After the Barrier keeping the beings known as Monsters imprisoned under Mt. Ebott fell courtesy of the Frisk Dreemurr, the Monsters have successfully assimilated into human
society while still remaining an autonomous culture in their own right.

Now, this doesn’t mean that things are perfect. But they focus on the good things - the freedom, the night sky, the speed-of-sound changes in every aspect of life on a regular basis. And they sure as hell aren’t going to do it alone - they’ve got allies in unexpected places, and they’ve got each other to fall back on.

Arc I: Chapters 1-14: Complete
Arc II: Chapters 15-22: Complete
Arc III: Chapters 23-27: Complete
Arc IV: Chapters 28-31: Complete
Arc V: Chapters 32-45: Complete
Arc Filler: Chapters 46-49: Complete
Arc VI: Chapters 50-63: Complete
Arc VII: Chapters 64-80: Complete

Click HERE for the Discord Server!

Notes

Hi there. I'm Spazzin. But y'all can call me Spaz.

I really hope y'all enjoy this. But if you don't, that's fine. You do you.

See the end of the work for more notes.
At Last

Chapter Summary

Alphys and Undyne are married. It is an Event.

Chapter Notes

My love has come around...

6:50 P.M., June 16th, 201Z

It’s a beautiful day in Ebott.

Birds are singing.

Flowers are blooming.

On days like this, kids like you...

...are attending the reception of a wedding between a couple of weebs.

“...and that’s the story of the third time i woke up half-naked in grillby’s broom closet,” Sans recounted to the group.

A Human male with black hair and narrow russet eyes clapped slowly in a mixture of irony and genuine respect. “Amazing. I would never have guessed you capable of such unlaziness.”

“you flatter me, chas.”

“Which is why I call bullshit,” said a Human female similar in appearance to Chas with black hair in an immaculate high bun and small rectangular glasses over her light brown eyes. “There is no way you could possibly have done any of that. Especially that thing with the blowdryer.”

“Well, shelby, it’s all true. though i never did find out how i got a toy boat stuck in my fourth intercostal space, i did eventually find my pants for sale at the tem shop -”

He was interrupted by the sound of a bleating goat. He answered instantly, knowing who had just texted him.

I text from: tori

*Hello Sans! Have you seen Frisk? I believe they have run off to escape the crowd, but I can’t seem
to find them.
*i’ll look for them
*Thank you! :) 
*no prob t
*let me know if you need anything else
*cuz i’m stopping by the buffet table while i frisk it for frisk-its
*LOL! :D
*Also, I would like some dinner rolls!
*how many
*Three, thank you.
*ok

Sans put away his phone. “sorry folks. gotta go find frisk. goatmama’s worried for ‘em -”
But the two humans had walked away at some point while he was texting Toriel. Dammit.
Then he got another text tone, this one being essentially a hunting horn.

I text from caemlaeth bloodbinder
*Sorry we ditched you Fezzik, but you were texting your gf so Shel and I let you have your fun with your bae

Chas Wong. What a character, that guy. They recently started making Let’s Play videos for World of Warcraft - Chas’ Blood Elf Caemlaeth Bloodbinder and Sans’ Goblin Fezzik Milflord. His sister Shelby, whom he shared an apartment with, was unamused by their antics. This gave Chas the incentive to start a Dungeons and Dragons campaign.
*chas no
*tori n i are not dating
*i mean she’s 1 of the best things ever to happen to me
*but she’d never go for me
*Sorry. But for real, go get her. Trust me on this. You won’t regret it.
*thanks
*i’ll sleep on it
*gdi Fezzik

Sans clicked out of the texting app. Texting Frisk was pointless since they - once again - forgot their cell phone at home. The kid was spacey.
Welp. Let’s ask Papyrus if he knows where Frisk is at...

“Oh, Papyrus!” Mettaton said as though he hadn’t asked the brides for the Skeleton’s whereabouts and had in fact been simply wandering about aimlessly. “What are you doing here~?”

“OH, HELLO METTATON! I AM HERE BECAUSE I AM THE BEST MAN!” Papyrus explained in his usual cheerful tone, not quite understanding what Mettaton meant.

Mettaton was, however, very much aware of Papyrus’ tendency to misinterpret the subtler meanings of many statements - one of his charms, in his humble opinion. Which was usually right.

“I’m aware, darling~! And you are absolutely dapper in your outfit~!” Mettaton drawled with a wink in Papyrus’ direction.

The Skeleton’s split-second blush did not go unnoticed by the Android - or did he blush? Mettaton wasn’t always certain with Papyrus; there had been something different about him as of late. But there would be time for inquiry about that subject later.

“PAPYRUS! OVER HERE!”

The sound came from a Human female with long bushy red hair and blue eyes, as well as multiple piercings on her ears and one eyebrows. She was seated at a nearby table with an older bearded heavyset male Human with greyish hair and blue eyes. She was waving at them in a “come over here” gesture with a near-manic grin on her face.

Papyrus waved back, acknowledging the gesture. Turning to Mettaton he asked while erratically pointing in the woman’s direction, “UM, WOULD YOU, UH, LIKE TO JOIN ME?? OVER THERE?”

Mettaton giggled at the adorkable display - there really was no other way to describe it. “Of course, Darling, I wouldn't mind at all ~!”

As much as Mettaton would have wanted to hold Papyrus’ hand on the way over to the table, he decided to simply follow a few short steps behind him.

“Papyrus, this is Randy Marlow! We were married over spring break and he just got here from Colorado!” said the woman as she latched onto the man’s arm at the elbow.

Papyrus reached out to shake the other Human’s hand. “IT IS VERY NICE TO MEET YOU, MR. MARLOW!” he said as he shook the man’s hand.

“Please, call me Randy,” said the man. His voice was quiet, but it had presence.

“OH, SHARONA, THIS IS METTATON! I’M SURE YOU’VE HEARD OF HIM!” Papyrus said with no small hint of pride. “METTATON, THIS IS SHARONA GOLDSBY! ERR, MARLOW?”

“Marlow-Goldsby now!” Sharona said with an elated, goofy grin while showing off the simple gold band on her left hand.

“Oh, congratulations! It’s so very nice to meet a friend of Papy’s!” Mettaton chimed, shaking Sharona’s and Randy’s hands.

“I’ve heard so much about you,” Sharona said, smirking. “So how long have you two boys known
each other?”

Papyrus just tilted his head to the left slightly in confusion, not being sure what was meant by the vague statement.

“Oh, we’re not seeing each other, if that’s what you meant!” Mettaton insinuated, blushing with mild intensity.

Sharona snorted. “That’s not what I meant, sweetie, but nice to know.”

“Err, why don’t you two have a seat?” Randy offered.

They sat in the proffered seats.

Sharona spoke up the split second the two sat. “Sorry we didn’t make it to the ceremony, Caroline got carsick from reading on the freeway.” she explained.

“You think she’d know better by now…” Randy grumbled with exasperation.

Papyrus got a look of confusion on his face. “UM, WHO OR WHAT IS A ‘CAROLINE’?”

“Caroline’s my daughter from my last relationship,” Randy said, a look of parental pride on his face quirking his beard to reveal a toothy grin - one of his bottom incisors was missing. “She’s sitting right…” his voice faded as he turned his head toward the empty seat to his right. He gave an exasperated sigh, slumping his shoulders and rolling his eyes, his face morphing from parental pride to parental irritation. Clearly this was not an uncommon occurrence.

“WOWIE, I DIDN’T KNOW HUMANS COULD BE INVISIBLE!!” Papyrus said.

“How many people are here?” Randy asked, resignedly.

“About 300 or so. Why?” Mettaton said.

Randy sighed, leaning back in his seat. “Caroline is very uncomfortable in crowds. She’s probably off somewhere reading in a nook or something…”

“Or under the table,” a voice offered.

“Or under the ta- wait, what the -”

Randy leaned over, lifting the table cloth to better see the source of the statement. “Caroline, please get out from under there and meet Sharona’s friends.”

“Don’t wanna,” said the voice, which apparently belonged to Caroline. “Too much sound. Too much people.”

“UM, ACTUALLY SOME OF THE PEOPLE HAVE ALREADY LEFT. THERE’S A LOT OF EMPTY SPACE AROUND THE TABLE. IF THAT HELPS. IT HELPS FRISK WHEN THEY GET TOO OVERSTIMULATED.”

“Frisk Dreemurr, right? Levi is friends with...them, you said the kid prefers?”

“THAT IS CORRECT!”

“Caroline, you coming out?” Randy asked.
“I guess…” Caroline said hesitantly.

From underneath the table a very pale, lanky girl with long black hair tried to stand up. And failed. And kept trying. Randy was forced to lift her by the ribs and set her down in the chair. Okay, the setting her in the chair part was just because he could.

The child was holding a book close to her chest with a place marked by one of her fingers - a book that seemed like most high schoolers would have trouble reading. She was staring blankly at some nonexistent thing on the tablecloth. And then she started to read again. At this point one would have noticed that two of her fingers were missing - the left index finger and the right middle finger.

“HELLO, HUMAN CAROLINE! I AM THE GREAT PAPYRUS, BUT SIMPLY PAPYRUS IS FINE!” Papyrus greeted enthusiastically, extending a hand in Caroline’s direction. Caroline shrunk in on herself anxiously.

The silence was not necessarily awkward, but it did have an odd feel to it.

“So, what are you reading?” Mettaton decided to ask.

Caroline seemed to start at this. She looked up. Her silver eyes widened. And then they squinted before returning to their natural state.

“Oh, uh, Return of the King. By J.R.R. Tolkien. The Two Towers is in the car with my glasses ‘cause I finished it. I don’t wear my glasses when I read because it makes my eyeballs feel all heavy and fuzzy and weird,” she rambled. She seemed a bit more confident since she was talking about something she liked.

“LIKE ASGORE?” Papyrus interjected.

“Is an ‘Asgore’ heavy and fuzzy and weird?” Caroline asked.

“YES.”

“Then yes, my eyeballs feel like an Asgore when read with my glasses on.”

Sharona stifled a snort at this odd exchange. Mettaton squeed a little bit because he found it adorable. Randy simply looked on in a mixture of awe and confusion. And then he had a look of realization on his face.

“Caroline. Where are your glasses?”

“In the car.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah. You saw ‘em on my face when we left the house, right?”

“We were in a hurry, so no, I didn’t.”

“Sharona, you saw my face this morning, right?”

“I’m with Randy on this one, sweetie.”

“I’m sure Levi saw ‘em. So, I’m currently reading The Battle Of The Pelennor Fields, and I wanna finish at least all of Book V by tonight at the latest!” Caroline continued, seeing no problem with the fact that she probably may have lost her glasses.
“CAROLINE!” came a voice.

The voice belonged to a tall, lean, excited young boy with bushy red curls and wide blue eyes. He was smiling widely enough to expose the gap in his front teeth. He ran toward the table, coming to an abrupt stop. This boy was Levi, Sharona’s son.

“Hey, hey, Caroline, there’s a buncha sofas over there by the buffet table! Frisk and Flowey’re over there too! Ya wanna come with?” he rambled excitedly.

Caroline shrunk in on herself a bit before responding. “Okay, I guess.”

“Alright! Grab onto my sleeve so ya don’t get lost!”

“Mmkay.”

Caroline grabbed Levi’s left sleeve and slipped out of her seat. She started to follow him away from the table.

“Levi,” Sharona said in a warning tone, “at least say hello to Papyrus and his boyfriend!”

“U-UM, HE’S! REALLY NOT MY BOYFRIEND!” Papyrus countered nervously.

“yeah, sharona. he’s his bot -friend,” Sans interjected. When he had shown up no one at that table had any clue.

“SAAAAAANS…” Papyrus groaned in brotherly irritation and personal embarrassment.

“Oh, okay. Hi Papyrus! Hi Papyrus’ boyfriend Mettaton!”

“HELLO, LEVI!  HE’S NOT MY BOYFRIEND!”

“Yeah, the short Skeleton said Mettaton was his botfriend,” Caroline said.

“Caroline Marlow…” Randy said in exasperation.

“Okay, I’m sorry. C’mon, Levi, I wanna go wherever ya said we were goin’ so I can sit down and keep reading. Dernhelm is about to kick some Witch King butt.”

And with that Levi and Caroline left. The fact that Caroline was taller than Levi - known for being the tallest among the Humans in his grade - did not go unnoticed.

“so. sharona. this the lucky guy you snagged yourself over spring break?” Sans asked. Now was as good a time as any. He knew where Frisk was now, so he had a bit of time to kill.

Sharona giggled. “Yep! This is Randy, Randy, this is Sans, he’s in the PTA -”

“I saw the video,” Randy said.

“which one?”

“The one with the first quarter bake sale, I think. There were spiders.”

“oh, yeah, that one was the fourth quarter bake sale. muffet made a killing that day.”

Sans just got three wide-eyed stares in response.

“figuratively speaking.”
Sighs of relief were heard from even Sharona this time.

“Wait, Sans, why was Muffet at that...Bake Sale, you called it?” Mettaton asked.

“Revenge.”

Sans’ answer was given in proper capitalization - never a good sign - and his eyelights had briefly shut off - also a bad sign.

“heh. sorry. so yeah, short answer revenge, long answer...would involve going way back in time.”

“But another short answer would be Linda Thompson…” Sharona said, her voice sharp with anger.

“ech, linda. i’d say what i really think about her but they’re all four letters long and to use them would be insults to the true meanings of the words,” Sans said, and by this he also subtly meant “i don’t want to swear in front of papyrus”.

“Is she really that bad?”

Sharona spat out a laugh. “PFAH! Is she really that bad? She fed Levi pork hot dogs knowing they aren’t kosher, she calls Frisk a girl even after being told otherwise and proven wrong, and don’t even make me mention…” her voice darkened considerably, “That Day…”

“That Day…?” Randy asked.

“the day papyrus showed up at a pta meeting because i was busy. we’d...rather not remember that day.”

Sans looked guilty and angry, his eyelights gone except for what appeared to be a faint glow of Yellow and Cyan Magic in his left eye socket. Papyrus closed in on himself a little bit, his face downturned in...shame. It was out of character and it hurt to watch.

Thankfully, Sans was a master at changing the atmosphere.

“hey pap, tori wants you to be the one to take frisk home at nine. i gotta go let frisk know, so i’ll take my leave now if you don’t mind.”

Papyrus immediately brightened, practically snapping back into character at the thought of babysitting Frisk - no surprise, since Frisk has an uncanny ability to make people feel better about themselves and inspire them and fill them with determination.

“OKAY SANS! YOU CAN LET MISS TORIEL KNOW THAT SHE CAN COUNT ON ME!”

“of course. who in their right mind wouldn’t count on you?”

“I KNOW!”

And so Sans left the group as they carried on a new conversation.

On some couches by a buffet table in the southwest corner of the building, there sat four children and a potted plant. The potted plant, for some reason, seemed to be what many would call “so done with everything”. One of the children was dressed a fair bit nicer than the others formality-wise, their facial features nondescript. Another was a reptilian Monster with no arms and a jittery air about them. The other two children were Levi and Caroline.
“Caroline, the Human kid is Frisk! They were the FlowerFrisk at the ceremony earlier! The other kid, the Monster, is MK! The flower is Flowey! Frisk, MK, Flowey, this is my sister Caroline! She just got here from Colorado a coupla days ago!”

“Yo, nice to meet you!” MK said. Their voice was as excited as the rest of them.

Frisk made some strange hand gestures. Caroline was a bit confused for a moment.

“Frisk says it’s nice to meet you,” said Flowey.

Caroline nodded in realization, an “ahh, I see” expression on her face. And then full realization hit her.

“You know sign language?” she asked, awed.

Frisk smiled and nodded.

“Cooool…”

“I know, right?” said MK. “Frisk is awesome!”

Frisk put a hand to their cheek and swiped their other hand in an “oh, stop it you” sort of gesture. And then they just as quickly made flirtatious gesture toward Caroline - finger guns and a wink, to be precise.

Caroline just stared blankly. She had no idea what the gesture meant. Caroline stared at Frisk’s flirting attempt for a few more moments, trying to decipher it. Frisk was getting nervous. Their flirts rarely had this effect on people. Either Caroline was very oblivious to body language or she was very stoic.

“Anyway, do you think you could teach me sign language? I think it’d be pretty fun to learn.”

Frisk nodded enthusiastically. They made another series of signs.

“They’re asking if you already know any signs,” Flowey said. He was clearly tired of doing this.

Caroline made the signs for book; water; exhausted; thank you; bored; boring; idiot; and every letter of the alphabet except F, G, H, K, P and Q.

“Wow, Caroline, I didn’t know you knew any signs! Where’dja learn ‘em?” Levi said.

“I read books.”

Levi laughed a bit. “Pfahahah! That’s your answer to everything, isn’t it?”

“Only when the question is related to how I know things.”

And then Sans showed up at the gathering.

“Hey kids. Floweypot. How’s it goin’.”

“Heya, Dr. Sans!” Levi greeted with enthusiasm. “Frisk is gonna start teachin’ Caroline sign language! Cool, right?”

“Heh, yeah, that is pretty dang cool,” Sans said.
“And she already knows a few signs! I didn’t even know the sign for book!”

“impressive.”

“You have a doctorate?” Caroline inquired.

Sans got a bit nervous at this. “uh, yeah.”

“Cooool.”

“...aaaanyway,” Sans said, “i’m here to tell frisky business that papyrus is gonna take ‘em home at nine. capiche, kiddo?”

Frisk nodded enthusiastically.

“Alrighty then. it’s eight right now kiddo, so we got about an hour til ya gotta go.”

Frisk saluted in response.

“good kid,” Sans mused as he tousled Frisk’s mop of mousy brown hair. “i should get goin’. your mom’s expecting dinner rolls and news of where you’re at. also, the thing pap ‘n i have planned is on in ten after the bouquet an’ garter tosses. ‘kay, friskito?”

Frisk hopped up and down on their haunches, giggling enthusiastically and nodding. Dear stars above this child was a-freaking-dorable.

And so he walked away to the buffet table to grab three dinner rolls. And one or two for himself. They were really good dinner rolls.

Alphys had never been happier. Not only was she on the surface, but she had friends. And a wife. A wife. A non-anime, real-life, sugoi-kakoi-kawaii-desu-ne wife. And she was cosplaying as the Anthy to said wife’s Utena.

Nothing could top this moment. Nothing.

Except for a pair of strong, loving arms wrapped about her.

“Hey, Alphy-babes~”

And there was the Utena to her Anthy, the Haruka Tennou to her Michiru Kaioh...

“H-hey Undyne…” Alphys stuttered. She didn’t stutter as much as she used to - at least not around Undyne. Well, when Undyne was clothed.

“Can you believe it? I mean, we’re married! Like, we’re at relationship level 75!” Undyne said without her usual boisterous enthusiasm. She instead had said it with a sweet, warm sort of excitement. She never used it with anyone else but her.

“I-I know!” Alphys said in sheer glee. “W-wait, 75?”

“ Heck yeah! It goes up to like, 100 or somethin’! Also, it’s time for the bouquet and garter tossing!”

“O-oh! O-okay then!”

Welp. Anxiety setting in. Oh my. People would be STARING AT HER. HADN’T THEY
GOTTEN ENOUGH AT THE CEREMONY??

But Undyne’s hand on her shoulder…

She was still anxious. But she’d **Persevere**.

The crowd of hopeful betrothed-to-bes had gathered already. Most of them Monsters, but a fair amount of Humans were in the crowd. Recognizable faces included Mettaton, Shelby, Alphys’ coworkers Sydnee and Brad, and Asgore’s coworker Lara.

Alphys turned away from them.

She clenched her eyes closed.

She tossed the bouquet of lilies and roses behind her.

Undyne watched the screaming pile of Humans and Monsters fight over the bouquet currently flying twenty feet over their heads…

...and into the lap of Toriel Dreemurr.

The crowd gawked at Toriel’s incredulous expression. Priceless.

Alphys had an arm, that was certain.

And then came time for the garter toss.

Undyne tossed back the Garter with her utmost…

...onto Sans’ cranium.

The crowd whooped and hollered and whistled - someone was clearly heard to shout “Go, Fezzik!” for whatever reason.

sans.exe has stopped working. Undyne took a photo of the Skeleton’s BSOD. Priceless.

Everyone calmed down after about five more minutes of laughing and cheering.

And then on the stage appeared two Skeletons. Both Skeletons had a microphone headset.

Shit was about to happen.

“you ready for this, pap?”

“NYEHEHE, OF COURSE!”

“okay then. let’s get this over with. 5, 6, 7, 8…”

And then some sort of poppish east Asian music came blasting through the speakers. It reminded one of fizzy candy drops. If one were capable of such imaginings.

And then the real shit began.

“umbrella at your side, it’s raining but you close it tight~”

“AND HOW ARE YOU, PURRED A CAT JUST PASSING THROUGH~”
“those heels that you like are soaking, but is that alright~”

“NYEH! NYEH! NYEH!”

“let out a sigh for another day the same as the last~ come on let’s try, dye it blue and change it up from the past~ reflecting up from a puddle but then gone in a flash~ is that the most that you can dream or wanted to see~ but look around~”

“DANCE UP AND DOWN~”

“the world is now~”

“STILL GOING ‘ROUND~”

“just feel it pound~”

“WE’RE SKYWARD BOUND~”

“move at the top~”

“SPEED~”

“of~”

“SOUND~”

And so the song continued, the brothers dancing along with the tune.

Then Papyrus sang a solo part.

“NOW FALLING TO HER SIDE, THE DROPS OF RAIN THAT MIX WITH LIGHT!”

“stealing a glance, hid a cat who turns his back~”

“THEIR HEADS STARTING TO SINK, THIS BOREDOM IS JUST HARD TO FIGHT~”

Mettaton watched Papyrus perform. He was...genuinely talented. Not as talented as he was, of course, but far better than the average person, for sure.

“shining down on me you’re my blue moon~”

“DREAMING FOREVER TO FIND NOW I’M AWAKE~”

Wait, did Papyrus look directly at him as he sang that line?

As Mettaton was lost in thought, the final stanza was performed, in more-than-decent two-part harmony.

“Taking It Step By Step~

We’ll Always Move Ahead~

Our Love Is Growing Red~

Need Me More~

Need You More~
You Fall Down Seven More Times~
I’ll Be There Seven-Eight-Nine~
As We Keep Trying We’ll Find~
You’re Always Gonna Be There Too~
We’re Always Singing The Same Tune~
Every Day From Now On~”

And then they struck a pose to finish. The same pose, opposite each other.

At times like this, when they weren’t bickering or being polar opposites and simply having fun together or doing something they both enjoy, people could see better that they were in fact brothers - most found it hard to believe, unsurprisingly. But they have similarities. Like the sparkle of Magic in their eyes when they find something they like, or the way their eye sockets turn up when they smile genuinely.

Mettaton applauded loudly and enthusiastically. Frisk was hopping up and down on the table he was sitting at, giggling and clapping. How they still had so much energy after having danced on that table was a mystery. It was definitely the cake.

They jumped off the table, sticking the landing perfectly - earning themselves a round of applause. They gave a curtsey in response - Toriel taught them that one.

And now it was Mettaton’s turn to wow the crowd. He was the one chosen to perform the First Dance song - and Alphys having convinced Undyne to give him a chance to choose a song was nothing short of a miracle.

And he was about to repay Alphys. For this, at least. There was still so, so much that he was certain he could never properly repay her for. But he’d still try. It was his way of giving Justice for his past transgressions against her.

He stepped onto the stage to the same applause he had always been used to - had always wanted to receive.

He decided to start with a toast.

“Here’s to the brides - may your lives together be filled with happiness! You two together - why, you’re almost as beautiful as me~”

This elicited applause - plus a few laughs. He was half-kidding, after all. The important word here being half. He was always serious about his appearance.

And with that, he began to sing.

“At last~ My love has come along~ My lonely days are over~ And life is like a song~”

Alphys and Undyne drew closer to each other. Alphys was very, very grateful that Mettaton had convinced her to wear heels. Now she was only half a head shorter than Undyne.

“You smiled, you smiled~ oh, and then the spell was cast~”

Papyrus was never good at picking up social cues. So when Mettaton seemed to glance in his general
direction when he sang this song, he was...confused. Was Mettaton...flirting with him...? No, impossible.

“And here we are in heaven~”

And then with a flourishing gesture in Papyrus’ direction general direction, Mettaton absolutely, wondrously, glamorously belted the last line of the song.

“For you are miiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiine~”

Mettaton could hold a note, that much was certain. Papyrus enjoyed calculating how long the high notes lasted in Mettaton’s songs. This one lasted a good 35 seconds. His ninth longest held note over all. And he had seen it live.

“Aaaaaat laaaaaaaaaaaast~”

And there was his seventh at 43 seconds. Wowie. Papyrus was definitely lucky tonight. He joined in the enthusiastic applause.

Mettaton blew a kiss to the audience - but wait, was he looking at him as he blew that kiss? Was he walking toward the table where he and Frisk were sitting? WHAT IS THIS???

“Papy, darling, Toriel told me that you and Frisk are leaving in a short while, is that right?”

“IT IS! W-WE LEAVE IN ABOUT TEN MINUTES! WE MUST SAY GOODBYE TO EVERYONE FIRST!”

“That’s quite alright with me~”

“O-OKAY THEN! I WILL...S-SEE YOU IN TEN MINUTES!”

Mettaton paused briefly before giggling. “Alrighty, Darling! I’ll be waiting~” he seductively drawled with a wink.

As Frisk watched this exchange they felt the need to warn Mettaton that any more Flirt Power and Papyrus could explode. Papyrus was strong indeed, but the more physically strong are often more susceptible to emotion in their personal experience.

Luckily Mettaton decided to leave off here. Frisk was not certain if this was because he noticed that Papyrus was about to overheat or because he wanted to enjoy the party a bit longer.

Papyrus still looked a tad unwell.

«Uncle Pap, are you gonna explode?» Frisk signed.

“N-NO, FRISK, THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS NOT GOING TO EXPLODE! WHY WOULD YOU ASK SUCH A SILLY QUESTION?”

«Because you’re all blushy and sweaty and stuff.»

“FRISK I WILL HAVE YOU KNOW THAT I AM MOST CERTAINLY NOT BLUSHING OR SWEATING AT THIS MOMENT!”

Frisk simply looked at Papyrus with their usual unreadable expression. The one that could mean anything from determined to done.
“I AM ABSOLUTELY ANXIOUS!” Papyrus said while retaining the most dramatic of poses.

«Do you need some lemonade? You look thirsty.»

Papyrus did not notice the pun. He was far too innocent for such -

“FRISK! YOU ARE NINE YEARS OLD! HOW DO YOU EVEN KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS? AND YES I WOULD LIKE SOME LEMONADE!”

Frisk simply walked over to the drink table where they observed Asgore speaking with Shelby. Shelby was blushing all the while. Frisk has a new OTP. Again.

Maybe they'll work on this one after Soriel gets together…

They decided to go up to them and say hello.

Frisk walked up beside Asgore - all 8 feet of pure bara and fluffy buns - and lightly tugged on his pant leg. Plus a bit of fur. And maybe not as lightly as they thought they had. Oops.

Asgore didn’t wince once as he looked down at Frisk.

“Ah, hello there little one!” Asgore said in his smooth basso profundo (that’s what Mettaton said it was), “I don’t believe I’ve seen you at all since the ceremony! Are you having fun?”

Frisk nodded, smile wide and mop flopping. «I have to go home in a bit so I thought I’d say hello.»

Asgore chuckled. “Well, hello, then! I suppose I’ll see you at the Fourth of July party, then?”

Frisk nodded wildly. They hugged Asgore goodbye.

Then they looked at Shelby, giving her two thumbs up.

Shelby’s eyes widened. She also blushed. A good sign.

They walked back to Papyrus, only to see him talking to Mettaton. So they decided to go get Flowey from over where he was playing Go Fish with Levi, Caroline, MK, and apparently Sans and Toriel.

But first a glass of lemonade…

Papyrus and Mettaton were in fact not talking. They were both too anxious, considering what they were both about to do.

Papyrus tugged on his bow tie and fidgeted with his scarf.

Mettaton played with the hem of his dress and cleared his throat.

“Um -”

“MAY I-”

They paused to giggle at their exchange.

“YOU FIRST -”

“No, no, after you -”
“PLEASE, I INSIST -”

“Well, if you insist…”

“OKAY THEN, GO ON.”

Mettaton paused. He had never experienced stage fright - at least nothing quite like this. He was almost as nervous now as he was when his Classic form was first revealed.

He inhaled to calm himself. It helped...but not much. A little bit, but not much. It would have to do.

Here we go.

“Um, Papyrus...would you...would you be willing to...go out on a date with me?”

Mettaton lowered his head. He was nervous as all hell.

There was quiet. Papyrus probably left, not knowing what he meant. Mettaton raised his head.

He did not expect Papyrus to be...blushing bright ORane. Were...were his eye sockets sparkling?

Mettaton was...unsure how to respond to this.

Papyrus then shook his head, as if the action would somehow cause the orange shimmer to dissipate.

“I-I’D LOVE TO!”

Mettaton brightened a bit hearing this.

“You would?”

“OF COURSE! UM, W-WHAT TIME SHOULD WE...?”

“We can schedule over text when you get Frisk home! How does that sound?”

“SOUNDS PERFECT! OH, THERE’S FRISK!”

Frisk took that as their cue. They walked carefully so as not to spill the lemonade - they overfilled it somewhat. Only somewhat.

It was at that moment that Frisk remembered that they had offered to get Papyrus some lemonade.

They decided to give him the lemonade they were already holding. They were about to go home, after all.

But Frisk couldn’t help but feel as though they were forgetting something…

Oh well. It probably wasn’t important anyway.

___________________________

Hours later, the event hall was a mess. It was to be expected, but still. It was a mess.

Flowey lay on the floor through no fault of his own. His planter was smashed by a drunken Undyne, who had mistaken it for a pinata. Actually, Sans had managed to convince her that he was a shittalking pinata.

And now said Flowey is screaming. He had been forgotten by Frisk.
Then he was lifted by the stem.

“looks like someone’s ready to go home.”

Sans looked him in the eye. For whatever reason, Sans was the only one who hadn’t managed to get drunk. He said it was because he was the “designated driver”.

“What did I ever do to you to deserve this.”

Sans gave him a look that said “are you kidding me?”.

“Other than kill everything you cherish infinite times.”

“you forgot to put a quarter in the swear jar this morning.”

Flowey gawked in exasperation.

“Surely you’re not serious.”

“i’m not serious, i’m sans. and don’t call me shirley.”

Flowey screamed.

The knowledge that your family is happy fills you with

**DETERMINATION**
Chapter Summary


Chapter Notes

Well. I'm back.

I'm so sorry.

jk lol i ain't sorry.

But in all honesty. Please enjoy this, and don't hesitate to leave comments and/or kudos!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

3:47 P.M., July 4th, 201Z

It's a beautiful day in Ebott.

Meat is grilling.

Flags are waving.

On days like this, kids like you...

Are attempting to calm a panicking Skeleton.

“...AND THAT IS WHY I AM ABSOLUTELY TERRIFIED OF DOING THIS! I STILL WANT TO DO THIS, I REALLY, REALLY DO! I'M JUST TERRIFIED OF DOING SO!” Papyrus explained.

«And how do you want me to help you achieve perfection in exactly two hours and three minutes?» Frisk signed.

Frisk was wearing a pair of overall shorts with red white and blue stars stamped onto it - a project Mettaton and Papyrus had helped them with - over a red and white striped t-shirt.

“WHY, ISN'T IT OBVIOUS, HUMAN? I WANT YOU HELP ME PICK THE PERFECT OUTFIT!”
«What are you doing on this date?»

“WE’RE GOING TO EAT DINNER AT A CAFE TOGETHER, AND THEN WE ARE GOING TO WATCH FIREWORKS!”

Frisk brightened.

«You guys are gonna join us?!» they signed eagerly. It had become a de facto tradition for their family to congregate at the base of Mount Ebott to eat food and watch fireworks every Fourth of July.

“N-NOT EXACTLY...I HAVE A SURPRISE IN MIND, REALLY…”

Frisk gained a quizzical expression. They shrugged and decided to ask another time. They were a bit sad that Papyrus wasn’t joining them this year - it was sad enough that Alphys and Undyne were gone on their honeymoon and that Asgore was doing...something they forgot what it was. But the sadness was quelled knowing that Papyton was about to set sail in canon waters and that they would be spending the evening with their mom and dunkle - maybe they would finally smooch! Or at least admit that they really really want to smooch. That’d be cool too.

The Sudden Sans that appeared behind them no longer surprised them unless they were spacing out. Which they kind of were. The startled squeak gave that much away.

The hair-rumpling that ensued was nonetheless expected - customary, in fact. And much-loved. A day without Sans-sational hair rumples was a day without...something important that you couldn’t quite put your finger on.

“How goes the date prep, you two?” Sans asked, the lazy smile plastered on his face seeming there in mockery of Papyrus’ anxiety. It wasn’t, really, but one had to wonder.

“TERRIBLE! I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TO WEAR! OR DO! OR ACT LIKE! OR -”

“wear a red-white-n-blue polo, some shorts - not too short, it’s only the first date after all - and some sneakers - the red ones, of course. and ya gotta wear the scarf.”

“I ALWAYS WEAR THE SCARF!”

“yep. just go with the flow, bro. don’t accept anything that makes you uncomfortable. just be you. no need to ‘act like’ anything or anyone. you’re the great papyrus, and ain’t nothin’ better than that.”

Papyrus hugged Sans as best he could. Which was the Best Hug Ever.

“THANK YOU, SANS.”

Sans stood stock still. Then he hugged Papyrus back.

“no problem, pap. just lemme know when you’re comin’ home. and don’t stay out past 1. and most importantly...”

Silence.

“...have fun, bro. see ya in the mornin’.”

“I SHALL SEE YOU IN THE MORNING AS WELL!”

“the place ya said ya’d meet up, it’s twenty minutes away?”
“TEN MINUTES! HALFWAY BETWEEN METTATON’S AND OUR RESPECTIVE ABODES!”

“okay then. i’m takin’ frisk out shopping for groceries for tonight. i’ll make sure to letcha be if i see ya while we’re out.”

“FRISK TOO, I HOPE?” Papyrus said warily.

«I make no promises,» Frisk signed with a smirk.

Papyrus merely facepalmed as Frisk and their dunkle headed out the door to Sans’ motorcycle. Frisk has their own little sidecar that they decorated with stickers and flame decals. They were a cool kid.

As they roared away, Papyrus decided to go with Sans’ outfit idea. It was better than nothing.

“...and that’s why I need your help, Alphy! I have no idea what to do - I’ve never been on a date before that wasn’t just going to end in sex! I-I’ve never done something like this before, it’s new territory for me and -”

“Sssso you decided to c-call me while I’m on my h-h-honeymoon?” Alphys monotoned in exasperation.

Mettaton had called her to vent about how he had “no idea what to do with himself” and “what do people do at the end of a date if not sex”. Completely ignorant of the fact that she was on her honeymoon. In Japan. A place far away from him.

“Well, I’m sorry I don’t know who else to turn to with this, Alphys!” said Mettaton ‘vented’.

“W-why not do what you always do on dates, o-only less...sexy? I-I mean, y-you can still be s-sexy, b-but not like ho-level sexy. More like...just...you-level sexy? If that makes sense?”

Mettaton paused.

“I guess…”

“Good boy. Have fun on your date~”

“Wai- ALPHYS DON’T YOU DARE TALK TO ME LIKE I’M A CHILD I AM AN ADULT!”

“Coulda f-fooled me. B-bye now! This f-f-festival’s about to start and I wanna b-beat the crowds!”

“No, Alphys, WAI -”

Busy signal. Dammit Alphys. As Mettaton gave the phone a Death Glare™, he took note of the time. 3:56 P.M.

The meeting place was ten minutes away from Mettaton™ Manor. Date starts at 4:30.

Oh stars above. Only half an hour to get ready. He at leasy had his clothes on - a sleeveless American flag crop top with rhinestone stars, sequined cut-offs, and gold gladiator sandals - with four-inch heels, of course. Half an hour for makeup. He could do that.

He could totally do that.

He walked to his bedroom vanity inside his walk-in closet.
He can do winged eyeliner in a half hour.

He sat on the plushy pink chair in front of the vanity.

He could totally do this.

He looked into the mirror.

He was fine. He could do this.

He grabbed the navy blue waterproof liquid eyeliner - he usually dealt with basic black, but hey. Fourth of July.

He was going to be fabulous. He always was. He’s Mettaton.

He made it into a perfect wing shape - simple, but classic. Never lets you down. Simpler than his usual, but he’d live.

He could do this.

Red glitter lipstick. He usually went with his signature black matte, but hey. Fourth of July. And glitter. Lips like a goddamn firework in this bitch.

Doing great so far. You go, MTT. Slay.

And there. Perfect. As close as he would get today, at any rate.

He wasn’t screaming. Externally.

Hm. Selfie time?

Maybe later.

Ugh. Still nervous.

Check the time. 4:10 P.M.

He had to leave in like ten minutes if he wanted to get to the cafe on time.

Well. He was going to do this. And he was going to do it right.

---

Sans walked around the grocery store while Frisk rode in the cart, surrounded by one bag each of hot dog and hamburger buns; two watermelons; three bags of chips (honey barbecue and plain with ridges, of course); exactly twelve bottles of ketchup; one bottle each of mayonnaise, ranch, mustard, relish, and grape jelly; one jar of crunchy peanut butter; and two boxes of juice pouches. Frisk didn’t like juice boxes - they claimed that they didn’t like the taste. Papyrus was the same way about juice bottles. Both Frisk and Papyrus agree that juice bottles are gross.

