropped open.

“Gaster?!” he exclaimed. “How-

Blue light blinded him, and Gaster found himself back on his bed. Right where he was supposed to be.

. . . Right?

A great feeling of unease twisted itself in Gaster’s gut.

He tried to sleep. He needed to sleep-

A small creature stood before him. A small creature covered in dust, with hellish red eyes and a sickening grin, a dagger in its hands covered in the remains of a dozen monsters.

Gaster knew this . . . this thing was responsible for the death of dozens. All the guards were gone, and it was to blame. Every bone in his body shook.

But he stood firm and tall, unwavering. Subduing the terrible rising feeling of dread.

“Human,” he said. “I have something to say.”

(THAT WASN’T HIS VOICE!)

“First,” he stumbled over his words, repressing a shudder of dread. “You’re a freaking weirdo! Not only do you not like puzzles, but the way you shambole about from place to place . . . the way your hands are always covered in a dusty powder . . .”

The remnants of monsters, Gaster thought remorsefully. How many have you killed?!

“It feels . . .” he continued. “Like your life is going down a dangerous path.”

Run! Just run! Or fight! Fight and end the slaughter!

“However, I see great potential in you!” he threw out his arms. He spread them wide in a grand show of acceptance. “Everyone can be a great person if they just try!”

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! NO!

“Human! You are in need of guidance!”

THE MONSTER NEEDS TO DIE!

“Someone needs to keep you on the straight and narrow!”

WHY DO YOU SHOW MERCY TO SUCH A TERRIBLE CREATURE?
“I will gladly be your friend and tutor!”

FOOL! YOU WILL DIE!

“I will turn your life around!”

THERE IS NO SAVING THIS THING!

The creature stepped forward.

RUN RUN RUN RUN YOU FOOL IT WILL KILL YOU JUST RUN-!

“I see you are approaching!” He didn’t move. He simply extended his arms wider. “I welcome you with open arms!”

The knife came from nowhere, and with a quick and decisive blow, his head was severed.

The pain was beyond agony.

But he did not die. Not right away.

He lived long enough to see his body turn to dust. He saw the creature tower over him, a foot ready to crush his skull.

“Well, that’s not what I expected...” he breathed. He felt so tired.

You fool...

“But still! I believe in you!” he encouraged. “You can do a little bit better! Even if you don’t think so!”

Why... why have you done this...?

He could feel his energy leave him.

How can you forgive such a thing so easily?

“I... I promise!”

He faded away.

How many times will he see monsters die?

How many dreams will he have of senseless death and genocide?

Gaster could feel himself going mad.

He wanted it all to STOP.

To the gods above, PLEASE LET IT STOP.

More Visions, more than he could count, flooded his eyes. Monsters he recognized, some he did not, sliced down before his eyes. A few brave souls trying to stop the rampage, others simply caught in its senseless rage.

All dust.
All became dust.

Gaster cried out in rage and helplessness.

**MAKE IT STOP.**

He needed silence. He needed PEACE-

- 

-- 

- 

Two young monsters rummaged in the Waterfall trash heap, eagerly searching for lost treasures. One was a young cat monster by the name Catty, the other a crocodile monster by the name Bratty. They were best of friends.

“What do you think we’ll find today?” Bratty giggled excitedly.

“Something my size, hopefully!” Catty countered. She held up a broken plastic toy. “Ewww, everyone knows green is out! Blue is this season’s color!”

“You’re wearing green shorts,” Bratty pointed out.

“Cuz no one seems to wanna make blue shorts!” Catty pouted.

A sharp crack sounded behind them and the two little monsters jumped. They spun, and saw another monster right behind them, pacing back and forth wildly.

“Where did he come from?” Catty wondered out loud.

“Nevermind that, is he ok?!” Bratty said, placing a hand over her muzzle.

The two instantly recognized the monster as the famous Dr. Gaster. Under normal circumstances, they would have screamed in delight and rushed up to him. His work was legendary!

But they hesitated.

Gaster spun in circles, his eyes wide and crazed. Blue magic seeped from his eyes like steam, and his hands bashed against his own skull.

<<Wrong wrong wrong wrong THIS IS ALL WRONG>>

He vanished in a flash of blue magic before the two could even utter a word.

The two friends stared at each other.

“Since when could he do that?” Catty wondered.

---

A very young bunny monster sighed as he sat beside his father’s Nice Cream cart. He didn’t understand! The snow was fresh and crisp, the air thin and frigid. This was the perfect weather for a cold refreshing treat! Why wasn’t he selling anything?

His father patted him on the head gently. “Never fear, my young entrepreneur! A great businessman
never gained anything without taking a few risks here and there!"

The young bunny sighed as he kicked a snow poff. “I know, Papa, but we haven’t sold anything all day!”

A sharp crack alerted them to a potential customer. They peeked around the corner.

And the two were elated to see the great Dr. Gaster right beside them!

“Hello, there!” his father called out. “You seem to be a monster in need of a sweet treat that warms your heart! Can I-”

Dr. Gaster spun, his expression one of utter horror. The two bunnies recoiled. The little bunny ducked quickly behind his father’s legs.

<<You shouldn’t be here . . . >> he whispered. His eyes were burning with blue magic.

“W-well, why not?” the bunny offered with an uneasy laugh. “This is where I always set up my cart!”

Gaster looked around, terrified. A dreadful clicking sound of rattling bones filled the air.

<<No no no no no no I shouldn’t be here this isn’t real this isn’t real YOU ARE NOT REAL!>>

He vanished in a violent burst of blue light.

The young bunny timidly emerged from behind his father.

“Papa . . .” he asked slowly. “Is Mister Gaster ok?”

He did not respond.

Being a bartender for a whole squabble of monsters, Grillby was destined to overhear a great deal of gossip. Who’s seeing who, the local politics, and whatever happens to be transpiring in the rest of the monster kingdom.

Yet these days Grillby found himself hopelessly distracted. It had been a few days since that night at the restaurant. He was losing up shop, as usual, and emerged from the back room to see Gaster standing right in the middle of his restaurant.

There was no way he could have gotten in. He locked the doors.

And he vanished seconds afterwards.

Grillby tried to call Gaster numerous times, without a response. He practically kicked down the lab doors. The scientist always happened to be somewhere else.

He ceased his search for answers for the time being. For his own sanity’s sake.

But he heard things.

“I swear up and down I saw Gaster wandering the woods right outside of town!” one of the regulars was saying. “The instant I piped up, he vanished! Like smoke!”

“Ha ha ha! Sounds like you’ve been drinking too much!”
“Ask Damien! He saw it too! Just standing there selling Nice Cream when the doc appeared out of thin air and popped away a second later!”

That settled it.

Grillby was seeing Gaster. Tonight. Whatever it took.

The end of the day couldn’t come fast enough. And as the patrons filed out, with much urging from Grillby, the elemental burst through his closing up chores with record time. Albeit haphazardly.

To hell with it. This was more important.

As he furiously scrubbed clean the last of the dishes, a loud crack sounded right in front of him. Grillby jumped, nearly dropping the glass he held.

Standing right in front of him was Gaster.

“Gaster what the ever living hell have-” Grillby started furiously, but his voice faltered when he saw the sorry state the doctor was in.

His eye sockets were hollow and dark. His clothes disheveled and filthy. He didn’t look to be completely there, lost between his thoughts and a thousand yard stare. It looked like he hadn’t seen a bed in weeks.

<<They won’t stop,>> Gaster whispered. <<They won’t stop. They won’t stop they will never stop they will keep coming until we are all dead!>>

Grillby rushed to Gaster’s side, holding his trembling frame. “Gaster, listen to me,” he spoke slowly. “It’s alright, I’m here, I’m right here, just talk to me, please, what’s going on?”

Gaster didn’t seem to hear him. His eyes, flickering with blue magic, scoured the walls. <<I keep seeing everyone die! Everyone will die, again and again I keep seeing it! I can’t make it stop, I can’t stop the nightmares, please, Grillby help me . . .>>

The skeleton collapsed in Grillby’s arms and began to weep uncontrollably. His hands clutched firmly over his eyes, blinking back tears as he endlessly muttered to himself.

Grillby was terrified. He had never seen Gaster so distraught. His mind raced. He had to do something! Who could help him?

There was only one monster in the Underground whose healing magic was second to none.

“I’m going to get help, ok?” Grillby said. “I’m going to call for help, you’re going to be alright, I will be right back-”

<<DON’T GO!>> Gaster reached out and grabbed Grillby’s vest in a death grip. <<DON’T GO IT’LL KILL YOU!>>

“There is no one here! It’s ok!” Grillby pleaded. “It’s ok! You are safe! We are safe! I need to get to my phone! Here,” Grillby lifted Gaster to his feet and guided him to the bar, where he seated Gaster upon a stool. “Here, just stay right here. You’re going to be ok, you hear me? Everything is going to be ok, and no one will die.”

Gaster either did not hear him, or didn’t care. He simply fell upon the bar and shook.

It tore Grillby’s soul in two to see him like this. But he was going to get help. He raced into the next
room and dialed on the restaurant’s only phone.

It rang twice before someone picked up.

“Dear me, who is this? Do you know what hour it is-?”

“My Lady Toriel, please forgive me, but this is an emergency of the upmost importance. It’s Gaster! He is not well. I fear something is terribly wrong with him!”

A scream shattered the air. The phone slipped from Grillby’s hand. He didn’t think. He just had to move.

He exploded out of the back room. And stopped dead.

Gaster was slouched against a nearby wall. He stared up, unblinking, at the ceiling.

A knife protruded from his right eye.

A second scream sounded. This one, from Grillby.

Grillby scrambled to Gaster’s side. He could feel hot tears streak down his cheeks as he latched onto Gaster.

“Please no no no no!” he cried. “Gaster, NO!”
Gaster tilted his head slowly, looking at Grillby with his remaining eye.  
And he smiled.  
<<It’s over . . .>> he giggled. Grillby’s core froze.  <<The Visions . . . they’ve stopped . . .>>
And Gaster laughed and laughed and laughed before succumbing to unconsciousness.
Grillby paced up and down the halls of the hospitals, his fists clenched at his side and his eyes never leaving the floor. His shoes clicked rhythmically against the pristine tiles, the pendulum click of footfalls the only distraction from what was transpiring behind the hospital doors.

On the other side, his friend hung on the precipice of death.

And it was his fault.

It was beyond stupid and ignorant to leave Gaster alone when he was in such a state. It was unforgiveable to leave him out of sight for even a second. What had he been thinking?! Yes, leave a mentally compromised and panicked individual at a bar, with silverware well within reach!

His fists clenched tighter and his flames crackled dangerously.

If Gaster died, it was on his hands.

Grillby didn’t know if his soul could take it.

King Asgore and Queen Toriel were seated in the hall, watching silently as he paced. Toriel opened her mouth a few times to speak, but hesitated. Even she was unsure how to comfort the elemental.

“Gaster is one of the strongest, most determined monsters I know,” Asgore finally spoke up in a gentle tone. “He is a resilient and stubborn man. He will pull through.”

“It’s my fault he’s here in the first place,” Grillby spat. “I left him alone. I shouldn’t have left him alone. I could have stopped him from gouging out his fucking eye!”

Grillby really wanted to punch something, but restrained himself. His flames grew hotter, and the royal pair flinched slightly.

“Grillby, please,” Toriel said softly, placing a hand on his arm. “Blaming yourself is doing no one any good. Please, sit. And calm yourself. Getting riled will not help anyone.”

Grillby’s entire body shook. But she was right. He had to control himself. He took a breath, wrangling in his flames that were growing too hot and wild for comfort. And he took a seat next to the queen.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered. “I am so sorry.”

A comforting hand rest on his shoulder.

It was many long and strenuous hours before the hospital doors were opened.

Grillby leaped to his feet, Asgore and Toriel followed suit. The trio were approached by a tiny mouse nurse, who was holding a clipboard inches from her face and staring down at the papers
through her spectacles.

“Are you the family members of Dr. Wing Dings Gaster?” she asked.

“Gaster doesn’t have any family,” Grillby said. “But we’re the closest thing he has to one.”

The nurse nodded, placing the clipboard under her arm. “I see. Dr. Gaster sustained traumatic injury to his right eye. Damage to the eye itself is very likely, but we will not know to what extent until he wakes up.”

“When he wakes up?” Grillby emphasized.

The nurse offered the elemental a small smile. “Yes. Dr. Gaster will not fall down today, or any time in the foreseeable future. The injury was grave, but not life-threatening.” She grew a bit more serious. “As with his . . . injury on his other eye, the wound may not heal fully.”

Grillby allowed a breath. “As long as he is alive, that is good enough news for me. May we see him?”

“You may. He’s asleep and will likely be for much longer.”

“Thank you.”

Grillby had to keep himself from sprinting into the room at full tilt. In the middle of the room, resting on a stiff bed and covered in white sheets was Gaster himself. Heavy bandages were wrapped around his right eye. Wires attached to his chest and arm blipped off soft sounds as they monitored his vitals.

The room was suffocating and sterile.

Gaster’s chest rose and fell in slow even breaths. Grillby could scarcely remember the last time he looked so . . . peaceful.

Grillby took a seat right next to Gaster’s bed, gripping the skeleton’s hand tightly. “Oh Gaster . . .” he muttered. “I am so sorry. Please wake up soon. Please. I can’t lose you. Wake up.”

The elemental took a shuddery breath.

“Please come back to us.”

Gaster stirred.

His head felt fuzzy. His body felt numb. And the bed he laid on was uncomfortably stiff.

And why was it so bright?!

He winced, blinking several times at the blinding light above him. The air was sterile and clean. Sheets were scratchy and coarse. Monitors blipped rhythmically.

He was in the hospital. He furrowed his brows. What-

Oh, right.

He had . . . an episode, to put it lightly.
A hand slowly reached up to his eye in a familiar sense of déjà vu. Just like that day in the battlefield. Bandages wrapped tightly around his skull, covering his right eye and halfway up his forehead.

He didn’t dare touch them.

The door opened, and there was Grillby, holding a cup of coffee. He jumped a bit.

“Gaster! You’re finally awake!” And like a flash of light, he was at his side. Before Gaster could react, Grillby had wrapped him in a suffocating hug and wasn’t letting go any time soon.

The elemental was shaking.

<<Grillby?>> Gaster said uncertainly.

“I thought you were going to die,” Grillby said. His voice was shaking, brimming with emotion he was just barely holding back. “Gaster, I honest to god thought you were going to turn to dust in my arms.”

Gaster lowered his head. << I am sorry for . . . putting you through that. I was not in my best mind.>>

“I just want to know you’re ok. Gaster, whatever happened, whatever made you do . . . this,” Grillby pulled away to stare pointedly at the bandages. “I need to know it won’t happen again.”

Gaster turned away. He could barely stand looking at Grillby. His face was contorted with grief and pain, with worry and concern the skeleton felt he didn’t deserve. He let out a low breath.

<<The Visions are quiet. Everything is quiet,>> he assured.

Grillby nodded. “I am happy to hear that.”

Just then, the mouse monster nurse stepped into the room. “Ah, I thought I heard voices!” she piped up. “It is a relief to see you awake, Dr. Gaster. How do you feel?”

Gaster thought for a moment. <<I am experiencing a slight ache in my temples, severity is rated at a moderate headache, I am fatigued and disoriented but my senses are returning to me. I surmise that within the hour I will be well, aside from the headache. Depending on a few factors, it could take upwards of a full day to fade on its own.>>

The nurse looked shocked.

<<I am a doctor, you know.>> Gaster said with a raised eyebrow and a tiny smirk.

“Right, right, I didn’t know you were . . . that kind of doctor,” she stuttered sheepishly.

<<I am a doctor in many fields.>>

“In any case, I daresay it’s time to take off those bandages!” she said, approaching him with a small pair of scissors. Grillby stepped back to let her through. “We couldn’t determine the damage to your eye while you were unconscious. I’d like to perform a diagnostic as soon as they’re off.”

Gaster wordlessly leaned forward and the mouse made quick work of unwinding the bandages around his head and carefully peeling away the gauze treating the wound. Grillby looked on, silent and stone still with his mouth pulled tightly down into an expression more fitting of a worried mother.
The nurse finished and took a step back. “Now, tell me how your eye feels.”

Gaster was silent. There was no pain in his eye. Yet half the room remained . . . dark.

He suppressed a rising sense of dread.

<<Are you certain you removed all of the bandages?>> Gaster asked in a ghostly whisper.

The nurse nodded, looking slightly offended. “Of course, Dr. Gaster.”

He experimentally raised a hand to his face. He placed it in front of his right eye. His vision did not change. The right half of the room remained dark.

His breathing grew just a little bit faster.

“Dr. Gaster . . . ?”

Hand trembling, he moved his hand to cover his left eye. The world went completely dark.

Gaster knew his eyes were wide open, Gaster knew there was nothing obstructing his vision, knew there wasn’t any outside force hindering his sight.

“Dr. Gaster, are you alright?”

Gaster lowered his trembling hand to his lap, forced a long and ragged breath between teeth that were chattering.

<<I have lost all vision in my right eye.>>

He said it as if talking about the weather. Plainly, clearly. And yet, saying it out loud, having the words hang in the air like a pendulum at the end of its arc, the full impact of those words dropped on Gaster’s chest like an anvil.

<<I can’t see.>>

Grillby pressed a hand to the doctor’s shoulder as he suppressed the rising sense of panic.

<<I can’t see!>>

“Dings, hey, listen to me,” Grillby called out to him. Gaster dared to turn to look at him with the only eye he had left. “It’s alright, we’re right here, we’re going to get you fixed up-”

Despite Grillby’s best efforts, Gaster could not subdue the rising storm of emotions within him.

He felt blue magic flood his eyes-

Gaster’s eyes went wide and he screamed.

The nurse and Grillby both lunged to his side. “What is it?! What’s wrong?!” Grillby demanded.

It hurt it hurt oh gods above everything HURT!

A stabbing pain, blinding and terrifying, exploded across the unseeing eye socket. Gaster clawed at the socket, gritting his teeth and choking back sobs as the world was nothing but white and agony.

<<It hurts!>> he grimaced. <<Dear god it hurts!>>
Grillby saw it, too.

Gaster’s eyes looked completely normal when the bandages were taken off. That familiar white ring of light filled Gaster’s eye socket, and for the briefest moments he had hoped for the best. And now, with Gaster’s eyes activated with his magic, Grillby saw the true extent of the damage.

The illumination of his magic created a backlight, filling the socket with a dim blue glow. The white ring that had been his pupil was now completely black. Unseeing.

“Gaster! Listen to me! It’s your magic!” Grillby said, summoning every ounce of courage he had to keep his voice calm and level. “You’re panicked and your magic is activated and it’s causing you pain. You need to calm down, and you’ll be alright!”

Gaster still gripped at his skull, his breath ragged and wheezing, shoulders trembling, but he nodded at Grillby’s words. It took him several minutes, several minutes of the skeleton panting and gasping in pain before the light in his eyes faded.

The room fell silent. All eyes were on the skeleton.

His eye sockets were black and hollow.

<<Addendum to my condition,>> Gaster whispered in a tiny, faint voice. <<Injury is more extensive than originally thought. Not only has it been physically damaged, removing all function of sight, but any . . . any influx of magic causes extreme pain.>> He took a breath. <<Should I . . . experience strong emotions or over-exert myself using my magic . . . the magic overflow will cause extreme pain.>>

The nurse nodded meekly. “I-I understand.”

<<I would like a moment alone. With Grillby.>>

“Of course. I can fetch you some water? Pain killers perhaps?”

<<Water is fine.>> The nurse nodded and excused herself.

The sterile room once again became suffocating.

It was a few moments before either of them spoke.

“Gaster, what the fuck happened?” Grillby finally said.

Gaster didn’t even look at him.

“I need to know what happened. I need to know what you saw to make you do such a thing to yourself. Wing Dings, please.” He grabbed his hand and once again Gaster turned to look at the tired, weary, and frightened visage of the elemental. “Let me help you.”

<<Now hardly feels like the time. I do not know if I can–>>

“What, please.”

The scientist paused, taking a good long look with his remaining eye at his friend. Grillby was distraught, his flames low and weak from lack of sleep. His eyes were tired, tired from hours worrying over him and pacing who knows how many miles up and down the halls. And in those eyes he saw a burning desire to do whatever he could to help. He saw worry and a sense of urgency in those eyes that he would not rest—could not rest—until he was able to help.
But the Visions flickered in his memory.

So much death and pain. So many monsters scattering in the wind. All that pain, all that horror.

Gaster shook his head. <<I cannot.>>

“Yes you can.”

<<Grillby, please, I cannot tell you>>

“Can’t or won’t?”

<<It is my burden to bear!>> Gaster exclaimed. <<I will not subject you to the things I have seen.>>

“You utter fucking idiot!” Grillby swore, grasping at his head. “Why must you shut me out?! Why must you bear this alone?! Are you so stubborn and idiotic you cannot see what this is doing to you?! YOU’RE BLIND! YOU ALMOST DIED! AND YOU DARE TELL ME YOU REFUSE BECAUSE OF YOUR PRIDE!”

<<I refuse because I don’t know what they mean!>>

“Then try!”

Gaster let out a roar of frustration. <<What do you wish for me to tell?! Cryptic riddles that will leave you awake at night, slowly losing your sanity as you fear for a future you do not know?! Is that what you want?!>>

“If it helps you, then yes!”

Gaster faltered.

He was serious.

Grillby was serious.

Grillby, willingly and without hesitation, would gladly bear the great burden upon Gaster’s shoulders.

What had he done to deserve such a friend? What had he done in all his miserable life to have a friend who would stand by his side in the darkest of times, facing down the worst demons Hell itself had to offer?

And still . . .

Gaster stood firm.

<<There is nothing to tell.>>

Grillby’s flames crackled loudly, like snapping twigs. His fists shook, smoke steamed from his mouth.

“Then I can’t do this,” Grilby said with a quaking voice. “I can’t help you if you can’t allow yourself to get help. I can’t take this anymore, Gaster. So, the next time you find yourself dying from your own damn pride, don’t come to my door!”

With large, furious steps, the elemental stormed from the room, black smoke in his wake.
He paused just before he crossed the threshold.

“By the way, you were out for a week,” Grillby said stiffly. “The Queen has given birth to the Prince. If you have any sense of dignity left in that skull of yours, you will do well to visit them.”

Gaster looked at Grillby. His back was to him. "And his name?" he asked.

“Asriel,” Grillby said. “Asriel Dreemurr.”

A flicker of blue sparked in Gaster’s eyes. A memory played in his mind.

“It’s me! Your best friend!”

White, blinding light. Light that burned his eyes.

“ASRIEL DREEMURR!”

Gaster was discharged later that day with a prescription for some painkillers should his eye flare up again. There was nothing that could be done to return sight to his eye; the damage had been too severe and too extensive. Gaster feared as much. He tried to not let it bother him so much.

At least he had a spare, he thought sourly.

He made a conscientious effort to see the King and Queen as soon as he was well. They welcomed him with open arms and much celebration.

“Oh, Gaster, it is so good to see you!” Toriel said as she once again wrapped him up in a suffocating hug. “We were all so worried! But tell us how you feel! We didn’t even know you were out of the hospital! I will need to have some words with the doctors, they were supposed to call us when you woke up!”

"You haven’t heard from Grillby?"

“No, we haven’t seen him for a while. We assumed he was with you in the hospital.” Toriel’s eyes grew concerned. “He didn’t leave your side for a moment.”

Gaster turned his head down in shame.

"We spoke for a while," he said. "And I must extend my congratulations to the new mother. I am sorry I missed it."

Toriel beamed, letting out a laugh. “Oh! Well I daresay you haven’t missed much! Would you like to see him? What a silly question, of course you would! Mind you, he finally settled down to sleep so we’ll need to be very quiet!”

"Like a ghost," Gaster nodded, and was swept away by Toriel.

Most royalty would make their homes in grand and elaborate castles. The Dreemurrs were very different. There was a castle, to be certain, but it was more ceremonial, used for conducting political business rather than a residence for the new royal family. The Dreemurr home was a small, quaint, and cozy house, a simple one story building with a cottage-like façade, neat square windows and a garden that was the pride of the monster kingdom. Gaster was lead down the warm yellow halls, the smell of freshly baked goods lingering in the air.

Everything about this place was the perfect image of what a home was supposed to be.
And in one of the bedrooms, decorated with soft furniture and warm colors, filled to the brim with plush toys and starry paintings on the ceiling, was the newborn prince.

He had to only be a few days old. The tiniest little ball of fur Gaster had ever seen. Asriel was fast asleep, his tiny little floppy ears dangling around his head and his thumb firmly lodged in his tiny little muzzle. Gaster didn’t know monsters could get that small. He looked down in awe at the tiny, almost helplessly fragile image of the future king of monsters.

Toriel saw the look in Gaster’s eye and only beamed brighter. “He’s wonderful, isn’t he?”

<<What a tiny little thing,>> Gaster said. <<Again, and with upmost sincerity . . . congratulations. I hope nothing but happiness.>>

The tiny little Asriel began to stir, and Toriel with angelic grace and gentleness scooped up the tiny baby and held him close. He made tiny little cooing noises as he woke from his sleep, and Toriel responded with gentle baby talk of her own.

“Would you like to hold him?” she offered.

Gaster visibly flinched and even took a few quick steps backwards. <<I dare not! I . . . I never was very good with children->>

The little baby Asriel looked at the mysterious monster that stood next to his mother. Gaster looked into those enormous and innocent eyes, which quickly contorted into terror as he began to loudly cry.

Gaster winced.

It was as he said. He was never good with kids.

Toriel set to work hushing her child, singing softly and bouncing him in his arms, but Gaster knew he had overstayed his welcome.

He left with barely a good-bye.

Gaster rarely visited the royal family much after that. He always kept his visits quick and professional and never stayed long enough to see the little prince. Partially because the Vision still burned in his mind every instance he stepped foot in the palace, and also because . . .

Well . . .

It was very difficult to forget the face the tiny little Asriel made when he saw the scientist.

He was only a baby, he reasoned. Anything would set them off into a screaming fit.

But he knew better.


Even after all these years and for all Gaster’s tough metaphorical skin, the words still stung.

He still visited Asgore every week to deliver his reports, which again, he kept short and strictly professional. But Asgore was no fool.

“The nurse that tended to you called me today,” he said one day, barely a week after Gaster left the hospital. “She said you lost sight in your eye.” He sounded so very sad. “Why didn’t you say
anything?”

Again, Gaster squirmed beneath the weight of guilt. <<It is none of your concern to worry about me.>>

Asgore stiffened, his eyes hardening. “Dr. Wing Dings Gaster, I daresay it is my business to know if any of my subject, and if any of my friends, are unwell.”

<<I am fine.>>

Asgore was not convinced. His gaze hardened, his face contorted into one Gaster knew too well, a face that would ramble on to lectures and scorns. But Gaster quickly bid his farewells and kept himself in the only place he felt remotely (if ironically) safe; his laboratory.

And over the years, the little prince grew. He grew into a fine young child, full of wonder and innocence and kindness. Monsters could not sing enough praise. Monsters could not have asked for a better heir to the king’s throne. And the royal couple could not be happier.

Gaster was careful to keep his distance.

But in time, Asriel and Gaster were fated to meet. It was on yet another of Gaster’s weekly reports when the little Asriel wandered into the throne room where Gaster and the King sat and talked.

<<The CORE is functioning stably and reliably, the coolant I have synthesized has proved to be a very effective solution to combat any potential flares->>

He paused as movement in his peripheral caught his eye.

And hiding right behind the mighty throne was a tiny, almost impossibly white and fluffy monster.

Asgore followed his gaze and let out a low rumble of a laugh. “Asriel, it is quite alright! Come on out, and meet the Royal Scientist!”

The little monster obliged, taking small slow steps to his father. God, he was still so tiny. He was still quite young, five years old if Gaster remembered correctly. Gaster himself stood stiff, bracing himself.

“This is Dr. Gaster, the smartest, most brilliant monster in the Underground!” Asgore introduced, placing a massive paw on Asriel that could have easily smothered him. “It’s about time you two had a proper introduction!”

“Hello, Dr. Gaster,” he said timidly. He began to regain a bit of his courage. “My teacher talks about you sometimes. He says you made the CORE.”

Gaster smiled patiently. <<That’s correct, my young prince.>>

The prince frowned. “I’m sorry, er, what did you say?”

Gaster paused, then let out a laugh. Yes, he had almost completely forgotten! It had been many years since he had to interact with a monster who did not know his language. Asgore laughed, as well, and happily translated.

“Dr. Gaster speaks a language that only he can,” he explained. “It took me and other monsters many years before we could understand each other.”

<<I remember all too well the days frustratingly trying to charade my way through conversation,>>
Gaster chuckled.

Asriel smiled with them. “Can you teach me?”

Gaster balked. <<Er, sorry?>>

“I think it’s a wonderful idea!” Asgore said. “And I daresay it’s high time you two spent some time together! He’ll be your king one day, and I should hope you two would do much business together!”

Gaster cast his gaze back and forth, from the encouraging nods of the king to the young and eager gaze of the prince. He allowed himself to relax.

<<If it pleases my King, then I shall.>>

Gaster never forgot his Visions, and not for lack of trying. He could never forget the feeling of foreboding, the feeling of dread and impending calamity. But he couldn’t give into doom and gloom when he had a tangible chance to change everything.

His lessons with the young Prince allowed him precious hours to not just teach Asriel his strange language, but also to teach him other things. He prided himself in magic and science and he was always eager to teach the prince such things, and Asriel with angelic patience listened to his words with rapt attention. Of course, it took him a while, as Asriel struggled to learn Gaster’s language.

So Gaster taught him a secondary language that was used more universally with monsters. He taught him sign language, which Asriel picked up with prodigious speed.

[You are making great progress.] Gaster signed one day. [Do you have any questions for me today?] Asriel shook his head. [I am doing well,] he signed back. He would always mutter what he was signing under his breath, not that Gaster minded in the slightest. He hesitated though. [Can I ask you something?]

[Anything, young Asriel.]

He fumbled. [Dad talks about the war sometimes. He says you fought in it.] Gaster nodded. [Is that how you got hurt?] Asriel gestured to the scars on Gaster’s face.

And very slowly, Gaster nodded. [I was a soldier. And I sustained grave injuries in my service.] [Do you hate them? Humans?]

Again, a nod. [I have found they are a treacherous, and violent race.] He leaned forward, looking at Asriel with a sense of urgency and seriousness. <<Young Asriel, should you ever meet a human, you must not trust them. You must not ever let your guard down. Or they will betray you in the worst way possible.>>

Gaster quickly wrapped up his lessons, leaving a bewildered and cautious Asriel in his wake.

“A human has fallen into the Underground!”

The news spread faster than a wildfire. Like smoke on the wind, it reached every corner, every crevice of the monster kingdom.
A human has fallen into the Underground!

Gaster, upon hearing the news, instantly raced to the King’s palace. And all at once the Visions came back like a storm.

The great calamity, the great threat to all monsterkind. This had to have been it.

King Asgore would know what to do. He had to have a plan. Assemble the guards! Hunt down the menace! And Gaster would be ready to do whatever the King commanded.

He burst through the palace doors and stopped dead.

Right there, right in the middle of the throne room, was the royal family. Asgore, Toriel. Asriel. And a human child.

Gaster’s entire body went cold.

“Gaster! I am happy you are here!” Asgore said, rising to his feet. “You must have heard the news! This poor child has fallen, but our dear son Asriel found them and brought them here!”

Gaster was barely listening. His eyes never left the human.

They were around the same age as Asriel, wearing a filthy torn shirt covered in mud and twigs. Their brown hair was shaggy and fell around their eyes.

*Their eyes, dear god their eyes.*

Red. The deepest, richest red Gaster had ever seen.

He felt his fists clench tightly.

<<May I have a word with the King and Queen? Privately?>> Gaster said sharply.

Toriel and Asgore shared bewildered looks but nodded. “Asriel, don’t wander too far, we’ll be right back.”

They didn’t even leave the room. They hid themselves in the corner, Gaster keeping his good eye focused with fiery precision on the child.

<<Get rid of it,>> he said simply. <<Get rid of that thing, as soon as you can.>>

Toriel’s fur bristled at his harsh words. “I will not leave a child alone to fend for themselves! They are a poor lost soul in desperate need for shelter! I will not turn my back on them!”

Gaster gritted his teeth. <<That thing will be our downfall!>>

“How dare you!” Toriel flared.

<<I never told you this, and now I see I was very foolish to keep this to myself.>> Gaster collected himself, and let out the truth. <<Do you remember the day I was in the hospital? The day I lost my eye?>>

Toriel, still furious with Gaster’s cruel words, silenced herself and listened to the doctor’s tale.

<<The reason I was driven to such insanity was because I was receiving an endless stream of
Visions. Endless nightmares where I saw countless monsters die, again and again! Monsters will die. The Underground will go empty. I have seen it.>>

“And you think this child is the cause?” Asgore asked carefully.

<<I know this beyond a shadow of a doubt.>>

“I refuse to believe this!” Toriel interrupted. “They are barely older than Asriel! How could you even possibly think they are capable of such things!”

<<I do not know, but I will not let my guard down.>>

“So what is your solution? You would kill a defenseless child?” Toriel challenged.

Without taking even a moment to think, Gaster uttered, <<Yes.>>

His words invoked the full wrath of the monster queen.

“I will not let you lay a single hand on an innocent child!” she roared. “Your hatred of humanity blinds you, Dr. Gaster! You dare accuse a child—a child!—of genocide! I will not stand for such talk within my home!”

Asgore himself had been listening, nodding grimly along with Toriel, he too bristling with rage. “Gaster, listen to yourself! To even suggest-!”

<<You are both fools!>> Gaster said. <<You accuse me of being blinded by hatred, but you are the ones that let your parental judgement blind you from the truth! My Visions have never been wrong!>>

“And look at what they’ve done to you,” Asgore said somberly. “If you truly think that the child is responsible for tragedy, then who better than us to take them under our wings and steer them on the path to righteousness? We will treat them as if our own, with love and kindness. Violence has gotten us nowhere in the past, perhaps it is time for love.”

Gaster narrowed his eyes.

“You are excused, Dr. Gaster,” Toriel said curtly. “And do not dare return if you wish to only insult my child further.”

<<Your child?!>>

“Yes! My child! I will love them and care for them as if I had given birth to them myself and I will protect them with everything I have!”

Gaster and Toriel glared down one another, both filled with anger. Gaster, furious that his words fell on deaf ears, and Toriel, brimming with motherly love that she refused to relinquish.

He left without another word.

And he never bothered to return.

Fate had other plans it seemed.

Gaster received the call on a Sunday. He answered the phone to hear Toriel, distraught and sobbing, on the other end of the line.
“It’s Asgore! He’s fallen deathly sick! Please, Dr. Gaster, I don’t know what to do, none of my magic is working and none of the doctors know what to do! Please help us!”

Immediately Gaster rushed into action, running around his lab and collecting equipment and materials in a mad frenzy. He started stuffing everything in sight in a duffel bag. “Stay on the line and tell me everything. What are his symptoms?”

“He’s feverish and sweating. He’s been vomiting constantly, oh, Gaster, it’s horrible.”

“Your Majesty, I need you to stay calm and focused. What else? Has he eaten anything recently?”

“I—I don’t know. He’s coughing blood. His mouth has these terrible sores, he can barely breathe.”

Gaster felt his pulse quicken. “It sounds like he has been poisoned. I will be there immediately.”

He grabbed a few more vials, a few more ingredients.

He closed his eyes and he B L I N K E D

..
..
.

He stood outside the Dreemurr home and rushed inside. He ignored the dizzying sensation of teleportation, he ignored the stars that swam in his vision. He simply ran inside, to the bedroom. Toriel jumped a foot in the air when he entered. She was still clutching the phone.

“Gaster?! How-?!”

“Never mind that,” he said. He rushed past the queen, to the bed sitting behind her.

Asgore lay beneath a white sheet damp with sweat. His condition was far more serious than he feared.

He remained focused, professional. He pulled a purple vial from his bag. Asgore’s breath was little more than a wheezing gasp, short and fast. Gaster pried his mouth open and bit down his tongue to suppress the rising sense of nausea.

His entire mouth and throat was covered in horrible, bloody sores. He pried open the vial and carefully dripped a few drops down his throat.

“He has definitely been poisoned,” he said. “He is going into anaphylactic shock.” He pulled out a needle and some more vials. “He needs a shot of adrenaline.”

“Will that cure him?”

“No. But it will buy him time.” He stabbed the needle into Asgore’s thigh. He winced slightly, shifting in the bed. Gaster straightened himself, looking down at the dying king.

“Let’s get to work.”

It took them several hours, but the king was finally stable. He would pull through. He would live.
Asgore was as strong and stubborn as Gaster, it seemed.

Toriel had been invaluable. With Gaster’s medicine and her magic, they were able to fight back the worst of the poison. They brought the king back from the precipice of death, and he now lay peacefully asleep in his bed.

Toriel and Gaster allowed themselves to breathe.

“I . . . I cannot thank you enough,” Toriel said softly after some time. “You saved my husband. I can never repay you for that.”

Gaster, still wiping sweat from his brow and collecting his things, paused and looked over the queen. He chose his words carefully.

<<Asgore is a great king and a great man. And one of the very few friends that I have. I am glad he was able to pull through. He has you to thank for that, as well.>>

“I know we have had our differences in the past,” she continued. “But you have always been a good man, Dr. Gaster. You have done so much for us. And I hope we can move past our disagreements.”

Gaster hesitated. <<I am still very serious about what I said when that human fell to the Underground. Will you consider my warning?>>

Toriel turned, her eyes glowering just the slightest bit. “I have been keeping a careful eye on them, and I still do not see the evil you do. Perhaps, for just this instance, perhaps you were wrong.”

<<Let us hope. For everyone’s sake,>> he muttered.

But he was far from convinced.

Gaster sat in a chair right by the King’s bed, taking pulse readings every now and then and recording other vitals. All was fine.

Toriel had discovered the culprit soon after Asgore had been stabilized. The two young children, Chara and Asriel, made a pie filled with buttercups, a plant that was notoriously lethal to ingest for beast monsters like Asgore. Gaster scowled at the negligence. How could Asriel not know such a thing?! But the Prince had been in tears, barely consolable even after Asgore had survived the worst of the sickness. He was still distraught and likely would be for much longer still.

Gaster was never good with children. He’ll let Toriel handle the brats.

He wouldn’t get his wish.

Chara, the human child, snuck into the room. Gaster turned and glared down hard at the young human.

“I’m here to check up on Daddy,” they said instantly. Gaster narrowed his eyes. “I just wanted to make sure he’s ok.”

<<He will survive,>> Gaster said curtly. Chara tilted their head, confused. The scientist sneered under his breath. He wasn’t going to waste his breath or effort teaching a human his language.

And then, Chara began to move their hands. [Can you sign?] they asked.

Gaster, despite himself, nodded.
[Is he going to be ok?]

Another curt nod.

They laughed a little, turning their eyes downwards. [It was stupid,] they said. [We were making a pie, to surprise Dad.]

[Don’t call him that.] Gaster signed aggressively. [He’s not your dad.]

Chara ignored him. [We added buttercups, instead of cups of butter.]

[Hardly a forgivable mistake. He nearly died.]

Chara shrugged. [It was an accident.]

[You don’t look very sorry.]

[But he’ll be ok.]

Gaster snarled, turning away. [I am busy,] he signed, making his gestures aggressive. [And the king needs rest. You should leave.]

“What happened to your face?”

That got his attention. He snapped around, his eyes hard and sharp.

[None of your business.]

“Dad talks about you a lot. He says you were a soldier.”

He turned back to Asgore, his back to the human.

“He says you got hurt because of the war. And I can tell, well, one was.” Gaster dared glance over his shoulder. “The other . . .” they paused, a sickening grin covering their face. “The other looks self-inflicted.”

Gaster jumped to his feet, eyes blazing. Chara still grinned up at him, that awful, knowing, conniving grin.

And he wanted nothing more than to strike a bone straight through their skull.

[You have over-stayed your welcome. You should go.]

Chara shrugged, and walked casually out the door. “If you say so. But hey, just so you know . . .” Another pause, another sickening grin and a burning feeling of hate welling in Gaster’s gut. “You’re not the only one that hates humanity.”

Three days later, the young prince Asriel and the human child died.

Monsters could scarcely remember a day that had brought such misery and sorrow to the Underground since the day the barrier fell.

There was not a single dry eye to be seen. Everyone wept for their beloved prince. Everyone wept as the one hope they had for peace and unity was stripped from their grasp.

Once again, by the humans.
The human child fell deathly ill and died. They died just seconds before Gaster came bursting through the door, summoned once again to perform a miracle.

There was nothing he could do to bring back the dead.

Gaster was there to offer whatever meek assurances he had to the king and queen. And little Asriel, poor little Asriel, consumed by grief, did the unimaginable.

He absorbed the human’s soul.

He became a being with unmatched power, terrifying and awe-inspiring.

And with scarcely another word, he took Chara’s body, and crossed the barrier.

Asriel returned hours later, covered in his own blood, bleeding out from the many injuries sustained from the humans’ cruel hands. He collapsed to dust on the king’s garden.

The Underground wept.

Hope had been ripped from the soul of every monster. Dreams of the sun, dashed in an instant.

Monsters from every corner of the Underground came to say their farewells to the prince.

A great calamity. Such great sorrow and dread.

Misery fell like a torrential rain.

To no surprise, Gaster saw Grillby there. The two had barely spoken a word to each other since the day in the hospital. Gaster offered a tentative nod in the elemental’s direction, who was slow to return the gesture. They stood shoulder to shoulder during the memorial.

They didn’t need to say much to one another.

Toriel was beyond devastated. The king as well. But he shook with grief and fury and a rage that Gaster sometimes saw in himself. He rose, fists trembling, clutching his mighty trident and sparks of flames spitting between his gnashing fangs.

“Once again, humanity has shown their true face,” he spoke in a thunderous voice. “Once again, humanity has taken everything from us! Humanity has taken my beloved son, humanity has taken away our chance of peace and prosperity, our hope of a bright and glorious future!”

He smashed his trident on the floor. Fire blossomed at his feet.

“I WILL NOT ALLOW THEM TO TAKE AWAY ANYTHING ELSE!” he boomed. “I WILL NOT LET MONSTERKIND FALL TO THE HANDS OF THESE . . . THESE SAVAGES!!! AND ON THIS DAY, THE DAY WE MOURN AND WEEP SO, THIS DAY I DECLARE, FROM HENCEFORWARD, ALL WHO FALL TO THE UNDERGROUND SHALL DIE! I WILL RIP THE SOUL FROM EVERY HUMAN WHO DARES TRESPASS ON OUR KINGDOM! I WILL TAKE THEIR SOULS AND BECOME GOD! WE WILL TAKE BACK WHAT IS RIGHTFULLY OURS! WE WILL RECLAIM THE SURFACE, WE WILL RECLAIM THE SUN, AND WE WILL SLAUGHTER ANY WHO TRY TO STOP US! THIS I SWEAR TO YOU!”

A roar, a cry of rage and grief, answered the king. Monsters raised their fists, their claws and teeth, and unleashed their hatred and pain. They too would be willing to do as the king commanded.
Toriel stood behind him, horrified.

She quickly retreated away from the memorial, bristling with rage. Asgore failed to notice.

And once again, Gaster felt an overwhelming sense of dread.

Grillby looked down at him, silently and unsure. “Is this what you have seen?”

<<No, my friend. I fear this is only the beginning of a great and terrible darkness.>>

Subject B lost count of the days as he was rushed to and from various rooms, each with their own unique set of equipment, each with their own sinister purpose. Some cut him open, others burned him with strange injections, others tested his physical and magic capabilities. Those were the easiest and he looked forward to those. He usually didn’t get very hurt on those days. Tired, yes, but not hurt.

Today was one such day. The Doctor ordered him to summon his skull attack and fire at a few dummies.

Subject B complied. He concentrated, and a terrible skull popped into existence next to him. And it opened its terrible maw filled with terrible teeth, and unleashed a blast of magic at the dummies.

Subject B shuddered. He didn’t really like those skulls.

Subject B took note of the various strange machines and monitors in the room. All were focused on him, reading the power of his special attack. The Doctor occasionally glanced at the reading and frowned, then ordered him to fire again.

Subject B knew better than to refuse.

It went on for several hours, the constant attacks slowly draining B of his energy until he could barely stand. The Doctor only grew more frustrated and angry.

<<Not enough, not nearly powerful enough,>> he kept saying. He smashed his clipboard on a nearby desk. <<I am so damn close! What more can I possibly do?!>>

But with Subject B completely exhausted, he couldn’t continue his testings. He threw the subject back in his cell and retreated to his office to contemplate on his readings.

His test subjects were strong, stronger than nearly any other monster. And their special attacks, even more so. Their attacks should have been strong enough to break the barrier, but they were nowhere close. So what was he missing?! Why wasn’t he getting results?!

Gaster retraced his steps. He had to rewind, start from the beginning.

Why were the blasters so effective? What made them so devastating?

Their unique nature, of course. They were not born from magic, but rather created out of an already physical, existing being.

Alright, so how did the attack work?

Like any other attack, obviously. The skulls were summoned, using a fraction of their owner’s own magic to manifest and expending said magic into a full-out attack.
Ah, so there lies the issue. Efficiency.

The blasters only used a fraction of the owner’s full magic potential. The magic user took a small part of their soul, summoned that magic into a physical form (the blaster) and that magic was expelled into the infamous laser attack.

<<Well then, clearly, the most logical step forward is to increase its efficiency.>> Gaster thought out loud. <<But nothing short of turning them into blasters themselves would->>

He stopped. Gaster rose a thoughtful hand to his chin.

And then quickly shook his head with a gruff snort.

<<How utterly ridiculous,>> he waved. <As if that would actually work.>>

. . .

And yet . . .

Gaster pulled out a pen, and a pad of paper.

<<This is ridiculous. There is no way this could work.>>

He jotted down a few numbers. He ran a few simulations on his computer.

He blinked.

He ran the numbers again. And then a third time.

And a fourth time, just in case.

He stared at the glowing computer monitor before him.

<<By god, I might be onto something . . .>>

It was time.

Gaster had run the numbers countless times. He had checked his work, again and again. He measured every dosage, every ounce, every concentration to the finest detail.

It was ready.

And by god it was going to work.

Creating sentient beings had seemed like an impossible feat, yet here he stood in his laboratories with two living constructs at his disposal. And now, he would do something even more impossible.

He was going to make them change.

There were certain things he could not possibly know. Would they retain their sentience after the transformation, or be reduced to a beastly state? Would they be obedient to his command, or wild and feral?

Gaster made special precautions should the latter happen.

But the more important questions lingered at the forefront of his mind. Could they even survive
undergoing such a dramatic procedure?

Well, that’s why he made two, wasn’t it?

Subject B would be the first to undergo the procedure. He was hardy, strong, with a high HP that made him ideal for such a risky experiment. There was margin for error. That would not be the case for Subject A.

He was sacrificing much with this. But should it work . . .

Should he succeed . . .

Monsters will be that much closer to freedom.

Gaster escorted Subject B from the cell with hardly a word and the subject followed without question. He had learned to silently obey the doctor’s commands, lest he be punished. Gaster took him to a room, still showing signs of extensive remodeling and rework Gaster did to prepare for the procedure. The room was mostly bare, the ceiling tiles were missing and lighting fixtures hung from wires. A single chair rested in the middle of the room.

And above it hung a terrifying device that looked like it had been plucked straight from a science fiction movie. It was a high-precision laser, designed to focus a great deal of magic and energy at the subject. With enough Determination, with enough power, it would catalyze the transformation.

Subject B froze in terror just looking at the laser, but Gaster roughly shoved Subject B to the chair and began to strap him in. He bound his legs and arms, strapped his head and chest down to keep him as still as possible. Orange light flickered in the terrified subject’s eyes.

“What are you going to do to me?” he whimpered.

Gaster didn’t respond. It wasn’t his business to know. He just had to sit there and take it.

<<Summon your cannon.>> Subject B looked at him, confused. The scientist narrowed his eyes.

<<Now.>>

Another tiny whimper, and a skull faded to existence. It hovered just to the side of its summoner, teeth clicking and growling lowly in agitation. It sensed its owner’s fear.

<<Move it just so it rests above your chest, directly between you and the laser.>>

Subject B did so. It now hovered millimeters above his chest, still growling and clicking. Gaster stared eye to eye with the beastly skull, and suppressed a shudder of anticipation.

He typed a few commands on his console, and the laser began to charge. Lights flickered on, a low hum emanated from the gun, slowly growing louder as it charged.

<<Now, it is very important that you do not move an inch. You are to remain completely still, or else you will die.>>

Subject B’s eyes widened, horrified. He trembled, shaking and sweating in fear. The growling skull grew more agitated.

<<And for God’s sake, keep that damn thing still, too.>>

“Please, just tell me,” he begged. “What are you going to do to me?”
The machine was ready to proceed.  

<<I’m going to save everyone.>>

He fired the laser.  

A bright blast of yellow energy seared from the laser head, blasting straight and true right down on the skull cannon, right down on Subject B. The skull let out a shriek as the sheer force of the impact reduced it to nearly nothing. The full force of the blast bore down on Subject B, piercing his chest and flooding his body with raw magic and power.  

And remnants of the beastly skull.  

He screamed. Screamed at the blinding pain, the fire searing through every bone. Electric fire burned every inch of him, his body convulsing wildly against the straps that held him fast, forcing him to endure the hellfire raining down on him.  

A full minute later, the laser stopped. Its job was finished.  

But it was only the beginning.  

Gaster moved fast. He was unsure how long it would take for the magic to take hold. He had to contain the subject. With lightning fast fluidity, he unstrapped Subject B from the chair and escorted him down the halls to the containment room.  

Subject B was barely conscious. His legs refused to support his weight. His body shook. Already his bones were covered in a sickly orange sweat. Magic residue. It was hot, and burned the doctor’s hands.  

It was happening quicker than Gaster anticipated. He moved faster.  

“W-hat is happening?” Subject B whined between strained breaths. “I... I feel... funny. Wrong. No, I... feel... wrong.”  

They had reached the containment chamber. A room with steel plated walls, two feet thick filled with rebar and concrete, strong enough to contain a bomb blast with hardly a scratch. It would be more than enough to contain the subject if he turned feral.  

Gaster placed Subject B in the room, where he crumpled to his hands and knees. He was covered in sweat. His bones sung a death rattle.  

“W-what did you do...?” he whimpered.  

Gaster did not reply. He shut the door, and made his way to the observation room, around the corner and behind another two feet of blast-resistant glass. Here, he could monitor everything, and record the process.  

He hit a few buttons. The mics turned on, videos began to record, and devices carefully read the energies of the room.  

They were spiking violently.  

And inside the room, Subject B weakly clawed at the door.  

Everything felt wrong. His bones ached. Everything felt tense, as if his entire body was being compressed. Like he was too small for whatever terrible thing was building within him.
It was getting very hard to breathe.

He gasped, still trying to claw at the door. His hands clenched, pain cracking like a spider web across his palms.

He could feel his bones cracking! Orange magic sparked along his bones, dancing like electricity. Tiny fractures splintered along his fingers and metacarpal bones. He tried to scream but no breath came to him.

*What was happening to him?*!!!?

The bones lengthened. The fractures tore the bones apart, bending them to new and horrifying shapes.

Claws grew from his fingertips.

And Subject B screamed.

*“WHAT IS HAPPENING TO ME?!!??!”*

*This wasn’t right this wasn’t right this wasn’t right!!!*

His hands were changing, shifting. Bones snapping, cracking, molding and stretching into a shape he did not recognize. His thumbs became small and useless, the newly forming claws becoming longer and deadlier.

Frantically, he pounded at the door.

*“WHAT DID YOU DO TO ME?!??!”*

There was no answer, no reply, as his newly formed claws left streaks against the steel. He scratched frantically, a terrible whine sounding from bone scraping over steel. Almost shrill enough to block out the noises of more bones cracking and shifting beneath Subject B’s feeble garments.

A fan of daggers pierced his spine and with a silent gasp B doubled over, gripping his chest. His vertebrae were lengthening . . . his shirt became tight underneath the strain of changing bones.

With a loud *rip* his shirt split in two, revealing a row of deadly spikes protruding from his spine.

It hurt. Everything hurt. Subject B could barely think over the endless waves of utter pain he was experiencing. But he knew that whatever was happening to him was wrong. His body no longer felt like his own! His hands were wrong! His back did not have spikes! And he wept with pain and terror as the changes continued their relentless march.

His feet were next. As if being pulled by an invisible hand his feet lengthened, his toes growing wicked talons just like his hands, growing thicker and sharper and deadlier. Spurs emerged from his heel. And through it all, orange magic crackled around him, singeing its way to every inch of bone that turned and churned. Subject B weakly fell to his side, doubled over and clutching his middle with tears streaming from his eyes.

*AND HE WANTED IT TO STOP!*

“Please please please make it stop . . .” he whimpered between teeth that were now too sharp. “Just
stop please stop!

His voice was different as he felt his throat burn. He let out another cry of distress. And his jaws began to snap, pushing itself forward, making room for more teeth. More fangs to adorn a lengthening jaw. He cried out, but the sound that emerged from his terrible maw was one he did not recognize.

And Gaster watched, too horrified to look away.

He knew this would not be pleasant. But to see it . . .

It was harrowing.

Gaster remembered his duty. His mission.

He remembered the barrier. He remembered the seven mages that had damned them here. He remembered all of the monsters that were counting on him. Depending on him.

He remembered Asriel.

And his eyes burned blue as his soul swelled with determination.

He will see this through, and bear witness to the monster he had created.

A tail had now grown from Subject B’s spine, snaking around him, with a cry of shock and horror from the subject. He attempted to rise to his feet but his structure was completely changed. He no longer could stand on two legs, and was forced to quickly adapt to a life on all fours.

It was almost done. His shoulders snapped into place, accompanied by a thunderous and agonizing roar. His muzzle finished taking shape, oozing with orange magic. He cried and screamed and roared in a terrible voice through it all, terrified of what he was becoming and terrified of the sounds he was creating with his own mouth.

And finally, it stopped. Nothing more moved, or shifted, or bent and snapped.

But still, everything hurt.

And everything felt so very wrong.

Subject B let out one last roar, shaking the very walls, trembling the machinery that stood within the observation room. He collapsed to his knees, and wept.

With a hand that could not hold still, Gaster began to write a new lab entry.

**THE PROCEDURE WAS . . . A SUCCESS.**

It was several hours before Gas-berefore Subject B was calm enough to move. Gaster couldn’t leave him in the containment chamber forever, he had to move him back to his cell.

The good news was that the procedure seemed to work in every way Gaster hoped. Subject B was substantially stronger, the energy he was giving off proved that much. And he still retained his consciousness. That was good. Saved him the trouble of trying to tame a ferocious beast.

Subject B hadn’t moved from his spot, choosing to curl himself into the corner and cry. The change must have been . . . exhausting. Mentally and physically. It took Subject B many hours to cease his
endless screaming, although he still sniffled into his paws in the corner.

Gaster opened the door. Subject B hiccupped, casting a bleary-eyed look at the doctor.

<<I will take you back to your room. You will be fed, and I expect you to be well rested for tomorrow.>> he said calmly.

Subject B curled into himself a little further. Tears still dripped from his sockets, and he stared at Gaster with flickering orange eyes.

<<Why have you done this to me?>>

Gaster was caught off guard. He thought Subject B’s speech would be eliminated, but it seemed to have only changed. Like the rest of him.

<<I did what I had to do to save monsterkind,>> Gaster answered simply. He stood of to the side, gesturing to the door. <<Now come.>>

Subject B hesitated, but slowly, he rose to his feet. Shaky and unsure, he managed to stumble his way forward, getting used to his new feet. He still whimpered and winced with every step.

*He hated being like this.*

And in silence, the two marched down the halls. Gaster’s footfalls were accompanied by the slow and steady clack of claws against tile, and the soft whispering of his tail dragging against the floor. It felt like far too much time had passed when they finally reached the holding cell.

Gaster opened the door. But Subject B did not enter. He took a few steps backwards, looking at the room with terror in his eyes.

Gaster remained firm. <<Now, Subject B.>>

Subject B let out a low whine, but complied. His steps were particularly slow and sluggish, dreading each inch he crept closer into the room. Once inside, Gaster locked the door behind him. And he saw what Subject B was so afraid of.

Through the small cell window, Subject A watched in horror as the beast walked into the room that his brother occupied. In horror, he gazed upon the terrible behemoth.