Sans grabbed a liter-sized bottle of strawberry soda from the top shelf with his Blue Magic, and lowered it into the cart.

Frisk decided to hop out of the cart before it got too full.

They stood up inside the cart and leapt out over the left side, doing a little twirl in midair before landing like a gymnast. Sans applauded.
A few other patrons stared in varying stages of shock and amazement. The store was pretty empty, though - it was a federal holiday, after all.

“Still putting your daughter in danger, I see.”

That voice. Nasally and haughty, with an air of unintelligence.

It could only be one person.

“hello, diana. to what do i owe the displeasure?”

Diana Mosley. Ash brown hair, brown eyes, poorly blended foundation, head emptier than the distance between Earth and the moon.

“I’m here to pick up some tofu and veggie platters for the barbecue my husband Michael is hosting. He’s not home often, you know, since he’s out of town for work. He’s a business analyst at Elecom, you know.”

“i know. you’ve told everyone and their mother. twice a week. on average. per person.”

“Well, at least he has a job, you know, unlike some, err, people.”

Smooth. Way to hide that racism, Di. At least Linda fucking tries.

“i do have a job, diana,” Sans countered. And he knew she would respond in one of two ways. Either she would be shocked that he has a job of any kind, or…

“Oh, please, what kind of person would give somethi - err, someone like you a job?” she scoffed.

Ahh, option number 2 - be shitty. Typical Diana.

“i am a hacker currently working on a top-secret project for the international shadow government.”

Diana just stared blankly at Sans. Then she growled and did a heel-turn in the opposite direction from where she should have been going.

Sans and Frisk both definitely heard her loudly mumble obscenities.

«Should we tell her that we can hear her?» Frisk asked

«nah,» the Skeleton signed in response.

Pause.

“so, frisky business, what say you we get this stuff home and then go out for some nice cream?”

Frisk nodded excitedly.

“but no toppings. if you’re gonna hop outta shopping carts you aren’t gonna get any toppings.”

Frisk nodded with considerably less excitement.

“good kid.”

Frisk smiled at this. Even when they acted out a bit, they were still a Good Kid. Knowing that their dunkle thought this filled them with DETERMINATION.
They spotted a SAVE point by a snack cake display, and jogged up to it. They reached out to touch it, their hand phasing through but feeling a rush of renewed energy. A sweet feeling indeed. They grinned slightly at the pun that would never be known to any but themselves - themselves and perhaps one other person.

FILE: SAVED

So the duo carried on with their shopping trip.

7:30 P.M., night nowhere near close to falling.

Mettaton was following Papyrus - finally holding his hand, too! Too bad it was simply for the practical reason of making sure they didn’t lose track of each other. In Papyrus’ words. And their hands were cuffed. Not laced. Cuffed.

Well. At least there was handholding at all.

Before Mettaton knew what was going on, they had walked into the downtown business district. They had reached Ebott Towers.

They walked in through the revolving door of Ebott Towers.

“Um, Papyrus, why are we -”

Papyrus put a phalange to Mettaton’s lips.

“I KNOW WHAT I AM DOING! THE GREAT PAPYRUS ALWAYS KNOWS WHAT HE IS DOING!”

He lowered his phalange.

“DO YOU TRUST ME?” Papyrus asked.

Mettaton nodded.

“OKAY THEN! FOLLOW ME!”

And so Papyrus led Mettaton to the elevator...

Frisk was confused.

If Undyne were here, this would be so much easier. Undyne knew her explosives.

“Look kid, there are other paying customers behind you. Just pick the fireworks you want already.”

Frisk did not do well when put on the spot like this. The teenaged boy cashier was not being of any help.

They grabbed some colorful sparklers, some crackers, a few packs of ground spinners, and some roman candles, setting them on the counter perhaps a bit too forcefully for the cashier’s liking.

“Christ, kid, why so grouchy?”

“’scuse me, sir, did my kid - who just so happens to be the ambassador for human-monster relations -
upset ya somehow?"

The teen’s eyes widened in slight fear. Something about the way the Skeleton stared at him was...unnerving. He wasn’t racist or anything. He had two friends who happened to be Monsters. It’s that this particular Monster was just creepy.

The sudden realization that holy shit this kid was the Ambassador for Monster-Human Relations hit him like a brick to the face.

“N-not at all, um...sir? W-will that be all?” He really hoped he didn’t sound scared. That wouldn’t be good for his street cred.

“wait, hold on a sec.”

The Skeleton used Magic to move some skyrockets from the top shelf. And by some he meant like eight. And by eight he meant eighteen.

The transaction was completed in such a blur that he was almost sure that the Monster didn’t pay for any of it. His attempt to call out the Monster was met with resounding jeers from people who not only witnessed the transaction, but were very, very impatient with him. He swears one of them called him a racist.

The Skeleton and the kid left. He was gonna complain to his manager about this. He hated the special privilege Monsters were getting around here. Humans were here first, dammit.

But when he tried to glare at the Skeleton…

He noticed it rumple the kids hair, while the kid smiled widely and hugged it. Like the kid was actually its own flesh and blood. It was oddly sweet. In a weird, kinda cartoony way.

He was still pissed though. He wasn’t a racist.

He wasn’t...

Papyrus and Mettaton took the elevator to the 80th floor of Ebott Towers. There were 89 floors in all.

This was where it got...strange.

Papyrus led Mettaton to the door leading into a stairwell.

The stairwell itself was ancient. It absolutely reeked of mid-twentieth century craftsmanship. The steps were made of concrete and had vinyl treads - the colors were positively DRAB.

But he was going to do this. He trusted Papyrus.

The stairwell decreased in aesthetic quality with each flight - a feat Mettaton had already considered impossible. Well.

“W-WE CAN GO BACK DOWN IF YOU WANT,” Papyrus started. “IF YOU’RE UNCOMFORTABLE, I-I DON’T WANT TO FORCE YOU TO DO THIS.”

“Darling, there’s nothing to apologize for!” Mettaton insisted. “I’m quite certain that whatever it is you wish to show me is far more attractive than a musty old stairwell!”
Papyrus “nyeheh”ed at that. “I’LL SAY IT IS! BUT I MUST WARN YOU THAT THE STEPS LEADING UP TO THE 87TH FLOOR COLLAPSED IN 1982 AND WERE NEVER REPAIRED DUE TO SOME...RE-SESH-UN? RECESSION, YEAH!”

“Wait, what?”

“I SAID THAT THE STAIRS TO THE 87TH FLOOR COLLAPSED IN 1982 AND HAS NOT BEEN FIXED.”

Mettaton simply stared aghast.

“METTATON, I KNOW WHAT YOU’RE THINKING. WELL, NOT LITERALLY, OF COURSE, THAT’S IMPOSSIBLE. I KNOW WHAT I’M DOING! I KNOW THAT IT SOMETIMES DOESN’T SEEM LIKE IT MOST OF THE TIME, BUT -”

Now it was Mettaton’s turn to put a finger over Papyrus’ teeth. He smiled warmly at him.

“I know, Papyrus. I trust you.”

Papyrus seemed...surprised. Mettaton wasn’t sure why. But then he remembered briefly Papyrus’ expression at the mention of his first PTA meeting...

“Lead the way, Darling?”

“NYEHEHEH, OF COURSE!”

Papyrus once again grabbed at Mettaton’s hand. Their fingers were laced this time.

Score.

The sun was slowly setting. From the base of Mt. Ebott, the sun appeared to be hovering just above the treetops.

It was here that a family of three was set on a picnic blanket in a clearing eating hot dogs.

Frisk tugged on Sans’ shirt sleeve. The small Human had grabbed the strawberry jelly, and squeezed it on their hot dog while he watched.

He chuckled at this. “dude, how high do you have to be to do that?”

Toriel gave him a brief glare. “Sans! I have told you many times now not to reference Sweet Bro and Hella Jeff in front of the child!”

Sans got a sheepish look on his face. “sorry, tori.”

Toriel started slightly as Frisk climbed their way onto her shoulders - even a standing Frisk was more than a full head shorter than their adoptive mother.

They settled themselves on Toriel’s shoulders.

They quickly stuffed the last few bites of the jelly-smothered hot dog into their mouth in order to free their hands.

«About this high!» they signed with a smile compromised by a mouth full of meat and jelly.
That did it. That broke Sans.

Sans was very proud of their child.

Toriel was confused as to why Sans was lying on the ground convulsed with laughter.

Frisk was quite proud of their achievement.

Next up: make Mom blush.

Frisk crawled onto Toriel’s head - positioning themselves in such a way that their stomach was placed on the crown of Toriel’s head and the could look into her eyes upside-down.

They smooched her on the nose.

Toriel squealed at how cute this was. She grabbed Frisk from their little perch atop her head and flipped them in such a way that they were now cradled in her arms and being smothered with kisses and giggling and wriggling.

Sans filmed it on his phone. This. This was adorable. This was why he got up in the morning. This was a reason to keep going.

As the light became dusk, he sent it out over all four of his social media accounts. He never did quite grasp how he’d gotten almost 100,000 followers on each of them except Facebook, but hey.

More people to show off his super-cool family to.

At the top of the musty stairwell was an observation deck. A concrete platform that had kept rather well over the decades - impressive.

But the apparent immaculacy did not mean that they were allowed to be complacent. There could be weak points anywhere in the seemingly pristine infrastructure.

But while the aesthetic status of the little secret hideaway was appreciable, it was in no way the high point of the evening.

That honor went to the view from 1000 feet in the air.

The setting sun painted the sky an awe-evoking palette of oranges and purples and pinks opposite the star-spangled navy blue of the coming night opposite the colorful display.

Papyrus invited Mettaton to sit by him on the ground - the spot had been cleared of debris at some point, so Mettaton decided to comply - what harm could it do?

Mettaton sat to Papyrus’ right, watching the sunset by his side.

It was like the end of a cheesy chick flick - and they were living it.

Oh yes. This was pleasant.

Very, very pleasant indeed.

“METTATON!” Papyrus exclaimed, “HEY, METTATON, LOOK OVER THERE!”

Mettaton faced the direction in which Papyrus’ finger was pointing - toward the portion of the sky
where darkness remained.

But on the horizon, there were the beginnings of fireworks. Small fireworks, unable to be heard because of the distance, but there they were.

They were so intensely focused on the adorable little baby fireworks that the big grownup fireworks made them jump…

...into each other’s arms.

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From the base of the mountain, the fireworks appeared directly above the heads of the family.

They lay on their backs staring at the fireworks overhead. Sans, being Sans, almost fell asleep multiple times, only to be awakened once more by a boom seconds later.

Frisk lay snuggled between their mother and dunkle. Before falling into the Underground, they hadn’t had a family of their own - not one that they remember. The Underground was the best thing that had ever happened to them. It had given them a family - a mom, a dunkle, some uncles, some aunts, some cousins, a brother - and a home.

No, wait.

A Home. Capital Letters make words Special.

Even though they had messed up so, so many times, abusing their gift, their DETERMINATION, and using it to cause suffering - no, that wasn’t them. It wasn’t Chara, either, through they’d thought it was in the beginning. It was a - what was it Sans had called it? - an Anomaly controlling them those times.

Sans forgave them. He also forgave Chara. He knew that Chara was only along for the ride, the Narrator of their story while in the Underground, that they had acted in what they had assumed was in their loved one's best interests.

Sans knew that both Frisk and Chara were Good Kids who had made mistakes.

How Frisk got so lucky they had no idea. But they weren’t complaining.

____________________________________________________________________________________

This. This had to be the single best moment of Papyrus’ life.

Well, one of them anyway.

From their vantage point at the very top of the building, the fireworks were at eye-level.

He kept sneaking glances at Mettaton through his peripheral vision. Not having eyelights could be an advantage at times.

Mettaton glanced at Papyrus.

Papyrus glanced back.

Neither had any idea at what point they’d begun to hold each other, but it had happened.

They both leaned toward each other without thinking.
Mettaton wouldn’t have guessed a Skeleton to have lips - err, a sort of. Papyrus’ alveolar processes plus a bit of Magic fulfilled the function nicely. Awkwardly, but nicely.

Papyrus’ phalanges ran through Mettaton’s hair. He was tempted to grab at it - to keep himself grounded? Who knows.

But this moment right here.

He could get used to this.

__________________________

Flowey sat on the windowsill in Frisk’s bedroom.

Frisk’s empty bedroom. In the empty house.

Flowey sighed to himself.

“This sucks.”

Then he shrugged as much as a potted flower could shrug.

“Ah well. At least I got my little friends here with me…”

An electronic sound beeped.

“Awww, come on! I trained you from a Bulbasaur, and this is how you repay me? For shame, Angela. For shame.”

__________________________

The super-cool fireworks have filled you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

The song the title is named for is In The Summertime by Mungo Jerry. Chh chh-chh uh, chh chh-chh uh...
The first day of school is always eventful. Also, Sans wasn't lying...

And so we get more characters. And other shit. I mean who DOESN'T love other shit, am I right?

Well. Up in the morning and out to school...

7:30 A.M., August 29th, 201Z

It’s a beautiful day in Ebott.

Alarms are ringing.

Buses are running.

On days like this, kids like you...

REALLY don’t want to wake up.

Seriously. Why did school have to start so. Flipping. Early.

Bluh.

Flowey turned off Frisk’s alarm for them, and swiped their blanket off them - vines are useful for things like this.

“Wakey-wakey eggs and bakey! We got a biiiig day ahead of us!”

Frisk got out of bead, slowly but surely. When Frisk was up, they were up.

They always ate breakfast before getting dressed for the day.

They walked down the stairs and into the kitchen, where they sat down in Their Spot at the table between Toriel and Papyrus and across from Sans.
After finishing their oatmeal - which, as per what Sans dubbed the Law of Frisk, was filled with sprinkles - they went back upstairs to dress for their day.

Frisk had a System for when they got dressed: The colors associated with the SOUL Traits they felt would best suit the situation of the day were the colors they would wear that day.

Today, they wore a t-shirt with red and purple stripes with a pair of overall shorts and some boots with black and white striped knee-high socks.

They grabbed their rainbow tie-dye backpack filled with school supplies.

Time to head out.

Mountainside Elementary, Room B17 - Mrs. Chang’s 4th grade classroom.

Frisk was filled with DETERMINATION.

FILE: SAVE

They entered the classroom.

They scanned the room, spotting Caroline sitting at the front of the class reading a book.

Frisk set in the seat to her right.

Caroline glanced up, and nodded.

Frisk couldn’t tell what they were reading, just that it was wider than maybe two or even three of their fingers.

Five minutes after that Levi came in.

Class started ten minutes later.

A woman of 30-something years with dark hair and eyes entered the classroom.

“Good morning, class. So, I am Emily Chang, and I will be your fourth grade teacher! Your first assignment -”

She paused, having anticipated the jeers of multiple nine- and ten-year-olds.

“- is to introduce yourselves to the class. So, you have ten minutes to fill these out before you are called up to read them. Now, I understand that some of our students may be nervous or have trouble speaking, so they may either pass or ask for someone else to speak for them. So, you may start writing!”

To say that Sans was grateful for school was an understatement. C’mon. Being home alone was a blessing.

Because now he could work in peace.

Yup. Sans has a job. With regular monthly pay.

So he sat on the ratty old fold out couch in the basement, laptop on a pillow in his lap, headset on
head, reading glasses on.

It was time to get cracking.

Sans opened the Tor browser.

He’s in.

Sans typed his way about the deep web.

He found what he was looking for.

He pressed a button on his headset.

“Alright, i’m in.”

“Good. We’ve been waiting, Timeline. Is that everyone?”

“Yup. Ready to go. The Heart of Gold’s all here.”

“Okay, what’ve we got?”

“Nothing here…”

“Nada.”

“Wot, y’think we actually got somethin’?”

“Nope.”

“Really? You bunch of lazy -”

“Hey, Timeline, I saw the vid you uploaded, the one with yer wife an’ child!”

“tori’s not even my girlfriend, extempore. we’ve been over this. and kindred, i saw you livetweeting the x-files on the 12th. don’t play innocent.”

“Ugh, whatever. Timeline, do you have anything?”

“actually, yeah. i got eighteen skyrockets and i recently found some old research papers.”

“Whoa, man! Skyrockets? Sweeet!”

“i know, right? the kid runnin’ the register tried to say i didn’t pay fer ‘em. after they had the nerve to make frisk cry.”

“Tch, what a little shit, makin’ kids cry.”

“i know.”

“Timeline, the research papers?”

“oh yeah, right. okay, so these papers were for a project my dad ‘n i worked on some years back. i’ll send ‘em over to ya.”

“Okay, students, so, ten minutes are up!”
Frisk had JUST gotten done filling out their paper. Filling out things like name, birthday, favorite food and color, likes and dislikes, that sort of thing.

“We shall go in alphabetical order from A to Z. First up is…”

Frisk had zoned out from there. They waited for the D names to begin being called. They were often the only D name.

“So, now for the D’s.”

Frisk started to stand, expecting to be the first one called.

“Penelope DeMartino, would you like to come up?”

“Okay!”

The voice came from a child shorter than Frisk - a feat matched by few. She had short wild black hair, fierce green eyes, and olive skin. She wore a neon green tank top over a white t-shirt with shorts and tights and a pair of high-tops. She was messing with a bunch of colorful coil bracelets, stretching them out snapping them against her wrist.

“I’m Penelope DeMartino! I just moved here from Colorado a few weeks ago ‘cause we needed a new start. My birthday is August 13th, and I have a big brother Theo in 5th grade, an’ my mom’s a nurse! My favorite color is green, and my favorite foods are pizza an’ beef jerky! I like taking pictures an’ hiking an’ moon bounces an’ sandpaper, but I really don’t like velvet or basketball or crowds. Oh, an’ when I grow up I wanna be a photographer.”

Some of the kids whispered - new kids were rare, especially ones from so far out of state. A few others giggled - these kids were the mean ones.

“Thank you, Penelope! We hope you like it here! So, up next, Frisk Dreemurr. Would you like to come up?"

“Uh, ‘scuse me, ma’am,” said MK, “Frisk doesn’t speak, so they need a translator.”

“Ah, okay! Ms. Toriel mentioned that. So, is that what the flower is for?” Mrs. Chang asked.

Frisk nodded in response.

“Okay then! Step right up!”

Frisk did as they had been bidden.

«Hi there! I am Frisk Dreemurr. My birthday is March 20th. My mom is Ms. Toriel, and I have a lot of uncles and aunts. Flowey’s my brother ->

“Kid, I am not. Your. Brother.”

«I love you too, Flowey.>>

“Ewww!”

Many of the kids laughed at this exchange, as did Mrs. Chang.

«My favorite color is red. My favorite foods are pie and hot dogs. I like drawing, gardening, making jokes, and looking at stars. I don’t like fighting, crowds, or needles. When I grow up, I want to be the
Ambassador for Monsters and Humans. I mean, I already am, but when I get older I’ll be able to do more to help people understand Monsters!»

Frisk nodded to Flowey.

“They’re done now.”

“Thank you, Frisk and Flowey! You may be seated!”

Most of the kids clapped. There were maybe two or three kids who booed them.

Frisk then realized that Penelope was sitting behind Caroline. They were talking to each other - well, Penelope talked and Caroline was listening intently.

“Levi Goldsby, would you like to come up?”

“Sure!”

Levi ran up to the front. He wore a red polo with black shorts and red high-tops.

“My name is Levi Goldsby! My birthday is November 12th! My mom’s a graphic designer who recently remarried, and my stepdad works with computers! My stepsister is Caroline - she’s actually in here right now!”

Caroline shrunk in on herself at being called out. She turned her focus onto her book - now known to be called Ready Player One.

“My favorite color is gold, and my favorite foods are lamb chops and oreos! I like card games, watching movies, money, and playing piano, and I don’t like thieves, ducks, or Miranda. When I grow up, I wanna be a filmmaker!”

A lot of kids laughed. One scoffed offendedly - and loudly. Mrs. Chang glanced at Levi with a look that said “really?”.

“Thank you, Levi. So, next we have Brian Green. Would you like to come up?”

No sound except a scooting chair. A boy with a golden-brown crew cut and hazel eyes with an orange and blue striped polo and cargo shorts with basketball shoes was at the front.

“Hi. I’m Brian Green. My birthday is April 18th. My dad owns a used car dealership, and my mom’s a stay-at-home mom. I have a dog named Rocco - he’s an Irish setter mix. My favorite color is blue, and my favorite foods are cheese fries and strawberries. I like hockey, skateboarding, fishing, and camping. I don’t like pink, pecans or clowns. When I grow up I wanna be a hockey player.”

Brian sat back down in his seat between Levi and his friend Hunter.

“Thank you, Brian! Up next we have…”

“So Levi,” Brian whispered. “This your stepsister?”

Levi nodded, his red curls bouncing. “Brian, Hunter, this’s Caroline. She moved here from Colorado like Penelope did.”

“What’s up,” Brian said.

“It’s nice to meet you!” Hunter said.
Caroline simply nodded in acknowledgement.

“So, K names.”

Someone sneezed loudly enough that the full name was unheard by all but a few.

“- would you like to come up?”

MK ran up to the front - falling on their face, only to stand back up again. A few kids laughed at this.

“Yo, call me MK! My birthday is July 3rd! My dad’s a cartoonist, and my other dad’s a carpenter! I have an older sister in 7th grade!”

A few kids oohed and aahed at this - these kids hadn’t been in a class with MK before now.

“My favorite color is orange, and my favorite foods are grilled chees sandwiches and lemon cake! I like skateboarding, model kits, watching movies, and drawing, and I don’t like gummy worms, spinach, or Digimon. I dunno what I wanna be when I grow up, probably an animator I guess.”

Some of the kids clapped. A particular group giggled in mockery.

MK sat in his seat without incident.

“What’s that you’re reading?”

“Ready Player One. I started on it last night, ‘n now I’m halfway through.”

“Dang, really?”

“Yeah. Why?”

“So, we’ve reached the M names. Caroline Marlow, would you like to come up?”

Caroline stood up. Some of the other kids stared at her. She was up to Mrs. Chang’s shoulder in height. She was wearing a purple and black striped polo with a denim pinafore dress and brown cowboy boots. She had her glasses on - rectangular black glasses.

“Um, hi. My name is Caroline Marlow. I moved here from Colorado in June because my dad got married. My birthday is February 7th. My dad’s a software technician, and my stepmom’s a graphic designer. Levi’s my stepbrother, but you guys know him. My favorite color is purple, and my favorite foods are steak and cherry cheesecake. I like reading, writing, hiking, and ice skating. I hate sports, wasps, and people. When I grow up, I want to be a writer.”

Levi, Penelope and Frisk clapped. Other kids murmured about her. Some called her a vampire.

“Next, Miranda Mosley.”

A particular group of two clapped. Brian and Levi discreetly booed from between their hands. Brian went so far as to disguise the phrase “you suck” as a sneeze.

A girl with wavy brown hair and brown eyes was at the front. She wore a pink tank top, a denim skirt, pink ballet flats, a pink headband, a lot of bangles, and a gold locket. She was clearly wearing lip gloss, and a lot of it.

“Hiii, I’m Miranda Mosley! My birthday is on April 20th! My daddy’s a businessman, and my mom’s a mom! I have a yorkie-poo, Cherry, and a horse, Diamonds! My favorite color is pink, and
my favorite foods are grapes and froyo! I like clothes shopping, music, dancing, and horseback riding! I hate bugs, meat, and weirdoes!” She glared in the direction of Frisk and their friends. Her friends laughed.

“When I grow up, I wanna be a supermodel!”

Her little group of friends clapped for her.

Levi stuck his tongue out at her. Hunter thumbed his nose at her. Brian flipped her off.

She looked offended, like she was about to tattle on them. And she would have, had Mrs. Chang not called someone else up. So she stuck her tongue out at them, the girls behind her doing the same.

This went back and forth as the two girls with her, Naomi and Olive, were called up to give their names.

“So, we’ve reached the T names. We’re almost done, and then you’re free until lunchtime. Okay then, Hunter Thompson, would you like to come up?”

Hunter came up. He had platinum-blond hair in a wings cut and bright blue eyes. He wore a blue t-shirt and black shorts with black tennis shoes.

“Um, hi. I’m Hunter Thompson. My birthday is December 13th. My dad’s a lawyer, my mom’s a housewife. I have a sister, Hannah, in kindergarten. My favorite color is blue. My favorite foods are pancakes, bubblegum, and ice cream sandwiches. I like soccer, baseball, comic books, and listening to music. I don’t like kiwi, Superman, or my mom. Um, please don’t tell my mom I said that.”

“Thank you, Hunter. You may be seated. And believe me, a lot of people don’t like their moms.”

Hunter sat in his seat, and let out a breath. “I thought I was gonna die up there! Or-or that my mom was gonna come in ’n yell at me or somethin!”

“Hunter’s mom’s the PTA president,” MK explained.

“And a witch,” Brian added.

“Brian, shh! She’ll hear you!” Hunter said in mock fear.

«And fly in here on her broomstick and turn you into a toad!» Frisk signed.

The group of kids laughed at this.

“So, um, Caroline,” Hunter said, “do you like comic books?”

“Not really. I haven’t read any.”

“Oh, okay then.”

“Sorry.”

“But why?” Brian asked. “There’s nothing for you to apologize for.”

“Except being a nerd.”

Miranda. Ew.
“Why don’t you apologize for being an ugly jerkface?”

Penelope. Yes.

Miranda looked offended. “Ex-ca-use me?”

“Why? Didja fart?” Penelope asked, a look of confusion on her face.

Miranda opened and closed her mouth in shock. She was not used to something like...like this.

She simply glared and sashayed away, Naomi and Olive looking at Penelope weirdly before slinking away to follow Miranda.

“You,” Levi said, “I like you.”

“Why? Do people actually tolerate jerkfaces here?” Penelope asked.

“Yes…”

“Yup.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Wow.”

“This is why I hate people.”

Then the bell rang for lunch.

________________________________________

“Timeline, this is...this is amazing. How has this not been published?”

“lotta reasons. most of ‘em personal.”

“is one of them laziness?”

“one of them is that my dad got fucking erased from existence.”

Silence.

“Oh.”

“What the fuck, Kindred.”

“W-wha - how the hell was I supposed to know that ’is dad is fucking dead?”

“he’s not dead, guys. he was erased from existence.”

“Like when a political dissident is unpersoned?”

“no - no, guys, i-i don’t wanna talk about this, let - let’s get back on track, ‘kay?”

“Ookay, man. So far, the paper seems...incomplete.”

“Yeah, why is that?”

“y’see, that’s where you guys come in. we have here some of the smartest people on the world. if
anyone can finish this…it’s us. i got a friend who i went to school with who can work with us.”

“The one that was married recently?”

“yup.”

“Is there a catch?”

“just the usual - get her permission, ask about pay, all that junk. oh, but just so you guys know, she has real bad anxiety. it’ll probably take ‘er a while to agree to anything. but the knowledge that she can work from her home while streaming anime should ease the process should she choose to accept.”

“Okay. Thank you, Timeline. What should we call her if she joins us, this friend of yours?”

“haruhi suzumiya.”

“Weeb?”

“weeb.”

“Okay. According to the algorithm, our next meeting is on…September 7th. Any problems there?”

“Nope.”

“None.”

“i got a pta meeting that day…”

“Okay then, how’s the 8th sound?”

“Okay with me.”

“Sounds fine.”

“no prob, bob.”

“Alright. See you all then.

Sans logged out.

Time for lunch.

Ketchup sounded good right about now.

Ketchup *always* sounded good.

3:12 P.M.

Frisk and Toriel are home now. Papyrus had come home an hour ago.

“Sans,” Toriel said as she walked in, “you remember that the first PTA meeting is on the 7th, do you not?”

“i already cleared my schedule that do so i can mentally prepare myself for my inevitable doom.”
Toriel understood the necessity of the sass - this was a PTA meeting - Sans didn’t even have to go to them, but he did anyway. And yet everyone had the gall to call him lazy - he even called himself lazy!

“AND HOW WAS YOUR DAY, FRISK?” Papyrus asked.

«It was good! You know how Caroline is from Colorado? There’s another new kid from Colorado! Her name’s Penelope and she’s shorter than me!»

“Penelope…does she have an elder brother named Theo, by any chance?”
Frisk nodded.

“He’s in my class.”

Sans chuckled. “wow, kid, someone shorter than you. small world.”

Frisk and Toriel laughed. Papyrus and Flowey screamed.

«Mrs. Chang is really nice, too! Oh, and Miranda had a bunch of spit on her lips this morning.»

“Spit? What do you mean by that, my child?”

«Her lips were shiny and gooey and ucky.»

“kid, i think miranda needs to tone down the lip gloss.”

“Well, I’m glad you had a good day today, Frisk.”

“i think such a good day calls for pizza.”

Frisk look up at Toriel with their best Puppydog Eyes.

“Hmm…Oh, fine! I’m quite exhausted today anyway.”

“ok. pap, you wanna order it?”

“UGH, FINE! LAZYBONES…”

That night…

Frisk lay in their bed, sleeping peacefully.

Flowey doesn’t sleep much. Not in the summer.

Photosynthesis prevented that.

Electronic beeping sounds.

Flowey hissed at the 3DS.

“Lucifer, you stupid fuck. I trade my Mandibuzz for the likes of you. I regret everything.”

The promise of a great year fills you with
Chapter End Notes

The title comes from the name of the song School Day by Chuck Berry.

Please stay tuned for the ACTUAL PTA Sans. The tag is there for a reason.
This Is How We Do It

Chapter by Spazzin

Chapter Summary

The first PTA meeting of the year. Pretty much everyone has a Bad Time. Also, Papyrus and Mettaton watch Disney movies.

Chapter Notes

Warning for this chapter, there are meltdowns. And PTA Linda. And kale chips.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

3:27 P.M., September 7th, 201Z

It's a stormy day outside.

Rain is falling.

Thunder is crashing.

On days like this, kids like you…

Are sitting on a beanbag chair in your school library waiting for the PTA meeting to start.

Caroline had her hooded jacket over her head as she read the third chapter of The Chamber Of Secrets whilst sitting on a purple beanbag chair. She frequently snuck glances at the large window. She liked rain. She liked any form of precipitation. Rain was just her favorite, then came hail and snow.

She especially liked rain when thunder and lightening were involved.

“Hey, Caroline!”

It was Penelope. She was holding some chip packets in one hand and a bottle of water in the other

“I got you a bag of barbecue chips. You said you like that kind, right?”

“Um, yes. Thank you.”

Caroline liked Penelope. They had bonded rather quickly - both had been diagnosed with Asperger’s in the past year, both had come from Colorado - it was almost inevitable.
“Hey, uh I almost forgot to ask…what part of Colorado are ya from?” Penelope asked.

“Um…Silverton. You?”

“Trinidad!”

“I’ve been through there. Rino’s is really good.”

“Yeah! An’ Silverton has that train station!” Penelope exclaimed. “I think.”

“It does. The Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad.”

“Cool! I’ve never been on a train before…”

“It’s cool. Silverton’s really touristy since the mines are all abandoned, but that just means we get a lot of people from all over the place!”

Penelope liked Caroline. She liked her smile - Caroline had a cute smile even though she’d only seen it once. She was really smart, too! She read really big books.

Then Penelope saw Frisk. She liked Frisk, too. They could use their hands to talk to people! AND they can run fast!

“Hey, Frisk! Come sit with us! Is it okay if they sit with us, Caroline?”

“Okay.”

Frisk walked over to them. Sans was right behind them.

“Hey, caroline. ‘s been a while.”

“Dr. Alphys and Mrs. Undyne’s wedding.”

“yup.”

<<Dunkle Sans, this is Penelope!>>

“So it is. nice ta meetcha. i’m sans, frisk’s dunkle.”

Sans held out his hand. Caroline got a scared-ish look on her face, even though the gesture was in no way directed at her.

Penelope eagerly shook his hand.

*phhhbbhtbrrrtt*

Frisk giggled.

“heh. the ol’ whoopie-cushion-in-the-hand trick. gets ‘em everytime.”

Penelope started laughing too.

“Ya got me!”

“Yep. i got you good. the pta meeting starts in ten. if someone says something hurtful to either of you, tell me or sharona about it.”
“Um, Dr. Sans, Sharona said to tell you that my dad’s gonna be here tonight too.”

“okay then. thanks fer letting me know.”

“No problem.”

Then Sans remembered something.

“hey, where’s levi?”

“He’s with Brian an’ Hunter. They’re trying to get snacks from the vending machines in the teachers’ lounge.”

“We’re watching their stuff for ’em til they get back!”

“okay then. i wish them luck. if ya can, tell ’em to bring me some twinkies.”

Penelope gave him a thumbs up.

“You got it, dude!”

“Um, hey, sir...how’s Mr. Papyrus and his botfriend been?”

Sans snorted back a laugh. The kid remembered that…?

“They’ve been good. they spent the 4th of july together, and they’re on a date right now.”

“That’s cool. Good for them.”

“Kay then. see ya in a bit.”

Sans decided to text Papyrus, check up on him.

Sure, Pap’s an adult - he’s actually old enough to drink now, for pete’s sake. But he was still Sans’ little brother, no matter what.

_____________________________________________________

“Okay, darling, which should we watch first - Hercules, or The Little Mermaid? Ooh, or how about - no, Russel Crowe can’t sing...no, not that either…”

Mettaton and Papyrus had a date - their third. Their second has simply been a meal at a cafe. Tonight it was going to be dinner and a movie - but dinner had been canceled due to the inclement weather.

Not that Papyrus was complaining.

At this particular moment, Mettaton was bent over in front of the DVD rack, rump in the air. Papyrus had come to the conclusion that Mettaton was most attractive in shorts and a t-shirt. But that was just what he was wearing right now. Mettaton looked good in EVERYTHING.

“HERCULES SOUNDS GOOD TO ME!” Papyrus said, “IT’S ONE OF MY FAVORITES!”

“Alright then Papy-dear! Let the show begi -”

*HONK*

“UGH, I’LL GET IT…”
*hey bro
*you and the bf doin ok
*WE ARE ABOUT TO WATCH A MOVIE. WHAT DO YOU WANT?  
a snack that isn't kale chips
*i was just checking on you to see how things were goin
*EVERYTHING IS FINE. I'M SORRY LINDA PROVIDED KALE CHIPS.
*me too
*also ill be texting you 2 more times tonight
to make up for the last 2 dates where i didn't
*i've been too lenient with you
*SANS DON'T YOU DARE.
*SANS NO.
*see ya bro meetings starting bye

Papyrus was now a bit tetchy.
“What did he want?”
“HE WANTED TO SEE HOW THINGS WERE GOING. HE’S GOING TO TEXT US TWO MORE TIMES.”
“Why…?”
“TO MAKE UP FOR THE LAST TWO DATES.”

Mettaton just stood confused.
“Your brother is a strange little man.”
“I'M SO GLAD YOU UNDERSTAND.”

3:45 P.M. Time for the meeting to start.
A clicking of heels and a lavender-scented fog spewed forth from the library entrance as if to say “here she comes, run while you can, save yourselves and your sinuses!”.

A woman of 5’6 with a light blonde bob cut, beady little brown eyes, a spray tan, and just a little too much blue eyeshadow was revealed. About 4 inches of her height was due to her heels. Her pastel pink pantsuit was pressed. She had on the biggest fake smile ever seen. Only one other could go bigger, and that’s because he’s a fucking Skeleton. She carried an off-white Coach bag with the logo plastered all over it. Her cross necklace and giant hoop earrings were gold. Her teeth were a shade of white to match her handbag that would make any sane creature uncomfortable - and knowing this woman, that was quite possibly the intended effect.
“Goooood afternoon, everyone! Sans.”

She glared at Sans with her beady little eyes, her smile briefly taking on the appearance of a grimace before almost painfully yanking itself back into place. Sans always took a tiny bit of pride in knowing why she did that...

“IIII see we have some new members here! Why don’t we introduce ourselves? Any objections?”

No one had time to raise their hands before she started speaking again.

“No? Gooooo! I’ll start! I’m Linda Thompson, and I am the president of the Mountainside Elementary PTA!” she said, leaning her head to the right. A woman with light brown hair and blue-grey eyes sitting there glanced up from her paperwork briefly, moving her head back down. “My husband Richard is a lawyer, my son Hunter is in fourth grade this year, and my daughter Hannah just started kindergarten! I DO hope we can get along this year!”

She looked around the room, clearly expecting applause. Only one person was applauding, however. “Stop clapping, Di,” Linda said through clenched teeth. “Helen! Would you like to go next?”

The woman to her right stood up to introduce herself, clearly understanding that she had no say in the matter. She wore a checked short-sleeved button-up shirt, skinny jeans, and flats. “Hi, I’m Helen Green, my husband owns a used car dealership, and my son Brian is in the fourth grade, and I’m the vice president.”

Helen sat back down, resuming her paperwork. With the announcement that she was Vice President, some were no longer certain if the paperwork was truly hers. Those who attended meetings last year knew that the paperwork was actually supposed to be Linda’s.

Helen glanced to her right where Diana was on her cellphone. She jabbed the distracted woman with her pen.

“OW! What the heck?”

“Your turn. Phones off during the meeting.”

“Oh! Sorryyyyy, won’t happen again!” Diana said, affecting a sickly-sweet voice that was so obviously fake that if this were a movie Mettaton would have walked out and given a bad review.