And he saw the plate. He saw the same plate that his brother wore, firmly embedded onto the beast’s wrist.

Subject A turned to Gaster, shaking. His eyes blazed with cyan light.

“What . . . what did you do to him?!” he said in a hoarse whisper.

Gaster said nothing. He turned, and walked away.

“GET BACK HERE YOU SON OF A BITCH!” Subject A screamed. “YOU GET BACK HERE RIGHT FUCKING NOW! TURN HIM BACK!! TURN MY BROTHER BACK!!”

Gaster clenched his eyes shut.

“WHAT DID YOU DO TO HIM??!!”

*It will all be worth it. It will all be worth it in the end.*
“WHAT DID YOU DO?!”

I will save everyone . . .

“WHAT DID YOU DO?!?!?”

Monsterkind will be free . . .

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!
Mount Ebott was an enigma.

It was a fairly normal mountain; modest in height with spruces and pine trees dotting its gentle slopes.

However, the mountain hid a great secret, for it was the home of monsters.

Within its rocky core, deep beneath the earth’s surface, far below the sun’s rays, monsters went about their daily lives, bustling to and fro, with a smile on their faces despite their predicament. And within the little town of Snowdin, it was particularly quiet.

It was unusual for the town to be so still for so long, especially after two skeletons wandered into town and made it their own. One of the skeletons was currently hidden deep within the snowy forests, and the other within a cozy little cottage.

The house was silent. Inside, its two occupants sat in stillness. A breath barely whispered between them. A hesitance, a chilling pause dangled in the air like an icicle that decorated the house.

The skeleton finally shattered the icy silence with a weak and timid laugh.

“So . . . yeah, that’s the gist of it,” he said in a very funny voice. He was avoiding eye contact. “The first time . . . turning was one of my clearest memories. After that it was all kinda blurry. But I hoped that, heh, answered your questions.”

More silence.

Papyrus was starting to understand why Sans wanted to keep this quiet-

A loud shattering sound snapped him from his trance. His head whipped around and saw the mug Undyne held was in a thousand pieces. He jumped to his feet.

“Oh my god, Undyne!” he cried. “Your tea! You got it all over yourself! Here. Let me . . . um . . .”

He stopped.

His voice froze in his throat when he saw her expression. Her eye, wide and terrified. Her mouth, gaping open in a silent gasp. Her vibrant blue scales were now awfully pale.

Her face was one Papyrus thought the fierce captain was incapable of.

Horror.

But her eye grew slanted, her teeth gnashed against each other as her lips pulled back into a hideous snarl. And she quivered with incomprehensible rage.
“You mean to tell me . . .” she whispered on a breath as thin as the frosty morning air. “You mean to
tell me this **ASSHOLE** locked you up in a fucking **DUNGEON** and tortured you?! For
**YEARS**?!?!”

Papyrus cowered under her gaze. “Um, um . . . y-yes?” he stuttered.

Undyne exploded.

She grabbed the nearest piece of furniture in the room (the poor unfortunate coffee table) and
smashed it against the floor with a roar. She screamed a battle cry so loud and so fierce Papyrus
swore he felt the ground shake.

“Undyne!” Papyrus called.

But her rage would not be stopped. With another cry, she lifted the couch they sat on clear above
her head and brought it crashing down, the rattle of the couch very nearly deafening her screams.

**“UNDYNE!!! STOP!!”**

She stood at the center of the room, doubled over and gasping for air, hissing between her teeth and
trembling like a leaf. She balled her hands into fists, so tightly her claws drew blood from her own
palms, her blood dripping onto the carpet, completely unnoticed.

And she was crying.

Papyrus took a very tentative step towards her.

“Undyne?” he called again, softly this time.

“It’s not . . . this isn’t fucking ok,” she wheezed. “This isn’t fucking ok! No one—especially you!—
should have gone through anything like that! How could anyone let anything like that happen to
you?!”

Papyrus took another step and extended his hand. His fingertips barely brushed against her
shoulder. “Undyne, it’s ok-”

“NO IT FUCKING ISN’T!” Undyne screamed. “You were tortured!!! You were some sick fuck’s
**science project**!!! After all this time! No, this is it! This is the fucking last day I let this happen!
Where the fuck is he, Papyrus?! Where is the asshole who did this to you?! I’ll fucking **KILL
HIM**!”

“Undyne! He’s dead!”

She stared at him, eyes blazing with fire and tears. Her sharp teeth were bared into a terrifying snarl.

“What?”

“He’s dead,” Papyrus said again. “Or . . . I think he is, it’s kind of complicated . . .”

“Un-complicate it! Is he dead or not?! Because if not, I’ll fucking end him myself!”

“Well, he’s um, **gone**,” Papyrus said. “And no one’s seen him for years and years. And even
weirder, no one has ever **heard** of him!”

“You are not making sense,” Undye growled.
“Don’t you think it’s weird?” Papyrus asked. “Dr. Gaster was the Royal Scientist. He must have been relatively well known, being in such a prestigious position. But if you ask anyone, they won’t know who he is. And if you ask them who the royal scientist was before Dr. Alphys, no one will have a clue! Not even Asgore! Don’t you think that’s a bit odd?”

Undyne opened her mouth to respond, but stopped. Now that she thought about it . . . he was right. She certainly had no idea who Dr. Gaster was, and even weirder, she had no clue who had been the Royal Scientist before Alphys took up the position. At first she simply thought she didn’t remember, or care to remember. But Alphys certainly would have cared. Alphys would have been very interested in the former scientist’s work. She would have told Undyne about the researcher before her time and shared all she knew. But Undyne can’t remember anything like that.

And the revelation unnerved her.

“So what, what does this all mean?” she asked.

“In an impossible way, I think something happened that made everyone . . . well, forget about him.”

Undyne narrowed her eye. “Like what?”

Papyrus shrugged helplessly. “I don’t know. I truly do not. I do not know what happened, but Dr. Gaster is long gone. Vanished. And no one remembers him. Probably for the best, really.”

“No! That’s not ok!” Undyne roared. “That bastard has to pay for what he did!”

“How do you plan to punish a monster who doesn’t even exist anymore?”

“I don’t know!” Undyne threw up her hands and paced in furious circles. “But—**nghaaa**!—If I do nothing then I am going to go insane! I have to know that asshole is dust! I have to, Papyrus! So tell me! How did he die?!?”

Papyrus rubbed the back of his neck. “I . . . I don’t know . . .”

“If you don’t know then he’s still out there!”

“**Sans** told me he was dead.”

Undyne paused. “**Sans**?”

“Yes. The day we escaped was the day Dr. Gaster . . . disappeared. It was that day my memories stopped being so fuzzy. Every day after that one, I can remember clearly.”

“So tell me. Tell me how you escaped.” She folded her arms over her chest and sat herself on the floor. Papyrus himself took a seat on the overturned couch, once again taking a deep breath to tell his story.

“Well, it was any other day in the lab,” he said. “I was just waiting in my cell for my brother. Gaster took him for some experiment, he never bothered to really tell us what.”

“I noticed,” Undyne hissed between her teeth.

“It had to have been many hours. And then, the entire lab just shook. Like the worst earthquake ever. The entire building rattled so violently I thought it was going to collapse! I had no idea what caused it, or what happened, but just minutes after the tremors, there was Sans. He stood outside my door, absolutely shaking . . .” Papyrus’s eyes went very dark and hollow. “Undyne, I had never
seen him so scared before."

"'We gotta go, we gotta get outta here.' he said. And he managed to unlock my cell door. And we just ran. We ran all over that lab, ran up and down all these grey halls. Neither of us knew where we were going. But we just ran.

"After a while we finally found the exit. We had never been outside before. We never left the lab. But Sans’ fear didn’t even make me hesitate. We burst through that door, straight to the heart of Hotland. The heat was absolutely jarring from the cold lab basements. Like a nice big, fat, hot slap to your face. But even that didn’t stop me. We kept running."

"What were you running from?" Undyne asked.

Papyrus looked at his hands. "To this day . . . I’m not entirely sure. Just as far away from the labs as we could, I suppose." He took another breath, and continued. "We ran straight through Hotland. Straight across the bridges over the pits of lavas, through the magma caverns, just . . . trying to get as far away as we could. And we reached Waterfall. And still we kept running." Papyrus paused for a moment. "It was right as we reached Waterfall I noticed how very sick and weak my brother looked. He was dripping with sweat and wasn’t breathing right. He could barely stand and yet here he was keeping up with me. And he . . . collapsed." Papyrus paused to collect himself. "So I picked him up . . . and just kept running."

"I had plenty of energy to spare, and he was light, so I didn’t mind carrying him. But after a while I noticed he was getting weaker. His breathing was getting worse, and I could feel his soul losing its strength. I set him on the ground and tried to heal him. I remember calling out to him, to anyone really for help. And someone came!"

"Who?"

"Grillby!!"

_It was a wet and miserable day in Waterfall. They all were._

_A suboptimal place for a fire elemental to be, really._

_Grillby was bundled from head to toe in thick water-proof clothing, clutching an umbrella firmly in one hand, and holding his scarf over his face with the other. Honestly, why did he volunteer to pick up Gerson’s supplies himself? Should have paid someone to do this for him . . ._

_He was pulled from his thoughts as something felt . . . wrong. An invisible wave washed over him, pulling at something deep within his being. He felt . . . hm, empty? No, not empty, but something was very wrong, indeed. He could never put his finger on it but something was . . . missing._

_The earth trembled slightly beneath his feet, and Grillby braced himself. An earthquake? Hm, not unusual, he supposed. The tremors thankfully stopped shortly afterwards, a few pebbles rustled from their spots but no noticeable damage, thankfully._

_What was he going on about again?_

_Gerson. Right._

_He set off._

_It was a few more minutes of perilous traversing through the slimy wet caverns of Waterfall before_
something stopped him again. This time, it was a voice.

Grillby froze, still as stone, and listened. The voice was young, and afraid. A child, from what he could tell. His heart skipping a beat, Grillby set off as fast as he could in the direction of the voice. He was getting closer. The words were coming clearer now.

“Wake up. Please please please, brother, wake up!”

Grillby’s heart churned sickeningly.

He skidded around some stalagmites and saw huddled away at the corner of the cavern two small skeleton children. One was laying on the cold wet ground, unmoving. The other was hunched over him, grasping the unconscious one’s hands and tears streaming from his eye sockets. Both of them wore tattered rags of clothing, thin and useless.

“Brother! Please wake up!”

Grillby stepped forward. “Do you need help?”

The skeleton jumped with a tiny squeal of shock, scared right out of its skin from Grillby’s presence. He turned, his eye sockets going wide. Orange lights blazed in his eyes, and soon, he was surrounded by the orange glow of magic and began to change . . .

“Well, heh, needless to say, Grillby scared me nearly to death! And as if that wasn’t bad enough, he was the first monster I saw besides Gaster, and as you can imagine, a monster made of fire can be pretty intimidating. So I, uh, tried to scare him off . . .”

Grillby nearly fell over his own feet as he madly scrambled backwards. The skeleton child, before his very own eyes, transformed into a terrifying bone behemoth! He gnashed his fangs, stomped his feet, and whipped his tail around threatening, a loud dangerous growl escaping his maw.

And he roared.

Grillby retreated, taking refuge behind another rocky outcropping. But the beast didn’t follow him. He stood firmly rooted to his spot, standing protectively over the other skeleton. Who was still unconscious. The beastly skeleton didn’t break eye contact, but bowed lower, keeping his chest just over the other skeleton’s. He roared again, clearly saying “Go Away!”

And slowly, Grillby began to realize.

He saw fear in those eyes. He saw the bones of the beast shake and tremble, not just in attempts to look threatening, but because he was afraid.

The beast turned back to his brother, nudging him with his snout, whimpering. But still, his brother remained unmoving.

Grillby may not be any sort of genius, but he understood well enough. These two monsters were in trouble. And they were hurt, and scared, and they needed help.

Very slowly, very carefully, Grillby stepped forward.

Immediately, the beast skeleton snapped forward, baring his fangs and letting out another terrifying roar. But Grillby did not even flinch.
“It’s ok, it’s ok,” he said gently. He kept his hands raised in front of him and moved very slowly. One foot carefully stepping just in front of the other. “I am not here to hurt you.”

The beast roared again. He gnashed his teeth, stomped his paws against the ground, slammed his whip-like tail against the rock. He roared.

<<GO AWAY!!!  PLEASE JUST GO AWAY!!!>>

“You do not need to be afraid, I am here to help you.”

Grillby noticed the tears forming in the beast’s eyes. His roars were growing quieter, reduced to whimpers, and then to pained whines that echoed off the cavern walls. He was desperate. Desperate to protect his brother. And so very, very afraid. The beast cowered before Grillby, but still, remained unmoving from his protective stance above the unconscious skeleton. His bones shook terribly.

“It’s ok,” Grillby repeated, over and over. “I will not harm you. You are safe, do not be afraid.”

The beast whimpered.

“Your brother is very sick. And he looks like he needs help.” Grillby pointed at the skeleton at the beast’s feet. The beast crouched over him, but his eyes were wide. Fear? Or hope?

“I can help you,” Grillby offered. “I can give you food. And a place to stay. I can give you clothes and safety. Let me help you.”
He was so close now. If he wanted, he could reach out and put his hand against the tip of the beast’s muzzle. The elemental cast a wary eye to the sharp vicious fangs that adorned that muzzle. Sharp and long enough to rip him to pieces, if he so wished.

Grillby remained perfectly still, just out of reach.

The beast let out another tortured whine. He looked back and forth to the warm inviting hand and to his quickly fading friend. No, not just a friend. He was the only family he had, the only thing either of them had.

He whined loudly. Tears streaked from his eyes. He so badly wanted to . . .

“It’s ok . . .”

Could he trust the fire thing?

“It’s ok . . .”

He . . . he needed to!

Closing his eyes tightly, the beast pressed his muzzle against Grillby’s hands.

And the elemental breathed a sigh of relief. Now with the beast’s permission, Grillby began to gently stroke his boney snout, whispering soft words of assurance. The beast pressed against him, and in another flash of orange, he was a skeleton again, his arms wrapped tightly around Grillby’s broad shoulders.

“H-help him,” he hiccupped between sobs. “Please help my brother!”

Grillby wordlessly lifted the skeleton into his arms, and the three of them quickly made their way back to Grillby’s home in Snowdin.

“Do not worry. I will take very good care of you.”

“Y-you’re not g-going to hurt us, are you?” The poor skeleton was shaking. The feeble rags it wore could not have been very warm for him.

“Of course not.” Grillby, with much skill and patience, unraveled the red scarf he wore around his neck while keeping the other skeleton firmly clasped in his arms. “Here, take this, it will keep you warm.”

The skeleton eyed it carefully. He looked back and forth between the scarf and Grillby.

“Is this a test?”

“No,” Grillby said gently. “I want you to have this.”

“Why?”

“Because you are cold, and you need it.”

And slowly, the skeleton grabbed it, and held it in his hands tightly as if it was going to be ripped from him any second.

“Now, come on. My home isn’t very far away.”
“And Grillby took us in, and wrapped Sans in blankets and put him on the couch. He made us food, he gave us clothes, he even let me keep his scarf!” Papyrus clung the hems of the red scarf he wore, the scarf he had never taken off in his entire life.

Save to warm a friend who was freezing in the cold. Just as he once was.

“Grillby even gave us our names. You know, cuz we didn’t have any. I was really happy to finally have a name. Because that meant I was really a monster now.”

“You always were a monster. And that guy was a dick for saying you never were one,” Undyne said, pressing her hand on Papyrus’s shoulder. He smiled.

“We stayed there for many days,” he went on. “It took Sans a long time to wake up. I never left his side. I would stand guard, or climb into the couch next to him and sleep besides him. Grillby was very worried about him and he always checked to make sure we were ok. He always had hot, delicious meals ready for us whenever we got hungry. He’s a really good cook, you know.”

Undyne sat in silence, letting Papyrus just . . . talk.

“For a long time, I was afraid it was all a trick. Or a trap. It was so nice having someone be nice to us. And I was afraid it was going to end soon. But Grillby was very patient. He always assured me everything was going to be ok, and he would never hurt us. He . . . well, he saw the plates on our arms,” Papyrus clung to his wrist, his gaze once again casting down to the plate that was now hidden beneath his glove. “He asked about them. But when I didn’t say anything, I think he . . . sort of knew. And he didn’t ask about them ever again.”

Papyrus took a moment to stare down at his wrist. He rubbed his hand over his bones, feeling the cold steel plate even through the fabric of his glove. Undyne noticed, but words of comfort failed to come to her. Then he snapped back to attention and continued.

“After a while, Sans woke up! And he was ok! And he assured me that Gaster was gone and he would never hurt us again! I asked him what happened of course, but, well . . .”

“Sans doesn’t like to talk,” Undyne finished with a bitter edge to her voice. Papyrus nodded.

“But Sans promised, and that was good enough for me. Grillby let us stay with him for a while more, until he was sure we were ok, and then we went on our own. And that’s that! See! We’re ok, Undyne! I’m ok!”

The bitterness, the anger, the rage, they all fell away. And now all Undyne could feel was a coiling, crippling sense of grief. How could something so terrible have happened to Papyrus? How could anything so heinous ever be done by monster hands?

“How can you be ok?” Undyne whispered through her tears. “How can you be ok with anything after what you’ve been through?”

There was a hesitation, but only for a moment before she felt a pair of arms wrap around her. Papyrus pulled her close, embracing her tightly.

“Very terrible things happened to me in the past,” he said softly. “Terrible things that are very unpleasant to think about and even painful to remember. But believe me, I am ok. And the reason why I’m ok is because I learned to accept what happened. I accepted that awful, terrible things happened to me. And maybe it wasn’t fair, or right, but they happened. But all of that is in the past. All of that is behind me now. I can’t go into the past. I can’t change what happened. But I can accept it, and move on. Because I realized the past does not define me! I don’t have to be so sad all
the time about the bad things when there’s good things I could be happy about instead! I live in an amazing house! I have an amazing, if annoying, brother who loves me very much! And I have many friends who care about me and love me! So it’s ok! I’ve put the past behind me, where it belongs, and I refuse to let it bother me anymore! So, Undyne, when I say everything is ok, believe me! It is! Because I have you, and Sans, and every monster in the Underground to care about. And that makes things pretty ok in my book!"

Undyne choked out a laugh, rubbing away her tears with the heel of her hand. “Man, Papyrus, you really are one cool dude.”

“That’s what I’ve been saying this entire time! Nyeh heh heh! But!” He pulled away, looking at her with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. “I know something that we can do that’s guaranteed to cheer you up!”

“Oh yeah? And what’s that?”

A shriek of joy echoed down the caves of Waterfall, followed shortly by a thunderous stampede of footfalls and a blur of blue and white.

Racing down the miles and miles of slick rocky caverns was a most peculiar sight; a mighty fish warrior riding on the back of a skeleton dragon.

Undyne was grinning ear to ear, the wind whipping past her so fast and so sharply tears were freely streaming from her remaining eye.

But hell if she cared!

“THIS IS THE GREATEST DAY OF MY LIFE!” she screamed at the top of her lungs.

Papyrus let out a yip of agreement as his paws pounded against the ground, speeding them through the Underground faster than any monster or riverperson or machine could. And they were loving every second of it.
The wind roaring past their heads, the steady thrum of footfalls, hitting every curve with enough speed to send either of them careening dangerously off path, it was all so exhilarating!

Undyne could barely contain her own glee as a maniacal laughter escaped her lungs. It was just like her favorite animes! Swordswomen, fierce princess warriors riding into battle atop great and terrible behemoths!

It was real!

“ANIME IS REAL!!!!”

Papyrus howled in turn.

They were speeding down the less traversed paths, the back paths that were so windy and dangerous monsters didn’t bother navigating them. But the terrain was no challenge for Papyrus; his long limber limbs provided him with all the agility and grace he needed to conquer anything the caves could throw at them. He hit sharp curves head-on, bouncing off the walls and slaloming between columns of rocks with just inches to spare. He was enjoying it just as much as Undyne was!

He had never been able to run so freely before!

A wide column of rock blocked their path, and to either side was not nearly enough room for them to pass.

Undyne’s eye widened. “Papyrus-!”

She could feel the swell of magic in Papyrus’s chest. She felt the hot heat of his magic building in his maw and throat before exploding out into a laser, firing straight and true ahead of them. The column was obliterated, and they burst through the cloud of dust and rock with hardly a scratch.

“FUCK YES!” Undyne screamed.

Papyrus barked back in celebration, letting out barks and roars of celebration. In time, he slowed, choosing a perch on a cliff that oversaw most of Waterfall. Up here, they could see Undyne’s house, and also the house of her ghostly neighbor Napsablook. They could see the snail farm, and Gerson’s shop, and the echo flower fields and Tem Village.

Undyne let out a breath. “You can see everything up here.”

Papyrus nodded his head, lowering himself to his stomach and allowing Undyne to clamber off his back. She sat next to him, and the two enjoyed the scenery in silence for a moment, both of them coming down from the adrenaline rush. Undyne was still grinning ear to ear.

“Allright, you bonehead. I have to admit, that did cheer me up,” she said. Papyrus let out a barking laugh, his eyes filled with light and happiness. He looked down at her, inquisitively and with a wide grin.

“You really are cool, Papyrus,” Undyne smiled. “And . . . I just want to say how happy I am that you showed me all this. It must mean a lot to you.”

He nodded.

“But one thing I can’t understand,” she said, growing a bit more somber. “What I can’t understand is that Sans knows that jerk of a doctor is dead. He knows he’s dead and gone and never going to hurt either of you again. So why is he still keeping it such a secret? I mean, fine, maybe he doesn’t want
to be reminded of all the horrible science shit, but why keep the shape-shifting bit quiet? I mean, this is cool, right? So what is he afraid of?”

Papyrus took a moment to think about it. With a familiar flash of orange magic, he was back in his skeleton form, sitting right beside her.

“It’s funny. I know he can shapeshift. I know he’s like me.” He narrowed his eyes, deep in thought. “But . . . I can’t ever remember him changing. I can’t even remember what he looks like in his other form.”

“Maybe it’s one of those memories that got all screwed up the same way everyone else forgot about Gaster,” Undyne offered. Papyrus shrugged.

“Maybe. And after all this time, I’ve never seen him change. When I go out to the forest and turn, he’ll never join me. I’ll try to get him to, you know? I’ll turn and try to play with him, or tell him out in the woods where no one is, that it’s safe to change. I tell him there’s nothing to be afraid of. I even told him if it hurt to change, I’d understand. But he makes excuses. Too lazy, he’ll say.”

His hands turned over themselves.

“I mean, the first time I turned, it was awful. But after enough practice, it’s second nature. Euphoric, even. And it’s not like your mind changes at all, either! It’s still you! You know?”

Undyne nodded. “Even though you look different, you’re still you.”

“Exactly!” Papyrus said. “But . . . I think he’s afraid. I think something about his other form really, really scares him.”

His eyes once again took on that expression that Undyne learned to know all too well.

“Undyne . . . I think the day Gaster disappeared, something terrible happened.”

“Ok ok ok, I got another one, it’s a really good one!” A tiny giggle could be heard behind the great door. “Alright, here it goes. Knock, knock!”

“Who’s there?”

“Broken pencil.”

“Broken pencil who?”

“Oh, dear, never mind, it’s pointless!” The woman behind the door erupted into a fit of giggles.

Sans’ smile barely flickered. “Heh. Yeah . . . that’s a pretty good one, lady.”

There was a pause.

“My dear friend, are you alright?”

Sans had been leaning against the purple door, but looked over his shoulder at the wall that separated him from the only one in the world who loved terrible puns as much as he did. “Why do you ask that?”

“You’re not laughing as much as you usually do. And your last few jokes, well . . .”
“They were pretty awful, weren’t they?” Sans winced.

“That racehorse joke was just downright deplorable.”

“Hey, maybe I just needed a high horse to jump down from!” Sans said, forcing a laugh.

“That . . . didn’t even make any sense,” she replied, although she too allowed a soft laugh. “My friend, I may not even know your name, and I know I can tend to be a bit motherly, but I just want to let you know something. You are my friend. And if something is troubling you, I want you to know that I am here to help. Or perhaps just listen. If you want to talk, I am more than happy to lend my ears to you.”

Sans sighed. Even if he wanted to, how on earth could he ever explain his current predicament to someone he did not even know the name of?

And yet . . .

“You know what, screw it,” Sans said with a determined huff. “Shit’s pretty messed up right now and my head ain’t in its right place. So, sure old lady, I can talk. Not like you’re going to remember it, anyway.” He kicked his foot over his knee. “No one does.”

“I’m sorry?”

“Eh, forget that last bit. Just me madly rambling. So, you know my brother, right?”

“Well, my bro and I got this . . . secret magic power.” God, was he really doing this? “It’s not bad or anything. Just different. And my bro, coolest dude he is, he got it down pat. Can use it without ruffling a feather on his head. He’s great at it.” He hesitated. “But the thing is . . . it brings back a lot of bad memories. I know this may sound crazy, me being such a jokester all the time, but Paps and I had a pretty rough childhood. Wasn’t exactly the greatest.”

“No,” the lady said, very softly and tenderly. “No, I can believe that.”

“You do?” Sans asked, cocking an eyebrow.

“Sometimes the greatest cure to sadness is laughter. The old saying has a grain of truth to it. Sometimes we make jokes in light of terrible things that have happened to us. I understand that more than you may believe.”

“I see.”

“Please, go on.”

Sans took a breath. “Alright. Where was I? Secret magic power, right. I admit, I kept Papyrus in the dark about it for a long time. Because he can’t remember any of the bad things like I do. And I don’t want him to remember any of it.”

“But recently, someone found out. Someone saw Papyrus . . . uh, do his thing. And it’s not Papyrus’s fault, I don’t blame him for it at all. But that doesn’t change things. Someone knows, and they’re going to ask questions, and now Papyrus is going to find out the truth.” His hands balled into fists. “He’s going to find out all the awful shit he went through. All the pain, all the . . .” Sans stopped to take a breath.
Was he really saying all this? Was he really confessing his deepest secret to a complete stranger?

But she wasn’t a stranger. He had been to this door a hundred times over a thousand lifetimes. He knew her better than she probably knew herself. He may not remember a whole lot over the resets, but he remembered her warmth and kindness, her compassion and love.

And he knew, knew to the bottom of his soul, he could trust her.

“Lady, if he found out, I don’t know what I’d do if something happened to him. He’s all I got. I can’t tell him what happened. I can’t tell him the truth.”

He sighed, staring up at the snow-covered pine trees. The snow gently falling from the endless cavern ceiling could almost be mistaken for stars.

“So, that’s my story. Hiding in the forest, running away from my problems and hoping it’ll eventually go away. Sad, huh?”

The lady behind the door was silent for a very long time.

“I didn’t bore you to tears back there, did I?” Sans chuckled. “Ah, forget it. It’s not a big-”

“No, it is a big deal,” the woman insisted gently. “You love your brother very much. And you want to protect him, as any loving brother would. But I think that perhaps keeping him in the dark after so long is doing him more harm than good.”

“So, what?” Sans frowned. “Tell my brother that his past was filled with pain and torture? How well do you think that will go over?”

“It will not,” the woman said solemnly. “He will be hurt, and distraught. That goes without saying. But it’s very apparent to me that him not knowing his own past troubles him greatly. My friend, he knows you are keeping something from him. And how do you think that makes him feel? Knowing your own family keeping such important secrets to themselves will only lead to disaster. Like a wound festering, it will only get worse over time.”

“Thanks for the visual,” Sans winced.

“But let’s continue with that metaphor,” she went on. “Right now, the past is a great wound, bleeding and infecting both of you. And you put a bandage over it. You shoved it to the back of your mind and ignored it, and only put more bandages over it when the wound bled through. And you may not know this, but bandages cannot heal every wound. It needs proper treatment.”

“I wouldn’t know, I don’t bleed.”

“In any case, my friend, what needs to happen is that you must rip off the bandages. Throw them away, and give the wound the proper attention it deserves. The truth is a powerful thing. It can destroy, but it can heal. It will be very difficult, but all good things are. It will not be without tears and pain, but a month from now, when you both have healed, you will be beyond relieved that you made this choice.”

Sans sighed, staring up at the snowflakes that fell on him. If he stayed here long enough, they might bury him. Freeze him to the ground, against this door.

“You tell me this like you’ve experienced this first hand.”

A long, long pause.
“I have.”

Sans closed his eyes.

“I’m sorry.”

“Thank you. I truly mean this. My dearest friend, I asked you to keep a promise once before, and now I must ask you to make another promise to me. Promise me, from the depth of your being, promise me you will tell your brother the truth. Promise me this, my friend.”

“Geeze, lady, you’re really making me work over here, aren’t you?”

“Please. This is important.”

He closed his eyes. “Alright. Alright, I promise. It’s . . . damn, this is going to be hard.”

“It will be worth it. That I can promise to you.”

“Deal.”

“I hate to go, but it is getting awfully late. And you have been away for a long time. Go home. See your family.”

“I will.”

“Promise?”

Another low breath. “I really don’t like making promises. But ok. I promise.”

He could practically see her smile. “Thank you. Good night. Don’t let the bed bugs bite!”

He grinned. “Good one.”

He stood, joints creaking and cracking in protest as he stretched. He had been sitting for a long time. It was indeed late, very late.

Papyrus was probably worried about him.

And Undyne . . .

Geeze, he really didn’t want to deal with her.

He shoved his hands deep within his pockets and shambled home, his feet barely stepping over the snow, leaving trails of shuffled footsteps behind him.

He knew the lady was right. He knew he had made a stupid gamble keeping his mouth shut all these years, hoping that Papyrus would never remember, and hoping no one would ever find out their secret.

He didn’t have to worry about someone finding out about him. Ever since . . . ever since that day, he swore to never turn again. He would never become that beast, that thing, ever again. That was a promise he was more than happy to keep.

Papyrus was lucky. He didn’t remember the pain. He didn’t remember what it was like.

He didn’t remember what that fucking doctor did to them.
Sans gripped his left arm that bore the marks of years of testing and abuse. No magic in the world could heal the writing on his bones.

He full-well meant to keep his promise. Papyrus . . . well, he wasn’t a kid anymore. He was an adult, naïve and perhaps a bit innocent, but an adult nonetheless. He was strong. The strongest monster Sans had ever known. He would be able to take it.

But Sans . . . well, he wasn’t ready. Not yet. This wasn’t going to be easy. And his head was whirring already from the inevitable storm.

Snowdin town loomed ahead, the lights cozy and warm in the fading nightscape. Grillby’s bar was still open, its neon lights blinking on and off as steady as a ticking clock. He would be open for a few more minutes, enough for a drink. And no one would be there. Save the elemental himself.

He strode inside, kicking the snow of his feet. “Heya, Grillz, I’m gonna need the strongest-”

He stopped dead.

Sitting at the bar, staring him down, was Papyrus and Undyne.

Papyrus gave him a meek little wave. “Hello, brother.”

“What are you doing here?” he asked flatly.

“Waiting for you, stupid!” Undyne huffed, folding her arms across her chest. “Damn well took you long enough, too! We knew you’d come here before going home, so we decided to wait for you here.”

Grillby was standing behind the bar, albeit a bit off to the side, his head down as he busily tended to a stubborn stain on a dish. He too offered a tentative wave.

“I don’t suppose you know why they’re here?” Sans asked with a pointedly raised eyebrow. Grillby shrugged.

“Didn’t say.” Grillby had always been a monster of few words.

“Oh, let’s all cut the crap, everyone in this room knows!” Undyne said impatiently, throwing up her hands. “Do I need to say it out loud, cuz I will!” Grillby shot her a look, pausing his scrubbing.

“Undyne . . .” Papyrus said with a strained voice. “We’re not here to throw around accusations! We’re here to . . . talk. Just talk. We’re all going to have a nice, calm conversation, and no one’s going to . . . throw around coffee tables or suplex couches!”

“That was oddly specific,” Sans said with his eyebrow arching higher.

“I said I’d pay for it!” Undyne said through gritted teeth. “That coffee table was ugly, anyway.”

“You broke our coffee table?!”

“In any case!” Papyrus interrupted. “Sans . . . I think we are all a bit overdue . . . for a talk discussing what happened. Although, perhaps we can do this at home and let Grillby be.”

“Why? He knows,” Undyne said with a wave. Now the bartender stopped his idle scrubbing altogether to stare at the captain, narrowing his eyes in suspicion.

Sans still hadn’t moved from his spot, teetering on the threshold between the inside of the bar and the
snowy landscape behind him. He could just turn around and walk away right now if he wanted to.

His hands dug deeper into his pockets and with a deep breath, marched to the bar.

“First things first. Grillby, the biggest, spiciest bottle of ketchup ya got.”

Grillby nodded, retreating to the back room and emerging with a large bottle of ketchup. Sans muttered a quick “thanks” and took a very long pull from the bottle. Undyne cupped a hand to her mouth to suppress a gag.

Grillby turned to Papyrus. “Another milk?”

“Please! It’s the only thing you cook here that’s not covered in grease!” Papyrus said. Grillby let out a wisp of a smile before he retreated to the backroom a second time, emerging a minute later with a large glass of milk in hand. Papyrus happily took a sip.

Sans cradled the bottle in his skeleton hands, feeling the gaze of all three of them on him. Welp, no going back now.

“What would you like to know?” he asked. His voice was so small and faint he was half-way hoping no one would hear him.

“Everything!” Undyne demanded, pounding a fist on the table hard enough to rattle the empty glasses behind the bar. Grillby flinched, instinctively slapping his hands over the fragile glasses to keep any from falling. He gave Undyne a quick, dirty glare. She winced.

“Sorry,” she muttered. “But yeah! We wanna know everything about you and your shape-shifting!”

Grillby’s flames sparked violently, startling both Papyrus and Undyne. He stared at her, flames hot and angry, his expression impossible to read.

“How?” he whispered dangerously. Undyne could feel herself flinch against his flames.

“Grillz, it’s ok,” Sans reassured with a wave of his hand. “Long story short, she saw Paps turn. So now she shares our lil’ secret. And now I’m going to tell them the truth.”

Grillby folded his arms over his chest, apparently displeased. But he didn’t say anything further, nor move from his spot.

“So the gist of it is this,” Sans said. He began speaking very quickly. “Some crazy psycho doctor created us in his evil psycho lab for us to be used as weapons. He imprisoned us and tortured us for years, and then made us turn into horrible beasts, and now he’s gone. So there.”

Undyne rolled her eye. “Yes, I know that! Papyrus told me more than enough about Dr. Gaster!”

At this, Sans froze.

He turned to his brother. He was staring down at his milk, hands clenched tightly around the glass, hunched over. He couldn’t look him in the eye.

Sans’ voice grew thin. “You told me you didn’t remember anything.”

“I never said *that*,” Papyrus protested weakly. “I said I don’t remember *much*! I mean, I didn’t even say *that*! I . . . I asked you a few times if you remembered anything and you just . . . never answered me?”
“Oh my god, are you two kidding me!?” Undyne screeched.

“You kept asking me so I thought you didn’t remember anything!” Sans protested.

“Because I don’t remember all of it!” Papyrus shot back. “I remember bits and pieces-”

“Like getting your fucking plate screwed in. Or how about all the awful experiments you had to sit through?! Or better yet, how about the horrible awful memory of turning into that dragon thing for the first time?!” Undyne roared.

Sans felt his hands begin to shake. His eyes grew dark as a terrible feeling crept down his spine. “You . . . you remember all that?”

Papyrus took a sip from his glass, still refusing to make eye contact. “I . . . yes, brother,” he said quietly. “I tried, I tried so many times to tell you but every time I did you got . . . sad. And I hated seeing you like that. So I . . . never asked you again.”

The bar fell quiet. The tension between the trio (and the unwitting bartender) was as fragile and tense as spun glass.

He had known.

After all this time. All these years, all the sleepless nights and tiresome days, Papyrus had known. For all the effort Sans put forth, for every ounce of energy he spent concealing the past, Papyrus had known. He remembered. Maybe not much, but it was enough. It was enough for him to know terrible things happened to him. He remembered enough to know the horror and pain they had experienced.

And the first transformation . . .

Sans shuddered.

God, he remembered that day, too.

Sans remembered his all too well. There were no words to describe the pain, the absolute fear that flooded him. And Papyrus remembered it.

The exact pain and torture and misery Sans worked so hard to protect him from.

All for nothing.

…

“Heh heh heh . . .”

God, that was hilarious.

“That’s . . . that’s the fucking funniest thing I have ever goddamned heard of!” Sans could feel himself erupt into a fit of giggles. He couldn’t stop, couldn’t stop his lungs gasping for air as he laughed and laughed and LAUGHED.

God, it was so FUNNY.

He buried his head in his hands, his chest heaving, pain rippling across his ribs as air refused to come to him fast enough to fuel the torrent of laughs. Tears streamed from his eyes.
IT WAS TOO FUCKING FUNNY.

He felt arms wrap around him. Strong, comforting arms. He felt those arms press him closer to a form he knew too well, the same embrace his brother had given countless times. In nightmares, in the days that Sans slipped too far. His brother had always been there . . .

“It’s ok,” Papyrus whispered. “It’s ok, I’m right here.”

“It’s too funny . . .” Sans gasped. Was he still laughing? Or was he sobbing? He couldn’t tell anymore.

“I know, I know. It’s ok. It’s ok.”

Undyne watched helplessly. Grillby still hadn’t moved, hadn’t reacted at all. He was like reading a stone wall. But every so often, sparks would ignite from the back of his neck, or his hand would twitch as if he wanted to reach out to the two brothers.

Eventually Sans calmed enough, and he wiped the wetness from his sockets with the heel of his hand. “I’ve been a lousy brother, haven’t I?” Sans muttered.

“Absolute balderdash!” Papyrus exclaimed. His grin split his skull in half, his eyes filled with that inextinguishable glint of happiness. “Sans, you are a great brother more than worthy of the great Papyrus! And I care about you more than anything in the world! And sometimes I know you try really hard to do what’s right, which is why I believe you’ve been . . . keeping this to yourself all this time. And perhaps I haven’t been the greatest either.”

“The Great Papyrus, not great?” Sans choked out a laugh. “Impossible.”

Papyrus smiled, a little forced this time. “Maybe. But if I was really great, then maybe I would have noticed you getting so sad and distant all the time. And maybe I would have confronted you sooner about things. But that’s then! This is now!” He gestured grandly to the bar. “Now we can start over. Now we can start from a clean slate. Come clean with all the secrets, all the lies. Sans, now we don’t have to be afraid of hiding what we are anymore!”

Sans winced at that last part. “It’s not that easy, bro,” he said, rubbing the back of his neck. “And in any case, it sounds like you know more than enough. I fail to see the point in telling you everything. What you know is more than enough.”

“There’s one thing we don’t know that I find particularly prudent,” Undyne spoke up. “We wanna know how the bastard died. We need to know that he’s good and gone.”

Sans looked at her, and then to Papyrus and Grillby. They all stared intently at him with bated breath.

“It’s not an easy story to tell,” Sans sighed.

“In any case,” Grillby said. All heads snapped to attention at the bartender who barely spoke more than three words in a day. “I would like to know as well, if only to sate my own curiosity. I think it is in the best interest of everyone to know for sure that we needn’t worry about such a terrible monster ever inflicting harm on any innocent ever again.”

“Grillby, I think that’s the most I’ve ever heard you talk,” Undyne gaped. Grillby shrugged.

“I’ve seen what this Dr. Gaster was capable of. I need to know he’s gone,” he said simply.
Sans took this opportunity to take another long sip from his bottle. It was already almost empty.

“You guys really wanna know?” he asked. All nodded. “Alright, then, listen up, and listen close, cuz I won’t repeat myself.”

He took a breath, and began.
Sans finally opens up about the past.

A silence hung in the bar. All eyes were on the small skeleton, who was fiddling with the red bottle in his hands. He didn’t dare tear his eyes away from the counter but he could feel everyone’s gaze on him.

Never before had he felt so vulnerable.

He forced a laugh. “Geeze, you guys really know how to rattle a guy,” he grimaced. He took a funny breath. “I need a sec to get my head straight before I start talking.”

“Brother,” Papyrus said gently. “You don’t have to do this right now, if you’re not ready.”

Of course he didn’t. Of course he could just walk away and put it off another day, to another time when he was ready. But Sans knew there would never be a day where he would willingly share his past. So he firmly shook his head.

“If I don’t say this right here and right now, well, I may never say it at all.” He shuddered. “So … here I go.”

A pause.

“Well crud, I am not sure where to even start.”

“OH MY GOD!” Undyne screeched. Sans barely flinched from his spot.

“But I suppose I can start wherever Paps left off.”

“That’s easy then!” Undyne said. “He told me about his first time turning.” She suddenly straightened in her seat. “So was that it?! After seeing your brother turn into that dragon-thing you wanted to snap that asshole in half?!”

“Language,” Sans warned. “And no, that’s not it.” He rubbed his head. “Alright. Let’s start there. Yeah, that was a pretty awful day. I can remember all of it, you know? All the awful experiments, all the cold lonely days sitting in that cell. Wasn’t very nice. But that day … man that was something else. The doc never really told us what he was going to do to us. He’d just throw us in a room and start doing whatever. So when he took Papyrus that day I expected him to come back with broken bones or bandages. Not …”

He trailed off.

“I only knew it was Papyrus because of the plate on his wrist. And the way he looked at me.”

Papyrus fidgeted in his seat a little. “I am sorry if I scared you.”

“Paps, I wasn’t afraid of you,” Sans said. “When I saw what you were, I felt shock, bewilderment,
horror. And … rage. Yeah, needless to say I was pretty furious. Pap was the only good thing I had down there and Gaster just …” Sans sighed and let the sentence hang in the air. “I made it my mission to be the biggest pain in the doc’s ass. I’d break things, I’d ruin his reports, I’d fight and struggle and refuse every order and command. He’d punish me, for sure. Even threatened Papyrus. But I refused to listen to him unless he agreed to my one demand.”

“And that was?” Undyne said.

“That he’d turn Papyrus back. We had no idea at the time, not even the doctor knew, but we had no clue we could change back. It was supposed to be permanent. And that’s what he told us. He told us he was stuck like that. Forever. Damn near broke Pap’s heart.”

“I don’t remember that,” Papyrus said quietly.

“Probably best you don’t,” Sans said, his eyes growing dark.

He remembered the day the doctor finally relented. It was when Sans managed to dump a week’s worth of lab reports and notes into an old filthy mop bucket, making the ink run and rendering the doctor’s precious notes illegible. He had been furious, of course. Sans remembered the doctor grabbing him by the arm with such strength he was afraid his grip alone would shatter his humerus. He dragged him down the halls and practically flung him into the cell, much to Papyrus’s surprise. He hesitated only a moment before rushing to his brother’s side.

<<BROTHER! Are you alright?>> he asked.

Sans hated that voice, the horrible bastardized sounds that came out of his brother’s mouth. But in the moment, he couldn’t care less. He flung his tiny self against the terrible thing that was now his brother, wrapping his arms tightly around his muzzle and wept.

“Oh, god, bro, I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry …” It was all he could say. “I’m so sorry.”

He remembered Papyrus pressing his muzzle back against Sans’ chest, his forearms awkwardly curling forward in a pathetic mimic of a hug.

<<I’m sorry, too.>>

They spent most of their days like that, just holding each other. Sans refused to let go, and Papyrus did whatever he could to offer whatever comfort his strange new body could. He whimpered and cried a lot. He hated being this strange thing as much as Sans hated seeing him like this.

<<I can’t even hug you back,>> he lamented. <<I can’t even hold you!>>

“You were so brave, though. As upset as you were, you did your best to assure me you were ok. You told me you weren’t in any pain, and you were still you. You told me that you just looked different. You were really frustrated about having no thumbs. You even cracked a few jokes about it. That … that was pretty funny.”

Papyrus offered a smile.

“But the day came when … he did the same thing to me.” Sans said. “I somehow knew. And you did too,” he looked at Papyrus. “We both knew what was going to happen. And you stood in front of that door and wouldn’t let the doc through. ‘Do what you want to me, but please don’t hurt my brother,’ you said. ‘Please don’t hurt him. Don’t do this to him, please.’ He, uh, didn’t listen.
Obviously.”

Sans shook a little, and his breath hiccupped in his throat. God, it was years and years ago, but the memory still burned in his mind. Every bit of it he remembered as if it only happened hours ago. He hunched lower over the bar, blinking back the tears welling in his eyes, and felt a comforting hand on his shoulder.

“It’s ok,” Papyrus whispered. “It’s ok. You do not need to rush this story. If it hurts, it’s ok to not talk about it.”

“I won’t go into detail. You know how it was,” he said hollowly. “Damn guy was so pleased with himself though. I remember his smug stupid face when I turned, he was so proud of himself.” His hands clenched into fists and blue light sparked into his eye. “God, I hate him.”

“And that’s when you kicked his ass!” Undyne said triumphantly.

“Ha, I wish,” Sans glowered, raising his bottle once again to his mouth. “It was a few more weeks after that. During that time we figured how to turn back. I’ll be honest, that part’s a bit fuzzy. I was pretty out of it after the doc did something to my head, some sorta mental exercise or some other bull, I can’t remember. I just remember Pap standing over me. You were so sad and worried. Maybe you were afraid I was really hurt or something but the next thing I knew …” Sans smiled up at his brother. “There you were. You somehow figured how to turn back and you were hugging me like no tomorrow! I can’t remember you being so happy when we were down in those labs. You were so happy to have your thumbs back! You made some pretty good jokes about that, too!”

Papyrus allowed himself to laugh as well. “I sure hope they were better than your terrible puns.”

“They were great, bro. And when I felt better, I turned back, too. Was no easy walk in the park turning back, either, but we did it. You really helped me a lot, bro. I couldn’t have changed back if you weren’t there to help me through it. And we thought it was over. We’d never be those things again.” The light in Sans’ eyes died down. “Our mistake.”

“You didn’t know you guys could turn back and forth?” Undyne clarified.

“Nope. As you can imagine, the doc was not happy when he found his prized creations were back in their ‘useless skeleton forms.’ There’s one thing you should know about the doc, and that’s that he didn’t have all the screws in his head in right.”

Papyrus crinkled his brows. “Um …?”

“He means Dr. Gaster was crazy,” Undyne clarified. Sans nodded.

“Definitely something up with his head. Man, I’ve seen him get mad but this was something else. Just went absolutely ballistic on us. He went on and on about how much work it took him to make us what we were and how it’s now all for nothing. I hate to admit it but he really scared me there. I honestly thought he was going to kill us. He stopped when he saw Papyrus.”

_The doctor’s rage subsided as his gaze fell on something behind Sans. Sans turned around, and saw his brother._

_He almost screamed._

_Orange magic crackled around his arms, specifically his hands. Which now bore long wicked talons. He was shaking, tears in his eyes and muttering to himself._
“No no no please no!” he said as he stared at his hands—hands that were slowly returning to their beastly shape.

The doctor glided straight past Sans, his hard burning eyes staring down at the subject.

<<Change,>> he commanded. <<Do it now.>>

“I … I don’t want to! It hurts!”

But fear seemed to catalyze the transformation. Already more changes were apparent; bumps on his skull shaping into horns, teeth growing longer and sharper, feet growing claws and bones shifting and cracking against each other. And through it all, he fought. He screamed and cried and protested, but it refused to stop.

The doctor was patient. His rage was gone as he watched the young skeleton fight futilely against the changes. In time, he was back in that hellish form, tears streaming from his eyes.

<<How very interesting,>> he commented. <<It seems the procedure was permanent, in a way. You have been changed. No matter how hard you fight it, no matter how fiercely you deny it, no matter how deep you try to hide it, you will always be my weapons. This is what you are now. This form is you. And you will never escape it.>>

He left with a cold smirk playing on his features.

The memory of the doctor’s cruel words burned in Sans’ memory.

“He did more experiments with us. Testing our transformation abilities. It was … agony.”

Undyne opened her mouth to say something, but a stern glare and a shake of his head from Papyrus silenced her.

And still, Grillby listened. He had not moved, not spoken a word since Sans began. But he broke his silence, and with a soft whisper of a voice, he asked. “And what happened that led to the doctor’s demise?”

Sans took another moment to collect himself.

“It was something Papyrus did, actually, that started it all.”

All eyes turned to the tall skeleton, who himself looked startled at the accusation.

“What did I do?” Papyrus asked, borderline concerned. “I didn’t hurt him, did I?”

Sans let out a loud, bombastic laugh. “Never, bro. You don’t have a mean, violent bone in your body. It was something you said to him that made him go way over the edge.”

The now-empty bottle of ketchup in Sans’ hands tapped rhythmically against the bar.

“Remember how I said the doc was crazy? Well, this put the nail in the coffin for that little theory of mine. It was another day, as usual. He made us change into our other forms so he could examine our bone composition, see if he could formulate some sort of equation to our turnings. He had Papyrus strapped to an examination table. I was right next to him. The doc was just … doing his thing, and Papyrus spoke up.”
"I think I understand why you are doing this."

Dr. Gaster snapped up from his microscope, the subject’s sudden words breaking his concentration. He barely glanced over his shoulder back at the beast before resuming his work.

"Why you keep hurting us, I mean."

Sans snarled. "Don’t talk to him, brother. He just likes seeing us get hurt."

"That’s not true!" he protested. "Isn’t it?"

"Quiet. Both of you, or I will put a muzzle over those infernal mouths of yours," Dr. Gaster grumbled.

"You kept saying you were doing this for the good of all monsters," he continued. "You say that a lot. ‘For the good of monsterkind.’ You said you knew that by … doing this, you’d save everyone."

Sans let out another growl.

Papyrus went on. "So you must really believe in what you’re doing."

Dr. Gaster paused, rising from his bench to look at the hellbeast. Those lights in his sockets shone brightly, staring straight at him with a warmth that made a terribly cold shiver run up Gaster’s spine.

"If you were hurting us just to hurt us, why would you lie about it, right?" he said. "You would just do it and … not look so sad all the time."

"ENOUGH," Gaster said sharply. His hand had clenched into a fist which began to tremble.

"You must really believe in what you are doing. You must really believe that by doing all these terrible things to us, you’re helping everyone." Papyrus then smiled at Dr. Gaster, and the chill up Gaster’s spine spread to every corner of his body and pierced straight into his soul.

"Dr. Gaster, if you are truly doing what you have to do … then I forgive you."

The world shattered.

Those words, those three horrible words echoed in Gaster’s mind.

I forgive you.

Like a death knell, it echoed. Again and again.

I forgive you.

Gaster’s entire body quaked.

He was barely able to keep himself composed as he stormed from the room, throwing open the door and running out of the examination room.

And there, he let go.

He screamed. He screamed so loud and so fiercely it rivaled the roars of the skeletal beasts. His
magic unfurled around him in a storm, a blue storm of fire and lightning that tore apart everything in his wake. Searing tiles, ripping through wires and steel alike, nothing was left untouched from the sheer brutal rage that overcame Dr. Gaster.

He fell to his knees. He wept. He shook, his hands clawed at his skull and still those words echoed in his mind.

I forgive you.

Never … In no possible conceivable outcome of the things he had done had he ever expected forgiveness from anyone.

And especially not from the ones he tortured so freely.

He would gladly have taken any punishment, any sentence monsters would damn him to when the experiments were done and the truth brought to light. He knew death was a strong possibility, and he welcomed it with open arms. He would be ready.

And …

And yet …

I forgive you.

An icy hand of guilt and dread ripped Gaster asunder. And in his mind he knew.

<<I … I have been compromised …>>

Papyrus’s eyes went wide. “I … I had no idea. Truly, brother, I do not remember any of that!”

Now all eyes were on him. On the skeleton that dared to show mercy to the one that had shown him nothing but agony.

“How?” Undyne said lowly. “After everything you’ve been through, how could you forgive him?!”

“Because it’s Papyrus,” Grillby said with a sigh. Papyrus snapped around to look at the bartender. His eyes were so sad and troubled. “Even after everything you’ve been through you still tried to help him.”

Papyrus fell silent, flooded with a swarm of emotions he couldn’t even begin to describe. His mouth opened and closed several times, trying to form thoughts, words, something.

“If I really said that,” he stuttered in a very quiet voice. “If I really did say those things, then maybe we could have-”

“Don’t even start down that path, Papyrus,” Sans said dangerously. “Don’t even doubt what has happened, or what you did, or what he did. There’s no excuse for his actions, no matter how he justified them. There’s nothing in the world to excuse anyone from those crimes.”

“Sans is right!” Undyne said. “I have no idea why he was hurting you guys so much but if he was trying to find some way to justify it then he’s the worst kind of criminal out there! And you bet your ass if he was still around I would have killed him several times over! Nothing is worth the pain you two went through!”

Grillby nodded in agreement.
Another thought came to Undyne and her eye went wide in horrible realization. “Oh god …” she breathed. “If Papyrus’s words rattled Gaster so much, did he … off himself?”

“That would be something, wouldn’t it?” Sans said with a dry laugh. “No. He wouldn’t kill himself. Too proud. And I don’t think his ego would let him.”

A pause.

“I killed him.”

Papyrus’s hands went straight to his mouth. “You didn’t-!”

“He was going to kill you, Paps!” Sans shouted, banging his fist against the bar. “He was going to kill us! He figured us a lost cause and was going to scrap us! I … I couldn’t let him do it! I couldn’t lose you!”

Tears welled in the skeleton’s eyes. “I … I couldn’t lose you, bro. You were all I had.”

Papyrus, sockets turned upwards in sorrow, placed a hand on his brother’s shoulder. “How did it happen?”

Sans’ eyes went dark and he shook. There were too many bad days to count. Too many terrible days filled with agony and anger and rage. None of this was easy to talk about, especially not that day …

“Take your time,” Papyrus comforted. “Take your time.”

Sans closed his eyes as the memories flashed before him in his head.

Dr. Gaster dragged him from the cell. He had no idea where he was going or what form of torture the doctor had planned, but Sans knew he was terrified. The doctor’s eyes blazed with blue fire, illuminating the halls in a cyan glow despite the bright fluorescent lights. His heels clicked loudly against the tile as Sans struggled to keep up, half-expecting his arm to outright pop out its socket.

Only then did he notice the doctor muttering under his breath.

It was mostly incomprehensible garble. A string of words spoken so quickly and slurred together so haphazardly that they could not be deciphered.

And the doctor looked terrified.

<<I will fix this, I will fix all of this,>> he was saying. His eyes scanned the halls looking for something that wasn’t there. <<I will grind you to ash and remake you like the phoenix!>>

Sans gawked at his words. “What are you going to do to us?!”

<<Should have done this earlier, should have done this the moment you could speak!>> The doctor’s eyes stared straight down at the smaller skeleton. <<Free will is a mistake. You do not need it.>>

Sans’s eyes went wide.

<<And if this next experiment proves unsuccessful, then I will have no choice but to abandon you and start over!>>
“You’re going to kill us!” Sans screamed. He pulled back against the doctor. He struggled and writhed in the vice-like grip of Gaster that clutched his arm. “No! I won’t let you!”

Gaster invoked his blue magic, and Sans was hefted in the air. Completely helpless.

<<You do not get a say in the matter. You will die. And your precious brother, too.>>

And the world went red.

Sans snarled. He growled, he bore his fangs as he felt the changes overcome him.

He felt nothing but rage as the changes consumed him. Like a fire, anger and hate seared him to the core, and one thought filled his mind.

Revenge. For what the doctor did to them, and for what he was trying to do to them now.

The doctor struggled to keep him under his control. The blue magic sparked in and out of Sans’ souls as his form shifted. And then it broke altogether.

The doctor gasped in horror.

He was free.

And he gave into his rage.

Nothing but red filled his vision.

“I … I don’t really remember much of the fight,” Sans said. His voice was like a ghost, faded and barely there. “I just … remember being so angry. I didn’t even feel like myself. I just felt … anger. It’s all I could think about, all I could focus on. Just … rage rage rage, nothing but rage. I wasn’t myself!”

A hand on his arm, but not from Papyrus. Sans looked up to see Grillby looking down at him with empathy, with a knowing look in his eye. He didn’t need to say anything for Sans to understand he too knew the pain Sans experienced, the rage and hatred that flooded every bone in his body and let that hate consume him so entirely.

Grillby understood, and gave a comforting nod. Sans found his strength and went on.

“But, we ended up at the CORE. That’s when the fight escalated. We pretty much wrecked the whole place, nearly brought down the whole damn building.” He narrowed his eyes. “I remember … I had shoved him against a catwalk, high above the CORE’s very heart that powered the whole thing. And that … center, that cataclysmic ball of magic and nuclear energy and magma and who knows what else, it just exploded. The whole place shook like a massive earthquake.”