“Hi, I’m Diana Mosley! I’m the PTA secretary, my husband Michael is a business analyst, and my sweet little girl Miranda is in the fourth grade this year!”

Sans mentally laughed. Miranda? Sweet? Next she’ll be saying Papyrus is evil.

Oh wait. She already did. On That Day.

Diana looked around. No applause. She sat down, slightly disappointed.

The person to her right went. Then the one to their right. And so on. Until our hero Sans was called upon.

“hey. how’s it goin’. i’m sans gaster. my kid frisk is in 4th grade this year. oh, and frisk is also the ambassador for monster-human relations.”

Linda’s left eye twitched a bit. Sans winked his right eye - a VERY subtle gesture which left a bitter
taste in Linda’s mouth after That Day. A bitter taste which ensured that she stayed quiet and stewed in said bitterness.

Then it was the next person’s turn. A woman with long dark brown hair in a ponytail and green eyes wearing Looney Tunes scrubs stood up. She was shorter than Sans - actually not that much taller than Caroline.

“Um, h-hi, I’m Monica DeMartino, I-I’m a pediatric nurse. I moved here recently with my children from Colorado. My son Theo is in fifth grade, a-and my daughter Penelope is in fourth grade.”

She sat down almost immediately after introducing herself.

Sans mentally put Monica’s name on his Panicky Parents List. This list existed for a few reasons, the main one being that they were susceptible to being manipulated by Linda and Diana.

Next to her was a Tiger monster, about a head shorter than Asgore.

“Hello.”

His voice was almost as deep, too. Damn.

“I am Shiva Khan. My wife Shakti is an office worker, and my daughter Shashi is in kindergarten.”

Shiva sat down. Linda suddenly looked terrified.

Sans secretly wished for Hannah and Shashi to become besties for many reasons. Because he was quite familiar with Shiva and his family, because he didn’t want Hannah to become a nervous wreck like her poor brother or a hateful bitch like her mother, and because he KNEW with every bit of his SOUL that it would piss Linda off. And anything that would piss Linda off was a Good Thing in Sans’ book, doubly so if it helped someone out in the long run.

Next came Sharona. Sans watched intently, knowing exactly what Sharona was about to do and why. Of course, her facemask was on. Linda’s perfume was killer on her hay fever. Poor Levi got that and the bright red hair from her.

“Hi everybody, I’m Sharona MARLOW-Goldsby! I’m a graphic designer, and my husband Randy is a software technician! My son Levi and my stepdaughter Caroline are both in fourth grade!”

Cue the ring flash, the attachment to the husband, the ensuing shocked faces of Linda and Diana, and the congratulatory applause of the rest of the PTA save Helen, who gave a thumbs up and a nod of approval with a light smirk. Helen was okay. Why she was friends with Linda and Diana in the first place was beyond him.

Then he remembered that Diana was like Jerry to those two. No one liked Diana. They just let her stay because she would just come back anyway if you told her to leave. That and she was just so incredibly STUPID that someone had to keep her from saying something so dumb it caused reality itself to implode.

Huh. Maybe having Linda around her kept the universe from being destroyed by Diana’s stupid.

“Hi, I’m Randy Marlow. I’m a software technician from Colorado, my wife Sharona is a graphic designer. My daughter Caroline and my stepson Levi are in fourth grade together.”

Linda’s left eye was now twitching even more. She was also quite red in the face.
Amazing just how little it took to make her upset.

Then she turned back into the perfect soccermom. Her eye was still a bit twitchy, and her face was still pinkish, but otherwise she would almost have a neon sign around her neck that said “This Is What A Real Mom Looks Like”.

Too bad he and about two-thirds of the PTA knew better. No matter how much Linda claimed otherwise, she was just as flawed a person as the rest of the PTA. Her flaws were simply more acceptable to the white conservative parts of Humanity - AKA the only ones that seem to matter.

“Ookay, time to start the meeting!”

“but everyone’s been introduced. how can we start what’s already finished?”

Laughter. Groans.

“Well, Sans,” Linda spat, “maybe if you hadn’t fallen asleep like you always do, you’d know what I mean.”

Diana snorted. When Diana snorted it was really gross because she sounded like she was trying to get something out of her throat.

Sans secretly hoped that it was a tonsil. He really wanted to watch Diana hork up a tonsil one of these days.

“everyone already knows you’re mean, linderp.”

Linda’s eye twitched.

“Aaanyway,” she said through gritted teeth, “our first order of business is the October fundraiser. Any ideas about that?”

Sans had planty. Sans always had ideas to bring to the table at these meetings. The problem is that there was no way in hell Linda would agree to one unless it involved him dying horribly, he was certain. And he actually had a few of those locked away somewhere.

Randy raised his hand.

“Yes, Mr. Marlow? Did you have any ideas?”

“I was thinking that maybe the kids could wear their costumes to school if they pay five dollars each on the 31st. If they can’t do that, then they can pay one dollar and wear their pajamas to school.”

A lot of the parents murmured in agreement.

“That’s a nice idea Mr. Marlow! Buuut -”

“But what, Mrs. Thompson? You just said it was a nice idea. Is there something wrong with it?”

“I thought it was a nice idea,” Shiva said.

“I kinda like it, too,” said Brett, a Rabbit Monster and MK’s adoptive father. “What about you, Sans?”

Linda’s eye twitched. Randy was officially cool. Anyone who could make Linda’s eye twitch was automatically cool.
“I love it. What about you, Helen?”

Linda looked shocked. She turned to Helen with a look on her face that was a mix of “why would he ask you that?” and “if you agree I can and will ruin you”.

Helen shrugged. “You did ask for ideas, Lin. He gave an idea. People like it. I think we should hold a vote.”

Linda could say nothing to that. She had dug her grave. Now she was rolling in it.

“Oookay then. All in favor of Mr. Marlow’s idea, raise your hands.”

Everyone except for Linda, Helen, and Diana raised their hands.

“That’s 28 for and 3 against,” Sans tallied. “I think we have our October fundraiser everyone.”

A few cheers rang out among the bolder parents.

Linda’s eye twitched. Not even an hour into the first PTA meeting of the school year and already her authority had been undermined by that damned skeleton.

Sans caught her eye. He winked his right eye.

Or did he? Linda wasn’t sure anymore.

But she was very, very sure of one thing.

“Ten minute break, everyone!”

Sans was going DOWN this year.

Down down down down DOWN.

Hunter sat on a beanbag, playing on his phone and listening to music - Time After Time by Cyndi Lauper was on, a song Linda would kill him for listening to. He didn’t want to hear his mother...talk. He got enough of that at home, and more often than not it was directed at him for something or other.

He watched Brian play Go Fish with Levi, MK and Frisk. Brian always lost against Levi. Everyone did.

He was lost in thought when he felt a tap on his shoulder.

He looked up and saw a small girl with hazel eyes and blonde half pigtails held up by little bows. She wore a sparkly Hello Kitty t-shirt and a tutu with leggings and flats.

“Hey, Hannah,” Hunter said, removing his earbuds. “What’s up?”

“C’n I listen, bub?”

“Sure. Just hold on a second.”

He changed the playlist from his to Hannah’s. He clicked on Hannah’s favorite song.

“Here ya go.”
“Tanks.”

“You’re welcome.”

He decided to go join Brian and them.

“Awww, c’mon! I SWEAR you’re cheating!”

“Explain how.”

“You-you just ARE!”

“You suck at cards, Brian,” Hunter interjected.

“Shut up, Hunter!”

“Dude, it’s true. You suck.”

Frisk nodded.

Brian growled.

“Hey, where’s Caroline and Penelope at?”

“I dunno…”

“We’re over here!”

Penelope’s voice had emanated from...

...a blanket fort. She and Caroline had made a fort out of beanbag chairs, blankets and a bookshelf. Caroline was reading a book inside.

“Hey.”

“We built a fort! Is it cool if they join us?”

“Not now. Next time.”

“Okay! You can’t come in. It’s a Secret Fort!”

“Oh my gawsh, Penelope!” Miranda said. “Only little kids and losers build blanket forts! EVERYONE knows that!”

“I think it looks pretty cool,” Brian said.

Miranda glared at Penelope, then turned back to her teen magazine in a huff.

Miranda didn’t realize it, but EVERYONE knew about her crush on Brian. It had been obvious since kindergarten.

“Brian, got any 3’s?” MK asked.

Brian threw down two of his cards.

Hunter decided to get up and grab some chips.
He glanced at Levi’s hand. He had three kings.

He grabbed the chips and a juice box. He looks at Brian’s hand.

“Brian,” he whispered, “ask Levi for some kings.”

“Levi,” Brian said, “got any queens?”

Hunter facepalmed. Brian was cool - heck, Brian was one of the coolest guys he knew. But he was an idiot.

“Go fish, cheaterpants.”

“ARGH!!”

Papyrus and Mettaton sat on the couch, cuddling, as was their way.

Ariel and Eric were on their date. The Mermaid Ariel was an inspiration to Mettaton in SO many ways, and her mannerisms were just so...adorkable! She reminded him somewhat of Papyrus in her enthusiasm for the little things…

A lot of things reminded him of Papyrus.

Ooh, the Kiss The Girl scene!! This was Mettaton’s FAVORITE.

The song began. Mettaton hummed along - as he had been to every song.

He suddenly had a Plan.

He snuggled closer to Papyrus as he hummed.

Papyrus blushed. And when Papyrus blushed, he blushed with his entire being. If Mettaton thought Papyrus was warm and cuddly before - and he did, on a regular basis - he only got warmer and cuddlier when he blushed.

As if knowing exactly what Mettaton was thinking, Papyrus grabbed him by the chin, tilting Mettaton’s face toward him.

They kissed right as Ariel and Eric did.

That is to say that they, too, were prevented from smooching by an untimely interruption by the machinations of a third party.

“SANS, REALLY?”

“yes, papyrus, it is i, sans. just checking in. seein’ how you’re doin’.”

“AREN’T PHONES NOT ALLOWED?”

“ten minute break.”

“YOU AREN’T GOING TO KEEP TALKING TO ME FOR TEN MINUTES, ARE YOU?”

“bro, of course not. gotta give you ‘n the bae a little privacy. i’ll letcha go back to whatever you were doin’.”
“THANK YOU!”
“just remember that depending on what you’re doin’, use protectio -”

“GOODBYE!”

And with that Papyrus hung up on Sans. Blushing far heavier than before. And breathing heavily.

Mettaton was worried now. “You alright, dear?”

“YEAH, I’M FINE HONEY. LET’S...LET’S KEEP WATCHING THE MOVIE, SHALL WE?”

“Mmm.”

Mettaton re-cuddled into Papyrus ribcage as Papyrus wrapped his arms around him and rested his chin on Mettaton’s head. Mettaton wrapped a hand around Papyrus’ ulna.

Then Mettaton suddenly registered something.

“Um, Papy, did...you just call me ‘Honey’?”

Papyrus blushed.

“UM??? YES??? DON’T I ALWAYS???”

“N-no, sweetie, you...you don’t.”

“OH.”

Silence.

“DO YOU...NOT...WANT ME TO?”

“Oh, no, sweetie, I-I didn’t mean it like THAT! I honestly really like it...”

“OH.”

Then they settled back in. Papyrus thought about talking to him about the call, but decided against it.

The third date was WAY too early to be thinking about that sort of thing. Papyrus didn’t need to read the dating rulebook to know THAT. Besides, he was quite happy with the way things are right now. And Mettaton hasn’t complained, either, so he must be fine with this as well!

This was nice...

But there was one other question...

The ten-minute break was four and a half minutes in. Everyone knew Linda was outside smoking. They also knew that Diana had followed her as always. So they were all free of the crazies for another five and a half minutes.

Sans took the opportunity to throw out the kale chips. And Linda’s nasty-ass perfume. That’ll teach her to leave her bag behind. Sure, she’d always get more, but for now it would do.

At the six minute mark Sharona was able to safely remove her facemask. She took a huff of an inhaler. That’s when Sans noticed something.
“hey, sharona,” Sans asked, “where’dja get that scar on your nose?”

“Oh,” Sharona said nonchalantly, “ya mean the one on my septum?”

“yeah.”

“Well, I was 15, see, and there was a piercing there. I had an allergy attack - sneezed the fucker clean out. There was blood everywhere. I’ve had a severe phobia of blood ever since.”

Everyone at the table stared at her.

“Damn.”

“Um, pardon me,” Monica said, “but you said your name was Marlow-Goldsby?”

“Yeah? And your name’s DeMartino.”

“I-I’m sorry, it’s just that Penelope really seems to like your daughter -”

“And Caroline really likes Penelope! Think we could arrange something for them? Trip to the park, maybe?”

Monica seemed surprised, yet grateful. “T-that sounds lovely! When do you think we could do it?”

“How’s this weekend sound?”

“S-sounds nice!”

“hey, you two mind if frisk joins ya?” Sans asked.

“Sure, I don’t see why not. That okay, Monica?”

“Oh, um, sure!”

“thanks, ladies. i mean, tori’s got errands out the wazoo, an’ i got work tomorrow, so this really means a lot. i’ll let tori know now.”

“Oh, it’s no problem!” Sharona assured him. “Frisk is welcome any time, I’ve told you!”

“Hey, guys, Linda’s coming back. Sharona, get your mask on. Monica, be less happy. Sans, keep being a little shit.”

“my true form.”

“Oh shit, here she comes. Everyone sit down!”

Everyone rushed to sit down. Randy had a cup of tea. Linda provided the kale chips, Diana provided the tea and coffee. Everyone knew the coffee was shit, and as such no one dared try the tea.

The door swung open, the odor of Newport cigarettes blustering throughout the library. The sounds of gagging could be heard. Coughing was now being heard. Whoever was coughing sounded near to puking.

Linda was slightly calmer than she was when she walked in the first time. But she also smelled worse, if such a thing was possible. Diana was close at her tail, as was her way.
“Ugh I can’t believe I forgot to take my perfume with me…”

She reached the table. Helen nearly gagged.

“Where the hell is my perfume?”

Linda searched around for it. Then she got the bright idea to ask the kids.

Linda cleared her throat. This act was totally unnecessary since the kids could smell her coming. “Hiii, kids!” Linda said in a syrupy voice one normally used on toddlers. “Has any of you seen -”

Linda focused her beady eyes on Caroline and Penelope’s blanket fort. “Who built that?” Linda asked, her voice dripping with accusation.

“Caroline and Penelope did!” Miranda said. “I tried to tell them that they could get in trouble, but they wouldn’t listen to me!”

“Thank you, Miranda,” Linda said.

“But I thought you said that only little kids and losers built blanket forts,” Caroline said. “Do you always lie to people?”

Miranda sniffled. “I am NOT a liar, you MEANIE!”

“I thought I was a loser and a nerd.”

“Young lady, that’s enough out of you! Take down this…this THING right now!”

“It’s a fort.”

The other kids stared in shock. No one ever talked back to Hunter’s mom. Not if you wanted to live to see ten.

Linda stomped over to the fort and ripped the blanket off.

Linda looked PISSED. Caroline stared at her…well, not at her, but…through her. She looked far, far paler than a healthy Human should look.


“P-p-please buh-back away…”

“Not until you clean this up.”

“Mrs. Thompson,” Randy spoke up, his voice calm yet angry in that way only a dad could be, “I sincerely suggest you step back before…”

It was too late. Caroline had thrown up.

All over Linda.

Miranda was laughing. Literally everyone else, Sans included, was terrified. How was Linda going to respond to this…?

“Everyone, go home. You’re dismissed.”
Apparently her marred appearance was more important than whatever else she had to discuss.

“Hunter, Hannah, get your things. We’re going home.”

Linda turned around, glared at the still-laughing-and-no-longer-fake-crying-Miranda, and turned on her heel to leave.

Hunter and Hannah stood stock-still in their terror. Everyone else gazed at them with pity. They could do nothing.

“Hunter and Hannah, I said get. Your things. NOW.”

They sped to grab their stuff.

Hunter glanced at the crying Caroline. <<I’m sorry,>> she signed.

Hunter smiled sadly, mouthing ‘it’s okay’ to her. She didn’t mean it. None of this was her fault.

“Hunter James Thompson!”

“C-coming Mom!”

Then he speed-walked out the door. He was almost in tears from fear.

“Miranda, come on. We’re going home too.”

Miranda stood up and glared daggers at Caroline. Caroline was too busy crying and rocking and apologizing to even know what was going on.

Randy ran over to his daughter and held her, disregarding the vomit.

He lifted her, rubbing and patting her back. He was almost in tears herself.

“Y’know, when you guys said Linda was a raging hellbitch, you weren’t kidding.”

“funny thing, randy,” Sans said, “linda’s usually not this angry. she’s never let a meeting out early before. late, yeah, every other time. but never early.”

“Huh.” He was out of it. Something was up. Whatever it was, now was not the time to address it.

“Randy, sweetie,” Sharona said, “I’ll drive. You can sit in the back with Caroline. Levi, you wanna sit up front with me?”

“Okay,” Levi said. His usual exuberance had been tempered considerably by the events

“Wait. Mrs. Mosley, before you turn tail to follow Linda…”

Diana turned around, the arrogance that always popped out in Linda’s absence evident on her face.

“The tea you brought? It’s moldy.”

Diana’s arrogance gave way to anger.

She walked out of the door in a huff, Miranda in tow.

Sans walked over to a far corner where a Frisk sat rocking and chewing their nails and crying in fear, MK rubbing circles into their back with his tail spikes.
“thanks, mk, i’ll take over from here.”

“Okay.”

MK stood an ran to join Brett.

“hey kiddo.”

Frisk lifted their head to look toward him, continuing to rock and whimper.

“she’s gone. we’re headin’ out early.”

Frisk’s rocking slowed. They were still biting their nails and sniffling.

“wanna go to grillby’s? i think we both need a lil somethin’ after all that.”

Frisk hugged him. Sans lifted them up and carried them toward the door.

“c’mon, frisky business. let’s go free yer mom from the evils of paperwork.”

Frisk nodded, a small smile on their face.

Sans smiled back, nuzzling them. This kid was strong.

Speaking of strong kids…

Caroline was still breathing pretty heavily, but she’d calmed down a lot. Penelope was holding five or so water bottles, two of which were empty.

Caroline’s reaction was…familiar.

But he’d have to keep an eye on her. Randy, too. Linda’s actions clearly upset him too. He was drinking a bottle of water as well.

“hey, sharona, monica,” Sans asked, a bit tentatively, “you guys still on for saturday…?”

“Of course.”

“I honestly think the kids need it…”

“Uh, hey.”

It was Helen.

“Can Brian join you guys? He asked me to ask you…”

“Sure, why not?”

“Okay.”

“Thank you SO much. I, um...have ways of having Hunter and Hannah join. I’ll see if Linda’ll allow it…”

“Okay then. Let us know by tomorrow?”

“Okay, thanks.”
“see ya ‘round, Helen.”

“See ya. C’mon, Brian.”

“Bye, guys.”

“Later.”

“See ya tomorrow.”

“Bye…”

There was quiet.

“c’mon kiddo. burgers and fries, burgers and fries.”

Papyrus and Mettaton cuddled whilst watching the Aristocats. The closing credits were rolling. Sans had sent out the third text alerting them of the early release of the PTA meeting as well as a brief summary of the circumstances behind it.

Neither moved a muscle. Wait, no. Poor choice of words. Neither of them have muscles.

Papyrus braced himself. What he had to ask was very, very important for his peace of mind.

“METTATON,” he asked, “I HAVE A QUESTION…”

“Yes, Papy? What is it?”

Hoo boy. This…this was more difficult than he thought it’d be.

“UM...WE’VE BEEN ON THREE DATES, CORRECT?”

“Yes…”?

Mettaton sounded…nervous?

“UM...DOES THAT MEAN THAT WE’RE...B-BOYF-F-FRIENDS?”

Mettaton stared at him blankly for all of about three seconds.

“Did you...not...think we were?”

“S-SORT OF??? I MEAN??? I'M NOT??? SURE???”

“Papy, sweetie, calm down, okay? Deep breaths…”

Papyrus breathed. Skeletons didn’t necessarily need to breathe, but the act of rhythmically expanding and contracting the rib cage was calming.

“Are we better now?”

Papyrus nodded.

“Good.”

There was brief silence.
“WELL…?”

“Well what, darling?”

“ARE WE?”

“Are we what?”

“BOYFRIENDS?”

Mettaton looked at Papyrus, touching his cheek and rubbing a thumb along his zygomatic - Mettaton really like Papyrus’ cheekbones.

“I do believe we are, Papy dear. I do believe we are.”

The effect was immediate. Eyes sparkling, smile widening, SOUL glowing.

Then came the kissing. Papyrus was definitely getting better at kissing, that’s for sure.

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Toriel was grading papers. All of them A’s. But then again the assignment was easy - some of the children commented that the work was “for babies”.

Her work had only been interrupted twice thus far - the first time by the janitor, and the second time by the sound of a grumbling, stomping woman. The smell of a very particular brand of unfiltered menthol cigarettes wafting down the hall and through the cracks in the door suggested Linda Thompson. Toriel was going to have A Word with Sans…

*knock knock*

Speak of the Skeleton.

“Who is there?”

“two.”

“Two who?”

“it’s to whom, tori. you’re teaching fifth grade, you should know this.”

Toriel couldn’t help laughing.

Then she noticed the way he was carrying Frisk. Then she noticed Frisk’s tear-stained face.

Toriel sighed.

Sans knew the drill. He used his Blue Magic to levitate Frisk into their mother’s arms.

“i’ll explain in the car. we’re goin’ to grillby’s to cheer ‘em up.”

“Alright…”

Frisk’s sleep that night was fitful at best. PTA meetings did that to them. Gave them nightmares.

Flowey ignored them as best he could.
He was getting sleepier. Slowly but surely. The cold did that to him.

The kid whimpered.

Flowey growled in irritation.

Asriel used a vine to rub their back in an attempt to soothe them.

It worked.

Time to fuck up the Elite Four.

______________________________

Knowing that you’re safe at home fills you with

DETERMINATION

______________________________

Chapter End Notes

Title name is from This Is How We Do It by Montell Jordan.
Downtown

Chapter by Spazzin

Chapter Summary

The kids have a day out and a sleepover at Alphys and Undyne's. Lots of foreshadowing is in here. Lots.

Chapter Notes

It's been a while. Finals are over for me, and I have a whole month free from responsibilities. I am free to do nothing.

Please enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

10:43 A.M., September 8th, 201Z

It's a beautiful day outside.

Kids are playing.

Grown-ups are chilling.

On days like this, kids like you…

...are getting ready for a weekend with friends.

“OKAY FRISK, LET'S CHECK OFF THE LIST OF THINGS YOU WILL NEED FOR YOUR SLUMBER PARTY!” Papyrus said.

Frisk saluted.

“FIRST, YOUR CELL PHONE!”

Frisk ran up to their room, coming down with their phone, saluting.

“NEXT, YOUR MEDICINE!”

Frisk held up a blue clutch bag with three orange pill bottles inside, putting it into their backpack with a salute.
“NEXT, YOUR SLEEPING BAG!”

Frisk held up a rolled-up beanbag with constellations on it - their eighth birthday gift from Sans - and saluted.

“NEXT, YOUR PAJAMAS AND A CHANGE OF CLOTHES!”

Frisk held up a red duffel bag, saluting.

“NEXT, YOUR TOOTHBRUSH AND HAIRBRUSH!”

They held up their backpack, saluting - the toothbrush and hairbrush were in the blue clutch bag with their medications.

“NEXT, YOUR FLOWER!”

“I BELONG TO NO ONE!”

Frisk saluted.

“AND LAST, BUT CERTAINLY NOT LEAST, YOUR HUG FROM THE GREAT UNCLE PAPYRUS!”

Frisk trotted up, raising their arms in the traditional “pick me up!” gesture, a request that Papyrus was only too happy to oblige.

“D’awwwww, that’s ADORABLE!”

The snuggly twosome was interrupted by Undyne and Alphys. Undyne was smiling - she smiled almost as much as Sans did - and Alphys was taking pictures with her phone and posting them online.

Alphys and Undyne had called the night before, noting that it had been a couple of weeks since they had last seen Frisk. Toriel remedied this by allowing them to chaperone Frisk for their day out with their friends - an offer they were only too happy to accept.

Papyrus lowered Frisk gently to the ground. The Human turned to face their aunts.

“Okay, punk, are you ready to HIT THE TOWN?”

Frisk hopped up and down in place and clapped - clearly they were excited.

“O-okay then! Let’s go!”

Frisk went to hug their mom and dunkle goodbye, and headed out.

“You sure you’re gonna be okay, Caroline?”

Caroline had a messenger bag filled with books, notebooks, and pencils and a rolling suitcase. Randy was apprehensive about letting Caroline go - sure, Sharona and Levi were going to be there, along with other kids, but after last night’s events, Randy was still rather shaken up.

“I’ll be fine, Dad. If something happens, I’ll call you.”

Randy looked at Caroline. After all that and more, she was still here. He swore on his life that no
one was as strong as his daughter…

But that didn’t mean he couldn’t worry.

“Are you really sure? I mean, Mrs. Thompson’s kids’re gonna be there…”

“But they didn’t do anything wrong.”

“I know, but still…”

“Dad, I can do this.”

Randy sighed. Caroline was stubborn…

“Okay. Have fun sweetie.”

With a hug and a kiss on the cheek - when did he stop having to bend down on his knees to do that? - Caroline hopped into the car where Levi was already waiting.

“Randy,” Sharona said, “I know Linda’s terrible and all -”

“Her eyes are exactly like Bethany’s.”


“Bethany’s not here, Randy. She’s where she belongs, you’re where you belong. You and Caroline are safe now. It’s because you’re safe that you and Caroline can get the help you need. It’s because you’re safe that Caroline is making friends. It’s a slow process, but she’s really starting to open up and heal a bit.”

Randy was almost in tears. He hugged Sharona, and kissed her.

“What did I do to deserve you…?”

“You were there for me and my son,” she said, “now I’m gonna be there for you and your daughter. I love you, okay? I’ll be back in a few hours.”

“Okay.”

Sharona got in the car, and drove off.

Randy waved them off.

“A noncommittal grunt was the only response the overweight blond man in the leather recliner gave.

“Remember to buy me more beer while you’re out for once.”

“Sure.”

Brian was already waiting in the car.

Helen peeled out of the garage. She could just leave and not come back. David wouldn’t care. He was drunk about two-thirds of the time he wasn’t at work anyway. He’d probably only notice she
was gone when he was completely out of beer.

But she couldn’t just up and leave.

She needed the money.

She had too many regrets. There was no turning back this late in the game.

Helen looked at Brian’s eyes in the rearview mirror. Pretty hazel eyes with gold flecks in the right lighting focussed on his video game. She thanked God every day for those eyes.

Because she knew exactly whose eyes they weren’t.

Linda was clothes shopping on her tablet while drinking her morning mimosa at the kitchen island. Her September pantsuit was completely RUINED by that idiot girl - Carolyn? Carleen? Whatever her name is, she COMPLETELY humiliated Linda in HER domain. And THAT would NOT stand.

Not to mention her father. He had the GALL to look at Linda like she was some sort of...monster. Linda was an upstanding citizen! She was the president of the PTA! She went to church every Sunday like a good person should - she even led a church group! And not to mention, she was a card-carrying member of her local chapter of the Human Welfare Coalition!

She was nothing if not a perfectly decent human being.

“Don’t lie to yourself.”

“Who said that?!”

Linda looked around the empty kitchen. She’d been hearing things like that a lot. She swore to God that that goddamned skeleton was pranking her by leaving some kind of recording device where she couldn’t see it…

No, that was CRAZY. God, that filthy monster was getting on her nerves and he wasn’t even there. There’s no way he could have...

“Mom, we’re all packed.”

Hunter came down the stairs with his and Hannah’s bags. Hannah came down the stairs, hopping down each step.

“Hannah, sweetie, don’t do that, it’s not ladylike.”

“Yes Mommy.”

Linda sighed. Hannah was such a little tomboy. Linda really hoped she grew out of it soon, or she’d NEVER have friends. And if Hannah never had friends, she’d never get a boyfriend, which meant she’d never get a husband, which meant she’d never have children, which meant -

*DING DONG*

The doorbell rang.

Linda walked to the door, opening it to reveal Helen.
God bless that woman.

“Hunter! Hannah! Brian’s mom is here!”

Linda had no idea what she’d do if it weren’t for Helen. Friends since middle school, Helen followed her through life no matter what. Linda made sure of THAT.

Sure, Helen was the first of them to have kids, but Linda had more of them. And besides, Brian was more brawn than brain - he’d flunked kindergarten, for pete’s sake! Her Hunter had both. He just needed a little more of each plus some manly confidence and he’d be perfect.

As her children waved goodbye, Linda closed the door. She was finished waving anyway.

She walked through the house to the back door, stepped outside, and took a much-needed drag from her cigarette, followed by a swig of her third mimosa. It had been far too long since she last smoked her usual two packs a day, and she was going to take advantage of that fact. She opened up the notes app on her tablet. Time to schedule the smoking prevention assembly…

“Penelope, are you ready?” Monica asked as they headed out the door.

“Uh-huh!” Penelope said as she nodded.

“You got everything?”

“Uh-huh!”

“Everything except a brain~” said a boy with dark brown hair and eyes a half inch taller then Monica.

“Theo -”

“I’m just kidding!”

“You’re coming too.”

“What!”

“Yep. We’re all going because I am not leaving you at home alone after what happened last time.”

Theo shuddered. “Yes, Mom…”

“Good. I just got a text from Mrs. Green saying that she just picked up Hunter and Hannah and that they’re on their way.”

“Where’re we stopping first, Momma?” Penelope asked.

“We’re stopping for lunch first, apparently it’s a Monster-owned diner called Grillby’s…”

“Frisk said somethin’ about that place! They said it’s really good and that the owner’s hot!”

Monica choked on air. She decided to ignore that last comment...

“Okay then, let’s head on out!”

“Yeah!”
“Yippee.”

Undyne, Alphys, Frisk, Flowey, and MK were the first ones at Grillby’s - not surprising, since Humans who didn’t live in this part of the city didn’t go through it often except to go to the airport. A few even took detours to specifically AVOID it.

They decided to sit on the bench outside and wait.

As soon as they sat down, Sharona drove up with Levi and Caroline.

“Hey! Looks like we’re early.”

“Sharona, five minutes ain’t early!” Undyne pointed out.

“It is for me.”

“Fufufu! Trust me, you’ll LOVE the cheese fries! So greasy…”

“D-don’t worry,” Alphys said. “We’re pretty sure Monster food is kosher.”

“It is,” Sharona said. “I checked around.”

“Sweet!”

Then Helen drove up.

She got out of her car. Hunter helped Hannah out of her car seat before getting out himself.

“Welp. We’re here. Never really been through here…”

“Not many Humans have.”

Helen merely hummed in response.

Five minutes later Monica, Theo and Penelope had arrived.

“Hey! We’re here!”

“Hey! Alphys, Undyne, this is Monica and her kids, Theo and Penelope!”

“Nice to meetcha! I’m Undyne, and this is my wife Alphys! We were married this past June!”

“N-nice to m-meet you!”

“Nice to meet you too! Congratulations, by the way!”

“Ehehe. T-thanks!”

“C’mon c’mon c’mon, I’m hungry!”

“Penelope, be patient. We’re going in now, alright?”

“Yessss.”

Penelope was excited. She was about to eat Monster food - she wondered if it was any different from Human food. Frisk had said that it was like Human food but different.
“Hey, hey Caroline!” Penelope said.

“What’re you gonna get?”

Caroline shrugged. She wasn’t used to people being curious about her. “Steak or chicken strips, I guess. What about you?”

“I dunno. Probably whichever of those you don’t get!”

“And you try whatever I get, I try whatever you get.” Caroline said. “Um, that’s how it’s s’posed to work, right? I’ve never done this before…”

“I neither,” Penelope said, shaking her head. “Still wanna?”

Caroline paused a bit, grabbing at her left shoulder. “Sure.”

And so the group went inside to eat.

Sans was back in his basement on his ratty fold-out couch, laptop open and headset on. He logged into the server.

He was first today. Huh. That was new.

He decided to leave a few links in the chat. He and the others in Heart of Gold save for Replay preferred using their headsets.

Aaand Jessamy is logged in.

She clicked the link.

“Fuck you.”

“i’d rather not.”

“Is that Mettaton reading the motherfucking Bee Movie script?”

“yup.”

“How.”

“he’s dating my brother.”

“Surely you’re fucking with me.”

“jessamy, i assure you that i am 100 percent single. and don’t call me shirley.”

Jessamy’s exasperated groans rang through the headset.

“But for real. I feel for your brother.”

“is it ‘cause mtt’s a ho? jessamy, are you slutshaming my bro’s bf?”

“Do you even keep up with the news?”
“what news?”

“Remember MTT’s last relationship?”

“that and all the ones before it were flings, nothing more nothing less.”

“I know. I can believe you since you know the guy. But other people won’t.”

“i know.”

“You know Lola Leigh, right?”

“is it bad if i say no?”

“No, it means you got lucky.”

“so some say.”

Hyperion’s logged in now.

“Hey, guys what’re we...holy shit I know that URL.”

“Hyperion -”

“I’m gonna put in on loop so everyone can hear it!”

“HYPERION NO!”

“hyperion yes.”

By the time the group of parents and children left, it was noon.

They headed off to a playground. It was immediately declared awesome due to the presence of a rocketship slide. Alphys took a photo and sent it to Sans.

*al

*is that a rocketship

*yep! o((^ω^*)o

*cool

*send pics of frisk on it to me and tori

*and pap

*okay okay! what r u, their mom? (ω逆;) 

*no im their dunkle

*lol u know what i mean ν(^

*ok

*made up your mind about the thing yet
*not yet! it seems like a lot of responsibility… \( (; \square `) /\)

*but it also seems like a lot of fun… (⊙△⊙)

*one of the guys is playing that vid of mtt reciting the bee movie script on a loop

*i still need time sans! this is a big decision! (・へ・)

*i know al

*im not trying to rush you

*i know… o(´д`)o

*everyones here now g2g

*okay! Beee! (´▽`)ﾉ

Alphys closed out of the messaging app.

She looked about the playground. Levi was on the monkeybars, climbing across the top of them to climb on the outside of the entire play area itself ala King Kong. Hunter and Brian were on the rock climbing section, racing Levi in order to achieve the same goal - Levi was winning. MK and Frisk were sliding down the slides - their favorite part of any playground. Caroline and Penelope were on the swing set. Hannah was playing in a sand pit. She’d have to clean up when they got back to the house. Theo was playing his video game on a bench.

“Hey, Helen.”

“Yeah, Undyne?”

“Please tell me Diana isn’t gonna be here.”

“Nope. Mike’s in town and Miranda’s at Naomi’s with Olive.”

“Thank GOD,” Sharona said.

“And Linda’s most likely plastered. I’m SURE that was NOT her first mimosa…”

“She smokes AND drinks? Those poor kids…” Monica said. She was genuinely concerned for Hunter’s and Hannah’s long-term health, not just as a pediatric nurse but a parent herself - parents are weirdly empathetic toward each other and their children most of the time.

“At least she doesn’t drink around the kids…” Helen said. She felt it necessary to defend Linda. She’d long forgotten why this was, but the need was still felt.

“B-but isn’t that exactly what she did? A-and doesn’t she still s-smoke around them?” Alphys questioned.

Helen sighed. “It doesn’t matter right now. If Linda wants to get drunk off her ass and stink up her house with cigs, let her. Richard’s out of town doing a case, so more time to do...whatever it is she does when no one else is around.”

“Ya mean get wasted?” Sharona offered.

A round of laughter erupted.
Helen wasn’t sure why, but something about this group of parents-plus-two-relatives was...nice. She was calmer than she usually was around Linda and Diana.

Must be the fresh air. She should go out like this more often...

Levi was almost at the top of the rocket ship.

Nearly there.

And there he was. King of the world.

Now. Where are the others...?

Oh. There’s Brian.

“Hey, Bri-Bri~”

“Don’t call me that, jerk!”

“I didn’t call you that, I called you Bri-Bri.”

Brian growled. “You’re lucky we’re this high up or I’d punch you.”

Levi only stuck his tongue out in response.

“Well, I’m gonna climb back down.”

He climbed his way along the outside to the nearest open-air slide. He saw Theo on his way down.

“Hey Theo.”

“Sup, Tiny.”

“Not me!”

And he slid his way down the slide. “HATERS GONNA HATE! WOOOO!”

He sat at the bottom of the slide for a brief moment, giggling.

Then he was pushed off the end with help from the combined weights of Hunter, Frisk, Hannah, and Flowey. They flew off the edge and landed in a heap on top of Levi.

Hannah laughed with the type of glee only a kindergartener could. “Again! Again!”

Then she looked over to where Caroline and Penelope were still swinging and chatting.

“I wanna swing!”

“Okay, but we gotta ask Penelope and Caroline if it’s okay…”

“Is it ‘cause Coraline got scared an’ threw up on Mommy an’ Mommy got all mad ‘cause her clothes were ruined?”

Hunter nodded, slightly scared. He glanced around nervously. Frisk was confused as to why he always did that.
“I’ll go ask ‘em if it’s okay if we join ‘em!” Levi said.

He ran over to the swingset.

“Hey Caroline! Hey Penelope!”

“Hey.”

“Sup Levi!”

“Me ‘n Hunter ‘n Hannah ‘n Frisk ‘n Flowey wanna swing too. Is that okay?”

“Sure! That okay with you, Caroline?”