Papyrus and Undyne shared a glance, both of them recognizing it from Papyrus’s own version.

“The catwalk collapsed. Gaster was hanging by the handrail, barely holding on hundreds of feet above the epicenter. He … looked at me. We stared at each other for a second.”

His eyes went dark.

“I didn’t hesitate. I smashed the catwalk. And I saw him fall into the CORE. I saw his entire being torn apart. I remember seeing him disintegrate before my eyes.” Sans sighed. “And that’s how Dr. W.D. Gaster died.”
No one spoke for a very, very long time.

“Angel above,” Undyne breathed. “That … shit, Sans, I don’t even know what to say.”

He shrugged. He felt numb. Empty. But it was all on the table now. The past unearthed and exposed.

And strangely … he felt almost … relieved.

“Don’t say anything, then,” Sans said. “Take it as it is. My bro and I went through bad stuff. Evil doctor fell to his death in the CORE. We’re better now. End of story.”

“Sans …” Papyrus started. “What a terrible thing you have kept to yourself all these years! I can’t imagine how awful you must feel to keep such dark things to yourself after all this time!”

He wrapped his brother in a suffocating hug.

“But that is no matter now! Now I know! Now you don’t have to bear the weight alone! I, your great brother Papyrus, will be sure that you never have to feel sad or angry about the past ever again!”

Sans laughed. “You’re not mad at me?”

“Never, brother,” Papyrus smiled. “I … I am very sad to hear you did such a terrible thing. And I do not approve, of course. But I cannot blame you. You were in a compromised position. You did what you had to do and I can never fault you for that. The doctor’s death was … unfortunate, but I am not angry at you. Never, my dear brother."

“Aw, shucks, you’re gonna make me cry,” Sans said as he swiped at his eye.

“AND IF ANYONE SO MUCH RAISES A FINGER AT EITHER OF YOU, I’LL CRUSH THEIR SKULLS LIKE CANDY!” Undyne roared. She scooped up the two brothers in her arms in a mighty hug, sweeping them right off their feet, much to Sans’ chagrin. “I won’t let any jerk hurt the two of you again!”

“And should anyone try to hurt us a second time, then I too shall smother them with affection and love until they have no choice but to be our friends!” Papyrus exclaimed.

For all the terrible dark things now brought to light, the bar couldn’t help but be filled with the sound of laughter. Perhaps it was because succumbing to the darkness was not an option for any of them, or perhaps it was because now there was a great sense of catharsis. A heavy weight suddenly dropped, leaving cracks and ripples in its wake but also leaving behind a great sense of relief and unity.

Sans was free of his burden. And no one hated him any less, no one feared him as he had feared himself.

And he had to wonder what divine magic allowed such an outcome. He was almost too afraid that it would be ruined, that the happiness would never last and an even greater darkness would fall on them.

But he ignored those thoughts for now.

For now, he allowed himself to laugh, and to smile. At Undyne, who pounded the walls and floors with vigor as she made her oath to protect the brothers. At Grillby, who never faltered or cowered,
who had been their rock and their light so long ago and who refused to abandon them to this day.

And at Papyrus. Who forgave him for hiding the past, who loved and cared for him through all their troubled days, and who steadfastly refused to judge him for his actions and refused to let the past corrupt him of the pure goodness that shone within his soul.

For now, all was right in the world.

And Sans savored it.
Chapter Summary

Undyne visits the Hotlands Labs . . .

It was without saying that what was spoken inside the bar that night was to never be repeated. Without exception.

Sans made his terms perfectly clear. No one but the four of them could know the truth. No one could know of the brothers’ past, and no one was to know of the despicable monster by the name of W.D. Gaster.

And nothing tore up Undyne’s soul more than knowing such atrocious crimes would never be brought to justice. It burned her core to know that Gaster was dead, alone and forgotten. He would never face his dues, his name would never be spoken again, to be spat with venom teeth, nor would history remember him as the worst criminal monsterkind has ever known.

Seemed far too merciful an end for the likes of him.

But she swore to them, and so she would keep their secret.

Didn’t make her feel any better, though.

“Can’t I just . . . tell people that Dr. Gaster existed and he was an ass and never even mention you two?” she had offered.

Sans scoffed. “It’s far too complicated, Undyne. You’d then have to explain how everyone forgot him. You have no proof. No one would believe you and all evidence of him was erased. It is for the best that no one can, honestly. Just . . . leave this alone. Please. For our sake.”

She trudged home, hands buried deep in her pockets and scowling at the snow underfoot. Papyrus and Sans walked with her. Grillby stayed behind, closing up the bar.

She hated the uneasy silence that hung between them. Far too much was on her mind. Far too many questions she yearned to ask, but knew not to.

A fierce breath pierced her lungs. “All of this sucks,” she spat.

That got a chuckle from Sans. “Yeah, sucks knowing all this, and even worse knowing there’s nothing you can do about it.”

“That’s the worst part, really,” Undyne said. “Dr. Gaster gets to be forgotten and no one will ever know what he did and you guys have to suffer silently for the rest of your life. It sucks!”

“Could be worse. We could have never escaped.”

Undyne bit her lip, tearing her eye away from the brothers. “If it helps any bit at all, I’m really sorry what you two went through. No one deserves that.”
Sans shrugged.

“I guess the next question is, what do we do now?” Papyrus spoke up.

“We keep going like nothing happened,” Sans said. “Just keep living our lives, keep doin’ our thing like we always have.”

“So right back to normal, huh? So then, I guess I will meet you tomorrow morning for Royal Guard training, eh?” Papyrus said to Undyne, offering her a small grin.

Undyne smiled back. It was painfully forced. “Eh, let’s . . . take a day off. I’m sure there’s plenty of boring Guard crap I need to focus on. My mind’s a mess right now. I need a day or so to . . . get my head straight.”

Sans gave her a warning glare, and she scowled.

“For god’s sake, I’m not going to tell anyone!” she roared. “This is a lot to take in and maybe I need time to digest everything, cut me some slack!”

“I didn’t say anything,” he said innocently.

“Oh, you’re a real bag of chuckles, Mr. Funny-Bone.”

“Can we please not fight?” Papyrus whined desperately. “Honestly you two need to get along, I don’t know why the both of you are so tense around each other!”

Undyne glared at Sans. He grinned right back up at her. And Papyrus sighed exasperatedly. But the both of them remained silent for the rest of the journey home.

The brothers’ home glowed in the distance, the yellow lights of the front porch radiating off the snow. Colorful lights decorated the roof, blinking an assortment of bright colors. The cheery little home was almost laughably out of place to the rather strenuous situation.

“Well, here we are,” Papyrus said, waving to their house. “You get back home to Waterfall safely and don’t you dare catch a cold!” He gave Undyne a wink. “Or I will come over there and make you some spaghetti soup!”

Undyne smiled. “Thanks, Paps. You really are the best.”

She hesitated, then stepped forward and scooped him up in a hug, lifting him clean off his feet. He squirmed a bit but relaxed when he realized she wasn’t about to affectionately suplex him. She held him there for a while, probably longer than what was comfortable, but if Papyrus minded, he didn’t show it. He patted her on the back.

“You take care of yourself, you got it?” Undyne muttered. “You take real good care of yourself and if you need anything, you let me know.”

“Thank you Undyne.” He squeezed her back. “Now get home, I am being dead serious about that cold of yours!”

They laughed, and with a good-bye, Undyne continued on her way.

She reached her home without incident, kicking off her wet snowy clothes and flinging herself on her bed. She knew she wasn’t going to get any sleep tonight.

Her head was too . . . busy.
Her imagination went everywhere, imagining all the terrible experiments, imagining the poor brothers locked in cold, dark cells, screaming in pain as they were strapped to tables and needles pierced their bones.

Her fists clenched tightly and her fangs ground against each other. She couldn’t just . . . sit here and do nothing! She had to do SOMETHING!

Yet, what? Sans’ warning ringed clearly. Trying to make the whole monster world remember a monster who never existed wasn’t going to be pleasant, or anything short of a fiasco. It raised more questions than it answered, and it would put more weight on the brothers’ already plagued minds. They wanted peace, and Undyne was going to be damned if she didn’t let them have at least that.

She slowly sat up in her bed.

There was no way every scrap of proof Gaster existed could be gone, could it? She knew scientists, (she was VERY good friends with one, after all) and she knew they were meticulous with their research and notes. Dr. Gaster would have been no different. He would have lab reports. Journals, computer entries, maybe even videos, who knows.

Something had to have survived.

And she knew what to do.

Tomorrow, she was going to visit Dr. Alphys.

In the labs of Hotland, a short, squat yellow lizard was frantically running around the place. She had so much to do! So much to clean and tidy and oh dear the place was such a mess! She never got visitors so she was perfectly content with having her things all over the place.

But Undyne was coming and she had to make the place look perfect!

She glanced at the mound of garbage and empty ramen bowls burying her desks.

Ok maybe not perfect, but at the very least presentable!

“Oh, darling, someone is in a tizzy!” a sultry voice called out.

Alphys groaned. “Oh d-dear, not now, Mettaton!” she squeaked as she started piling the trash in bags. “U-Undyne will be here who knows when! I can’t let her s-see the p-place like this!”

“Ohhhh! Undyyyyne!” he cooed. “The fish of your affection! The sultry seductress of your dreams and fanfictions!”

“METTATON!” she screamed in horror.

“Don’t deny it, darling, I’ve seen the way those little yellow scales of yours flush like roses in bloom at the mere mention of her name!”

“Y-You are not helping anything!” she said. She paused. “‘She flushed like a rose in bloom,’ oh that is good, I have to use that.”

“Don’t mention it.”

“B-But still!” she said, resuming her cleaning. “I w-want the lab clean and I could really use your help!”
Mettaton brought a gloved hand to his square “face.” “Janitor duty?” he said with disgust. “Hardly seems fitting of such a star like myself.”

“METTATON, PLEASE!”

The doorbell rang. And Alphys turned whiter than the snow in Snowdin.

“I’ll get it!” Mettaton said in a sing-song voice.

“No! Wait! Don’t!”

Too late. He was at the door and happily opened it.

Standing in the doorway was Undyne. A towering figure clad in shining silver armor, teal spear in one hand and helm cradled under the other. Her crimson hair was neatly pulled away into a ponytail, her yellow eye hard and sharp and focused. She stepped into the lab with large important strides, turning to the robot and flashed him a dazzling smile of razor-sharp teeth.

Alphys could feel herself go crimson.

Oh god she was perfect.


“She most certainly is!” Mettaton said, wheeling around to where Alphys was tucked away behind her desk. He slung one arm around her shoulder and dragged her out of her hiding place. “Behold, the grand, the magnificent, Dr. Alphys!”

“H-h-h-heya, U-Undyne,” Alphys choked with a tiny wave.

“I’ll leave you two to it! Toodle-oo!” Mettaton waved as he rolled off.

“Thanks for agreeing to meet with me on such short notice,” Undyne said. “I wanted to talk with you about some stuff.”

“A-anything f-for you, Undyne!” Alphys said. She immediately froze. Oh god did that sound too desperate?! Oh god she was messing everything up!

Undyne didn’t seem to notice her little flub. “Listen, I know this sounds a bit weird, but I’m . . . investigating a case. Details are very sparse and the info I have is rather flimsy, but I figured I’d check all my bases, you know?”

Now it was Undyne’s turn to sweat bullets. She had been mentally rehearsing this spiel all day and she hoped she sounded somewhat convincing.

Alphys nodded. “Sure thing!” she said. “What did you want to know?”

“Well, first of all, do you know anything about the previous Royal Scientist?” she asked.

Alphys opened her mouth, looking sure of herself, but froze. She brought a claw to her lips, her eyes turning upwards as she racked her brain. “Come to think of it, I-I don’t,” she said. She looked troubled. “I-don’t know anything about wh-who the scientist before me was. T-that’s really weird, isn’t it?”

Undyne shrugged. Crap, she couldn’t let Alphys think too hard on that. She waved the thought aside. “Eh, no big deal, I just-”
“No no no! It is a big deal!” Alphys said, waving wildly. “Who was the scientist b-before me? Were they the ones who build this lab? Who built t-the CORE? So much knowledge and wisdom and it’s all gone! Why don’t I know this? I should know this!”

Undyne anticipated as much. Alphys wasn’t one to be fooled so easily. “That’s what I’m investigating. Now for my next um, really weird and maybe confusing question. Did you notice anything . . . strange in the lab? When you took over, I mean.”

Alphys froze. “W-what do you mean?” Again, the color drained from her face.

Undyne took a breath between her teeth. “Like, uh . . .” she frowned. “Just . . . weird things! Anything suspicious at all. Maybe some strange notes or . . . other stuff?”

“I d-d-don’t know what you’re talking about.” She wasn’t looking at the captain. “W-What’s all this about a-anyway? This k-kinda feels like an interrogation--not that I’m accusing you of interrogating me or anything but . . . !”

“No no no, it’s not like that!” Undyne said hurriedly. “I’m sorry if I’m making you uncomfortable but this is really important. I just want to know if you noticed anything out of the ordinary.”

Alphys vigorously shook her head. “N-no! Nothing. It was empty and a b-bit dusty but n-n-nothing unusual or sinister or anything!” she laughed weakly.

Undyne sighed. “Ok, I believe you. You know what?” she said, grinning down at Alphys. “I never really checked this place out much. Would you mind giving me a tour?”

Alphys immediately brightened. “O-of course! I’d love to! I have so m-many cool things I’m w-working on! Come on, follow me!”

Alphys eagerly waddled her way through the labs, Undyne right behind her. Alphys happily and eagerly pointed out the many different machines, what they did, and she even showed the captain a demonstration or two. Undyne smiled patiently, nodding as she listened to Alphys enthusiastically talk.

*God she’s so adorable when she gets all passionate*, Undyne said, biting her lip. But she remained focused. She had a mission, after all.

The tour continued, and they passed the elevators leading to the lower floors. Alphys walked past them without pause.

“What’s downstairs?” Undyne asked curiously.

Alphys twitched, but it went unnoticed. “Oh! You d-don’t wanna go down t-there! N-nothing important! It’s all d-d-dusty and d-d-dirty down there! I w-wouldn’t bother! Just dust and a r-r-room even I can’t get to!”

“Wait a minute, a room?” Undyne asked.

“Y-yeah,” Alphys said nervously, turning her hands over each other. “There’s a d-door leading to another wing that’s locked and f-for the life of me I can’t crack it!”

Undyne narrowed her eyes. “And you didn’t think to mention that when I asked you if there was anything suspicious?”

Alphys’s eyes went wide. “O-oh j-jeeze! N-no I didn’t! I-it completely s-slipped my mind, I forgot
about that!” She buried her face in her hands. “I-I’m s-such garbage.”

“Hey hey hey hey,” Undyne reassured, kneeling down and pressing a hand on her shoulder. “You are most definitely not garbage! You forgot, and that’s just fine! I’m not mad, I promise. And I’m sorry if I got short with you, you didn’t deserve that.”

Alphys wiped her eye. “This m-must be really important to you, h-huh?” she asked. “This . . . mission of yours?”

“Oh, you have no idea,” Undyne said, her eye hardening. “Let’s check out that door, then, huh?”

Alphys nodded, and they hopped in the elevator. Her claws clicked over a few keys, and the elevator whirred into motion. A small chime sounded as they reached their destination, the door opening up to almost complete darkness, the only light was Undyne’s spear.

“She’s never c-come down here I k-keep the lights off,” Alphys said meekly as they stepped out. “G-gimmie a sec, I’ll get the lights back on.”

She stepped just to the right of the elevator, to a circuit breaker, and flipped it open. With the flick of a few switches, the fluorescent lights flickered to life, dimly at first but quickly warming up and bathing the chamber in a pale light.

Just fifteen feet in front of them was a monstrous silver door. There was nothing else in the room.

“That’s foreboding,” Undyne grimaced. She stepped up to it and rapped on it. Solid steel, through and through, who knows how thick. This was a door meant to keep things out—or in—at all costs.

To the right was a control pad, glowing green as power returned to the level. Alphys approached it.

“F-from my best guesses, this is a magical signature reading,” she explained. “Only the magical energy of one specific monster can unlock the gate. I s-spent weeks trying to override it but the coding is impenetrable! Whoever designed this was beyond brilliant! A real genius!” She sighed. “I k-kinda wish I met whoever made such advanced programming!”

“You really don’t,” Undyne growled under her breath. She looked around, carefully weighing her option. She was strong, and tough, but she seriously doubted her own brute strength would tear down the door. And she had a strong suspicion Papyrus or Sans might be able to open the door. They were Gaster’s creations, after all, maybe they shared his magical signature. But she would never dream of dragging either of them down here.

After all, this is where it all happened.

Undyne knew this beyond a shadow of a doubt.

All of her answers were behind that door.

“U-Undyne?”

Her eye narrowed.

She glanced up at the ceiling, at the thin metal sheets riveted together. With a grunt, she hurled her spear upwards, knocking one of the plates right out of place.

“Undyne! W-what are you doing?!” Alphys cried.

“We’re getting down there,” she growled. “One way or another!” She jumped, catching the edge of
the ceiling and pulling herself up.

“Undyne, b-be careful!”

Undyne found herself in a very tight crawlspace between floors. It was filed with support beams and power cables, conduit and ductwork running in orderly parallel lines. She crawled forward, mentally keeping pace. As she suspected, she ran into a wall of steel. The door frame went straight through the ceiling.

She banged her knuckles against it. The sound was tinnier, meaning the steel was much thinner. She grinned.

Undyne had very little room to maneuver, but she summoned her spear and jabbed it forward with all her might. It pierced straight through, and she yanked it out, leaving a fist-sized hole in the steel. The steel wall was easily two inches thick, at least. She groaned.

This was going to be a major pain in the ass.

Again and again she summoned spear after spear, piercing holes in the steel and punching her way through. The hole was slowly growing bigger, but Undyne was gasping for breath. She was sweating profusely, laying up in the cramped crawlspace with stale air filling her heaving lungs. But she wouldn’t let that stop her! With renewed vigor she kept working until she was able to squeeze herself through.

She couldn’t help but let out a little cry of celebration when she finally managed to squeeze her hips through the hole, falling flat onto the other side of the crawlspace. And with a single punch, Undyne broke through the ceiling plates and crashed clumsily to the floor.

“She’s alright!” Alphys called out. Her voice was incredibly faint.

“I’m alright!” she yelled back. “Just . . . gimme a moment. GOD, that sucked!”

“W-what do you see?”

Undyne turned. The hall on the other side of the door only led a few paces away until they turned into stairs, leading down deeper and deeper to the lab. Fluorescent lights sparked in and out of life, some pulsing weakly. It gave off a chilling vibe that was all too fitting of such a terrible place.

“The hall goes downstairs further,” she called out. “Maybe another floor or so. There’s another door at the bottom.”

“Oh no, I hope that one’s not locked!”

“I don’t see another key pad or anything.”

“That’s good. But uh, how do I get over?”

Undyne frowned. It made sense that the door to get in would have a lock, but what about to get out? She looked at the door and found another pad, this one a keypad. She looked down at it. One word blinked up at her

**PASSWORD**

Undyne groaned. “This one has a password.”

“T-that’s weird, having two different locks,” Alphys mused. “I r-really don’t know what to tell you,
you can try a few combinations. B-but be careful! Too many tries and i-it will lock you out!”

Undyne thought about it for a minute before she typed.

   GASTER

She hit enter.

   PASSWORD DENIED.

She tried again.

   RETSAG

   PASSWORD DENIED.

“Damn, thought I had that for sure,” she muttered. “Usually villains have stupid obvious passwords in the animes!”

She thought again.

   ASGORE

   PASSWORD DENIED

   HUMANS SUCK

   PASSWORD DENIED

“Eh, worth a shot,” she muttered. But now she was running out of ideas. She hesitated.

   ASRIEL

   PASSWORD DENIED. YOU HAVE THREE ATTEMPTS REMAINING BEFORE SYSTEM LOCKDOWN.

   “Aw crap!” Undyne muttered.

   “W-what?!”

   “Three tries left.”

   “D-don’t blow all three!” Alphys warned. “W-who knows what sort of s-safety measures the Royal Scientist p-put in place!”

Undyne bit her lip. She let out a frustrated roar. God, she had no idea!

   IM A SADIST she angrily typed.

   PASSWORD DENIED

“Fucking hell, I don’t know!” she yelled. She had one more shot. “Hell with it, I don’t know what else to try!”

   GRILLBY

   PASSWORD ACCEPTED
She froze.

The light turned green. The doors groaned loudly as rusted hinges opened, pulling apart the doors. Dust speckled the air as the room opened up for the first time in years.

Undyne stared down at the keypad in utter bewilderment.

GRILLBY.

The password . . . the password was GRILLBY.

Alphys, in the meantime, was beaming. “Undyne, you did it! You did it!” she clapped. “T-that was amazing! Gosh, you are so smart! How did you figure it out?”

Undyne blankly shook her head. “Just lucky, I guess,” she whispered.


Again, she shook her head. The keypad dimmed, the password disappearing. She turned to Alphys and flashed a reassuring smile. “It’s nothing,” she said. “Just . . . I have a lot of questions.”

“Yes, me too,” Alphys said. “What do you think could be down here? What was the previous scientist hiding?”

Undyne remained silent.

Luckily the door at the bottom of the stairs were unlocked. Undyne pressed her hand against the cold barrier.

She took a breath.

Who knew what horrors lay beyond that door.

She pushed it open.

The door creaked open, revealing a tiled hallway, much like the one upstairs. To either side were a handful of small rooms, one being a storage closet. Alphys opened it up, revealing a few lab coats that were neatly hung up, a box of safety glasses and lens wipes, and an assortment of latex and work gloves. Undyne examined the coats. No nametags or any other markings.

They continued.

The rooms in the hall were pretty bare, only containing the most basic of furnishings. A metal table, a chair, a desk, and some storage cabinets.

All the cabinets were empty.

“T-that’s weird,” Alphys remarked. They were reaching the end of the hall, where it forked, and had searched the last of the rooms. “There’s nothing in any of these. No notes or any sort of supplies, heck, not even any office stuff! Why would those rooms be so empty?”

“Maybe he had no need for them,” Undyne shrugged.

“But the desks had scratches and marks on them! Clearly they had been worked on!” Alphys noted.

“So . . . where’s all of the equipment?”
Undyne didn’t have an answer. They kept going, choosing to go right at the fork.

This led to another hallway, leading down to more stairs. The lights were less frequent, casting the lower levels in a dim grey light. The tile gave way to bare concrete and sheet steel. It felt... colder. More hostile. Undyne gritted her teeth.

The halls went on for a bit. Until they came upon two rooms. Two small, cramped rooms, seated right next to each other, with enough room for a tiny metal bed and perhaps five paces between walls. The rooms shared only a tiny little window with metal bars.

The doors were heavy steel, equipped with some of the biggest locks Undyne had ever seen.

And one of the doors was ripped clean off its hinges.

“Oh my god...” Alphys breathed. “W-what is this?!”

Undyne wordlessly stepped into one of the rooms, Alphys following behind her closely. The small lizard let out a tiny gasp of shock, and Undyne spun.

Alphys only pointed at the walls, tears welling in her eyes.

Claw marks. The walls were covered in claw marks.

Silently, slowly, Undyne brought her hand to the walls, her fingers tracing over the marks. Papyrus, or Sans, had made these marks, lashing out with rage and fury and despair...

Through the steel and dust, she could feel their pain.

Her fist clenched.

“Undyne, do you know... w-what happened here?” Alphys whimpered.

Undyne’s eye narrowed.

“Let’s keep going.”

They left the cells behind. The halls kept going. More rooms awaited. One by one they searched every room they came upon. They tore apart every drawer, every cabinet.

Nothing.

There was nothing in any of the rooms besides the furniture. No equipment. No notes. No computers. Not even a goddamn coffee mug.

Undyne felt her fury begin to build.

After the tenth room or so, the tenth room that was completely empty, Undyne finally let out a roar of rage.

“GODDAMN IT!” she screamed, pounding her fist on the wall. “WHERE IS IT?! WHERE IS ALL OF IT?!"

Alphys cowered under her friend’s wrath. “W-w-what are we l-looking for? Undyne, what’s down here?!”

“PROOF!” she cried. “I NEED SOMETHING! A GODDAMN SLIP OF PAPER! A NOTE, A
“FUCKING TEST VIAL, SOMETHING!” She slammed her fist again against the wall. Tears were streaming down her cheek. “It can’t all be gone! It can’t all have just vanished!”

She fell to her knees.

“It . . . there has to be something . . .”

Alphys approached, taking careful and tentative steps. She reached out, placing a gentle hand on the distraught warrior’s shoulder.

“Undyne,” Alphys started softly. “What do you know? What’s down here that’s so important? What are you looking for?”

“I can’t,” Undyne said, shaking her head. “I can’t tell you, Al. It’s too important. I’m sorry. But I made a promise.”

She nodded. “Okay. I understand. It’s important, and I know your job means you can’t tell people stuff.” She sat next to Undyne. “But . . . those rooms back there. They looked like . . . like jail cells.”

Undyne remained quiet.

“Was . . . were monsters kept prisoner down here?”

“I’m sorry, Al,” Undyne whispered. “But I can’t answer that.”

Alphys nodded. “Ok. So what do we do now?”

“We keep looking,” Undyne growled, rising to her feet. “If I need to tear apart every goddamn tile in this place, then so be it!”

Alphys sighed, but silently followed.

Curiosity had gotten the better of her. And horrible thoughts filled her mind.

Those rooms . . . those claw marks.

Whoever did that . . . the pain those poor things must have been in . . .

She could feel herself shake.

It struck a little too close to home for her.

More rooms, all empty. Some of the rooms they came upon were large and expansive, and housed much larger equipment. Massive engines and power transformers and various mysterious machines . . . or what was left of them. Everything that was too big to be lifted or moved was smashed beyond recognition. Even Alphys had a difficult time deciphering what the mangled pieces once were. Glass and metal scraps littered the floors of the rooms and wires hung like cobwebs.

“S-someone d-didn’t want any of this stuff to be reconstructed,” Alphys mused. “These machines were absolutely gutted! Their circuit boards fried! Who did this?”

Undyne thought. Did Gaster destroy everything in a fit of rage? When Papyrus, for lack of better words, drove the doctor to the brink of insanity, did that make him destroy everything in his possession?
She couldn’t say.

The hall led to a square cul-de-sac, with a massive wall of metal to one side. A heavy door, much like the one that guarded the lab, was seated in the middle. Wordlessly, Undyne approached and tried to pry it open.

It stubbornly creaked and groaned in protest.

“Someone needs to give these damn doors some oil,” she groaned. With a great deal of heaving and pulling, the doors finally swung open.

When they saw what was inside, they both froze in horror. A profound silence loomed in the air, a silence so absolute a heartbeat could have shattered it.

“I-I think we f-found where everything went . . .” Alphys whispered hoarsely.

The room was massive. At least twenty feet by twenty feet. Its walls plated with steel, thick and heavy and designed to withstand the force of a bomb.

And inside was two solid feet of ash.

Black soot covered the walls. The floor was buried under the remnants of whatever had been in the lab. Twisted metal parts. Bubbling plastic. Tons and tons and tons of charred remains of countless notes and journals.

Everything had been burned so absolutely and so thoroughly that nothing could survive.

Undyne stepped into the room, her feet sinking into the ash. Her foot crunched under melted glass and metal, soot clinging to her armor. And she felt her heart drop to her feet.

“No . . .”

Everything. **Everything** had been destroyed. And she could feel her spirit deflate.

She wanted so desperately to find something. Some remnant or memory to prove that the skeleton brothers spoke the truth, not because she ever doubted them, but because she wanted so badly to have something *tangible*. She needed something to prove the existence of a horrible monster that tortured. She wanted to have something, something she could touch and feel and see to carve in her mind that this was real and it had *happened*.

But now, seeing everything burnt to oblivion . . .

She wouldn’t get her closure.

Alphys was picking her way in the room, taking off her coat and setting it aside as she waded through the dusty remnants. She stopped here and there to poke or prod something, but even she was discontent to find nothing remotely intact.

“T-the fire that burnt everything had to have been really really hot,” she commented more to herself than the captain. “Glass and metal are both completely melted. The f-fire had to have been at least 1400 degrees! Celsius, of course.” She adjusted the glasses on her nose. “I k-know of a f-f-few monsters with fire magic but I’m not sure how they would have done this without suffocating in the flames! Unless they w-were made of f-f-fire as well, heh . . .”

Undyne’s eye shot wide open.
She could barely listen to Alphys. Her eye unmoving from a spot on the wall. Alphys took notice and followed her gaze.

There, on the far wall, carved right into the thick plated metal, was a single haunting sentence.

**MAY YOU BURN IN HELL FOR ETERNITY**

The writing was jagged, sharp, angry. Like a molder digging its fingers into soft clay, the solid metal was cut away to form jagged, warped gashes in the wall.

And Undyne knew who had done this.

Of course.

Who else knew of the brother’s secret? Who else vowed to keep the secret, who also happened to be the fiercest and most powerful fire monster Undyne had ever met?

Grillby.

It was Grillby.

He came down here. Scavenged every room, turned over every desk and drawer and cabinet, gutted everything he could and brought it here. Where he burnt it to ash.

She knew his title, what the humans called him in the war. The Firestorm General.

It was a title he did not earn lightly. It was a title forged by the blood and fear of the humans, who ran in terror from his hellish blaze. It was said that when Grillby stepped into the battlefield, he left behind a trail of ash and blackness a mile wide.

If anyone did this, it was him.

“U-Undyne! I t-think I found something!”

She tore her eyes from the writing on the wall and turned around to see Alphys holding a melted lump of metal. It was deformed beyond recognition, with some sort of cloth or fabric caught between its folds. Alphys was fussing over the fabric, holding it right up to her face.

“What is it?” Undyne asked.

“This metal. It’s different. It’s tempered, far stronger than any of t-the other metal parts of machinery in here.” She knocked her knuckles against it. “And there’s something in here. Looks like it was protected from the heat. If only I can get it open!”

Undyne wordlessly took it. She dug her fingers into the cracks, and like an oyster, she split the metal hunk in half, revealing a filthy and horribly worn piece of cloth inside.

But even after years of neglect, years of being buried under ash and enduring a raging inferno, the Delta Rune insignia that was embroidered in the center was too obvious to miss.

Alphys’s eyes went wide. “I-I-It’s a uniform! A soldier or guard uniform!”

But Undyne’s eyes were on something else. There, right on top of the cloth, right on top of the tabard that bore the mark of monsters, was a small piece of finely crafted metal. It was a royal insignia. A royal insignia that was awarded to generals during the great war between humans and monsters.
She picked it up with trembling claws, and by now Alphys had seen it too. She could only stare silently in horror as Undyne held the badge in her hand.

Dr. Gaster wasn’t just a scientist.

He was a soldier.

And a general.

Her fists clenched, her body shaking.

“U-Undyne . . . ?”

Furiously, she snatched up the tunic and stormed out of the room.

“Wait! Where are you going!!”

Undyne spun on her heel, rage radiating from her entire being, and Alphys froze, an icy chill creeping down her spine.

“No one is to know of this!” Undyne bellowed harshly. “No one is to know about ANY of this!”

Alphys trembled. “B-b-but, what-“

Without a word she stormed out of the labs.

She had a bartender to see.

It was the afternoon lull, the usual crowds from the lunch hour either gone on with their day or finishing up their plates. A handful of patrons lingered, sitting at the bar and taking their time with their drinks. Grillby didn’t mind. He kept busy, mostly mindlessly scrubbing dishes and tidying up the already pristine bar. Mindless tasks helped him think. Helped keep his thoughts in order.

The door open with a great bang, causing many to jump in their seats. A cold blast of air announced the arrival of another customer, and Grillby looked up from his dishes to see Undyne standing in the door.

She was livid.

“Everyone out of the bar. NOW,” she hissed between her teeth. There was an uneasy shuffling of seats as the handful of customers debated staying or obeying the furious captain.

Grillby retained his composure, tucking his rag into his apron. “My patrons can stay as long as they need to finish their meals,” he said calmly. His eyes narrowed. “What can I do for you?”

Undyne stormed up to the counter, leaning close to the elemental, her remaining eye glaring daggers. Grillby did not so much flinch. “You have a lot to answer to, General! You are going to tell me everything you goddamn know about Ga-“

“Keep your voice down,” Grillby whispered harshly, his eyes growing fiercer. He pointedly looked at the other customers. “Not now.”

“Yes, right goddamn now!”

Wordlessly, Grillby opened the door leading to his kitchen and gave a quick look. She followed him
through the kitchen and out the back door. There, Grillby slammed the door shut behind them.

There, his flames rose dangerously, his fire turning shades of blue as his anger grew. “What in the angel’s name do you think you’re doing?” he roared. “What gall do you have to storm into my bar saying that name-”

Undyne shoved out her fist, revealing the tunic and medal. Grillby froze. His flames instantly died, as if he had been smothered.

He did not move for several seconds.

“Where . . . how . . .”

His flames reignited.

“You . . . foolish child! How dare you-!”

“NO! How dare YOU?!” Undyne roared, throwing the filthy tunic at Grillby. He caught it in his hands. His fingers smoldered the edges of the cloth. “YOU KNEW HIM!”

Grillby’s shoulders heaved.

“YOU FUCKING KNEW THE BASTARD! HE WAS A GENERAL! YOU FOUGHT WITH HIM! YOU, OF ALL PEOPLE, KNEW THAT FUCKING AWFUL, DISGUSTING-!”

“I KNOW!”

Grillby’s roar was as loud as the flames that ignited around him. The snow within three feet of him melted in an instant.

“DO YOU THINK I AM UNAWARE OF THIS?! DO YOU THINK I DID NOT KNOW THE MOMENT I SAW HIS UNIFORM HANGING IN HIS STUDY?!”

Undyne winced against the raging storm of his fire. She could feel herself sweltering in her armor, even in the freezing weather.

“DID YOU THINK I DID NOT SCOUR THROUGH EVERY ONE OF HIS JOURNALS?! EVERY ONE OF HIS NOTES?! YES, CAPTAIN, I KNEW THE MONSTER CALLED GASTER!”

Still, Grillby shook, fire spiraling from his feet and dancing off his frame. His eyes were wide and wild, contorted with rage and grief.

Grillby could not cry, but if he could, he would have been sobbing.

“He . . . he spoke of me! Like an old friend!” Grillby grieved. “He wrote of the war, he wrote of his battles! He wrote of Meadowbrooke!”

Undyne’s jaw dropped open.

Meadowbrooke. That word haunted every guard and soldier to this day. It was the worst defeat monsters had suffered in the war. It wasn’t simply because of how many monsters were lost, but the merciless way they were all so helplessly slaughtered like cattle. It was the battle that shattered monsterkind’s spirit and ultimately led to their defeat.
Merely mentioning that horrible day was the most forbidden of taboos in the Guard.

And Gaster . . . he had been there . . .

“He was the general in the battle of Meadowbrooke . . .” Grillby went on. “His journals were filled with nightmares. Flashbacks. And how I comforted him.”

Grillby shook in rage.

“To even think! To even think I knew such a monster! To think I had been his friend, his partner, his brother in arms! How do you think that makes me feel, Captain? How much do you think it tears me apart to know I knew the man that had caused untold cruelty to Sans and Papyrus?!”

“If you knew him, then that means-!” Undyne interjected, but Grillby fiercely cut her off.

“Do you have any doubt in your mind that if I knew Gaster’s crimes that I would not have killed him myself?!” Grillby challenged. “Do you think so little of me that you would even humor the notion that I would allow such suffering under watch?! Sans almost died because of that bastard! If I knew what he did, I would have ruined him in every sense of the word!”

Grillby still clutched the tunic and medal in hand. Smoke rose from his fingers. He lifted the relic before them, hand trembling.

“What did you hope to accomplish today, Captain?” Grillby challenged. “Why did you go down to those labs?”

“I wanted answers,” she said simply. “And I wanted to remember.”

“A lesson for you, then, Captain,” he spoke with a shaking voice. “It is better these crimes are forgotten. That is why I burned every goddamn thing in there to ash. The past is dead, Undyne. Let us leave it like that. Before your recklessness causes even more harm!”

Undyne opened her mouth to interject, but the fury that sparked in the old elemental’s eyes silenced her. He would hear no protest from her. The conversation between them was finished.

She turned on her heel, and marched away.

Grillby stood in the back alley for longer still, hand firmly clenching the tokens of the past. His entire body shook and sparked, and with a furious howl, he reduced the tunic to ash. The medallion of the general was reduced to liquid, unrecognizable, and Grillby ground it under his heel.

He collapsed to his knees, and wept.
The Newest Member of the Royal Guard

Chapter Summary

Sometimes dreams do come true

Despite everything, life went on. The world was unforgiving like that.

Grillby went back to his bar, continuing his duties. Being a quiet guy, no one paid him any mind when he didn’t speak a single word for the rest of the day.

Undyne went back to her guard duties. She had to check with the sentries. She made her rounds in Snowdin, checked in with Lesser and Greater Dog (giving them a few heart-felt pats for good measure) and greeted the Dogi. She even gave Doggo a few treats for him to smoke.

“I thought you hated seeing me smoke on duty!” he laughed as he graciously accepted the captain’s gift.

“I do,” she shrugged. “But the hell with it, you guys work hard. And life’s too short to not enjoy some guilty pleasures, yeah?”

“Yes ma’am!” he saluted, and returned to his station.

She walked back to Waterfall, not really watching her steps as her boots crunched the fresh blanket of snow that carpeted the little town. The gurgling river was a soothing sound and she found herself treading along the rocky coast, staring blankly in the distance.

A boat drifted into view, ferried by none other than the mysterious Riverperson. They hummed quietly under their breath in a soothing sing-song voice.

“Tra la la,” they sang. “Hail, Captain of the Guards. Would you like to ride in my boat?”

Undyne waved them away. “Thanks, not now. Maybe later.”

The Riverperson tilted their head, the hood shifting slightly. “Tra la la, heavy is the head that hangs with troubles unsolved. Nothing to be done, nothing that *can* be done.”

Undyne jerked around, glaring at the Riverperson. “Wanna run that by me again?” she challenged.

They remained unfazed. “Tra la la. Even the blind see the gloom that wears on you like the armor you bear. But trouble does not trouble you. Only the burden of inaction.”

“Alright, punk, you wanna get off my case and mind your own damn business?!”

“Tra la la,” the Riverperson whispered as they steered the boat away. “Beware the man who speaks in hands. Beware the man not of this world. Beware the flower that speaks untruth. Tra la la . . .”

And like that, they were gone. Undyne scoffed under her breath. The Riverperson was always such an enigma and she decided right then and there she didn’t like them.

She had better things to worry about, though.
Like checking in with the Hotland guards. Her favorite place to visit. She growled lowly under her breath as she trudged away.

The days managed to pass without the Captain really noticing. So lost in her own busy head whirring with questions unanswered that she forgot things. She forgot her reports with Asgore. She forgot to help Gerson with his shop.

And she kept forgetting about Papyrus’s training.

A few days after the night of Sans’ confession, she found him outside her home, standing tall and proudly, ready for action.

Just like the first night she met him, standing outside her door at ungodly late o’clock.

She waved him off with a very forced smile. “I hate to skip training, but not today,” she said. “I’m still, uh, busy. Maybe layer, ok?”

Papyrus was disappointed, but he tried not to let it show. “Alright, if you’re busy then we can train later!” he said. “And if you ever wanna hang out, just call me! I always have my phone on me if you need anything at all!”

Undyne hated to admit it, but she was avoiding him. And the worst part was she didn’t even know why!

Nothing was his fault! He didn’t do anything wrong and she wasn’t even angry with him! Not even about hiding his secret from her. God, if she was in his shoes, she probably wouldn’t have done anything different.

Well . . . no, not exactly, she probably would have ran across monster kingdom cursing Gaster’s name and retelling everything, only to have no one believe her and then be labeled as a crazy spaz.

No wonder they kept things quiet.

So why did she shy away from him? Why did she hate seeing him? Even knowing that despite everything, he was ok?

Was it . . . was it guilt? Guilt for not being able to help him? Guilt for not knowing? She didn’t know and it was gnawing at her soul.

It was on another day (what day was it, even? She was losing track) Undyne actually remembered she promised to help ol’ Gerson around the shop, so she scurried over to his little hole in the wall, filled to the brim with strange trinkets and knick-knacks. The little shop was a maze of tables and shelves all stuffed with merchandise, save for a section of the wall that bore the Delta Rune, which was displayed grandly for any passerby’s. Gerson made extra sure that nothing hindered its view.

“Whaddyaw doin’ lass?” Gerson shouted. “Crab apples go by the tea, the books on the other side! How many times have you done this, missy?”

Undyne returned with a toothy grin. “Sorry, Gerson, I wasn’t thinking.”

“That’s obvious!” He laughed good-naturedly. “You seem distracted.”

“I am,” Undyne admitted.

“Guard duty getting’ to that thick numbskull of yours?”
“Ha, you’re a riot. I guess you could say that.”

Gerson tilted his head to the side, sucking on his pipe as he brought a thoughtful claw to his chin. “Well, yanno what they always say. ‘A mind not on task has a mind for disaster.’ So let’s break for some tea, and you can tell me what’s botherin’ ya, kiddo.”

“Thanks, but I have to say no,” Undyne said. “It’s . . . personal, and not my place to go spilling someone else’s business.”

“I see, I see,” Gerson nodded. “Some advice for ye, young whipper-snapper. Grudges and burdens are like poisons, ye? Hold on to them too long and they’ll ruin your mind and body. Gotta bleed it out, if you know what I’m saying. Let go of your troubles or troubles find you!”

“Not sure if it’s that easy,” Undyne muttered.

“Have you tried?” he countered. “Don’t know if you don’t try, kiddo! You’ve always been too stubborn for yer own good, and I know you’re the type o’ person to hold onto grief a bit too tightly. So, take a lesson from the rivers the next time you go swimming. Let go, and your worries will flow like water.”

Undyne couldn’t help but laugh. “Yes, sensei,” she said with a mock bow. “Your young grasshopper will learn much from your wise teachings.”

“Am being serious, you little smart-aleck!” Gerson laughed right back. “And you need to lay off all those animes, or whatever silly cartoons you watch.”

“They’re not silly! They’re ART!” Undyne protested loudly. “I will make you watch some to prove it!”

“Over my dust,” Gerson spat with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. “Now, that’s enough for today, you’re just ruining my shop now.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Aye, aye, now scram, ya guppy!” Gerson said, waving his pipe. “I have customers to get to!”

Undyne saluted as she marched away.

“And remember what I said!” he called after her. He paused. “Er . . . what did I say? Well I hope you remember whatever it is that I told you!”

She laughed, heading back home.

Waterfall was quiet. Serene. A cavern of greens and blues, water gently bubbling in the background and the soft whispers of echo flowers playing on the winds. Glittering crystals guided her way home, like stars. Gerson talked about the stars a lot. He remembered them, how they twinkled in the night, high above and millions of miles away. He always said the crystals were cheap imitations of the celestial bodies that danced in the night skies. But for many, many monsters, it was all they had known, or will ever know.

Gaster had been beneath those same stars. Had he looked up on them with the same wonder and rapture? Did he too love their beauty and silently curse their loss when he was sentenced beneath the mountain?

Did he too look upon the same crystals, and curse them for being a mockery of the true stars?
Had he stood where she was standing now?

Just the thought made Undyne’s skin crawl, and she shuffled away with a furious huff.

When she returned home, she was caught off-guard to see Papyrus standing right outside her door. This was strange, because she had (once again) canceled their training.

Even more unusual was his posture. He stood with his arms firmly crossed over his chest, weight on one foot and his face one of extreme disapproval.

She paused. “Uh . . . heya, Papyrus,” she said awkwardly. “I told you no training today, I had to help Gerson.”

“I am aware,” he said patiently. “But I can’t help but think you are making silly excuses!”

Undyne felt herself shrink the tiniest bit. Papyrus definitely was not one to be so easily fooled.

“I daresay that you are even . . .” He leaned forward, as if sharing a scandalous secret. “I daresay the Captain of the Guards herself is slacking off!”

“What?!” Undyne protested.

“I could hardly believe it myself!” Papyrus cried, lifting the back of his hand to his forehead in a mock swoon. “Captain Undyne is getting lazy!”

“LAZY MY ASS!”

“You want sparring opportunity?!?” Undyne roared, spear appearing in each of her hands. Papyrus’s clever smirk grew. “Oh, I’LL GIVE YA ONE, YOU BONE-HEAD!”

“BRING IT!” Papyrus called right back, his own attacks materializing in his fists.

With a fierce battle cry, Undyne charged forward, straight at Papyrus. With a simple side-step, the skeleton easily avoided her, kicking out his foot to trip her up. Undyne lost her footing, stumbling but gracefully recovering.

Papyrus tutted. “Oh, and here I was hoping for a challenge equal to someone as great as myself,” he mused wistfully. A spark of magic lit in his eye sockets as he grinned down at her.

Undyne gnashed her teeth and spun, unleashing a flurry of spears. Yet again Papyrus dodged, ducked and dove around the attacks without so much as a misstep. With an impressive acrobatic leap, he twisted over several spears and landed flawlessly on the cave floors.

“I didn’t know we were moving from sparring to gymnastics!” he taunted.

Oh, that did it.

Letting loose another roar, Undyne charged yet again. And the two were locked in battle.

Magic attacks shot in every direction, shattering and ricocheting against the rocky cavern walls. Papyrus was as slippery as an eel and evaded Undyne’s every strike, but the determined captain refused to relent. She unleashed a barrage of spears, coming from all directions. And Papyrus blocked and dodged them all, swiping them away with his own bone attacks. Papyrus fought back
with impressive vigor, sending out waves and waves of bone attacks. Extending a hand, he reached out with his magic and pinged her soul blue. Like an anvil falling on her chest, Undyne let out a gasp as her whole body felt much much heavier. But she refused to let even his blue magic slow her down!

Again she charged, catching Papyrus off-foot and slamming him to the ground. He found himself in a familiar place, back flat on the ground and glaring up at a spear inches from his nose.

Undyne grinned triumphantly.

“You put up a hell of a fight!” she said between heavy breaths. “But I am still your superior!”

“Ah, it would seem so,” he sighed. But a familiar, malicious twinkle returned to his eyes. “But . . . are you suuuuuuuure?”

Instantly Undyne jerked her head up. No giant bone hovering above her . . .

“You should really watch your footing.”

“What.”

Something wrapped around Undyne’s ankle and yanked hard, sending her crashing flat on her butt. Papyrus erupted into a fit of laughter.

“THE HELL WAS THAT?!” She roared. And then she saw it. Papyrus’s long boney tail snaked from behind him, waving back and forth playfully. Papyrus gave her a very toothy grin.

“That—that’s cheating!” she protested, pointing at his tail.

“Oh? How so?” Papyrus challenged.

Undyne didn’t even answer him. She just tackled him, grabbing him in a headlock.

“It’s time for the cheater’s noogie!” she boasted, letting out a victorious laugh.

“Please don’t noogie the skeleton!” Papyrus cried. He squirmed in Undyne’s grasp but escape was not an option now that she was giving him the mother of all noogies.

She laughed. Really, really laughed. It felt like ages since the last time she laughed so hard, she was actually crying. And Papyrus, despite being a bit bruised, looked very pleased with himself.

She eventually let him go, but Papyrus was still beaming, hands resting on his hips in triumph.

“Feeling better?” he asked.

“Loads,” Undyne smiled. “I don’t know how you do it, dude. But you really are the great Papyrus!”

“It’s what I keep telling everyone!” he said proudly. “And I’m glad to see you smiling and laughing again. It was getting kinda sad seeing you so bummed out all the time.”

“Maybe all I needed was a good ass-kicking,” she said, playfully punching his shoulder. “And I couldn’t have asked for a better monster to kick it!”

Papyrus saluted dutifully. “Always a pleasure to plant my foot firmly upon someone’s bum! Platonically, of course!”
Undyne chuckled. “So I guess I’ll see you tomorrow bright and early for training then, huh?”

“You’re not telling me you’re done with training already!” Papyrus cried out with mock hurt. “Why, we’ve barely started!”

Undyne tilted her head. “Well, what else did you have in mind?”

Papyrus shrugged. “You’re the captain and my trainer! You tell me!”

Undyne grinned. “Then let’s go all out!”

Papyrus smiled right back. “Define ‘going all out.’”

“I think you know what I mean!”

Indeed he did. And with a flash of orange magic, Papyrus shifted, standing before Undyne in his draconic form. He lowered his forelegs to the ground, hips high in the air and tail wagging in the universal sign of dogs that said “ready to play!”

Fighting a skeleton dragon! Ha! Undyne had only dreamed of such a thing!

Roars of battle echoed across the caverns of Waterfall as the two collided.

Undyne was collapsed on the ground, staring up at the glittering crystals on the cavern ceiling. Her back rested against the ribcage of a skeletal behemoth, the bones expanding and contracting in great big gasping breaths.

“That . . .” Undyne wheezed. “Now that was a hell of a fight!”

Papyrus let out a low moan.

The two of them could barely move. Both had sparred with the fury of the CORE itself and had only ended when Undyne performed a perfect suplex, stunning Papyrus into submission. She collapsed shortly afterwards.

Suplexing a dragon. Check that off the bucket list.

Her muscles screamed from abuse, her skin glistened with a profuse amount of sweat, and her hair had exploded from her pony tail and hung around her shoulders like a soggy mop.

She had never felt so good!

Completely exhausted, drained, and pushed to her very limit. Now that was what she missed so much about fighting!

Papyrus twisted around, looking at her from the corner of his eye. He let out a series of growls and barks, but their meaning was completely lost to her. But his expression said everything.

His teeth in an impossible way were twisted into a genuine grin. The light that shone in his sockets was bright and lively.

He was happy. And happy to see her happy.

Again, Undyne could only marvel at how lucky she was having someone like him who knew the perfect remedy to her slump.
She pulled herself into a sitting position, turning herself around so she sat facing the skeleton. He shifted as well, laying on his belly instead of his side.

A thought came to her.

She had never met a monster like Papyrus.

The other guards and sentries were committed warriors, all of them with fantastic battle expertise and powerful magic. She did not choose her guards lightly and each one she personally oversaw their training.

And all of her current guards paled in comparison to the skeleton before her.

Ignoring his beastly form, Papyrus was the strongest, most powerful monster Undyne had ever faced. No one (save Asgore) even came close. No one else could even keep up with her, yet the skeleton easily kept pace with her brutal training and strenuous tests. No one matched his perfect magical finesse, no one came close to his endurance and raw power.

And there was something else that Undyne did not—could not—truly know until now.

And that was his unbreakable, unwavering spirit.

Despite everything he had been through, despite all the pain and terrible memories, Papyrus greeted every day with a smile. Despite his troubled past, his optimism could not be dampened in the slightest; he absolutely refused to see malevolence in anyone. Despite untold cruelties committed against him, he found the courage and patience to grant his offender mercy.

It was no small secret that many in this line of duty emerged from service battle-worn and hardened. It was not uncommon to hear of good soldiers turned bad, turning to substance abuse and cruelty to combat the harshness and sheer depression they faced every day.

If Papyrus could survive the hell of those labs intact... if he managed to be this happy and cheerful after everything...

Then Papyrus was far stronger than Undyne could have ever imagined.

She grinned.

There was no one in the whole world who could beat Papyrus in battle! And there was no one on earth who could take away the grin that refused to leave his face!

What had she been so worried about? Why had she ever doubted him?

She sat up, proud and tall, determination like fire in her veins.

“You know what, Papyrus!” she said. “I think you are ready to become a Royal Guard!”

Papyrus jerked back, his eyes going wide. His jaw dropped open.

“You heard me, you bonehead!” Undyne laughed. “I am making you an official Royal Guard!”

Immediately he jumped to his feet, tail wagging at a hundred miles an hour. A string of barks and whines streamed from his mouth, his tone frenzied. He raced back and forth, spinning in excited circles.

Undyne laughed. “Alright, calm down before you make yourself puke!”
Papyrus roared loudly.

“CALM DOWN?!” he exclaimed, shifting to his skeleton form in a burst of magic. “UNDYNE!! THIS IS THE GREATEST DAY OF MY LIFE!!! HOW CAN I BE CALM?!!”

He raced up to her, slamming his hands on her shoulders. “Are you serious?! Truly, truly serious?! Are you really going to make me a Royal Guard?!”

“Serious as a heart attack!” she reassured. “You are ready!”

“OH MY GOODNESS!” he hollered, jumping in the air and hooting loudly. “Yes! Yes! My lifelong dream, finally realized! Oh, I am so excited I think I’m going to puke! This is WONDERFUL! I won’t let you down! I swear it! I will be the best, the greatest Royal Guard EVER!”

“I have no doubt about that!”

“I need to tell Sans right away!” He could barely stay still, he was so giddy with excitement. “I—I need to tell EVERYONE! Undyne! Thank you thank you thank you!!!”

He ran up to her, gave an affectionate head-butt, and sped off faster than a blink of an eye, his cheers and laughter ringing loud and clear. Undyne herself couldn’t stop beaming.

Things were going to be better around here, she was going to make sure of that.

With that, she set off to the Capital. She had to let Asgore know, and get everything ready for the newest member of the guard.

Both of the monsters failed to notice the yellow flower tucked away in the corner, watching them.

Sans was lounging around his sentry station, feet kicked up on the table, dozing away, when Papyrus descended on him like a bomb.

“SAAAAAAAAAAAAANNNSSSSSSSSSSSS!!!!”

He immediately jerked awake, eye flashing blue and yellow. “What?! What is it?!”

Papyrus scooped up the smaller skeleton in his arms and spun him in circles, his grin the biggest Sans had ever seen. “Sans, it’s wonderful! The absolute most wonderful thing in the world!” he said gleefully. “Undyne has made me a ROYAL GUARD!”

“What?” Sans said blankly. “She . . . she made you a guard?!”

“I KNOW I COULD HARDLY BELIEVE IT MYSELF!” Papyrus shouted, throwing up his arms, and subsequently Sans, into the air. Papyrus then caught his brother in his arms before he fell to the ground. “I am just so happy! Finally, after all my hard work and training, I can finally accomplish my dream!”

Sans’ jaw hung open. He didn’t even know what to say. Undyne had made it clear she would never make him a guard, and now just a few short weeks after their little revelation she . . .

He frowned.

“Sans?” Papyrus asked. His mood immediately diminished when he saw his brother not sharing his enthusiasm. “Something the matter?”
Sans grinned. “I guess I’m practicing my right to remain silent in the new guard’s presence,” he snickered.

“YOU KNOW WHAT, BROTHER?!” Papyrus spat. “NOT EVEN YOUR TERRIBLE JOKES CAN RUIN THIS DAY FOR ME!” He began to pace back and forth furiously, too wound up to stay still. “I just can’t believe it! I really can’t! I’m so excited I can’t think straight!”

Sans watched his brother rant, overcome with giddiness and the happiest he had seen him in years. He wanted to share his excitement, he wanted to jump and holler and hoot with celebration right along with him. But something about the whole situation didn’t sit right. He knew his bro was tough, but Papyrus lacked the resolution to harm anyone. And he feared Papyrus was made a guard for the wrong reason.

But he wouldn’t take this moment away from him. Papyrus deserved that much. So he smiled, and treated him to a meal at Grillby’s, where they shared the news with all the patrons there. The dog sentries happened to be on break, and were ecstatic to hear he was joining their ranks.

The dogs had always liked Papyrus.

And Grillby, with a faint whisper of a smile, gave Papyrus a vanilla milkshake, free of charge.

“Here’s to whatever is to come,” was all he said before the bartender returned to his duties.

The rest of the day was Papyrus running around the entire Snowdin town like a pinball. Within five minutes, everyone knew the exciting news, but that didn’t stop the skeleton from making laps around the entire town, talking to every individual, stopping at every building, at least five times.

Sans could only howl with laughter at the sight of Papyrus acting like an excitable puppy.

Undyne was busy making arrangements for Papyrus’s induction. There was protocol to follow, and as much as she hated pomp and circumstance, the ceremony of initiating a new guard was something she wouldn’t dream of skimming on. She knew how important this was to him, and she was going to make damn sure it was going to be the best ceremony ever.

And if it could be helped, the shortest.

Asgore himself helped with the arrangements, just as happy to have a new guard as Undyne.

“Young friend will make an excellent addition to the guard,” he complimented. “He is a monster with a kind and generous spirit, but a strong one nonetheless. I am only curious as to what made you decide to change your mind?”

“What do you mean?” Unyne asked.

Asgore looked at her coyly. “Was he not the same friend you came to me, time and time again, lamenting how you could never make him a guard? ‘Too naïve and goofy,’ I think that’s what you said.”

“Well, Papyrus is certainly that,” she said, scratching the back of her head. “But you know what? He’s tough! Real tough! The toughest monster I’ve ever met! He’s nearly as strong as you are!”

Asgore laughed deeply. “Is that so?”

“Yeah, that’s right!” she said, puffing out her chest. “I’ve seen the kind of beating he can take! And I know how strong he is! And after seeing just how capable, just how strong he is, I decided he was
more than ready! No human that faces him will stand a chance!”

“You sound very sure of yourself,” Asgore said with a patient smile. “I will trust your judgement. If you are certain Papyrus is ready, then he is ready! Now!” he said, clapping his hands together. “Are we ready to proceed?”

“I think Papyrus has been ready since the day he was born,” Undyne snickered.

The ceremony was the following day, which absolutely killed the skeleton. He could barely wait one full day until he became an official guard, but Undyne (and Sans) assured him the wait would be worth it. Undyne took some measurements for Papyrus’s armor, which took a bit longer than normal because he wouldn’t stop squirming. Sans actually had to hold him still with his blue magic.

The armor would take a week or so to be fashioned, but there were a few old pieces that fit him well enough that he could wear until then. When Undyne handed him the old armor, his eyes lit up like Gyftmas.

“Hey, punk, this isn’t even your real armor,” she grinned.

“I know but still!” he grasped the pieces carefully, as if touching an ancient relic. “It’s really happening! I can’t even believe it! I mean, I always knew this day would happen! But it’s happening right now and I can barely believe it!”

“Well, believe it!” Undyne said, slapping him on the shoulder. “Now let’s get this armor on!”

Undyne assisted Papyrus as he stripped off his “battle body” as he called it, no longer needing it now he was getting real armor. The scarf stayed, of course. As they assembled the armor, Undyne was sure to instruct exactly which pieces went where, and in what order. Putting on some pieces before others caused a massive headache, she had found that out the hard way.

“And just remember to take good care of it, polish regularly, keep it from getting too wet, all that fun stuff,” Undyne said as she strapped up Papyrus’s breast plate.

He nodded, eagerly listening. “I will take extra-good care of it! I will polish it every night until I could use it for a mirror!”

“Ha, that’s the spirit!” She helped Papyrus slip on his gauntlets. She tried not to stare at his plate for too long. It still unnerved her, seeing that awful thing on his arm.

She bit her lip.

“Hey, uh, Papyrus, a bit of a personal question for you . . .” she said awkwardly. He tilted his head, curious. “And you don’t have to answer if you don’t want to, ok? I know this might be uh, stepping out of line.”

“Ok, what is it?”

She took a breath. “Why don’t you get that darn plate removed?”

The question caught Papyrus off guard, but he did not look upset. He thought about it for a minute.

“Well . . . guess I really never thought about it,” he muttered.

“Really?!”

“I mean I always keep it covered, you know,” he said quickly as he explained. “It was something
Grillby thought of when we were still living with him. He actually asked me the same thing all those years ago, now that I think of it. He couldn’t remove it himself, you know, he said a doctor had to do it.” He shuddered a bit. “After everything, the last thing I wanted to do was . . . go visit a doctor.”

“Of course,” she winced.

“So I just . . . wore stuff to keep it covered. Wrapped bandages or bracelets or over it. It was always something. And I made a habit of it, you know! Finding some new fashionable thing to wear over my wrists. Gloves were always something I wore on and off and with my new cool battle body I would now always have something covering it! So I just . . . kinda forgot about it I guess? I’ll be honest, half the time I forget it’s even there! It doesn’t bother me, so I guess I never bothered with it!”

“Out of sight, out of mind, huh?” Undyne said.

“Exactly!” Papyrus said cheerfully.

“I guess that makes sense. And hey!” she said as she slipped his gauntlets on his hands. “Now you have some really cool armor to wear over it now!”

Papyrus beamed.

With his armor assembled and polished to a shine, they were ready to begin the ceremony. Undyne and Papyrus marched side-by-side to the golden hallways of the king’s castle, where all the sentries, from Hotland to Snowdin, were present, as well as a small scattering of friends and curious city-folk who wanted to see what all the fuss was about. Sans stood among the crowds, his grin as big as ever as he saw his brother proudly march down the halls.

King Asgore stood at the end of the hall, trident in hand and he too grinning ear to ear. The sun was shining, birds were singing, flowers were blooming. It was a perfect day for such an occasion.

Papyrus approached the king, giddy with excitement, not a nervous bone in his body, and he knelt before the Asgore. Asgore hefted his trident in hand, and the crowds fell silent.

“Today is a most joyous occasion!” Asgore boomed. His voice echoed in the great hallway.

“Today we initiate Papyrus as the newest member of the Royal Guard! An esteemed position for those with bravery, strength, and an unwavering soul. Time and time again, Papyrus has proven his worth, through countless trials by none other than the captain herself! And now, Undyne, the Spear of Justice, Captain of the Guards, Right Hand of the Throne, will begin the oaths.”

Undyne stepped forward, spear in hand, and Papyrus grinned up at her. She smiled, puffing out her chest.

She had never felt surer, nor more proud in her entire life.

“Papyrus!” she began. “When I met you, you were the wimpiest wet noodle I had ever met!”

The crowds erupted into laughter.

“But you were determined! You were persistent! And you are without a doubt the toughest, and the bravest monster I have ever met!” She took a moment. “I have known you for many years, and I know the trials that you have been through.”

Sans raised his eyebrow.
“And I can say, with no hesitation or doubt in my mind, that you are more than ready to be a Royal Guard! Now rise, and prepare to say the oath of guards!”

Papyrus jumped to his feet, tall and proud, his chest puffed out.

And Undyne began.

“State your name!”

“Papyrus, of Snowdin!”

“Papyrus of Snowdin, do you solemnly swear, on your honor as a Royal guard, that you shall always and forever uphold the laws of monsterkind?”

“I solemnly swear to uphold the laws of monsterkind!”

“Do you swear to protect the weak and defend against any enemy? Do you swear to be a symbol of hope and determination?

“I swear to protect the weak, and I swear to defend against any enemy! I will be a symbol of hope and determination!”

“Do you swear to stand strong and true against the face of adversity? Do you swear to be the hand of our great king, Asgore Dreemurr? Do you swear to protect our land and our people with all your soul?”

“I swear to stand strong and true against the face of adversity! I will be the hand of our great king, Asgore Dreemurr, and I swear to protect our land and our people with all my soul!”

“Do you swear this, before the angel above and before all here who witness you today?”

Papyrus took a breath, his gaze flickering over the crowds. All eyes on him, eyes full of hope.

His eyes landed on his brother, who was beaming. Smiling with genuine happiness, his eyes filled with light that Papyrus had not seen in ages. And his soul swelled with pride.

“I swear! Before the angel above and all here who witness me today!” he proclaimed. “I proudly, and humbly, accept the position of Royal Guard!”

“Then let it be known, from this day and henceforth! Papyrus! The newest member of the Royal Guard!”

Applause rippled through the halls, accompanied with the cheers and howls of the other guards. In a swarm, they all came up to him, congratulating him and patting him on the shoulder. Undyne could swear he saw Papyrus fighting back tears of joy now that all were shaking hands and congratulating the skeleton.

She stepped back and let Papyrus savor his moment in the spotlight.

A skeleton appeared beside her.

“You made Papyrus really happy, Undyne,” Sans said.

Undyne planted her hands firmly on her hips. “Well, he deserves it! He’s been working so hard for it, and it’s time he’s rewarded for all his hard work!”
“You know, he’s wanted to be a guard for as long as I can remember,” Sans said wistfully. “To be honest, I didn’t think I’d ever see the day.” His eyes went to the floor. “It’s never happened before,” he added under his breath.

“I believe in your bro,” Undyne said. “He’s a hell of a fighter and he’ll do great!”

“I just want to make sure you’re not making him a guard for the wrong reasons,” he said, casting a wary look at the captain. Undyne frowned, full well knew what he was trying to say.

“You think I don’t know what I’m doing?” she challenged. “You need to give your brother more credit. He’s tough! And he is stronger than any scrawny human that might fall down here! I’m sure of it. He’ll do great!”

Sans didn’t look assured.

“Why can’t you just enjoy this day?” she sighed. “Look, if it makes you feel better, I’ll keep an eye on him and make sure nothing happens, alright? Will that make you feel better?”

“I guess it’s a start,” he shrugged.

“Good!” Undyne said. “Now, come on, we got a nice big dinner set up in just the other room! Papyrus helped make the spaghetti!”

“Oh, ha ha, go ahead and mock our cooking all you want, won’t stop me from eating a big heaping bowl of it!”

The dinner went for a few hours, enough for mingling between the guards. Papyrus found himself in his element, happily talking to anyone within earshot. The guards questioned him and his training regime, and Papyrus happily answered them.

All the fame, all the admiration he had been dreaming about.

It was just as wonderful as he imagined it!

Soon enough, everyone had to return to their posts, which put Papyrus in an uneasy spot. He walked up to Undyne, unsure of his next move.

“What orders do you have for me, Captain?” he asked, saluting.

Undyne guffawed. “So formal! I like it!” She gave him a hard slap on the back. “Your first official day of duty is tomorrow! Meet me at my house bright and early and we’ll start your first mission!”

“I get a mission?!” he asked excitedly.

“Yeah, it’s called ‘Papyrus gets to set up his own guard station.’”

“I already have a guard station!”

“Well we’re gonna make you a bigger and better one!” she said. “Now go home, get some rest, and get ready for tomorrow! And welcome to the Guard!”

Papyrus saluted. And set off home.
But there was no way he could sleep! Not after today! He was still so wound up and excited after everything that happened! So why not put his new duties to use and go on patrol! It had been a few days since he checked on his trap, he better go make sure they were all ready for whenever a human showed up!

He was in Snowdin a short while later, happily marching down the streets in his nice new/old armor. The caverns had grown dark with the evening hour, the magic crystals losing their light to mimic “night.” They would reignite in the morning, filling the cavern with light that was supposed to resemble what some monsters called “the sun.”

Papyrus would like to meet the sun, one day.

He began traversing the woods of Snowdin. These woods he knew as well as every bone in his body. He spent countless hours out here, and no one knew them better than he. And as he crossed the rock formation he had painted to resemble a bridge, he was pleased to see all his puzzles and traps working perfectly.

He was nearing the edge of the forest, where a great wall and a towering door marked the end of the caves. As he approached, he started when he heard a voice.

“Howdy! It’s me, you best friend!”

Papyrus turned around, grinning.

“Flowey!”

Directly behind him, in the middle of the path, was a small yellow flower, a happy little grin on his face. He swayed side to side, his pedals shifting in the wind. Flowey giggled.

“It’s me!” he cheered. “And I could hardly recognize you with all that bright new shiny armor! You look great!”

“Why thank you very much!” Papyrus said, lowering to his knee. “Can you believe it, Flowey! I’m finally a Royal Guard!”

“I always knew you could do it! I always believed in you!” Flowey said. “Although, such a shame you hadn’t told me before now! That’s not something friends do, now, is it? Lie to them?”

Papyrus recoiled, taken aback. “Flowey, I would never lie to you!” he said, horrified.

“Flowey, I would never lie to you!” Flowey said, his grin growing ever more unsettling. “Like how you keep lying that I’m your best friend.”

“But you are my best friend!” he protested.

Flowey hummed. “Clearly not. It seems that Undyne is your real best friend. I know this because she knows the truth about you and I don’t. Why would you keep something like that from your very best friend, unless they’re really not your best friend, right?”

“I . . . you’re not making sense,” Papyrus said slowly.

“I know what you are,” Flowey said in a sing-song voice. “What you really are. A freak, just like me!”

“You shouldn’t call yourself such awful things!” Papyrus said immediately. “You are most certainly
“Oh, you are such a delightfully ignorant bone-head!” Flowey giggled. “I guess it doesn’t matter now, does it? I know your secret! And I am horrified to know that you lied to me! I never thought you, of all people, would like to lil’ old me!”

“Are . . . are you talking about the Gaster Blaster beast?” Papyrus whispered.

“What else would I be talking about?” Flowey grinned.

“Flowey, you have to understand! I had to keep it secret!” he explained. “A lot of . . . awful things happened, and it was better if no one knew. It pained me greatly to keep silent, but I had to! I am so sorry that I could not talk about it, and I am sorry that I hurt you. Can you forgive me?”

“I understand all too well about keeping secrets because they hurt people.” he grinned. “So, of course, Papyrus! I forgive you! After all, what are friends for?”

The skeleton let out a sigh of relief. “Oh, that is wonderful to hear! I am happy we can still be friends! It would be terrible if I lost your friendship!”

“Since we are such great friends, may I ask you one tiny, itsy-bitsy teeny favor?” Flowey asked.

“Anything!”

“I want to see you as you really are. I want to see you shift!”

“Eager to see me at my full potential, are you?” Papyrus laughed. “Why of course! I imagine you must be really curious about it! Now, stand back! And watch as I, the Great Papyrus, shall transform before your very eyes!”

Flowey grinned sickeningly. This was going so much better this time! He could play that idiot Papyrus like a harp! And he watched as the skeleton shape-shifted before his very eyes, transforming into a terrifying skeleton behemoth.

He laughed. It took him long enough to figure out what to say to get that dolt to turn! But now that the beast stood before Flowey, he felt . . . something stir inside him.

Excitement.

This was something new!

After a hundred hundred resets, there was finally something new and exciting for him to play with!

Flowey let out a cruel laugh as his vines unfurled from the ground and wrapped around the beast’s limbs. Papyrus let out a shocked roar as he was rendered immobile, the vines slamming him to the ground.

<<What are you doing?!>> he cried.

“Oh, you have no idea how many times I had to RESET to get you to turn!” Flowey cackled. “But now here you are! In all your freakish glory! And I am going to have some FUN!”

Flowey lifted Papyrus into the air and dropped him like a rock. He crashed against the snowy ground, dazed, but rose to his feet, shaking his head. His eyes were wide and scared.

<<Flowey, please stop this!>> he cried out. He growled under his breath. <<Oh, what’s the use,
no one can understand me like this!>

“I can.”

Papyrus froze.

<<You . . . you can understand me?>> he asked hoarsely.

“Every word! After all, it was your dear ol’ daddy Gaster that taught me his language!”

<<I don’t understand,>> Papyrus whimpered. <<You . . . you knew Gaster? You remember Gaster?! How?!>>

“Oh, shut up, I want to play with you now!” More vines sprung from the ground, lashing out to grab once again at the skeleton. Papyrus leaped out of the way, avoiding the vines and agilely slipping out of their grasp. He scrambled on top a rocky overhang, just out of Flowey’s reach.

<<It is clear you are upset with me!>> he called out. <<And once again, I am truly sorry for angering you! But I think this is maybe a bit extreme?>>

“I’m not angry with you, idiot!” Flowy laughed. He picked up a massive boulder in his vines. “I just want to play with a brand new toy!”

He hurled the boulder. Papyrus planted his feet firm, and fired his laser at the incoming rock. It was reduced to dust, which fell around the flower like snow.

Flowey cackled louder.

“Oh, this is wonderful! Come on, you freak! Fight me!”

<<I will not!>>

“THEN I’LL MAKE YOU!”

The vines climbed up the rock. But Papyrus was fast, and avoided the grasping vines easily. If he was smart, he would have turned and ran, but he lingered just a few short yards away. Hoping he could reason with the flower.

<<Why do you want to fight me?>>

Vines crashed down on him. He side-stepped, dodging the attack.

“Because it’s fun to hurt people! Because finally there’s something new and exciting in this pathetic boring world!”

<<I don’t think hurting people is fun at all!>>

“It is if it’s the only thing that can make you feel ANYTHING!”

Vines wrapped around the skeleton’s forepaws, and with his great fangs, Papyrus bit down and ripped himself free. Still he did not run. Still he did not fight.

“You are really starting to piss me off!”

<<You called Gaster my father,>> Papyrus said slowly. <<Why . . . why did you call him that?>>
“Oh my god, shut up and DIE!!!”

Again the vines descended on him. Papyrus was quick to dodge, but failed to notice the vine that had wrapped around his hind leg. He tripped, and before he could even react, the vines wrapped around him, winding themselves over every inch of exposed bone. Papyrus roared.

“Fight me, you cowardly piece of filth!”

Papyrus lay there, immobile.  <I am not going to hurt you!>>

“You lazy sack of bones! I’ll choke the life out of you!”

The vines squeezed. The sound of cracking bones filled the air.

Papyrus let loose another agonizing howl.

“FIGHT ME!”

The vines around Papyrus’s legs compressed, snapping his bones.

“GET UP AND FIGHT ME!”

The vines around the skeleton’s neck squeezed tighter. Fractures sparked like spider webs along his spine.

And Papyrus’s eyes blazed with orange light.

“Hee hee hee hee!” Flowey laughed. “Now isn’t this interesting!”

Flowey then reached deep into his SAVE file.

And RESET.
“SANS! Time to get up! I made breakfast!”

Sans started awake. He was half-slung over the mattress, blankets stuffed into a corner and the perpetual tornado of trash in his room flinging papers in every which direction.

An insistent pounding came at the door.

“Get up, you lazybones! Today is my first official day as a Royal Guard and I will not let this day be anything less than absolutely perfect!” Papyrus stepped into the room, already wearing his armor which was polished to a spotless sheen. His scarf draped around his shoulders, looking almost like a cape. He looked really cool.

“I’m up, I’m up,” Sans groaned, rubbing his eye sockets. He rolled off his bed, face-first onto the floor. “Actually I’m down at the moment. I’m a grounded sorta guy.”

“SAAAAAAANS!” Papyrus groaned. “Of all your terrible puns, that is by far the worst!”

“Looks like I just got off on the wrong side of the bed,” he shrugged.

“NO.”

With much insistent from Papyrus, Sans managed to drag himself into a fresh change of clothes (an impressive feat in itself) and downstairs where a rather expansive breakfast covered the kitchen table. A large plate of bacon and eggs, a dashing of fresh fruit, a large glass of milk, and a plate full of donuts were but a few of the foodstuff that cluttered the kitchen. Sans’s eyes went wide with disbelief.

“You . . . did you make all this?” he asked.

“Of course!” Papyrus said proudly. “I couldn’t sleep at all last night so I spent the entire night figuring out how to cook the greatest breakfast in the world! I was on the internet Googling all the best recipes and watching the greatest master chefs!” He suddenly frowned. “There was one rather unruly chef who kept yelling, I didn’t like him very much. Also I may have asked Grillby for a bit of help. This is his area of expertise, after all.”

“If I see him today, I’ll be sure to thank him.”

“When you see him today,” Papyrus corrected matter-of-factly. “Honestly, when’s the last time you didn’t spend your lunch break at that greasy old bar?”

“What can I say, I’m a sucker for habits.” He seated himself, digging into the food. It was surprisingly edible. Delicious, even. Seems all those cooking lessons were finally paying off. Papyrus looked on, pleased.
“You are not allowed to leave the table until your plate is completely cleaned!” Papyrus said sternly.

“Yes, Mom,” Sans sassed through a mouthful of eggs.

“I mean it! You need a proper breakfast!”

“What about you? Aren’t you going to eat?”

“I already have!” Papyrus exclaimed. “I have crafted for myself the finest of breakfast foods! OATMEAL! With the little dinosaur eggs!”

“Ah, of course,” Sans nodded.

“Now, I will be off! Undyne will be meeting me soon to erect a grand and magnificent sentry station that is worthy of my greatness! I will see you in a few hours!”

Papyrus marched out the door, but suddenly stopped just as his hand touched the handle. He looked around, his grin slowly fading. “Now if that isn’t the most peculiar thing . . .” he muttered.

Sans peeked out from the kitchen. “What’s up, bro?”

“I just had the strangest sense of deja-vu,” he said. His brows were furrowed together in concentration. “Like a deja-vu of a deja-vu, if that makes sense? I just had this overwhelming feeling that I had experienced this exact moment before! Only not just before, but . . . several times before! Isn’t that odd?”

Sans remained silent. The light in his eyes went dark.

“Oh well! I’m sure it’s nothing!” Papyrus waved off with a laugh. And just like that, the moment was forgotten. “I’ll be checking in later! Have a nice day!”

And he was gone.

Sans sat at the table for a moment longer. He stuffed his hands into his jacket pockets, the light still gone from his eyes as his smile slowly turned into a scowl.

He thought things had felt off, but now . . .

Sans rose from the table, the breakfast going cold and uneaten.

“Alright, let’s see what our ol’ bud is up to,” he murmured.

He closed his eyes and blinked . . .

. . .

. .

. .

Flowey was not hard to find. But what Sans found most shocking was where he found him. Flowey was hiding behind a patch of snow, eagerly watching Papyrus in the distance. Papyrus was
busy chatting with Undyne, obviously discussing the details of his station. He was too far away to hear what he was saying, even with his bombastic voice.

Sans planted a hand against a tree trunk, standing right behind the flower. He had yet to be noticed.

“Heya, buddy,” he greeted.

Had Flowey any legs, he would have jumped. Instead, he let out a little yelp as he twisted around. His shocked expression quickly turned into a sickening smile.

“That’s a good one, trash bag,” he snickered. “You spend all morning on that one?”

“Nah, just came to me all of a sudden,” Sans shrugged. “ Couldn’t help but notice someone was being a bit of a busy body. Which is impressive, considering, ya know, you aint got a body to speak of.”

“Oh yes, Sans,” Flowey cooed. “I’ve been having so much fun! Your brother is just so much fun to play with! I always said Papyrus was the one person I never got bored of! And now that couldn’t be truer, considering how I just discovered his big secret!”

“Fraid I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Sans said.

“Don’t play stupid with me!” Flowey snarled. “I know you’re not that big of an idiot!” He began swaying side to side, a twisted grin covering his face. “Ohhh, this is just too good! I know what Papyrus is capable of! I know the true extent of his power! And, by extension, I know what you are!”

He paused for effect.

“You’re a freak. A big, boney, shape-shifting freak! A pet project of the forgotten scientist, Dr. Gaster!”

Sans went stiff.

“You know, I had always wondered what happened to him...” Flowey hummed wistfully. “He was always so secretive, well, from what I can remember. Doesn’t seem like anyone can remember him at all.” He locked eyes with Sans. “I wonder who we have to blame for that.”

“What do you want?” Sans asked dryly.

“What do I want?” Flowey echoed. “Isn’t it obvious? I just wanna have some fun! And your brother has been just wonderful! Took me a few resets to get him to change, but after that—”

“If you hurt him, I will—”


A whine. A flash of blue.

The Gaster Blaster fired at the spot where Flowey stood, leaving nothing but charred dirt before the squat skeleton. His hand was shaking, his left eye flickering with light.

Flowey popped up behind him, still wearing that same disgusting smile.

“And I’m beginning to lose track of how many times we’ve had this conversation,” he giggled.
“Honestly, the hardest part was acting surprised when you show up right behind me! That’s getting pretty old, honestly. I’ll see you around, trash bag!”

And Flowey disappeared back into the ground.

Sans stood there for a moment, seething with rage.

Flowey knew.

Of all the people to know their secret . . . This was unacceptable.

Sans didn’t even bother walking. He took a shortcut straight over to where Papyrus was setting up his station, startling him. Undyne didn’t notice him right away.

“Bro, we need to talk,” he said sternly.

Undyne jumped. “NGHHAAAAA!” she screamed. She spun, glaring at Sans. “Where the hell did you come from?!”

“Around,” he dismissed. He turned back to Papyrus. “I thought we agreed that the whole blaster fiasco was going to be kept a secret.”

“And it is,” he said. He looked horribly confused. “I haven’t told anyone about it! Not even Asgore knows.”

“Someone knows,” he said thinly, eyes narrowing. “Your other friend.”

Undyne placed her hands on her hips. “Ok, what are you talking about? Who knows? And more importantly, why is this such a big deal!!?”

Papyrus’s eyes lit up. “OH! You must be talking about Flowey! I’m sorry, it completely slipped my mind! With everything going on I just—“

“Wait a second, Flowey?!” Undyne interrupted. “Who the heck is Flowey?!”

“He’s my best friend!” Papyrus proclaimed. “And we spoke yesterday, after the ceremony! He . . . well I’m not entirely sure how he found out but . . . uh, yeah! He knows too! But it’s ok! He’s my friend and I can trust him!”

“Yeah, sorry, hate to break it to you, but you absolutely cannot trust him,” Sans warned. “He’s dangerous! This is why I wanted this quiet in the first place! Now someone else knows!"

“I . . . I’m sorry,” Papyrus said quietly. “I didn’t mean for him to find out, he already knew, but I swear I didn’t tell him!”

“That doesn’t matter, does it?!”

“You know what, Sans?” Undyne said threateningly. “I think you need to back the hell off!”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me!” she scowled. “So what if one of Papyrus’s other friends knows? Why does it matter to you?”

“Because this Flowey friend is dangerous! And he’s going to hurt Papyrus!”
“Flowey would never hurt me!” Papyrus defended.

“Yes he will!” Sans roared. “Because he’s hurt you in the past and he’ll do it again!”

“I think I would remember that!”

“Like how you remember Gaster?” Sans challenged. He sighed. “Ok, look, you know how no one can remember Gaster? Well, this guy, Flowey, he has this . . . similar power. He can make people forget! So he can just do whatever he wants to people without any repercussion! So you need to stay away from him!”

“That’s the most bull I have ever heard of,” Undyne growled. Her arms were folded over her chest. “You are just throwing a fit because you always got to call the shots! Ever since you two were off on your own you kept Papyrus and your big important secret under your thumb, and now when you’re not in control of every little thing, you throw a hissy fit!”

Sans clenched his fists. “That is not what’s going on!”

“Oh no?” Undyne challenged. “Who decided to keep this quiet in the first place? Who decided not to tell anyone about what happened?”

“And with damn good reason!”

“Not arguing that, but did Papyrus ever get a say in the matter?”

A pause. Both Sans and Undyne turned to him. Papyrus stood, looking back and forth between his brother and his friend. His hands twisted over each other, racked with conflict.

“Well?” Undyne pressed.

Papyrus stared at the ground. “I remember when you woke up. When we escaped, I mean. You looked me dead in the eye and told me no one was to ever know about us. And . . . that was that. I didn’t argue. I never did.”

Undyne turned back to Sans with a pointed stare.

Sans smacked his hand against his forehead. “You two are missing the point! People knowing this is only going to get us hurt! Or worse!”

“I think you’re just afraid,” Papyrus said. “You remember so much of the labs, and how much we got hurt, and just . . . anything that reminds you of that makes you really upset. Is that why you hate seeing me turn?”

Sans balked. “Papyrus! I don’t-t-!”

“Don’t!” Papyrus shouted suddenly, making the two of them jump. “Don’t lie to me! I’m not dull, Sans! I see that look your eye every time we sneak out to the woods together! You wince and cower away from me! You shudder in fear! And I’ve tried so many times to get you to see it’s still me! It’s still us!”

Sans shuddered. “Bro, you don’t get it . . .”

“No, Sans, I think it is you who does not get it.”

Papyrus stood before Sans, straight and tall, glaring down at his brother with a fierce look, but with
also a softness of concern and worry. His voice lowered, but an edge still lined his words.

“Something Gaster said still resonates with me to this day,” he began. “Do you remember what he said? We had been changed. Permanently. For better or worse. This . . . blaster beast of ours, this thing we turn into . . . it is us. It’s a part of us now. No matter how we try to hide it. No matter how fiercely we deny it. It is still us. That beast is just as much a part of us as our very bones. To deny it would be denying ourselves. And I think it all makes sense now.”

“What?” Sans said.

“Why you’re so sad all the time,” Papyrus said softly. “Brother, I understand more than you know how much the past hurts and terrifies you. But to hide it away and pretend it doesn’t exist? For the rest of our lives?” He shook his head. “I can’t do that. I won’t do that. And maybe . . . just maybe, you should try to accept it as well.”

Sans faltered. To be that thing again . . .

His bones rattled.

“I won’t,” he whispered hoarsely.

“And I will not make you,” Papyrus said gently. “But neither can you expect me to keep denying what I am. Undyne and I have agreed. Should the time come where monsters face a grave threat, I will not hesitate to unleash my blaster form!”

“Papyrus, are you crazy?!” Sans cried, eyes going wide.

“No, it’s sensible,” Undyne hissed between fangs.

“You can’t just jeopardize us like that!” he protested.

“It’s his secret too!” Undyne roared. “And it seems it’s high time you remember that!”

Sans looked back and forth between them. They couldn’t be serious! But their eyes were focused, determined, steadfast. They were serious. Sans felt himself shake.

“I’m sorry, brother,” Papyrus said. “I promise I won’t transform unless I absolutely must. But I will no longer hide it. It has only given us grief.”

“Yeah, well, I hope you can live with that decision,” Sans muttered. He turned, and in a blink of an eye, he was gone.

Undyne and Papyrus stood in stone cold silence for several minutes, barely breathing.

Papyrus slumped his shoulders. “Undyne . . .” he asked. “Did I do the right thing?”

“I think you did,” she said confidently. “It’s high time you guys stopped hiding. You have a great and awesome power that can do us a lot of good. And no one is going to hurt you because of it. I’ll make sure of that.”

Papyrus allowed a smile. “Thank you.”

“Come on,” she said, clapping him on the shoulder. “Let’s get to work on your sentry station.”

Sans was absolutely fuming.
His hands dug deep into his pockets as he sulked against a frozen pine tree.

After everything he told him, they still wanted to go around showing off that . . . that **thing**.

Sans shuddered. He . . . he hated it. Papyrus didn’t understand. How could he? And yet still Sans hated how powerless he felt against his brother’s stubbornness. It was impossible to put into words Papyrus could understand why Sans hated that thing so much.

He had turned plenty of times in the labs. But only because Gaster forced him. And every time he just felt so . . . helpless. Even with all the strength and power in the world, he was still just a plaything for that sick bastard.

And he **hated** it.

“Sans? Oh, there you are.”

He turned. Papyrus had found him, of course. He approached, hands clasped together and worried. He tugged at his scarf.

“I went to check up on you. And when you weren’t at your station, I got worried.”

Sans didn’t say anything. Papyrus cast his gaze down to the snow.

“Sorry if today didn’t go as well as I hoped. And I’m sorry if I upset you.”

Sans shrugged. “Eh, you know me. Nothing gets under my skin, ya know?”

“We both know that’s not true,” Papyrus said, half smirking. He stood next to Sans, back pressed against the tree trunk. “I know you’re upset with me. And about Flowey. Honestly, I don’t know how he found out. He must have accidentally spotted me when I turned one time. Like Undyne.”

“Probably,” Sans agreed.

“But I want things to be good between us. We’re brothers, Sans. And I want us to be able to talk to each other. No more running away. Alright?”

“What’s there to say?” Sans muttered.

Papyrus raised a brow at him. “Sans,” he said sternly. “See, this is what I’m talking about. You pretending things are ok even though they aren’t. You keep hiding things from me and keep pretending things are ok when they aren’t! And it’s ruining you! The nightmares, the insomnia, the countless nights at the bar! Sans, you can’t possibly be that blind!”

Sans sunk into his jacket.

“This is why we’re like this in the first place!” Papyrus said in frustration. “Hiding! Scared for our lives! Have you ever thought how much less grief you’d struggle through if you weren’t so proud? But no, you keep taking it upon yourself to ‘protect me from the truth’ or whatever ridiculous lie you keep telling yourself! So that ends **now**!”

“What do you want from me?” Sans prodded.

“I’m saying I want you to yell at me!” Papyrus said. “You’re furious with me, and I want you to tell me why you’re so angry! Let me hear it! Let it out, Sans, because by God I deserve it!”

“You know what, I **am** goddamn furious with you!” Sans snapped. “Everything was simpler when
no one knew what we were! It was easy to just blend in and pretend nothing was wrong! Then you went ahead and ruined it!"

“That’s right, I did!” Papyrus yelled right back.

“Now I have to relive every waking moment in those labs! Every day I see you as that beast I remember how much turning into them hurts! It’s so easy for you, but it never got easy for me, Papyrus! NEVER!”

Papyrus’s eyes shot open.

“Yeah, good for you, the Great Papyrus isn’t in agony every time he shape-shifts! Papyrus can control it with barely an effort, give yourself a pat on the back for that one! Papyrus doesn’t have to worry about losing control! Like I do!”

Papyrus’s hands rose to his mouth. And Sans was faintly aware of the fact he was crying. He was shaking, numb and boiling over with rage. And everything just began to pour out.

“I can’t forget his face, I can’t forget what he put us through!” Sans shook. “And I can’t forgive myself for not being able to stop him sooner! I can’t forgive myself for letting him hurt us for as long as he did! Every time you turn all I see are nightmares! And I can’t! Make! Them! Stop!”

Papyrus wrapped him in his arms, hugging him tightly. He pulled his brother close, he too shaking.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered. “Oh, Sans, I’m so sorry . . .

Sans sobbed, clutching his brother and crying into his shoulder. “I’m never strong enough to save you, I’m never strong enough to protect you, oh god, Papyrus, I can’t . . . I can’t . . . I don’t want anyone to hurt you. I can’t bear watching you get hurt all the time . . . I can’t take it, bro . . .”

“Shhh, it’s ok,” Papyrus whispered. “I’m here. I’m right here. It’s ok. I’m not going anywhere. I’m right here.”

It was anyone’s guess how long they stood there, both of them crying into each other. With enough time, the tears stopped but still they were locked in a frozen embrace neither of them wanted to break. They slumped against the pine tree, arms around each other as the soft flakes of snow drifted around them. It grew dark before either of them spoke.

“I’m sorry, Sans,” Papyrus said. “I wish I knew earlier. But I’m glad I know now.”

Sans swiped at his eyes. “It’s not like I’m exactly the greatest person, either. I clam up worse than a mussel on a date.”

Papyrus snorted. “How very shellfish of you.”

“Hey now, that joke was a bit too fishy for my taste.”

“Oh, I bet you feel reel funny.”

They both hiccapped with laughter. “We better cast aside all these fishing puns before we end up trolling each other,” Sans rebuked.

“If you’d stop being such a cod it would be much easier!” Papyrus shot right back.

Sans rested his head against his brother’s chest. “Heh, yeah.” He hesitated. “But I guess I should
thank you.”

“For what?” Papyrus asked, perplexed.

“For finally getting me to come *out of my shell.*”

“I have never felt more betrayed in my entire life,” Papyrus muttered.

“No, seriously,” Sans said. “It’s . . . hard for me to talk about these things. I, uh, well . . .” he shuffled. “It’s a bad habit I developed. I think if I just . . . ignore stuff, it will go away. Out of sight, out of mind. And it’s just . . . easier.”

“And it is very like you to be so lazy like that,” Papyrus nodded. “But it’s not healthy.”

“I know,” he admitted.

“It’s so hard. I know. And it hurts a lot. But you realize it’s something that has to be done, sooner or later, right? And perhaps I was a bit too . . . pushy, but . . .” Papyrus sighed. “I can’t take it, either. Hiding. Lying. I’m tired, Sans.”

“Me too.”

“I just wish things were simpler for us.”

“Life doesn’t wanna make things easy for us.”

“That’s apparent.” Papyrus reached around and squeezed Sans’s hand. “But no matter how hard things get, no matter what happens, I’m gonna be there. You’re my brother, and I’m never going to turn my back on you. Whatever happens, we’ll be there to face it together. That I promise you.”

Sans smiled. “Thanks, bro. You’re the coolest.”

Papyrus grinned. “I know! And I wouldn’t be the coolest, greatest brother in the world if I wasn’t there for the person I love the most when he needed me the most! Now come on!” He hefted Sans into the air, carrying him on his back. “It’s late, and we are going home! You didn’t finish your breakfast like you promised you would! So we’re going to have breakfast for dinner!”

“Eating the same meal twice in a row?” Sans mocked. “Now who’s the lazy one?”

“IT’S NOT LAZY, IT’S EFFICIENT!” Papyrus cried.

“Whatsoever you say, bro.”

Papyrus, however, was smiling.

They walked in silence for some time.

“Brother,” Papyrus said suddenly. “Are you still angry with me?”


Papyrus nodded sadly. “You have every right to be. Don’t be sorry.”

“But just . . . promise me you’ll be careful, ok?” Sans said.

“Always,” Papyrus smiled. “And I promise. I will only turn when I must.”
“Thanks, bro. You are the greatest.”

Two sets of footprints led into the forests, but a single set of large boots with long confident strides emerged.

And the snow fell around them in soft gentle whispers.

Several days later, the doors to the Ruins opened for the first time in years.

Sans may have been lazy, but he wasn’t so lazy as to forget his only job in this world.

He watched above from a tree branch as a small child peered out from around the door. They rubbed their hands together, their breath puffing out into a fog at the chilly air. Their long brown bangs hid their eyes, but from Sans’s vantage he could see the striped blue and purple sweater and the ribbon tied in their hair. He stood perfectly still as they cautiously emerged, looking around at the new snowy landscape.

They noticed the bush to the left of the door. And the camera inside of it.

They only pondered the curiousness of the whole thing for a moment before heading down the snowy trail.

Sans pursued from a distance, keeping out of sight.

And, as usual, he made sure to step on a large fallen branch, causing the kid to stop for only a second. They turned back around at the sound, but Sans was long gone.

Sans suppressed a snicker from behind the tree.

They approached the bridge, and now, Sans came into full view, slowly and methodically stalking up from behind.

“Human,” he said as he approached. “Don’t you know how to greet a new pal? Turn around, and shake my hand.”

They complied.

Sans extended his hand.

They took it.

A long, wet, drawn out fart sound rattled the snowy air.

Sans let out a bombastic laugh. The kid even smiled, too.

“Ha, the ol’ whoopee cushion in the hand trick,” he laughed. “It’s always funny.”

He took a moment to look over the kid. A bit bruised and battered, but looking rather alright. Their sweater was a bit torn and frayed from abuse, and their knees were scraped but no signs of any dust. Sans allowed himself to relax a bit more.

“Anyways, you’re a human, right?” he asked. “That’s hilarious. I’m Sans. Sans the skeleton. I’m actually supposed to be on watch for humans right now. But y’know, I don’t actually care about capturing anybody. Now my brother, Papyrus—” he leaned in a bit. “He’s a human-hunting FANATIC!” He peeked around the kid’s shoulder. Over the distant hills, he spotted a shimmer of
silver armor accompanied by a flapping bit of red fabric. “Hey, actually, I think that’s him over there.” Sans hesitated. This was going to be new for the kid. Never in any of their resets had Papyrus ever been a Royal Guard.

. . . What was going to change?

Sans looked at the kid again, a bit more critically. He gazed into their very soul. Their LV was still at 1. That was good, wasn’t it? They wouldn’t do anything foolish.

Would they?

Sans kept grinning, hiding away any sense of doubt or hesitation. “I have an idea,” he said coyly. “Go through this gate thingy.” He gestured to the wooden poles haphazardly constructed around the narrow wooden bridge. “Yeah, go ahead and walk right through. My bro made the bars too wide to stop anyone.”

Sans led the way, across the bridge and right up to his own sentry station. Right beside the station was a very conveniently-shaped lamp, which he directed the kid to hide behind. With a grin, they swiftly ducked away behind it, just as Papyrus approached in all his shining glory.

The kid’s eyes went wide upon seeing Papyrus, nearly falling out of their hiding spot upon seeing Papyrus in his brand new armor. Thankfully, the tall skeleton remained oblivious to the kid’s existence.

Sans played it cool. “Sup, bro?” he asked casually.

“You know what is up, brother!” Papyrus said sternly, folding his arms over his chest. “It has been four days and you still haven’t recalibrated! Your! Puzzles! You just hang around outside your station! What are you even doing?!”

“Staring at this lamp,” Sans said slyly. His gaze flickered over to the kid, still hidden, and gave a wink. “It’s really cool. Do you wanna look?”

“NO!” Papyrus yelled, stomping his boots. His armor rattled. “I don’t have time for that! I want to be ready! I will be the one! I must be the one! I will capture a human! Then I, the great Papyrus, will get . . . hm, I mean . . .” he faltered. “I am already the greatest Royal Guardsman in the whole monster kingdom! I’m not sure what else I would ever want and need!”

“How about a lifetime supply of puns?” Sans offered.

“You already subject me to more than my fair share of terrible jokes,” Papyrus scowled. “But still! Although I have finally accomplished my lifelong dream of becoming a Royal Guard, I will still be the one to capture a human! To prove my greatness to any who doubt my skill and prestige!”

“You sound like you were . . . bone ready,” Sans snickered.

“SANS! Now is not the time for your hideous puns!” Papyrus cried. “Is telling jokes the only thing you do, you lazybones?!”

“Hey, take it easy. I’ve gotten a ton of work done today.” He paused. “A skele-ton!”

“SANS!”

“Come on, you’re smiling!”
“I am and I hate it!” Papyrus pouted. He sighed. “What did I ever do to warrant such ceaseless . . . punishment?”

Sans let out a small gasp, holding his hands in front of his face. “Oh my god, bro, I’m so proud of you.”

“Someone has to keep your punny business in check,” Papyrus countered. “Now I must return to my puzzles! As for your work? Put a little more . . . backbone into it! Nyeh heh heh heh!” He marched off, chuckling to himself. And he disappeared back over the hills.

Papyrus now long gone, Sans turned back to the lamp. “Ok, you can come out now.”

The human emerged, still staring in wonder at Papyrus. They looked back and forth between Sans and where Papyrus ran off to, their eyes asking the obvious question.

“You better get going before he comes back,” he brushed off. “And if he does, you’re gonna have to sit through more of my hilarious jokes!”

They folded their arms stubbornly across their chest, tapping their foot impatiently.

“What?” Sans asked nonchalantly. “Are you super-intimidated that my really cool brother is a Royal Guard? Don’t sweat it, kiddo. I know all that armor makes him look real tough, but he’s totally harmless.”

They huffed, unsatisfied, and began their way down the path. Sans stopped them just before they left the area.

“Actually,” he spoke up. The human paused, turning around. “I’ve been thinking. My bro’s been feeling kinda down lately. He’s never seen a human before. And seeing one just might make his day. Like I said, don’t worry about all that shiny armor, he’s not dangerous, no matter how hard he tries to be. Thanks a million. I’ll be up ahead.”

He turned, and headed back into the forest. And the kid went on their own way down the path to Snowdin.

But Sans made sure to keep an extra-close eye on the kid this time around. He took a shortcut to meet Papyrus up ahead. Papyrus was currently making his rounds around the forest, looking grand and important.

“Sup, bro?” Sans asked.

“Oh, have you decided to join me on my quest to improve my already nefariously devious puzzles?” Papyrus chuckled. “I have so many great ideas to capture a human! Undyne has told me she much prefers to throw spears at her enemies, but where’s the fun in that! Where’s the challenge! The intrigue! The thrill of watching your opponent struggle and break beneath your far superior genius! No, Sans! Puzzles are where it’s at, and I will be sure to impress Undyne!”

“I’m sure you will,” Sans assured.

“Our training has only begun!” Papyrus went on. “Our sparring matches are the envy of monster guards everywhere! All tremble beneath my might!”

Sans gave Papyrus an incredulous look. “What do you mean by that?”

“Oh, Sans, relax, none of the other guards know, I promised you that,” he waved off. “I simply
“Mean our training has increased in ferocity and intensity! I will be the strongest Royal Guard yet!”

“Ha, I don’t doubt that for a second!”

“Anyway, as I was saying about Undyne—” He suddenly stopped. His eye sockets went wide, his jaw dropped as he saw something behind Sans. Sans followed his gaze, although he full well knew what he was looking at.

Right down the path was the human.

The skeleton brothers exchanged rapid looks back and forth between each other and the human, so fast it was a surprise neither of their heads had flown off. Suddenly, Papyrus grabbed Sans by the shoulder and began to speak to him in a rather loud whisper.

“SANS! Oh my god!” he said breathlessly. “Is that . . . a human?!”

“Actually, I think that’s a rock,” Sans countered, pointing to the rock right behind the human.

“Oh,” Papyrus said dejectedly.

“Hey,” Sans whispered. “What’s that in front of the rock?”

“OH MY GOD!” Papyrus cried. “Is . . . is that a human?!”

“Yes.”

“OH MY GOD!” Papyrus began spinning in circles in excitement. “SANS! I finally did it!!! Undyne will--! I’m gonna be--! I will be so popular!!!” He straightened, clearing his throat. “HUMAN!” he said with a dramatic point. “You shall not pass this area! I, the great Royal Guard Papyrus, will stop you! I will then capture you! You will be delivered to the capital! Then . . . then . . . !” He faltered. “I’m . . . not sure what happens next. IN ANY CASE!” He placed his hands on his hips, puffing out his chest heroically. “Continue! Only if you dare!”

With a mad cackle, he zoomed away.
“Well, that went well,” Sans remarked casually. “Don’t sweat yourself, kid. I’ll keep an eye socket out for ya.” He winked, and followed his brother further down the path. Right now the kid would be passing Papyrus’s new and fully-built sentry station. Long gone was the station he assembled out of cardboard and prayers. Now there was a station just as sturdy and solid as Sans’s. On the front was writing in great big letters “SENTRY STATION OF THE GREAT ROYAL GUARD PAPYRUS! SURELY, ONLY THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS CAPABLE OF CRAFTING SUCH A FINE AND MAGNIFICENT STATION. OH, YEAH, UNDYNE HELPED TOO. BUT IT WAS MOSTLY BUILT BY YOURS TRULY, THE GREAT PAPYRUS!”

And on the edge was a plate of spaghetti.

It was frozen solid, a fork sticking straight out of it like a flagpole.

The kid kept walking.
Next was Doggo’s station. Sans stuck around, out of view. He had to know if the kid was still determined to stick to their peaceful path . . .

But sure enough, the kid didn’t raise their weapon once against the movement-blind guard dog. They stood perfectly still as Doggo struck them with his blue attacks, and proceeded to appease him with gentle pats. Victorious, the kid continued on.

The invisible electricity maze awaited them. Papyrus stood in front of it, currently preoccupied with speaking to Sans.

“You’re so lazy!” he scolded. “You were napping all night!”

“I think that’s called sleeping,” he countered.

“Excuses, excuses!” he tutted. He caught sight of the human and instantly jumped to attention. “Oh-ho! The human arrives! In order to stop you, my brother and I constructed some puzzles! I think you will find this one . . . quite shocking!” he snickered. “For you see, this is the invisible electricity maze! When you touch the walls of this maze, this orb will administer a hearty zap!” He pulled a blue orb (but it was really a dodecahedron) from seemingly nowhere. “Sound like fun? Because the amount of fun you will probably have is rather small I think. Ok, you can go ahead now!”

The kid barely stepped an inch forward when suddenly Papyrus was heartily zapped, the armor only creating a bigger and brighter zap. He stood there, smoke seeping from his eye sockets, before he shook off the soot and immediately turned to his brother.

“SANS!” he yelled. “What did you do?!”

“I think the human has to hold the orb,” Sans pointed out.

“Oh, ok!” Papyrus said with a stunning amount of calm. He then walked right through the maze, leaving a very convenient trail in the fresh snow. “Hold this please!” He tossed the orb into the air, and it landed perfectly on the human’s head. He rushed to the other side of the maze, eagerly anticipating the human’s first move.

The human simply followed Papyrus’s tracks, easily navigating the maze with nary a hair out of place. Papyrus’s jaw dropped open.

“Incredible! You slippery snail!” he gaped. “You solved it so easily! Too easily . . . However! The next puzzle will not be easy! It is designed by my brother, Sans! You will surely be confounded! I know I am!” And once again, with a hearty cackle, Papyrus sped off to the next area.

Sans watched with mild tepidity.

“Hey, thanks,” he said. “It seems like my bro’s having a ton of fun. By the way, you notice that fancy armor he’s wearing? That’s actually not his official armor. You see, my brother was made a Royal Guard pretty recently. They’re still working on making his real outfit. So right now he’s wearing some old leftover armor until it’s finished. He’s barely taken it off since he got it. Man. Isn’t my brother cool?”

The kid smiled, nodding. They then went on their way, striking friendly conversation with the Nice Cream Man just over the bridge.

Strangely, despite Papyrus’s new position as a guard, things remained relatively unchanged. The word search barely caused any inconvenience to the human, and they voiced their opinion that Junior Jumble was harder than crossword, much to Papyrus’s delight. They rolled and petted their way out
of Dogaressa and Dogamy’s grasp. They breezed through Papyrus’s X and O puzzle without his help, again, much to the skeleton’s delight. The colored tile maze was hilariously easy and posed no challenge to the small human.

Papyrus was a bit miffed about that one.

They petted and played with Greater Dog, and honestly they probably went a bit overboard with petting Lesser Dog, but hey who was Sans to judge the happiness of a dog with an impossibly long neck and an equally insatiable passion for snow art?

But the time came when the human encountered the most nefarious of Papyrus’s puzzles: The Gauntlet of Deadly Terror.

The human walked across the bridge, only to see Papyrus and Sans blocking the end of it. Papyrus once again puffed out his chest, speaking grandly.

“Human!” he bellowed. “This is your final and most dangerous challenge! Behold! The Gauntlet of Deadly Terror!”

From absolutely nowhere, traps emerged around the bridge. A deadly mace swung above head, a flamethrower’s fire licked the underbelly of the bridge, a cannon poised just off to the side of the mountain, a spear launcher sat right next to the cannon as well as above. And just next to the spear . . . was an ordinary dog, suspended by a rope.

“When I say the word, it will fully activate! Cannons will fire! Spikes will swing! Blades will slice! Each part will swing violently up and down! Only the tiniest chance of victory will remain! Are you ready?! Because! I! Am! About! To do it!”

There was a pause.

Nothing happened.

The human allowed themselves to smile a little bit.

“Well?” Sans asked. “What’s the holdup?”

“Holdup?!” Papyrus exclaimed. “What holdup?! I’m . . . I’m about to activate it now!”

Still, nothing happened.

“That, uh, doesn’t look very activated,” Sans commented.

“Well!” Papyrus started. He was shifting side to side nervously. “This challenge--! It seems . . . maybe . . . too easy to defeat the human with.” He nodded firmly. “Yeah! We can’t use this one! I am a skeleton with standards! My puzzles are very fair! And my traps are expertly cooked! But this method is too direct! No class at all! Away it goes!”

With another unseen command, the traps retracted back to . . . wherever they came from.

Papyrus allowed a breath of relief. And the human let out a tiny giggle. Papyrus spun at them, glaring accusingly.

“What are you looking at?!” he challenged. “This was another decisive victory for Papyrus! Nyeh heh . . . heh?” He shuffled away rather awkwardly.

The human finished crossing the bridge, running up to Sans with a great big grin. Sans smiled right
back at the kid.

“I don’t know what my brother’s going to do now,” he said. “If I were you, I would make sure I understand blue attacks.” The human nodded. When Sans said nothing else, they continued.

Just ahead was Snowdin Town.

The human took their time exploring the quaint and snowy village, talking to each of the residents and popping inside each and every building. They spent a while inside the Librarby, reading a handful of the books. It gave time for Sans to speak with Papyrus.

Papyrus was at the very edge of town where Snowdin connected to Waterfall. The clash of Snowdin’s cold and Waterfall’s humidity created a thick blanket of fog, but even still, the skeleton was hard to miss.

Papyrus was pacing back and forth, arms clasped behind his back, eyes staring straight down at the ground as his feet dug a deep rut in the snow. He was pacing with such speed he was actually causing the fog to swirl around him.

“Something bothering you, bro?” Sans asked.

“Oh! Sans!” Papyrus jumped. “N-no! I’m fine! I am perfectly fine! I am simply . . . preparing for the inevitable fight with the human! I must capture them! For the glory of monsterkind! For King Fluffybuns Dreemurr!”

He deflated.

“Oh, who am I kidding?” he moaned. “I can’t capture them, Sans! How could I capture someone who loves puzzles just as much as I? How can I capture a human with such an exquisite taste of spaghetti? What do I do, Sans?”

Sans patted his brother on the shoulder. “Hey, bro, don’t beat yourself up. Whatever you decide to do, I got your back, ok?”

Papyrus nodded. “Thank you, Sans. Truly you are worthy of being the great Papyrus’s great brother.”

“Aw, bro, you’re making me blush.”

Papyrus grinned. “But . . . I have a duty! I will capture them! I must! I will face them down and I will capture them!”

“I am rooting for you, one hundred percent.” Sans looked back to the town. “Looks like they’re heading this way right now.” Papyrus stiffened. “I’ll be watching you, bro. Go get ‘em.”

“You’re right! And I will!” Confident, Papyrus approached the human amidst the swirling fog. He cleared his voice, the human barely visible in the snowy mist.

“Human,” he began. “It seems we are fated to do battle! Human against monster! For it is the sacred duty of the Royal Guard to capture any humans that fall down here and deliver them to our great king, Asgore Dreemurr. Do you understand, tiny human? I must capture you!” He looked back and forth between the human and his surroundings. “I must confess some complex feeling you are surely experiencing! How it must feel to meet another one whose love for puzzles is unequal! To meet another pasta aficionado! To want someone who is really cool to think you are cool as well! Well, worry not, small human, for despite my duty . . .” Papyrus cleared his throat. “Despite
my duty I will be sure to visit you in prison where you are sure to be taken to! Now enough
dawdling!” In Papyrus’s outstretched hand, a bone materialized. “Now it is time for me to capture
you!”

The human grinned. With a sly wink, they said something most flirtatious that made the skeleton
turn beet red.

“W-what?! F-flirting?!” Papyrus stuttered. “So you finally admit your ultimate feelings! W-well I
am a skeleton with very high standards!”

The human then promptly informed Papyrus that they could make spaghetti.

“OH NO! YOU’RE MEETING ALL MY STANDARDS!” Papyrus cried. “I guess . . . this
means I have to go on a date with you . . ?” He shook his head. “L-Let’s date later! After I capture
you!”

A bone attack launched forward, straight and true. The human dodged it with hilarious ease.

After the attack was finished, the human did not raise a single finger against the skeleton guard.
Instead, they extended their arms in a sign of mercy.

“So you won’t fight,” Papyrus muttered. “Then let’s see if you can handle my fabled blue attack!
Behold!”

Now a barrage of bones shot forward, all glowing a bright and vibrant blue. The human stood
perfectly still, the attacks passing them like a frigid breeze. Suddenly, they felt a cold grip in their
chest as their very soul was turned blue, afflicted with the skeleton’s signature magic. Even so, they
managed to leap out of the way of a bone attack that had very sneakily crept up on them.

Papyrus laughed. “You’re blue now! That’s my attack! Nyeh heh heh!”

And then the fight truly began.

The human once again showed mercy, refusing to lift their weapon. Papyrus responded with another
bone attack, a wave of blues and whites to which the human flawlessly dodged. If Papyrus hadn’t
known any better, he would say that the human practically *memorized* each and every one of his
attacks.

He would not have been wrong.

As the fight progressed, his head was littered with thoughts. Such finesse and perfection dodging his
attacks! And he was going to have a date with them later! He pondered what he should wear . . .

The human gave him a sly grin.

“What?!” Papyrus snapped. “I’m not thinking about that dating thing!”

But he totally was.

The battle continued, Papyrus launching out wave after wave of bone attacks. For all the human’s
practice and finesse the skeleton did manage to land a handful of hits, to which he felt a striking
feeling of guilt. He didn’t want to hurt them, but how was he supposed to capture them without
weakening them first?

And still, the human showed mercy.
The battle raged on. Bones littered the landscape. Snow and fog swirled around both as they
dodged, danced and dove their way between attacks. But eventually, even with all of Papyrus’s
strength and training, he grew weary.

He doubled over, gasping for breath after unleashing a really cool normal attack.

But he wasn’t finished yet! He still had his special attack up his chainmail sleeve! He flicked his
wrist, and under his armor he felt his fingers turn into claws--

He hesitated.

He looked at the tiny little human, that innocent and patient smile. That calm and warming stance
and their unrelenting mercy. He felt his heart break.

He . . . couldn’t. Not on them. He couldn’t bring himself to shape-shift, even if it was his duty! He
had a duty to himself, first of all, and he refused to brutalize an innocent child.

Another flick of his wrists, and the changes reverted. He would do as the child has done, and would
show them mercy.

“I can see you shaking in your boots!” Papyrus exclaimed. “I, the great Royal Guard Papyrus, elect
to grant you mercy!”