“Okay.”

“Alright! I’ll go tell’em!”

Levi ran back to the other four.

“They said yes!”

Hannah ran over to the swingset as soon as Levi finished talking. She was a go-getter.

Hunter, Frisk, MK, and Levi ran after her, Flowey forgotten once again.

“I swear to god if you leave me here overnight again I WILL eat a squirrel this time!”

He wouldn’t, though. Not really. Asriel wouldn’t let him.

He just sighed in resignation. Flowey was so done.

Meanwhile at the swingset, everyone was chatting.

Except for Caroline. Caroline was grabbing nervously at her left shoulder with her right hand and holding her book in the other - Prisoner of Azkaban this time.

“Uh, Coraline…” Hannah said.

“What?”

“Where are your fingers?”

“Hannah!” Hunter exclaimed. “You don’t just ask people where their fingers are!”

“I lost them.”

“We can see that,” Brian said, “But where’dja lose ‘em?”

“I dunno. They fell off.”

“But fingers don’t just fall off,” Theo said. “That’s stupid.”

“Mine did.”

“But how?”
“They just did.”

Caroline had grabbed at her shoulder even harder. Now she was squeezing it. Her leg was bouncing up and down, moving her book with it. How she was still able to read it was a mystery.

“Um, hey guys, you’re kinda upsetting her,” Penelope interrupted. “I don’t think she wants to talk about it.”

“Oh. Sorry…” Hannah said.

“It’s fine. I ask weird questions a lot too.”

Hannah smiled, reassured.

“So…” Brian started. “Does anyone know when we leave?”

Awkward silence ensued.

“Is someone gonna ask our moms when we leave?” Levi asked.

“I’ll do it,” Caroline offered, “I’m gettin’ kinda tired anyway.”

Caroline jumped off the swing.

As the kids watched her leave, they turned to Levi.

“So what DID happen to Caroline’s fingers?” Brian asked.

“Brian, please no,” Hunter pleaded.

“Hunter, she’s not even here,” Brian countered. “Besides, it’s probably not even that bad.”

The look on Levi’s face said otherwise.

“What the heck, Brian.”

“I didn’t mean it like THAT!”

“Um…honestly, I dunno. Her fingers’ve been like that since we met.”

“Guys, she’s back.”

Caroline ran up to the swingset.

“Sharona said we leave with Dr. Alphys and Mrs. Undyne at 3:30. That’s in ten minutes.”

“Okay.”

Caroline sat on a patch of grass and continued to read.

She rubbed her left shoulder.

——

Sans was typing in some code.

Then Replay had typed something in the chatbox. Replay couldn’t speak much English since he was from Japan, but he was understandable enough.
RP=>/TL i find your bae

TL=>/RP do you even know what a bae is

Then Replay posted a link to…

...the Wikipedia page for the Nubian goat.

The entire Heart of Gold exploded with laughter.

Huh.

Sans could safely say that these fucks were so...

Uncreative.

“huh. can’t say this is the first time i’ve seen this article. ‘specially since the kid sent it to me five times in the past week.”

RP=>/TL :( 

“Way to go, Timeline,” Kindred said. “You made Replay sad.”

RP=>/KD not sad need more good idea

“i have no doubt in my mind that you can come up with better next time, replay.”

“Okay guys, now that that shit’s out of the way –” Kindred started. “Hyperion, you left Mettaton running.”

“Fuck, I forgot how to turn him off.”

“Hey Timeline, how do you turn off your brother’s boyfriend?” Jessamy asked.

“you can’t turn off mtt. but if you’re talkin’ about the playback loop, i got it.”

Then it was shut off.

“THANK you, Timeline.”

“no prob, bob.”

“Anyway, on to business. What do we got on ‘em, guys?”

“I actually got somethin’!”

“Heyyy, go Jessamy! Give us the deets, dude!”

“Okay, I got shit on the VP.”

“hold up, jessamy. you got the straight shit on jennifer howard?”

“Timeline, that shit ain’t straight OR narrow. Apparently she...naw, Imma just send you the files.”

The attachment was a series of screenshots from Apple Notes put through MS Paint. Encrypted in an hour-long YouTube Poop.
Since it was encrypted just so, the Heart of Gold could easily view it.

“Holy SHIT, Jessamy! Doc Verne’s gonna SHIT themself when they see this!” Hyperion marvelled.

*RP=>/JA !!!!!*

“damn, jessamy, ya got replay all excited.”

“Okay then, good going, Jessamy. Anyone else got anything?”

Sans really had mixed feelings about Kindred. Without him they would just sit around shitposting instead of getting stuff done. But at the same time, the guy could be a real stick-in-the-mud.

Thankfully, Sans knew how to deal with muddy sticks.

“hey, kindred. i got a few tunes for us to loop while we work. i’l set ‘em up.”

“Timeline, if you even THINK about the Tom Jones playlist -”

Sans had already set up the playlist.

The first song that came up?

LazyTown Trap Remix.

The screaming people was music to his ears.

He took a long, loud slurp of ketchup before sending the attachment containing the secretary’s internet search history.

Get riggety-rekt, Angie Perkins.

Ten minutes came and went in the blink of an eye for the eight kids plus one Flowey.

They said goodbye to their chaperones and Theo and bade them farewell.

By the time they’d made it to Alphys and Undyne’s house it was around 3:40 - Caroline’s phone said that it was 3:47.

Undyne started to speak.

“Okay, punks! We’re stayin’ in the rest of the day! Whaddaya wanna do first?”

<<I wanna watch Steven Universe!>> Frisk signed eagerly.

“Same, dude!” MK said.

“Cool!” Levi said in agreement.

“I’m okay with that,” Caroline said.

“WOOHHOO!” Penelope cheered. “I LOVE Steven Universe!”

“Wut’s Steven Ooniverse?” Hannah asked.
“Yeah, I dunno either,” Hunter admitted nervously. “I keep hearing kids talk about it, but…”

“I don’t watch much TV unless sports’re on. Dad always hogs the TV and the one in my bedroom doesn’t have cable.”

“Let’s start from season one episode one, then! For the new punks!”

The kids gathered on and around the couch. Alphys and Undyne opened up the site they used to rewatch episodes Steven Universe. They set it up on the TV - a feat that seemed to astound Brian. He didn’t have a TV that could do that.

The show started.

By the time they had finished the episode Bubble Buddies, Hunter was hooked. He decided that his favorite characters were Pearl and Garnet.

The doorbell rang. Undyne got up to get it.

A teenage girl with brown hair in a ponytail and green eyes was at the door. Her name tag said that her name was Erica.

The door opened. “Oh, hey. HEY PUNKS! PIZZA’S HERE!”

The children cheered.

“Okay, so, uh, extra-large plain cheese with stuffed crust, that’ll be $10.99, miss,” Erica said.

“I used a debit card,” Undyne said.

“Oh, okay then,” Erica said. “Do...do I hear Be Wherever You Are?”

“ Heck yeah you do!”

“That’s my favorite song!”

“Sweet!”

“Have a nice day!”

“You too!”

Undyne closed the door. “Pizza girl’s got taste.”

2:58 P.M. The Heart of Gold was offline. Sans was Facetiming Mettaton.

“you ready for this?”

“Hell yeah.”

“okay. let’s do this.”

Sans turned on the TV.

“Esa mujer me esta matando~ Me ha espinado el corazón~ Por más que trato de olvidarla~ Mi alma no da razón~”
Corazón Espinado - popular long-running telenovela. Sans was bored at home one day last year and he was unable to sleep. So he turned on the TV, and there it was. He was hooked.

Then the front door unlocked.

“Sans, I’m home~”

“hi home, i’m sans.”

Toriel laughed.

“but for real, welcome back tori. mtt’s on facetime.”

“Okay! Ooh, is this the new episode?”

“yep.”

“Do you think Sol is finally going to tell Talia he loves her?”

“Toriel, sweetheart, it’s been ten seasons and it’ll only take longer. The shipping wars in the CoraEspi fandom are absolutely terrifying.”

“i can’t believe placido/milagros is canon.”

“Darling, I shipped that from the beginning.”

“can you believe it was a crack ship just a few months ago?”

“Some people are saying it was an asspull - after all of Milagros’ character development and those cute, shippy moments between him and Placido…”

“I swear some of those whiners ship Milagros and Nicodemo…”

“Ewww, Demo’s his COUSIN!”

“i know, why even. at least he’s not related to mercedes…”

“Can you believe some people ship Placido with Mercedes?”

“seriously? they’ve never even interacted in canon.”

“Oh, hey it’s on! Aww, Sol is out shopping with Feliz, how cute!”

“ugh, dulce. what a puta. i’m so glad luisa isn’t there.”

“I know. That Dulce had the NERVE to call MY husbando un demonio to his FACE!”

“I cannot wait to watch Milagros completely WRECK her dumb ass!”

“Dios MIO, Toriel! I had no idea you swore!”

“let tori say fuck.”

“I wonder if Tali has ever said that word?”

“let tori and tali say fuck.”
6:30 P.M. The first season of Steven Universe was ending.

This meant that they were watching one episode in particular…

Jailbreak.

Tensions were high. Hunter had grabbed onto Brian’s shirt. Levi had as well, to Brian’s annoyance. Penelope had grabbed onto Caroline’s skirt hem. Caroline was hugging her book. Frisk and MK had grabbed onto each other. Hannah was unsure of who or what to grab - she was really scared.

So she jumped onto the couch in between Undyne and Alphys and held onto their arms. She watched intently despite her fear.

Undyne and Alphys were confused. They looked at Hannah, then at each other, then at the kids, then back at the show.

“Oh great. You’re both out? And you’re fused again? Why? Fusion is just a cheap tactic to make weak Gems stronger. Quit embarrassing yourselves!”

Then came some music.

“I’ve seen what you really are.”

Badass chuckles ensued.

“No you haven’t.”

When Garnet started singing, Hunter listened intently. He was mesmerized. He took mental notes on the tune, the lyrics, every aspect of the song. His brilliant blue eyes seemed to sparkle as Garnet performed Stronger Than You while being her usual badass self.

The next chorus was coming on. He wanted to sing along.

But Mom doesn’t like it…

...but ‘Mom’ isn’t here right now. I’m free…

“I am made o-o-o-o-of lo-o-o-o-ove o-o-o-o-of~ Lo-o-o-o-o-o-ve, lo-o-o-o-o-o-ve, lo-o-o-o-o-o-ve~ And it’s stronger than you~”

The others watched Hunter as he sang along. He had natural talent. He could totally get a career in music if Linda were literally anyone else.

And then the song ended. The kids applauded.

Then they screamed as the ship crashed into Beach City and They Were Malachite Now.

They decided that ten-minute break for pizza and ranting was in order.

“Wow, Hunter you can SING!” Penelope said.

“Yeah, dude!” MK said. “You got SKILLS!”

<<You’re gooood,>> Frisk signed.

“Well, very impressive,” Caroline said.
Hannah proudly hugged her brother.

“I didn’t know you could do that,” Brian said.

“P-please don’t tell my mom, she’d KILL me if she knew I was singing…”

“Who do you think I am, Miranda?”

This comment sparked an eruption of laughter.

“But seriously, I’m not gonna tell her.”

Hunter blushed slightly and smiled shyly.

“Thanks, Bri…”

9:02 P.M. Sans was scouring his Tumblr dashboard.

The news about Jennifer Howard’s multiple extramarital affairs and Angie Perkins’ embezzlement had reached Tumblr in record time.

Do not underestimate the power of people with no social life.

But Sans had to give the asshats at the HWC credit. The speed at which they had a replacement for Jennifer Howard was...shocking.

I was almost as if they knew she’d be found out.

Or maybe the Vice President position was purely ornamental. Jen Howard was Ms. America back in the 90s. She didn’t seem all that intelligent either.

But the replacement for Angie Perkins was taking a lot longer to find. Sans was quite proud of that one.

This just gave their group more time to uncover things.

Alphys had tagged him, Tori, Papyrus, Mettaton, and everyone who knew Frisk in the picture of Frisk and their friends at the rocket ship park. He reblogged it.

The kid had texted a while ago saying that they were watching season two of Steven Universe. Apparently Hunter was a very good singer.

Sans logged out of Tumblr. He’d already eaten dinner. Guess some sleep was in order.

He stood up off the couch and started to walk toward the stairs.

“Going to bed so soon, Sans?” Toriel asked.

“yeah. i already ate and there’s really not much for me to do, so…”

“Oh. Alright then. Goodnight, Sans. I will see you in the morning.”

Was it just Sans, or did Toriel sound a bit...sad?

No, no, it was definitely just him.
Sans walked up the steps and disappeared down the hall and into his room.

Toriel sighed. She’d sincerely hoped that he’d help her bake a cake…

Oh, well. Maybe next time…

1:43 A.M. Alphys and Undyne were lying in their bed, the small army of children sound asleep in the living room. Alphys had her laptop open, finishing a fanfiction - her body language suggested that the work was not pornographic. Undyne sat up next to her.

"U-um, Undyne?" Alphys said anxiously.

"Yeah, babe?"

"Um, I-I’ve been t-t-thinking l-lately…"

"What about?"

"W-well, I-I…o-oh, gosh, u-uh…"

Oh no, she was starting to panic a bit. This question must be important to Alphys if it was causing this.

Undyne held Alphys to her chest, rubbing small circles into her wife’s back.

"Deep breaths, Alphys. Deep breaths in through your nose, out through your mouth. In…and out…"

Alphys breathed until she was calm.

"You good now, toots?"

"Y-yeah, I’m better now."

"Okay. So uh...what didja wanna ask?"

Alphys tensed slightly again, before breathing in and out again to calm herself.

"U-undyne…I-I’ve been w-w-wanting t-to tell you…"

Undyne looked at Alphys.

"I-I want to have a child. With you."

"Oh."

So THAT’S why Alphys was so nervous.

Wait.

Oh.

OH.
OH STARS.

“U-Undyne? I-it’s okay i-if you’re n-not ready yet, I mean, I was just…”

Alphys was interrupted by Undyne hugging her. She felt warm drops hit her shoulder. Was Undyne crying?

“Alphy...babe, I...I’d LOVE that...I-I’d TOTALLY be cool with having a kid...I-I’d been thinkin’ about that too, honestly, but uh...I wasn’t sure how you’d take it…”

Yep. Undyne was definitely crying. Alphys hugged her back.

“W-we have a lot to discuss in regards to t-that…”

Undyne let her go. “Oh, man, we do, don’t we? Like, what are we gonna name ‘em? And how many do we want? And which of us is gonna carry…?”

“Sweetie, w-we still have time. A-and, um...I-I wanna be the one to carry.”

Undyne’s eyes widened. “Alphy, are ya sure?”

“Dyney, you live a far more active lifestyle than I do. Many of those activities are dangerous. A-and besides…”

She breathed in and out again.

“I’ve already taken lives. I want to give life.”

Undyne had a feeling that that was the reason.

But it was Alphys’ decision. She could be surprisingly stubborn about some things.

“Okay then. Let me know if you change your mind.”

Undyne smiled at Alphys. Alphys smiled back.

The held each other and went to sleep. They couldn’t start trying with a bunch of kids just down the hall, could they? That would just be weird.

____________________________________________________________

Flowey sat in the car, forgotten as usual.

But that didn’t bother him. Not right now. He was too engrossed in kicking Diantha’s ass.

“But no. Chongo the Slowbro had failed him.

Flowey couldn’t even scream. He was just...he was done now. He was never doing another Nuzlocke run again.

Fuck this. Fuck everything.

He deleted the save file to start another, non-Nuzlocke game.

This time, he would NOT be foiled by some stupid “rules”. Flowey was a free plant.
Wait. No he wasn’t. He stuck in a clay pot covered in stickers and fingerpaints. And that pot was inside of a Mini Cooper with weeaboo bumper stickers. Flowey wasn’t free. He was in hell.

Oh well. At least it was HIS hell. And at least he got food.

Most of the time.

The power of friendship fills you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

The song the title is referring to this time is Downtown by Petula Clark.

The other songs are Corazón Espinado by Carlos Santana and Stronger Than You by Estelle.
Christmas Time Is Here

Chapter by Spazzin

Chapter Summary

Plot advances. Foreshadowing occurs. Backstory shows itself in your peripheral vision before finally diving back into your blind spot. Baking and dancing and reminiscing are all here. And a terrible storm's abrewin'.

Just in time for the holidays, bitches.

Chapter Notes

Yo. How goes the December.

Enjoy your 36 pages and 8389 words worth of tinsel-covered shit.

Ya dingus.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

10:17 A.M., December 21st, 201Z

It's a cold day outside.

Wind is blowing.

Sleet is falling.

On days like this, kids like you…

...are watching Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer with some friends.

Papyrus, Mettaton, Frisk, Hunter, Hannah, and Brian watched as Clarice comforted Rudolph after his being barred from the Reindeer Games for something beyond his control.

Papyrus was cuddling Mettaton on the right side of the couch - they never missed an opportunity to indulge in some PDA. Frisk was on the opposite side of the couch with a mug of cocoa - with whipped cream, sprinkles, marshmallows, and a cinnamon stick, as per Law of Frisk. Brian sat next to them, Hunter and Hannah next to him in that order. They each had drinks as well - cocoa with whipped cream and marshmallows for Brian, eggnog with nutmeg for Hunter, and warm strawberry milk for Hannah.
“This is kinda stupid,” Brian said. “Why the heck is somethin’ like a red nose somethin’ that can ruin your entire future? That’s just stupid and unfair.”

Hannah shushed him. “The one with the bow boutta sing!”

“There’s always tomorrow~ For dreams to come true~ Believe in your dreams, come what may~”

Mettaton and Hunter had started humming along.

“We all pretend the rainbow has an end~ And you’ll be there, my friend, someday~”

They had started singing along at this part.

“There’s always tomorrow~ For dreams to come true~ Tomorrow is not far aaaaawaaaaayyy~”

The two-part harmony was incidental and amazing. As such, the round of enthusiastic applause was to be expected.

While Mettaton basked briefly in the applause(and the physical affections of his Skeletal boyfriend), Hunter hid his blushing face in his navy blue sweater, showing the world only blond hair.

Hannah affectionately tackled her brother. “You sing real pretty, bub!”

“She’s right, you know,” Mettaton said in agreement from the confines of Papyrus’ arms, “you really are very talented! Believe me, I’d know~”

“HE REALLY WOULD! YOU ARE INDEED VERY TALENTED, HUNTER!”

“Yeah, man,” Brian said, “you should try out for the solo part for the spring concert next year.”

“Oooh, really~?” Mettaton asked. “That’s a WONDERFUL idea!”

“Yeah, bub! Do it!”

“Are you guys crazy?!” Hunter asked incredulously, freeing his head from his sweater. “Mom would KILL me if I did that!”

“Dude, your mom’s a butt,” Brian countered. “She’d probably kill you even if you didn’t.”

Frisk tapped the end table to get everyone’s attention. They had an Idea.

<<You could always try out and say you did it on a dare.>>

“Dang, Frisk, you’re a genius,” Brian said.

Frisk put a hand on their cheek and swept their hand in front of them in an “oh stop” gesture.

“FRISK ALWAYS COMES UP WITH IDEAS LIKE THAT!”

“But she’d still wanna kill me…”

“THEN MAKE IT A QUADRUPLE-ANNOYING-DOG DARE WITH SPAGHETTI ON TOP.”

Frisk raised their eyebrows in shock. Hunter Thompson hath been issued The Ultimate Dare.

Hunter’s eyes widened. He looked around at the group.
He was trapped.

Well, not really. He kind of liked the idea. Now he had a semi-legitimate excuse to go through with it…

“Okay…”

“Alright!” Brian said. “I’m texting Caroline about it.”

“WHY ARE YOU TEXTING CAROLINE ABOUT THIS?”

“Because Caroline remembers weird stuff.”

“Where IS Caroline, anyway?” Hunter asked.

<<Sleepover with Penelope,>> Frisk signed. <<She said that they’re gonna make cookies and stuff. Levi’s with his mom’s family for Hanukkah, and MK has a cold.>>

“Speaking of missing people, where is Sans?”

Toriel was peeking through the entryway into the den.

“HE SAID HE HAD SHOPPING TO DO,” Papyrus said.

“I thought he had already done his shopping online…” Toriel said.

<<I’m sure he’ll be back,>> Frisk signed. <<He always disappears for a few hours and comes back.>>

“That is true…” Toriel said.

_But I still worry...

“King me.”

Caroline had once again beaten a member of the DeMartino family at checkers. This was her third time beating Theo.

The thing about Theo? He’s a very, very sore loser.

This is shown by his having flipped the board and stormed off into his room, slamming the door behind him.

Monica growled as she stood up and stomped over to Theo’s room.

“THEODORE FRANCIS DEMARTINO, WHY THE HELL WOULD YOU DO THAT?!”

“BECAUSE SHE FRICKIN’ CHEATED!”

“ARE YOU SERIOUS?! CHEAT AT CHECKERS?! THAT’S NOT EVEN POSSIBLE!”

Caroline and Penelope just sat on the living room carpet and listened to Monica and Theo debate on whether or not it was possible to cheat at checkers and that Theo was being a sore loser.

“Soooo…” Penelope said. “Wanna watch Frosty?”
Sans loaded the last of the presents into the Dimensional Box on his phone.

He decided to check it.

Let’s see...25 ketchup packets, a used napkin, a pocket joke-physics book, a fuzzy candycane, a rubber band ball, a ukulele, 10 skyrockets, a sonic screwdriver, and the christmas presents.  Yep.  He was all good to go.

He decided to take out a ketchup packet and the candy cane.  He squirted the ketchup into his mouth - how old was this thing anyway?  He checked the date on the now-empty packet.  It had gone bad June of last year.

Oh well.  He’d drunk older ketchup without so much as the second time he woke up half-naked in Grillby’s broom closet.

Ahhh, college.

He stuck the candy cane into his mouth and held it between his teeth as he hopped onto his motorcycle, put on his helmet, and zoomed off toward Mt. Ebott.

Undyne was bored.  For someone as passionate as Undyne this posed a problem.  Not just for her own sanity, but for the safety of the structural integrity of her house.

Alphys had been called in for work.  Plus, there was a Christmas party.  Alphys gave frequent updates plus one or two selfies on Snapchat.  Sydnee and Brad were having a swordfight with a cheese log and a summer sausage last time Alphys updated her.

New update.  Alphys’ boss Walter was now trying to balance beakers due for disposal on his gut.  He was on beaker number 35.

Undyne decided to go for a jog.  They needed to pick up some more eggnog at the store anyway.

Alphys loved eggnog.

For some reason.

Rudolph had ended long ago, and Papyrus and Mettaton had left to start on their date - their Tenth Date Spectacular, to be precise, so they were doing Something Special.  Now Frisk, Hunter, Hannah, Brian, and Toriel were about to start making snickerdoodles.

Toriel and Frisk were dutifully rolling the dough into little balls and rolling the balls in the cinnamon-sugar.

Brian seemed to have no idea what he was doing.  He was just grabbing hunks of dough and dropping them into the cinnamon-sugar.

Hunter was actually observing Frisk and Toriel and trying his best to follow along.

Hannah kept grabbing too much dough and mashing it into the cinnamon-sugar.

“No, Hannah,” Hunter said.  “Like this.”
Hunter demonstrated how to roll the dough into a ball and roll the ball around in the cinnamon-sugar.

“See?”

Hannah nodded. She tried it again, on her own. She did much better. The ball was a bit smaller and less evenly-rounded than the others, but it was better than Hannah’s previous attempts by a long shot.

“Like this, bub?” Hannah asked.

“Just like that! Good job, Hanners!”

Hannah smiled and giggled as Hunter tousled her hair.

Then he lifted his hand to reveal that he had accidentally gotten a fingernail-sized gob of cookie dough in Hannah’s hair.

Brian and Hunter looked on in mild horror.

Hannah felt around for the gob, and grabbed it. She looked at it for a few moments before eating it.

“Ewwww, gross!”

“Hannah, don’t eat things you find in your hair!”

Hannah stuck out her tongue in response.

Frisk was nibbling on their thumbnail while watching this exchange. Chara remembered an incident when Asriel got pie filling in his fur. Both of them giggled.

Papyrus sat on Mettaton’s couch in a three-piece suit with a sparkly red ascot and crisp white gloves waiting for his Robot Boyfriend to get dressed for their Tenth Date Spectacular. His Red Scarf was tied about his waist like a belt. He glanced around at the interior of the parlor.

He noticed the many photographs on the mantle above the fireplace. He noticed that Mettaton was in all of them. Some were glamor shots, some were magazine covers, and the rest were group photos.

While the majority of the group photos had Mettaton with Shyren, Napstablook, and/or Frisk, Papyrus saw quite a few with himself and others in them.

But the one on the end table caught his eye. It was in a much nicer frame than the ones on the mantle.

It was a photo of everyone in what Frisk considered their Family from their very first Christmas on the Surface. Everyone was dressed nicely - even Sans had bothered to make some effort for the sake of the picture.

“Papy-dear,” Mettaton called, “I’m almost finished! I just need your help with something!”

“DO YOU NEED ME TO COME UP THERE?” Papyrus replied.

“No need, darling, I’ll be right down!”

And with that Mettaton descended the spiral staircase.
He was wearing a sparkly red long-sleeved off-shoulder gown with a slit on the right side that went up to his thigh and matching heels. There was only one word to describe him in Papyrus’ point of view.

“WOWIE…”

He was blushing. Definitely blushing. Why would anyone in his situation NOT blush when Mettaton was before them?

Mettaton giggled. “Papyrus, would you be a dear and zip up the back for me?”

Mettaton turned around. The entire zipper was down. Did he even TRY?

Oh. Of course he didn’t.

This. This was Flirting Power.

Papyrus kept his composure - it was very, VERY difficult, but he managed. Boy, did he manage.

He decided then and there that two could play at THAT game.

He took hold of the zipper, zipping it up slowly, “accidentally” brushing his knuckle and thumb tip along Mettaton’s back as he did so.

The slight shiver did not go unappreciated.

He finished zipping it up with a few pats. “THERE! ALL DONE!”

“Well then. Are you ready, darling?”

“ARE YOU?”

“Lead the way, dearest~”

Sans drove up to the toll booth.

The poor 50-something Human running it was inexplicably cheerful.

As always.

“Howdy there, Sans!”

“how goes it, gene?”

“It goes, it goes! You got the change this time?”

“lemme check.”

Gene was a Ranger at Mt. Ebott National Wildlife Refuge, and one of the first Humans to officially welcome Monsters when they were released from the Underground. He often said that Mt. Ebott was “in his blood” - his father and grandfather had all been rangers before him, and his daughter Natasha was currently in school to carry on the tradition.

Anyway. Gene was cool.

Sans checked his Inventory.
Let’s see… snail shell, souvenir snowglobe from Switzerland, pair of handcuffs, Pet Rock, bouquet of fake daisies, high school class ring, and 47 cents.

“i got 47 cents.”

“That’s 13 cents more than last time!”

“here’s a rubber band ball, too.”

“Okay, that about does it! Have a nice evening, Sans!”

“you too, gene. say hey to selma for me.”

“Will do! Tell Pap ‘n Toriel ‘n the kiddo I said the same!”

“alright then. see ya in a bit.”

Sans drove off.

He’d have to call Alphys at some point and tell her he found his class ring.

But he probably wouldn’t. He didn’t last time he’d found it.

Undyne left the store with the eggnog plus some peppermint bark(Alphys also loved peppermint bark), a pack of chopped walnuts and a loaf of fruitcake(Undyne liked fruitcake - the nuttier the better).

She was now halfway back to her place when she realized a way to stave off her boredom.

Just a few miles down Cedarwood Road to her left was Toriel’s house, shared by Sans and Papyrus.

Papyrus was out on his Tenth Date Spectacular with Mettaton, so he wouldn’t be there. She had never seen a time when Sans was NOT there, so of COURSE he was going to be there. Frisk had a 50/50 chance of being there. If they were there, there was a chance that another of their friends would be there.

By the time Undyne had reached the front door of the house she realized exactly what she’d been thinking.

Alphys had been getting to her.

She rang the doorbell.

The sound of Westminster Quarters rang out through the house.

Toriel answered the door.

“Undyne, is that you? Why on Earth are you out jogging in this weather?”

“Aw, c’mon, Toriel, it ain’t a big deal! I was bored, so I went shopping.”

Toriel groaned in response. “I’ve heard worse reasons, now come inside and dry off - Frisk, can you get some clean towels?”

Undyne swore Toriel was BORN to Mom. If or when Alphys got pregnant, Toriel would be the FIRST person they turned to. They’d both decided on that when they’d first started trying.
Frisk trotted up to Undyne with a light green towel, a mint blue towel, and a yellowy-green towel. Undyne gratefully tousled their mop of dark brown hair.

“Thanks, punk!”

Frisk saluted in response. <<Brian, Hunter, and Hannah are here, too!>>

Hannah peered through the kitchen entryway. She slowly walked up to Undyne - she didn’t want to spill her cocoa.

“Mrs. Dyne, where’s Dr. Alpha?” she asked.

“Alphys is at work right now, kid. ‘S just me. Can ya handle that?”

Undyne smiled.

Hannah gave a mildly unimpressed shrug in response. “I guess.”

“Hi Mrs. Undyne,” Hunter chimed in from his spot at the kitchen table.

“We made cookies,” Brian said from his spot next to Hunter.

“Cool! What kind?”

“Singlenoodles!” Hannah said in excitement.

Hunter snorted back a laugh in response until Brian spat out his cocoa.

“Dude! What the heck, Brian?!”

“Oh, crud! Sorry, Hunter!” Brian grabbed some napkins.

Hannah chugged her cocoa and ran for a towel.

Undyne, Frisk, and Toriel joined in.

A few minutes later, everyone was all dry and clean.

“Hey,” Undyne said. “Isn’t Sans usually here, like, 24/7?”

“He went out shopping at around nine…” Toriel said, her voice betraying her worry.

“That was six hours ago.”

“I know!” Toriel snapped.

Undyne just stared at her wide-eyed. “Okay, geeze.”

Toriel exhaled, relaxing visibly as she did so.

“I am sorry, but…with the weather being what it is, and Sans having one HP…”

“Toriel, I’ve seen him sleep in a snowbank and wake up a good eleven hours later. I’m sure he’ll be fine. He’s tougher than his stats would have ya think.”

Toriel sighed.
“I know. I appreciate it. I will wait until six and then call him…”

“Sounds like a plan.”

Then a timer dinged.

“Sounds like the singlenoodles are ready!” Hunter said.

“They’re simbadoodles!” Hannah said.

“Close enough.”

Papyrus and Mettaton sat at the bar at the Myriad Ballroom in downtown Ebott. Papyrus wasn’t drinking anything alcoholic, as he was the designated driver, and neither was Mettaton, as he didn’t want to embarrass himself.

They had been quiet for the few minutes they’d been at the bar.

“So…” Mettaton said for to break this silence, “Are you enjoying yourself, darling?”

“OF COURSE!” Papyrus said. “EVERY MOMENT OF THIS NIGHT WITH YOU HAS BEEN OF THE UTMOST ENJOYABILITY! IN FACT, I DOUBT THERE’S ANYTHING THAT CAN MAKE THIS NIGHT BETTER…”

Mettaton paused. Papyrus’ tone when he said that last sentence...it could ONLY be described as “sultry”! Mettaton didn’t think he WENT for sultry.

Not that the surprise wasn’t pleasant. Au contraire, Mettaton LIKED this.

“Anything, Papy-dear? Why, SURELY there must be SOMETHING missing that could make this night better…”

Papyrus smirked. “WELL, I DO SUPPOSE THAT THERE IS ONE THING…”

“Weeeeell, look what we have here!”

Papyrus visibly twitched as he looked to the source of the condescending words. Linda Thompson smiled a smile absolutely DRIPPING with sticky-sickly-syrupy-sweet condescension.

“HELLO, MRS. LINDA. WHO MIGHT YOUR ESCORT BE?”

Mettaton didn’t even think it was Papyrus that had said that. There was something...negative buried in the tone, something that seemed rather...not-Papyrus. There was no way to put it elegantly without putting it terribly at the same time.

“Who, this?” Linda said, putting her hand on the chest of the black-haired, blue-eyed man next to her. “This is my husband, Richard! He’s not in town often because of his job, but he’s staying until New Year’s! We’re here on a date, so the kids aren’t here with us!”

Richard’s face didn’t emote fully. It was shallow, but there.

“How do you do?”

“IT’S NICE TO MEET YOU, SIR.”
“Soooo, Papyrus,” Linda said, practically spitting with the amount of vitriolic emphasis on Papyrus’ name, “who’s your friend?”

“MRS. LINDA, THIS IS MY BOYFRIEND, METTATON. HE’S AN ACTOR. AND A SINGER. AND A DANCER. AND HE DABBLES IN WRITING. HE ALSO DOES VOLUNTEER WORK FOR CHARITIES. NOT THAT YOU CARE.”

The speed with which Linda changed from sweet to sour to spicy right back to sweet astounded Mettaton.

“Well, your... girlfriend seems...nice!”

“Boyfriend, sweetie. I’m a male.”

“But if you’re a REAL man, you shouldn’t be wearing dresses and makeup! It’s WRONG!”

Well.

Welly well well well well well.

“Sweetie, what’s WRONG here is the fact that that dress doesn’t go with your makeup. Kate Middleton and Mimi Bobeck do NOT go together at ALL.”

Linda scoffed indignantly. “I beg your pardon ?!”

“You’re pardoned THIS time, ma’am.”

He latched onto Papyrus’ arm and began to walk back over to the bar to sit down.

Linda growled until the song changed. Her mood changed with it.

“Ooo, it’s my song! Come on! Let’s DANCE.”

Richard was forcibly dragged to the dance floor. He turned his head to Papyrus and Mettaton and managed to wave apologetically.

At least Richard seemed somewhat decent. But then again, if what all Mettaton had heard about Linda was even partly true, the woman made raw sewage look good in comparison.

But the song. It hurt his ears like someone took a drill to his eardrums.

“Is this...? Oh my STARS, this song is so TACKY! You can’t even DANCE to it!”

Then the song ended abruptly at “a 54 convertible”.

A short burst of feedback came through the speakers.

“Sorry about that, folks! We had to cut that number short due to the influx of complaints. The Myriad Ballroom would like to apologize for the delay while we slip in something more...enjoyable for you all.”

The cheers of relief drowned out any complaint Linda was most likely making.

A few minutes later, the feedback returned.

“Okay everyone, we’ve decided, at the request of a few anonymous patrons, to play a few sloooow
songs for you all! Hope you all like Kenny G!"

And on came the saxophone covers of classic Christmas hits. Something about a jazzy version of Greensleeves was...nice. Mettaton and Papyrus certainly thought so.

The couple took to the dance floor. Papyrus' hands rested on the small of Mettaton's back. Mettaton's arms were draped about Papyrus' neck.

They gazed warmly into each other's eyes, smiling all the while. They held their foreheads together, letting some MAGIC flow through the contact.

Linda glared at them. Their presence had ruined her night completely. UGH. She KNEW she should have searched online for segregated dance halls, but the Myriad was where she and Richard had their first date together! It held MEMORIES for her...

She would have told them on no uncertain terms to leave and never comeback, but there were too many people here. And besides, if one skeleton was here, then the other had to be as well. What if he ratted on her? Linda HATED rats.

“Why do you hate yoself, girl?”

Linda turned around to confront the person. “Oh my GOD, shut UP!”

But no one came.

Then she felt a hand on her shoulder. She looked up into Richard’s face.

“Just let it go, Lindy. I know you don’t like it, but it is what it is. They’re the only Monsters here tonight. Just ignore them as best you can.”

Linda stared at Richard. He had always been the calmer one.

She sighed.

“Allright...”

There was a brief silence between the two of them as Linda pouted and Richard just stood there.

“Want I should get you a drink?”

Linda smiled. “Some chardonnay would be nice...”

Perhaps this night wasn’t completely ruined after all.

Monica, Penelope and Caroline were munching on chocolate chip cookies while putting some batter in a cupcake tin for chocolate chip cupcakes.

Penelope really enjoyed baking. She was especially skilled with cupcakes.

Caroline was quite happy to be helping her.

“We done with this one?” Caroline asked.

“Yup! Is the oven heated, Momma?”

“Yup, all warmed up!”
“Yessss.”

Penelope put on her oven mitts and pushed the tin onto the rack.

She high-kicked the oven door closed.

The force of the kick nearly caused Penelope to fall backward with a yelp. But Caroline caught her before she could fall. They ended up looking like they were dancing, and Caroline was dipping Penelope, who had a leg in the air.

They stayed like that for a brief moment, gasping for breath, before Caroline righted Penelope.

“You okay there, Nell?”

Penelope nodded, blushing. “I’m fine, yeah…”

“Penelope Michelle, do NOT high kick the oven! You are VERY lucky Caroline was here to catch you!”

“Ugh, MOMMA! I HATE my middle name!”

“I think Theo’s is worse, honestly,” Caroline said.

“What’s yours?”

“My what?”

“Middle name.”

“Violet.”

Penelope’s eyes widened. “Wow, that’s PRETTY! Caroline Violet Marlow…”

“Uh, thanks…”

Caroline’s blush appeared heavier than it really was due to how pale she was.

“So what do you wanna do while we wait?”

“I dunno. Wanna help me choose a song for Hunter to audition for the spring concert with?”

“ Heck yeah!”

As the girls ran through all the songs they knew, Monica posted the photo of their little dip on Facebook.

__________________________

Sans parked the motorcycle and set it on its kickstand.