With a huge grin, the kid dashed forward, flinging their tiny self in Papyrus’s arm. With a hearty
laugh, Papyrus hugged them right back.

“Come by my house later if you want to have that date!” he said. “But you may pass this area
unobstructed! As Royal Guard, I will proclaim that you shall always be welcomed in Snowdin
Town!”

And as the child promised, they came over to the house a short while later. Papyrus took them on
their “date” with much enthusiasm.

Sans watched everything from afar, and breathed a huge sigh of relief. His brother was going to be
ok.

His phone jangled. He answered it, more reflexively than anything else.

“Heya, Alphys,” Sans greeted.

“SANS!” the little yellow lizard exclaimed over the phone. “I j-just saw the human’s f-fight with
your b-brother Papyrus!” She was ecstatic. “That was s-so cool! And the human seems really nice!
This is good news, Sans! M-maybe they’ll b-be the one to finally get us out of here! Isn’t this
great?!”

“Don’t I know it, Al,” Sans said.

“Y-you must be so proud of your brother! Facing the human like that!” Alphys went on. “I-I’ll keep
watching them, but I’m really rooting for them now! I gotta go talk to Mettaton, but I’ll s-stay in
touch! Things are finally looking up!”

The phone clicked as she hung up. It had been a while since the poor monster sounded so happy
about something.

It was a shame it was a conversation Sans had heard a thousand times. Even with everything that
has happened, things were still staying the same. Stuck in a perpetual loop.

Sans thought for a minute.

*Things were different, but everything was staying the same.*

*So why? Why the endless cycle? What possessed the human to repeat the same thing, over and over?*

If he had the power to reset, what would compel him to relive the same loop, over and over?

He stood.

He just had a very brilliant, but incredibly stupid idea.

“Let’s see if we can shake things up a bit,” he mused. A flash of blue, and he was gone.

The human wandered through Waterfall. It was serene, quiet, and lonely. Sure, there were monsters here and there, but for the vast majority of their time through the caverns, they were alone. Alone to explore and discover the many secrets hidden in the crevices and endless tunnels. They had barely begun their journey through the caverns when they paused within some tall cattails.

Someone was coming.

Between the tall green stalks, they saw something. A towering figure clad head to foot in glinting steel armor, their face hidden behind a ghastly helmet with great pointed teeth and glaring eyes.

Papyrus came into view, timidly approaching the figure in armor.

“H-hi, Undyne,” he said in an uncharacteristically subdued voice. “I’ve come to deliver my daily report, as you asked. Uh . . . regarding that human I called you about earlier . . .”

The human sunk deeper into the weeds.

Papyrus jerked upright. “Huh? Did I fight them?” he asked. The helmet and the distance between the human and the skeleton must have muffled the soldier’s voice. “Of course I fought them!” he replied with false bravado. “I fought them valiantly! And I—”

He paused as the soldier, Undyne, turned to him, saying something the human could not hear.

“Did I—erm . . .” he hesitated. “I did not.”

The soldier approached, furious, and Papyrus stumbled backwards at Undyne’s aggressive approach.

“You must understand! They were nothing more than a simple, frightened child! I could not dream to even—“ He stopped as he was interrupted again. He bowed his head at whatever angry words Undyne was saying to him. “No, no, I understand,” he sighed. “And I promise to help you capture them . . . and take their soul.”

The human remained very still, hardly daring to breathe.

Suddenly, Papyrus Jerked upright. “You have an idea?!” he asked excitedly. “Do tell! What is it?”

Undyne approached, grabbed Papyrus by his cheekbone, and dragged him away.
“O-oh dear, I don’t think I like this idea . . .” he lamented as he was dragged out of sight.

The human remained in their spot for several moments to ensure the monsters were gone before daring to emerge from their hiding spot. They clambered their way through the cattails, and found another monster within their company. It was none other than the friendly monster simply called Monster Kid.

He ran in circles excitedly. “Yo! Did you see the way she was staring at you?” he cheered. “That was AWESOME! I’m so jealous! What did you do to get her attention?” He laughed. “Come on! Let’s go watch her beat up some bad guys!” He raced off, tripping over his own feet in the process. Despite face-planting on solid rock, he popped right back up with hardly a care in the world.

The human contemplated the encounter for a moment longer. Things were different . . . and it was impossible to tell just how much has changed. And they couldn’t help but wonder why. Why now? What happened to make things so different?

They were filled with determination to find out just that.

They continued on their perilous path, filled with excitement and nervousness alike for the impending battle against the mighty Undyne.

They stopped.

Against the cavern walls was something most peculiar. A door. A plain, simple grey door, made of metal as far as the human could tell. They looked up and down the tunnel. There was nothing in sight for a long ways, and they found it very strange such a door would be . . . here.

They placed their hand upon the round handle. It was nearly frigid to the touch.

They swung the door open.

Inside was a room, perhaps ten feet by ten feet. The walls and ceiling and floor were the same monotonous shade of grey, impossibly smooth and impossible to determine what it was even made of.

But standing in the room as another monster.

At least, the human thought it was a monster.

It was vaguely human in stature and form but its shape was . . . distorted. The edges of its figure shimmered in and out of sight, sometimes translucent as fog, other times as solid as stone. Fragments of its being surrounded it, almost as if it was struggling to maintain . . . existence.

It was facing them, its face a ghostly white with large jagged cracks jutting across its face. Its shoulders were heaving up and down rhythmically. As if breathing.

Or . . . sobbing.

The human tentatively approached. It tried to call out to it but their voice carried no weight. Sound did not travel in this place. They could not speak, they could not hear.

They inched ever closer, reaching out to touch the thing. Would it be like touching mist, or tar? It
was impossible to tell.

Suddenly, the creature saw them, its eyes widening in horror. It recoiled, flinching away as if stung by acid.

And just like that, Dr. W.D. Gaster was gone.
The Power of Determination

Chapter Summary

The human continues their journey through the underground ...

Chapter Notes

So some of you had some excellent questions about the timelines and how the resets worked. So I thought I’d answer it real quick-like in this crappy illustration here! http://sta.sh/02d7wwif8aft

Like I said, if you don't get it, it's ok, try not to worry about it too much! Enjoy!

In the caverns of Waterfall, a battle raged.

Spears clashed against the rocky walls, flickering lights of vibrant teal refracted off the watery pools, and the echo flowers chanted the chorus of battle cries.

In the caverns of Waterfall, Undyne, Captain of the Royal Guards, fought fang and claw against a tiny human.

She gnashed her teeth. “Nghaaa! What are humans even made of?!”

Shattered remnants of her spears littered the floor around the innocuous child. They still peered up at her with a patient and cunning smile and Undyne HATED THAT!

Again she unleashed a torrent of spears. And again without breaking a sweat the human dodged and blocked every single one. She had been impressed at first but now she was just getting pissed off!

“JUST DIE ALREADY!” Undyne screeched. “Can’t you see that your death is a mercy?! Every second you live is another second us monsters must suffer in our earthen prison!” She stood tall and imposing, spears dancing behind her. “But we monsters can be determined as well! Determined to breach the surface and take back what is rightfully ours! Don’t look so smug, punk! I will rip your soul from your body, no matter what it takes!”

She attacked yet again, trading blows with the human. She released the human of her green magic to unleash an even more fearsome storm of attacks, but even that didn’t leave a single mark on the child!

And then, the child turned tail and ran.

“OH NO YOU DON’T, YOU LITTLE BRAT!”

The human was fast but Undyne, being much taller (and very angry) caught up to them quickly. She once again encased the human’s soul with her green magic, forcing the child to stand and fight.
“You are not getting away from me this time!”

And once again the two engaged in a fierce battle of will, Undyne’s soul burning with passion and determination. With renewed vigor she kept attacking, spears coming faster and from every direction. Now she was landing hits! She managed to land a few solid blows on the child, knocking them down to nearly half their health!

She could do this! There was no way she was going to lose to a child-

The human pulled out a bandage and instantly healed themself of all damage.

“**OH COME ON, THAT’S CHEATING!! YOU FILTHY CHEATER!!**”

This human was really testing her patience. But this was neither the time nor the place to hold back! To hell if this brat was only a kid, they were still a human and it was her duty to take their soul!

Undyne leaped into the air, her attacks more aggressive an unrelenting. But for her to attack, she had to dismiss her green magic. And again, the human took off.

But Undyne was quick to act. With a wave of her hand, a row of spears shot up from the ground, blocking the human’s path.

There was nowhere for them to go. Undyne leered above them, smiling in triumph.

“You’ve put up a hell of a fight! I suppose I should congratulate you!” Undyne mocked. “But your path ends here! I will not let you best me, and if you think you can beat me, you are sorely mistaken!” She let out a menacing grin. “Because I’ve got one last trick up my sleeve! Prepare to meet your devastation, human! Prepare yourself to meet the most terrifying monster in the Underground! Prepare to meet my partner in arms, and your DOOM!”

Her voice echoed loud and clear across the cavernous halls. Her voice shook and trembled the very stones, and the air grew thin and short with anticipation.

And for the very first time, the human looked uncertain.

Several moments passed.

Nothing happened.

Undyne loudly cleared her throat. “I said,” she said, looking around her. “*Prepare to meet my partner in arms and your DOOM!*”

The human looked around. Still nothing.

Undyne hissed. “You numbskull!” she said in a very loud and hoarse whisper. “That’s your freaking cue!”

<<*Oh, whoops! Sorry, here I come!*>>

A thunderous crash sounded behind the human.

Very slowly, and with great apprehension, they turned around.

And found themself staring eye to eye with a great and terrifying skeletal dragon.
They back-pedaled, eyes going wide and jaw dropping open. The weapon they held in their hand—a dusty notebook—fell to the ground and tumbled over the ledge, swallowed by the bottomless cavern depths.

The beast let out a terrifying roar, its bottom jaw splitting in half to reveal all of its sharp teeth. They were trapped between Undyne and the skeleton beast.

“Now we will end you!” Undyne cried.

For the very first time, the human had no idea what to do.

Spears rained down. The human quickly came back to their senses and dodged as best they could, barely making it out of the attack unscathed. The beast slashed at them with its long sharp claws and they rolled out of the way, ducking under the attack.

The beast then opened up its maw, a blue glow and high pitched whine building in its mouth.
The human’s eyes bulged in sudden realization. Now they knew why the skull was so familiar!

They barely moved out of the way from the blast.

They pleaded with Undyne. They asked the fish creature to stop fighting.

Undyne did not listen. But the bone beast looked . . . hesitant.

They attacked again. Undyne with more spears, the beast with another swipe of its claws and another blast. Undyne was giving it her all, and the beast too grew more aggressive, snapping forward with flashing fangs and more frequent and faster blasts.

They had to figure out how to resolve this and quick! They reached into their inventory, rummaging for a weapon to replace the one they lost. They would not use it, of course, not unless they had to. But the only thing they had was a useless, flimsy old stick!

In frustration, they threw the stick away.

The bone beast instantly went rigid. It spun on its heels, ran after the stick and brought it back, clenched in its teeth and bony tail wagging.

Undyne dropped her spear. “The hell are you doing?!” she swore.

The human paused. They had a brilliant, magnificent idea.

The human threw the stick again, and once again the beast gave chase. The child couldn’t help but laugh. It was nothing more than an oversized dog!

“ENOUGH!” Undyne roared. “I’m going to put you in the ground!”

The human quickly side-stepped Undyne’s wild attack, instead focusing on the bone-dog-thing. They were currently giving it scratches right behind its large cranial horns. The beast let out a purr of satisfaction, its rear leg pounding the floor in approval.

“OH MY GOD STOP LETTING THE ENEMY PET YOU!”

The beast snapped to Undyne, letting out a pitiful whine. It turned back to the human, almost apologetically as it once again remembered itself. It attacked, very half-heartedly if the human was honest with themself.

But the human was no longer worried. They knew what to do.

In a firm and authoritative voice, they commanded the beast to SIT. By instinct, the beast plopped its haunches on the ground, standing at attention.

“MIND CONTROL!” Undyne cried. “I knew it! The animes were right! You punk, I’ll make you pay for that!”

Again, the human commanded the beast to BEG.

The beast rose back on its hind legs, forepaws clasped together in front of it.

Undyne let out a terrifying battle cry, getting ready to unleash a fearsome attack.

One more command.
The human instructed the beast to ROLL OVER.

“What?! Wait no no NO NO!!!”

It was too late. The beast had rolled onto its back, rolling onto the floor and also on top of Undyne. She could barely move as the massive creature pinned her under its bulk. All she could do was let out an unending stream of curses and insults.

The human paid no mind. They were too busy giving the beast a belly rub . . . or rib-cage rub, seeing as it lacked a stomach. Nevertheless, it enjoyed the human tickling its ribs, its leg kicking in the air.

The fight was over, both monsters pacified (though one still really ticked off) but the human was still confused. The skull was definitely that of a Gaster Blaster, they had seen them enough times to recognize it, but never had they seen it . . . well, whole. It was different.

Like Papyrus-

It hit them.

In a way that the human couldn’t quite put their finger on, they knew the truth. They knew who the blaster beast really was.

They called the beast by his true name.

Papyrus perked up, rolling off Undyne and jumping to his feet. And in a flash of orange light, he transformed into his more familiar skeleton shape.

“Human!” he shouted proudly. “You recognized me! I knew you would, you are so very clever! Oh dear, I hope I did not frighten you too badly, did I?”

Smiling, the human shook their head.

“Excellent! I hope we can still be friends! Even though I fought you twice now,” he said sheepishly. “But forgive and forget is what I always say! Now there is no reason for us all not to be friends! What do you think, Undyne?”

Undyne jumped to her feet, seething. “What do I think?!” she screeched. “I think this little brat needs to shut up and DIE!”

A spear formed in her hand. And just as quickly, Papyrus jumped between her and the human. He ushered the child behind him, spreading his arms wide.

There was silence. Both guards stared down one another. The human hesitated as well, peeking out behind Papyrus to look up at the furious captain and the unmoving skeleton.

“You’re defending this punk?!” Undyne challenged.

“They’re my friend,” Papyrus said simply.

She looked back and forth between him and the kid. Rage flooded her body, but even in her state she could not bring herself to harm her friend, no matter how much that bonehead needed a good thump on his big fat head. With another defeated cry, she stormed away, her boots thudding furiously across the echoing corridors.
“Well that went well!” Papyrus said cheerfully. “You should visit her house in Waterfall! We can hang out together and be friends! It’ll be great!”

Papyrus turned away, but the human stopped them. They had to know. Had he always been able to do that?

“What? Shape-shift?” he asked. “Oh! But of course! But it’s a super-secret power I have, and none other than my very best friends are allowed to know!” He lowered himself to his knee, looking eye to eye with the human. “I did mean it when I said we were friends! And I trust you to keep my secret! Come find me in Waterfall! We’re going to make you friends with Undyne yet! Nyeh heh heh!”

And just like that, he was gone.

The human contemplated this for a while. They had a few more things to do first, but they would return to the captain’s house soon enough.

“87! 88! 89! 90! Oof . . .”

Papyrus didn’t have any muscles but that didn’t mean his whole body couldn’t be in inexplicable agony.

“91 . . . 92 . . . 93 . . . oh dear I hope Undyne wasn’t serious about five thousand push-ups . . . 94 . . .”

He sat outside Undyne’s house like so many times before, right beside her training dummy as he continued his relentless exercise.

But a flash of blue and purple caught his attention.

He jumped to his feet. “Human!” he exclaimed. “You came! I knew you would!”

The human gave him a questioning look, motioning to the spot where he had just been standing.

“What am I doing? Well . . .” Papyrus said. “Undyne may be a . . . teensy bit angry about me protecting you. So she sentenced me to do five thousand push-ups! If I keep it up at this rate, I will finish in about eight hours! But since you’re here, I suppose my exercise can be postponed! Right now we have a grave mission ahead of us! Our mission is simple! Get Undyne to be your friend! It will be the greatest challenge you have ever faced! Are you ready, human?”

They nodded eagerly.

“Alright, here we go!”

Papyrus gave the door a hearty rap. It opened seconds later, a very disgruntled Undyne at the door.

“There is no way you finished so quickly,” she growled.

“I didn’t!” he said, hands resting on his hips. “But a friend of mine would like to see you!” He stepped off to the side, revealing the human. Immediately Undyne’s eye shot wide open and she practically began to froth at the mouth.

She looked at Papyrus. Papyrus looked right back at her.

“Why don’t. You two. Come inside,” she hissed between clenched teeth. Papyrus eagerly clapped
his hands together as he stepped inside, making sure to wipe his boots off on the doormat. The human followed him.

Undyne stood as rigid as an old oak, and just as ready to snap. “Shall we move on to other training practices?” she said threateningly.

“Oh yes that sounds wonderful! Perhaps some of your best cooking lessons would do us much good!”

Undyne did a double-take. “Cooking?”

“Sure! Why not! We used to do it all the time, and ever since I became a guard we haven’t cooked once! I would very much like to do it again!”

Despite herself, she let out a laugh and allowed her hands to unfurl from clenched fists. “Heh, alright, we can do that.”

“But first things first! I have to go to the bathroom!” Papyrus proclaimed. “You two have fun now!” He then performed a perfect front flip out of Unyne’s window, shattering it to pieces.

The human stifled a laugh. Undyne scowled.

“So what are you really doing here?” she challenged. “Came here to rub your victory in my face? Is that it?!”

The human quickly shook their head.

“Oh! So you really do want to be friends!” Undyne mocked with fake cheeriness. “Let us put aside our differences and frolic in the fields of friendship!” She paused. “NOT! If you weren’t my house guest I’d tear you limb from limb! So I suggest you get out of my house and never return!”

“Darn!” Papyrus said loudly. Both of them turned to see the skeleton watching from the broken window. “I really thought Undyne could make friends with you! But I suppose she’s just not up to the challenge.” He sighed as he slinked away with a very clever grin. “Oh well!”

“What?! Challenge?! Wait, Papyrus, get back here!” She raced to the window, but he was long gone by then. “Darn it!” she cursed. “He really doesn’t think I can be friends with a weak little shrimp like you?! Pah! I’ll show him! Human, by the end of the day, we’re not going to be friends! Oh no, we’re gonna be . . . BESTIES!”

She cleared her throat.

“How about some tea, yes?”

Undyne made golden flower tea for the both of them, sitting down at her quaint little kitchen table. They engaged in some small talk after a few rather tense moments. And as much as she hated to admit it, the kid was . . . kinda growing on her. They were quiet, but they didn’t need to say much. And Undyne found it easy to just talk with them.

“So I became the Captain of the Royal Guard, and now it’s my job to train new recruits!” she was saying. “Like Papyrus!”

She hesitated.

Papyrus . . .
She set down her tea.

“You know . . . don’t tell anyone this, but . . .” she sucked a breath between her teeth. “I am terrified I made a mistake making Papyrus a Royal Guard.”

The human leaned forward, hanging on her every word.

“No that he’s weak or anything!” she said hurriedly. “He’s actually pretty freaking tough! And did you see the way he scared you! Ha! You must have jumped at least three feet in the air!” She grew quiet. “I mean, you saw him. And now you know his secret power. I’m trusting you to not tell anyone! Do you know how freaking long it took for me to find that out?! Ages! I’ve known him for years and just learned about it a few weeks ago!” Another pause. “Maybe his brother was right. Maybe I made him a guard for the wrong reason . . . Papyrus is tough, and strong. The strongest monster I know! But he’s—he’s too nice! I mean, look at you! He’s a Guard! It’s his sworn duty to capture humans, and instead he became friends with one instead!”

Undyne gazed out the window. “If you had been a different human, if someone a bit meaner and nastier came down here, and the Guards had to go to war, Papyrus would have been torn to little smiling pieces.” Her eye landed back on the human. “So I guess I should thank you. For being a good friend to him.”

The human smiled, suppressing the nagging feeling of guilt welling in their chest.

“Ah, but enough of this mushy crap!” Undyne said, flinging her tea cup across the room. “Papyrus wanted to train, yeah!? And he’s not here! So you’re going to do his training for him! NGAH!” She jumped from her seat, landing on the kitchen counter and knocking everything to the floor. “Nothing has brought Papyrus and I closer than our rigorous training! And by engaging in the fiercest of training sessions, we’ll be closer than ever!”

“But what’s that stupid face for?” Undyne challenged.

“I knew it!” he said. “I knew you’d be friends with the human!”

“Yeah, well, hard not to, really,” Undyne said. “So, hey, can I stay at your place for a bit? I uh, burned my house down. Again.”

“What about the fire extinguishers I placed everywhere in your house?!”

“Oh, right, I forgot you did that.”

“YOU FORGOT?! After the last time?!”

“Hey! That fire barely scorched my hair!”

“And it nearly burned my hand off!”

“Look, can I stay at your place or not?! I’m freezing my butt off!”

“Fine! But you are grounded from cooking duty!”
“Yes, Mom.”

Just then Undyne’s phone rang loudly. Quickly she fished it out of her back pocket and brought it up to her ear, barely registering the name or number. “Hello?”

“Undyne!” Alphys’ voice cried out over the other end of the line. “It’s the human! They’re here! I-in my lab! And they just met Mettaton and they just left but right now I’m going to be in charge of guiding them through Hotland and I gave them my phone number but ohmygosh I am so nervous I’m actually hiding in my bathroom right now I--!”

“Is that your giiiiiiirlfriend?” Papyrus crooned.

“NO?!? STOP IT!” Undyne shouted as she pulled the phone away from her own ear. “Alph! Alph! You ok, you’re alright, right? I mean of course you’re alright you’re talking to me, heh, I just mean, uh, if you’re ok, um, physically.”

“Ask her out!”

“Go away!”

“Oh y-yes, I’m f-fine!” Alphys said. “Just super nervous you know, I hate making phone calls!”

“But you’re talking on the phone right now!” Papyrus piped up. Undyne punched him.

“Is that P-Papyrus? Hey, Papyrus!” she said. “H-hey, you s-should really watch Mettaton’s show, that way you can see the human make their way all through Hotland and through all the cool puzzles! I know how much you like puzzles!”

“Not the ones in Hotland!” Papyrus said. “The conveyor belts and lasers are the absolute worst! Nyegh!”

“B-but seriously! W-we’re gonna put on the best show ever! It’s gonna be great!” Alphys went on. “J-just watch the show, and don’t worry, I am watching the human’s back s-so nothing bad ever happens to them!”

“I know you’re gonna do great!” Undyne said.

“Bye bye!” Alphys then hung up.

Papyrus folded his arms over his chest. “You should have asked her out on a date.”

“Oh my god, Papyrus, would you stop that?! Now come on, let’s watch that stupid box’s stupid show!”

“Mettaton is most certainly not stupid! I can’t believe you said that!”

The tv clicked on and the two monsters sat at the edge of their seats as they cheered on their human friend from halfway across the kingdom. They screamed and cheered when they deactivated Mettaton’s devastating bombs, Undyne gave a particularly hearty battle cry during the cooking portion, and once the human got to the colored tile maze, they collectively lost their minds.

“OHHHH! OHH! The human knows this one! I trained them myself on its dastardly machinations!” Papyrus cackled gleefully.

“They got this IN THE BAG!” Undyne hollered.
“You have thirty seconds to cross this maze before the firewalls burn you alive!” Mettaton’s bombastic voice boomed. “Good luck!”

And like lightning, the human set off.

“RIGHT RIGHT RIGHT GO RIGHT!” Papyrus screamed. “NO DON’T GO DOWN--WHAT ARE YOU DOING KEEP GOING FORWARD AAAAAAGHHH!”

“They just ran into the electric tile five times you can’t do that ya dumb punk!” Undyne screeched as she yanked on her hair. “DOWN! NO, LEFT! LEFT LEFT GO LEFT!”

“No don’t go left the pirahnas will eat them they need to go—no no no no, up! yes now down—what are you doing?!?!?!”

“Almost there come on you gotta—get the lemon square backtrack and get the lemons!!! yes yes!!! no!! yes!! they did it!!! huraaaagh!!!”

With enough screaming to draw every resident in a five mile vicinity, Undyne and Papyrus leaped onto the couch and bounced around in mad jubilation, hugging and pumping their fists. Undyne then performed her victory suplex, sending Papyrus flying across the room. Dazed, but his spirit nonetheless for wear, he watched as Mettaton drew in on the victorious human. They were smiling quite proudly, hands firmly planted on their hips and chest puffed out.

“Well well well,” Mettaton said dryly. “Well well welly well well wellington. It seems you have passed the treacherous tile traps. But have you forgotten? Stepping on a green tile sounds an alarm which will summon a monster you must fight! And that monster—is me!”

Alphys chimed in to save the day! With the Royal Scientist’s quick wit, she activated a hidden power in the human’s cellphone, allowing them to successfully fend off the bloodthirsty robot!

“Ohhhhh,” Mettaton moaned sarcastically. “How could this be? You have defeated me so easily. You were so much stronger, etc.” He made a vague waving motion as he exited the screen.

“Whatever.”

“Yeah! That’s my punk! Kick his shiny butt!” Undyne cheered. “Man, who knew television was so exciting!”

“There’s nothing they can’t do! They’re unstoppable!” Papyrus beamed. “Aren’t you glad they’re our friend!”

“Haha, you know what?” Undyne grinned. “I really am!”

The Mettaton Luxury Hotel loomed before the tiny human, but that wasn’t what caught their eye. Sure, it was bright and flashy, borderline gaudy, really, with its rich lavish colors and spotlights that could be seen from space. No, what caught their attention was the small squat skeleton casually standing next to the side of the front doors, his usual trickster grin on his face and his eyes filled with a friendly warmth.

The kid smiled as they ran up to him.
“Hey, kiddo,” Sans greeted. “Heard you were heading to the CORE. Wanna grab some dinner with me first?”

The kid eagerly nodded.

“Great, thanks for treating me,” he said with a wink. He walked around to the side of the hotel, waving over his shoulder. “Over here. I know a shortcut.”

The kid dutifully followed them along the dark side alley of the building and in the blink of an eye, they were inexplicably sitting within the extraordinarily fancy hotel restaurant. Gentle piano music played in the background, dim overhead lights bathed the restaurant in a calming blue, and the chorus of clinking dishes and chattering patrons filled the air. Sans sat across from the human, his smile never fading, but his eyes didn’t meet theirs. He kicked his feet on the table, leaning back in his seat as he scratched the back of his head.

“Well, here we are,” Sans said. “So. You’re journey’s almost over, huh?” It was a rhetorical question and Sans didn’t give them time to really respond. “You must really wanna go home.” Now he flickered his gaze over the human, trying to gauge a reaction. Nothing he could tell just from that expression alone, so he kept going. “Hey, I know the feeling, buddo. Though . . . maybe sometimes it’s better to take what’s been given to you. You’ve already got food, drink, friends . . .”

Papyrus, Undyne, Alphys . . . they’ve befriended so many. They gained their trust and loyalty. No small feat, to be sure, but how much longer would the kid keep it up before throwing it all back in their faces?

Sans’ smile flickered for the briefest of seconds.

“Is what you have to do really worth it?”

This time he did pause, and long enough for the kid to answer, if they chose. They didn’t. They kept silent, their face still a mask.

Sans shrugged. “Eh, forget it,” he said nonchalantly. “I’m rooting for you, kid.” Another pause, and he grinned a bit more sincerely. “Hey, let me tell you a story. So I’m a sentry in Snowdin forest, right? I sit out there and watch for humans. Pretty boring if you ask me. Fortunately, deep in the forest, there’s this giant locked door, and it’s perfect for practicing knock-knock jokes. So one day, I’m knocking them out as usual. I knock on the door and say ‘knock-knock.’ And suddenly, from the other side of the door, I hear a woman’s voice. ‘Who’s there?’ she says. Naturally I responded: ‘dishes.’ ‘Dishes who?’ she says. ‘Dishes a really bad joke!’”

He lets himself chuckle at the terrible joke. It even gets a smile from the kid.

“Then she just howls with laughter as if it’s the best joke she’s heard in a million years. So I keep them coming, and she keeps laughing. She’s the best audience I’ve ever had. After a dozen or so, SHE starts knocking back and telling me jokes that are just as bad and funny! Needless to say, she is extremely good. We kept telling joke for hours, until I had to go home. But the next day, I go back, and tell some more bad jokes to her. It’s a thing now. Every day I go to that door and tell knock-knock jokes to a complete stranger. It rules.”

Again, his smile softened, not quite disappearing but not all there either.

“One day, I noticed she wasn’t laughing very much. I asked her what was up. She then told me something strange. She said to me: ‘If a human ever comes through this door, could you please, please promise something? Watch over them, and protect them, will you not?’ Now, I hate making
promises. And I don’t even know this woman’s name. But someone who sincerely likes bad jokes has an integrity you can’t say ‘no’ to.”

Another pause as he let the story sink in. He leaned forward, dropping his feet to the floor and folding his arms on the table. “Do you get what I’m saying?” he asked. “That promise I made to her? You know what would have happened if she hadn’t said anything?” He let out a cold laugh. “Buddy . . .”

“YOU ’D BE DEAD WHERE YOU STAND.”

“I know.”

Sans froze. He jolted upright in his seat, eyes staring hard at the kid. They were grinning.

“I’m happy you made that promise, Sans,” they said through that cheerfully innocent grin. But there was malice behind it. And it sent a cold shiver through San’s entire being. “Would have made this journey a whole lot tougher had you tried to kill me right then and there. But I have nothing to fear from you anymore. Even if you were to go back and do it all over again, by some magical providence perhaps, I sincerely doubt you could beat me.”

They leaned forward, elbows on the table and fingers interlaced, resting their chin on their hands.

“It’s so great we’re friends, isn’t it?” they chided. “I’m sure we’ll find out so much about each other the more time we spend together.”

Their eyes flashed red.

“I look forward to it.”

Without another word, they rose from their seat, and left a stunned and shaken Sans sitting at the table.

His hands trembled. The kid never spoke to them before. Not like that.

And their haunting warning . . . god they were going to go back through the loop. Over and over and over again, uncovering every inch and speck of mystery Sans had hoped to hide away.

But Sans could be pretty determined as well.

With his soul thrumming with resolution, he snapped his fingers and found himself in Alphys’ laboratory. He only had to look around for a minute before finding the reclusive scientists. She started at his arrival, surprised but not put off.

“Oh! H-hi, Sans!” she said. “What brings you by?”

“Hey Al,” he said. “Listen, I know this sounds kinda crazy, but I need a favor from you.”

“Uh, s-sure! Anything!”

“Can I borrow your phone?”

Alphys blinked. “My phone? Something wrong with yours?”

“Outta juice. Guess my phone’s a bit of a lemon.”

Alphys snorted. “Pft, ok, ok, here you go! J-just don’t go sn-snooping around!”
“Eyesockets will remain on task,” Sans grinned. He scrolled through her contacts. “Oh, good, you have Undyne on here.”

Alphys visibly paled. “W-why do you w-wanna call Undyne?”

Sans didn’t answer. He simply let the phone ring, and awaited a response.

“Hey Al!” Undyne greeted as she answered the phone. “What’s up!”

“Oh, Undyne,” Sans said in a high-pitched voice. “Oh, you’re so strooooong and amaaaaazing!”

“What are you doing?!?!?!” Alphys cried. She clawed at Sans, grappling for the phone. “Give it b-back! You’re going to r-ruin everything!”

“Sans,” Undyne chastised. “Really not funny, dude, enough prank calling and give Alphys back her phone.”

“You’re talking to Alphys?” Papyrus’s voice could be heard through Undyne’s end.

“No, it’s your dumb brother doing a prank call on Alphys’ ph—hey, what the heck do you think you’re doing?!”

“GREETINGS! It is I, Undyne!” clearly-not-Undyne said through the phone. “I too would like to confess my unbridled feelings for the love of my life, Alphys!”

“What are you doing?!” Undyne screeched.

“Oh, I am so relieved to hear!” Sans cooed back while he attempted to fend off the desperate lizard. “Because all my life I have loved and admired you from afar!”

“Then our love for one another is mutual! It is settled!” Papyrus said. “Let’s go on a DATE!”

“PAPYRUS YOU SACK OF CRAP I AM GOING TO-!!!” The line went dead.

Sans snapped the phone shut, grinning at Alphys who had now gone red faster than a chameleon. “So looks like you’re going on a date!”

“N-n-no way!” Alphys blubbered. “U-Undyne is way too cool for m-me not to mention I’d mess it all up and I don’t even know what to do on a date oh god Sans I’m going to mess all this up!”

“No you won’t,” Sans assured, patting her shoulder. “Look, I got an idea. If you’re really so worried about messing up your big date with Undyne, maybe you could practice.”

“Practice?” Alphys asked.

“Sure. I bet the kid would be more than happy to help you, right?”

Alphys’ eyes went wide. “T-the human?! You’re asking me to practice dating with the human?!”

“Hey, it worked for Paps,” Sans shrugged.

“Oh g-gosh, I don’t know . . .”

“One way to find out,” Sans said, holding the phone out to her. “Come on, better call them sooner than later, or else they won’t be able to get your call from inside the CORE.
Alphys, shaking and nervous, extended her hand and took the phone, taking an agonizingly long time to dial the child’s cell number. It rang twice before they picked up.

“Are you sure about this?”

“Of course! My skills of fashion are unmatched!” Papyrus held his hands in front of him in a box, framing her. “You will surely woe the heart of your love when she gazes upon your exquisite and fishy beauty!”

Undyne adjusted the leather jacket she now wore, taking a look at herself in the mirror. She looked like one of those wild and fierce biker chicks she occasionally saw on human magazines. She liked it.

“Why am I not surprised you have a leather jacket?” she muttered to herself.

“Seeing as your house burnt to the ground, it was only reasonable I give you my very best clothes to wear on your great important date! Now go! Ride off like a knight in shining armor to fetch your princess!”

He stopped short, eyes sparkling.

“In fact—!”

“No, I am not going to ride you to my date!” Undyne laughed. “Although that sounds so badass! I mean, you’re supposed to keep your shape-shifting quiet, right?”

“Oh dam, you’re right,” Papyrus pouted.

“But hey! You can come along and uh, cheer from the sidelines!”

“Dating spectator! I like it!” Papyrus said. “Now let’s not keep your hot lizard date waiting!”

“COME ON! SAY IT LOUDER AND PROUDER! I AM GREAT! I AM SO GREAT! I AM THE BEST AT WHAT I DO AND WHAT I DO I DO MY BEST!”

Alphys gasped and wheezed for breath, trailing long and far behind the over-enthusiastic skeleton. Papyrus was literally running circles around her; with his much longer legs and just as boundless energy, he could have raced to the palace and back by the time she completed half a lap around the garbage pile.

Alphys doubled over, hands on knees and dripping with sweat. “I . . . I . . . oh god I’m going to die.”

“Eventually! But not today!” Papyrus said cheerfully. “After you’ve had a long and successful and happy life! After you get married to your one true love and have lots of babies! Although I am not sure how that works . . .” Papyrus frowned, rubbing his chin. “Oh well! You’re a scientist! You’ll figure it out!”

Alphys let out a funny snort/wheeze that made her break out into a coughing fit.

“Now come on! One more lap! Come on! Say something good about yourself!” Papyrus cheered.

“At least there’s no one in the Underground worse than me!” Alphys blurted.
Papyrus froze, spinning around and struck with such profound shock it completely threw Alphys off. She quickly attempted to laugh it off.

“Self-deprecating humor!” she waved. “I-it’s ok, I m-make those j-jokes all the time! I g-guess I have a really morbid sense of humor!”

“You don’t really believe that, do you?”

Papyrus’s voice was so soft and gentle and quiet. It was so out of character from the jovial Papyrus she knew that it left Alphys speechless and . . . terrified.

“I-it’s j-just a joke, promise!” she said with a weak laugh. “I . . . I . . .”

And she faltered. Beneath that calculating and piercing gaze that could see right through her, she felt the façade crumple.

She grabbed his hand. “I . . . I . . .” She hung her head. “I’ve done some really awful things,” she said lowly. “I . . . I hurt so many people, trying to do something right. And I . . . I messed up so many times and everything I’ve ever done was a mistake. My life’s nothing but a mistake.” She shook her head, desperately pawing away the tears in her eyes. “I’m s-sorry, I don’t mean to be crying like such a baby, I didn’t mean to dump all this on you.”

“It’s ok,” Papyrus assured, gripping her hand in response. “Do you want to talk about it?”

She sat on the ground, and Papyrus folded his legs under him, sitting right beside her.

“D-do you think . . . do you think someone could be forgiven of something really awful?” she asked. “If someone did something really bad, could they ever truly be forgiven for it?”

“I think so,” Papyrus said. “But they have to really want it. They have to be really sorry, or else they’re not doing it for the right reason. But if they were truly sorry, and truly remorseful for whatever it is that they did, then I think they could be forgiven.”

Alphys couldn’t help but let out a dry laugh, which came out as a hiccup between her sobs. “You’re too nice,” she said. “N-not that being nice is bad, but . . .”

“You think I don’t understand?”

Alphys gave a weak shrug.

“Alphys . . . I’m going to tell you a secret. But you have to promise me that you won’t tell anyone, ok? If you promise me you can keep my secret, then I promise that you can tell me anything and I will keep it secret as well. Is that a deal?”

The scientist looked confused, but slowly she nodded. “Wh-what . . . ok, ok, I promise I won’t tell anyone. What’s this big important secret?”

“The secret is . . . well, a long time ago, there was a monster. And he too did a lot of awful and horrible things. He hurt people. And he did these things because he believed with all his soul it was the right thing to do. Was he sorry for what he did? Did he regret anything? I don’t know. But you know what? If I met him, if he came to me on his knees begging for forgiveness, truly sorry for everything he did . . . I would forgive him.”

Papyrus once again gripped her hand, and removed the glove from his left hand, revealing the plate embedded in his wrist. Alphys let out a tiny gasp.
“Wh-what is this?!” she asked, horrified. “H-how long have you had this?!”

“I received it the very same day I was created,” Papyrus said calmly.

And then, all the pieces came together. The destroyed lab, the burnt notes, the cells, the claw marks on the wall . . . it all made sense! Alphys looked up at Papyrus, shaking.

“You . . . you were in the labs,” she whispered.

He nodded.

“A long, long time ago . . .” he said. “There was a man named Dr. W.D Gaster . . .”

“This is the barrier.”

Asgore stood before the great wall, the great shimmering silver curtain that glistened before them. Light flickered and sparkled through, shining down purples and yellows and pinks. It was impossible to see anything beyond the barrier besides wide swathes of color.

“This is what has kept us locked beneath the mountain for so many years.”

Asgore dared not turn around. Dared not look upon the child that followed him to this terrible room. His soul bled. It cried in anguish for what he was going to do. For what he must do.

“If you have unfinished business, I would advise you to attend to that first,” he said in a quiet rumbling voice. “But if you are ready . . .”

He could feel it. Their determination. Their heart, beating with a power they could not fully comprehend.

They were ready.

Asgore closed his eyes.

“I see.”

He turned. The six collected human souls appeared before him in their capsules, with one final empty capsule resting just to his side.

He could not falter now.

“Human,” he whispered. “It was nice to meet you.” His voice trembled.

“Good-bye.”

His trident appeared before him. With a mighty swing, he launched it at the human. He would not accept mercy. He did not deserve mercy, not after what he had done.


He attacked. He launched attack after attack against the human. Every blow he landed was like a dagger against his own heart. And when the human was left with no choice but to fight, he did not flinch away from the human’s strikes.
They didn’t want to hurt him. But there was only one way this battle could end.

The human was determined, and he was afraid. Afraid of winning. Afraid of taking another young, innocent life.

And with one final swing of the child’s blade, he fell to his knee, defeated. He could feel himself on the verge of turning to dust.

*He deserved this fate.*

“Ah, so this is how it ends,” he said quietly. He closed his eyes. “I remember the day after my son died. The entire underground was devoid of hope. Our future had once again been taken from us. In a fit of anger, I declared war. I said I would destroy any human that came here and use their souls to free us from this terrible prison. I would destroy humanity and let monsters rule the surface. Soon, the people’s hopes returned. My wife, my dear sweet Toriel . . . she was disgusted with my actions. She fled this place, never to be seen again. But truthfully . . .” He lowered his head. “I do not want power. I do not want to hurt anyone. I just wanted everyone to have hope . . . but . . . I cannot do this any longer. I just want to see my wife and my child. Please, young human, this war has gone on long enough. So please, take my soul. Leave this cursed place. Return to the surface. And be happy and free, for all of our sake’s.”

The human stood, trembling before the mighty king. They ran up to Asgore, and threw their arms around his neck.

They refused to take his soul.

Asgore’s eyes went wide. He could not move for several moments.

“You . . . after everything I’ve done to hurt you . . .” he whispered. “You would rather stay down here and suffer, than live happily on the surface?”

The human, with tears in their eyes, smiled, and nodded.

Asgore grinned, enveloping the human in his great arms.

“Human,” he said through tears of happiness. “I promise you, for as long as you live, my wife and I will take good care of you. We can sit in the living room, telling stories. Eating butterscotch pie. We could be like . . . like a family!”

Suddenly, a white ring of pellets encircled the king. His eyes widened in time to see them crashing down on him, and in a flash of blue light, Asgore was gone.

The human jumped away. Wait, blue light . . . ?

A tiny yellow flower burst up from the ground right in front of the human. “You IDIOT!” he screeched gleefully. “Don’t you get it?! In this world it’s kill OR BE KILLED!”

With a maniacal laugh, Flowey consumed the six human souls and the world went dark.

When the human came to, they were face to face with an unthinkable monstrosity. A creature made of nightmares, a being that defied description. Flowey, with the power of six souls, turned the little human into his plaything.

He killed them again and again, setting them on fire with his flames, tearing apart their tiny body.
with lasers and razors, cutting them down with thorny vines and choking flies. Again and again, they died.

But a million deaths would not sate the hellish creature. And for all the human’s efforts, they could not destroy the thing alone.

They cried for help. Six times they called out, and every time . . .

**No one came.**

Flowey’s laugh filled their ears, drowning out their thoughts as his malicious vines choked the breath from their lungs. Flowey lofted the human before him, staring down at them with insane red eyes.

“Did you **REALLY** think you could defeat **ME**?!” he cackled. “I am the **GOD** of this world! And you? You’re **hopeless**! Hopeless and alone! Golly, that’s right!” he taunted. “Your **WORTHLESS** friends can’t save you now. Call for help! I dare you! **CRY INTO THE DARKNESS**! ‘Mommy! Daddy! Somebody help!’ See what good it does you!”

With nothing else left for them to do, they called out one final time for help.

A hesitance.

“But nobody came,” Flowey sang with a twisted grin. “Boy! What a shame! Nobody else is going to get to **SEE YOU DIE**!!!”

The vines choked harder . . . the human could feel their bones creaking from the strain-!

A high pitched whine sounded in the darkness. Suddenly, an explosion of blue light filled their vision, cutting the vine that held them in half. Flowey let out a furious roar.

**“WHO DARES RUIN MY FUN???”**

The human shakily returned to their feet. And standing before them

Was **Sans**!

“Wey, buddy,” Sans smirked with a wink. “Really don’t appreciate you callin’ me worthless. Feel like I could fetch a couple of pennies or something, at least.”

Flowey sputtered in utter rage. **“YOU??! WHAT?!! HOW??!?”**

Sans shrugged nonchalantly. “Eh, didn’t feel right letting the human face such a twisted sicko all on their own. Felt like changing things up a bit, y’know. And pal . . .”

Sans’ eye glowed blue.

“You’re gonna have a **REAL** bad time.”
Your Best Nightmare

Chapter Summary

The final battle between the fallen human and Flowey

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! Long time no see, yeah? Well, there's a very good reason for that! For this chapter, I thought it best to illustrate this amazing fight sequence instead of writing it! I thought it would have a better impact, and convey much more than what I could with only words. As such, progress has been slower than normal but we're almost there! I will update this chapter as the comic sequence progresses, so check back in from time to time!

Or if you wish to follow this chapter's updates more closely, you can find me at ichiwashername-o.tumblr.com!

I'll see you soon!
You really think you two PATHETIC little sons of a guns can defeat me?!

Oh, this is hilarious! You think you two IDIOTS can defeat me?!

I'll rip you to pieces!
YOU THINK YOU CAN WIN
WITH YOUR STUPID WEAK ATTACKS!
YOU HAVEN'T SEEN THIS BEFORE!
I will destroy the both of you!
I will tear you limb from limb from a million times!
Yanno what, you're absolutely right. The kid and I ain't gotta chance at beating you.
I brought some friends!

Ha! This freak's even uglier than you said he'd be!

We're with ya, kid.

Don't worry, I filled 'em in.
And if you EVER

Harm my child again-

YOUR CHILD?!

YOU DARE TO CALL THAT LITTLE BRAT YOUR CHILD?!
You don't even know them!

None of you know anything about them!!!
BUT YOU DON'T CARE

YOU LOVE THAT HUMAN MORE THAN YOU EVER LOVED YOUR OWN SON!
Do not dare...

Lay your hands...
That attack barely did anything!

Are you alright?

Yes.

Thank you, Asgore.
y-you should stay behind m-me!

W-w-wait!! No, STOP!!!
Y-y-you're going to g-get hurt!

Stop right there, fiend! I, The Great Royal Guard Papyrus, will defeat you!

OOF!
IT'S ME!

F-F-FLOWEY???

BRO!!!

No! PAPYRUS!!!

Why don't you show everyone what you really are!

God damn it!
Undyne! Get him out of there!

He's squirming too much! I can't get a clear shot!

Papyrus! No! Please! Stop it!
E-everyone else is so strong! And brave!
A-and they can fight!

What am I even doing here?!

A-a-and I'm just...

Just...

Useless...
NO!
You... could brother

Flowey!
Let me go!

Don't you unleash your power!
Papyrus? Papyrus! Can you hear me?

I... I did it!

Of course you did, you badass!

Way to go!
OW that hurt! My head's still spinning.
INSOLENT BRATS!!!
Yo, Paps. This guy's gonna be a real thorn in our side.

SANS, of all the-

We're gonna need a bit more fire power.
SERIOUS?!?! HA!!!

I ALREADY USED YOU CAN'T USE
YOU'VE BEEN JAPED ON

Although I said it to myself... in the middle of nowhere... with no one else around...

I'm so proud of you, bro!

But of course! My jokes are the epitome of comedy!

So how 'bout it, kid? Ready to give this story one hell of a finale?
Heh. Guess that's a "yes."

Alright.
RRRAAGGGHHH!
Brother? Brother! Can you hear me?

Now...

LET'S KICK SOME GRASS!
SANS! W-w-what are you doing?

I don't-I don't know what to do.

Come on, kid, hop on.

I don't like this idea. But I know it must be done.

Just promise me they won't get hurt. Will you do that for me?

Just like anime?
Don't worry, I'll take good care of the kid.
YES YES! FINALLY! SHOW ME WHAT YOU
HA! IS THAT ALL YOU CAN MUSTER?!

Nice shot, Paps!

Give it up, ya pile of mulch! You can’t win against us!
I can hear all the souls of the world punning together as one!

TO DEFEND YOU!
For years we’ve dreamed of a happy ending!

When we put our hearts together-
WE CAN'T LOSE!

All of us are putting our hearts; all of us share the same hopes and of a happy ending!

And we’re not going to take that from...
Let us show you how determined friends can be!

No. This is important.

You-
I CAN'T BELIEVE HO STUPID YO ALL ARE!
All of your souls, beh!
Ha ha ha . . .
You know, I don’t care about destroying this world anymore.
All your RESETS,
all your running about...
Then everything will finally have an ending that it deserves.
IT’LL BE YOUR ENDING, TOO!
Because no stone can be left unturned . . .

BECAUSE YOU REFUSE TO US GO!
Isn’t that hilariously ironic?

Your DETERMINATION...

The power that allowed you to get this far...
The power that let you SAVE this world countless times before...
Enough of all this! It’s time to finish this!
You told the Lost Soul a bad pun about dragons.

The Lost Soul gave no response. The other Soul hesitated.
Just give up. I did.

I must capture a human!
The Lost Soul furiously wags its tail in glee!
Suddenly, the Lost Souls re
THE SHADOWS CUTTING DEEPER
BLOOD OF THE TRAITOR?
Heh. Nah, I'm rooting for you, kid.
There's still one last person that needs to be saved.
What did you do?

No! NO! I don’t need ANYONE!

I’m doing this ...

You’re the...
because you’re special, Chara.

You’re the only one that understands me. You’re the only one that’s fun to play with anymore.
I’m doing this because I care about you!
I care about you more than anyone else!

I want this to end but I don’t want you to go! I don’t want to say goodbye to someone I like you again.

SO PLEASE!

STOP THIS!

AND JUST LET ME WIN!!!!
STOP IT!!!

PLEASE JUST STOP!!!
Chara...

I'm so alone...

Chara, I...

I...
You know, I can’t remember everything that happens in the RESETs.

Only that they **happen**. Sometimes I remember small pieces, how I felt.

Whether they were happy... or not.

Frisk... I understand why you keep doing this. Why you keep coming back.
You don’t want that to ever stop. I suppose I can’t blame you.

But maybe ... it’s time to let this chapter end. We all know you can’t keep repeating this forever.

And ... if you really are their friend, it’s only the right thing to do.
Well, I have to go now. I can’t stay like this for much longer. Go be with your friends.

Frisk ... take care of them, will you?

Oh, and one more thing. Don’t kill, and don’t be killed, ok?
Frisk! This is all just a bad dream! Please,

Oh! You’re awake! Thank goodness! We were so worried!

Yeah, you punk! You really freaked us out, there!
But, uh... Good to have you back.

Oh, my dear child, the battle took quite a toll on poor Sans.

He has yet to awaken, himself.

BROT wake up...

You can't leave me all alone! You gotta-!
Ugh... ok ok I'm up
I'm up.
And what can I say, bro? I just got done with some monster weed whacking.

Good to be back, heh heh-- ow...

S-Sans! Are you a-alright?

Been better. Just bone-tired is all.

What can I say?
What can I say? It's in my bones.

But I want you to know I am so very proud of you, Sans! I always knew you had it in you!

Don't be, bro.

So ... Sans ... was that your “super-secret super-cool special power?”

Yup. Probably the first and last time you'll ever see it.
Well... in any case...

When you were knocked out, we found out the barrier was gone! No idea how, but it's finally broken! We're **FREE**!
Come on, punks! Last one outside is a rotten Moldsmal! Race ya!

You shall not defeat the Great Royal Guardsman today, Captain Undyne! Nyeh heh heh!

W-wait for me! I'm c-coming!

Well, seems all your friends are very excited to go outside!

Frisk, are ready to
Come on, kid. I gave you one hell of an ending.

I made sure this was the ultimate happy ending.

Kid . . .
Just let us go . . .
I get it.

Someone I you will NEVER satisfied

Heh heh.

Giving us a happy ending...
Mount Ebott was, to say the least, an enigma.

The mountain glistened with morning dew as the sun broke the horizon. But deep beneath the mountain, where the sun’s rays could not pierce, monsters ruled.

Deep beneath their rocky imprisonment, monsters awoke to a new day. A new day to wear smiles despite their depressing predicament, a new day to put on a brave face and tackle the morning with as much enthusiasm as they could muster.

This was no challenge for one monster in particular.

Before the glowing rock crystals began to alight with the coming morn, Papyrus sprang out of his bed with glee. Today was going to be a great day! He could feel it in his bones! Today was the day he was going to capture a human!

He quickly dressed himself, leaped over the banister to the living room downstairs, and rushed to the kitchen to make himself a delicious meal of oatmeal! The special kind with the little dino eggs! As his breakfast cooked, he stole a glance outside to the surrounding town of Snowdin.

It was snowing, a light and flaky snow that would put a sprinkle of powder on top of the already several inches that perpetually covered this section of the Underground. What a lovely morning! Papyrus knew it! Today was going to be a great day!

His breakfast finished cooking and he gobbled it down. It was just beginning to grow brighter in the caves; some monsters would call this “dawn.” Still very early, Papyrus decided to let his brother sleep in for a little bit longer. It seemed for all the sleep Sans got, he never truly looked rested. Besides, there was no harm in letting him sleep in. His sentry duty was still hours away.

In the meantime, it was time for his training session with the great and mighty Captain Undyne!

--

Life was pretty routine in the Underground. It was difficult to tell one day from another when they all looked exactly the same.

Was today Monday or Tuesday? Hell, what month was it? What year? They all just blurred together far too easily.

Sans rolled out of bed. And rolled right onto the floor. The hard thud of his head hitting the floorboards was loud enough to alert his brother Papyrus downstairs. Already Sans could hear his big heavy boots thud up the stairs.

“Sans?” Papyrus called out in his bombastic voice from the other side of the bedroom door. “Are
you finally up?”

Sans stared at himself, his limbs all tangled together in a cocoon of blankets. He struggled to free himself, but alas, he was trapped.

“Nope,” Sans quipped. “I seem to be tied down at the moment.”

“Sans, I swear if that’s another pun . . .” Papyrus said waringly. He opened the door and frowned. “Tied down, indeed.”

“Little help, bro?”

Papyrus grumbled but helped unwrap Sans from his quilted prison. “Now that you’ve successfully escaped the tantalizing entrapment of sweet, sweet sleep—”

“Oh, how I wish I had not.”

“-it’s time for a bright new day! Can you feel it, brother? Today will be the day! Today, I will capture a human! I told Undyne as such this morning during our training, and she agreed to help me apprehend the human when they come!”

“Did she now?” Sans said through a yawn. “Well, best of luck to ya, bro.”

“I don’t need luck, I have skill!” Papyrus said. “Now come on! It’s time for you to get ready for sentry duty! You’re already running late!”

--

Sans dozed at his station, feet kicked up on his stand and leaning back in the stiff wooden chair. He drifted in and out of sleep, keeping an eye on the door.

So far, no dice. Hm.

Sans yawned, stretching his creaky bones. The kid usually showed up by now. Seemed they were taking their sweet time this run around. He frowned.

Come to think of it, when was the last RESET? How many had there even been by now? It was hard for the skeleton to recount; the RESETS always messed with his memory and he didn’t trust himself to keep an accurate count.

Oh well. It didn’t matter. If the kid was gonna romp around the Ruins for a few days longer than usual, it was no skin off Sans’s nose. They’d come sooner or later.

Sans could wait. It’s not like he had anywhere else to be, or anything else to do.

It didn’t matter. It never did.

--

Mount Ebott was, to say the least, an enigma.

Once again, a new day dawned. Once again, monsters rolled out of their beds, putting on a grinning mask, and went about their business.

And in one corner of the expansive caverns, two monsters were engaging in a rather spirited cooking session.
Their cries of triumph and dismay echoed down the stony labyrinth. Fire roared from the stove, vegetables were brutally and mercilessly smashed, noodles were thrown with reckless abandon into a boiling pot.

Papyrus and Undyne stood proudly over their abominable kitchen creation. They did it! They successfully made spaghetti!

Their achievement lasted a whopping five seconds before it spontaneously burst into flames.

But Papyrus was prepared. He whipped out a fire extinguisher from seemingly nowhere and put out the flames.

“A fire extinguisher! Good thinking!” Undyne complimented.

“But of course!” Papyrus said, puffing out his chest. “It’s a necessity for a future Royal Guardsman to be prepared for anything! And . . . well . . . seeing as all of our past training sessions ended with something on fire, I thought it would be a good idea,” he added a bit more sheepishly.

And then came time for the part of the training that Undyne dreaded the most. Papyrus would ask her if he was finally ready. He would ask if it was finally time to be a Royal Guard.

And, like a dozen times before, Undyne would say “not yet.” Again, Undyne would put off telling him the truth; that she could never make him a guard. Again, Undyne found her courage falter and the words die in her throat. How could she bear to break Papyrus’s heart telling him his one dream would never come true? How could she look him in the eye and tell him all his hard work, all his strength and enthusiasm would never be enough?

She couldn’t. So she didn’t.

But today, as she looked into his eyes and once again desperately mustered up the courage to tell him the truth, an idea sprang to her.

“I THINK THIS CONCLUDES OUR COOKING TRAINING AND WE SHOULD MOVE ON TO SOMETHING ELSE!” she yelled. “TOO MUCH OF THE SAME TRAINING MAKES YOU STALE AND WEAK!” Undyne lurched forward and grabbed his skull, pulling him close until his cheekbone was pressed against her own scaly skin. “So we’re moving on to a new training called ‘I’m gonna sneak up and stab ya in the butt!’”

“But I don’t have a butt!” Papyrus protested.

“IRRELEVANT!” Undyne cried, throwing Papyrus through the kitchen with a panicked “NYEH!” “Your ass will be mine, whether or not there is flesh to claim!” She stood above the skeleton, hands planted on her hips as she loomed over him. “So, bone-brain, do you think you can be diligent enough to counter my surprise attacks?!”

“Oh ho ho!” Papyrus said mischievously. “You dare to challenge the Great Papyrus?! You will NEVER sneak up on me!” He sprang to his feet and bolted out the door. “I will be forever diligent! Sleeping with both eye sockets open! Because I don’t have eyelids to begin with! Nyeh heh heh heh!”

Undyne watched him race off like a rocket, her spirits deflating as she watched the skeleton disappear from view.

“Oh man, what am I doing?” she muttered.
But her mood would not be deterred for long. Summoning a spear in hand, she gave him a five-minute head start, and began her chase.

--

In a cozy home in Snowdin, a short squat skeleton sat on an unusually lumpy sofa in front of a TV screen. The TV show was the latest episode from Mettaton’s hit new cooking show, though it was a rerun from earlier that week. Sans didn’t really care for the eccentric robot, but his robotic voice had a strange melody that helped Sans drift in and out of sleep.

Sans paused. This felt … familiar. He could have sworn he saw Mettaton do the exact same thing with those exact same motions as he said those exact same words. Like he saw it happen once before in a dream. Or had he simply done the same thing for so long that he could no longer distinguish real memories from RESET déjà vu?

Well, in any case, Papyrus would be home soon-

The door slammed open with a thunderous boom.

“SANS!”

Speak of the skeleton.

“Hey, bro,” Sans said, barely moving from his spot. “Back from training? How was it?”

“IT WAS GREAT!” Papyrus beamed, leaning over the couch. A grin split his face in half as he vibrated with excitement. “My training is progressing! We have moved on to counter-stealth training!”

Sans paused, trying very hard to keep his expression unchanging. “Really?” This felt . . . familiar . . .

“It is only a matter of time before our training completes, and I become the newest member of the Royal Guard!”

Papyrus kept yammering away, but now Sans was barely listening. No, there was no mistaking it, there had definitely been a RESET. The feeling of déjà vu was too strong to shrug off, and Sans had learned to listen to that feeling. His eyes darkened. Another RESET. Great. He felt his smile diminish.

What was the kid playing at? What were they trying to do? What was the point of all this?

Papyrus, too wrapped up in his own excitement, was completely oblivious to Sans’s mood.

“. . . and you have sentry duties soon!” Papyrus was saying. “Don’t be late, you lazybones!”

Sans started. “Oh. I, uh, I won’t. I’ll be there.”

“I mean it! I’ll be checking up on you!” he warned sternly. Then his mood changed from overbearing motherly to excited like the flip of a light switch. “Today’s the day, Sans! I can feel it! I will capture a human!” And with that, he rushed out the door and went on his way.

Sans sat there for a moment, unmoving. His eyes didn’t really see what was happening on the TV screen, nor did his ears really hear anything. His thoughts were still on the kid.
A blue flash filled the living room and Sans was gone. He was now in the basement, in his own little sanctuary. A long time ago, a million RESETS ago, he thought he could figure out a way to stop them. He thought he could find some way to make them all just end.

A foolish endeavor, but he was wiser now. The lab had fallen into disuse, the scattered notes old and worthless. The remains of an ambitious, senseless project lingering in the corner of the room.

But one constant in his lab was a journal he had been keeping, detailing what he could recount from the RESETS. It took him a small miracle to figure out a way to keep just one single piece of paper from being affected by the time loops, and he had briefly and erroneously thought he was on the edge of a breakthrough.

No such luck. A notebook was as much as he could muster, but it was an immeasurably valuable journal, at least.

Sans opened the journal, reading the last entry before picking up the pen to write a new one in a cryptic cypher.

“Jeeze, kid, why are you torturing us like this?” he muttered.

--

Sans had buried himself in the many scattered papers of his lab. It was anyone’s guess how long he had been down there; time lost all meaning when Sans was zoned out in his own little world. But he was suddenly disrupted when the door to his house burst open with a cacophonous boom.

“SANS!” came Papyrus’s frantic cry.

Sans jumped about half his height into the air, and immediately appeared in the living room.

“What?! What is it bro?!” Sans asked in an equally frantic tone.

“It’s Undyne!” Papyrus cried out. He grabbed Sans by the arms, lifting him into the air to face-height with the taller skeleton, and began to violently shake him.

“OHMYGODSANSYOUHAVETOHLPMEIT’SUNDYNESHEFOUNDMESANSOHGOODLORD” Sans stared in complete silence as his brother screamed mad Gibberish in his face. “What?”

It was starting to come back, and dread crept across every bone.

“It’s Undyne!” Papyrus said insistently. “She saw me!”

Sans blinked dumbly. What on earth was he getting so worked up about? Unless-

Oh.

Oh no.

No no no no . . .

“How you?” Sans repeated weakly. “What do you mean she saw you?”

Papyrus let out a strangled noise of frustration as he dropped him to the ground. “I MEAN—”

Orange magic crackled around his skull as it transformed into a much more beastly form. <<-SHE SAW ME TURN INTO A BLASTER!!>>
Sans felt the entire world freeze.

It all made sense now. The RESETS . . . this must be why. No one had ever discovered their secret before, not in the infinite replays the kid had subjected them to. And this must be the reason for the latest one.

Somehow, someway, the kid found out. And they were going to be very determined to find out everything they could possibly know.

And Sans just felt . . . numb.

“What do we do?!” Papyrus wailed as fat tears streaked down his cheeks.

“. . . heh heh heh.”

Papyrus froze. He had been expecting Sans to be angry, or scared. But he was … laughing?

“Heh. That’s hilarious, bro.”

Sans’s tone was dry, flat, dead. His eyes were dark and his smile was too forced, grinning too wide to be anything other than disturbing. He was laughing, but it was a dark, haunting laugh.

“Brother . . . are you ok?” Papyrus asked timidly.

“Don’t you think it’s funny?” Sans asked between belts of his deadpan laughter. “We tried so hard, I mean, we really tried. We were so careful, y’know. We did everything by the books. And NO ONE found out. But now, despite everything, they did. And now we’re never gonna get out of here. It’s just the funniest thing in the world.”

Papyrus stared, shocked. “Brother, you’re not making any sense. What do you mean, ‘we’re never getting out?’”

The brothers were interrupted with another thunderous crack of the front door being violently blown open.

“SANS HOLY FUCK!” Undyne screamed.

Oh, it was too good. They were all so oblivious. No one could even begin to know the Hell they were just thrown into.

It was too funny.

Sans began to laugh just a little bit harder.

Undyne stared. Papyrus stared. Both were completely caught off guard, their confusion stunning them as they stared at the short skeleton stand there and laugh.

“. . . is he ok?” Undyne asked.

“I . . . I honestly don’t know,” Papyrus said uneasily.

“I . . . I honestly don’t know,” Papyrus said uneasily.

“I’ve never been better!” Sans said as he walked up to Undyne and playfully punched her shoulder. “I’m just peachy.”

More silence followed. Neither Undyne nor Papyrus knew what to even do. They had never seen Sans act like this.
At least, not that either of them could remember.

“Sans . . .” Papyrus began again, very slowly and gently. “I know you must be very upset over what happened—”

“Upset?! Who said I was upset?!” Sans said with a wide, manic grin. “It’s funny, bro! Don’t you see? It’s the best joke in the world! No matter what we do, no matter how hard we try, it’s never gonna matter! There’s no point in even trying! And especially—” He had to take a breath, he had been laughing too hard to speak. “—especially after all those years where I thought we could actually hide it! Of course we never could! I can’t believe I actually thought we could keep this hidden! Of course the kid would find out! You see? Nothing ever matters!”

The only sound in the house was Sans laughing. Just standing there, laughing.

And both Papyrus and Undyne were scared. Legitimately, honest-to-god, scared.

Undyne straightened. The gravity of the situation was finally beginning to dawn on her. She had discovered something very deep and very sacred to the skeleton brothers, and her finding this secret broke Sans. She shoved away her gnawing guilt to address the matter at hand.

“Sans, snap out of it,” she said firmly, gripping Sans’s shoulder and shaking him out of his laughing fit. “I’m really sorry, alright? I really am. I didn’t mean to find out about you guys, but I can promise you, I won’t do anything to compromise your secret—”

“You still don’t get it,” Sans said with that haunting smile. “It doesn’t matter.”

Undyne hesitated. She looked to Papyrus, who looked just as lost.

“Spent so long burying it away, but now I’m gonna relive it again and again and again and again AND AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN. Forever. For as long as they want to. Heh heh heh.”

Sans sauntered out the door, leaving a stunned and worried Papyrus and Undyne in his wake.

“Welp, I’m off to sentry duty. See ya later.”

The door slammed shut behind him.

Sans walked, hands in his pocket, through the town of Snowdin. He walked past all the residents, he walked past the sentries. He walked past Papyrus’s numerous puzzles, and he walked past the pine forests of the town outskirts. He walked until he came upon a massive purple door, carved with the insignia of the Delta Rune.

He had been laughing the whole way.

It really was a great joke.

He knocked on the door. “Knock knock!” he announced.

A kind woman’s voice spoke up. “Who’s there?” she asked. She had been waiting for him, and her faint giggling from behind the door meant she was very eager to hear his joke. She was in luck! It was his best joke by far.

“Knock knock!” he said again.
Another giggle. “Who’s there?” she said again.

“Knock knock!”

“Who’s there?”

“Knock knock!” It was getting harder to talk with how hard he was laughing.

There was a pause. “Um, who’s there?”

“Come on! One more time! Knock knock!”

There was no response this time. Just silence. “My dear friend, are you alright?”

“Aw, don’t ruin the fun just now. You know how it goes!”

“. . . Who’s there?” a very reluctant voice came.

“INFINITE LOOP!” Sans exclaimed. He burst out laughing. “Get it? D’you get it? We’re stuck in an infinite loop and we’re never getting out!”

And Sans laughed and laughed and laughed, even as tears streamed down his face.

It was just. So.

**FUNNY.**

--

Undyne and Papyrus sat on the lumpy green sofa, both cradling mugs of tea in their hands. Undyne held an ocean-blue cup with a fish skeleton, and Papyrus had a black mug with “BAD TO THE BONE” written on it. Two bones in an X floated underneath the words.

An uneasy silence hovered between them. Sans’s words and actions still lingered in their mind, and neither of them wanted to be the one to bring it up. But the longer Undyne sat there in the tortuous silence, the thinner her patience waned. She needed to know what happened, preferably before she grew old and turned to dust where she sat!

“So,” she finally said with a clack of her sharp teeth. “You gonna talk?”

“I-I am! I mean, I will!” Papyrus sputtered as he clutched his mug tighter.

“Well, you’re not.”

“I know, I know!” Papyrus said. He dropped his gaze. “It’s just hard, you know? I thought I was ready for this! I was so ready and so sure to tell you everything! But after what Sans said . . .” His voice lowered almost shamefully. “It just seems so much more complicated than I thought.”

“What’s so complicated about it? He didn’t even try to deny it!”

“And that’s what worries me!” Papyrus said, throwing his arms out and nearly splashing his now-lukewarm tea everywhere. “We’ve never told anyone about this. Undyne, no one knows that we’re shape-shifters. And now you know, and he acts like he doesn’t even care!” Papyrus started fidgeting, glancing at the door. “I’m really worried about him, Undyne.”
Undyne too looked to the door. “Yeah, trust me, I am, too. You think we should try to talk to him?”

“He never talks,” Papyrus said with the faintest hints of anger. “I tried to bring it up to him all the time in the past. I try to ask him about it, or just . . . anything about it at all! And he shrugs me off and avoids the whole thing and never gives me any straight answers!”

Undyne frowned. “That sounds really frustrating.”

“It is,” Papyrus agreed somberly. “Sometimes I don’t even know what I am.”

“Well . . .” Undyne said, tapping her cup. “Wanna know what I think? You can turn into a skeleton dragon on command, and in my books, that makes you the coolest damn monster in the whole Underground!”

Papyrus perked up. “Y-you think so?”

“Well yeah I do!” Undyne said, jumping to her feet. “It’s just like all those cool monsters in the animes! And even those magic girls who can turn into awesome beast to fight bad guys! It’s totally awesome!”

“So?” Papyrus said, eyes sparkling. “Wowie! I never thought about it like that before!”

“Sans doesn’t know what he’s talking about! Why should you even hide something so cool?! You’d be the envy of every monster in the kingdom! Hell, I wish I could turn into some cool fish-dragon-monster thing!”

“But you’re already the coolest fish-monster I know!”

“Ha! You suck-up!” Undyne said, tackling him and gripping him in a headlock.

“Nooooo! Please don’t noogie the skeleton!” Papyrus wailed.

Undyne laughed as she released Papyrus. He looked rattled, but still in good spirits. He was grinning wide, feeling much better already.

“Look, I meant what I said. I can tell this is a really important secret for you guys. And though I don’t know, or understand why you guys are keeping this a secret, I promise not to tell anyone.”

Papyrus’s expression softened into one of sheer gratitude. “Thank you, Undyne. That really means a lot to me, and to Sans, surely.”

Undyne grinned. “Hey, anything for you, ok? We’re friends, aren’t we? That’s what friends do!” She paused, thinking. “Erm, is it ok if I asked some questions?”

“Yes you can ask one! So fire away! Nyeh heh heh!” Papyrus laughed.

Undyne chuckled at that pun. Not even Papyrus could resist them, it seemed. “Well . . . how long have you been able to, uh, shape-shift?”

“Oh, since I was very young!” Papyrus said matter-of-factly. “I gained that ability a few years after I was created.”

“Created?” Undyne raised her eyebrow at the weird choice of words, but put it to the back of her mind for the moment.

“Do you know why Sans would want to keep this such a secret?” she went on.
Papyrus shrugged, his expression and posture growing more reserved. “I don’t know if I can really say. It’s always been like this, you know? And like I said . . .” his eyes darkened, and that frown returned. “Sans doesn’t like to talk about it.”

“Why not?” Undyne pressed.

“I don’t really know,” the skeleton admitted. “Maybe he thinks people will be afraid of us, or people will start asking all sorts of questions. And Sans…”

“-Doesn’t like to talk, yeah, got it,” Undyne finished. She knew Papyrus wasn’t trying to repeat himself on purpose, but man, was that answer getting repetitive.

Papyrus blinked. Huh. He was getting the weirdest sense of déjà vu. “Erm, sorry . . .”

“No, it’s ok, don’t apologize, it’s not your fault.”

“Anyway,” he went on. “I guess the bottom line is I don’t know for sure. Never got a straight answer out of Sans, and it’s always been this way, so . . .” Papyrus trailed off with a shrug.

“Well, that’s bull,” Undyne spat. “You shouldn’t keep it a secret, cuz I still think it’s wicked awesome! Unless . . .” She backtracked, remembering the discomforting sound of breaking and grinding bones as Papyrus first shifted. If it was as painful as it sounded, then she couldn’t blame them. “Does it hurt to turn into that thing?!”

“What?! Of course not!” Papyrus exclaimed, halfway offended. “It’s entirely painless and effortless! I could do it at a moment’s notice! Of course, I, the Great Papyrus, can even change partially if I truly wish to!”

Undyne blinked. A grin grew on her lips. “Is that a challenge?”

“Come again?”

“I dare ya. I dare ya to do it again! Right here, right now!” Undyne said eagerly, balling hands into fists. She was dying to see it again, up close and personal this time!

Papyrus’s face broke into a wide grin. He shared Undyne’s excitement and jumped up from the couch, taking several steps back. He had never been able to show off to anyone before! He waved his arms around him grandly.

“Stand back, dear citizen!” he boomed in a showboating voice. “For I, the Great Papyrus, shall now transform into a grand and magnificent beast, far larger than any monster you have ever seen before!”

“Oh my god, just do it already!” Undyne cried, pounding her fist in the air.

“If you say so!”

Papyrus flexed, and the familiar orange magic surrounded him, crackling and fizzling along the length of his bones. His armor melted away into nothing, and Undyne bore witness to Papyrus’s incredible transformation. He purposely slowed it down so she could see the way his entire body changed. His newly-grown tail snaked behind him, swinging back and forth excitedly, and he fell to all fours, his own eyes level with Undyne’s.

Undyne gaped at the behemoth before her. He was huge; his shoulders stood taller than Undyne herself and Papyrus’s long neck would easily give him a few more feet of height. He looked at her
in anticipation, head slightly cocked.

“Oh my god . . .” Undyne breathed. She jumped forward, scooping up Papyrus’s massive skull in her hands. “THIS IS SO FREAKING COOL!”

Undyne jumped about, examining every part of him, from his sharp fangs to his long claws to his whip-like tail. Like a jackrabbit she hopped all over the place, taking in everything about Papyrus’s draconic form.

Papyrus felt his soul swell with happiness and pride. Undyne was right! There was nothing to be afraid of! This was totally cool! They had been wrong to hide this away for so long-!

A glint of silver caught Undyne’s eye, and she reached for his left forepaw.

She had seen his plate.

Reflexively, Papyrus jerked away, clutching his arm close to his chest as a horrified expression shot across his face. Angry orange magic crackled around him as he returned to his skeleton form.

And like a flood, memories long buried and long tucked away flooded to the surface. Terrible, terrible memories of a more violent time. A time devoid of hope or happiness or warmth. A time of agony.

Undyne recoiled, startled. She saw that look on his face, the way he held his arm, the way this change seemed more . . . chaotic.

“Papyrus?” she called out to him.

Papyrus swallowed hard, doing his best to put forth a reassuring grin. His teeth were sharper than they should be. “Heh heh . . . it’s nothing to worry about!” he said shakily. “J-just some s-silly little thing-”

Undyne was not so easily fooled. “Papyrus,” she pressed.

He hesitated. Then, very slowly and very deliberately, he removed his glove. Eye sockets clenched closed, he held out his arm for her. She took it without a word, her fingers running over the strange plate embedded into his wrist.

“What . . . what the hell is this?” she asked, torn between anger and horror.

And he told her. He told her of his past, he told her of how he had received his plate. He told her everything he knew.

He told her the story of the monster known as Dr. W.D. Gaster.

--

The lady beyond the locked Ruin door didn’t stay very long. Sans spent most of the day with his back leaned up against the door, alone with his thoughts.

More and more of the last RESET was coming back to him. He even remembered Papyrus knowing of their time in the labs. Not a lot of it, but enough. Again, a cruel joke fate had played on him. All that effort to protect his bro from the truth when he already knew.

So everything he had done, everything he had ever done, had been pointless.
It was so hilariously pointless. All there was left to do was laugh at it.

Sans could have sat there for days. But by now, he was half-buried in the snow, and if he sat there any longer, his bones would freeze right to the ground. He briefly debated the pros and cons of such a fate. Despite the compelling arguments for letting himself turn into a bone-cicle, he pushed himself to his feet, brushed the snow off his clothes, and sauntered off to Grillby’s.

Something told him Papyrus and Undyne would be there waiting for him. He also debated going home and avoiding them altogether, but he was going to get chewed out some time or later. Might as well do it in a bar where he could get some drinks.

He opened the door to the restaurant. It was near closing time, and it should have been empty. But Sans’s premonition was correct; right there at the bar, sitting in anticipation, was Undyne and Papyrus. Grillby stood idly behind the bar, washing an already spotless glass.

“Heya,” Sans greeted nonchalantly. “Howzit going?”

“There you are!” Undyne said exasperatedly. “Do you have any idea how long we’ve been waiting for you to show up?”

“Considering you’re the Captain, I’m guessing you were ready to pull an all-knighter,” Sans said with a wink.

“ARE YOU REALLY GOING TO BLOW ME OFF WITH THAT AWFUL PUN?!” Undyne screeched. “I’m not having anymore of your crap today! We’re going to have a talk!”

“But of course, that can wait until we get home!” Papyrus interrupted pointedly. “There’s no need to keep Grillby here! It’s closing time, after all!”

“What’s the big deal? Everyone here knows!” Undyne said, gesturing to Grillby. Grillby paused, looking up from his glass and arching an eyebrow in guarded confusion.

“And I know you know everything there is to know,” Sans said plainly. “I’m sure my bro told you everything. And I have nothing else to add. So there’s that.”

There was a pause as Undyne and Papyrus exchanged looks. Grillby had stopped altogether.

“So you have nothing to add?” Undyne repeated dangerously. “Nothing to say to us, nothing to say to your brother after lying to him after all this time?!”

Sans blinked in surprise. “Never lied about anything.”

“No, you just refused to say anything and leave your brother lost and confused and hurt! Which is somehow even worse! You knew what was going on, you knew what your brother went through, and you refused to talk about it! FOR YEARS! What the FUCK kind of brother are you?!” Undyne roared.

“Undyne!” Papyrus exclaimed, horrified.

Sans winced. “I never intended to lie, but there was no point in talking about it—”

“NO POINT?!” In a flash, Undyne stormed across the bar. Sans was lifted clean off his feet and slammed into the nearest wall, making his teeth rattle. “YOU LIED TO YOUR BROTHER! YOU HID WHO HE WAS FROM HIM FOR DECADES! YOU LEFT YOUR BROTHER
“Undyne, that is enough.”

The voice was cold and commanding, yet so white hot and scalding that it left a cold shiver running up Undyne’s back. Grillby had appeared right behind her, his flames scorching with fury.

“Let him go.”

Wordlessly, she dropped him. Even she, Captain of the Guards, felt cowed under Grillby’s anger. No one dared to challenge the legendary Firestorm General, retired or not. But her anger had been far from extinguished. She looked back to Sans. The skeleton’s expression was impenetrable.

“It wasn’t right,” Undyne said, fists shaking. “You didn’t have the right to keep this from him. What, you thought if you just kept quiet and pretend that it wasn’t there it would just go away?”

Sans looked away.

“Brother . . .” Papyrus finally spoke up, stepping close to him. “I know how much the past haunts and hurts you. I know how difficult it must be to talk about those things. But . . . Sans, I know you’re not so foolish to think that burying it and hiding it away would make you feel better.”

Sans gave a lame shrug. “It just . . . seemed so pointless.”

“Keeping all your worries and troubles to yourself for all this time is not healthy,” Papyrus pressed. “Sans, we’re brothers. We’re supposed to be there to help each other and share burdens, especially something as serious as this. You don’t have to live your life being afraid of this-”

“I’m not afraid.”

There was a silence as Papyrus glared at Sans, the tall skeleton’s jaw tightening.

“You’re lying, and I don’t believe you,” Papyrus said firmly. “I’m not dumb, Sans. It’s alright to be frightened, trust me, I more than understand-”

“You just don’t get it,” Sans snarled. “I’m not afraid of that thing! I’m afraid of . . .” He stopped, letting out a huff of frustration. It was a lie; he was terrified of what he was. But there was something else that scared him even more. “There’s just no point! You can’t understand.”

“Then help me understand!” Papyrus pleaded. “If the beast does not scare you, then what does?”

Sans shook his head. “It doesn’t matter, so just let this go.”

“It matters to me!” Papyrus protested. “Brother, this is something that is clearly troubling you! So let me help! I don’t want to see you hurt.”

“You don’t want to see me hurt?” Sans repeated, raising an eyebrow. Papyrus nodded insistentely. “Oh, if that’s the case, then there is something you can do for me.”

Papyrus brightened. “Anything!”

“Forget this. Just forget everything. Leave the past where it is and don’t bring it up again. Gaster is
gone, he’s *dead*. I can promise you that. But don’t ever mention that beast again, and don’t ever mention him again.”

Papyrus’s expression fell. With a sigh, he straightened. “I can see you are still very upset and troubled. But we do not need to talk now if you are not ready. So I shall wait until you are ready to talk to me.”

“Yeah, well, if that’s everything-”

“No, it’s not,” Undyne snarled. “You don’t get to run away from this again! You owe Papyrus an explanation!”

“What is there to even explain?!” Sans protested. “Some psycho scientist tortured us, then turned us into horrible beasts. He’s dead now. He’s gone, and forgotten, and I don’t wanna talk about it because I’d honestly prefer to just forget everything that happened. And I don’t need anyone asking unnecessary questions and prying their noses into business that does not concern them!”

“I think I get it,” Papyrus said, stopping Undyne from interrupting him again. “It was so easy to just blend in and pretend everything was ok and normal when no one knew about our secret. But now someone knows, and now you’re just constantly reminded of all those terrible days back in the lab. And that must really be hurting you.”

Sans paused. Well, yeah, that hit the nail pretty squarely on the head. And though he didn’t say anything, Papyrus could understand well enough.

“Sans, I really am sorry I hurt you like this. I didn’t mean for anyone to find out. And I always understood how much everything that had happened still haunts you. But I still believe that hiding it is not the best answer. With that said,” Papyrus said before Sans could interject. “I will be willing to continue to keep this quiet for your sake. There’s no reason for us to tell the entire Underground about this! We can keep this between the three of us!”

“Four.”

Papyrus and Undyne jumped. Grillby had been so quiet and standing behind them, they forgot the fire monster was even there.

“Oh, right! Four! How could I forget about you, Grillby!” Papyrus laughed. He then looked pleadingly at Undyne. She huffed.

“Fine! Like I said before, I won’t tell anyone, promise!” She pointed at Sans. “But you still got some serious issues you need to work out!”

--

Undyne was still fuming about everything the next day. She didn’t like how guarded Sans was, or how little he cared how his own evasion was hurting Papyrus. Yeah, ok, he was hurting from the messed up shit he endured in the past, but it was hardly right for him to continue burying everything and leaving his brother in the dark. He saw no point in talking about what happened, but Undyne didn’t see it that way.

God, Sans needed some serious therapy.

And even though Sans told her that the sick monster named Gaster was dead and gone, she was still brimming with righteous justice and fury. She felt like she had to do *something*! It burned a hole in her soul to know such a disgusting monster existed, and that he could be forgotten and released from
his sins so easily. It was far too merciful. He needed to pay for what he did, he should be remembered so every monster could spit on his memory!

She knew what she needed to do. She was going to visit the labs tomorrow.

*Something* had to have survived! There was no way every scrap of him could just vanish!

But the only thing she would find is the medal of a general.

--

“Hey, Paps, I’ve been thinking.”

Two monsters were sprawled on the rocky cavernous floor of Waterfall. Stalactites hanged from the ceiling above them, sparkling with water and glowing rocks. Both Undyne and Papyrus were gasping for breath, dripping with sweat after one hell of a training session. Papyrus rolled onto his side, letting out a low groan as he turned his massive muzzle in her direction.

She grinned. Yeah, didn’t matter how many times she saw Papyrus shift, it was damn cool every time.

“You know what? I think you are ready to become a Royal Guard!”

Papyrus jerked back, his eyes going wide. His jaw dropped open.

“You heard me, you bonehead!” Undyne laughed. “I am making you an official Royal Guard!”

Immediately he jumped to his feet, tail wagging at a hundred miles an hour. A string of barks and whines streamed from his mouth, his tone frenzied. He raced back and forth, spinning in excited circles.

Undyne laughed. “Alright, calm down before you make yourself puke!”

Papyrus roared loudly.

“CALM DOWN?!” he exclaimed, shifting to his skeleton form in a burst of magic. “UNDYNE!! THIS IS THE GREATEST DAY OF MY LIFE!!! HOW CAN I BE CALM?!!”

He raced up to her, slamming his hands on her shoulders. “Are you serious?! Truly, truly serious?! Are you really going to make me a Royal Guard?!”

“Serious as a heart attack!” she reassured. “You are ready!”

“Oh my goodness!” he hollered, jumping in the air and hooting loudly. “Yes! Yes! My lifelong dream, finally realized! Oh, I am so excited I think I’m going to puke! This is WONDERFUL! I won’t let you down! I swear it! I will be the best, the greatest Royal Guard EVER!”

“I have no doubt about that!”

“I need to tell Sans right away!” He could barely stay still, he was so giddy with excitement. “I—I—I need to tell EVERYONE! Undyne! Thank you thank you *thank you*!!!”

He ran up to her, gave an affectionate head-butt, and sped off faster than a blink of an eye, his cheers and laugher ringing loud and clear. Undyne herself couldn’t stop beaming.
Things were going to be better around here, she was going to make sure of that. But now, she had to go inform Asgore of their newest addition to their ranks! She strolled through Waterfall to the docks, hoping to catch a boat to get as close to the Capital as she could. The less time she spent in Hotland, the better. Hotland sucked!

She didn’t have to wait very long for that familiar hooded figure to approach. She climbed onto the boat, directed the ferry to the Capital, and away they went.

“Tra la la, be sure to rub the belly of a good dog 1,000 times for good luck. Tra la la.”

In moments, she was on that familiar winding path right up to the castle, her own soul thrumming with excitement.

“You’re making a mistake.”

Undyne jumped in the air, screeching. She spun around, raining down a storm of spears.

Sans casually stepped out of the way.

“Jeeze, someone’s jumpy,” Sans chided.

“Angel above, you piece of crap, don’t do that!” Undyne cried.

“Force of habit.”

Undyne huffed. “What do you want?”

“I’m saying, you’re making a mistake making my brother a guard,” Sans said, growing serious. “You know he doesn’t have it in him.”

“No, I definitely think he does,” Undyne said confidently. “He is the toughest monster I have ever met! And he’s passionate!”

“And the humans will tear him to pieces,” Sans said calmly. “Face it. You’re only making him a guard because you found out about his shape-shifting powers.”

“What?! That’s not true!”

“I think it is,” Sans said. His smile was beginning to wane. “If you never found out, you would have never made him a guard. Be honest with yourself.”

Undyne bit her lip. “Alright. Maybe it was the final straw to convince me to make him a guard, but you’re still wrong. Papyrus’s shape-shifting will give him the edge he needs to fight against any offending humans! One look at him, and they’ll run in terror! No one stands a chance against him!”

“Papyrus is still the same goofy, naïve skeleton he has always been, shape-shifter or not,” Sans said. “No matter what he looks like, he’ll still get ripped to little smiling pieces if he were to ever find himself in a fight.”

“I am not convinced,” Undyne said. “I get it, you worry about your brother. You want him to be safe, and if it makes you feel better, I’ll keep my eye on him, ok? I’ll make sure he doesn’t get in over his head. But he’s ready Sans, I believe in him! He’s fully committed to this, too. He’s done hiding his full potential! He’s done hiding what he really is! When the time comes, he’s not gonna hold back! He’ll show those humans what he really is!”

Sans wish he could say he was surprised. But he anticipated as such. Papyrus could be stubborn in
his own right, and Undyne doubly so. The secret was out, and Papyrus wasn’t content to leave it buried, despite Sans’s warning.

Sans didn’t say anything, he just looked at her with that constantly smiling, unwavering expression. It was a very unsettling expression that made Undyne’s skin crawl.

“I just hope you know what you’re doing,” Sans said.

--

There was a grand celebration at the king’s castle to celebrate Papyrus becoming the newest member of the Royal Guard. All the sentries and other guardsmen had been there, from the massive pack of the Snowdin dogs, to the guards who patrolled the CORE and castle. Papyrus was beaming with pride and excitement, and the crowds shared his enthusiasm and good cheer.

Sans was there, watching the whole ceremony with numb detachment. He kept smiling, trying to be proud of his brother, but faced with a grim reality.

When Papyrus stood there, reciting his vows, Sans genuinely felt proud for his brother. He really was one cool, tough dude. Papyrus deserved to be happy, didn’t he?

After the ceremony, Papyrus came sprinting up to Sans, sweeping him up in a hug. Papyrus was on top of the world! His dream was finally realized! He was finally a guard, and nothing could ruin this day!

Sans let himself smile, really smile. Yeah, his bro definitely deserved this. To hell with the kid, they were happy right now, and he wasn’t going to take that away from his brother.

In hindsight, did it really matter if his brother was a guard or not? The kid would kill him whenever they damn well felt like it, guard or not. He supposed his protest of Papyrus becoming a guard went unfounded.

So why not at least let his brother live out his dream before the kid came barreling through and killing everything?

But he knew it couldn’t last forever. Especially not when a certain yellow flower was now privy to their secret, as well.

--

Several days later, the doors to the Ruins opened for the first time in years.
“Human, don’t you know how to greet a new pal? Turn around and shake my hand.”

The human complied. The shadowy figure extended its hand. The human took it.

A slow, wet, sloppy fart punctuated the otherwise hushed winter air.


He eyed the human, his otherwise friendly face betraying nothing as he kept talking. The kid wasn’t covered with dust, no. They held an old splintered stick in their hands, their sleeves were dirty with mud and scuffed with age and wear, but no dust. Just the frost of snowfall.

Hm.

Sans didn’t make any sort of assumptions what was going on this go-around. So he’d play it casual. He directed them behind a lamp, and they complied. They wandered through Snowdin, talking to all the residents and poking at all the snow poffs. They played, petted, and romped with the Guard Dogs.

They talked to Sans every chance they got. He kept it short and delightfully cryptic, underlined with the occasional pun.

They looked impatient.

They fought with Papyrus. Although “fought” was a generous term; all they did was stand there and flirt, flustering the poor Royal Guard-skeleton. When the fight concluded, Papyrus declared he had no choice but to date the human.

And much to Papyrus’s delighted dismay, it went extremely well, but he ended up friendzoning the poor human so hard.

The human walked out of the house, unsatisfied. Of course, who wouldn’t be, getting turned down by the coolest skeleton in the Underground?

_They found absolutely nothing different._

--

RESET

--

They fought Papyrus, and good lord, did they fight. They fought with everything they had, they pulled no punches. They gave it their all and Papyrus enthusiastically returned the favor. And just as Sans was starting to get worried, standing on the edge of his toes as his brother was just one blow away from being nothing more than dust, the human showed them MERCY.

Impressed by the human’s strength and prowess in battle, Papyrus decided the next logical course of action was to go on a date with the human. They had a great time. They talked about pirates and cars and fashion and engaged in a very intense dating simulation.
But at the end of it all, Papyrus decided it was best if they were just friends. The human left, feeling unsatisfied. But who wouldn’t be, getting friendzoned by the Great Papyrus?

Nothing was different. They had to keep going.

They wandered through Waterfall. They evaded Undyne, they talked with the Monster Kid and Gerson, they visited Temmie Village, they played the piano and recovered the mysterious artifact, only for an annoying dog to steal it. But no matter how hard or how deep they pried

Nothing was different.

At least, until they fought the Captain herself.

The human readied themselves. This was one of the few things that was really different from the original timeline! They fought Undyne, and when the Captain pinged their SOUL red, they fled. They ran until Undyne caught them, and just as they were about to make it to Hotlands-

Undyne rose her hands, and a wall of spears blocked their path. The human tried to hide their grin.

“You’ve put up a hell of a fight! I suppose I should congratulate you!” Undyne mocked, her hands on her hips. “But your path ends here! I will not let you best me, and if you think you can beat me, you are sorely mistaken!” She let out a familiar toothy grin. “Because I’ve got one last trick up my sleeve! Prepare to meet your devastation, human! Prepare yourself to meet the most terrifying monster in the Underground! Prepare to meet my partner in arms, and your DOOM!”

The human snickered as nothing happened. Undyne poised, but no one came to her call. She looked around, aggravated.

Undyne loudly cleared her throat. “I said,” she said. “Prepare to meet my partner in arms and your DOOM!”

Still nothing. The human was practically dancing with anticipation.

Undyne hissed. “You numbskull!” she said in a very loud and hoarse whisper. “That’s your freaking cue!”

<<Oh, whoops! Sorry, here I come!>>

And then Papyrus, unrecognizable in his skeletal dragon form, leaped onto the bridge, his jaws splitting open to unleash an earth shattering roar. The human pumped their fist. There we go! Now, time to see what these two could really do!

Both Undyne and Papyrus attacked, and the human did so in turn. They reminded themselves they SAVED just before this fight. So . . . it wouldn’t hurt anyone if they killed one of them, just to see what would happen, right? They’d just RESET, be back on their Pacifist route, and no one would be any wiser. Everyone would still be alive and no one would ever know.

There had to be something different, and they had to know what it was!

The human bit their lip. They chose Papyrus first. It’s not like they hated the skeleton or anything. In fact, they were rather fond of the cheerful guy. He was their favorite character! It was nothing personal.

They brought down their knife, landing a solid blow on the skeleton. Papyrus let out a pained yowl.
They winced. That sound was just like they kicked a poor puppy. They felt a bit bad about that. But this fight would be over soon.

Undyne ground her teeth, beat her chest with her fist, and her attack increased dramatically. The human recoiled, caught off guard by the sudden ferocity in the captain’s attacks. And Papyrus wasn’t going to let them off easy, either. He kept attacking them with the same intensity as before.

The human struck Papyrus once more. Another howl echoed through the caverns.

“YOU LEAVE HIM ALONE, YOU LITTLE BRAT!” Undyne cried, throwing a torrent of spears at the human. “I’LL FLAY YOU ALIVE!”

Again, her attack increased. The battle was getting significantly more difficult, far more difficult than her usual battle, and that was factoring in Papyrus’s added strength! This was nearly as difficult as the Genocide fight!

One more blow-

They struck true.

Everything seemed to pause as the blow set in. Papyrus stared, eyes wide, stunned, as if he was trying to understand what happened. Undyne looked on, her face contorted in horror.

Papyrus’s form shifted and his edges became hazy as his bones slowly deteriorated into dust. And his head clattered to the floor, decapitated from his body.

<<Alas, poor Papyrus!>> he wailed.

His body then disappeared in a cloud of dust.

<<Well, at least I still have my head!>>

He only lasted for a moment longer before his head too crumbled to dust on the cold wet rocky ground.

The human’s jaw dropped. No. NO. That couldn’t be it! It . . . it was still the same!

Undyne howled. She screamed with such desperate heart-broken rage that the Echo flowers chorused her cries. The spears came like a blizzard.

“YOU!” she seethed. There was no humor in her eye, her rage was cold and subdued, silent and furious. There were no more quips, no more taunts, just unbridled fury as she unleashed everything she had. The spears were coming faster, in greater numbers, and they cut deep. The human hissed, their health dwindling under Undyne’s volley. They dodged, they tried to see if it was possible to show Undyne MERCY-

But they had run out of healing items, and a spear struck their heart. Blackness enveloped them.

--

BUT THEY REMAINED DETERMINED.

--

They were back at the bridge, fighting only Undyne. They sighed. Did they really have to do that
whole fight over again? Ugh. So be it.

They kept fighting Undyne. They ran as soon as they could. And once their path was blocked, Papyrus once again came to the captain’s side.

The human steeled themselves. They were going to have to be very conservative with their items and their health.

Once again, they felled Papyrus. Once again, Undyne’s anguished cries echoed the caverns.

The human tried everything. They tried to plead. They tried to taunt. They could no longer flee. MERCY was no longer an option. They could not end the fight killing only one of them.

In hindsight, it made sense. In every other battle where they fought two monsters at once, it was impossible to let one monster live while they killed the other. This fight was proving to be no different.

So they attacked Undyne, landing blow after blow. They sliced her, the knife cutting deep, until her health plunged to zero.

And . . . even so . . . despite everything . . . Undyne refused to fall.

She hung on the precipice of death, her fiery determination alone keeping her alive long after she should have expired.

“I will not die!” she cried out, even as her form began to deteriorate. Even as her form faded and her entire body began to turn to dust. “I WILL NOT DIE!”

The human struck, blow after blow. And still, Undyne fought. But her attacks were getting weaker. She could barely conjure a single spear. And still, she stood. She refused.

“No! NO! Alphys, Asgore . . . Papyrus! Everyone is counting on me to protect them!” She yelled out a resounding defiant cry as she once again attacked the human. “HUMAN! In the name of everyone’s hopes and dreams, I WILL DEFEAT YOU!”

The human deeply admired Undyne, they really did. And even after all this time, after all those RESET's, this was one of the few deaths that truly broke their heart. Seeing the captain hang on with such tenacity, refusing to give in, despite all odds . . .

It was admirable.

Even as her body threatened to crumple to dust, she kept fighting as if nothing was wrong. She smiled right in the human’s face. Even when the knife came down, again and again.

“You’re going to have to try harder than that!”

So the human did. The knife came down. Again and again.

“S-see how strong we are when we believe in ourselves?!” Undyne rallied. She refused to let her fading body stop her. Even as her attacks grew weaker and weaker, slower and slower, her spears coming in fewer and fewer numbers . . .

And she laughed.

The human struck another blow. Undyne flinched, her head hanging low.
“... I won’t... give up...” she gasped.

The human delivered one final blow. Undyne could hold on no longer.

But still, she refused.

“No!” she screamed. Her body distorted. “NO! I won’t die!” Her voice became alien as her entire body began to melt away. “I WON’T DIE! I WON’T DIE! I WON’T-!... I...!”

The human could only watch.

“Asgore...” Undyne called out. Her voice was weak and fragmented. She reached forward with a hand that no longer looked anything like a hand. “Papyrus...” Her teeth clenched, her eye stared at nothing as her form sunk into the ground. “A L P H Y S...”

For all her strength, for all her determination, Undyne could not survive.

The human showed them the only mercy they could, and ended her life right then and there, instead of letting her continue to suffer in such a grisly state.

And her dust joined Papyrus’s.

They wiped at their eye. That was still just as sad and tragic as the first time.

But it was no matter. With a single LOAD, she and Papyrus would be right back, like nothing ever happened!

--

**RESET**

--

They once again stood at the bridge, Undyne towering above them. And they began to fight. But still, their curiosity was not sated. They wondered, no, they *had* to know...

What would happen if they killed *Undyne*?

The fight progressed as usual. But now, with Papyrus in the fray, they focused solely on the captain. Their weapon cut deep, and the captain winced, but smiled.

“Not bad!” the captain jeered. “How about THIS?!” Undyne increased her attack, throwing more and more spears at the human. And Papyrus winced with every blow the human landed on the defiant captain, his voice whimpering as he watched Undyne’s health plunge dangerously low.

“COME ON!” Undyne continued to taunt the human. The spears came, faster and faster. Papyrus kept up his attack with his claws and teeth.

One more blow. One more final attack, and Undyne would fall.

They raised their knife, and brought it down. They felt it connect!

Everything stopped.

Their blow landed.
But not on the Captain.

On Papyrus!

Papyrus stood before Undyne, between her and the human. The blow that landed upon him was enough to rend him to dust. No one moved. No one—not even the human!—could believe it!

“P-Papyrus!” Undyne gasped.

Papyrus’s form shifted and he was a skeleton again, standing there with a big goofy grin . . . and a knife in his chest.

“Tis b-but a scratch!” he wheezed. “N-nothing t-to worry about!” He fell to his knee, choking out one final laugh. “Nyeh! Heh! . . . Heh . . . heh . . .”

And then he was nothing more than a pile of dust.

There was a terrible pause as both the human and Undyne stared at the skeleton’s remains. The human couldn’t believe it. Did that mean it was impossible to kill Undyne?

Undyne screeched in rage and grief. The captain attacked relentlessly, mercilessly, her eyes wide and wild with pain. She had watched her friend cut down right in front of her! After she promised—!

That blow was meant for her! She was supposed to—! Not Papyrus!

“I promised I would protect him!” she seethed between clenched teeth. “I promised Sans! I promised . . . I promised I would watch over him!”

Her attack increased. The human tried to once again show Undyne MERCY, but again, nothing would work.

Undyne bowed her head, her molten rage consuming her. “Papyrus . . . who I knew was too goofy and naïve, who I knew could never hurt anyone . . .” Bitter tears stung her eyes. “I knew, and still . . .”

She choked back a sob.

Sans had been right.

“I should have never made him a Royal Guard.”

Her heart hardened.

“And for that, human . . . I’LL KILL YOU WHERE YOU STAND!”

MERCY was not an option.

And Undyne’s dust joined Papyrus’s, scattering in the howling wind.

--

RESET

--

They continued along their Pacifist route. They SPARED both Undyne and Papyrus, they tricked
Papyrus into subduing the Captain, and then later came over to her fishy little house for tea, where in the midst of a burning house, they became friends. With that settled, they continued onwards.

So at least that one bit was different. Although it was very curious. They had tried a few times to see if they could leave Papyrus alive and kill only Undyne, but the same thing happened again and again: Papyrus would step in at the last possible second and take the blow for himself.

How very Papyrus.

They made their way through Hotlands, through the lab and through all of Mettaton’s annoying hijinks, until they finally, finally ended up at the Golden Halls.

Sans was waiting for them. The human greeted them with a smile.

There was one thing they needed from Sans. One final place they had not been able to check.

And as Sans spoke, they gave him a nod, and a knowing look. The skeleton paused.

“Wait a second,” he said. “That look on your face . . . you’ve already heard my spiel, haven’t you?” The human nodded. “I suspected something like this. You always act like you know what’s going to happen, like you’ve seen it all before. So, I have a request for you.”

He looked up at the human, his eyes black and staring right through the human.

“ENOUGH.”

The human flinched backwards, blinking.

Sans let out a laugh. “Yeah, that expression you’re wearing. It’s pretty unmistakable. You’ve seen this all before. Like, a lot.” Sans cocked his head. “And honestly, even if I don’t know exactly how many times you’ve been here, how many times you’ve heard me say the same thing over and over, it’s a bit frustrating knowing you’re still here.”

He shrugged.

“Welp. I don’t got anything else to say. Later, ya freak.”

And he was gone.

The human jumped, shouting out to the skeleton. Wait! The key!

They clenched their fist. They had been to Sans’ room a handful of times, they were always careful to scour every inch of both the room and the lab for any clues, but they only found a few curious items that indicated Sans had been involved with the Labs. But nothing more solid than that. But they knew if they could get in there now, knowing the brothers’ true forms, they could find something else!

But Sans wouldn’t give them the key! How frustrating. They sat there, thinking. They wracked their memory for every little detail in that secret room. And the more they thought . . . no, there hadn’t been anything in there that could give them more of a clue to the brothers’ secret. Just those diagrams of the DT extractor, which looked all too similar to the Blasters, and to the draconic secondary forms. But nothing to indicate how the skeleton brothers got that power, or why it had been hidden so carefully.

They knew one thing, though. They weren’t going to get anymore answers from this timeline.
It was time to try the others.

---

RESET

---

They suspected things wouldn’t be too different if they performed any combination of deaths with Toriel, Mettaton, Asgore, or really anyone but Undyne and Papyrus. And they were right. The Neutral runs were relatively unchanged. At least, until they finally decided it was time to see what would happen if they killed Papyrus in Snowdin.

His fight nor his death were any different, despite him being a guard. Although they noticed that when they went to Grillby’s afterwards, it was completely dead. There was no one there. Everyone, all the dogs, all the regulars, were just gone. The human raised an eyebrow. They approached the bar, looking around.

Grillby, the bartender himself, emerged from the back room. He was expressionless, but his fire crackled dangerously. Wordlessly, he indicated that the bar was closed.

The human then found themselves outside. The bar had now been locked.

Huh. That was new. As they explored the rest of Snowdin, they found that the rest of the town was eerily silent and empty. The remaining residents were curt and short with the human. Businesses were closed. The Inn had a sign saying “TEMPORARILY CLOSED FOR BEREAVEMENT.”

Their heart ached. Man, this town really liked Papyrus. They took his death pretty hard. The whole town just . . . shut down.

They kept going. Sans was still gone. And they wouldn’t find him until they reached the Golden Hallway.

Waterfall was the same. They still had to evade Undyne, they still explored Temmie Village and talked to Gerson. They skipped all those unnecessary puzzles; they weren’t worth the time.

They met Undyne at the mountain. She stood at its precipice, her back to the human.

“Seven,” she began. “Seven human souls, and King Asgore will become a god. Six.” She turned her head to look over her shoulder down at the human. “That’s how many we’ve collected thus far. Understand?” She turned around fully, staring down beneath the hellish visage of her helm.

“Through your seventh and final soul, this world will be transformed. First, however, as is customary for those who make it this far, I shall tell you the tragic tale of our people. It all started, long ago . . .”

There was a long pause.

Undyne once again turned her back on the human.

“Forget it.” Her voice seethed with hatred and anger. She removed her helm. Her eye didn’t meet the human’s. “Look. Papyrus didn’t come to his meeting today. Say what you want about him. He’s weird, he’s naïve, he’s self-absorbed, but Papyrus has NEVER missed a meeting. And no matter what time you call him on the phone, night, day, afternoon, morning . . . he ALWAYS answers within the first two rings.”
Once again, silence, as Undyne stared off into the distance.

“But now he’s gone. And his brother isn’t around, either.” She finally looked at the human, her yellow eye piercing, cold and furious, filled with that same familiar grief and silent anger.
“What did you do to him?” Her voice was like ice. “What did you **DO TO HIM?**” Her fists shook. “Papyrus, who I trained every day, who I made a Royal Guard, even though I knew he was too goofy to ever hurt anyone . . . even thought I promised him . . .”

She became very still. Resolution filled her being as she stared down at the human.

“Go ahead. Prepare however you want. But when you step forward, I will **KILL** you.”

The human was filled with determination. They stepped forward, and they began to fight. With Papyrus no longer here to lend his aid, the fight was just the same. And now they were finally able to SPARE Undyne. They led her to Hotlands, where she collapsed from the heat. They gave her water to rejuvenate her. She rose back to her feet, staring down at the human. Her rage was more than palpable. Every fiber of her being wanted to slaughter the human where they stood.

*They killed Papyrus.*

*They killed him.*

Undyne shook. But she could barely stand. She barely had any strength left in her, especially in such a sweltering area. She had no choice but to retreat. Like a coward, she ran home.

She had failed him. She promised him . . . she promised she’d watch out for him. She promised . . . but now he was gone. The human had cut him down. Goofy, naïve Papyrus . . .

Undyne swore to herself she’d wreak havoc on the human if they ever dared showed their face again. They were rotten. All of them. All the humans deserved to be wiped off the face of the earth. Every single last one of them. And Undyne would see that not a single human remained once they breached the surface.

And the first human she would kill would be that brat of a child.

--

This was getting tedious.

The human had long lost count of how many variations they’ve done of the Neutral Endings. They killed countless combinations of monsters, they even went so far to kill all but one, or kill only one, just to see what would happen. But the differences were miniscule and insignificant. There wasn’t anything that helped them reveal more of the skeleton brothers’ shape-shifting powers. There wasn’t a single phone conversation they had with Undyne and Papyrus that uncovered their secret.

They were starting to get frustrated.
Fine. They gave it a shot. They played it peacefully, they played it not-so-peacefully.

Time for the third and final option.

*There had to be something.*

--

**RESET**

--

It’s not like they *enjoyed* killing. They didn’t get any sort of sick satisfaction from the act, really. It was just curiosity, plain and simple. They could always go back and fix everything. But they just... they couldn’t leave things alone! They had to know the truth, whatever it was.

So they stalked their way through the Underground. They cut down any and all monsters in their path. Their hand wavered as they felled Toriel with a single strike. But they had done this before so many times. Her final haunting words were beginning to lose its affect.

They exited the ruins, and into Snowdin. There, they continued their rampage.

The guard dogs fell. The residents fell. And when they finally reached the town, it was as silent and empty as a crypt.

They approached Papyrus. He stood before them in his shining armor, standing resolutely before them.

“Halt, human!” he commanded.

The human stepped forward.

“Hey! Quit moving when I’m talking to you!” he said. “I, the Great Royal Guard Papyrus, have some things to say. First: you’re a freaking weirdo! Not only do you not like puzzles, but the way you shamble about from place to place, the way your hands are always covered in a dusty powder. It feels like your life is going down a dangerous path.”

The human narrowed their eyes. Was he really going to say the same damn speech?!

“However! I, the Great Royal Guard Papyrus, see great potential within you! Everyone can be a great person if they just try! I mean, just look at me! I am a great and fantastic Royal Guard, and I barely had to try at all! Nyeh heh heh heh!”

The human stepped closer.

“Hey, quit moving!” Papyrus scolded yet again. “This is exactly what I am talking about! Human! I think you are in need of guidance! I know it is my duty as a Royal Guard to capture any humans that I may find, but I see now I have a duty to something much greater, and much more important! And that is you, human!” The human blinked. “I see what you really need is not to be captured! What you need is a friend! Someone to keep you on the straight and narrow! So worry not! I, Papyrus, will gladly be your friend and tutor! I will turn your life right around!”

The human hesitated. But they knew what had to be done. They stepped closer.

“I see you are approaching,” he said. “Are you offering a hug of acceptance? Wowie! My lessons are already working!”
The human felt their heart churn. They always liked Papyrus . . .

“I, Papyrus, welcome you with open arms!”

And when they engaged in their fight, Papyrus immediately spared them. Like he always had.

The human raised their weapon. They hesitated.

No, wait . . . they didn’t have to kill him now! They could still hang out! Yeah, that’s right! On their date, after an aborted Genocide, they hinted at their true secret attack! Maybe if they hung out again . . .

The human showed Papyrus MERCY.

Papyrus beamed. “Wowie! You did it!” he exclaimed. He raced forward and swept the human up in his arms for a fierce bear hug. “You didn’t do a violence! To be honest, I was a little afraid, but you’re already becoming a great person! I’m so proud of you that I could cry! . . . wait, I’m a guard! I’m supposed to capture you! Well, forget all that, then! I just want you to be the best person you can be! So let’s let bybones be bybones. I’ll be at home being a cool friend! Feel free to come by and hang out!”

He then went on his way home, and the human eagerly followed after them. They went on their hang out with Papyrus, following him up to his room. They went to the box of bones and curiously asked about it. Papyrus laughed.

“I am relieved you chose not to do a violence!” he said. “Otherwise, I would have had no choice but to use my special attack and blast you—” He stopped, his eye sockets going wide. “Wait! My special attack! Where did it go?!”

A little white god popped out of the box, a bone clenched in its jaws, and it shot out of the room.

“Darn it! Stupid dog!” Papyrus cursed.

The human gestured back to the box, prying into the matter. Special attack? Papyrus grinned.

“I can’t tell you about my special attack! Otherwise, it won’t be special! Nyeh heh heh heh!”

The human scowled. This had been a bust.

--

RESET

--

“I, Papyrus, welcome you with open arms!”

The human sighed. He was sparing them, right as the fight started. But they were already this far down the path. Time to see where it all went.

He fell in a single blow.

“W-well, that’s not what I expected to happen,” he said in a wavering voice. His body crumpled to dust, leaving nothing but his head. “B-but still! I believe in you! Everyone can be a good person if they just try! I p-promise!”
And then, he disappeared altogether. The human sighed sadly. It baffled them how Papyrus could be so delightfully kind and optimistic.

They kept going.

They expected the fight with Undyne to be different, they expected her to say something about Papyrus. But it was still the same. *It was all the same.*

The human gritted their teeth as they fought against the undying captain. They admitted that this particular battle always gave them such trouble. They actually died a few times. They were admittedly rusty, but after a handful of tries, Undyne fell. Just like all the others.

“Damn it . . .” she trembled. “So even all that power wasn’t enough?!?” Her knees quaked, threatening to buckle beneath her. Then, she smiled. And *laughed.*

“If you . . . if you think I’m gonna give up hope, you’re wrong. Cuz I’ve . . . I’ve got my friends behind me!” and she kept smiling in defiance, her voice wavering and her body beginning to lose its shape. “Alphys told me she would watch me fight you, and if anything went wrong, she . . . she would evacuate everyone. By now, she’s called Asgore and told him to absorb the six human souls! *And with that power-!*” Her form began to slip, to melt away. Her features became hideously warped under the power of her own determination. “*This world will live on!*”

Undyne then became nothing more than dust, and the human ground the pile underfoot, kicking it into the wind.

*IT WAS ALL THE SAME.*

The denizens of Hotland were shown no ounce of mercy. Everyone fell to them, everyone who got in their way was cut down like an annoying weed. Even that loud-mouthed, annoying sack of bolts Mettaton could only taunt and harass them so many times before they met the same grisly fate as all the others.

And of course, Alphys was nowhere to be found. The only smart monster in this entire kingdom, apparently.

They reached the elevator, and began to make the long, arduous trek to the castle. And on their way, a familiar smiling face accompanied them.

“Howdy!” Flowey said, dancing side to side. “We’re going to have so much fun today, aren’t we? Hee hee hee!”

The human narrowed their eyes. This wasn’t fun, this was frustrating. They tried everything, and barely anything was different! They just discovered the skeleton brothers’ monstrous (quite literally!) secret, and nothing was different! They tried *everything!* They could find no clues, could find no details about that mysterious power of theirs, and they were getting very frustrated with how little they actually knew about the skeletons.

Flowey tilted his head, grinning a devilish smile, cackling. “Oh, not *everything*!” the flower assured. “*Not yet,* anyway!”