He put his helmet in his Inventory.

He stepped into the woods and took a shortcut to his old Workshop.

He flipped on the light and looked around. Same as when he left.

Almost. He noticed small handprints in the dust on the desk and drawers.
Huh. So Frisk actually knows. Smart kid.

He plugged in his phone and set it on the desk before he checked the drawers. The first drawer contained what he’d come for - the blueprints for The Machine.

Sans almost considered leaving. But then he decided to check the other drawers. He wondered what all the kid had found all those years ago.

Wait, it was only two. Fucking Resets…

No. It wasn’t their fault. And it wasn’t Theirs, either. It was far beyond the control of either of those poor kids. They didn’t ask for any of that. Sans knew that now.

He opened the second drawer. His old ID Badge. Huh. What do you know. Sans HAD grown in the past 12 years…

A whole two inches. What an ego boost.

He put the ID Card in his Dimensional Box. It might just come in handy.

Then the third and final drawer. Contained within was…

...an old photo album. Huh.

He wondered what to do with it.

Before he knew it he snapped out of something. Ugh. Dissociation. He hated the feeling. He hated the feeling of...nothing. It always left him a bit nauseous after the fact.

He never wanted to feel nothing again for any amount of time.

Not after last time…

No. Nononono NO. NO. Do NOT think about...THAT.

He needed to distract himself. He’d been having those thoughts again as of late. The last time he’d done this was back in January.

A whole eleven months since his last flashback series. A new personal best.

He decided to distract himself with the Photo Album. He sat himself on the desk and leaned against the wall.

He skimmed through the album. He took note of every image. His high school graduation, his college graduation, all of it, he brought up the memories and people within them.

He went back. It was only a moment, but he went back to ALL of it.

He wished so, so much that he could go Back.

But he couldn’t. No one could. It was impossible.

Flowey, Frisk, Chara, and the anomaly - who Frisk and Chara call The Player - were Special Cases. DETERMINATION was a VERY Special Case.

The Doctor knew this. He knew it all too well. DETERMINATION, and his attempts to harvest it
from the 6 Human SOULS. He knew that using some of that what he was trying to do with it was far more than risky. But he did it anyway. The old bastard did it, and he paid the price.

He wasn’t dead. He wasn’t in prison or in any sort of exile. He just…wasn’t.

And yet somehow, even though he wasn’t, there was irrefutable proof that he was.

The Core was proof. These blueprints, this badge, this photo album, all of it was proof.

Sans and Papyrus were proof.

Sans thought about all of this as he looked at the photograph of the Lab faculty taken on the first day of his and Alphys’ internship - no. Sans and Alphys hadn’t been mere interns. They had been Apprentices to the Royal Scientist.

It was a dream come true for them both. Alphys got the chance to make her visions come to life and use them to help people, and Sans got the chance to work alongside one of the most brilliant minds in all of history to help free them all.

At least she was doing something worthwhile.

Sans wondered if he’d done anything good since Monsterkind had breached the Surface.

Then he reached the end of the album. There was an old card with a poorly drawn picture of three smiling people.

Sans recognized it. Papyrus had drawn it for Sans’ sixteenth birthday.

Not even a month later, the third person in the photo would be gone, leaving behind nothing but his greatest achievements.

Not even his name remains.

But Sans knows his name. And so do Papyrus, and Alphys, and Frisk.

They were all that remained to remember his name.

“don’t forget.”

Sans chuckled hollowly. At least he still remembered. Better one thing than nothing.

Then there was a knock at the Workshop door. And not just any knock - a short series of knocks to the tune of A Cruel Angel’s Thesis.

Sans didn’t respond. Alphys had a key, after all.

The sounds of the door being unlocked proved that much.

The clicking of short heels turned the corner.

“S-Sans? W-what are YOU doing here…?”

Sans chuckled hollowly. “i should be the one askin’ you that. how long’s it been since you’ve been in here? eight years?”

“H-having an e-episode?”
“the last one was back in january.”

Alphys groaned. “Sans, you really should tell people before you just up and disappear. Remember what happened last time you did that?”

Sans’ eyelights turned off. His innate rictus grin hardened.

Alphys knew that to mean that he wished to the stars above that he didn’t.

Alphys sighed. She really shouldn’t have brought it up…

“A lot of people are worried about you. Undyne said that Toriel is borderline f-freaking out she’s so worried about you.”

“is she?”

Alphys had That Look on her face. That Look only came onto her face when in close contact with one of her OTPs.

He’d definitely said that with too much hope.

Sans sighed. With the sigh he felt the weight of that sprig of hope wither and fall and crumble into dust.

He didn’t deserve the concern of someone like Toriel. Even remaining single for the rest of her immortal life was far better than even considering a relationship between the two of them.

He wasn’t worth it. He wasn’t worth even a small fraction of a single one of the kind things she’d done for him. What had he done to deserve Toriel’s friendship, anyway? Even that on its own made him happier than he had been in over a decade.

“S-Sans, you’re crying - wait, what’s that you’re holding?”

Sans hadn’t realized it, but he was indeed crying.

He wiped at his tears with the sleeve of his Hoodie.

“photo album. from the lab days. wanna look through?”

Alphys smiled at this.

“S-sure!”

5:49 P.M.

The storm outside was stronger than it was a few hours ago - hell, it was stronger than it had been half an hour ago!

The children sat on the couch in front of the fireplace with drinks. Frisk with their besprinkled cocoa, Brian with his marshmallow-filled cocoa (which seemed more like a glob of marshmallows drenched in cocoa with a squirt of whipped cream on top), Hunter with his eggnog, and Hannah with her warm strawberry milk.

“Dude,” Brian said, “how can you drink that stuff?”
“Who, me?” Hunter asked.

“You’re the only dude here, right?”

“What about Frisk?”

“Frisk is Frisk. Why do you drink that stuff?”

“It’s good.”

“How?”

“It’s creamy and sweet.”

“Just let it go, Brian,” Undyne said. “Alphys likes eggnog too.”

“What about you, though?” Hunter asked.

“I’m more of a cider person myself.”

<<Undyne actually eats fruitcake!>> Frisk signed, a look of disgust on their face.

“Ewww!”

“Who does that?”

“Me. I like it with nuts.”

“Double ewww!”

“They aren’t pecans, are they?”

“Undyne,” Toriel said, “did you happen to see Monica’s latest Facebook post?”

“I haven’t checked Facebook in a few days.”

“Really?”

“Okay, fine, weeks.”

“Here, I’ll just show you.”

Toriel opened up the app on her phone - there were some apps she had trouble with, but she could take Facebook and texting without much issue. Other things she used the desktop for.

Toriel scrolled down to the intended image, and handed the phone to Undyne.

Undyne was confused for a moment. Then she smiled.

“Holy crap - I mean, CRUD! There is NO WAY this was an accident!”

Then Toriel scrolled down to a video.

“Well dang. Mettaton’s gonna love this.”

Toriel checked the time on her phone.
5:56 P.M.

Might as well call Sans now…

Papyrus and Mettaton were once again at the bar. Papyrus had decided to allow himself one drink. He went with a hot buttered rum - 'tis the season, after all. Mettaton decided to order one of the same. They had to leave soon, anyway. The weather was getting bad enough that they could hear it from inside!

They took a few selfies with their drinks. Then they took a sip.

Papyrus had the most adorable reactions to some things. Warm drinks made him curl in on himself slightly, as if to keep the warmth from leaving.

Mettaton had noticed that Papyrus had been bouncing his right leg like a piston and fidgeting with his scarf - for some strange reason, Papyrus never went anywhere without that tattered old thing. Papyrus did that whenever he was anxious.

Mettaton really felt for his poor boyfriend. He had come here to have a wonderful time on their Tenth Date Spectacular and then some bitchy xenophobic PTA mom had to come along and ruin it.

Mettaton laid his hand on Papyrus’ bouncing leg. No change. He rubbed from around mid-femur to his patella.

That almost seemed to make it worse somehow. Oh no.

“Um, Papy, are you alright?”

Papyrus flinched slightly before turning to face Mettaton.

He visibly relaxed.

“I’M FINE. IT’S JUST...IF MRS. LINDA HAD JUST STUCK WITH TARGETTING ME, I WOULD HAVE BEEN OKAY! BUT WHEN SHE TURNED ONTO YOU…”

He was starting to tense again. Wait, what was that flash of Orange in his right eye…?

Papyrus inhaled sharply before exhaling slowly.

“I’M SORRY, THAT WAS...SORRY.”

Mettaton simply kissed him on the jaw.

“It’s alright, Papyrus. You handled that encounter rather well, I’d say.”

Papyrus touched where Mettaton had kissed him. He often did that when he was spontaneously smooched.

“NYEH HEH...Y-YEAH, I DID, DIDN’T I?”

“Mm-hm~”

“Um, excuse me,” said a voice from behind them, “you are the Mettaton, am I right?”

Mettaton turned around. A Human female of about 30 or so with short brown hair and blue eyes
with a tablet was behind him.

“Yes, I am. And you are…?”

She produced an ID card from her bag.

“Cynthia Gregory with Modern Review magazine. Would you be willing to take a few moments to schedule an interview?”

Mettaton went through the information in his head. Modern Review was published internationally - a very good opportunity, to be sure. It was also very forward-thinking in regards to content, with a very high LGBT readership. They were also quite welcoming toward Monsters, if a tad wary at first.

But then again, he was on a date. But this was scheduling an interview.

“Sure, why not? I’m free on January 18th. How does that sound?”

“Sounds fine to me,” Cynthia said, scheduling the date on her tablet. “I was hoping it would be a bit sooner, but any time before the 28th of January is good for me.”

“Ahh. Unfortunately I have a televised interview with Lola Leigh scheduled on the sixth…”

“Oh. I’m so sorry.”

Mettaton chuckled at this. “It’s quite alright! I suffered a week well enough, a few hours should be a CAKEWALK!”

Cynthia nodded at this. “Alrighty then, 2:30 on January 18th in Chicago, you can make that?”

“Absolutely, and if there is any sudden change in schedule I will let you know!”

“Of course, sir, thank you!”

“You’re welcome, beauty~”

“Alrighty! Oh, and one more question, if it’s alright with you…?”

“Yes, and that would be…?”

“Is your date here able to join you? It’s alright if they aren’t, but I just thought I’d ask…”

If Mettaton was surprised in any way, he didn’t show it. At all. But he did pause momentarily.

“I’m not sure, honestly. I’ll get back to you on that one.”

“Alrighty! May I have their name just in case?”

Mettaton looked to Papyrus as if to say “it’s up to you”.

Papyrus seemed a bit overwhelmed. “O-OH, UM. MY NAME IS PAPYRUS. PAPYRUS GASTER.”

Cynthia entered his name into the reminder as well. “Alrighty! Thank you very much, um...pronouns, please? Sorry, I should have asked from the beginning.”

“HE/HIM, IF YOU’D PLEASE.”
“Alrighty! Thank you for your time, sirs! I’m very sorry about the interruption, you look amazing together, and have a fun rest of the night!”

“Thank you~”

“YOU, TOO.”

And with that Cynthia walked away.

Papyrus and Mettaton both sagged with all relief and zero poise.

“WOWIE, THAT WAS…”

“I know, I NEVER get approached out of the blue like that! That was definitely a first for me!”

They laughed out their remaining anxiety, which wasn’t much.

Then they sat in silence for a few moments.

“U-UM...IT’S ALMOST 6:30. WE...SHOULD GET GOING…”

“Oh...yes...we should...before the weather gets too bad”

“SHALL I TAKE YOU HOME? OR SHOULD WE EAT DINNER AT TORIEL’S AND THEN I’LL TAKE YOU HOME?”

“As tempting as that last option sounds, I think I’ll hold off on the home cooking until Christmas Dinner.”

“OH, I SEE. OKAY THEN.”

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day were days that all of Frisk’s family and friends had a dinner at Toriel’s house. Then everyone gathered at Mettaton’s for New Year’s.

“LET’S GO?”

“Let’s go!”

“y’know, i found my class ring earlier while scroungin’ around mt pockets for spare change.”

“S-seriously, Sans? Surely you’re j-joking!”

Sans smirked. Alphys’ eyes widened. She WALKED into that one.

“i’m completely serious. and don’t call me shirley.”

They laughed. It had been years since Sans and Alphys had hung out, just the two of them. They should do this more often.

“S-so, uh, w-what are your N-New Year’s r-resolutions?”

“my what now?”

“I-it’s a Human tradition. T-they make promises to themselves that they d-don’t usually intend to keep.”
Sans quirked a brow ridge. “then what’s the point?”

Sans, for all his faults and failures, put utmost stock in promises. When he made a promise to someone, if ever, he kept it to the best of his ability. That’s one reason why he never made promises.

Alphys shrugged. “To m-make themselves feel better about f-failing, I guess? T-to tell themselves that they t-tried? I-I don’t know.”

“seems legit. but why not say something we may or may not do? something up to chance?”

“Hmmm…o-okay! You first!”

“no.”

Alphys playfully pouted. “F-fine…”

Alphys was silent.

“well?”

“I-I’m t-t-trying to s-say it b-but it won’t come out!”

“breathe.”

Alphys breathed.

“better?”

Alphys nodded. “Y-yeah.”

A brief pause.

“U-um...w-well...U-Undyne and I...ha-have been trying f-for a b-b-baby. My New Year's resolution, is to...g-get pregnant? That sounds kinda weird, b-but -”

“it ain’t that weird, al. hell, it sounds kinda commonplace. i wish you ‘n the missus the best in that department.”

Alphys was near tears. “T-t-tha-tha-thank y-y-yo-y-you…”

Sans sighed and grabbed hold of Alphys in a one-armed hug. “deep breaths, al. deep breaths.”

*You're beautiful~ You're beautiful~ You're beautiful, it's true~ I saw your face in a crowded place~ And I don't know what to do~ 'Cause I'll never be with -*

“sup, tori.”

“Hello, Sans. How is your shopping going?”

Sans mentally cursed everything.

“I’m done shoppin’. i had to stop ‘n pick up something for work, but i’m on my way back. also, i ran into alphys while i was out, so she’s joinin’ me.”

“Alright. I’m glad you’re okay. Please keep safe, Sans. The weather outside is getting worse by the minute.”
“don’t worry, tori. i’ll be back shortly - i’ll even use a shorcut.”

He heard her sigh over the phone. She really must’ve been worried…

“Thank you, Sans. I’ll see you here shortly?”

“see ya in a bit, tori.”

He hung up. He had to metaphorically bite his tongue to keep from adding...three more words onto the end.

He checked the phone. 30 missed calls, 47 missed texts. Over half from Toriel. He sighed.

“welp. you ready to go, al?”

“Y-yeah. It’s been a v-very long time since the last time I took one of your Shortcuts, Sans.”

Sans let out a short chuckle.

Sans turned out the lights before Alphys locked the Workshop door behind them. He’d have to ask Frisk for the Silver Key back.

“hey, al?”

“Y-yes, Sans?”

“my new year’s resolution...tibia honest with ya, i think next year’ll be the year i tell tori i love ‘er.”

Alphys looked at him and smiled. She knew that the fact that Sans would even consider that meant that he would do it. Maybe he’d wait until New Year’s Eve of next year to do it out of sheer laziness, but he’d do it.

When Sans made a promise, he kept it, damn the consequences.

They were one of the few things he took completely seriously. He would actually work to hold you to a promise.

That’s what ended their friendship in the first place, after all. But considering the circumstances, and their mental states at the time, any old thing could have broken it. But it was too late now. They were friends again. They weren’t near as close as they had been before, but they were starting to mend the rift.

And really, that was enough for the both of them.

As Toriel hung up the phone, the sounds of four giggling children and one snickering Undyne became fully audible.

She gave them a Look. They stopped instantly.

She still got it.

Two knocks from the front door.

“knock knock…”

Toriel brightened visibly. “Who’s there?”
"snow."

"Snow who?"

"snow way we can stay out here in this weather, now open up."

Toriel laughed as she opened the door to let Sans and Alphys in.

"Thank goodness you’re safe! I...We were starting to get worried!"

"Yeah, worried Miss Toriel’d explode if you didn’t come back."

"Brian, shut up!"

Frisk giggled.

"Miss Toral an’ Dr. Sand, sittin’ in a tree~ K-I-S-S- something that...rhymes with tree…"

"It’s K-I-S-S-I-N-G, Hanners."

"Oh. Otay."

"Okay, punks! Who wants to watch Rudolph?" Unydne said. She did not want four pieces of extra-crispy fried children on her hands.

<<We already WATCHED Rudolph!>> Frisk signed in exasperation.

"Well then whaddaya wanna watch instead, hah?"

"Gunch cartoon!"

Sans snorted back a laugh. Did PTA Linda’s daughter just meme on accident?

"The Grinch sound cool to me."

"Same."

Frisk clapped and hopped in place.

"Awesome! Should we start now or wait for Papyrus?"

"he texted earlier sayin’ he ‘n mtt are stuck in traffic on the interstate. apparently a semi jackknifed off the exit to route 20."

"Dude, that’s the exit from the business district! How didja get back here?"

"shortcut."

"Undyne, I told you before, Sans knows his shortcuts."

"I still don’t think that’s a real thing, but whatever! Let’s Grinch it UP!"

"Sooo, Hunter’s gonna sing Complicated?"

"No, he’s gonna sing Hallelujah."
“Okay, gotcha.”

Caroline and Penelope were finally agreed on a song for Hunter’s spring solo audition. They were going to meet up at the New Year’s party to discuss it further and see what Hunter thought - it was his audition, after all.

As Caroline munched on a handful of snack mix, she pondered what to do. She was very, very bored.

“Uuugh, I’m BORED.”

Huh. So Penelope was bored as well. So much the better.

She stared briefly as Penelope stuffed half an entire biscuit into her mouth.

“I brought Pokemon.”

“Fwifsh fwumf?”

“Heart Gold.”

“YufshhsshffshAh crud…”

Caroline snickered. “Shouldn’t’ve tried to talk with half a biscuit in your mouth, Nell.”

Penelope giggled. “Shut up!”

Yep. Penelope knew it. Caroline did have a cute smile.

Papyrus and Mettaton were starting to become more than a tad miffed at this turn of events.

*HONK*

“NYEEGH, WHAT IS IT THIS TIME? OH, COME ON! THEY COULD AT LEAST WAIT FOR US!”

“What is it?”

“THEY’RE WATCHING THE GRINCH! THE CARTOON ONE!”

“Without US? How dare they.”

“I KNOW!”

Papyrus pouted. When he pouted, his mandible stuck out and he crossed his arms.

Mettaton could tell he was getting anxious again. His right leg was bouncing.

And it was kind of getting on his nerves.

He laid his hand on Papyrus’ knee.

“Papy. Please. Tone it down a bit.”

Papyrus stopped bouncing his knee. “SORRY…”
Mettaton sighed. “It’s fine, baby. It’s been a long night for both of us. You handled yourself very well, what with what’s-her-face and the reporter in such quick succession.”

Mettaton kissed Papyrus on the cheek.

“I am VERY proud of you, my Sweet Sugar Skull~”

Papyrus looked him blankly for a moment. Did he not like that nickname?

No. He liked it. He liked it a LOT. Combined with the praise, it was apparently worth an impromptu makeout session.

When they parted again about five minutes had passed. They looked into each other’s eyes. Then they giggled.

They decided to snuggle a bit - for warmth and to while the time away.

“UM, METTA, HONEY…”

“Yes, Papy-dear?”

“SANS AND MISS TORIEL WANT YOU TO COME OVER FOR DINNER ON THE TWENTY-SIXTH. AS A SORT OF MEET-THE-FAMILY GESTURE...THING.”

“I have no problem with that.”

Then came a knock on the car window. A middle-aged highway patrolman was outside.

Papyrus rolled down the window.

“YES, OFFICER?”

“Hey, yeah, uh, exit 238 is bein’ used as a detour to reach the northern residential areas if that’s where you two’re headed.”

“YES, THAT IS INDEED OUR DESTINATION! THANK YOU VERY MUCH!”

“No problem, sir. Happy holidays!”

“YOU TOO!”

Papyrus rolled up the window.

A brief moment of silence as traffic moved forward at a snail’s pace.

“There’s a Panera Bread on the way. Wanna get some for everyone?”

“SOUNDS GOOD TO ME!”

Everyone was in the den watching as the Grinch himself carved the roast beast. Hunter and Brian were arguing about what, exactly roast beast even was. Hunter declared it turkey, while Brian said ham. Frisk and Sans agreed that it was probably beef.

*Spooky scary skeletons~*

Sans knew who THAT was.
“SANS, METTATON AND I ARE AT THE PANERA BREAD! WHAT WOULD EVERYONE LIKE?”

“hey, yo, undyne, can you get everyone’s attention for me?”

“Why?”

“papyrus ‘n mettaton are bringin’ back panera.”

“Oh, okay, cool. HEY PUNKS!”

The series of events caused by the shock of a screaming Fish Warrior was quite amazing. Hannah spilled her milk (not on herself or the carpet, thank goodness), Brian and Hunter accidentally headbutted each other, Frisk nearly dropped Flowey (he’d been forgotten yet again), and Toriel let out an adorable yelp.

“Owww…”

“My malk!”

“What the heck!?”

“Whaddaya WANT from us, Fishwoman?!”

“Flowey! What did you want, Undyne?”

“Sans got a text from Papyrus saying that he and Mettaton are bringin’ back Panera! What do you losers want?”

“Maconi an’ chee wif yogurt an’ a apple juice!” Hannah said.

<<PB&J, apple, chocolate milk,>> Frisk signed.

“French onion soup, baguette, and a fruit punch for me,” Hunter said.

“Tomato soup, yogurt, Dr. Pepper,” Brian said.

“Baked potato soup, I’ll put on some tea,” Toriel said, getting up to boil the water.

“C-chicken noodle soup for me, a-and I’ll join Toriel with the tea,” Alphys said.

“Okay, and I want a barbecue chicken flatbread with a green passion power smoothie!”

Everyone stared at Undyne.

“You eat fruitcake AND green glop?” Hunter asked incredulously. “Ewww!”

“Kid, if it tastes gross, it’s good for ya!”

Sans finished typing in everyone’s orders.

*and ill take tomato soup with a grilled cheese

*can you handle all of that

*YES WE CAN! WHAT ABOUT PASTRIES?
Sans sighed. This was taking WAY too long. He mentally swore to himself that he would have no
more than two kids - including Frisk.

Then he momentarily broke himself imagining the impossible possibility of kids with Toriel.

Then he snapped out of it. No use getting all weird over the impossible.

“what’s everyone want for pastries?”

This got attention from everyone. Toriel had just walked back into the den.

“Muffin!” Hannah shouted.

“what kind?”

“Punkin!”

“Cherry pastry for me,” Hunter said.

“Orange scone,” Brian said.

<<Fudge brownie,>> Frisk signed. Apparently a certain Demon That Comes When You Call Its
Name was peeking out. Sans made a mental note to talk to Chara if They were going to be out here
shortly.

“I’ll take a chocolate pastry myself,” Toriel said.

“I-I don’t want any pastries, thanks,” Alphys mumbled. “N-not in the mood for sweets, honestly.”

“Same as Alphys, it'll lighten the load!”

“okay then.”

*and a candy cookie for me

*ALRIGHT! WE JUST MADE IT TO THE PANERA BREAD DRIVE-THROUGH! WE WILL
SEE YOU ALL IN 15 MINUTES!

*ok

*see you in a bit

“They’ll be here in 15.”

“Alright! What can we do in 15 minutes?”

Undyne looked at the group of children plus one Sans sitting on the couch.

“No benchpressing my furniture, Undyne. Especially with children on them.”

“Aw, fine. Who wants to play Mario Kart?”

“...and to this day Marie should still be the queen of a country in which shimmering Christmas forests
and glazed marzipan castles - in short, the most marvelous things you can imagine - can be seen if
you only look. The Nutcracker and the Mouse King, the end.”
Caroline closed the book she had been reading aloud. Penelope was fast asleep in her lap, her soft black curls tickling Caroline’s chin.

Caroline set down the book, picked up a blanket, and wrapped it around them.

She checked the time on her phone. 10:53 P.M.

She supposed she was sleepy. She hadn’t taken her medication, but she could get by without it once in awhile.

Penelope’s hair is really soft...

Toriel surveyed the scene before her.

Frisk lay holding Flowey by the pot as they slept on the carpeted floor.

Hunter and Brian were snuggled up together on the couch opposite an equally-snuggled Undyne and Alphys.

Papyrus and Mettaton were off in the far corner snuggling together beneath the Christmas tree. Hannah had joined them at some point, being smushed on between them. Toriel thought it would be quite uncomfortable, but Hannah seemed happy as a clam. Oh stars Hannah was a little clam child and Papyrus and Mettaton were her shell.

Sans was asleep on the coffee table.

Oh no, wait. Sans was beginning to stir slightly.

“mmm...wha’ time’s it, t?”

Toriel looked at the grandfather clock. “It’s almost one in the morning.”

“really? huh.”

Sans sat up and dangled his legs over the edge of the coffee table.

He yawned, his spine cracking somewhat as he stretched.

He hopped off the table and stood beside Toriel.

He looked around the room.

“some party, eh tori?”

Toriel giggled. “Indeed it was.”

Quiet.

Sans scratched at the back of his skull.

Toriel tugged at the sleeve of her night gown.

“want me to help get some blankets together for these lazybones?”

Toriel stifled a full-blown laugh.
“I would like that, yes.”

Toriel and Sans walked over to the supply closet with the blankets, grabbing a bunch and walking back over to the den of sleeping oddballs.

“don’t worry, tori. i got this.”

Sans used his Blue Magic to give each little group two blankets each.

Toriel was always a little mesmerized whenever she watched Sans use his Magic. His body was completely relaxed, like he didn’t even have to TRY to concentrate it.

“Um, Sans, would you be willing to help me bake something for everyone to eat in the morning?”

“okay. we got thyme. let’s hope this little scheme pans out.”

Toriel BARKED out a laugh.

Both Skeleton and Boss Monster were VERY surprised that everyone was still asleep after that.

Time to get cooking…

It’s dark. Nay, MORE than dark.

It’s Dark.

Well, it WAS Dark.

Now it’s just...dark. No capital letters. Just regular old dark.

Something was calling him back.

He was going home.

But not yet.

There was much work to be done.

Inside the Void and out.

---

“The promise of a happy holiday fills you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

The title of the chapter, once again, is from a goddamn song. Christmastime Is Here by the Vince Guaraldi Trio.

Other songs mentioned include There's Always Tomorrow from Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, Santa Baby by Eartha Kitt as covered by Madonna, Greensleeves as
Chapter Summary

Christmas Eve. Food, church, mistletoe, karaoke, and a side order of feels.

Chapter Notes

How am I like butter?

Because I am on a roll with how fast these chapters are being shat out.

Fuck that was terrible.

12:09 P.M., December 24th, 201Z

It's a cold day in Ebott

Water is freezing.

Fog is heavy on the ground.

On days like this, kids like you…

...are helping make Christmas dinner.

In the kitchen, Frisk, Sans, and Papyrus stand at attention. They are all wearing old t-shirts and aprons. They had just finished eating lunch.

Toriel is before them, pacing back and forth sizing them up. She is also wearing an old t-shirt and an apron - hers being a specially-made one made as a gift, saying “Seasonings Greetings” on it.

She mentally calculated the best role for each member of her household to perform in preparation for the evening before them.

“Alright. Frisk, you are on cookie and cake frosting duty until notified otherwise.”

Frisk saluted in response.
“Sans, you are in charge of the main courses. You remember what they are?”

“ham, turkey, ‘n prime rib.” Sans REALLY liked seeing Toriel take charge. He just hoped it wasn’t all that...obvious.

“Papyrus, you are in charge of side dishes. You remember what they are?”

“YES MA’AM,” Papyrus said as he saluted. “MASHED POTATOES WITH BROWN AND WHITE GRAVY, STUFFING, MACARONI AND CHEESE, YEAST ROLLS, BISCUITS, CORN, AND CRANBERRY SAUCE, MA’AM!”

“And I am in charge of pies and the remaining baked goods. Soldiers, to your stations!”

Toriel’s “soldiers” set themselves up at their designated places - Sans at the counter, where the meats, spices, and carving knives were all set up; Papyrus at the kitchen table, where his many designated ingredients were set up; and Frisk at a card table next to the kitchen table, where cookies of multiple shapes and a chocolate cake they had made all by themself and homemade icings of varying colors and homemade chocolate frosting were laid out.

Toriel was at the counter next to Sans. She made a habitual gesture of rolling up her nonexistent sleeves, and placed her hands on her hips.

“Ready?”

“YES, MA’AM!”

“All set.”

Frisk rubbed their hands together loudly.

“Alright! BEGIN!”

And so began the preparations for Christmas Dinner 201Z.

“Okay Alphys, moment of truth, it’s all down to these.”

Mettaton was having trouble choosing an outfit. As usual. So many choices, and he looked AMAZING in ALL of them…

So his solution was to facetime Alphys

“B-but I still don’t quite understand w-why you don’t just ask P-Papyrus.”

“BECAUSE, Alphys, I want to SURPRISE him, DUH,” Mettaton drawled, as if it were THE most obvious thing in the world.

“W-whatever. What are my c-choices again?”

Mettaton sighed.

“Hold on, lemme set this damn thing up…”

He set it on the charging dock, putting on some music. The sound of the Jingle Bell Rock rang through the frosty air. Except the air inside Mettaton’s giant-ass walk-in closet is room-temperature.
“Y-you could always wear a s-sexy santa outfit and make a ton of M-Mean Girls references - OH MY GOD, M-M-MAAAAAAUGH I AM TRAAAASH -”

Okay, Alphys had NO idea that Mettaton was only wearing underwear. And lacy purple underwear at that - NO ALPHYS, BAD.

“Calm your tits, Alphys, you’re a married woman, I have a boyfriend. Now the choice is yours. Somewhat.”

He gestured to the outfits on the Mettaton EX-shaped mannequins.

“Okay, we have green-red, red-green-gold, green-silver, red-gold, blue-white, green-gold, silver-gold, red-green, green-white, blue-white-silver, blue-white-gold, or good ol’-fashioned PINK.”

Alphys just stared at the multitude of holiday-themed outfits.

She sighed, knowing full well that she was doomed, so very, very doomed.

“Pink. You always wear it anyway.”

Mettaton gasped in surprise. “Oh my stars, you’re right.”

He tossed the mannequin with the pink outfit into the back of the closet.

“Okay, next choice.”

Alphys just squinted in confusion. At least in this case she could see some logic behind his actions.

“Silver-gold might work. It’s shiny l-like you.”

“True, true.”

Another one tossed.

“B-blue-white looks kinda n-ni -”

“Oh GOD, it reminds me of SANS. Out it GOES.”

Another mannequin down.

With it went the blue-white-silver and blue-white-gold.

“G-green-silver might work. I-I mean, you ARE a S-Slytherin.”

“And you’re a Ravenclaw.” Out with green-silver. “Your point?”

“Y-you just asked me to t-tell you what n-not to wear, d-didn’t you?”

“Alphys, I love you, you’re my best friend, I can’t thank you enough for all of,” he gestured to his body, “this, but face it darling. You have zero fashion sense.”

Alphys just squinted at him.

“I’ll get rid of red-gold while I’m at it. I mean, I’m not a Gryffindor -”

“Papyrus is a Gryffindor.”
“Really?”
“Y-yeah?”
“I always thought he was a Hufflepuff…”
“I-it depends on the quiz, b-but on Pottermore he’s a Gryffindor.”

He tossed the red-gold mannequin anyway.

And then he tossed the green-white one.

“Green-white was a poor color combination choice. Especially that shade of white…and green-red and red-green are both SO overused…”

The corresponding mannequins were eliminated.

Mettaton watched the mannequins fall wherever. One hit a headband rack.

Then he spotted exactly what he wanted.

His eyes widened and sparkled. “Of COURSE! What was I THINKING!?”

“Y-you’ve made your f-final decision?”

He walked up to the camera displaying a green velvet headband with gold glitter swirls on it.

It perfectly matched the long-sleeved tunic top.

“Thank you, Alphys! Buh-bye~”

Mettaton turned off the camera.

Alphys had no idea what he had needed her for in the first place.

“What the hell kinda game were YOU two playin’ at, hmm~?”

“WAAAH!”

Undyne had snuck up behind Alphys at some point. You’d think Alphys would have smelled the (burnt) coffee.

“O-oh my god, how long have you been standing there?!”

“I’ve been right here the whole time!”

Alphys sagged, hiding her blushing face in her arms on the table.

“Okay, now I wanna die…”

Undyne chuckled, kissing her moe waifu on one of the spines of her crest.

“C’mon, toots, we’re in charge of pickin’ out party games.”

Alphys didn’t budge.

Undyne just rolled her eyes, chugged down the rest of her coffee, and lifted Alphys from her chair to
carry her.

The way Alphys was giggling gave Undyne a weird feeling that they’d be having some fun of their own before they got ready to go…

Shelby Wong finished putting on her mascara. Now all she has to do is put on her lipstick and -

*DING DONG*

“I’ll get it.”

“Thank you Chas…”

Anyway. One more flick and…

“SHELBYYY, IT’S YOUR BOYFRIEND HERE TO PICK US UUUP~”

...aaand lipstick on her cheek. Greeeat. Just what Shelby needed. A makeshift Glasgow Grin to make a Skeleton jealous.

“CHAS FOR THE LOVE OF...HE IS NOT! MY! BOYFRIEND!”

She cleaned it off, put on her glasses, and checked herself in the bathroom mirror one last time.

Brick red short-sleeve turtleneck dress with black tights and black kitten heels. Gold post earrings. Hair in a high bun, as usual.

Just needed a jacket and she’d be all set.

She grabbed a black overcoat from her closet and walked into the living area of the apartment, where Asgore and her brother were waiting for her.

Chas had a khaki coat on over his ugly holiday sweater that was almost exactly ten years old - it even looked and felt the part. He wore it every day of December until the 25th. It was important to him.

Asgore was wearing a flannel shirt and a khaki canvas coat.

“I take it you had work today?”

Asgore chuckled - Shelby always had to fight back a blush when he did that. “No, no, it was simply the first thing I grabbed!”

“Good. Because if you did have to work today, I know a guy in OSHA who owes me a few favors…”

Asgore chuckled once again. “There’s no need for that, Miss Wong, I assure you!”

“Yeah yeah, you two can yiff it up later. Now let’s go before the weather gets too bad…”

“CHAS!”

“He does have a point, we should get going. A storm is blowing in from the north.”

Shelby sighed. “Fine, let me grab my purse.”

She grabbed it from the console by the front door and headed out ahead of the men. For all that
Shelby was a staunch feminist, she couldn’t deny that she appreciated the feeling of having doors be held open for her.

“Um, if you’ll both pardon the seemingly obvious question, what exactly does ‘yiff’ mean?”

“It means to make conversation, now come on!”

Asgore just stared after her. He looked at Chas in confusion. Chas simply smirked and shrugged in response.

Levi and Sharona sat bored in the empty living room of the Marlow-Goldsby residence. Hanukkah ended on Monday, and with it their family event. They hounded Sharona about her new husband and stepchild - they were a very nosy bunch, them. Sharona temporarily placated them with photos from their wedding - AKA the signing of the marriage certificate - and Levi and Caroline goofing around and the like. When she got the photo of Caroline and Penelope’s Little Accident, she showed it off like only a mother could.

Randy and Caroline had left for Colorado on Tuesday to be with Randy’s family in Denver. As such, Levi and Sharona were by their lonesome. This wasn’t necessarily a bad thing. But in this case it sucked major ass because the weather kept them indoors.

Levi was an inherently restless boy. He needed something to do, and quickly.

Sharona spotted the Wii.

She had an idea.

“Just Dance?”

Levi brightened immediately.

“YEAH!” he shouted, nodded so quickly that his curls nearly vibrated from his head.

“Okay! Let’s DO this!”

Linda awoke with a gasp.

What a nightmare that had been! There was an...an angel with a chainsaw? Shouting something about attacking her boys? It was confusing and terrifying because angels are supposed to...not...carry chainsaws? What was that even about?

Her bedroom door opened.

“Good morning, Linda,” Richard piped, sipping a cup of coffee. “Err, afternoon. It’s almost one.”

Linda looked blankly at her husband for a moment. Then she checked the alarm clock on the bedside table. 12:49.

She darted out of her bed cursing. Richard just sipped his coffee.

“Linda, the children are downstairs. They can hear you.”

Linda stopped putting on her jeans. “Oh my God, Richard, can you at least try to have a little sympathy for me?!”
Richard sipped his coffee. “Kind of hard to sympathize when you had scheduled to start making dinner an hour ago. The Greens will be here at three, by the way. Hunter and Hannah are dressed for helping you cook, but they’ll have to change for church at around 5:30.”

“Thanks, sweetie.”

Linda walked out of her bedroom, only to be stopped by Richard grabbing her shoulder.

“Linda, put on your pants.”

Linda looked down. She sighed.

“Thanks, Richie.” She kissed him on the cheek and went back into her room to get dressed.

“I’ll be downstairs. I’ll put on some music.”

Richard closed the master bedroom door behind him and walked down the stairs.

Hunter and Hannah were playing with a Christmas coloring book in the living room.

“Okay, you two. Your mom’ll be downstairs in a few minutes. Hunter, you want the first choice of song?”

Hunter looked up, surprised. He gestured to himself. “Y-you mean me?”

“Yeah. Do I have another kid named Hunter?”