The human stopped, looking at the flower curiously. Flowey’s grin split his floral face in two.

“*You haven’t yet fought them at their full power!*”

The human huffed. They already fought Papyrus in his dragon form, and the only way to fight Sans
was in this path, and they doubted they could make him go dragon on them-

They stopped. They looked at Flowey. They rose an eyebrow, asking a silent question. Flowey cackled harder.

“Oh, yes! Yes, indeed!” Flowey leaned closer. “I know how to MAKE them fight you in their full, terrifying, dragon forms! Oh, wouldn’t that be FUN?! Fighting a skeleton dragon! Hee hee hee! A battle for the AGES! Ah, but of course, it must be done delicately!”

The human leaned closer, urging Flowey to tell them!

“So impatient!” Flowey teased. “Don’t worry, I’ll tell you! It’s simple, really! You just have to push him to the very edge! Right at the very doorway of death! And he’ll have no choice but to turn!” From Flowey’s vines, he revealed a thorn-like whip, and held it out to the human. The human took it, examining the weedy weapon.

**THORNY WHIP -- WEAPON ATTACK 0.999999999999999.**

The human held the thorn whip in their hand. And smiled. Flowey shared their manic grin.

“Do you get it? You know what you have to do?” Flowey cooed. “It’s all you need! One blow, and he will turn! One blow, and you will finally have The Ultimate Battle!”

Now, finally, with a promise of something worthwhile, they proceeded to the castle, a grin on their face. They marched across the Capital and into the Golden Hallways. Ah, but best not let Sans know of the surprise quite yet! They put the whip back into their inventory and took back out their trusty knife. They would use the whip when Sans’ guard was down.

The skeleton stood before them, hands in his pocket, looking as nonchalant as always. He grinned that permanent smirk, his expression unchanging and unsettling.

He looked at the kid, at the dust that covered their hands and arms, at their devious little smile, and at the all-too-real knife clutched in their hand.

“That expression you’re wearing . . .” he began slowly. His eyes turned black as the pupils in his eyes blinked out. “Well, I won’t grace it with a description. You’re really kind of a sick freak, aren’t you?”

And the battle began.

The human was really rusty. It had been a while. They died numerous times from the opening sequence alone. Man, if all the monsters began with their strongest attack, this journey would have been a whole lot tougher!

But soon enough, it all came back to them. Dodging, ducking, diving, their movements became automatic as their numerous attempts at this exact same fight came back to them. They dodged the bone attacks, they evaded the blaster blasts, they watched with careful precision every one of Sans’ tells to avoid the next strike.

Sans was strangely silent through the entire battle. Possibly tired of the same old speech over and over?

“What can you possibly get out of this?” he asked. “What sort of sick, perverted nostalgia drives you to such derangement?”
Because they had to know. They couldn’t NOT know!

“Just give up. I know I did.”

I can’t.

It was time for the final attack. The human prepared themselves, every nerve on edge for the most intense sequence they had ever experienced. Rows and rows of bones shot before them, their soul was bashed relentlessly against the walls, the blasters chased them in circles, but Sans was at his limit. He could fight no longer. He was forced to relent, and his attack ceased. Or, at least, his attack became nothing.

Literally nothing.

But the human was patient. They waited.

Sans was always so lazy, and especially after giving every ounce of his strength to this fight, he could not ward off his exhaustion for very long.

The human reached for their other weapon. The thorny whip.

They struck.

Sans snapped, dodging the initial strike. He laughed.

“Did you really think-“

SHCK!

They attacked again, the whip now finding its mark. Sans’ eyes went wide, the thorns cutting through, and he fell to the ground. A red liquid oozed from his wound. He stared down at disbelief. A skeletal hand rose to his chest.

But he wasn’t dead. Not yet. He still had a sliver of health, just a minute fraction. A breeze cold kill him right now! But for the moment, he was alive, if only barely.

He looked up at the human, confused. They had their chance to kill him. So why was he still alive? The human loomed over them, grinning wickedly. They TAUNTed him.

Show me what you’ve got! Show me your REAL power!

Sans froze. Once again, his eyes went dark.

“So,” he began in a low and dangerous voice. “Is that what you want? What you REALLY want? You want to fight me . . . at my full potential?”

The human’s widening grin confirmed that statement without them having to say a word.

Sans gritted his teeth. He could feel a dark and terrible energy build within him. He felt his bones sear with an inner fire as he felt a terrible change build within his very being. A primordial instinct prompted to do whatever it could to keep Sans ALIVE.

Sans laughed. “Oh. OH. I get it now.” He rose to his feet. His fingers were beginning to grow claws. His teeth grew into pointed fangs. They could see the human quivering with excitement. And it made Sans SICK. “You’re not just doing this out of a deranged sense of curiosity, although,
admittedly, that’s a pretty big chunk of it, isn’t it? You’re doing it because you can, and just because you can, you think you have to.”

He gritted his teeth. God, everything hurt so much . . .

“Because you want to brag to the world, whatever world that is, that you beat the ultimate monster. That you beat the toughest enemy. Some sort of . . . sick egotistical prize to say ‘hey, look who I killed!’ Isn’t that right?”

Sans doubled over, laughing. It was getting harder to suppress the changes.

“Well, don’t worry, kiddo,” he seethed. “I know what to do to sick little freaks like you. And that is to-“

The human leaned forward in anticipation.

“-not give it to you.”

The human blinked. They balked. They stared. What . . .?

Sans stood up straight, that same red liquid freely dripping from his mouth as he grinned a manic fanged smile. “Heh heh heh. I get it now. I really do. All that DETERMINATION of yours, it won’t let you quit when you know there’s some stone out there to overturn, when there’s one plausibility you haven’t yet explored. And you won’t ever stop until you get what you want, what you think you need. Well, I know one thing that can stop someone like you right in your tracks. I’m gonna refuse to give you the ending you want. I’m gonna take away from you the one thing I can. I’m gonna rob you of your big, epic, final battle. I’m gonna take away your bragging rights.”

The human stared, unblinking. And slowly, they felt themselves grow furious. No. NO! They came so far! They worked so hard! They couldn’t have this taken from them!

“Now that,” Sans said with a pained laugh. “That’s the face of someone who’s very frustrated. Don’t worry kid.” He winked. “I’ll tell all the Sanses out there the same thing. No matter what you try, no matter how many times you come back here, I won’t let you have your grand finale. And maybe, just maybe . . . you can finally let this world go.”

The human suddenly felt their SOUL turn blue. With a gasp, they were suddenly jerked forward, right towards Sans-!

Their whip cut right through him, and they stared face to face with a grinning, bleeding skeleton.

“See you on the other side, you sick freak.”

And then, he died.
“You know, you still haven’t tried *everything.*”

The human kicked the dirt under their feet, scowling. Sans was a complete bust. That damn skeleton knew what they were looking for, and snatched it away from them! What else *was* there?!

“There’s still one other skeleton!” Flowey sang.

The human gave them a look. Papyrus?! They already fought him, and he-!

“No no no *no,* silly!” Flowey giggled, swaying to and fro. “Oh sure, you may have fought him normally, but you haven’t yet seen him at his full strength!”

The human tilted their head. They were listening.

Flowey grinned.

“Reload your SAVE file and meet me in Snowdin! I’ll show you a fight you will *never* forget!”
“COME ON, YA BIG BONY BRUTE! SHOW ME WHATCHA GOT!”

With a cacophonous roar, Papyrus charged, jaws split open as a beam of energy built within his fangs. With a thunderous boom, the beam shot forward into a laser, obliterating the spot Undyne had been standing in before she expertly leaped out of the way, landing on his back and kicking off him as spears rained down. Papyrus twisted, firing shot after shot, shattering the spears before they could land. His tail lashed out like a whip, just barely glancing across Undyne’s scaly skin as she maneuvered around him. Jumping over a swipe there, ducking under another laser attack, just barely dancing out of the way of his snapping jaws, DAMN was fighting a dragon awesome! And not just any dragon! The fiercest, strongest dragon that ever was!

Papyrus’s forepaw rose in the air, ready to bring it smashing down, and Undyne ducked and rolled out of the way—right into a wall of bones, smacking face-first into them. She cursed loudly, rubbing her smarting forehead. She heard Papyrus chuff out a laugh.

“Sheaky bastard!” she quipped with a gleam in her eye. The paw came down, and Undyne summoned a spear in her hand, knocking away his strike. She then jumped high into the air, using her spear as leverage, and landed a solid kick to the side of his head. Papyrus’s legs wobbled, disoriented by the attack, but he shook it off and fired off another blast. This one singed her hair it was so close, Undyne barely arching her back out of the way in the nick of time. She was thrown off balance, and Papyrus was quick to take advantage of that. His paw came forward, ramming into her chest and pinning her to the ground—gently, of course, but enough to keep her immobile. Papyrus stood above her, gleaming with pride. And Undyne was smiling too.

“Allright, alright, off, ya sack of calcium!” she said. Papyrus backed off, shifting back into his more familiar skeleton form. But by now, both forms were becoming equally familiar to her, but no less cool! He was beaming, panting hard from the exertion of their sparring session, and Undyne was just as equally wiped out, her entire body drenched in sweat. It smelled like sushi.

“Hey now, you’re starting to beat me as many times as I beat you!” she said proudly. “Maybe soon I’ll have to promote you to Lieutenant or something!”

Papyrus’s eyes sparkled in glee, and Undyne laughed, reining back in her words.

“Don’t get any bright ideas just yet! I don’t even think we have a Lieutenant position.”

“Doesn’t mean we can’t make one up!” Papyrus pointed out.

Undyne laughed. “I’ll take it up with Asgore! You’re getting good, Paps! Real good! Good enough to give my butt a firm beating!” She cracked her back. God, she was sore. She was sore everywhere. She was sore in muscles she didn’t know she had.

“Maybe I can be Captain!”

Undyne punched his shoulder. “Now don’t you go getting any smart ideas! I’m the Captain here and you are my underling! Now drop and give me fifty!”

“I’ll drop and give you ONE HUNDRED!”

Undyne had to admit it, training with Papyrus had gotten a lot more interesting since she discovered his secret. But despite what had happened, it was still the same goofy, fun-loving, semi-smart-ass
Papyrus she had always known since they met. But she didn’t regret her decision to make him a guard in the slightest! He was tough, really tough! She couldn’t wait to see the look of horror on the humans’ faces when they came face-to-face with him! And any excuse to ride him like all those cool animes was an added bonus!

Papyrus finished his one hundred push-ups with remarkable speed, and Undyne resisted the urge to rib him and accuse him of cheating with blue magic. They parted ways, Papyrus heading back to Snowdin to work on his puzzles and perform his daily scouting routine, and Undyne off to Waterfall to perform her own check-ups on the other guards.

But of course, she also had to check up on her friend Alphys. Undyne’s cheeks grew a touch hot as she plugged in Alphys’s social media account on her phone, looking at the latest updates. It was the usual cheeky self-deprecating joke; today featured a sparkly glittery pink trash can working at a computer with the caption “JUST ANOTHER SNAP OF ME HARD AT WORK! #NOFILTER LOL.” Undyne had to snicker at that, but at the same token, it wouldn’t hurt if Alphys posted a couple of sincere posts every once in a while...

Undyne’s phone began to jingle in her hands. It was a call from Alphys, of all people! Talk about freaky coincidences! Undyne answered it.

“Hey, what’s up!”

“U-Undyne, h-hi!” Alphys’s shy voice came from the other end. “I s-s-saw you were o-online and checking out my latest post, a-and I thought I’d give you a call!” Ah, ok, maybe not really a coincidence after all. “O-oh, I hope that didn’t s-sound too creepy! I j-just thought that since you were online you were available, a-and I w-wanted to call you anyway b-b-because I wanted to t-talk with you—I mean, duh, why else would I c-call you! Heh heh! Er, I’m s-s-sorry, I h-hope I’m not bothering you—”

“You’re not bothering me! Promise!” Undyne assured. Alphys could be so cute when she got all flustered. “Just got done with training with Papyrus, so I’m available to talk! What’s on your mind?”

“Oh! That’s good! I-I-I . . . er, this is going to sound weird, but . . .” Alphys’s voice grew quieter. “I-I’ve been thinking a lot. About the l-l-labs, and w-what we found down there.”

Undyne paused, growing cautious. She remained quiet and let Alphys finish her thought.

“I know y-you told me not to talk about it, and t-t-that you were doing an investigation, and t-t-that you were going to take care of a-a-all that, b-b-but I can’t stop thinking about it!” Alphys went on, her voice slowly rising. “I-I-I . . .” her voice grew shamefult. “P-p-please don’t be mad, but I w-w-was really worried. I w-w-went back down there and t-t-took a closer l-l-look at that room with the ash . . . a-a-a-and the room w-w-with all the c-c-claw marks . . .”

“I’m not mad,” Undyne promised. “But . . . God, this really bothers me too, but there’s nothing you can do about it, ok?”

“B-b-but what if I can?!” Alphys wailed. “Undyne, s-s-someone was trapped down there! F-f-f-for a really, really long time! A-a-a-and they were hurt, and they were . . . they were . . .” Alphys’s voice began to dissolve into sniffles and sobs. “I just . . . I have to know what happened to w-w-whoever was down there.”

Undyne hesitated. And Alphys took that as a cue.
“Right. I know. You can’t talk about it,” Alphys said miserably.

“Al,” Undyne said slowly, thinking very long and very hard on how much she wanted to say. One of the reason why she had such a massive crush on this dorky lizard was because she cared so much. Not just about her work, but about other people, too. She always threw her whole heart into everything she did, and Undyne knew it was tearing poor Al apart to know that a monster was hurt, and she was getting stone-walled from proper closure. Alphys deserved to at least know if they were ok, if nothing else, right? She didn’t even have to say who it was!

“Alphys, I may not be able to say much, but I can tell you that whoever was locked down in there, they’re ok now,” she assured. “Al, I promise you, they’re ok! They’re alive, and they’re happy, and they’re alright!”

Alphys sniffed on the other end of the phone. “Y-you’re just saying that to make me feel better.”

“I wouldn’t do that to you,” Undyne said firmly. “I’m not gonna treat you like a baby and tell you something that I think you need to hear. I’m telling you the truth because you deserve to know at least that much. They got out, Al. They got out, and they’re better now.”

A pause. “Promise?”

“I promise you. On my honor as Captain as the Guards.”

Another longer pause. “The previous Royal Scientist did that, then. They hurt other monsters. As some sort of experiment.” It wasn’t really a question. Alphys was too smart for that.

Undyne didn’t say anything, and she felt like she didn’t need to.

Alphys took a deep shuddering breath. “Heh. It . . . it figures . . .”

“What do you mean?”

“Oh! Uh . . . it’s . . .” Alphys said. “It’s nothing, just talking to myself. Heh heh . . .”

Undyne knew better than to press it. She smiled. “Hey. I know something that’ll cheer you up. How about I get you some of that seaweed you like to study, and we can sit down and watch that new anime you’ve been dying to show me?”

Alphys sniffed again, but her voice was considerably happier than before.

“I w-would really like that. Thanks, Undyne.”

--

Papyrus was hard at work improving his latest puzzle. One thing that he didn’t like so much about Snowdin was how the snow got everywhere! Even in his electric boxes to power his super cool puzzles! So a lot of his time was spent making sure the electrical boxes were adequately weather-proofed, and rewiring rusty wires and replacing burnt fuses and making sure everything was taped up nice and secure. It was tedious work, but it kept Papyrus busy and he liked it when his hands were busy.

“Sup, bro?”

Papyrus glanced up. Standing in front of him was his dear brother, Sans, hands in his pocket and his casual care free smile always grinning. Papyrus jumped upright, returning the broad grin.
“I’ll tell you what’s up, brother!” Papyrus said enthusiastically. “Today I had a wonderful day training with the mighty and fierce Captain Undyne! And to make the day even more wonderful, I had successfully vanquished her in battle! Undyne is very pleased with my training as her newest and best Royal Guard!”

“Hey, that’s great to hear!” Sans said. “Man, what’s this, the third time this month you’ve beaten her?”

“Fourth!”

“Ha, you got me there. Soon you’ll be the new Captain!”

“That’s what I told her! But,” he leaned forward, whispering conspiratorially. “I don’t think she’ll let me be Captain that easily!”

“That’s fair. So watcha up to?”

“I am working on my latest and greatest puzzle!” Papyrus said, motioning to the tiled floor and the half-ripped apart fuse box. “The snow got into the electronics and messed up the circuit board! I have to make sure it’s fixed before a human falls down here! This will be sure to confound them! Alphys herself made this, you know!”

“I can see it’s got her Royal signature all over it.”

“Don’t you have sentry duty right now?” Papyrus asked waving an accusing screwdriver in Sans’s face. “You’re supposed to be on the lookout for humans!”

“Aw, c’mon Paps, I can’t even say hi to my coolest bro anymore?” Sans shrugged. “Besides, y’know I always got my eye sockets peeled.”

“As flattered as I am at your blatant brown-nosing, I will not have my own brother be a lazy slouch!” Papyrus said, puffing out his chest, desperately hiding the fact he was extremely touched. “Now off with you! Once I am done here, I shall check up on you!”

“Alright, Paps, you have fun.”

“And no funny-bone business! Nyeh heh heh!”

Sans saluted. “Scout’s honor.”

Stuffing his hands back into his pockets, he headed back to his post on the very fringes of the Snowdin borders. Papyrus knew how hard he could be on his little big brother, but this job was important! If a human came through the Ruins, Sans would be the first to see them. He had to be forever vigilant for such an occasion. Because Papyrus knew in his very bones that today would be the day a human would come! They had to be ready to capture them!

Soul swelling with determination and pride, Papyrus worked all the more eagerly on his puzzles. The notes from Alphys were an indecipherable mess of chicken scratch, but Papyrus knew he’d figure it out! Screwdriver in hand, a mess of wires and fuses and switches in the other, Papyrus dove back into his work.

It was another hour, maybe two, that Papyrus finally managed to get the blasted contraption working again. Who knew all this trouble came from a single loose wire! Papyrus considered wiring some redundancies just in case. Oh, but that would make it that much harder to troubleshoot! But on the other hand, less chance of failure due to weather . . .
Well, it was fixed now! The puzzle was back up and running and was now ready for its inevitable confrontation with the human! He better go check on Sans, make sure that lazy bones was doing his job.

He marched to the furthest reaches of Snowdin, all the way to Sans’s sentry post. Here the evergreens grew tall and long, the bottom lengths of the trees bare and dead and only the very very tips flourished with green. The skeletal looking trees, while creepy to some, were a comfort to Papyrus. They reminded him a lot of himself! And he spent a lot of time out here, romping around, back when he was still afraid of showing his other half.

Well, not any longer! Mind you, still no one knew, but Papyrus was no longer to reveal that secret when the time came!

He came to the sentry station to see his brother Sans standing about with another strange creature wearing a purple and blue striped sweater. Both looked in his direction as he approached.

“Sans!” Papyrus greeted. He was happy to see his brother hard at work. Usually, he’d be sleeping at his desk, or even worse, selling hot dogs! But right now, he was out and about! Could he actually be patrolling the area like he was supposed to?! Papyrus beamed with pride. “Have you found a human yet?”

Sans glanced at the thing standing next to him. “Yup.”

“Really?! Wowie!” His premonition was correct! There WAS a human here! But, of course, it couldn’t be the thing standing next to his dear brother. He may not have seen a human before, but he knew humans didn’t look like that! “Guess that’s settled!”

Without further ado, Papyrus marched back into town. He had a human to find! Sans rejoined him not much later, taking a break from his sentry duty to assist in his search. It occurred to him that if Sans saw a human, why didn’t he stop them?! But then again, Sans was always so lazy and non-confrontational. It was up to him, the Great Papyrus, to bring this human to the Capital himself!

“So, Sans,” Papyrus said as they were walking back towards town. “When is the human going to show up? I want to look my Sunday best!” For emphasis, he took out a rag and began to buff out his armor. Clean and spotless and shiny as always, but he wanted his armor to look extra shiny for the human! “Or at least my Tuesday pretty-good.”

“Don’t you just wear your Royal Guard armor all the time, anyway?” Sans rebuked.

“Yeah, but I could style my hair!” Papyrus sassed sarcastically.

“Oh, right. Good idea,” Sans grinned. “Say, why don’t you look over there,” he said, pointing back down the trail from where they came.

Papyrus turned. Directly down the path was that same blue and purple striped sweater wearing thing that he had seen just minutes ago! He turned back to Sans, whispering to him. Though his whisper wasn’t much quieter than his usual talking voice. “Sans! What am I looking at?”

“Behold,” Sans said, gesturing back towards the strange thing. Papyrus tilted his head this way and that.

“Oh my god!” Papyrus said. “Why are you telling me to look at a rock?!”

“Hey, what’s that in front of the rock?”
Papyrus squinted. “Oh my god! I have no idea what that is.”

“Well, it’s not a rock,” Sans said.

Papyrus furrowed his brows tightly together, thinking hard. “Not a rock . . .? Oh no! By process of elimination, that means it’s a human!” Papyrus turned, puffing out his chest and dramatically clearing his throat. Weird! He didn’t think humans looked anything like that, but his logic was sound! It had to be a human! “Human!” he announced. “Prepare yourself! For high jinks! For low jinks! Dangers! Puzzles! Capers! Japers! Being captured! And other sorts of fun activities! Refreshments will be provided, if you dare! Nyeh heh heh heh heh!” Like a bolt, he shot off! He couldn’t wait! The strange human would surely fall prey to his cunning traps! And then he would capture them! And he would surely get that promotion to Captain! Then he and Undyne could be captains together! It would be amazing!

His first stop of course was his invisible electric maze! Surely none could make it through without experiencing the shock of a lifetime! Sans followed him over, and as he prepared it for the human, something was bothering him greatly about that weird, strange human.

“Something eating at ya?” Sans asked, practically reading his mind. “Hopefully not that silly little dog again, heh.”

“Sans, now is not the time for your most confounded puns!” Papyrus huffed. “Really, though! That human! Do I know that person?” He couldn’t shake that feeling of familiarity or that incredible feeling of déjà vu!

“Do you not know who you know?” Sans asked.

“Pft! Of course I know who I know! I wanted to know if you know I know who I know as much as I know I know who I know! . . . you know?”

Their passionate yet incredibly confusing conversation was halted by the appearance of that striped sweater wearing creature. Papyrus turned to address them.

“Oh ho! The human arrives! In order to stop you, my brother and I have created some puzzles! I think you will find this one . . . quite shocking!”

No sooner had he said that did the human take several steps forward, walking right through the maze. Papyrus balked. This wasn’t what was supposed to happen! He cleared his throat again and kept talking. “For you see, this is . . . the, uh, invisible . . .” He frowned. “Hm, you must be having culture shock. You see, where I come from, it’s a loving tradition to suffer through horrible puzzles for no reason.” At least, it was a loving tradition for him and his brother. “So, uh, just walk back there, and . . .” He faltered again as the human kept approaching, standing directly in front of him only a few feet away. The human’s face was . . . expressionless. It was majorly creeping Papyrus out! He sighed heavily. “Why couldn’t we get a human that likes puzzles?”

This puzzle had been a thorough bust. But that was ok! He had many others! And he went off to the next one to prepare it! Maybe now the human would understand the point of them and would more enthusiastically engage! Once again, Sans met him at the human’s next nefarious challenge, one that Sans himself had prepared. Papyrus was eager to see how this one would go! In a few short moments, the human approached them yet again.

“Human, I hope you’re ready for-!” Papyrus began, but he stopped. “Sans! Where’s the puzzle?!”
“It’s right there, on the ground,” he said, gesturing casually to the little piece of paper sitting on the snow between them and the human. “Trust me, there’s no way they’ll skip this one.”

The human walked directly over it, giving one deliberate, purposeful step directly on top of the flimsy little piece of paper.

“Sans!” Papyrus cried. “That did nothing!”

“Whoops. Knew I should have put down Junior Jumble instead.”

“What?! Junior Jumble?!” Papyrus parroted. “Finally! Something we can both agree on.”

But this puzzle had, once again, been a bust. That’s ok, so what if two of his puzzles were duds? After all, he could blame Sans on that last one, he really should have put down Junior Jumble! That would have stopped them for sure!

Though . . . as he approached his next puzzle, which he had lovingly names X’s and O’s, he found it was already completed! He stared in shock. Someone had already come through here and did his puzzle! Oh, he wished he could have seen them! Did the human somehow beat them to here? Highly unlikely, since he was so fast and knew this place better than the back of his hand, but maybe the human was beginning to warm up to his ingenious puzzles! And his next puzzle was the best one yet! The colored tile puzzle!

Sans was there, just as always, and he joined right up with his brother to start up the machine on the control panel. And sure enough, only moments later, the human arrived.

“Hey! It’s the human!” he announced, grabbing Sans’s attention. “You’re gonna love this puzzle! It was made by the great . . .” But his voice faltered as once again, the human just marched straight across without any regard for the really cool puzzle he was just about to turn on. Papyrus felt disheartened. “Are you serious?!” he sighed. “Sans! Help! They keep walking through my puzzles! They’re supposed to let me explain them. Then threaten and baffle them with dangerous japes.”

“Well, maybe they don’t like japes,” Sans offered.

“Everyone likes japes!” Papyrus protested.

“What about Undyne? Doesn’t she hate puzzles?”

“She hates puzzles, but she loves japes,” Papyrus explained patiently. “Everyone knows that!”

“That makes sense.”

“Human!” Papyrus began again. He would not be outdone by a puzzle pooper! “Puzzles or japes?”

The human did not answer. They didn’t even move. Or blink.

“Ok, this is normally the part where you either agree or disagree, and depending on your answer, we say something great in response.”

Again, no response from the human.

“Here, why don’t you do this puzzle yourself,” Papyrus finally offered, leaving the instruction manual right by the control panel, which happened to look just like Mettaton.

There was one last puzzle for the human. The most dangerous, the most diabolical, the most
The human took a little longer to arrive, but arrive they did. And Papyrus was prepared for them.

“These is your final and most dangerous challenge! Behold! The Gauntlet of Deadly Terror!” On his command, traps and weapons and contraptions of all sort descended into view. “When I say the word, it will fully activate! Cannons will fire! Spikes will swing! Blades will slice! Each part will swing violently up and down! Only the tiniest chance of victory will remain! Are you ready?! Because! I! Am! About! To do it!”

There was a long pause as Papyrus stared down the human. The human stared back, unfazed, unfaftered, unwavered. And still not blinking a single time. This human was a freaking weirdo!

“Well? What’s the holdup?” Sans asked.

“Holdup?!” Papyrus spat. “What holdup?! I’m . . . I’m about to activate it now!”

That would surely get the human riled! But . . . no. They . . . they just stood there! Clutching their weapon and covered with that dusty powder. This was really starting to become unsettling.

“That, uh, doesn’t look very activated,” Sans said.

“Well . . .” Papyrus said. “They’re probably going to walk through it.” Knowing how the human had acted before, they’d find some way through his amazing puzzle without breaking a sweat. “And it won’t be very fun at all.”

“Hm, so this human thing was a bust, huh?”

“Well, I mean, I’m excited to capture them,” Papyrus admitted. “So I can become an even more famous Royal Guardsman!” He deflated. “But all the time I put into these puzzles, it’s kind of like throwing a birthday party.”

“Without traps and fire?” Sans asked.

“Exactly!” Papyrus said. “It’s pointless! Maybe you were right to be lazy about puzzles.”


Papyrus paused. “Yeah! What am I saying! You’re still completely wrong! I just have the wrong audience. Think about how much fun Undyne would have here! Flames! Violence! It’s right up her alley! So I won’t waste this puzzle on a human who can’t appreciate it! I just have to appreciate the friends I already have!” The traps then retreated from where they came from, leaving the bridge its safe, usual-looking self. Papyrus breathed a sigh of relief. He turned to the human sternly. “A valuable life lesson!” he said, wagging his finger in the air. With a final laugh, he retreated back to the little town of Snowdin.

But what he didn’t see was the human retreating the other way back over the bridge. There, a little yellow flower was waiting for them. Normally, the flower would disappear back under the ground as soon as the human came near. But not this time.

“Say,” the little yellow flower said in that mischievous sing-song voice. “That bone head just gave me a wonderful idea! We’re going to make this fight something really special! Just keep going along and meet me in Snowdin! You won’t regret this!”
With a laugh, the flower disappeared into the snow.

The human couldn’t be certain what Flowey was planning, but they were in this together, and both were looking forward to rending this world to dust. The human may not personally trust Flowey, but they could trust his sadistic motives.

With a smile, they kept marching on.

--

“I-I want to th-thank you again. You know, for coming over a-and cheering up a miserable l-lizard,” Alphys told Undyne.

“Aw, hey, anything to watch some cool anime with the smartest gal in the Underground!” Undyne said, trying hard not to blush. “We need to do that again and finish the rest of the season! That cliff-hanger is such a killer!”

“I-I know, right?! I c-can hardly wait for what happens n-next!” Alphys said, wringing her hands together. “D-Do you think Princess Starsky will find the Jewel of Everlasting Hope before Lord Nexxon does?!”

“Oh, she better! Then we get to see Starsky kick his greasy little butt!” Undyne cheered. “But I gotta get back to my guard duties! How does tomorrow night sound?”

“Th-that sounds g-great!” Alphys said. “I’ll m-make lots of popcorn!”

“I’ll bring soda!”

“Deal!”

Today had been a good day. Training with Papyrus was invigorating and exciting, and watching those animes with Alphys was the perfect way to wind down the day. Undyne knew how much the whole mess with the labs had upset Alphys, so Undyne was happy she was able to do what she could to help, even if that meant distracting her for a few hours with those awesome animes. They had been saving this particular show for a rainy day, and, well, rain wasn’t something that happened all too often in Hotland. But it turned out it was just what they needed.

As Undyne headed back to the boat, something caught her attention. It was a soft sniffling sound. Was someone crying? Undyne curiously followed the sound.

It led her straight to a . . . a little yellow flower?! Was the flower crying? Undyne stared at it for a moment.

Wait, didn’t Papyrus mention he had a friend that was a talking flower . . .

The flower lifted its little white head, its golden petals drooped around it. It looked up at Undyne with big, wet eyes. “C-Captain Undyne!” it exclaimed. Oh, God, it really could talk! “P-please! You have to help me!”

Undyne lowered herself to one knee. The questions could wait, right now the flower needed her help, and as her duty as Captain of the Guards, it was her charge to help any monsters in need, even little talking flowers. “Hey, little buddy, it’s ok, tell me what’s going on,” Undyne said.

“It’s Papyrus!” the flower cried. “H-h-he’s in trouble!”
Undyne blanched. “What do you mean he’s in trouble, what’s going on?!”

“A human has fallen down here! To the Underground! A-a-and they’re gonna--” the flower buried its head into its leaves and began to wail. “The human’s going to kill Papyrus! You have to help him! Oh, please, Captain Undyne, you have to save him!”

Undyne stood, her fists clenching and her teeth grinding together. “The human is not going to kill Papyrus! He’s the toughest monster in the whole Underground, and once they see what he can do, they’ll--!”

“Listen to me!” the flower begged, wrapping a vine around her leg. Undyne flinched at the unexpected move. “I know Papyrus as well as you do! Maybe even better! I’m his best friend!”

It came back to her. “Flowey. You’re Flowey, aren’t you?”

The flower cracked a sad grin behind its teary eyes. “So he did tell you about me. He cares so much about me. He always cares so much about me.” He sniffled. “So I know better than you that even his secret power isn’t going to be enough to stop the human! The human already killed everyone else!”

Undyne felt unexpectedly cold, even in the middle of Hotland. “What the Hell are you talking about?”

“Lesser Dog, Greater Dog, Dogamy, Dogaressa, Doggo, they’re all gone! They’re all dead! The human killed them! Like they were nothing!”

The chill crept through her entire body, freezing her dead. “No . . . no way! Not all of them--!” Flowey only nodded miserably.

The chill gave way to a rising heat. Her despair gave way to rage, and to a furious righteousness.

“Then I’ll kill that miserable brat myself!”

“It won’t be enough . . .” Flowey moaned. He paused, raising a leaf thoughtfully to his mouth. “But maybe . . . no, no I could never. It’s too terrible, I could never make Papyrus do that . . .”

“What?! What is it?!” Undyne insisted fiercely.

Flowey squeezed his eyes shut, shaking his head. “I can’t! It’s too dangerous, I could never ask Papyrus to do it, but . . .”

“What IS IT?!” Undyne demanded, slamming her hand on the ground, making Flowey jump. “I’m not going to let Papyrus get killed by that punk! So if you know some way to stop them, you better tell me!!!”

Flowey hesitated, looking right up at her. “You really care about him, don’t you?”

“What sort of stupid question is that?! Of course I do! He’s my friend!”

“So then . . . you’ll do whatever it takes to protect him and save his life?”

“Anything!!!”

“Then . . .” Again, Flowey hesitated. “You have to make him transform. You have to make Papyrus turn into a dragon!”
Undyne nodded. “Yeah, yeah! He’s way tougher in that form, and he can easily kick the human’s butt!”

“It’s not that simple!” Flowey insisted. “He’s not going to do it willingly! He-he told me! He’s going to try to reason with the human! He’s going to try to talk them out of it! He won’t transform! You have to make him transform!”

“I can do that?” Undyne asked.

“Y-yes!” Flowey said. “B-but . . . but you’re not going to like it . . .”

“If it saves his life, then I don’t care! So stop wasting my time and just tell me!”

Flowey lowered his head. “His dragon form comes out when he’s pushed to the very edge. If he’s on the brink of dying, his transformation will trigger, and he’ll be strong enough to stand up to the human.” He looked up to Undyne earnestly. “But you have to bring him to the very edge! Even bringing him down to 1 HP won’t be enough! You have to take it even further!”

“How is that even possible?!” Undyne protested. “Are you suggesting I beat him to within an inch of his life?! Are you insane?!”

Flowey pulled out what looked to be a great thorny vine. It was the Thorny Whip, the same one the human had used on Sans in their last run. He held it out to Undyne.

“Please . . .” he begged. “It’s the only way to save his life. You want to save him, don’t you? It’s the only way! He may hate you for a little bit, because you made him turn, but you’ll save his life! And that’s all that matters, isn’t it?”

Undyne took the whip, but hesitated.

“You have to go now! There isn’t a lot of time! The human is on their way to Snowdin as we speak! If you don’t reach Papyrus in time . . .” he buried his head in his leaves and wept. “Then we’ll both lose our best friend.”

Undyne gritted her teeth, filled with steely determination. She was off like a bolt of lightning.

And beneath his petals, Flowey grinned.

--

Papyrus stood resolutely in the middle of Snowdin, alone in a blanket of mist and snow. It had been so quiet as he traveled through the town. Everyone was gone. No dogs at their stations, no townspeople meandering to and fro, no bears casually leaning against Grillby’s restaurant, even all the shops had been long abandoned. Papyrus had never seen the town so empty and abandoned and . . . dead.

The human was coming. And Papyrus could see the human was set on a very dark and dangerous path. For a moment, he had been conflicted between his duty as a Royal Guard, and what was right. But he arrived at a conclusion he was very proud of: he had to help this human find their way, even if it meant going against the Royal Guard’s charge. This human needed his help and guidance! Who was he to turn them away?

“Papyrus!” a desperate voice called out to him.

Papyrus turned around. Well, this was certainly unexpected. “Undyne!” he replied, completely
surprised. But her appearance was not an unwelcomed one. “What are you doing here?”

Undyne sprinted up to him, her gasping breath coming out in clouds of fog. “I came here as fast as I could!” she gasped. “I heard—Flowey, he told me everything, he said—”

“You met Flowey?! Wow! My two best friends finally met each other! I think you will like each other very much!”

“LISTEN TO ME, YOU NUMBSKULL!” Undyne cried, throwing her hands up in the air. “Flowey told me about the human! How that little punk killed everyone! And now they’re going to kill you!”

Papyrus’s jaw dropped open. He lowered his head. “That . . . that would explain why I couldn’t find any of the dogs at their stations . . .” he said quietly.

“Papyrus, I’m not about to let that human kill you, too! You have to fight them! Give them everything you got! Just like in training!” Undyne said. “You have to-!”

“No.”

Undyne faltered. She was completely caught off guard! He had been so direct, so firm, she could hardly believe what he had just said! “What do you mean, no?!?”

“The human needs help, Undyne,” Papyrus said, growing worried and fearful. “They are going down a dark and dangerous path. And I have to help them get on the straight and narrow! And who else better to do that than I! I believe they can do the right thing, but they need to know that someone out there believes they can do the right thing! So that is what I am going to do!”

Undyne felt her heart break. This was Papyrus. This was the goofy, cheerful, optimistic, always bright, always smiling skeleton she knew. He always believed the best in everyone, no matter what. It was his best quality . . . and the one thing that had always kept him from joining the Royal Guard. Until Undyne went against every instinct she had and made him one. Now she was going to pay for that mistake with Papyrus’s life.

Her fist clenched, trembling.

No. She wouldn’t allow it. She wouldn’t let him die.

Without warning, Undyne pulled back her fist, and clocked him straight across the face, sending him crumpling to the ground. Papyrus fell hard on the snow, twisting around to stare at her with shock.

“What in the world was that for?!”

“It’s for your own good,” Undyne whispered, her entire body trembling. “I won’t let you die. I can’t let you die, Papyrus.” She reared back her fist again, her blow landing solidly against his skull.

Hs head cracked against the icy surface. But he pulled himself to his feet, shaking off the blow. He looked warily at her, perhaps even a little bit scared. “I hardly see how punching me in the face is helping me,” he said carefully. “Please, Undyne, you have to trust me.”

“Then change!” Undyne urged. “Change into a dragon and blow that brat to pieces!”

Papyrus hesitated. “I won’t do that.”
Another punch, and Papyrus was back on the ground.

“YOU’LL DIE!” Undyne screamed, tears pricking at her eyes. “THE HUMAN WILL CUT YOU TO PIECES! YOU HAVE TO CHANGE!”

“You have to give me a chance!” Papyrus pleaded. “Let me talk with the human!”

“I can’t let you take that chance!” Undyne cried. “I won’t leave your life in that thing’s hands!”

Another punch. Papyrus was back on the ground. Again, he picked himself up.

“For God’s sake, at least fight back!” the captain pleaded, tears streaming from her remaining eye.

“We don’t have to settle this with violence,” Papyrus said. Even with the vicious bruising on the side of his face, even after being repeatedly struck down . . . he wouldn’t give up.

Why did this bastard have to make everything so hard?!

“I can’t lose you!” Undyne said. Another punch. “I won’t lose you, too!” Another punch. “I won’t allow it!” Another punch. “PLEASE!!! IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE, THEN FIGHT ME BACK!!!”

“It doesn’t have to be like this.”

Undyne screamed. Her hit landed true, and Papyrus was back on the ground. One more hit would do it. One more blow, and he would turn to dust. But still, he rose to his feet, and faced Undyne, just as determined as she was.

“Let me talk to the human,” he pleaded gently. “I can talk them out of it. I can reach them. You have to believe me.”

Undyne’s entire body shook. She was sobbing, her fists shaking and her eyes stinging with tears. She lunged at Papyrus, wrapping her arms fiercely around his form. Papyrus returned her embrace, breathing a sigh of relief.

“I trust you,” she whispered.

Papyrus smiled softly. “Thank you, Undyne.”

Undyne hardened. “But . . .”

The Thorny Whip appeared in her hand.

“I can’t trust that human!”

She brought the whip down on Papyrus, screaming out with rage and grief.

Papyrus collapsed onto the ground, gasping for breath. His armor had a deep cut running across his chest. He stared down at it, then up at Undyne, his face twisted into one of betrayal. He was so close to turning to dust! But . . . he was still here . . .

Undyne stood above him. She couldn’t . . . she did it, she had . . . she hurt him. But she had to! It was the only way! She had to!

“I’m so sorry,” Undyne begged. “Please forgive me.”
Papyrus pressed a hand against his chest, wincing. He felt something stir deep within him. It was the sensation that he felt when he was about to transform. He looked down at his hands and saw his fingertips were becoming claws. He could feel his teeth lengthening and sharpening—

He doubled over, arms wrapped around his chest, and he screamed. Something was wrong. Something was very, **very** wrong.

Undyne rushed to his side. “You’re turning!” Undyne explained quickly. “Flowey told me this is how to make you turn! Come on, Paps, you’ve done this a million times, you got this!”

“No,” Papyrus said, his voice trembling. His eyes were wide and flickering with orange magic. “Something’s different, something’s wrong. I—**AAGGGHH!!**”

He doubled over again, his bony spines bursting from his armor. Undyne had watched him transform dozens of times, she should have been used to this. But Papyrus was right, something was definitely wrong. The change was more . . . violent. His back spikes weren’t that long, they didn’t look like that, **something was wrong!**

“What’s going on?!” she demanded.

Papyrus could only shake his head. He writhed on the ground, his changes causing his body to convulse. With every change, he let loose another cacophonous cry of pain. His clawed hands reached up to his face, tears spilling from his eyes.

His horns started to grow in, twisting and snaking and cracking out of his skull. _They didn’t look like that, he didn’t have that many—_

Undyne pulled away, watching in horror. What did she do to him!?

But she steeled herself, kneeling by his side. She did this to him, and now she wasn’t going to leave him! She was going to help him through whatever was happening to him!

Before she could even utter a word, Papyrus lashed out, his heavy clawed paws landing on her shoulders. He gripped her tightly, so tightly his claws scored her armor. He looked at her, desperate and pained and so very scared.

“Undyne . . .” he gasped. His jaws began to lengthen with a terrible sound of breaking and cracking bones. Papyrus yowled loudly. “R-r-run!” He clenched his eyes tightly shut as his muzzle took full shape.

**R-R-R-RUUUUNNNNNN!!!**

It didn’t matter how scared she was. She had to be here for him! “I’m not leaving you! I’m staying right here!”

“You are coming with me.”

Before Undyne could even register the voice, or what was even happening, something grabbed her arm, and her entire world turned blue. There was a sharp snap and the smell of ozone, and then . . . she was in Alphys’s lab. She blinked.

“What the fuck?”

She turned. Standing next to her was Sans! She was about to demand what happened—then froze when she saw his face.
She had never seen him so . . . so . . . Undyne couldn’t even think of a proper word. It was an expression that froze her blood cold, it was an expression that filled her with terror and dread. It was an expression that told her she had done something very wrong.

Alphys emerged from a door, and just about jumped out of her skin when she saw them. “U- Undyne!” she said. “You’re back! Sans-!” She too stopped dead when she saw his expression, and she turned as pale as a ghost. “Wh-wh-what’s going on.”

“Turn on the monitor to Snowdin camera 09,” Sans commanded in a flat voice. Alphys hesitated. “NOW.”

“Y-y-yes!” Alphys shuddered, running to the massive screen in the room and typing on the keyboard with trembling claws. Undyne clenched her fists.

“You want to tell me what the Hell your problem is-”

“You have no idea what you’ve done.” Sans said. His eyes were black and fixated on the screen.

Undyne paused, but scowled, stepping next to Alphys. The monitor clicked to show camera 09, which was positioned in just the right spot to see where Papyrus was. At the moment, he was splayed across the ground, writhing and screaming in pain as his body twisted and contorted violently. Alphys let out a terrified scream.

“What’s happening to him?!?” she cried. Neither Undyne nor Sans replied. All they could do was watch him.

It was over in minutes, but those minutes felt like an agonizing eternity. It was torture to see the poor skeleton’s body reshape so violently. And he looked . . . he looked nothing like the dragon form Undyne was so acquainted with.

His form was far more beastly, far more vicious and ruthless. His eyes were a blazing wildfire of orange, his fangs were long and serrated, his claws flexed and honed to tear into anything that got in his way.

There were no signs of intelligence, no signs of Papyrus still within that beast.

In the distance, a figure approached. It was the human. They wore a bandana on their forehead, a glove on their hand, and they approached the dragon, smiling and determined.

The dragon turned. The dragon saw the human. And it leaped into action, claws and fangs bared.

What happened next was almost too fast for any of them to see.

But what they did see was the pure white snow turn a deep and rich crimson. What they saw was the dragon tear and slice at the laughably tiny body of the human child. What they saw was an endless sea of red and gore, splashing across the snow and trees and across the bones of the fearsome dragon.

They didn’t even hear the human cry out. The dragon hadn’t even given them the chance to. All they could hear was the sick snapping sound of bones crushing bones, teeth tearing into flesh and claws rending muscle.

Undyne could only watch in horror. The monitor was red.

Red, red, red, nothing but red.
Who could think such a tiny body could hold so much *blood*?

The lab was absolutely silent, the only sound coming from the staticky feedback of the camera, of the dragon roaring and snarling and tearing into its prey. When it was finished, it reared back its head and unleashed its terrible blast down on what little remained of the human body. It then threw its head back and roared in triumph. A roar announcing its victory over its prey.

It then dashed off into the woods, a blur of blood-stained white.

The lab remained dead silent for many, many moments still. Undyne nor Alphys could even breathe. They couldn’t even begin to comprehend what they had just seen.

The camera was still and unmoving, revealing to them the handiwork of the dragon. It was . . . grotesque. To think something could do . . . *that* . . .

“--I-I-I need to go to the bathroom . . .” Alphys wheezed, retreating out of the room as fast as she could. She ran to the bathroom, sobbing, choking back down the bile that threatened to rise back up in her throat.

Undyne couldn’t move. She couldn’t bear to tear her eyes away from the screen.

**What had she done?**

“Are you happy?” Sans said coldly. “Are you proud of what you did?”

Undyne shook.

“I . . .” she swallowed. “I couldn’t let him die . . .”

“I hope this was worth it, then,” Sans said. “I’m going to go find him.” He turned to her, eyes glowing blue and yellow. “You stay the Hell away from my brother.”

And in a flash of blue, he was gone.

Undyne collapsed to her knees. She couldn’t look away. She couldn’t stop seeing the dragon tear into the human, the gore flying across the screen. She couldn’t stop thinking about how that was *not* Papyrus.

**So what was that, then?!**

All she knew was that this was all her fault . . .

--

Deep in the forests, a feral beast rampaged. It tore at trees, it blasted at logs and rocks, it scoured its claws against anything that interfered with its path. It was a beast with one mission, and one mission only: to kill. And there was nothing in these woods to kill, so it lashed out with rage and frustration.

But its violent rampage could only last so long. It was beginning to grow tired. Its eyes grew heavy and its limbs slow to respond.

In the distance, a skeleton watched. He watched, his heart torn in two and his bones shaking with what he had been forced to watch his brother become.

He hadn’t arrived in time to stop Undyne. He should have been more careful. He should have been watching his brother more closely. Then he could have stopped his brother from experiencing this
wretched fate. His brother wouldn’t have had to suffer, he could have stopped this . . .

The dragon turned, spotting him. It let out a fierce roar, brandishing its blood-stained teeth, its long whip-like tail thrashing.

Sans slowly raised his hands. “It’s ok, brother,” he whispered. “I’m here. I’m not going to hurt you. And no one’s going to hurt you. You’re going to be alright. You’re going to be safe.”

The dragon reared its head back, readying another of its laser attacks. But it was exhausted now; the light died in its gaping jaws. Sans stepped closer.

“It’s ok, little bro. I’m here. I’m right here. You’re going to be ok.”

The beast’s eyes began to droop. It was so tired.

“I’m right here.”

Sans pressed a hand against its muzzle. The beast’s eyes closed, and it fell against the snowy ground, a low rumbling growl echoing in its chest. Sans continued to stroke Papyrus’s muzzle, tears streaming from his eyes.

“I’m so sorry, bro. I’m so, so sorry.”

The growl turned into a whine. The dragon’s eye cracked open, and he looked at Sans. Really looked at him. And he recognized him.

Orange magic crackled and sparked over the beast’s body, and his form began to twist and warp. He began to shrink, his claws and teeth and spikes and tail fading away. Papyrus gasped, reaching out to his dear brother. But he was so weak and so very, very tired.

“Sans . . .” he choked out.

“I’m here, I’m right here,” Sans said, gripping his brother as tight as he could. “I’m right here, and you’re going to be alright.”

Papyrus could fight against his exhaustion no longer, and his eyes closed, fading into a deep sleep.

And Sans held him in his arms, clinging onto him and sobbing.

He didn’t want this to happen to his brother.

He never wanted his brother to discover what he really was . . .
Aftermath

The mountain was cold and dark.

The mountain sat beneath the stars, beneath a moonlit and blackened sky, resting like a giant behemoth that could never be moved. The mountain, Mount Ebott if you wished to give it a name, slumbered still yet ever so restlessly.

It was so quiet in those accursed caverns. It was unnaturally still, a suffocating and hallowed silence gripping every inch of the Underground, wrapping and coiling around every remaining inhabitant, hushing the ever-whispering echo flowers. Few could scarcely recall the last time these caves had such a lingering stillness.

A gentle snow fell in the forever winterscape of Snowdin. But none stood outside to admire it. In fact, few even remained in the humble little town. The only signs of life were buildings, hushed and boarded up, lights muted and shuttered, the paths beginning to fill with snow when none dared emerge to clear it. Nary a sound broke, apart from the sounds of nature. The harsh breeze sliced through the towering pines, hissing and chattering as ice shards pelted freshly torn bark, the snow flitting upon the ground, covering up the red that still lingered on the frozen ground.

In the Capital, in the golden throne room, flanked on all sides by spectacular stained glass, surrounded by perpetually blooming golden flowers, two figures stood. One, a towering behemoth of snow-white fur, a golden mane framing his face just like the yellow petals framed the pale faces of his beloved flowers. The other, thinner, shorter, clad in shining silver armor, a plume of crimson hair from a turquoise-blue scalp. Even here the silence lingered. Even here, the birds were silent of song and even nature held its breath.

Asgore straightened from his hunched over position, setting aside the watering tin in his hand. And he sat, heavily, mournfully, upon his throne.

“Sixteen dead?” he repeated in a hushed whisper.

Undyne nodded, her brows furrowed and her lips pulled into a tight frown. She could barely manage to look him in the eye, her fists clutched and shaking. “At least. We have reason to believe they came from The Ruins. We don’t know how many others were killed there yet.”

Horror and grief covered the king’s visage. Asgore rose a hand to his face, burying it beneath his massive paw. His shoulders heaved for a moment or two before he stillled and rose back up to face Undyne. His cheeks were wet, and his eyes were red from tears. “Please, Captain, search every corner of The Ruins. We must look for any survivors.”

“It will be done,” Undyne promised. “But I swear to you, if not for Royal Guard Papyrus’s heroic actions, many more would have been lost. He single-handedly stopped that murderer in their tracks! If not for him—” she shook for just a second. “I... he deserves to be praised and admired!”

Asgore nodded absently, perhaps not really listening to what Undyne was saying. “How soon can you muster up an expedition to The Ruins?”

Undyne blinked, being pulled back into the present conversation and thought for a moment. “I’ll need to pull some guards from Hotland for that. And... we’ll need to hire new guards to replace those we’ve lost.”

“None of them survived?”
“No, Your Highness. All of them . . . all the sentries were killed. Save for Sans.”

Asgore hung his head once more. “This loss is devastating. We’ll have to be sure to collect the dust of all we can find and give them a proper funeral. We’ll have to notify their families, make arrangements . . .”

“Of course, sir,” Undyne said. “It will be taken care of.”

Asgore nodded. He took another long measure of silence to collect his thoughts and his composure. A loss this tragic had not been seen for a very long time. And for it to be done by a lone child--!

After the initial shock and mourning passed, gone but far from forgotten, the old king turned more thoughtful. “I dread to ask this, but was the soul of the human recovered?”

Undyne shook her head. “I’m afraid not. There was a . . . complication during the battle. The soul shattered before we could recover it.”

“I understand.” Asgore’s expression was a very curious one. Of course, to lose such a precious and rare artifact was devastating, but there was a certain sense of relief. The king would not be forced to break the Barrier. Not yet. They had to wait for one more human to fall. They had time. More stalling, Asgore reprimanded himself bitterly. But what was to be done, but wait? “And you said . . . Papyrus was the one who slew the human?”

“Yes, sir.”

Asgore frowned. “I never would have ever imagined. He was always such a kind and innocent soul. Naive, yes, but good. I don’t understand . . . but I trust you.”

Undyne felt her soul crawl, her skin grew cold and her entire being lurched with guilt.

“Where is he now?”

“He is resting at home,” Undyne said quietly, barely trusting herself to speak. “The battle took quite the toll on him, and he’ll need to recuperate for a while longer.”

“Of course. We’ll be sure to . . . commend him appropriately. Thank you, Captain. That will be all for now.”

There was more they could talk about, to be certain, but Undyne was relieved to get out of there when she could. This could not have been easy for Asgore to hear that over a dozen citizens were slaughtered right beneath his nose, and neither was it easy for her to deliver this report. She had to protect Papyrus . . . for his own sake. And for the ease of mind of his brother.

She remembered Sans’s face when it was all over. The unbridled fury that rolled off the small skeleton like steam off heated metal.

“You did this to him. You. Are you proud of yourself? Are you happy with what you’ve done to him?”

Undyne didn’t have it in her to argue with Sans there and then. He had every right to be upset. But he would see in time. His brother was still alive, and he’d grow to appreciate that fact sooner or later. _She saved his life._

That did nothing to quell her own guilt, however. Her soul was still heavy because she did . . . whatever she did to him! The memory replayed again and again in her mind. Him, on the ground,
writhing, clawing, *screaming in pain* . . . He’d never done that before! How was she supposed to know?!

. . .

How the hell had *Flowey* known? It *had* to have happened before for that little shit of a flower to know of that dirty trick! Papyrus would have remembered that, wouldn’t he? And he wasn’t the best at keeping secrets . . .

. . . *she said to herself after he managed to keep his dragon-shape-shifting powers secret for years*, Undyne chastised herself. But she shook her head. No . . . no, she had to believe that Papyrus would have told her after she found out his shape-shifting powers . . . wouldn’t he?

She didn’t know. But she knew the skeleton was currently in no position to answer any questions. If she was lucky enough to be *allowed* within a hundred feet of his house ever again. Sans was still fuming and furious, days after the matter, chasing her away if she got too close for his liking. Well, Undyne had been patient enough! It’s been a couple days and it was high time Undyne paid a visit!

As she left, she asked Asgore for a small favor, and it was happily accommodated. She left carrying a large and beautiful bundle of flowers of all types. She didn’t care if Sans was still angry with her, Papyrus was her friend! She had to know if he was ok and she’d kick the crap out of Sans if he tried to stop her again! She was going to visit him, and she was going to *apologize*, and she was going to make sure he was ok, and she wasn’t going to leave Snowdin until she had the chance to see Papyrus! Yes, this was her fault, and she was going to make it right, dammit! Why was Sans insisting on making everything so difficult?!

No matter, she was already on her way to Snowdin. She approached the docks in Hotland, just outside of Alphys's lab. The Royal Scientist had been very secluded herself these days, more so than usual. The events had greatly upset her, of course, that wasn't so hard to understand, but Alphys always had her phone in her hand, posting social media updates at least five times every hour, even into the dead of night. But these last few days . . . nothing. Absolute radio silence. And that made Undyne worry.

She had stopped by before, just the other day. No response from her incessant knocking. And not even Undyne with all her brute strength could get that damn door open. Not that she wanted to! She would respect Alphys wanting some time and distance! It was just something Undyne kept in the back of her mind. The Captain had left voice message after voice message to no avail, even sent her a hundred texts. Nothing. The silence was killing her, but Undyne had to be patient.

But *damn it*, was it frustrating that everyone was being so cold to her! Why couldn’t they just be happy that Papyrus was alive?! Undyne shook her head. Whatever, they’d come around! They’d have to! They would see! Papyrus was alive, that horrible human was dead, this was something to be *happy* about!

If only Papyrus would just wake up already . . .

Undyne was so deep in her own thoughts she hadn’t even realized the boat had now stopped. She had arrived in the frigid Snowdin, the boat pulling up to the dock with barely any movement from the Riverperson. She stepped out, thanking them under her breath, expecting some sort of witty (or unnerving) reply.

Nothing.

Undyne growled, choosing to ignore that even *they* were giving her the cold shoulder and stomped
into town. It was eerily silent, the snow piling high in the streets, which were going a very long time without being shoveled away. Though . . . there weren’t a lot of people left to shovel anymore . . .

She passed by Grillby’s, the neon lights still on, but the interior dimly lit and completely empty. She passed by the inn and the general good store, both locked up tight. The only footprints in the streets were hers.