Hunter giggled. “Okay, um...God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen by Mannheim Steamroller?”

“Gotcha.”

Richard set up the smartphone to play on shuffle starting with the song Hunter chose.

Linda walked down the stairs. “Goooood afternoon, everyone~”

“Hey Mom.”

“Hi Mommy.”

“Heeeey sweeties! You two can stop messing around and start helping mommy with Christmas dinner! How’s that sound?”

Hunter and Hannah had both learned early on that this was Mom Speak for “do it or else”.

“Yes, Mom.”

“Yes, Mommy.”

They got up to help her.

Hunter was stirring the mix for the rolls, humming along to the Jingle Bell Rock.

“Hunter, stop that. It’s distracting.”

“Sorry, mom.”

Hunter sighed. His mom found EVERYTHING distracting. Besides, he wasn’t even singing this
time. What was her deal, anyway?

“Hunter James, I said stop. Humming.”

“I-I wasn’t even doing anything!”

Linda glared at him. She huffed, returning her attentions to the ham.

“Of course you weren’t.”

Hunter shrunk in on himself. He hadn’t even DONE anything!

Had he? His mother was pretty convinced that he had…

No, he hadn’t. But he wasn’t going to convince his mom of that. It was pointless.

At least he could sing at church this evening…

Sans had finished seasoning the meats. He decided to take a nap at his station.

It was about ten minutes before the doorbell rang. He stayed in place.

“SANS, GET THE DOOR! WE’RE ALL BUSY!”

“Okay.”

Sans remained in place.

“Sans. Please get the door, it might be one of our guests.”

“Okay, since you said please.”

“Thank you!”

Sans sat up and walked to the front door.

“How do you do that?”

“What?”

“Get SANS to do things!”

“I say please.”

<<Please and thank you are the magic words, Uncle Pap!>>

Papyrus just rolled his eye sockets. It was DEFINITELY more than just the magic words. He and Frisk shared a knowing look.

Sans opened the door to see lesbians.

“Hello, Alphys. Undyne. Happy holidays to ya.”

“H-hey Sans!”

“What’s up with your face?”
Sans touched his face. There was some grease, fat, and seasoning caked on his cheekbones and forehead.

“i rubbed meat. now get in here, it’s cold out there.”

Alphys and Undyne entered with their games and presents.

“I brought fruitcake!”

“of course you did. ya nasty…”

“What was that you egg?!”

“acknowledgement of your having brought fruitcake. i’ll see what tori wants to do with it.”

“Put it in the refrigerator, Undyne!”

“Gotcha!”

Undyne walked into the kitchen and placed the fruitcake next to the eggnog in the fridge. The only people who drank eggnog that Undyne knew of were Alphys and Hunter.

She closed the fridge. She noticed Papyrus boiling something over the stove.

“‘Sup Papyrus.”

“HELLO, UNDYNE! I’M MAKING CRANBERRY SAUCE!”

“How is boiling cranberries gonna -”

Some of the cranberries popped.

“HOLY CRAP! THAT WAS AWESOME!”

“I KNOW! THE CRANBERRIES POP AND THE STUFF INSIDE BECOMES THE SAUCE!”

“Ohhh, so THAT’S what happens!”

Then she noticed Frisk carefully squeezing some blue frosting out of a piping bag and onto a gingerbread man.

“Hey, lil booger! Whatcha doin’?”

Frisk held out a palm, signalling for Undyne to wait as they completed the cookie.

It took about 30 seconds. Then Frisk set down the piping bag and gestured to their masterpiece.

Undyne noticed something familiar about the gingerbread man.

No. The Gingerbread Sans.

Undyne smirked. “Sweet! Better save this one for your mom, punk~”

Frisk smirked knowingly and snickered. <<I already am!>>

Undyne noogied them. Frisk giggled in response.
When she was done noogying Frisk, she turned menacingly toward Papyrus.

Papyrus seemed to feel fishy eyes upon him.

“PLEASE DO NOT NOOGIE THE COOKING SKELETON!”

“Oh, so you can say please to Undyne, but not your own brother? I didn’t raise you to be this way, Papyrus…”

Papyrus groaned. “SANS, THIS IS COMPLETELY UNNECESSARY!”

“If you say so. Alphys, you can put the games over in the den on the coffee table.”

“T-thanks! O-oh, and Mettaton texted me on our way here. He’ll be here in about ten to twenty minutes.”

“Okay. Thanks, Al. I’ll let Pap know.”

“I HEARD YOU SANS!”

“So you know Mtt’s gonna be here in half an hour?”

“YES!”

“Okay.”

Alphys just squinted in her confusion.

“We adjust Mettaton’s time of arrival for ten minutes after the latest he claims he’ll show.”

“Fashionably late thing?”

“Fashionably late thing. Give or take a bit for eyeliner.”

Alphys hummed in agreement.

“Wanna see my playlist of holiday memes?”

“H-heck yeah!”

Linda was putting the pecan pie in the oven when the doorbell rang.

She closed the oven door and answered it.

Helen and Brian were outside. The Greens came over every Christmas Eve to join the Thompsons at the Christmas Eve church service.

“Helen! Heeeey! Come inside! Is David not with you?”

Linda either didn’t notice Helen flinch or mistook it for a shiver.

“David’s busy with work stuff,” Helen explained. Of course, by busy with work stuff, Helen maybe seven times out of ten meant too drunk to function. This was one of those seven. “Where’s Hunter and Hannah?”

“In the kitchen helping me cook. I finished my part, they just have to finish theirs.”
“Really, Lin? Let them take a break or something.”

“Helen, are you telling me how to raise my children in my house?”

Helen rolled her eyes. “No, I -”

“Gooooo. Now come on, have a seat! Would you like something to drink?”

*Bleach would be nice right about now.*

“I’ll just take some Dr. Pepper.”

“And how about you, Brian? What do you want?”

Brian shrugged. “I’ll take what mom’s having, I guess.”

“Oookay! I’ll be back in a jiffy!”

Linda walked into the kitchen. “Hunter, Hannah, Brian and his mom are here. Get finished with your stuff so you can join us.”

Hunter nearly said something before Linda walked out of the kitchen with two Dr. Peppers and a glass of chardonnay.

Hunter continued to work.

“Hey, bub?”

“Yeah, Hanners?”

“Why don’t Mommy help us?”

Hunter sighed.

“I dunno, Hannah. I guess it’s just something only she understands.”

“Hey hey, you two.”

Richard had walked in. He was refilling his coffee for the fifth time.

“You two go join your mom and Brian and Aunt Helen. I’ll take over for you.”

Hannah gasped. “Really??!”

Hunter brightened considerably. “Thanks, Dad!”

Richard shushed them and nodded. “Keep it a secret, okay? We don’t want her angry.”

“You got THAT right,” Hunter said.

Papyrus put the dinner rolls in the oven when the doorbell rang again. “I’LL GET IT!”

He ran to the door - he went back to the kitchen halfway there to turn on the timer - and opened it.

Mettaton was toying with the fur cuff of one of his gloves when he noticed the door had opened. Papyrus face was glowing with how happy he was to see him. Mettaton was absolutely smitten
with the way his eyes would widen and sparkle whenever he was happy - most adorable thing ever.

Mettaton brightened a bit himself. “Hey, darling! Happy Holidays~”

“And a very happy holidays to you, my sweet!” Papyrus said, leaning to kiss Mettaton’s hand.

Well. If that didn’t make Mettaton blush.

“Oh my GOD, you two, just stop flirting and get in here before you freeze us all!”

The couple giggled and closed the door behind them. Papyrus took Mettaton’s coat and placed it with the others.

“Guess who brought music and movies~”

“Is that a karaoke machine?” Alphys asked.

“Am I beautiful?”

“Well if it’s not a karaoke machine then what is it?”

“Undyne, it’s obviously the most amazing karaoke machine in the universe!”

“Where is Frisk, anyway?”

A few pats came from the kitchen. Frisk was frosting the chocolate cake. They managed to wave at Mettaton anyway.

“Frisk,” Toriel said, “You can take a break now if you like.”

Frisk looked at their mother, then back to the cake. Then back to Toriel. They wanted to make a snowflake on the cake out of white icing. They quickly frosted the top of the cake and went to let this fact be known.

“Oh my GOSH, that sounds like a wonderful idea!” Mettaton said.

“I agree!” Toriel affirmed. “I don’t see why not. But it can wait for a bit, can it not? You’ve worked very hard today, my child! You deserve a break.”

Toriel kissed Frisk on the cheek, and Frisk allowed her to set them on her lap.

Frisk settled themself in.

“I got water on for cocoa. anybody want any?”

“I’ll just take some eggnog.”

“I’ll take some cocoa!”

“That sounds lovely, thank you Sans~”

“I’ll take some cider.”

“I’ll have some tea, if that’s not too much.”
Frisk simply nodded. <<With whipped cream, cinnamon sugar, and sprinkles!>>

Sans chuckled. “okay.”

“Wait a minute,” Undyne said. “Is this everyone?”

Toriel sighed. “Asgore’s coming, too. He should be here soon.”

“Ahh.”

Everyone was quiet.

“Who wants to play a few rounds of Mario Party before Asgore gets here?”

The answer to that question was everyone.

Linda and Helen were chatting - chatting actually means Linda was yakking and Helen was pretending to listen - while Brian, Hunter, and Hannah played Old Maid and Richard was upstairs making some calls.

Then a timer dinged.

“Oh! Pie’s ready,” Linda said. “Does anyone want some?”

“Mom, Brian’s allergic to pecans,” Hunter said. You know that.

“Then he doesn’t have to eat any. He can just have some brownies.”

“The brownies have pecans in them too.”

Linda pursed her lips.

“Cookies!” Hannah shouted.

“But Hannah, sweetie,” Linda said, “the cookies are for Santa! Don’t you want Santa to have any cookies?”

“Let them have some cookies, Linda,” Richard said as he walked down the stairs to get his tenth cup of coffee. “They’re the only things you made without pecans. And I think that Santa has more than enough cookies, don’t you?”

Linda’s eye twitched.

“Fine. They can eat cookies.”

The kids cheered.

“I’ll get ‘em,” Hunter said.

“One each, and no more,” Linda said. She used the tone of voice she used whenever someone was going to “get it” later.

Hunter was 100% sure it was going to be him that “got it”. For some reason, it usually was.

While Hunter was in the kitchen getting the cookies, the only sound coming from the group was chilly, awkward silence.
Helen knew why Linda made everything with pecans. She wasn’t stupid.

But Linda didn’t need to know that. Let her believe Helen was stupid. Let Linda believe that Helen dropped out community college instead of successfully graduating. Let Linda believe that she wasn’t just a way to hide from David in case he finally lost his temper. Let Linda believe that her children were happy.

Better trapped by sparkly delusions than by a filthy reality…

Daisy pushed Peach over the edge of the platform, only to be knocked off by Rosalina.

Then Rosalina was anticlimactically pushed by Donkey Kong.

Undyne wins this round.

“okay, that’s 1 full game won by undyne, 3 by alphys, 4 by yours truly, 2 by mtt, and none for the rest. who’s up for another round? i could go either way.”

The doorbell rang.

“I’ll get it,” Undyne offered.

Undyne left the den and went to the front door.

“Hey, wassup, Asgore!”

“Howdy, Undyne. I brought some guests, I uh...hope no one minds two more…”

“Hello, Undyne.”

“Hey, Shelby! Been awhile, hasn’t it?”

“Since around August, I think.”

“Nice! What’ve you been up to, Chas?”

“Oh, the usual. Raids, sessions, internal screaming. That sorta thing.”

“Sounds good to me! Come inside before -”

*BOOOM*

“...the storm starts.”

Awkward silence and sleet ensued.

“Just get in here.”

“Gladly.”

“Okay.”

“Right behind you.”

Hunter, Brian, and Hannah sat bored in the middle pew of the church.
Hunter and Brian were in itchy suits and Hannah was in an itchy red dress. All of them wore shoes that claimed to be the right size but actually caused blisters unless the wearer was a size and a half smaller than advertised. In other words, they were wearing church clothes.

And the service wasn’t due to start for another ten minutes. And they were forbidden from leaving their seats on threat of punishment. And they weren’t allowed to bring something to do. The only thing Brian, Hunter, and Hannah were allowed to do was talk to each other quietly. Which none of them particularly wanted to do.

Hunter looked around. Linda and Helen were talking a group of ladies from their church group - judging from the look on Linda’s face they were talking about someone from another church group. On the opposite side of the room from Linda he saw Diana and Miranda talking to the pastor and his wife - clearly the latter two did not want to be talking to Diana.

“Pssst, Brian,” Hunter whispered as he shook Brian’s shoulder.

“What?”

“Miranda and her mom’re here. Just a heads up.”

“Crap, thanks, man.”

“No problem.”

“Bub, I gotta go pee…”

Oh no. Not good.

Hunter had a decision to make. He could be like his mom and have Hannah wet herself on the pew and say “you told us not to move or else” - that held a sort of satisfaction but also left a slightly bitter taste in his mouth. Option 2 was get up and tell his mom that Hannah needed to go to the bathroom and risk getting chewed out later - this one terrified him, but at least Hannah wouldn’t humiliate herself.

Option 2 it was.

“Come on, Hannah. Let’s go tell Mom.”

Hannah’s eyes widened in fear.

“It’s okay, I’ll be with you. I won’t let anything happen to you. I promise.”

Hannah nodded as she took Hunter’s hand. She had a really strong grip for a five-year-old girl. If Hunter didn’t know better, he’d’ve attributed it to her fear of Linda’s anger. That was part of it, sure, but she had a pretty powerful grip when not fureled by fear.

He took a deep breath, bracing himself for his mother’s inevitable anger.

He walked up to the group of ladies and tugged on Linda’s shirt.

“- and then it called me Mimi Bobo or something, who even IS that - what is it, Hunter? Can’t you see I’m busy?”

“Hannah has to go to the bathroom,” he said quietly. He was always quiet in the company of his mother’s “friends”.
“Well, I’m sure it can wait. Now as I was saying -”

“Um, i-it really can’t, Mom…”

“I gotta go NOW.”

Linda’s eye twitched and her face grew red. “I’ll be right back.”

She grabbed Hunter by his left arm and dragged him and Hannah to the bathrooms. Hunter bit his lip so as not to scream in pain.

“Go. You have two and a half minutes.”

Hannah went into the girl’s room. Hunter watched her before he went into the boy’s room.

When Hunter was finished with his business he checked his left arm. No blood this time.

Dinner was done, dessert was being downed.

Everyone was eating in the kitchen or the dining room. Except for Sans. He sat on the couch in the den watching Gremlins. Well, watching the credits for Gremlins.

He took another bite of chocolate cake. He considered putting in another movie, but he knew he’d just choose a comedy. The question was, Christmas Story, Elf, or National Lampoon?

Frisk was kind of young for National Lampoon still, Toriel thought. They’d have to wait until they were a bit older for that. Preferably older than ten.

Elf was good and all, but Alphys was very uncomfortable with Will Ferrell movies after that one party back in ‘99. Sans did not blame her.

“Ah, there you are Sans.”

Toriel was in the entryway to the den holding a mug of tea.

“Do you mind if I join you? It’s getting quite hectic out there…”

“it’s all good, t. i was gettin’ a bit lonely out here all by my elf.”

Toriel giggled. “Well, I do hope yule find me decent company!”

Sans chuckled. “and i hope i don’t claus ya to miss anything good.”

“Oh, non-sans!” Toriel said, lightly swatting Sans on his scapula as she uttered the last syllable.

“I’m already having more fun in here than I was out there…”

“you certainly do seem more relaxed,” Sans observed. “that’s good.”

She really was more relaxed. She leaned back into her armchair and took a sip from the tea. She was beautiful when she was calm like this, taking her mind off her troubles. But she was always beautiful in Sans’ eye sockets. She was beautiful before he ever saw her face, before she glanced at him with her eyes the color of cinnamon, before any of this. She was so, so strong and intelligent and gorgeous - she was the total package. Stars above Sans loved Toriel so.

Toriel sat her mug down on the end table.
“Is the cake good?”

Sans gave a thumbs up since his mouth was full of cake. He swallowed the bite. “frisk really outdid themself. this is great.”

“May I try a bite?”

“don’t see why not.”

Toriel took the plate of half-eaten chocolate cake and took a bite. It was better than she thought it’d be.

“This is AMAZING…”

“isn’t it?”

“I should get a slice for myself…”

“no need, tori. sit back. relax. i’ll get it for ya.”

Toriel smiled. “Thank you very much, Sans.”

Sans winked his left eye at her as he turned to go to the kitchen. “snow problem, tori.”

Toriel giggled again. Sans was not what would be considered traditionally handsome in any sense of the word. But something about him was certainly endearing - nay, magnetic. He had the greatest sense of humor - though to some it would not even be considered humor. He was very loyal and family-oriented - Frisk and their friends absolutely loved him. He was also extremely intelligent. But Toriel simply couldn’t ignore the nagging feeling that Sans was hiding something. But it was not her place to pry.

Sans walked into the kitchen before turning around to walk back out and into the den once more.

Toriel looked at him with worry. His eyelights were out. “Sans, are you alright?”

“papyrus and mettaton are making out on the card table.”

“Oh dear.”

“yeah.”

They were quiet.

“Should we start the karaoke so they’ll stop being intimate on the furniture?”

“tori you’re an angel.”

Toriel blushed and giggled in response.

____________________________________________________________________________

The church was silent. The final hymn was about to be sung.

“Silent night~  Holy Night~  All is calm~  All is Bright~”

Hunter sang ever so slightly louder than he had during the last one. He kept his eyes focused on the candle in his hands, his ears focused on the music, his mind focused on what his eyes and ears were focused on.
“Glories stream from heaven afar~ Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia~”

He didn’t see himself as talented, nor did he really care. Even if he was complimented on his “talent” by his seven closest friends and four highly trustworthy adults - one of whom was a world-famous celebrity.

When Hunter sang, he didn’t care what people thought. He didn’t care about how “average” he was, or what he did to make his mother angry this time, or anything at all. He sang to make himself feel better. He sang to forget how much he hated himself.

“Jesus lord at thy birth~ Jesus lord at thy birth~”

Then the service ended, the lights came on.

Everyone stood up to leave. He heard some of what they other members of the flock were saying. Saying the little blonde boy was really talented, that he should join the choir next year, that it was such a shame that he was that woman’s son.

He was very much afraid to glance up at his mom in case she heard what they were saying. So he looked to Brian to see if it was safe to do anything.

Brian understood. He shook his head. <<Sorry.>>

Hunter was extremely terrified. He almost wanted to cry.

As if recognizing this, Hannah held Hunter’s hand in both of hers. Hannah’s presence always made Linda’s scoldings less severe. Or less scary. Either way, she helped.

Hunter gripped Hannah’s hands.

One of the last things he heard before leaving the chapel and after saying his goodbyes to Brian and Helen was…

...static? It sounded like a very old recording…saying something…reassuring? Yeah…

Hunter took a deep breath in and then out.

He knew it would all be over soon.

He just had to be Patient.

Everyone had finished applauding Mettaton’s rendition of Silent Night. According to the randomizer, Sans was next.

The Christmas Song.

Huh. Okay then.

Sans stepped up to the mic. He clicked the play button.

The music started.

“chestnuts roasting on an open fire~ jack frost nipping at your nose~ yuletide carols being sung by a choir~ and folks dressed up like eskimos~”
When everyone who wasn’t Papyrus or Alphys first heard Sans sing the previous year, it came as a major shock that Sans, Smiley Trash Bag, Fucking Sack Of Potatoes, Lazy Bum, Sans, could sing extremely well much less at all. Alphys was somewhat surprised, but because he still “had it” after eleven years.

Shelby was still very surprised. She thought Sans was lip syncing. To which Chas, her ever-supportive brother, asked if it really counted since Skeletons don’t have lips. To which she said shut up.

“although it’s been said many times, many ways~ merry christmas~ to you~”

The applause was well-earned. Sans turned to walk back to his spot at the end of the couch. He spotted Shelby on the carpet.

“wassamatta? ya look shel -shocked.”

The sound of “ooooo”s was indicative of how much of a burn it was.

“Alright, who’s next?”

“Papyrus.”

“Yaaaas, sing it, Papy!”

Same Old Lang Syne. Papyrus had never heard of that one before.

SONG: START!

Piano solo. This song sounds sad. Wowie.

Oh, the lyrics are coming!

“MET MY OLD LOVER IN THE GROCERY STORE~ THE SNOW WAS FALLING CHRISTMAS EVE~ I STOOD BEHIND HER IN THE FROZEN FOODS~ AND I TOUCHED HER ON THE SLEEVE~”

Aww, this song is so cute! Wait, why is everyone looking at him like that?

“WE DRANK A TOAST TO INNOCENCE~ WE DRANK A TOAST TO NOW~ WE TRIED TO REACH BEYOND THE EMPTINESS~ BUT NEITHER ONE KNEW HOW~”

Well, that’s...kind of sad. But it’s gonna have a happy ending! Right?

“WE DRANK A TOAST TO INNOCENCE~ WE DRANK A TOAST TO TIME~ RELIVING, IN OUR ELOQUENCE~ ANOTHER ‘AULD LANG SYNE’~”

Nope. Not right. Not even close.

“JUST FOR A MOMENT I WAS BACK AT SCHOOL~ AND FELT THAT OLD FAMILIAR PAIN~ AND, AS I TURNED TO MAKE MY WAY BACK HOME~ THE SNOW TURNED INTO RAIN~”

Silence. Then applause, as led by a teary Mettaton.

Papyrus went to snuggle Mettaton.
“THAT SONG IS SAD…”

“I know, baby...stupid Dan Fogelberg, making my boyfriend cry…”

The comforting session was interrupted by squeals of glee from an excited Frisk.

Once they had everyone’s attention, they pointed directly above where Sans and Toriel were seated on the couch.

Where a sprig of mistletoe was shamelessly hung.

sans.exe has stopped working. The hooting and wolf whistles had no effect on the program.

Toriel was blushing heavily. Oh my. What to do.

She decided to do as Sans did and sit blankly.

Now to wait until everyone gets bored of waiting for them to...do whatever it is people do under the mistletoe.

Everyone else decided to wait on them while continuing the karaoke.

It was Shelby’s turn.

Hunter sat on his bed in his room. He grabbed his tablet from the drawer of his nightstand. He entered the password.

The time said 9:36 P.M.

It had been an hour since they’d come home. The ride home was spent in silent fear.

Not a sound was heard from Linda since they had gotten back.

The silence only amplified Hunter’s fear and anxiety.

He heard someone stomping up the stairs.

He turned off his tablet and stuffed it under his pillow.

He pretended to sleep.

Linda opened the door.

She huffed before slamming his door behind her.

He heard her enter the master bedroom and slam that door behind her.

“I can’t BELIEVE our children tried to humiliate me like that!” Linda said through her teeth as she paced the floor of her bedroom

“Like what, Linda?” Richard asked as he finished the jigsaw puzzle on his tablet.

“They interrupted me while I was having a VERY important conversation with my church group!”

“Why did they interrupt you?”
“Because Hannah forgot to go to the bathroom at home!”

“Did she have an accident?”

“Well no, but -”

“Then it shouldn’t matter, Linda. She’s five. She’s been getting better at going to the bathroom.”

Linda groaned. “That’s not the POINT, Richard! You’re not understanding the point I’m trying to make here!”

“Then enlighten me. What is your point?”

“My point is that they made me look negligent!”

Richard just stared at her.

“Linda. Just because your child had to use the bathroom doesn’t make you look negligent.”

“Well yeah, maybe to YOU!”

“You mean needing the restroom is negligent in your opinion?”

“No!”

Richard stared at Linda as realization dawned on her face. She growled before turning off the lamp on the bedside table.

“A lot of people want Hunter to join the choir.”

Silence.

“Really.”

“Come ON, Richard. This is SERIOUS. They want our son to sing in the goddamn choir.”

“They might want him to, but does he want him to?”

“I don’t care, Richard. He is not going to join the choir.”

“You say that like you think he’s going to run away and join Broadway.”

“Oh my FUCKING God, Richard!”

“Linda, think about what it is you’re saying.”

“Our son is NOT going to join a choir or any other group of those stupid artsy people!”

“Why, exactly?”

“Because...because they’ll turn him into a goddamn QUEER, Richard!”

More silence.

“Linda. It’s a CHURCH choir. I’m pretty sure that if anything somehow ends up making our son a ‘goddamn queer’, it won’t be church-related.”
Linda growled before turning out her light to go to sleep.

Hunter sat with his notes app open as he listened to the conversation/argument end.

He began to type.

*Went to church with Brian. Sang. Mom got mad again. Grabbed my arm and dragged me. No blood this time. Hannah was there.*

Hunter closed out of the notes app and plugged in his earbuds. He opened Pandora.

Peace On Earth/Little Drummer Boy by David Bowie and Bing Crosby.

He sang along as quietly as he could…

---

Chas had warned them. He’d warned them ALL.

“I told you guys Shelby’s tone deaf. But you didn’t listen. Now you’ve suffered the consequences, and I hope you know better now.”

“Oh my GOD, Chas, I’m not THAT bad!”

There was some indistinguishable mumbling.

“NEXT!”

“Sans and Mettaton singing Peace On Earth/Little Drummer Boy.”

“Oh my GOSH, that’s David Bowie and Bing Crosby isn’t it?”

“T-that’s what it says.”

“Okay, but who sings what part?”

“Well,” Mettaton said, “my tessitura is in the tenor range, and Sans’ seems to be in the baritone range. That would mean that I sing David Bowie’s part, and Sans sings that of Bing Crosby.”

“Yeah, I’m sure that’d be cool ’n all,” Undyne began, “but Sans is still blue-screened.”

“I GOT THIS,” Papyrus said in resignation. “SANS! IF YOU DO NOT SING THIS FINAL SONG, I WILL THROW OUT ALL OF YOUR KETCHUP.”

“you wouldn’t dare.”

“TRY ME.”

Sans’ eyelights turned on. They were slightly dim, but on.

“okay. let’s get this over with.”

Mettaton nodded and hit play.

They performed the first verse together.

“Come they told me~ Pa-rum-pum-pum-pum~”
Then Sans was to continue with Little Drummer Boy as Mettaton began singing Peace On Earth - in harmony.

“little baby, pa-rum-pum-pum-pum~  i am a poor boy too, pa-rum-pum-pum-pum~”

“Peace on earth, can it be~  Years from now, perhaps we’ll see~”

Then they both sang Peace On Earth.

“Every child must be made aware~  Every child must be made to care~”

Then the song finished to vast applause. Mettaton bowed. Sans just stood there.

They returned to their spots - Sans on the couch, Mettaton on Papyrus.

Frisk yawned. Time for them to go to bed.

“I can take ’em up if you want me to,” Chas offered.

“Are you sure?” Toriel asked.

“Totally.”

Chas picked up Frisk. They directed him to their bedroom.

He set Frisk on their bed and bid them goodnight.

Chas wasn’t quite sure why, but something about Frisk reminded him of...

Nah. Probably just his imagination.

As Chas walked down the stairs, the power went out. The shock caused him to fall down half a flight of stairs.

Levi and Sharona had flameless candles going. They were playing poker. Sharona was winning. Sharona always won.

*I want to live, I want to give~  I’ve been a miner for a heart of gold~*

Sharona picked up the phone. The ringtone signified Randy on the other end.

She held the phone between her ear and shoulder while she held her cards. “Hey, Randy~  How’s it going?”

“Ohhh, it’s going. We keep moving back ‘n forth to an’ from the hospital…”

Sharona sighed. Randy’s mother hadn’t been doing too well. She kept having flashes of dementia that increased in length if what his sister had been saying was any indication. Randy sounded very tired.

“How’s Caroline taking it?” she inquired. Caroline didn’t really like moving about too much without stopping.

“She’s...she’s trying. She’s sticking to her books and keeping to herself. She’s real tense, but she’s hanging in there.”
“That’s good. So when d’you think you’ll be back…?”

“We’ll come back on the 26th.”

“Okay. See ya then!”


“Love you too.”

Sharona hung up the phone and slid it into her lap.

“Well, boy? What’ll it be?”

Levi was sweating nervously.

“I fold…”

Hunter sat in his room continuing to listen to his music. The time on his tablet said it was past ten. He turned off his tablet and put it away.

He looked outside his window. All the street lights, porch lights, and Christmas lights were completely out. Only fog and sleet were visible.

He hummed himself to sleep.

Brian lay in his bedroom. The entirety of the Green family’s house reeked of alcohol. But Brian was still kind of thankful. At least his dad was passed out by the time he and his mom got home.

Brian hated nothing more than how much this whole thing was hurting his mom. He didn’t know how to help.

Hunter was the only person outside of his house who knew about his dad’s problem. Considering Hunter’s mom didn’t act any more or less butt-like than usual, he took it that she didn’t know.

That’s probably a good thing. No saying what Linda’d do to his mom if she did know.

“No, no, it’s fine, Mike, I understand, you’re busy. Okay, then. See you next year, Michael. Love you. Bye.”

Diana hung up her cellphone. She sighed.

Miranda stood at the top of the stairs. Diana spotted her and walked up.

“Daddy’s not coming home tomorrow, is he?”

Diana sighed. “No, sweetie. Daddy’s not coming home until after New Years.”

Miranda lowered her head. “Oh.”

Diana hugged her daughter and picked her up. “Come on, sweetie-pie. Let’s go to bed. Tomorrow after we open our presents, we’ll go down to the farm to visit Diamonds if the roads aren’t too bad. How’s that sound?”
Miranda hugged Diana back. “That sounds nice…”

Diana carried Miranda to her bedroom, tucked her in, and kissed her goodnight.

Miranda wasn’t crying. Only losers and babies cry...

Penelope was awake in her room, lying on her bed. She hated nightmares. But she didn’t want to wake up her mom, and Theo...yeah, not a chance.

Penelope wasn’t sure of any other options. So she decided to text someone.

*hey.

*are you there?

*Yeah. What’s up?

*nightmare. can’t go back to sleep. :(

Penelope’s phone vibrated. She answered.

“Yeah?”

There was a pause on the other end. Deep breaths could be heard.

“Want me to read ya a story, Nell?”

Penelope smiled.

“Sure, Caroline.”

“Okay. A Christmas Carol, by Charles Dickens. Stave One. Marley was dead, to begin with…”

Everyone had left by this point. All that remained was the remains of a perfect party.

Sans and Papyrus had cleaned everything up with their Blue Magic. Papyrus didn’t usually allow this, but it was past midnight and even he was tired. And maybe just a little bit tipsy. But that was probably just leftover excitement.

Papyrus went up to his room, where he currently lay asleep. Sans was still downstairs in the den. He was setting up the presents and filling the stockings.

He used some of the stuff in his Inventory as stocking stuffers. Toriel got the snail shell, Papyrus got the snowglobe and the handcuffs, Frisk got Pet Rock.

“Well well, if it isn’t Sansta Claus.”

Toriel stood in the entryway in her nightie. Oh stars. ACT Natural Sans, ACT Natural.

“yep.”

“Everyone’s gone home.”

“yep.”
Toriel wasn’t entirely sure what to say or do at this point. She’d come in to... remind Sans about the mistletoe thing, but now that she was actually here, so close and yet so, so far, she blanked.

“I believe there’s still some of the chocolate cake left,” she said. “Would you care to join me for some?”

“hold on a sec, tori.”

Sans put a few lumps of charcoal into Flowey’s stocking. “there. and yes, i would love to join ya.”

Toriel smiled. Sans smiled a bit more genuinely.

This very Merry Christmas fills you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

The song in the title this time is The Season's Upon Us by The Dropkick Murphys.

Other songs featured include:

The Jingle Bell Rock by Bobby Helms
God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen by Mannheim Steamroller
Silent Night
The Christmas Song by Nat King Cole
Same Old Lang Syne by Dan Fogelberg
Peace On Earth/Little Drummer Boy by David Bowie and Bing Crosby
Heart Of Gold by Neil Young
Chapter Summary

Mettaton has dinner with Papyrus' family. Levi and Sharona are in airplane jail. Randy and Caroline are tired of waiting for their plane to take off. Miranda and Diana do stuff, too.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a bit shorter than the last two for reasons.
Okay, I'm actually just real fucking lazy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

4:30 P.M., December 26th, 201Z

It's a cold day in Ebott.
The sun is shining.
Frost covers the ground.
On days like this, kids like you...

...are waiting for your uncle’s boyfriend.

Frisk presses the A button like their life depends on it.
It works.
“Awww, come ON! Another round. Different ‘mons.”
Frisk simply smirked.
Challenge accepted.

They went to their PC and deposited all of the Pokemon in their party. They decided to go easy on Flowey this time.

The battle began.

...are waiting for your uncle’s boyfriend.

Frisk presses the A button like their life depends on it.
It works.
“Awww, come ON! Another round. Different ‘mons.”
Frisk simply smirked.
Challenge accepted.

They went to their PC and deposited all of the Pokemon in their party. They decided to go easy on Flowey this time.

The battle began.
Flowey sent out Nidoking.
Frisk sent out Blorb.
“Frisk. That’s a Ditto.”
Frisk nodded.
Nidoking used Horn Attack.
Blorb used Transform.
Blorb’s Quick Claw let it move first.
Blorb used Earthquake.
Blorb won.
The doorbell rang.
Frisk answered it despite the fact that they were wearing a gingerbread person kigurumi.

<<Uncle Metta!>>
“Hey, Frisk~” Mettaton sang as he hugged them. “How was your Christmas?”
<<It was great!>> they signed. <<I got so much cool stuff!>> They showed off their rainbow-polished fingernails. <<Thanks for the nail kit!>>
“Oh my GOODNESS, your nails are GORGEOUS!”
<<Thanks! I’ll try not to chew them!>>
“Frisk, is that Mettaton?”
“Hello, Toriel!”
Toriel stepped out of the kitchen. “Hello, Mettaton! How was your day yesterday?”
“It went great! Blooky absolutely loved your gift!”
“I’m glad they enjoyed it!”
“i heard the doorbell.”
“Good afternoon, Sans!” Toriel said. “Glad to see that you’re finally awake.”
“afternoon, tori. mtt. pap’s still getting ready, if you’re wondering. come on in.”
“Oh, alright then.”
Sans led Mettaton into the den. There was still wrapping paper lying around. There was a nest of wrapping paper with a cactus inside of it in a far corner.
“don’t mind that. that’s frisk’s new pet cactus. teachin’ ‘em responsibility. might end up gettin’ ‘em a cat for their birthday.”
Mettaton awed.

There was a moment of silence.

“wanna watch some old family movies before dinner?”

“Sure?”

“okay. you got a choice to make. you can choose ‘papyrus first birthday’, ‘risky business’, ‘papyrus kindergarten graduation’, or ‘papyrus gets stuck in the vending machine’.”

“Papyrus Gets Stuck In The Vending Machine?”

“okay, but which one?”

Mettaton probably shouldn’t be watching these. But his curiosity was too much to ignore. He really wanted to see what happened.

“Chronological order, I suppose…”

“okay. pgsitvm part one, comin’ atcha.”

Sans went to a cupboard, got out a cassette tape with some very strange symbols on a masking tape label.

He inserted it into the VCR.

“i gotta remember to transfer these to dvd.”

The video started playing. On the screen was…

...a small pouty Skeleton child trapped in a vending machine.

The person holding the camera was trying so hard not to laugh.

“okay, okay, i’m sorry. tell me what happened again, papyrus?”

“SAAAAAAAAANS! LET ME OOOOUT!”

Oh my gosh. Papyrus was so CUTE as a child...

“nope. first you gotta tell the camera what happened.”

“I JUST WANTED SOME CHIIIIISPS!”

“so you crawled inside of the only vending machine on this floor to get some?”

“YES…”

“you could have told dad or me, y’know. heck, i’m sure alphys woulda been fine with helpin’ you.”

“BUT YOU GUYS’RE TOO BUSY!”

“not right now. we’re on break.”

“THEN GET ME OUT OF HERE!”
“okay.”
The much-younger Sans just stood there holding the camera.

“I’M STILL STUCK, SANS.”

“i can see that.”

“GET ME OOOOUT!”

“okay.”
The camera closed in on the vending machine. Teen Sans...put in some change and bought a snack cake.

“SANS, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!!”

“trying to save you. you apparently cost a lot more than 50 gold.”

“DON’T YOU HAVE A KEY OR SOMETHING?”

“bro, dad has the only key.”

“THEN GET DAAAAAAD!”

Little Papyrus started sobbing.

“okay. sorry lil bro. be right back.”

Then the camera cut out.

Sans looked at Mettaton. The Robot was trying so hard not to squeal with how adorable Little Papyrus was.

“wanna watch the sequel?”

“Heck yeah!”

Sans chuckled. “okay. papyrus gets stuck in the vending machine: electric boogaloo, comin’ atcha.”

*BING-BONG*

*ATTENTION PASSENGERS. UNITED AIRLINES FLIGHT 475 TO EBOTT HAS BEEN DELAYED FOR TWO HOURS AND SEVENTEEN MINUTES DUE TO INCLEMENT WEATHER.*

The kind of groan that only people whose flight has already been delayed twice emanated from Gate B-15.

Randy and Caroline were two such people.

“For fuck’s sake…”

“Dad, I’m hungry.”

“Same here, Care-Bear. How’s Pizza Hut sound?”
“Okay.”

“There’s a Haagen-Dazs too. How’s ice cream sound?”

“Sounds good.”

“Ma, they shoulda been here by now!”

“Here” was the baggage claim of Midtown-Ebott Regional Airport, where Levi and Sharona waited

“I know, Levi. I don’t know where they could -”

Heart Of Gold by Neil Young resounded from Sharona’s back pocket.

“Hello? What?! Ya gotta be shittin’ me…”

“Ma, what -”

Sharona shushed Levi.

“Ugh, goddamn it…okay. See ya in a few hours, babe. Love ya. Uuhh. Bye.”

Sharona hung up the phone.

“Their flight’s been delayed another two an’ a half hours…”

Sharona growled and kicked a planter with a fake ficus decorated for Christmas until it fell over with a crash.

She walked over to the next one about ten feet away, kicking it over as well.

An airport security guard noticed the commotion.

“Hey, you! What do you think you’re doing?”

“Taking out my frustration at the FAA on some ficus!”

“Why?”

“Flight from Denver’s been delayed!”

“Oh. Carry on then.”

“Thank you!”

“Can I join, Ma?”

“Knock yerself out, boy!”

“Woohoo!”

“Come on, Diamonds! Let’s go!”

And they were off.
The riding trails in Ebott were still snowed out, so Miranda had to ride her horse - her precious dapple grey Dutch warmblood mare - in the indoor riding ring. There were a few other riders there.

The two rode about the ring at a trot. Miranda surveyed her surroundings.

To her right was, of course, the edge of the ring. To her left was a cheerful, smiley sixth grader with blonde hair and green eyes riding a bay-colored Arabian stallion.

Miranda knew this girl. She knew her. Emma Reese was only her biggest rival outside of school and cheerleading. No matter what Miranda did, no matter how hard she worked, she still came second to Emma. Every single competition Miranda and Emma competed in together, Emma won. Even if Emma and her horse - seriously, who’s name their horse Rootbeer? - messed up in some way when Miranda and Diamonds performed flawlessly, she STILL won.

And yet Emma had the nerve to talk to her like they were FRIENDS.

How stupid can she BE?

“Hey, Miranda!”

Jinxed it.

“How was your Christmas?”

“My daddy’s still working. He’s gonna BE working until next year.”

Emma didn’t deserve the satisfaction of seeing her happy. Only her friends could see her happy.

“Aw, I’m sorry.”

“Hmph.”

There was brief silence between them. Emma probably noticed it, too.

“Is that a new saddle?”

“Yep. My nanna got it for me.”

“It’s really nice! Black saddles really look good on Diamonds!”

Diamonds snorted. Of course she looked good in black. Everyone does. Even monsters and ugly people.

“Do you and Diamonds wanna race me and Rootbeer around the ring?”

“Why?”

Emma shrugged. “It sounds fun. You wanna do it?”

This was it. This was Miranda’s chance to wipe that perky little smile right off Emma’s pretty little face once and for all.

“Sure.”

“We’ll only go at a canter since we’re indoors. You got your helmet fastened?”
Miranda took off her hot pink riding helmet to readjust it. She was competitive, sure, but she wasn’t stupid.

“Got it.”

Emma smiled again. Ugh.

“You choose how many laps we go!”

“Three.”

“Okay! We’re ready when you are!”

“On three. One...two...”

Miranda and Emma adjusted themselves in their saddles.

“Three!”

And with a crack of their riding crops, they were off.

Diamonds was in the lead for the first half of the first lap before being overtaken by Rootbeer until the second half of the second lap. For the entire third lap they were neck and neck.

Diamonds won the day.

Yes.

Miranda let out a whoop of victory. Before signaling Diamonds to stop.

Emma and Rootbeer stopped a ways ahead.

“Wow, Miranda! Great job!”

Miranda smiled proudly in response. Sure, Emma wasn’t crying, but she still lost.

“Feeling better now?”

Miranda smiled a bit wider. “Yeah, I am!”

“Good! I have to leave in five minutes, so I’ll see you around!”

And with that, Emma and Rootbeer left the ring to return Rootbeer to the stables.

Miranda’s smile fell.

She actually did feel a lot better.

Dang it.

Papyrus Gets Stuck In The Vending Machine: The Return Of The WD-40 was almost over.

Only to be interrupted by the Papyrus of thirteen years later.

“SAAAAAAAAAAAAAAANNS!”
“oh, hey pap. perfect timing. seven-year-old you just screamed my name at the same time.”

“Hi, Papy!”

“OH MY GOOOOD…”

“Awww, I’m sorry, sweetie! My curiosity got the better of me! You were so ADORABLE as a child…”

“YOU MEAN I’M NOT NOW?”

“If anything, you stayed adorable and grew handsome.”

Frisk applauded.

They hadn’t even been noticed.

“hey, kid. you want somethin’?”

<<I’m just here to take Cactus Everdeen to my room. But then I saw a small Papyrus trapped in a vending machine and decided to…stick around.>>

Sans laughed. Papyrus made a face and crawled onto the floor in the fetal position while making a sound that reminded one of a kettle about to boil over. Mettaton giggled at the sheer contrast between the brothers.

“Sounds like everyone’s having fun in here! I’m almost tempted to not tell you all that dinner is ready!”

Frisk jumped up like they’d just won the lottery. They started to run into the dining room.

<<Come on! Mom reheated the prime rib and made some rolls!>>

Sans chuckled, following them into the kitchen.

“come on, you two. food waits for no one.”

Mettaton stood up. He looked down at Papyrus.

“Need a little help there, Sugar Skull?”

Mettaton didn’t wait for an answer before grabbing his boyfriend by the hand and pulling him up with ease. Skeletons are really light…

“Come on, Papy! I REALLY love that prime rib…”

Papyrus smiled at him.

__________________________________________
*BING-BONG*

*ATTENTION PASSENGERS. UNITED AIRLINES FLIGHT 475 TO EBOTT IS NOW BOARDING.*

“YEEEES!”

“Finally.”
The entire flight crew left the plane.

“Dad.”

“Yes, Caroline?”

“Why are the flight attendants getting off the plane?”

“The crew is being switched out.”

“How long does it usually take?”

“Less than an hour.”

“That’s a lot of potential minutes.”

“Yes.”

They were silent.

“Wanna play Tetris?”

“Okay.”

“You made a bad decision, Mom.”

“Yeah, I know, Levi. I’ve known since since the FIRST ten times you told me.”

“It’s your fault we’re in airplane jail.”

“I know, Levi.”

Sharona and Levi sat in the airport holding cell. This was bad. This was very, very bad.

Levi was getting restless.

He turned to the security guard who locked them up. He was a completely different security guard from the last one.

“Hey, uh, mister?”

“Whaddaya want, kid?”

“Can I please have my 3DS back?”

“No.”

“Okay…”

Levi sat back down.

He tapped his fingers on the bench.

Cold air doesn’t do much to help a scalded tongue.
Miranda is learning this the hard way.

“Miranda, sweetie, I TOLD you to blow on it first!”

Miranda just glared at her mother. Diana paid no attention, being fully engrossed in her Candy Crush game.

Diana had sent a notification to Linda asking her to play about twenty minutes ago. She hadn’t responded.

Miranda loved her mother, she really did. But her mother was kind of extremely needy.

Miranda attempted another sip of her soy caramel mocha latte.

She squeaked. Still too hot.

“Miranda, come on. Let’s go. You have a sleepover to get to.”

Miranda grabbed her purse and her mocha latte.

She and Naomi and Olive were going to come up with a name for their clique tonight and watch some movies.

She had SO many plans…

The dinner table was as awkward as could be expected when one of the family members brought home a significant other.

The little family plus one Mettaton sat in relative silence.

Someone coughed. No one was sure who, and no one was quite comfortable enough to ask.

“So,” Mettaton started uncertainly, “just how many years difference between you and Papyrus, Sans?”

“eh, ‘bout nine years.”

“NINE YEARS AND ONE MONTH, ACTUALLY.”

“ah, yeah, right.”

“So that would mean that Sans is…”

“30 years old, yeah.”

<<I thought you were in your twenties!>> Frisk signed in amazement.

“As did I, honestly,” Toriel said.

“sorry i’m older than you guys thought i was?”

<<It’s fine. Just don’t do it again.>>

“i’ll try.”

Another brief silence.
“I’m going to Chicago for a magazine interview on the eighteenth!” Mettaton chimed.

“oh, that’s cool.”

“I WAS INVITED TO COME ALONG.”

The silence after that one was intensely heavy.

“please explain.”

“You see, what happened was, we were on our date back on the 21st, and I was approached by a reporter for Modern Review magazine, have you heard of it?”

“where are you going with this?”

“THE REPORTER LADY ASKED IF I WAS ABLE TO JOIN HIM. I SAID I’D CONSIDER IT.”

Another awkward silence.

“well?”

“WELL, WHAT?”

“do you wanna go?”

Yet another silence.

“Y-YES, OF COURSE. WHY -?”

“bro, you’re old enough to do things like that. just let someone know where ya are and it’ll be fine by me.”

Papyrus seemed overwhelmed.

“T-THANK YOU, BROTHER…”

“no problem, bro.”

Frisk smiled at the scene before them.

Frisk couldn’t see it, but the Void smiled back.

They were filled with determination.

FILE: SAVED.

“I see my suitcase. Yours is right behind it.”

“Alright. Let’s go.”

Caroline and Randy grabbed their suitcases.

Randy got out his phone and tapped Sharona’s number in the contacts.

He held the receiver to his bearded face.
“Hey, how - who the fuck is this?”

“Dad, no fuck words. I’m literally nine years old.”

“I’m sorry, what? Yeah, that explains the felled ficuses. Okay. Yeah, that sounds good. I mean, it’s not like we can be any more off-schedule due to nonexistent circumstances.”

Randy hung up.

“What happened?”

“Sharona and Levi are in jail for kicking trees. They have a tram coming to take us to them.”

Caroline just stared blankly.

“I’m gonna need details.”

Sharona and the old security guard watched as Levi climbed the cell door bars and growled and shook at them as though they would budge if he did his best King Kong impression.

“He’s been doing this for ten minutes. How much longer can he keep this up?”

Sharona shrugged. “His record’s about two hours.”

“Ma’am, your son is crazy.”

“I know.”

“Sharona!”

“Randy!”

Randy ran up to the cell door after the guard unlocked it.

Randy hugged Sharona and kissed her. “Thank GOD you’re okay!”

“Mmmmm…”

Randy and Sharona looked at the cell door. Levi was still attached, shaking the bars and gnawing at them.

“Levi, you can stop climbin’. We’re bustin’ outta here.”

Levi’s growls and gnaws slowed.

He tried to jump off. His foot was stuck between the bars.

Miranda, Naomi, and Olive were watching Barbie: A Fairy Secret. As soon as Olive’s mom left on her date with...whoever she’s dating this week, they’d browse Netflix for movies that were NOT for babies.

Then the doorbell rang.

“Bye, girls! I’m off! Have fun!”
“Bye, mom.”

“Bye, Ms. Olbermann.”

And then after giving Olive a quick kiss on the cheek, she left.

Miranda started giving demands.

“Alright. What have you two got?”

Naomi and Olive stared at her blankly.

“The name ideas for our clique? Duh?”

“Ohhhh,” the other girls said in unison.

“Why don’t you come up with it?” Olive said. “It was your idea.”

“And besides!” Naomi added, sensing Miranda’s anger. “You could probably come up with a better name than either of us ever could!”

Miranda calmed down.

“Okay,” Miranda said. “I mean, I really wanted us all to do this together, but whatever! It’s fine.”

Naomi and Olive looked guilty.

Just what Miranda wanted.

“I guess we’re calling ourselves the Pretty Committee.”

“I like it!” Naomi said.

“Yeah, it rhymes!” Olive agreed.

Miranda rolled her eyes. Olive was such a dumb blonde. But that just made her more likely to do as Miranda says. She was also home alone more often, making her house the go-to place for unsupervised sleepovers.

Naomi was the smart one. But she had such poor self esteem that she didn’t use it much. Also she had a cute older cousin. Not as cute as Brian, but still.

“Okay! First on the agenda, 4Teens Magazine quizzes! So, ladies, which Justin Bieber song is about us?”


Frisk took the plates into the living room on a tray big enough to fit all five of them.

They set the tray on the coffee table and passed around the plates.

If Toriel noticed her Gingerbread Sans, she didn’t show it.

Frisk sat down with their plate of cookies between their uncle and dunkle.

The silence was only broken by the crunching of cookies.
Frisk tried to feed Flowey their peanut butter cookie. He ate the cookie with his face to the ceiling, letting gravity do its thing.

And they thought Sans was a messy eater.

More silence.

“Will one of you idiots just SAY something already?!”

“something already.”

Flowey glared daggers at Sans.

“hey, you asked.”

“I heard a mention of blasters earlier in one of the videos...?”

“oh, yeah. gaster blasters. family thing. like guard pets.”

“GUARD PETS THAT SHOOT LAZERS!”

“yep. they also double as pest control.”

“DO YOU WANNA SEE THEM, METTATON?”

Mettaton was slightly nervous.

“don’t worry yer bolts, mtt. the blasters are pretty docile outside of battle situations.”

Mettaton relaxed somewhat. “Alright, why not?”

Frisk clapped. They loved the Blasters.

“Wait!”

Everyone turned their attention to Toriel, the source of the statement.

“If we’re going to play with the Blasters, do so outside. I do NOT want to by another floor lamp again.”

And with that, they walked into the backyard. The garden was covered in snow still, and a half-melted snow...person sat in the middle of the yard.

With a sound like bass synthesizers, two blasters materialized. The force of the Magic that had allowed them to materialize caused small craters in the dead grass beneath them and the rest of the snowperson to melt.

They were a bit taller than Papyrus. They were also literally giant, floating animal skulls.

And they were just chilling out. One of them was snoring. Mettaton naturally assumed that one to be Sans’.

“SANS, YOU KNOW JUICE IS GETTING ON IN YEARS!”

“yep. but she doesn’t get out much anymore, and she’s one of the calmer ones, so i thought ‘why the heck not?’.”
Papyrus sighed in exasperation.


Magneto glanced at Mettaton. He seemed to be sizing him up.

Magneto slowly moved up toward Mettaton until he was about three feet in front of him. He huffed.

Mettaton looked at Papyrus. Papyrus could see how nervous he was.

“GO ON! HE WANTS YOU TO PET HIM!”

“Oh. Okay.”

Mettaton reached out. Magneto moved his muzzle toward Mettaton’s outstretched palm.

Contact was made.

“SEE? HE LIKES YOU!”

“He does? I mean, who doesn’t?”

Papyrus simply smiled. He reached out to pet Magneto as well.

Magneto moved closer to Mettaton with a slight growl.

“HEY! HE’S MY BOYFRIEND, NETO, NOT YOURS!”

Mettaton giggled. He scratched the Blaster’s jaw. Magneto purred in response.

Frisk and Sans were sitting on top of Juice. Juice just laid there. She’d been around since Sans was five. She was very used to being climbed on, and it showed.

Toriel watched the scene before her with a smile on her face as she nibbled on the Gingerbread Sans.

Levi pouted.

He’d managed to sprain his right elbow and break his nose while jumping from the cell bars. An ambulance was called. People were shouting. Caroline had a meltdown. It was pretty bad.

She was a lot calmer now that they were back at home.

She was hugging one of her books close to her chest and sitting cross-legged on the couch while rocking back and forth on her haunches and clawing at her left shoulder.

Levi felt guilty.

“Hey, Caroline?”

Caroline looked up toward him.

“Are doing okay?”

Caroline nodded. She pointed at Levi.
Levi guessed that this meant that she was asking him if he was doing okay.

“My elbow hurts and my nose feels weird, but other than that I’m good.”

Caroline seemed to relax a bit. Her rocking motions slowed.

“Need ice?” she asked. Her voice was still rasping slightly, and far quieter than usual.

“Yeah, sure.”

Caroline went to the freezer and got out an ice pack.

She gave it to him. Levi put the ice in his arm sling.

Caroline opened her book and began to read.

She’d read this book before. Twice, actually. But hey. It was one of her favorites.

Diana resented the Candy Crush notification to Linda. And a Farmville one was sent to Helen.

She was playing Temple Run when high-pitched yipping sounds started up.

Diana huffed in frustration. She downed the rest of her wine went to the room the sounds were coming from.

She opened the door and picked up the black teacup yorkie poo with the red ribbon around its neck.

"Come on, Cherry, let's go..."

She sat back down on the chaise lounge after refilling her glass and continued playing Temple Run with the little doggy next to her.

She almost didn’t notice the dog lapping up her wine.

Mettaton returned home that evening with a smile on his face. He’d learned a lot about both Papyrus and Sans this evening.

He’d meant to ask about their father as well, but something stopped him. He wasn’t quite sure what it was, but it felt like...like someone was listening in.

But no one was there. Mettaton, being a Ghost Monster, would have known if there was a Ghost or the like there.

He sighed. Maybe he could ask Papyrus while they were in Chicago…

And then it truly registered.

He was actually going on a trip with Papyrus. Alone. With Papyrus. Just the two of them.

Mettaton ran up to his bedroom, jumped onto his bed, and screamed into one of the many useless decorative pillows while thrashing around in pure, unadulterated glee before stopping while on his back and hugging the pillow to his chest with a goofy smile on his face.

Every little thing about Mettaton’s relationship with Papyrus was completely unlike ANY of his prior relationships. For obvious and not-so-obvious reasons.
Obviously, they hadn’t gone much further than making out and flirting. Mettaton wasn’t really sure Papyrus was even into sex and the like. He’d never really brought it up. Oddly enough, Mettaton was fine with this.

But one of the biggest differences was that there was nothing to be gained by either of them. All of Mettaton’s prior partners stood to gain something from him, and he from them. With Papyrus, there was no discernible rhyme or reason as to why they were together, and yet here they were.

And Mettaton had never been quite this happy.

He fell asleep thinking of things to do in Chicago with Papyrus.

Flowey sat upon the windowsill in Frisk’s bedroom - his usual place. But something was off.

Next to Flowey was a potted cactus. Flowey glared at it.

“I’m onto you, Cactus Everdeen. Whatever it is you’re plotting, it will. Not. Stand. Do you understand?”

Cactus Everdeen said nothing. She was too busy being a cactus.

Flowey took this for intimidation. “That’s what I thought.”

The relief of the holiday season being over at last fills you with

DETERM IN AT ION

Chapter End Notes

This song title is from I Need A Silent Night by Amy Grant.

Hey! If you guys have questions, go ahead and ask! I'll answer them unless spoilers are involved.
Happy New Year

Chapter by Spazzin

Chapter Summary

Science, songs, sibling squabbles, and secret stuff.

Just another day with these guys.

Or is it...?

Chapter Notes

All of this is...muh.
There's a lot going on here. Just a warning.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

10:29 A.M., December 31st, 201Z

It's a beautiful day outside.

The sun is shining.

The wind chill is slightly above freezing.

On days like this, kids like you...

...are going to have a New Year's party with your friends and family.

"Are we there yet?"

"No, Flowey, we are not there yet. We have about five more minutes."

"You said that FIVE MINUTES AGO!"

Frisk swatted Flowey. Toriel had said no such thing and Flowey knew it.

"HEY! Frisk hit me!"

"Did they, Sans?"

"sorry, i was sleepin’.”
And there you have it.

Frisk, MK, and Flowey sat in the backseat of Toriel’s van, and Toriel and Sans sat in the front. Not minivan, van. Toriel’s height made minivans look like four-door sedans next to her.

It took them four more minutes to arrive at the Ebott Science Museum.

They parked their vehicle. The museum was not as full as usual due to the holidays.

Frisk was filled with DETERMINATION.

FILE: SAVE.

They walked through the front doors and got their tickets. Randy, Sharona, Levi, Caroline, Monica, Theo, Penelope, Helen, Brian, Hunter, and Hannah were already there.

“looks like we made it on time.”

“No, you guys’re late,” Theo said.

“But maybe we were all early,” Caroline said, “didja think of that?”

Theo just looked at Caroline like she was crazy.

“Caroline, don’t wax philosophic,” Randy chided, “it scares children and the less intelligent.”

“I’m not a kid, I’m eleven!”

Caroline just stared at him.

“Theo,” Penelope said, “You do realize that by saying that you’re not a kid, you called yourself stupid?”

“Yeah, you - you really did,” Hunter added nervously.

Theo glared at all of them. “Buncha brats…”

“Theodore, you’re the one whining and complaining about having to be here,” Monica said.

“That’s cuz I’m old enough to stay at home!”

“No until I say so, you’re not.”

“Is there a bookshop here?” Caroline asked.

“it’s in with the gift shop.”

“Okay. Sounds cool.”

“so, levi, you broke yer nose and sprained yer elbow in airplane jail.”

Levi glared at him. He had a splint on his nose and a sling holding his arm.

“Now!” Toriel said, “Shall we get started?”

The kids that weren’t Theo cheered.
Toriel giggled at their enthusiasm. “Alright, then! Everyone, follow Sans!”

Sans nearly spat out the ketchup he was drinking from his thermos. “really, wha -”

He looked at the group of kids that weren’t Theo. They all looked so...eager. It was kind of adorable.

He chuckled a bit. “okay, okay, settle down. i’m dr. sans, and i’ll be your tour guide for the day. if any of you little boogers have questions fer me about anything, don’t hesitate to ask. no such thing as stupid questions, only stupid people, and stupid people are only stupid because they don’t wanna learn. now c’mon. we got science to look at.”

Everyone stuck together, although Hannah had to have Hunter hold her hand so she wouldn’t wander off to look at every little thing that caught her eye. It kind of reminded Sans of when Papyrus was little and wandered off on little adventures while he and their dad were busy…

First up on the list was the giant dinosaur skeleton.

“All right, kids,” Sans said. “we’re gonna play a little game. what type of food does this dinosaur eat?”

All of them raised their hands.

“All right, Hannah. what does this guy eat?”

“People!”

The kids laughed while the adults were a bit surprised and yet amused.

“Well, it is about the right size. but how do you know?”

Sans was indeed challenging her. He was challenging a five-year-old to tell him how she knows a dinosaur eats meat.

“His teef are big an’ pointy!”

Sans chuckled in surprise. “that’s right! nice job, kid!”

Caroline was jumping up and down with her hand raised.

“Yeah, Caroline?”

“Is this a tyrannosaurus or an allosaurus?”

Everyone looked at her.

“The heck is an allosaurus?” Brian asked.

“It’s like a t-rex but smaller,” Caroline said.

“Then what’s the difference?” Theo asked.

“That’s kinda why I’m asking…”

“Y’know, that’s a good question. thing is, biology ain’t really my thing. i’m more of a physics guy myself. i’ll ask someone with experience in the field of things that are alive.”

He got out his phone and sent a Facetime notification to Alphys. She picked up.
“W-what is it, Sans?”

“okay, alphys, me an’ a bunch of kids - hold on, lemme change perspective -”

Sans changed the perspective so that the kids and the dinosaur were in the shot.

Hannah waved and said hi.

“okay, so our question is, what the heck kinda dinosaur is that?”

“O-oh, it’s an allosaurus fragilis. Allosaurus teeth are smaller in proportion to the skull than those of the tyrannosaurus rex, and the allosaurus is also s-smaller.”

The kids oohed and aahed at this. Hannah clapped.

“alright, thank you, dr. alphys. you have sated the curiosity of many a child this day.”

“No problem. see ya at mtt’s this evenin’.”

“O-okay! Y-you too! Bye!”

“bye.” And with that he hung up.

“okay. moving on.”

And on they moved. From exhibit to exhibit they moved, like a family of ducklings following a Skeleton.

They reached a room with many oddly-shaped metal objects and a glass ball with streaks of lightning emanating from a core inside of it.

“okay, you little weirdos can run around and enjoy. if ya got any questions for me, i’ll be right here.”

The kids weren’t exactly certain what to do/look at/touch first.

Brian walked up to a structure resembling a small cell tower. The sign said that it was...uh…

“Hey, Hunter, c’mere for a sec!”

Hunter ran over to Brian and the object.

“Can ya...tell me what this says?”

Brian’s dyslexia was a bit difficult to work with, and frustrating for a lot of people, himself included. But it was workable with help.

“It says it’s a...Tesla coil,” Hunter explained. “You press the button right there and sparks come out.”

Brian pressed the button. What came out of the top of the coils was more than just sparks.

“Whoa, AWESOME! Hey, everyone, check this out!”

The other kids came over.
“What’s up?” Levi asked.

“That’s a Tesla coil,” Caroline said.

“Yep! Watch THIS!”

Brian pressed the button.

“Whoa.”

“Cool!”

Caroline went back to what she was doing, which was going around the exhibits and reading about them.

She made it to the glass ball full of lightning in the center of the room.

Plasma ball. It literally said to touch it and see what happens.

Caroline poked it with her right index finger. A pulse of lightning came over to meet where her finger touched the glass.

Caroline retracted her finger, holding it close to her. She reached out to touch it again.

This time she used her whole hand.

She used the other hand as well.

This was awesome.

Hmmm…

Caroline remembered the movie she and her dad had watched a few days earlier. There were a few parts her dad had to cover her eyes for - “They’re really really scary, yeah, that’s it!” - but she saw all the important parts.

And remembered the important words.

What she was about to do was gonna feel SO cool.

She straightened her body and closed her eyes. She recalled the chant - the Charm Of Making, it had been called - and whispered under her breath...

“Anál nathrach, orth’ bháis’s bethad, do chél dénmha.”

There was a flick and a crash.

Caroline opened her eyes. When had the power gone out?

Toriel used her Fire Magic to create light.

After everyone had calmed down about five minutes later, Randy had announced that the entire block was without power. It didn’t say why, just that an entire city block was without power.

Caroline whispered the words under her breath again.

The power returned.
Caroline was pretty sure it was just a coincidence. A very, very cool coincidence, but a coincidence nonetheless.

“Who wants lunch?” Helen asked in an attempt to defuse the tension created by the sudden power surge. “I’m buying.”

There was an agreement that lunch was a necessity.

Penelope had noticed that Caroline seemed anxious.

“Hey, you okay, Care?” Penelope asked.

Caroline nodded. “I’m fine. It just startled me is all.”

“I know! It came completely out of nowhere!”

“I was touching the plasma ball when it went out.”

“What’s the plasma ball?”

“That globe in the middle of the room that had lightning in it.”

“Oh, that? What did it do?”

“When I touched it, the lightnings moved to where I was touching it.”

“Whoooaa! That sounds COOL!”

“I guess. The sudden power outage was kind of shocking though...”

Penelope saw Caroline’s little smirk. She giggled at the pun, causing Caroline to giggle as well.

“You GOTTA tell Miss Toriel and Dr. Sans that one! If you want to, I mean.”

Caroline seemed to think about it. “Okay. Um, can you join me, Nell? I’m kinda nervous about doing it on my own...”

Penelope smiled. “Sure!”

Caroline grabbed the hood of Penelope’s hoodie as they went to find Sans and Toriel.

Sans was sucking on a ketchup packet, and Toriel was eating some potato chips. They were both laughing about something. Frisk was next to Toriel. They had their usual vacant expression on their face as they munched on their cheeseburger. MK sat across from them eating their grilled cheese.

MK was the first to notice Caroline and Penelope coming toward them.

“Hey, Caroline! Hey, Penelope!”

“Hey MK! Hey Frisk! Hey Miss Toriel! Hey Dr. Sans!”

“Hello! What did you two need?”

“We have a joke! Well, actually it’s Caroline’s, but whatever!”

Caroline was suddenly nervous.
But she breathed in and out.

"The power went out while I was touching the plasma ball."

"wow, really?"

Caroline nodded. "It was pretty shocking ."

That did it. The laughter of the adults and the two children was loud enough that one of the museum workers had to shush them.

"that - that was impressive, caroline. not bad."

"Although," Toriel said, "I do wonder how much they'll end up being... charged for damages!"

The adults laughed even more.

"tori, i'm positive that it doesn’t really matter."

They laughed again. They continued making electricity jokes.

Frisk and MK got up to toss out their trash and leave the adults to their lovey-dovey time that wasn’t really lovey-dovey at all because they STILL weren’t together.

Caroline and Penelope had left as soon as they realized that they had created a disaster with Caroline’s apparently-too-brilliant pun.

Their food was still waiting for them.

Sort of.

"Theo," Penelope said, her voice low with anger. "Give me back my fries."

Theo smirked. "I don’t HAVE your fries."

"That’s because you ate them," Levi said.

"Wh - ya little snitch!"

"I’m only a little snitch when it involves french fries. I can keep a secret, but french fries are where I draw the line."

"What kind of stupid -"

Theo didn’t finish his sentence before Penelope socked him in the face.

3:48 P.M. They should be here in about ten minutes…

The decorations were up. The activities were ready for playing. The food and drinks were set out. He was even on 100 percent charge. There was NOTHING else to do as far as Mettaton could see.

Normally, that would be a problem because he’d be forced to stand around bored. But this year was different because he had a diversion. And by diversion he meant boyfriend.

They sat on a couch in the parlor snuggling. Mettaton laid with his head on a pillow on Papyrus’ lap - Skeleton laps aren’t good for sitting or laying on, you know - while Papyrus read a book. He loved
himself some Agatha Christie - Hercule Poirot was his favorite.

Mettaton looked up at Papyrus as he read Death On The Nile. Papyrus looked very handsome in his reading glasses. He was handsome no matter what, really, but the glasses gave him a sort of...sophistication. When Papyrus read, he moved his mouth as he did so - Mettaton found it fun to try and guess what he was reading using this little quirk of his. But right now Mettaton contented himself with gazing at Papyrus as he read.

He was so engrossed in Papyrus that the feeling of phalanges running through his hair made him flinch.

“DID I STARTLE YOU? SORRY ABOUT THAT.”

“No, no, it’s perfectly fine. I’m the one who was distracted by the sexy…”

“NYEH HEH, WERE YOU NOW? I DIDN’T NOTICE…I MEAN, I WAS QUITE…” Papyrus ran a hand up Mettaton’s leg at this. “…DISTRACTED MYSELF, TO BE TRUTHFUL…”

Well. Welly well well well well.

Well.

“Well, then, that must be a very good book you’re reading!”

“INDEED IT IS! IT HAS DANGER, ROMANCE, AN EXOTIC SETTING...IT’S ABSOLUTELY AMAZING!”

Mettaton chuckled. “It sounds like it! One of these days we simply MUST watch Murder She Wrote!”

Papyrus quirked a brow ridge at this. “WHAT IS THAT? IT SOUNDS INTERESTING.”

Mettaton moved so that he was sitting on Papyrus’ lap rather than laying down.

“Alright, alright, so you know Angela Lansbury?”

Papyrus squinted in confusion. “I DON’T...THINK SO?”

“She voiced Mrs. Potts in Beauty And The Beast, and had roles in Blue Hawaii and The Manchurian Candidate. She also played the title role in the original Broadway production of Mame. Ooh, AND she was in the film adaptation of the book you’re reading right now!”

“OOH, REALLY? WHO’D SHE PLAY?”

“Salome Otterbourne.”

“OH! SHE ALREADY DIED, THEN.”

There was a brief silence.

“IN THE BOOK, I MEAN.”

“Ahhh. You had me worried there, sweetie!” Mettaton kissed Papyrus on the cheekbone.

“NYEH HEH, SORRY.”
“Oh, it’s quite alright, Sugar Skull~”

Mettaton seductively removed Papyrus’ glasses and placed them on the end table before he kissed him on the teeth. Papyrus responded by closing his alveolar processes into pseudo-lips, as he always did.

He set his book down on the side table so his hands could move around more.

Papyrus and Mettaton never needed something as silly as an excuse to be intimate. They were affectionate Monsters by nature who were extremely proud of both each other and themselves - why SHOULDN’T they show off their love for each other?

As soon as Papyrus’ hands were free of Hercule Poirot, the doorbell rang.

The couple groaned at having lost freedom.

“You get it.”

“How can I possibly get it when I’m trapped under a bunch of boyfriend?”

Mettaton chuckled. “True, true. I’ll be right back.”

Mettaton kissed Papyrus’ nasal bridge and stood to open the front door.

Every one of the guests was at the gate.

Mettaton waved at them and opened the gate.

Frisk, Sans, and Toriel entered first.

“Hello, Mettaton!”

“Hey.”

<<Hi, Uncle Metta!>>

Frisk hugged Mettaton.

“Hello, everyone! Do come in! Everything’s been set up, karaoke’s in the rec room, food’s in the kitchen on the counters! The theatre is open for anyone who wants to watch movies - oh my god, what happened to Levi and that other kid?”

The other kid was Theo with a black eye.

“Levi sprained his elbow and broke his nose after getting put in an airport jail cell for kicking ficus, and Theo here got socked in the face by his sister for stealing her fries,” Sans explained.

“Undyne would be proud,” Mettaton deadpanned.

“No one steals MY fries and gets away with it,” Penelope said. “Totally worth being grounded…”

“They weren’t even good fries…” Theo grumbled.

“We’re in a castle…” Hannah marveled.

“And I’m the king, Hannah dear~!”
“And I thought my sister’s townhouse was huge…” Randy muttered.

“See, I know you’re talking about Kathy because you mentioned the words ‘townhouse’ and ‘huge’,” Sharona said.

“Hey, Randy,” Levi said, “When can we see your family?”

“We’ll be visiting them for spring break in Fort Lauderdale.”

“Where the heck is Fort Lauderdale?” Brian asked.

“It’s a coastal city in Florida just to the north of Miami,” Caroline said. “Uncle George and Aunt Kathy have a yacht there.”

“Your aunt has a yacht?” Hunter asked.

“What the heck is a yacht?” Theo asked.

“I think it’s a game with dice or somethin’,” Penelope said.

“Yes, but a yacht is also a kind of boat for rich people,” Hunter said. “My mom wants a yacht.”

“Your mom also wants a mansion in Paris, but that’s not gonna happen,” Brian said.

“A yacht’s still more likely than a French mansion.”

“Helen, please don’t tell Linda about my sister-in-law’s yacht,” Sharona asked. “I wanna be able to brag about it after spring break.”

“Sounds fair,” Helen conceded. “Who wouldn’t brag about knowing someone who owns a yacht?”

“Someone who owns a bigger yacht, I guess,” Monica joked.

“Got me there.”

“Uh, Mettaton, where’s the rec room at?” Hunter asked.

“How about I show you?” Mettaton offered.

“O-okay!”

“C’n I come too?” Hannah asked.

“Of COURSE, sweetheart!”

“I’m comin’, too,” Brian said.

<<I’ll join!>> Frisk signed.

“Me too!” MK said.

“Same here!” Levi said. “I won’t sing, but I’ll watch.”

“I...guess I’ll join you guys,” Caroline mused. “I dunno how this works, but I’ll figure it out.”

“If Caroline’s goin’ then I will too!” Penelope said.
“Alright, beauties, follow me!”

And off they went.

Randy watched in surprise. He’d never seen Caroline so...willing to join people in her age group in their activities. Even if said activity involved books she’d find a way to avoid interpersonal contact. Preferably with a book or five.

Randy sighed. His little girl was growing up. She was starting to come into her own, as the phrasing supposedly went.

It was amazing what a change in company could do for one’s mentality.

“Welp. I’m gonna find a place to sit ‘n read.”

“I’m guessing Caroline inherited her obsession with books from you?” Helen quipped.

Randy smiled proudly and nodded. “A healthier obsession than books does not exist anywhere else in the world.”

“A very true statement indeed,” Toriel said in agreement.

“Wait,” Sharona said, “The presents are still in the car.”

“Shit, you’re right,” Randy mumbled. “I’ll be right back, I’m goin’ out to the car to get the presents.”

“I’ll go get ours too while I’m at it,” Helen said.

“HELLO, EVERYONE!” Papyrus chimed as he entered. “WHAT’S THIS I HEAR ABOUT PRESENTS AND SANS WILL YOU PLEASE STOP SLEEPING ON THE FLOOR?”

“okay.”

“Hey, Papyrus! How’ve you been?” Sharona said.

“HELLO SHARONA! I’VE BEEN QUITE WELL, ACTUALLY! METTATON AND I ARE GOING TO CHICAGO ON THE EIGHTEENTH!”

“Ooh, nice! Randy just went back out the car to get the presents he and Caroline got for everyone in Colorado!”

“WOWIE! THANK YOU!”

Sharona laughed. “Don’t thank ME, it was all Caroline’s idea!”

“Well, then, when I find her I’ll thank her! And Sans, I said get off the floor!”

“okay.”

Toriel rolled her eyes with a mixture of exasperation and affection. “I’ve got this.”

Toriel deftly picked Sans up. Sans’ smile suddenly became a strange mixture of smug and internally screaming despite not even moving an inch. It made one wonder if this was his plan all along.
The door opened once again. “Aaand we’re back. Hey, Papyrus. Alphys and Undyne just got parked and are on their way in.”

“HELLO, RANDY! THANK YOU FOR LETTING ME KNOW! I’LL GO ASK METTATON WHERE YOU SHOULD PUT THE PRESENTS!”

“Thanks.”

“Hey Papyrus.”

“HEY, HELEN!”

“The kids are in the rec room with Mettaton if you’re wondering.”

“THANK YOU! I CAN’T BELIEVE I MISSED THEM…”

“Depends on what you were doing, I’d think,” Randy said.

“Can we PLEASE set these damn things down? My arms are starting to hurt,” Helen grunted.

“I got it!”

Helen’s load was lightened by Undyne. “Want me to take yours too, Randy?”

“Nah, I’ve carried bigger loads for longer than this. Still do sometimes.”

“A-are you SURE you’re a software technician?” Alphys said.

“Well, most of the time. Back in Colorado I did some backpacking and hiking and emergency rescue work.”