And there, just at the end of town, was that familiar home. Christmas lights speckled the gutters, though the bulbs were shut off. But thankfully, the lights were on inside, a shimmer of pale orange spilling onto the snow between drawn curtains. Sans had to be home, and she knew Papyrus was, too. She had to see him.

Taking a breath, shivering from the cold and shaking off the snow that had built on her shoulders, she knocked.

And waited.

No answer.

She knocked again.

Waited.

Nothing.

Undyne ground her teeth together. “Damn it, Sans, I know you’re in there, open up!”

“Sorry, no one’s home,” came a surprisingly upbeat, yet coldly sarcastic, voice.

“Sans, come on. Open the door. I need to talk to you.”

“Doesn’t seem like the door’s stopping you.”

“For Christ’s sake, Sans. Just open the fucking door and let’s talk face-to-face like goddamn people for once!”

There was a long pause. And just as Undyne thought Sans was completely ignoring her, the door cracked open. In the tiny space between the door and threshold, Sans’ pale round face peered out, one eye on her, his permanent grin a very unsettling and disturbing sight.

“Can I come in? I’m freezing my ass off,” Undyne insisted.

Sans’ eye flickered to the bouquet of flowers in her hand. “You know I have allergies.”

“You’re being an asshole,” Undyne snarled, shoving the door open. She met no resistance as Sans just shuffled to the side for her. Undyne happily slammed the door shut behind her, shuddering violently as if it’d shake off the cold. And—as always, because Papyrus had always been so insistenteUndyne shoved off her boots before she went any further inside. It was rude, you know, to track snow and mud in someone’s house.

Undyne took a breath, thrusting the flowers in front of her. “I want to see him. And, uh, give these to him.”

Sans looked at the flowers, considering. He then looked up to her. “Well, aren’t you just his best bud?”
“Oh for fuck’s sake, Sans!” Undyne screamed, nearly thrashing him right then and there. “God, I am not in the mood for your shit right now! I fucked up! Ok?! I know I fucked up! I didn’t know that could even happen to him! But you know what?!

Fuck you! I saved your brother’s life, you ungrateful ass! And I’m sure he’s pretty damn happy to be alive right now, too!”

Sans continued to stare at her, completely unmoved.

“What I did was wrong, ok? I get it! I was wrong! I messed up big time! I hurt Papyrus and I wish I could . . . not do that! But the Underground is safe now! The human brat is dead, Papyrus is alive, I think that’s a pretty good thing, right!”

Sans said nothing, but his brows creased upwards ever so slightly. In the back of his mind, a single thought arose: It really isn’t.

“So . . . I’m going to go see him now, ok? I’m going to say hi, and I’m going to apologize, and I’m gonna make it up to him. I don’t know how, not yet, but . . . argh, I’ll do something! Ok?”

Sans simply shrugged. “Go ahead. But he’s still out.”

Undyne jerked back. “Still? Man, he’s been out cold for, what, three days now? Is he going to be ok?”

“Probably,” Sans shrugged. “But, ya know, turning into a feral blood-thirsty beast . . . takes a lot outta ya.”

Undyne winced. “. . .right. Ok, uh . . . going now . . .” She awkwardly shuffled past him, and then up the stairs. The upstairs was dark, the hallway lights off, and Papyrus’s door was cracked open. She gently pushed it open, letting the background light from downstairs filter in. It was still dark, but she could see his room more clearly now. His racecar bed was pushed to the left side, a desk covered in action figures and a desktop computer to the right, a black flag with a grinning skull pinned to the far wall next to a shelf stuffed with books, a box of bones to the right corner. It was exactly as she remembered it, and in the bed laid Papyrus, stone still, as if fast asleep. Well, he was, sort of, kind of, she guessed . . . was unconscious the same thing as sleeping? Ugh, screw it, she wasn’t a doctor. Gingerly, apprehensively, she approached the bed. She could see the covers over Papyrus’s chest rise and fall with his slow, even breaths.

“Hey, Papyrus,” she said, not knowing if he could even hear her. “Uh . . . just wanted to say hi, and make sure you’re ok. I mean, you’re asleep, but you’ll be ok. You will be, you’re tough. I always knew how tough you were. Heh. Made the other guard dogs look like a joke. Heh.” She shut her eye tightly. “Stupid. I’m sorry . . . I was . . . stupid.”

She collapsed into a chair placed besides the bed, where undoubtedly Sans had sat for great lengths of time the prior days, watching over him, hoping for him to wake up . . . Undyne placed the flower bouquet atop the nightstand besides his bed, between the anime action figures and model racecars.

“I should have never made you a guard. You’re too nice. I mean, you were trying to befriend a murderous human! And . . . and maybe you would have, you know? Maybe you would have smiled and hugged the evil right outta them! You’re just that goofy and nice and likeable!” Undyne’s smile faded. “But I didn’t want to live with that on my conscious. You . . . killed by a human because I made you a guard . . . I . . . I made you fight. I made you turn into something horrible and awful and you . . . you . . .”

Red. All she saw was red. Red, over the computer monitors. Red with blood from the slaughtered human. Red on the bones and fangs and claws on the monstrosity that Papyrus had become.
“That’s not you,” she whispered. “You’re not . . . that. You’re always smiling, always making really bad jokes and equally bad puzzles. You like cooking, and reading those human magazines, andragging on me for watching anime . . . whatever happened, it’s not you. I just . . . I hope you can forgive me. Because I’m so sorry, dude. I’m so, so sorry. But . . .” she wiped at her eye. “I didn’t want to lose you. You’re one of my best friends. You’re my best friend. I don’t know what would have happened if I lost you. I couldn’t lose you! I did what I thought would save you! And . . . it did! You’re alive! You’re here! That awful shitty human is gone! Everyone’s safe because of you!” Undyne deflated, her shoulders slumping to the side. “I just hope you can forgive what I did. But for what it’s worth . . . I’m happy you’re still here. You’re still my best friend. Look, I don’t care what you are, ok? I don’t care what . . . whatever the hell that piece of shit Gaster did to you. I know that’s not a real part of you! I know that if you had any say, that wouldn’t be you! And you know what, it’s not! Ok? The Papyrus I know is kind and funny and goofy and way too damn nice for his own good! So that thing can’t be you! We’re gonna figure this out, you and me! We’ll get through this! I’m here for you, Papyrus. I mean it. I’m not giving up on you. I still believe in you. I always will.”

Undyne sat there, looking over him. She reached out, to the skeletal hand that rested across his chest. She gripped it in her own, and in the light that peeked through the doorframe, the shine of something silver embedded into his wrist pierced her eye. She ignored it.

“I love you, Papyrus.”

She sat there, her thumb running over the bones of his palm, warm and still, and she just . . . looked at him. She really hoped he could hear her, somehow. She wished he would just wake up—hell, she wished she could just wake up and this would all be some sort of sick twisted nightmare. As she thought that, she gripped her arm in her other hand and viciously dug her clawed nails into her scaly skin—shit, that hurt. Damn, still here. Not a dream. That sucks.

As she held his hand, turning it over and then holding it between her own two hands, something caught her eye. His fingertips were still clawed. She frowned, and as she looked closer, she could still see his canines were rather long and pointed. Undyne scooted her chair even closer to him, but it seemed those were the only . . . remnants.

There was a creak behind her, and Undyne whipped around to see Sans standing in the doorway, leaning to one side, hands in his pocket, his smile faded.

“Sometimes it takes a little bit for all the changes to go away,” he said unprompted. “‘Specially if you try turning when you’re tired. But they’ll all be gone by tomorrow, I’m guessing. He’ll probably be awake by then.”

“Can I come over?” Undyne asked. “I want to be there when he wakes up. I should be the one to explain everything. It’s the least I can do.”

Reluctantly, Sans nodded.

“Thank you, Sans. But if he wakes up sooner, call me right away, ok? I don’t care if it’s the dead of night, call me! Got it?”

Another nod.

“Ok.” Undyne stood, pulling her hands away and placing Papyrus’s hand back across his chest. She stood there for a moment more, nervously shifting on her feet. “I’m sorry. I really am. But you still have your brother. That’s gotta mean something to you. He’s still alive. Be happy for that.”
Sans didn’t quite look at her. He moved as if to say something, but thought better of it and chose not to.

“Well . . . see ya.”

Another awkward shuffle past Sans and Undyne made her way back to the front door, slipping on her boots and casting one last look over her shoulder. Sans still stood at the top of the stairs, watching her go. The Captain gave one final wave, and let herself out into the bleary cold weather.

Walking past the all-too-quiet town, she again saw no one. She shuddered again, but not from the cold. Looking out to the trees and surrounding woods, she could still pick out tree limbs snapped from unnatural causes and deep claw marks against the bark, but there was nothing to be done about that. In the days that passed between now and . . . then, the snow had done a great job of covering up the scene of the crime. Undyne had disposed of the remains as best as she could . . . but there was only so much she could do. The mere thought of it made her nauseous. She had seen human movies, some of them horrors or thrillers with plenty of fake blood and guts and gore, and she always thought it was so comically over-the-top and ridiculous.

Not anymore.

Another shudder.

She passed Grillby’s, the neon sign still glowing bright, dim orange light reflecting off the snow. And inside, in the very back, she could see a bright smudge of yellowish light, flickering stronger than the ambient light around it.

Against her better judgment, Undyne went inside. After all, the door was open.

A bell chimed, announcing her entry. The flame monster, Grillby, looked up as she approached. He remained still and silent as Undyne took a seat at the bar, heaving herself heavily on the stool and leaning against the cold wooden surface. It was so quiet in here. No other patrons, no music playing in the background, no sound, save for the soft crackle of Grillby’s flames.

And there they sat, and stood, in a prolonged silence.
“Did I do the right thing?” Undyne whispered.

Still saying nothing, Grillby reached under the bar, pulled out a glass, and poured a measured length of smoky-brown bourbon. The smell was strong and rancid, but Undyne felt it was appropriate for the occasion. Undyne nodded in thanks, and took the drink, slamming it back while simultaneously putting a gold coin on the table.

“My friend’s alive. A dangerous human is dead. That’s good, right? So . . . why do I still feel so
Grillby did not reply. He simply reached under the bar again, pulled out a matching glass, and poured himself a drink. He held it up to the light, as if admiring it, or saying a silent toast, before he carefully sipped it. He set down the glass, a few sparks of white igniting around the jagged creases of his mouth.

“I saved his life. I never thought saving my best friend’s life would make me feel like such shit.” Undyne looked up at the silent bartender. “I didn’t mean for that to happen to him. I didn’t know. But he’s alive. That’s all that matters! . . . Right?”

Grillby tilted his head to the side ever so slightly, his movements measured and minute. And finally, a breathy, quiet voice drifted between them.

“There are some fates others would consider far worse than death.”

Undyne blinked. “Like what?”

“Corruption.”

Now it was Undyne’s turn to tilt her head in confusion. “What? Corruption?”

“Corruption of the soul.”

Undyne felt her blood grow cold as her very energy left her body. She slinked in her chair. Having killed someone, Papyrus’s LOVE would have undoubtedly increased. His soul would forever be stained with his act of violence. Unspeakable violence.

“To forgo all you believe in, to go against everything you stand for . . .” Grillby went on, staring off into the distance. “You go against everything you thought you were, and you’ll find yourself asking who you really are. Many come to terms some way or another. But some do not.” With one quick motion, he knocked back his drink.

“I don’t understand,” Undyne said.

Grillby stared down at his empty glass before filling it back up. He took another drink before speaking again. “Before the war, I ran an inn.” Memories flashed in front of him, of a bustling tavern full of patrons, of monsters and humans alike. Some wanted a nice hot meal. Some, just a simple drink. Others, lodging for the night. And others still, just a place to rest their weary feet. “I wanted no part in the war. I was an innkeeper. I was not a fighter. I was not a killer.” His voice grew thick. “We didn’t have a choice. The war needed everyone. I was given a sword. I was given armor. And I was ordered to kill.”

His gaze grew very far away.

“Apparently, I am very good at killing humans.”

Another drink knocked back.

He remembered those days, even as far away as they were, he could not forget them. He tried to deny himself, deny what he was doing. I am not a killer, he kept telling myself. I am not a killer, as he scorched legions of humans around him. I am not a killer, as he heard humans scream as he burned them alive.

His hand shook.
“I’m not a killer. That’s what I kept telling myself.”

*I could never harm a human*, as he reached out and with one motion set aflame a man standing before him. *I would never use my fire to hurt anyone,* as he watched the flesh melt off a woman’s face. He can never forget that sight. Forget their screams. Forget that *smell.*

“I’m not a killer. I kept saying it, over and over. Like it could make the bodies go away. Like it could erase the LOVE weighing down my soul.” He clutched at his chest. “I’m not a killer. The Firestorm General, Scourge of Humanity, not a killer. High Commander of the King’s Guard, first of the Royal Guard, not a killer.”

A long, long silence followed.

“You can only lie to yourself so long. Until you look in the mirror, *really* look in the mirror, and have to face the lies you tell yourself. Then, you have a choice. You either accept it, accept that maybe you were wrong. Maybe you weren’t the peaceful gentle barkeep you thought you were. Maybe there’s a dark part of you that you wish never existed, but here it is, and now you have to deal with it.”

“But that’s different. You didn’t have a choice, it was *war.* That’s what you do in war! You’re *not* a killer.”

Grillby looked at her, his eyes distant and sad. “I am, Undyne. It’s the only way I survived the war. And being a killer is the only way *Papyrus* survived that human.”

Undyne hung her head, staring down at her empty glass. Grillby filled it up again.

“He’ll be ok, though, right? He’s going to wake up . . . and be happy he’s alive. Because I’ll be there, and so will Sans. And so will you. And Alphys. And Asgore. All these guys will be alive because of him. And we’re all going to be there to support him. He’s going to be ok. I mean, wouldn’t you?”

Grillby considered it. “I would be happy to be alive and with my friends, yes. I would be happy that a dangerous human was gone and no longer a threat.” He then looked her right in the eye, taking time to gaze straight at her and *through* her.

“But I am not Papyrus.”

--

“Hee hee hee! Again! Again! Play it again!”

Alphys’s claws trembling over the remote, her hand shaking so hard she could barely keep the little thing in her grip.

“I *said,* play it again!”

A choking sob escaped the scientist’s mouth. She felt like she could barely breathe, her eyes red and sore and the streaks of tears long since dried out, having nothing left in her. She tried to swallow, her tongue thick and dry, and she gasped again. Her fingers twitched, almost spastically, and she hit the rewind button. The screens strobed in a dizzying array of colors, reds and whites and some blues as the security tapes lurched backwards in time.

“Stop! *Right there,* right there, this is my *favorite* part!”
Almost against her will, Alphys complied.

A screen flooded the room with a vibrant red glow as she was forced to stare at the image before her. By now she had learned better than to try to look away. Because he would know. Flowey would know if she wasn’t watching.

The little golden flower sighed wistfully as his beady black eyes stared up at the monitors. “Isn’t this great? I would have never thought I’d ever see it! Something new! Something I’ve never seen before! Yet here we are! Hee hee hee! Oh, it’s so delightful, isn’t it? Seeing that horrendous little brat getting torn to bloody pieces?! Oh, this brings back such fond memories!”

Alphys squeezed her eyes shut, barely able to breathe within her own gasping sobs. She felt the vines wrap tighter around her chest.

“You aren’t watching.”

“S-s-s-s-sorry . . .” she managed to choke out. “S-s-s-s-something in m-m-m-my eye.”

Flowey huffed, clearly not believing her, but thankfully, decided not to pursue it. He turned back to the screen.

“I was getting so bored, you know. Watching the same thing over. And over. And over. I thought I had seen it all. How delightful it is to be wrong! How invigorating is it to know there’s something different! Yes! Yes! I’m going to have such fun! We’re going to have such fun! Aren’t we?”

The little flower turned around, those black eyes fixing on her, the mouth opening into a jagged joker-like grin. That tiny innocuous form hid something horrible and monstrous, something even worse than what was shown on the screen. Because this tiny little plant in front of her, this tiny little thing which she created, she was responsible for, took horrid delight in her torture. And she would only be tortured further if she did not comply to that awful little thing’s demands. Alphys knew better than to say no.

“Y-y-y-yes . . .” she said miserably.

“Wonderful!” Flowey beamed, his hellish grin splitting his face in half. “Now! Play it again!”

--

Everything felt heavy.

Papyrus groaned, his eyes slow to open and his limbs like lead. He felt groggy . . . he felt exhausted. He felt that maybe he could keep his eyes closed and go back to sleep. That didn’t sound like too bad of an idea . . . yeah, maybe he could sleep for a little longer. The bed was so nice and comfy, and warm, all wrapped up like a . . . well, like a skeleton in a blanket! He managed a weak chuckle. Ah, Sans would have gotten a kick out of that . . .

It was dark. Night, maybe? Well, why else would he be in bed and asleep, right? Slowly, very slowly, his eyes open. He was in his room, and it was dark outside, but the door was cracked open and there was a sliver of light across the floor.

Papyrus frowned. He always kept the door closed! Did Sans come in and forget to close the door behind him? Again?

He might be a little more annoyed if he wasn’t so tired. He felt like he didn’t even have the strength
to lift his arms! He’d go back to sleep, rest a little bit longer . . . But he didn’t want to be so lazy! That was Sans’s job!

Hehe, Sans was starting to rub off on him, spending so long in a bed napping when he could be out doing puzzles, or training with Undyne, or cooking spaghetti! Or . . .

He frowned. He felt like he was forgetting something . . . there was something just on the tip of his tongue, but he couldn’t find it. It was that aggravating feeling of forgetting something, forgetting something important . . . oh well, maybe he’d remember it when he felt better. Even his mind felt heavy and slow.

Maybe a little longer in bed . . .

He heard the floorboards outside his room creak with footsteps. Papyrus managed to keep his eye open to see the door pushed further inward, letting in more light. And there was his brother, Sans, cautiously peering in, his pupils almost creepily illuminating his shadow-cast face.

“Bro?” Sans called out very quietly. “Are you up?”

“I am now,” Papyrus croaked. He blinked. Wow, his throat was so dry and scratchy and raspy, he barely managed to even squeak that out. “Might need some milk.”

“I can do that for ya,” Sans said, and ducked out of the door, gone for only a second before returning, a tall glass of ice-cold milk in his hand. He held it out to him, and as Papyrus took it, he realized how scared and worried his brother looked.

“Sans?” he asked. “Are you alright?”

“Yeah, sure thing, bro, don’t worry about me,” he said, grinning. He . . . didn’t sound very convincing. But Papyrus pushed that thought aside and happily drank his milk, wetting his throat to talk better. As he drank, Sans was on his phone, hurriedly texting someone.

“Who you talking to?”

“Undyne,” Sans said. “She wanted to check up on you.”

“Oh! That’s nice of her,” Papyrus said. The feeling that he was missing something kept nagging at him. What was he forgetting? It was subtly growing from a background aggravation to a more insistent unease. And he was starting to get . . . nervous? “Uh . . . why does she want to check up on me?”

Sans put down the phone, and he looked up at his brother. There was no denying it now, Sans definitely looked worried. Scared, even. “Well . . . you were out of it for a while. Just want to make sure you’re ok.”

“I do feel kinda tired and fuzzy,” Papyrus acknowledged, scratching at his head. “How long have I been out of it? What happened?”

Sans didn’t answer. He was still looking at his phone, which buzzed with an incoming message. He read it, then slipped it back into his pocket. “It’s probably best if we wait for Undyne. She really wanted to talk with you.”

“Um, ok.”

“You want some more milk?”
“I would, yes! Thank you, brother!” Papyrus said, and without him even reaching out to give the empty glass back to Sans, he took it, and he was off yet again. His brother was being quite hospitable. It was out of character for him. Man, Sans really was worried about him.

What was he missing?

That feeling of unease in his nonexistent gut continued to grow.

Sans returned with another full glass, and Papyrus gratefully took it, sipping slowly this time. They sat in a rather awkward silence, making very painful small talk as they waited for Undyne. Thankfully, they didn’t have to wait long. Maybe ten, fifteen minutes later, the front door slammed open. There was the shuffling of boots on the doormat followed by the heavy thump of footsteps climbing up the stairs. And there, huffing and puffing in the doorframe, was Undyne.

“Hey,” she panted. She was covered in sweat, which looked like it had almost started freezing. “Got here as fast as I could. Ran the whole way. What’s up, Papyrus?”

“Are you ok?” Papyrus asked, his brows creasing with concern.

“I’m fine! I’m fine, promise,” she said, taking a nearby chair, letting out a huff as she sat herself down. “I . . . I want to make sure you’re ok, though.”

“We know, Papyrus, trust us, we really do! It’s just hard, ok?” Undyne said. “I’m trying my best, I promise, it’s just--” She trailed off into a sigh, a hand running through her hair. Undyne took a very deep breath, her eye squinting shut as her hands balled into fists on her knees. “Paps, what’s the last thing you remember?”

Papyrus balked, then clicked his teeth together, thinking. “Huh. Well, I was . . .” he strained, trying to remember. “I was in Snowdin . . . Sans and I were working on a puzzle, no, wait, I was working on a puzzle, and went to check on Sans, and you were lazing at your station, as usual . . .” His brows creased together. It was starting to slowly come back to him. The haze and exhaustion were slowly leaving him, and he began to remember more and more. “There . . . there was a human! Yes! I think I remember! There was a human! Or . . . we thought it was a human. But they were creepy. And . . . not nice.” He paused, thinking very long and hard. The memories were starting to get fuzzy again. “I was waiting for them at the edge of town. I was going to talk to them. They were going down a very bad path, and I was going to try to talk them out of it. And then . . .” he tilted his head to the side in confusion. “Undyne, you punched me.”

She flinched, recoiling at the accusation. “Yeah . . . yeah, I did.”

“You were really angry. You kept hitting me.” He rubbed his cheek, almost as an afterthought. He felt ok, so whatever injuries he had must have healed. He felt so confused. “It’s getting really hard to remember now. It’s all pieces. I just remember you being angry and scared and hitting me.”

Undyne was hunched over, her shoulders shaking. “I’m so sorry, Paps. I’m really sorry . . . I’m so
“Well, I’m ok, so that’s good, right?” he tried to reassure, but again, that incessant feeling of foreboding crept up his back. He was missing something. What was he missing? Wait— “Where did the human go?”

Undyne froze. She looked up to Sans, who looked right back at her. Their expressions were something that really put Papyrus on edge. Undyne looked scared. And Sans looked equally worried, but also angry.

“Well . . .” Undyne began. Papyrus had never seen her look this way before. She was shaking. She was scared. Undyne was never scared! She was so tough and brave and wasn’t afraid of anything! “I . . . you . . . I . . .” she wrung her hands, letting out a frustrated cry. “You . . .” Her hands dropped into her lap. “The human’s gone, Papyrus.”

“Where did they go?” Papyrus insisted. But inside, he felt like he knew. That darn feeling kept growing, like it was clawing painfully at the back of his mind.

“They’re dead.”

Papyrus jerked upright. “What?! Dead?!”

Undyne nodded miserably.

He didn’t want to ask. He had to ask. He had to know. “How . . . what killed them?”

She didn’t say anything. She just looked at him. Tears were in her one remaining yellow eye, now tinged with red. Her fear and sorrow were nothing Papyrus had ever seen before. And . . . he knew.

“. . . me?” His voice was barely there. His chest felt like it was going to explode, like his mind was going to burst. He felt him shake, he felt a great terror welling inside of him, paralyzing him, halting his very breath.

Undyne only nodded.

Silence followed.

“. . . No.”

Papyrus couldn’t stop shaking.

“No. I wouldn’t. I couldn’t! I would never . . . I never wanted to hurt the human! I just wanted them to stop! I wouldn’t hurt anyone!”

“I know you wouldn’t, Papyrus,” Undyne said, rubbing her eye. “You’re so nice. You wouldn’t hurt anyone.” She brought her hand to her mouth, biting down on her knuckles as her shoulders heaved again. “But I made you. I made you hurt them. It’s all my fault. It’s all my fault. I’m so sorry. God, I’m so fucking sorry, Papyrus.”

Papyrus clutched his head. That couldn’t be right. It couldn’t be true! He’d never hurt anyone, much less kill someone! No, they had to be wrong, there had to have been a mistake! Maybe they were wrong, maybe they saw wrong, or the human tricked them! Maybe the human was still alive and just made it look like he killed them! He would never--! He would never . . .

But then he remembered. The pieces were coming back to them.
The human was coming. Undyne was so scared. She was begging him to change. He’d be stronger if he changed, she kept telling him that, she begged him to change. He wouldn’t. He refused. She told him he would die. But he kept refusing. He wouldn’t change. He wasn’t going to hurt the human. They needed help—

Undyne hurt him. Worse than he’d ever been hurt before. She kept hitting him. He wouldn’t fight back. He wouldn’t fight back.

And . . .

And then . . .

Pain.

So much pain.

Everything hurt. His body twisted and broke and shattered into a shape he did not recognize, distantly familiar but so much worse. And he . . .

He . . .

**ALL HE SAW WAS RED.**

Red. In his vision, consuming his mind, compelling him to lash out violently at everything and anything before him. Red. The snow turned crimson as his jaws and claws found purchase . . .

On the human.

He remembered.

*He remembered.*

Papyrus felt his entire body tremble. His hands clutched at his head, his fingers digging into his skull as his eyes went wide and his vision went far away. He curled in on himself, and he felt his mouth open and he screamed without hearing it.

And all he could see were the memories flashing before him. They wouldn’t stop, he couldn’t make them stop, oh god, why won’t they stop?!

He felt his throat strain as he continued to cry out as loud and as long as he could, but he could hear nothing but the sounds from his resurfaced memories. All he could hear were the terrible sounds coming from a maw that couldn’t be his own, all he could hear was the terrible screams and cries of a tortured human for only a moment before they were forever silenced. All he could hear was the sound of some hellish roar that came too close to be from anywhere but from *him.*

And all he could see was the snow turned red with what he had done. The red covering him, covering claws too long, too sharp, teeth too jagged and too many . . .

He did this.

*He did this.*

He killed them.

He killed a human.
He killed . . .

He . . .

_How could he?!_

.
.
.
.
.

Mount Ebott was cold and dark. It was so quiet in those accursed caverns. It was so quiet in all but one place.

The Underground was silent, with all but the distant tortured cries of a skeleton who remembered far too much.
Unending Silence

Chapter Notes

Hey, ever forget about your own fanfiction?! Cuz I kinda did! I am so sorry I took so long to write this chapter. Please accept this offering as my sincerest of apologies.

Snowdin was a quiet, sleepy little town. Not much happened here, nothing much changed. A perpetual air of familiarity and comfort hung over the cozy little town. And it was cozy . . .

_Had_ been cozy.

Had been full of warm, friendly people with warm, friendly faces. Faces that grinned and bore their less-than-idyllic circumstances bravely.

_Had_ been.

But now Snowdin was quiet for a much more sinister reason. The silent air was filled, not with the peaceful calm of a sleepy little village, but of a place holding its breath, afraid to even breathe, lest the slightest errant noise give them away. It was a night filled with terror and fear.

And the frozen air was shattered by a terrible scream. A scream of horror and dread. A scream of someone who remembered far too much, of someone remembering actions that were not entirely their own. Things they had done without even knowing, and the terrible weight of VIOLENCE clinging to their soul.

Papyrus was all but inconsolable.

Undyne and Sans were at his side, doing whatever pathetic meager things they could do to comfort him, both hideously and woefully inadequate with such things. But damn it, Undyne would try.

She told him, again and again, he did what he _had_ to do. He _survived_. The human left him no choice. If he didn't fight back, the human would have killed him like all the monsters before him. And she told him how thankful she was that he was here.

Yet still he could not be comforted. The visions flashed in his head of what happened--what he had _done_--and he simply couldn't--he just couldn't, he _couldn't_!--believe that he had done that.

"But it wasn't you!" Undyne tried to plead. "Papyrus, I know you better than anyone, you would never do something so terrible, even if you wanted to!"

"_But I did, _" was all he replied before he dissolved into a sobbing mess.

Undyne and Sans stayed by his side for many hours, offering what little they could for him, and eventually Papyrus stopped, if only because he had exhausted himself. He was still so very tired. Though he did not initially fall asleep, he became completely distant and unresponsive to anything either of them said. He just laid on his bed, so still and so quiet he could have been sleeping. And with little else to do, they left him. He must have much to think about. They would try again. Undyne would keep trying. Because she meant what she said; no matter how scared she was or how
horrible it was, she was glad her friend Papyrus was still alive. She’d take that over him being gone any day. And he’d realize that, too. Eventually.

Papyrus was tough. The toughest monster Undyne knew! And if anyone could come back from something like this, it was Papyrus! Papyrus always saw the good in everyone! Hell, he saw the good in that evil little brat that came barging in and slaughtering everyone! If he thought that thing deserved mercy, then he’d realized he himself deserved the same!

. . .

Right?

It was unlike Sans, but after everything, he felt the overwhelming urge for some fresh air. Making sure Papyrus was alright, sound asleep and not waking up anytime soon, Sans headed out for a stroll around Snowdin. Perhaps a walk would help clear his head. Or just make everything worse, as he took in the ghost town around him.

He didn’t think he’d ever get used to how quiet everything was now.

The wind whistled like an eerie whisper through the frozen pine trees, the wooden limbs creaking and groaning, the snow crunching like thunder with every footfall. There should be other noises, distant laughter and conversation, other footfalls, other people.

But there was nothing.

Nothing at all.

"Hee hee hee."

Sans stopped. He knew that laugh. He craned his head back, letting out an aggravated groan. Normally, seeing that little flower instantly fueled a raging fire in his heart, but he was too tired to care much. He was as exhausted as Papyrus was. The last thing he wanted to do was deal with him.

“What do you want?” Sans sighed, digging his hands into his pockets. His voice was tired and bored. He just didn’t care right now. Couldn’t be bothered to care.

The little yellow flower appeared in front of him, happily bouncing back and forth as his little evil grin split his face. “Oh, isn’t this wonderful and new! Wowie, never thought I’d see the day where I would see Papyrus break! I always tried so hard before, you know! I even tried possessing him! But nothing worked. Until now! Hee hee hee hee!”

Sans continued to look down, bored and unimpressed. “Wow. Congratulations.”

Flowey slowed, his grin fading just a little bit. “It was fun, seeing him all sobbing and crying and wailing! It was so exciting! I’ve never heard him cry so hard before!” But then, his face fell. Flowey sighed in contempt. “But the excitement didn’t last as long as I wanted it to. Having Papyrus being so depressed and mopey for so long isn’t nearly as fun as I thought it was going to be. It’s so boring. It’s just you all over again, and it’s BORING! He just sits and cries and cries and cries. Boy howdy, how dull.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry you are not completely enthralled and entertained by the state of things right now,” Sans said, rolling his eyes. “if you’re so bored, you can just RESET, you know?”
“Ugh, and listen to all that annoying whining? No thanks.” Flowey stuck out his tongue. “I’ve had my fill of that silly skeleton’s moping about. Not as fulfilling as I thought it would be. I’d rather him get over it and go back to doing stuff a little more fun.” He grinned wickedly. “Like killing **more people!** Hee hee hee! That would be so much **fun,** wouldn’t it?”

Flowey was trying to bait a reaction out of Sans. Sans knew it, and he was, conveniently, far too tired to have as much of an emotional outburst as Flowey was hoping. “Yup, sure, that’d be swell. Can I go now?”

Flowey huffed and pouted. “Gosh, **neither** of you are fun anymore! Ugh! This is the worst timeline! Can’t wait for that brat to **RESET** so they can kill your whiny little brother! Later, you trash bag!” And Flowey disappeared back beneath the snow.

Well. That went well.

---

Another night passed. Another night with the pub eerily silent and eerily empty. Grillby’s was always full of monsters looking for a quick bite to eat and cold drinks to wash it down. But over the last few days, the bar has been noticeably vacant.

It was missing over half of its regulars. Empty chairs situated at empty tables, their former owners long gone, and no one daring to taint those sacred places, so accustomed were the customers to their usual spots, that those chairs had all but their former owners’ names engraved on them.

Even when the errant monster came in to eat, they hardly said much. A solemn silence lingered. It was hard to shake free of the tragedy that had ripped through this place. And even harder to forget how that tragedy came to a screeching halt.

When the human had come into the main town, word of what was on its way quickly spread. Grillby had taken the current patrons and ushered them into the back room, where they barricaded themselves in. They had managed to evade the human and escaped with their lives.

But they had been close enough to hear what happened soon after.

The screams. The terrible unearthly roars. The quick, but horribly impossible to mistake sound of crunching bones and shredding flesh.

And then silence.

Grillby and the others had stayed there, huddled together, in total silence, for several hours, until they could be absolutely certain that whatever made that sound was gone. And Grillby ushered them all off to the safety of their own homes, one by one, eyes wide open and ever on the alert.

Grillby saw the red-stained snow before any of them. He was quick to subtly and quietly guide them away before anyone else noticed. And his flames grew cold as terrible realization hit him.

Because to him, those roars were very familiar. Familiar, but different. Distorted. Twisted into something monstrous. It didn’t take him long to put the pieces together himself.

**Poor Papyrus.** What could have possibly happened to drive him to such madness?

The question answered itself as he remembered a very similar scenario of a time long ago, where he was pushed into a corner, surrounded by merciless enemies, alone and stranded.

Grillby had reached deep inside to a darkness he didn’t know existed to unleash a wave of flames far
more powerful than he ever thought possible. Flames that left a crater of blackened ash and scorched bodies, humans cooked and charred alive in their metal suits of armor, turned red-hot by the sheer intensity of his flame.

Yes, he knew what could drive a monster to do something awful. But he never imagined Papyrus being pushed to such desperation . . .

With a quiet sigh, he closed the restaurant, wiping down the already spotless bar top and the booths, turning the chairs on top of the tables and sweeping the floors. Cleaning up was easier now. Quicker. Less messes. Less dishes.

He retired to his home for a night of restless sleep. He rarely dreamed, and when he did, they were little more than noises and brief flickering images. He rarely, if ever, remembered his dreams.

Tonight was different.

He was in a blackened room, featureless and empty. He furrowed his eyes in confusion, looking about. It was impossible to tell how big this room was, as there were no visible walls or ceiling, just a featureless expanse of blackness.

Behind him, no further than arm’s reach, was a silver door.

His hand reached to the handle.

He blinked, and now he was on an empty field. The grass was black and scorched. Spears and swords and empty armor pieces littered the ground. Tattered and burnt flags flapped in the wind. Grillby stared down at his hands, coated in blood and ash.

He blinked again. He was back in the black room. The door was open. There was a voice.

You understand. You understand his pain and suffering.

Grillby shook his head. He never heard that voice before. But why was it so familiar?

Go to him. Speak words of comfort.

“I don’t understand,” Grillby called out, but his voice was muted. He spoke, but couldn’t hear his own voice.

Help him. You can help him.

“Who are you?” Again, he could hear nothing.

Please.

He blinked, and the door was closed.

He awoke in the morning, his alarm waking him with a gentle tune. Grillby shook his head, switching off his alarm clock and sitting up in his bed.

What had all that been about? He never had dreams so vivid and . . . poignant.

But he felt that whatever that had been, that voice, was right. Grillby knew Papyrus must be so distraught with what happened. Grillby had been there before. He understood.

The voice was right, he realized grimly. He could help Papyrus. And he should.
Dressing, he decided the bar would remain closed today. He walked across Snowdin. Quiet, still, eerily silent little Snowdin, to the last house in the town before crossing over to Waterfall. The lights were dark, but surely the residents must be awake.

He knocked on the door. It took a few minutes, and another knock before the door was answered by a very exhausted looking Sans. The smaller skeleton blinked in surprise to see the fire elemental at his door.

“Hey, Grillby,” he said. “Uh, gotta admit, certainly wasn’t expecting to see your face around here.”

“I know it might be unconventional, but I did wish to stop by and see how the both of you were doing,” he said in his quiet, whispery voice. “It wasn’t hard for me to realize what happened. And I imagine that you and Papyrus must be feeling very distressed right now.”

Sans looked away. “. . . yeah, that would be a pretty accurate assumption.”

Grillby hesitated. This might be out of line, unwanted help, but in his soul, he had to at least try. “I . . . might be able to help him.” Sans threw him a very curious look. “I know what pain he must be experiencing right now. I’ve been there. Perhaps I can reach him.” He paused, opening his hands. “May I at the very least try?”

Sans considered it. It was an open secret that Grillby had fought in the war, but Grillby himself never spoke of it, or what he had been through. No one had dared to ask, either. Everyone knew better than to pry. But at this point, what could it hurt? Papyrus needed a pep-talk, and Sans wasn’t the one to do it. He always loved dodging problems. Trying to solve this one with his usual tricks wasn’t going to work. With a nod, he welcomed Grillby inside.

Grillby shucked off his coat and boots and ascended the stairs to Papyrus’s room. Papyrus was sitting on his bed, knees pulled tightly to his chest and staring at the far wall, at absolutely nothing at all, completely lost in thought. He didn’t even acknowledge Grillby entering as his warm orange fire-light spilled into the room. Grillby looked back at Sans, who shrugged helplessly.

“He’s been like this for days,” Sans said quietly. “He rarely responds to anything anymore. He barely eats anything. I don’t know what to do.”

Grillby nodded grimly. He strode into the room, taking the seat that had been set besides the bed. On the nightstand was a plate of spaghetti, barely touched and stone cold.

“Hello, Papyrus,” Grillby said. The skeleton didn’t respond. “You must be going through a lot. What you must be experiencing, well, I can hardly imagine it.”

Still, no response.

Grillby leaned back, hands folded in his lap as he let out a breath, sparks flitting out of the crack that was his mouth. “I remember the day I first met you and your brother. I don’t think I can ever forget such an exciting first encounter.” He smiled at that, but yet, the skeleton was unresponsive. “You were very protective of your brother. I remember you giving me the start of my life when you revealed yourself to me. And how you loomed over me, so scared and shaking so badly, but refusing to leave your dear brother. I admit, you were quite the sight!”

Finally, something. He could see Papyrus shrink in on himself, pulling his legs tighter into him and lowering his head.

“But I mean that in the best of ways. You always had other’s best interests at heart, even before your own. No matter how scared you were of me, your first priority was of someone else. Sans. I know
you can be a bit overbearing, but inside you have a heart that is devoted to making people happy and
doing your very best to see the very best in everyone.”

Papyrus remained silent still.

Grillby took a moment. This was the most he had spoken in a long time. And he had much more to
say. He cleared his throat and continued.

“I know you must be thinking, ‘then, if I am so good, if I always see the best in others, then how
could I do something so awful?’ Is that right?”

Very slowly, and with very subtle motions, Papyrus nodded. Grillby smiled. Ah, progress. He was
getting there. And he continued, slowly and gently.

“Let me ask you something. Do you think I am a good monster?”

Papyrus turned to look at him. He looked so very sad, but he finally spoke, his voice hoarse and
very, very quiet. “You took us in. Gave us food and clothes. And names. You helped us.”

“All of those are very true. But they do not answer my question,” Grillby said patiently. “Am I a
good monster?”

“Yes,” Papyrus said, almost immediately. “You were kind to us.”

“But how can that be?” Grillby asked. “I killed people. I have killed many humans. How can I
possibly be good?”

Papyrus scrunched up his face, fumbling over himself as he struggled for an answer. “But you were
protecting people. You had to-“

“Ahh, is that right? I was protecting my friends, and thus it made it ok?”

Papyrus looked very uncertain. “Well . . . it’s not right to hurt people. You shouldn’t hurt people.
But you felt like you had to. You felt it was the only way to protect them.”

“Then I am confused,” Grillby said. “I killed many people, because I had to. And you believe that I
am a good monster. So . . . why aren’t you?”

Papyrus looked away, curling into himself once again. “Because . . . I didn’t mean to— I didn’t do it
on purpose—I didn’t want to! But something . . .” Papyrus clutched his chest. “It made me hurt
them.”

“So you even admit you are not responsible for what happened. You are not to blame. So why do
you punish yourself like this?”

Papyrus looked away. He didn’t answer for a very long time. “Because maybe I could have
stopped it. But I didn’t. I couldn’t. So it is my fault.”

“Let me ask you something else,” Grillby offered. “Imagine if you stop breathing. You force
yourself to stop breathing and try not to breathe again. How long do you think you can hold your
breath before your body forces you to?”

Papyrus took a moment to think about it.

“My point is, you can’t force yourself to stop forever. Eventually, your body will kick in and make
you breathe again. Your body will naturally do whatever it takes to survive. Because that’s how we
are; we survive. And our bodies will do whatever it takes to keep us alive. Some of us fight just a little bit harder.”

Grillby looked away. “I know, because I found myself in a very similar scenario. I was surrounded by humans who wanted me dead. They were going to kill me . . .” His hands intertwined, gripping each other tightly as the painful memory came back to him, and he looked away. “I had no idea just what I was capable of until I was pushed to that edge. I fought back.”

He let a long pause hang between them, Grillby dipping his head low.

“You may think the scenarios are different, but at the core, are they really? We were forced to do something terrible because we had to. And to make it worse, there were some humans I could have spared. I could have just walked away. But I didn’t. I hurt them, Papyrus. Because I was hurt and angry. Because I could. And that’s worse, right? Hurting others not to survive, but just because you can. Terrible, right? And now, one final question for you.” He looked Papyrus in the eye. “Knowing all this, do you still think I am a good monster?”

Papyrus thought for a long time. “That must have been awful,” he said quietly. “I’m sorry you had to go through that.” Grillby nodded silently. “I’m sorry you had to go through that.” Grillby nodded silently. “But . . . still . . . after all that . . . you were still kind to us, and helped us, and protected us . . .” There it was, that dawning realization. Slow, but it was there. “Even if you did something terrible, you did good things.”

Grillby patted his shoulder. “If you can see the good in me after all the things I did, then you have to find that same mercy and goodness for yourself. Perhaps you do not need to forgive yourself. Not yet. But you should. Eventually. Not because you know I did worse than you, but because you didn’t have a choice. And perhaps you don’t forget. Maybe you should never forget, and use them as a reminder to live your life to the fullest that was denied to them, and denied to the ones they killed. Do it for them, Papyrus. Step forward, move on. Forgive yourself. But don’t forget. Don’t you think you deserve that?”

Papyrus contemplated this quietly for a while.

“Well, my doors are always open for you. And if you need to speak more, know that I am happy to listen to whatever you want to say.” Grillby stood, turning to the door to leave. He cleared his throat and tugged at the collar of his shirt. “After all, I think I’ve talked enough. Hm, talked enough for the rest of the decade, perhaps.”

And as he left, he could have sworn he heard just the softest ‘Nyeh heh heh.’

The day after, Papyrus was . . . well, he wasn’t quite back to his full self, not yet, that would take time. But he finally left his room. He finally joined Sans at the kitchen table for breakfast. He finally ate something, and not just one or two bites, but a full meal. A small one, but a real one. He was still very quiet and introspective, still thinking very hard about many things, but it seems he had shaken off the very worst of his depression. Whatever Grillby had said to him seemed to have helped, and Papyrus was taking small steps to get himself back onto the right track.

He still didn’t stray too far from the house, but eventually Undyne had come over to visit. She knocked on the door, and all but barged over Sans to run to Papyrus when she saw he was up and about. She charged at the skeleton, wrapping him up in a suffocating hug and lifting him off his feet.

She was shaking.

“You’re ok,” she said. “Good. You really scared me, you know? Don’t do that again, got it, you
She set him down, taking a step back and wiping the back of her hand across her eye.

“God, Papyrus . . . I don’t even know where to begin. I’m just so sorry. You don’t even know how sorry I am, man. I’m just . . . I’m glad you’re alive. Ok? I don’t care about anything else, you know I would never think anything less of you, right? I’m glad you’re alive. You’re my best friend. I don’t want to lose you.”

Very subtly, so subtly it could have been so easy to miss, the corner of Papyrus’s mouth twitched upwards. “Thank you, Undyne.”

“If there’s anything I can do to ever make it up to you—”

“I think if it’s alright with you, I’d rather we not talk about it right now,” Papyrus insisted quietly.

Undyne dipped her head. “Right, right, of course, whatever you want.” She thought, biting at her lip. “Um, I have some crummy anime videos we can watch. Or we can work on a puzzle or something. Whatever you want.”

“Hm, maybe no puzzles today,” Papyrus said. It was so weird to hear him speak so quietly. His voice lacked that usual bombastic flamboyancy that allowed anyone to hear him clear across the Underground. But now Undyne found she actually had to strain to hear him. “I suppose I will have to do with your children cartoons.”

Undyne barked a laugh. She wouldn’t rib him too hard for his joke, because he was joking! And that was beyond a relief to hear that he still had his sense of humor. He was getting better, and that was a reassurance Undyne desperately needed right now. “Alright, we’ll watch my little kiddie cartoons. I have the very best of the best!”

They situated themselves in the living room, wrapping themselves up in blankets and fixing themselves up some tea, huddling together as they watched the eye-searing bright magical schoolgirls fight off bad guys of all shapes and sizes. Papyrus didn’t say much, and neither did Undyne. But sometimes just being there was good enough. And she was happy to be here. And she was happy Papyrus was here.

But despite everything, something nagged at her. And it wouldn’t leave her alone.

“Hey, Papyrus?” she said. He turned to look at her. “I know you didn’t want to talk about it, and I promise I’m not going to ask about what you think I am but . . . how the hell did Flowey know?”

Papyrus blinked in confusion. “How did Flowey know what?”

“How did Flowey know how to do . . . you know . . .” She trailed off and gestured to him. “I mean, he knew exactly what to do to make you . . . do that. So he must have known about it!”

Papyrus only looked even more puzzled. “I am certain that I’ve never shown him that before. I mean, not even I knew about it.”

“Yeah, so what the hell?”

The two lapsed into an uneasy silence, puzzling over this.

Sans had been around, and he overheard the conversation. He was just standing at the periphery of the family room with one foot in the kitchen. And it seemed the conversation caught his attention.
Undyne looked up at him, also remembering something else. “Wait a minute . . . I remember your story about what happened to Gaster. The same thing happened to you, didn’t it? When you dumped him into the CORE or whatever? You . . . uh . . .” Undyne made a clawing motion. “That explains why afterwards you were out for so long, just like Papyrus was.”

Sans slowly nodded. “Yeah . . .”

“And that’s why you were so scared,” Papyrus said with horrible realization. “That’s why you were so scared of it.”

Again, uneasy silence. Sans only nodded, shrugging in attempt to bring levity to the situation. “So it seems like Flowey knew about me, and then made a leap of assumptions about you,” Sans said.

“Brother, I’m so sorry for bringing up such unpleasant memories! If I had known, I would have never pressured you so earnestly!” Papyrus said.

“It’s not your fault,” Sans insisted. “I never spoke of it, I never answered any of your questions, I kept you in the dark on purpose. How were you to know?” He shoved his hands in his pockets, he too thinking about recent events.

*Flowey.*

Of course he caused all this. And that meant the little weed reset enough times before the human reloaded their SAVE to figure out how to trigger Papyrus’s feral side. Well, that made sense. But something else was on his mind, something he hadn’t considered.

*Flowey, the human . . .*

*Why hadn’t the human RESET by now?*

Though it was a long time ago (was it? Eh, time travel and RESETS got messy and complicated, who even knew) Sans remembered the first time he met the human in the Golden Halls after they killed everyone. He remembered their eager, hungry gleam in their blood-red eyes. He remembered how excited they were to finally face off against him.

And he remembered how that brat hardly lasted two seconds into their very first fight.

He remembered the first time they came back. That look of total shock, mixed with horror, awe, and bewilderment. But there was that all-too-familiar glint of determination, that steel resolve to persevere and defeat him. They had been noticeably shaken, but they hadn’t let them stop that for a second. They were all too eager to try again and again and again and again. However many times it took, they wouldn’t stop until Sans was defeated.

Not until several dozens of tries later until they finally did have to take a break, but the point was, he remembered how quickly they RESET and came back for more, determined to beat him.

Yet, one go against Papyrus, and they hadn’t RESET for days.

For some reason, that was the most disturbing part of this whole ordeal. Their determination was unlike anything Sans had seen. And they gave up after one go? It wasn’t like them.

*Why hadn’t the human RESET by now?*

“Sans? You alright?” Papyrus piped up.
“Huh?” Sans jerked upright, realizing he had gotten lost in his own thoughts. “Oh, yeah, it’s nothing, just thinking.”

“Well, let us know if you come up with any grand revelations,” Undyne said. “And if you see Flowey again, kick his ass.”

Sans grinned darkly. “I’ll certainly kick him in the bud.”

Papyrus groaned. “I was going to scorn you because I don’t think anyone else needs to get hurt, but that pun makes me retract my statement.”

“God, Papyrus, you are way too nice,” Undyne said.

Sans chuckled. He dipped out of the house. It was time to visit Hotland and drop in on Alphys. He knew about all her cameras, and if anyone had a clue about what happened, she would know.

He winced inwardly. Watching the video was not something he was looking forward to in the least. But it was the only way to find out what happened.

He knocked on the lab, and as expected, it took quite a bit of persistence for the doors to open. In fact, they didn’t open at all. Sans had to call Alphys, and after that went to voicemail, he tried texting hr. No answer. So then he went to her social media channels and dropped her a message there. No dice. Getting a little impatient (this was important, dammit) he finally resorted to using a shortcut to teleport inside. He wouldn’t normally use his little trick to invade someone’s space, but dire times call for dire measures and all that.

“Al?” he called out. “Al, you home?”

A squeaky wheel caught his attention as a box-shaped figure came rolling down the dark and dimly-lit labs. It was Mettaton, arms on his hips and making a bee-line straight for Sans. It was hard to gauge his attitude, but seeing as he was free of his usual dramatics, it seemed serious indeed.

“She’s not seeing anyone today, darling,” Mettaton said flatly. His arms crossed his chest. “I’ll have to kindly ask you to leave. She’s not well.”

“Hey, Mets. I know it’s rude to drop in like this, but it’s important.”

“I can imagine. But my answer remains. She’s not well. She needs rest after the dreadful things she’s been through, and she’s certainly in no mood for visitors—”

“Sans?”

Both turned upwards to the escalator, where Alphys was standing. She looked terrible. Her scales were a dull grey-gold color, massive bags hung under her eyes, her glasses were skewed and smudged, and her clothes were filthy. It looked like she hadn’t had a shower in those last few days.

“S-S-Sans? What are y-y-you doing here?” she asked.

“Oh, darling, don’t mind him, I was simply seeing him out,” Mettaton said, then put a hand on Sans’ shoulder and began to wheel to the door. “You get some beauty rest, lovely, I’m sure it can wait.”

“N-n-no, it’s o-ok,” Alphys insisted. She stepped on the escalator and descended to the lower floor, slowly shuffling up to the both of them. Despite her shabby and exhausted appearance, she looked strangely alert. “I-i-is Papyrus ok?”
“He’s getting there,” Sans assured. “A little pep-talk did wonders for him. It’ll be a bit before he’s back up to snuff, but he’ll get there.”

The scientist cracked a smile. “T-t-t-that’s good. I’m happy h-he’s doing better.” Mettaton, seeing the situation was handled, quietly left the two alone. Alphys lowered her head, the smile vanishing. “It’s t-t-t-errible what happened. I c-c-c-can’t stop thinking about it. It’s j-just a-a-a-awful.” Sans silently placed a hand on her shoulder. She sniffled, but bucked up and shrugged it off. “So . . . you didn’t come all this way f-f-for little ol’ me! What can I do for you?”

“Oh, come on, I don’t need an excuse to see a fellow science pal, do I?” Sans joked. “Who else could appreciate my puns on subatomic particle structure?”

Alphys snorted. “Oh, gosh, please don’t. They’re so bad.”

“Aw, they always get such a positive reaction out of you.”

“That hardly makes any sense!” she cried, but that seemed to do the trick. She was smiling and laughing. A definite improvement. Mission success.

And now to totally ruin it.

“But I do need your help,” he said seriously. “There’s something that’s been bugging me. And . . . Alphys, I need to see the footage of the battle between my brother and the human.”

Alphys’s face went sheet-white. Her eyes went wide, her pupils tiny, and her jaw dropped wide open.

There was a very long pause.

_”What?”_ she squeaked.

“You don’t have to watch it with me,” he insisted. “You can just tell me where they are, and I can fetch them and watch them by myself. I know how . . . yeah, it’s bad. You can literally do anything else, I don’t mind. But I have to see it.”

“But . . . why?!” Alphys blubbered. “It’s horrible, Sans!”

“I know,” he said grimly. “But something’s up, and I think the fight may have something to do with it.”

Alphys simply shook her head. “I don’t get it.”

“I think the human’s RESETs might be messed up somehow. Can you help me?”

She reeled, but slowly, she nodded. She knew a little bit about the RESETs. Maybe not as much as Sans, but she did have first-hand experience of them through her time with the determination experiments and Flowey. “I-I-I guess. If it’ll help you. H-h-h-here, let me show you.”

“Thanks, Al, you’re the best.”

She walked over to her massive computer, and with a few clicks, it powered on and she navigated through a whole bunch of folders until she found the video clips she was looking for. It didn’t escape Sans’ notice just how quickly and efficiently she found those files.

“T-t-t-this one,” she said grimly. “This camera has the best angle of the fight.” She clicked it and opened it up.
Sans stared at her. “You don’t have to watch this.”

She shrugged, numb. “Yeah, I know. But I’ve watched it enough. I th-th-th-think I’m like, totally de-s-s-s-s-sensitized to any sort of v-v-v-violence now. Heh.”

Sans just looked at her, but didn’t want to press her. She was a wreck as is. So he turned back to the computer and steeled himself for what he was about to see.

The fight was just as dark and disturbing as he remembered, and there were times he had to even look away. He asked Alphys to turn the volume off, to which she was all too happy to oblige. He watched the whole thing, which, thankfully, wasn’t too long.

He frowned. “Can you play it again?”

Alphys inhaled deeply, squeezing her eyes shut, but she did as he asked. She played the video again.

They said nothing as they watched. It was just too grim. Too grim for Sans to even dare cracking a joke. There was a time and a place for joking. This was not it.

It was actually Alphys that noticed it first. She leaned forward, peering at the screen, adjusting her glasses. She took them off and cleaned them on her food-stained shirt before shoving them up on her snout. “Huh. Do you see that?”

“What?”

Alphys paused the video right at the end of the fight, the Blaster beast looming over the body of the human. She zoomed in, right onto the body. It was a disturbing sight with all sorts of shades of reds mixed together. So that might be why Sans hadn’t noticed it at first.

But Alphys, who had been forced to watch this very clip dozens, if not hundreds of times, was able to notice the subtle details.

“Is that . . . is that their SOUL?”

Sans leaned closer, trying to pick out what Alphys was seeing. And she was right. Right there, floating just above the human, nearly perfectly camouflaged by the sea of red around them, was a glowing red heart.

A human SOUL.

Sans slowly nodded. “Ok . . . yeah? And?”

“S-s-so we know human SOULS can last a little while outside the body, right? Well, watch what happens next-“ She clicked the play button.

What happened next was that the beast—it wasn’t Papyrus, Sans refused to acknowledge it as such—craned its neck down and unhinged its massive jaws. It shot its laser beam right down on the human, all but vaporizing the body.

Sans nodded. Yeah, he remembered this part.

But Alphys had a much more noticeable reaction. She let out a soft ‘oh no!’ as she rewound the video and played it, frame by frame. And Sans saw what Alphys had seen.

The beast hadn’t just fired its blaster attack on the human body, but on the SOUL itself. Sans had
seen SOULS shatter before; just like dropping a pane of glass. Literally shattering into a million pieces.

But as they carefully watched one frame at a time, the blast hadn’t shattered the SOUL. The SOUL had, piece by piece, disintegrated.

Realization hit the both of them like a cement truck. “He didn’t just kill the human. He destroyed the human’s SOUL,” Sans breathed.

Alphys, completely numb from this revelation, could only stare. “Y-y-y-your blast attack can destroy SOULS?!”

Sans was reeling. He put a hand to his head and had to find a chair to sit down.

That utter madman. Was this Gaster’s true plan? Was this the true nature of their forms? To not just kill humans but to utterly destroy them?!

He remembered Gaster saying he was making them into weapons. But this—

“That psychopath,” Sans muttered. “I had no idea . . . we can do that?!”

“Y-y-y-yeah. S-s-s-seems so,” she said, her voice incredibly faint. “So . . . what does that mean?”

The SOUL hadn’t shattered. It was destroyed.

The human didn’t RESET because they couldn’t.

The human was more than dead.

Their SOUL was gone.

A cold chill gripped Sans’ body.

There would be no more RESETs.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!