“Seriously? Cool!”

“In Silverton it snows semi-constantly from October to May. That shit is absolutely necessary for ensured survival.”

“REALLY? WHERE SANS AND I LIVED BACK IN THE UNDERGROUND IT SNOWED MORE THAN THAT!”

“yeah, but it always stayed at like six inches no matter what.”

Randy just stared. “That sounds creepy.”

“That actually sounds perfect…” Monica mused.

“Exactly. It sounds perfect. No matter how hard it snows, six inches of perfect white. Something that, according to ALL laws of meteorology, be impossible!” Randy stated.

“Then there’s the whole underground thing…” Helen said.

“No, there are some cave systems large enough to have entire ecosystems. The meteorological events are probably magical in nature, so it’s not that much of a stretch.”

There was some silence.

“I changed my major multiple times, and one of those majors was in environmental science,” Randy said.
“Ah yeah,” Sharona said in realization, “a few months after we’d started writing each other you’d just changed your major from that to -”

“- category theory, yeah!”

“I have no idea how me offering to carry your stuff led to how you met your wife,” Undyne said.

“If you think that’s weird, I had a conversation with Caroline about why you shouldn’t insult people that eventually led to us googling the Tetris theme song.”

“i had a talk with frisk about how i met tori that led to wondering why ross and rachel didn’t even try to work things out between them,” Sans interjected.

“Because the series should have ended after the seventh season,” Monica said.

There was another brief silence.

“OH MY GOD YOU’RE RIGHT.”

The kids were in the rec room. Mettaton had explained how to set up the karaoke system before leaving. Brian was the one who successfully got it up and working, to the amazement of the others.

“Who’s goin’ first?” Brian asked.

“I’ll go, I guess,” Caroline said. “Get one I really wanna do outta the way.”

“Okay. Shoot.”

Caroline breathed in and out. The randomizer picked her song. She had to admit, Mettaton had very appreciable musical tastes. Unsurprising considering his love of the fine arts.

Yeah. Focus on anything but the people watching you.

Time to sing.

“Sweet dreams are made of these~  Who am I to disagree~  Travel the world and the seven seas~  Everybody’s lookin’ for somethin’~”


“Some of them want to use you~  Some of them want to get used by you~  Some of them want to abuse you~  Some of them want to be abused~”

Caroline dropped the mic and sat down on the carpet in front of the couch.

Everyone was applauding her, but she paid them no heed in favor of her book, as she was wont to do in most if not all situations.

“Wow, Caroline, you’re pretty good!” one of the group members said. Which one it was, Caroline was uncertain. She gave a hum of indifference in response.

“Who next?” Brian asked.

“Levi, you’re up!” Penelope said.

“Okay! What’m I singin’?”
“The Shoop Shoop Song, parentheses, It’s In His Kiss, by...Churr?” Penelope said. “The heck is Churr?”

“It’s Cher, actually,” Hunter said.

“Oh.”

“Oh come ON! I wanna SING already!” Levi whined.

“Okay, geez,” Brian mumbled before he pressed play.

The song started.

“How can I tell if he loves me so~”

The way Levi sang came across as goofy, like he wasn’t being serious about it. That’s because he wasn’t. He didn’t want to sing, he wanted to make everyone laugh. At least for this particular song.

“Whoa hug him~  And squeeze him tight~  Find out what you wanna know~  If it’s love, if it really is~  It’s there in his kiiiiIIIIIISSSS~”

The obviously-forced falsetto ensured Levi’s success in that endeavor. By the end of the song everyone had failed to hold back their laughter.

It took a bit for the group to calm down enough to think clearly.

“Next!”

Penelope was quiet,

“Well? Who’s next?”

“Frisk.”

“Can...can she even talk?”

“Frisk is a they, Brian,” MK corrected.

“Crud, sorry. Slipped again.”

<<It’s fine! You’ve been getting better at remembering! And besides, I’ve been feeling more verbal for a while now anyway. So why not?>>

“Oh. Okay then. What song’re they doing?”

“Once Upon A December from Anastasia.”

“Never heard of it,” Brian said.

“It’s a very pretty movie about a Russian princess, Anastasia!” Penelope said, stars in her eyes.

“It’s a cartoon movie loosely based on the true story of the massacre of the Romanov family of Russia by the Bolsheviks in 1918,” Caroline explained. “The key word being loosely. While the Dowager Empress Marie did survive for ten years after the massacre, Anastasia herself died along with her family. And Rasputin was killed two years before that, albeit after putting up one heck of a fight.”
Everyone stared at Caroline. She ignored them to continue reading her book.

“How the heck do you -”

“I read.”

More silence. They should have guessed.

“Aaaanyway,” Brian said, “Frisk, you ready?”

Frisk nodded.

“Are you sure, Frisk?” MK said, slightly worried. “You don’t have to if you don’t wanna, you know.”

“I want to.”

The voice was quiet. It was unfamiliar. But at the same time, it had a certain quality to it that was very, very assured in its course.

Frisk had spoken.

Everyone looked up at Frisk in surprise. Caroline glanced up briefly from her book, eyebrow cocked in fascination.

“I will sing,” They said with quiet conviction. “I...I am determined.”

Everyone stared at them. Frisk did not waver. They made their choice. When Frisk makes a choice, they will not change their mind.

Frisk stepped up to the microphone.

They were filled with DETERMINATION.

Frisk licked their lips. The music began.

“Dancing bears~ Painted wings~ Things I almost~ Remember~ And a song~ Someone sings~ Once upon a December~”

Frisk’s voice, while quiet, was very distinctive. Some voices are completely indistinguishable from each other. Frisk’s was not one of those voices.

“Someone holds me safe and warm~ Horses prance through a silver storm~ Figures dancing gracefully~ Across my memory~”

There are also voices that, when they perform a certain song, they don’t simply perform it - they become it. They take the song and transform it into their own. Frisk’s was one of those voices.

“Far away~ Long ago~ Glowing dim as an ember~ Things my heart~ Used to know~ Things it yearns to remember~”

During the rest, someone sniffled.

“And a song~ Someone sings~ Once upon a December~”

When the song ended, the sounds of sniffling and sobbing intermingled with applause. Frisk’s
performance was one of those performance where, while the person performing is of mediocre to average skill, something about the performance sparked an emotional response in the listener.

Frisk bowed before walking back to their spot on the couch, their face hidden.

But then they realized that their audience had nearly doubled while they had performed. The adults and Theo had come in during their performance without them realizing. They uncovered their face to look around, then hid it again, this time in Sans’ shoulder.

Sans was surprised by this gesture of affection for all of three and a half seconds before accepting his fate and wrapping his arm around the kid, rubbing their back.

He’d have to talk with Chara about why they were out later. But not now. After he had a little chat with his brother’s boyfriend. Mettaton was a tad overdue for a certain discussion. One offered by guardians to their ward’s significant others from the beginning of time. Oh how Sans awaited this discussion.

“Who all wants to join in?” Brian asked. “I’m passing around the randomizer, add your name in if you wanna join.”

Everyone added in their name save for Sharona and Helen. Helen because she was content to watch, Sharona because she was left incapable of singing after an incident during high school in which she accidentally swallowed a tongue piercing.

“Heck, you’re next,” Brian said.

“You’re singing - ooh, this one’s from Moana!” Penelope said.

“Moana?” Hunter asked. “My mom said we can’t see it.”

“Lemme guess, it’s because it’s pagan and if you see it God will hate you?” Brian said with none-too-subtle disdain.

Hunter shook his head. “Nevermind. It’s not important…”

But then he smirked. “Let’s DO this!”

The cheers from the audience spurred Hunter forward.

“Wait,” he said, “what’s it called?”

“What’s what called?” Penelope asked.

“The song I’m supposed to sing - right now, I mean.”

“Oh. It’s called How Far I’ll Go.”

“Oh. Okay then. NOW let’s do this.”

The play button was pressed.

Hunter inhaled. This was a new song to him. He wasn’t quite sure how well he’d do with it.

Here goes…

“I’ve been standing at the edge of the water~ Long as I can remember~ Never really knowing
why~ I wish I could be the perfect daughter~ But I come back to the water~ No matter how hard I try~”

No cringing as he sang the word ‘daughter’. No change in vocal inflection either. Hmm.

Mettaton watched Hunter’s performance carefully. He’d already displayed signs of musical talent despite a lack of proper training - not that Mettaton had had any either, he was self taught. But something about Hunter’s talent seemed...innate? He wasn’t quite sure what the word was that he was looking for.

“See the line where the sky meets the sea it calls me~ And no one knows~ How far it goes~ If the wind in my sail on the sea stays behind me~ One day I’ll know~ How far I’ll go~”

Well.

The applause was inevitable. No way it could ever be otherwise. It was so obviously going to happen that everyone was mentally prepared to applaud the minute they realized that Hunter was going to sing.

Mettaton was beyond impressed - it was already quite difficult to genuinely impress him. Not only was Hunter’s performance perfect from a technical standpoint, it was clear that, like Frisk’s performance, there was emotion and personal understanding behind it. Hunter empathized with the song. Mettaton was positive that had the audience been larger and unprepared, the applause would have been so wild that limbs flew off people’s’ bodies!

Technical performance was rare enough in any situation. But combined with emotional power on top of that? Mettaton was certain that this child had more than mere talent.

This child had a gift.

The other performances were lackluster in comparison until it was Papyrus’ turn. But then again Undyne was never meant to sing anything by Cyndi Lauper. Her tessitura was simply not that wide and her voice was not that high. And apparently the neighbors’ cocker spaniels were very much aware of that fact.

He’d have to apologize to Mary-Susan and Charlotte for that later. They were very sweet ladies. He’d have to take them up on their offer of joining their mahjong club for one of their sessions one of these days…

“OKAY, WHAT AM I SINGING?”

Penelope looked at the song randomizer. “Poison by Alice Cooper.”

“Huh,” Randy mused. “One the better ones from their later career.”

“very true. hey stoopid ain’t half bad either,” Sans said.

“Eh. I could go either way with that one, really.”

“Oh, man, I had Hey Stoopid on cassette!” Sharona said. “I blasted it on my boombox from my bedroom with the window open all summer long…”

“Can you guys stop talking about the eighties or whatever? I already got the next person chosen,” Brian said.
The silence following was a bit awkward with an air of mild offense. “It was the nineties…” Sharona mumbled.

“Okay, you ready, Papyrus?” Penelope said.

Papyrus nodded.

“Okay!”

The play button was clicked.

Thirty seconds of electric guitar presaged the lyrics.

“Your cruel~ Device~ Your blood~ Like ice~ One look~ Could kill~ My pain~ Your thrill~”

Drum roll.

“I want to love you but I better not touch~ I want to hold you but my senses tell me to stop~ I want to kiss you but I want it too much~ I want to taste you but your lips are perilous poison~”

Holy shit.

“You’re poison running through my veins~ You’re poison~ I don’t wanna break these chains~”

Oh god. Mettaton knew Papyrus could sing - he often favorably compared his voice to Dennis DeYoung and Neil Patrick Harris. But with this, he learned about Papyrus’ more metal side. Add Alice Cooper to the list of Artists Who Sound Like Papyrus.

The song’s end brought applause. Of course.

“Okay, someone mentioned food earlier?” Randy said.

“There is, food’s in the kitchen,” Mettaton said.

“Okay, but is it kosher?” Sharona asked.

“Yes, we do have kosher options,” Mettaton said.

“Wh- really? Wow, that’s - wow.”

“IS THERE SOMETHING ODD ABOUT THAT?”

“Well, considering most people are unwilling to check and see if something’s kosher, yeah, it’s - it’s kinda odd from a cultural standpoint,” Sharona explained.

“It’s a Human thing,” Caroline said, with some disdainful emphasis on the word Human. “A lot of Humans are unwilling to learn about new things because those things don’t apply to them, and sometimes they’re unwilling to make compromises with other Humans for various petty reasons.”

Everyone was quiet.

“My god I’ve raised a cynic,” Randy mused. “I’m both proud and...slightly disappointed in myself for that.”

Caroline smirked. “I learned from the best.”

Randy relaxed. “That - that makes it better. Slightly.”
“Okay, but what about FOOD?” Penelope said. “I mean, I didn’t exactly get any fries earlier, so I’m kinda hungry.”

“Oh my GOD, just let it GO already!” Theo said in exasperation.

“You stole my fries, Theodore FRANCIS,” Penelope said, making sure to add extra vitriol to Francis. “If you think I’m letting go of that, you’re a jerkface AND a moron.”

Theo glared at her. Penelope glared back.

When Penelope glared, something about her eyes made it extra creepy.

“You can stop now, geez,” Theo said. “Your eyes are ugly…”

“Momma, Theo said your eyes are ugly!”

“No, I said YOUR eyes are ugly!”

“I got Momma’s eyes, jerkface!”

“Theodore Francis and Penelope Michelle!”

Monica’s Angry Mom Voice silenced them immediately.

“I told you two a THOUSAND times now NOT to argue with each other! I get enough of it at home, but in public it just looks...UGH. WhatEVER. Just...just keep arguing. Go ahead. You both CLEARLY wanna leave early. Keep arguing. It’ll give me more reason.”

Penelope and Theo shrunk in slightly.

“Sorry Momma…”

“What she said…”

“I won’t argue anymore…”

“What she said…”

“Theo’s a stupid buttface…”

“What she said...HEY!”

“Okay, NOW I’m done.”

Monica facepalmed. “I am so sorry about them…”

Toriel giggled. “It’s quite alright. Siblings can be quite a handful. Particularly when they’re rather close in age…”

Sans chuckled. “well, then, pap, i’m guessin’ that dad musta been pretty glad for our huge age difference.”

“WE CAN ONLY HOPE.”

“Did EVERYONE here forget about the existence of FOOD in favor of family schmaltz?” Undyne said in exasperation.
“I did.”

“What the heck is schmaltz?”

Food was indulged. Hours passed smoothly. Now it was about an hour and a half til midnight.

Everyone had reached that point where talking about what they would be doing next year over drinks/

“Well, we’re going to Fort Lauderdale for spring break,” Randy said. “Other than that, everything else is up in the air.”

“My birthday’s comin’ up,” Caroline said. “We’re goin’ ice skating.”

“Really? When’s your b-day, eh, punk?” Undyne asked.

“I’ll be ten on February seventh.”

“Whaddaya want for your birthday?” Penelope asked.

“Books.”

There was a brief silence.

“Of course you want books,” Brian said.

“Okay, but any book in particular?” Hunter asked. Hannah had fallen fast asleep a few hours before. And was currently laying in Papyrus’ lap.

Caroline seemed to think for a moment before responding. “A big one.”

“Yeah, Caroline isn’t really that picky,” Randy said in amusement. “She’ll read a dictionary as long as it’s in front of her.”

“What kinda nerd reads dictionaries for fun?” Brian asked.

“Me.”

“Well, yeah, of course YOU do. You’re WEIRD.”

“Is it really that weird to be able to read?”

“Well…” Hunter said, his voice laced with caution, “You ARE the only kid who’s allowed to read from the books at the back of the library…”

“I am?”

The other kids stared at her in shock. She couldn’t be serious.

“Yeah,” MK said, “you kind of are.”

“Huh.” Caroline paused momentarily, staring at her book. “Is that really that big a deal?”

“Uh, yeah, kind of!” Theo said. “Not even the FIFTH graders are allowed to read those!”

“Why not? Are they irresponsible with them?”
“NO! They - they’re too hard to read!”

Randy’s eyes widened. “Caroline, if you’re about to say what I think you’re about to say -”

“No they’re not. They’re easy.”

Randy hit his face on the table. He lifted his head and hit it against the table a few more times for good measure.

“I raised a smartass. I raised a smartass with zero tact.”

“They are NOT easy to read!”

“Are too.”

“Caroline, can I talk to you for a moment in private?”

Caroline grabbed at her left shoulder and scrunched her face in fear.

Randy’s eyes widened when he realized the reason for Caroline’s reaction. “No, no, don’t worry, Care-Bear, you’re not in trouble. We’re just going to talk, okay?”

Caroline relaxed somewhat. She was still holding her left shoulder. “Mmkay.”

She and Randy went into the other room.

“I don’t GET it!” Theo said. “How can she think reading those books is EASY?!”

Monica sighed. “Theo, you know how Penelope makes extremely good cupcakes?”

“Yeah? What does that have to do with anything?”

“Well, Caroline and Penelope both have Asperger’s. It’s an autism spectrum disorder, I’ve told you this.”

“So what? I thought that just meant that they had no social skills.”

“Theodore Francis DeMartino, will you listen to me?”

Monica’s Angry Mom Voice. Theo started to listen seriously.

“Yes, poor social skills are a common symptom. But it’s not the only symptom, and some symptoms aren’t necessarily negative.”

“So how are reading skills and really good cupcakes alike?” Hunter asked. He was pretty curious about this.

“Well, in this case, they’re connected because they’re Caroline’s and Penelope’s special interests. Many people on the autism spectrum have a special interest that they dedicate a lot of time and effort into honing. For Caroline, it’s reading. For Penelope it’s really good cupcakes. It’s different for everyone.”

Hunter looked pretty thoughtful.

“Hey, we’re back.”

Randy and Caroline were back. Caroline seemed almost completely relaxed.
“Hey, uh, Theo?” Caroline said.

“Yeah?”

“I’m sorry I said Harry Potter was easy to read. Just because it’s easy for me doesn’t mean it is for other people. I have a little trouble understanding that other people don’t find the things I like enjoyable, and it can be real frustrating. So yeah. I’m sorry.”

Theo shrugged. “You apologized. That’s good enough for me.”

Caroline sighed with relief.

She checked he phone. One hour til midnight.

“Hey Nell,” Caroline said, “you wanna show Hunter the song we picked for his audition?”

“Yeah!”

“Wait, you what?” Hunter said in confusion.

“We chose a song for your audition,” Caroline explained. “Mostly for consideration, but it’s one we both agreed was simple and fun.”

“Consid...wha?”

Caroline sighed in exasperation. “It’s optional. You don’t have to use this one, but it’s one that a lot of people use for auditions.”

“Oh. Okay then. What song is it?”

“Hallelujah by Leonard Cohen,” Caroline and Penelope said in unison.

“hey, that one was in shrek,” Sans said.

“That was the Rufus Wainwright cover,” Mettaton said. “He is related to Leonard Cohen though.”

“still can’t believe leonard cohen’s dead.”

“Yeah, this year was just…”

“I have no words for how TERRIBLE this year was in regards to celebrity deaths.”

“Hmm.”

“I actually cried in my room when David Bowie died,” Hunter admitted. “I had to be quiet about it though. My mom was pretty happy that day and I was afraid she’d yell at me for ruining her day with my bad mood…”

“I was pretty sad when Alan Rickman passed,” Caroline said.

“carrie fisher…”

“This year was the worst. And here I thought 200Y was bad…”

“oh god billy mays and michael jackson…”

“Has anyone else noticed that when celebrities die, they die in threes?” Helen said. “That can’t be a
coincidence.”

<<But surely there were SOME good things that happened, right?>> Frisk signed. <<I mean, Alphys and Undyne are married, and so is Mrs. Sharona. Papyrus and Mettaton are dating. Is there anything else?>>

Frisk did have a point. While there were some pretty upsetting events, to be sure, there was some good in between the cracks.

“I puked on someone,” Caroline said quietly. “I’d kinda always wanted to do that…”

“yeah, that was actually kinda hilarious in hindsight,” Sans admitted with a fond chuckle.

“I never really had friends before I moved here,” Penelope admitted. “That’s kinda new for me…”

“I finished the entire Tolkien bibliography this year,” Caroline said. “I’m pretty proud of myself.”

“The heck is a bib...bibluh...bilio...whatever the heck you just said?”

“A bibliography is every book written by a particular writer.”

“Randy,” Undyne said, “You may want to have Caroline avoid dictionaries for a while. I’m learning things and I’m too drunk to learn.”

“undyne, you are never too drunk to learn,” Sans said sagely. “alphys passed her organic chem final drunk. i passed my stats finals completely stoned.”

“Sans, you b-blew through your second year of grad school c-completely wasted w-without any trouble,” Alphys said.

“ah, man, i forgot about that. you think that’s why it took me so long to realize that i’d spent three whole weeks with a funky hat on my head?”

“I t-think it was a factor, yeah.”

“dang. college.”

“Yeah…”

There was silence.

“oh yeah, hey, speakin’ of college,” Sans said, “i’ll be takin’ a few classes. gonna probably go fer my...third? fourth? i dunno anymore, but i’m goin’ for another doctorate.”

“Another?!” Undyne said.

“REALLY? WHAT’S THIS ONE FOR?”

“How are you so chill about the fact that this smarmy potato has more than one of them doctor degrees?!” Undyne growled.

“i’m thinkin’ probably astrophysics.”

“Oh, hey, Brian May from Queen has a Ph.D. in astrophysics!” Mettaton said.

“yep.”
“Why is everyone so cool with this?!”

“Because not everyone is after their not-first Ph.D.,” Monica said.

“45 minutes til midnight.”

“i got skyrockets. who wants fireworks?”

The resounding cheers from the kids plus some adults was all he needed to hear.

“okay. mettaton, you have experience with pyrotechnical arrangement. you’re comin’ with.”

“Alright.”

The two went outside to set up the fireworks. Sans had taken off his Blue Hoodie and wrapped it around his waist. Mettaton had put his hair in a little ponytail. It was pretty pointless since his bangs remained in place. Three skyrockets was deemed enough - the skyrockets were rather large. The small amount made it somewhat easier for them to arrange.

Mettaton knew that this was about more than just pyrotechnics.

“What did you wanna discuss with me Sans?”

“your relationship with my bro.”

“Is this the fabled ‘break his heart i break your face’ thing?”

“nah. that’s too cliched for my tastes. and besides, that’s more undyne’s schtick, don’tcha think?”

“You got me there. I don’t even think heartbreaking is required for facebeaking.”

Sans hummed in affirmation.

“i’m here to ask you some very important questions, explain some very important shit.”

“Alright then. I’m all ears.”

“So you were never in a serious relationship before my bro. why?”

“Well, to put it simply, I just...never really connected with other people in a romantic sense before Papyrus came along. Well, that is to say, I never really had any desire to experience a committed romantic relationship before he came along.”

“so...wouldja say you’re gray-aro or demi?”

“Not really sure. I suppose the first one is a little more accurate.”

“ah.”

Silence.

“You’re suspicious about my motives.”

“nah. i trust ya. ya done nothin’ to make me hate you personally. the ones i don’t trust are your fans.”

“Not all of them are rabid teenagers, Sans.”
“i’m aware. but it ain’t just the rabid teens i don’t trust. and really, it ain’t distrust, it’s just an incessant, nagging suspicion.”

“So distrust?”

“if that’s what you call it, sure. knock yerself out.”

More silence.

“so. how long d’ya think you’ll be in this for?”

Mettaton raised his eyebrows. He hadn’t expected that question.

“Well. I’m not really sure, honestly. Romantic relationships are unfamiliar territory for me, and I know that it’s the same for Papyrus. I’m really just taking things as they come.”

Mettaton got a strange look on his face.

“Heh. Taking things as they come. Never thought I’d do that. I mean, I’m just so used to taking charge and making sure things go the way I want them to, you know?”

“eh. i get it. when ya love someone, you’ll do things you never really thought ya’d do, some of ‘em completely crazy.”

Sans’ eyes wandered toward the house. Toriel was talking and laughing with the other guests. Frisk - but it could also be Chara, he’d have to talk to them later - was going through the list of songs for Hunter’s audition with him, Brian, Levi, MK, Caroline and Penelope.

“So why ask about how long I’ll be with Papyrus for, anyway?”

“i didn’t mean it quite like that, actually.”

“Then how do you mean ‘how long do I think I’ll be in this for’, hm?”

“i mean, do ya plan on staying committed for the long haul?”

“Oh. Wow.”

Yet more silence.

“too soon?”

“W-well, I mean, ten dates is a bit early to be discussing long-term commitment, I’d think.”

Mettaton sighed to calm himself. This was a lot to take in. But then again, this was his first real relationship. He had no idea what he was even doing.

But wasn’t that the whole point, now that he thought about it? Neither he nor Papyrus had any idea what they were doing. They were completely lost.

But they were lost together, and wasn’t that what really mattered? Did everything really have to be so concrete all the time? Security was nice, but what they had now was pretty great as far as Mettaton could see. He was happy.

But was Papyrus happy?
Oh no. How could Mettaton have been so short sighted? He ALWAYS did this somehow. He got so caught up in himself, in his own feelings and experiences, that he completely disregarded the effects his actions had of the people around him.

“well, i’m not here to tell ya how ta go about your relationship. i mean, clearly yer doin’ somethin’ right. i honestly don’t think i’ve seen papyrus quite this happy. just keep doin’ whatever it is yer doin’.”

Mettaton blinked once in surprise.

“Sans, I swear you’re a mindreader or something.”

“nah, not minds. just people. some people are kinda impaired in the mind, after all.”

“True. Some don’t even HAVE a mind of their own. Sad, really.”

“did you mean: pta diana?”

Mettaton stifled a bit of a laugh. “Maybe. I haven’t met that one yet.”

“oh yeah, pap mentioned that you’d met linda on your last date. heard you dragged her xenophobic ass to the tune of a drew carey show reference.”

“Well, I don’t mean to brag - oh who am I kidding? That bitch got SLAIN!”

“i also happened to hear that you got a chance to meet the fabled rick thompson, what’s he like?”

“Let’s just say that he seems nice enough, but he has poor taste in women.”

“putting it kinda lightly there, aren’tcha?”

Mettaton affected an air of playful condescension. “What can I say? I’m too nice for my own good sometimes…”

“dude. you called linda mimi bobek.”

“What, like you of all people haven’t thought of it?”

“oh, i have. i’m just not quite ready to get kicked outta the pta yet.”

“Ah, I see. You think this setup is good?”

The skyrockets were all set up.

Sans gave a thumbs up in response.

“Alright. Quarter til 20XQ. Can you believe it?”

“yeah. can’t hardly believe much of anything these days.” Sans sighed. “never really thought we’d make it up here.” At least not for two years with no RESETS.

“I really don’t think anyone did.”

Sans hummed before going to retrieve the guests.
It’s a beautiful early morning in Ebott.

The year is new.

Silence is everywhere.

At times like this, kids like you...

...are letting your demons do the talking.

Papyrus and Toriel were fast asleep at long last.

Now’s as good a time as any.

“so. chara. where’s frisk?”

“Frisk is in the START MENU. They’re trying to make sure that The Player won’t RESET.”

“so you’re coverin’ for ‘em.”

“That’s correct, yes. They haven’t seen The Player yet, but they’re going to stay and keep watch until further notice. Do not worry. I will let you know if something happens.”

“gotcha. thanks.”

“Of course.”

Silence.

“so it was you that made the chocolate cake?”

They giggled.

“Nope! It was all Frisk. Though the snowflake design was my idea. Frisk makes very good chocolate cake.”

“They really do.”

More silence.

“will they be out on their birthday?”

“We will be sharing control. It’s my birthday, too.”

“huh. didn’t know that.”

“I’ll be 110 this year.”

“wow. and i thought asgore was old.”
“Watch it, Comedian.”

Sans chuckled semi-affectionately, tousling their. “back atcha, demon.”

Sans yawned and stretched, his spine popping loudly.

“g’night, chara. see ya in th’ mornin’, i guess.”

The child smiled, warm but aloof. “Good night, Sans.”

The promise of a better year this time around fills you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

The title song is Happy New Year by ABBA. Other songs are:

Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This) by The Eurythmics
The Shoop Shoop Song (It's In His Kiss) by Cher
Once Upon A December from Anastasia
How Far I’ll Go from Moana
Poison by Alice Cooper
Chapter Summary

How do feelings? Plot is occurring. Gay fourth graders. Go back to kindergarten, bad speller-person.

Chapter Notes

Okay, so a lot of you have noticed a little something-something between Caroline and Penelope. But is it real?

Ten chapters in and you guys will finally find out that...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

12:28 P.M., January 10th, 20XQ.

It’s a rough day outside.

Rain is falling.

Thunder is crashing.

On days like this, kids like you…

…are having recess indoors.

“Go fish!”

“Brian, we’re playing Hearts and you’re not even losing.”

Hunter was right. Caroline was the one losing. But then again when you’re trying to read a book and play a card game at the same time, neither escapade will go as smoothly as if they had been performed singularly.

Multitasking is the strong suit of few. Caroline not being one of those few.

But in Chara’s case, there was little if any multitasking occurring. This wasn’t their body - that old thing had gone the way of sans and Papyrus nearly a century ago. But with how easy it was to navigate, it might as well be. It was a bit weird to walk around in at first, for many reasons - having been dead for nearly a century being the least of them, surprisingly. That actually made it a bit
like...going back into an old routine after a much-needed break.

But that didn’t mean that card games became easier. Chara was still as terrible at cards as ever.

Just one of many things they’d have to ask Frisk to teach them.

The bell rang. Recess was over. Everyone returned to their seats.

Miranda and her little lackeys were suspiciously gigglly while looking at them and pointing.

Chara looked at Frisk’s desk.

Someone had written on it.

_monti_

Frisk’s friends looked at the graffiti. There were only two beings on earth that they all knew to be…“unique” enough to even consider using pink glitter gel pens for literally any non aesthetic unironic reason.

Only one of those two used it for everything that involved writing no matter what you tried to tell her. And didn’t even bother with the spelling.

Frisk’s desk wasn’t the only one

“You know, if she’s gonna insult someone, she could at least learn how to spell,” Hunter muttered. His desk had _sisy_ written on it.

“Just looking at this without reading it makes me wanna take out my eye with a pencil,” Caroline deadpanned. Her desk had _wich_ written on it. “I’m pretty sure that’s why she did this…”

Brian’s desk had _hoty_ written on it. “I have no idea what this says, but I’m pretty sure it’s spelled wrong.”

“I can’t even tell what this is, is it some kinda slur?” MK said. Their desk said _freek_.

“I’m pretty sure mine is,” Levi said. His desk said _jinjer_.

“At least be more creative, GOD,” Penelope said. Her desk said _ugly_.

“Hey, Nell, yours is actually spelled right,” Caroline noticed. “Miranda must really like you if she actually spelled right for you.”

Mrs. Chang walked into the classroom five minutes after the bell.

“Sorry about that, everyone, staff meeting. So, who’s ready for some…”

Mrs. Chang noticed the graffiti on the desks.

She sighed. It was very obvious who did this. The other students knew this. They just didn’t want to be next so they kept their mouths shut.

“You know what? Forget math. No one likes math. Let’s talk about bullying and why bullies are terrible.”

“No, math’s fine,” Penelope said. “The person who did this probably went back to kindergarten
A few of the kids laughed at this. Caroline snickered and high-fived Penelope. Chara, MK, Hunter and Brian high-fived her as well. Miranda looked like she had been slapped for all of ten seconds before glaring at Penelope.

Mrs. Chang smiled and rolled her eyes. These kids were stronger than they seemed. She was still going to tell someone about this, but she’d wait until class was out. She put it in her schedule on her phone.

“Okay then. So, open your math notebooks to page 45…”

Sans sat on the ratty foldout couch in the basement with his headset on.

He wasn’t working. The Heart of Gold was meeting tomorrow.

He was listening to music while scouring the news for work and hacking into the database for the local chapter of the HWC. He had never seen such shitty firewalls. But then again, Helen had mentioned how annoyed she was that the computers they used had Windows XP. Windows XP. In 201Y. That was more than just stupid. It opened them up to all sorts of terrible viruses and malware and such.

So Sans decided to teach them a little lesson.

He slipped a little bug into the IP address as he got the info he needed and wrote it down on the palm pilot he’d had since high school. How it still worked he had no idea, but he thanked his dad nonetheless.

News update. HWC President Leland Schwartz announces new secretary. Took him long enough.

Of course the new secretary was a woman named Angie. It was practically a running gag in the Heart of Gold that the HWC considered secretarial positions so demeaning that they were pawned off on women named Angie because no one else would take them.

Well, that wasn’t true. A lot of people would be willing to make tens of thousands a year just organizing files and taking calls. They just don’t want to do it for Leland Schwartz. He seemed a very unsavory character on the whole, and reports of employee abuse with blatant evidence were numerous yet often ignored.

The truth is worthless if the people who are supposed to do something about it are going to ignore it.

This particular secretary named Angie was called Angie Nesbit. She even looked like an Angie Nesbit. Sans had to wonder if Schwartz had a thing for secretaries named Angie, or at least looked like they should be secretaries named Angie. Hell, his wife looked like a secretary named Angie, and he name was fucking Sarabeth.

He texted one of his coworkers. The Heart of Gold had managed to send each other their contact info in encrypted memes. Replay didn’t have any way to contact everyone aside from a gmail account.

*seen the news yet

*she look like a bitch >:(
*really
*i thought she looked like a secretary named angie
*oh so theres a difference >:P
*fair point
*so ur brother leavin for chicago in a few :|
*yep
*what he look like :3c
*youve seen pics of him ioniq
*you called him hot
*o shit fam u right my bad ;P
*please dont use semicolon p ever again when talkin about my bro
*ok :P it aint my fault his jack skellington ass so fine ;P
*gdi ioniq
*see ya tomorrow
*lol cya :)

Ioniq Campbell from Chicago, otherwise known as Jessamy. She was a smart cookie, fresh out of high school at the tender age of 16. She wanted to go into journalism because she likes gossip and loves exacting Justice on those who deserve it. Her Tumblr, Twitter and Instagrams were all gossip, Peggy Carter, and celebrity tweets. She was one of, if not THE first to post the recording of Mettaton's interview with Lola Leigh a few days ago. She even edited airhorns onto the ending. It was beautiful enough to deserve a reblog from Sans and a blog recommendation from Mettaton himself.

Sans started a new text.

*yo lex
*i found another dead bird in my backyard
*should i stuff it or trash it

Alexis Wilkins, AKA Kindred. Blue collar worker from London, England. Very serious-minded, but has a good heart beneath their crispy outer shell. Started hacking when they found out that the executives of the company they worked for at the time had been embezzling funds for decades. They almost single-handedly sent them packing.

*What's it look like? What's the damage?
*red violet
*mid size
*both legs and a wing missing

*Stuff it for now. We’ll discuss more about it tomorrow.

*okay

*see ya then

*Right.

*hold up

*Can it wait, Sans? You’re taking up my lunch break.

*okay

*ill ask later tonight if i remember

*Right then.

Sans closed out of the messaging app with a sigh. Sure, Alexis pissed him off sometimes with their no-nonsense attitude, but they made sure things actually got done. Perhaps this was why they held the highest respect for the concept of breaks. Who knew with that one.

Sans considered checking in on Replay until he remembered that Replay was still in school at this point. Yuu Fujiwara was the youngest of the group at twelve years old, but also one of the most skilled. He was at or below average in other fields, but when it came to computers he was a prodigy. He mentioned a desire to get a Tumblr on his thirteenth birthday.

Sans was getting kind of tired. He decided to take a nap until Papyrus came home and he had to help him pack. Tomorrow was going to be A Day.

For the first time on a long time, Sans dreamed as he napped.

And when Sans dreams while napping, that usually means that something big is in store, either for him or someone close to him...

Toriel walked down the hallway on her way back to her class after successfully arguing her case in favor of keeping the spring concert on the schedule to the principal and texting the results to Sans.

Linda’s argument for canceling it pretty much amounted to a lack of funds for it. Toriel pointed out that this was because they were being forced into the dwindling baseball program. The baseball team was too small to compete this year, and the coach was close to quitting due to the pressure to come up with a full team by next week, something that not even drafting every other child onto the team could accomplish. Linda feverishly argued that the music program was useless for many reasons, each of which was easily shut down. Then she provided a reason for cancelling the concert that was so stupid that the case was thrown out. The music teacher was in tears from relief.

Toriel returned to her classroom just as the other fifth grade teacher across the hall from her had returned from her lunch break with a cup of coffee so black it absorbed the surrounding light.

Betty Roth had been teaching at Mountainside Elementary for almost forty years. No one liked her then, no one liked her now. Some of the teachers actually had her when they were in fifth grade and used her as an argument that there is no good or evil, only Ms. Roth and her black hole coffee.
Toriel and Ms. Roth never made direct eye contact. Any direct eye contact was quickly forgotten. For the sake of the students, Toriel hoped it stayed that way.

The announcement of audition dates would be made over the weekend and sent out to the parents and staff via email Monday morning. Linda was going to keep arguing her case in any way she could until then. She was predictable like that.

Until then, Toriel would work as always. Tomorrow was the first PTA meeting of the new semester.

She had Ms. Roth’s students for an hour and a half after lunch every other day. She swore that some of them lost a little bit more of the youthful twinkle in their eyes each time she saw them. Why someone like Ms. Roth was allowed to teach in the first place was a mystery for the ages.

Luckily Toriel always had some candies in a bowl on her desk. If it made the children feel better for even a few seconds, she considered it a job well done.

She only wished there was more she could do…

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Time for class work. You could work in groups or alone, just make sure you’re actually working and not reading a teen magazine or a comic book hidden in a textbook. And make sure it’s actually a textbook.

Neither Chara nor Frisk was any good at math. Math one of those things that seemed useless to both of them. They were trying to work with MK, who was slightly better at math than Chara and Frisk. The kids worked together until this point. They were almost halfway done when they came across a problem that neither of them could solve.

MK tapped Levi with the tip of their tail. Levi turned to face them, twirling his pencil in his fingers. Curse his amazing math and fine motor skills.

“Lemme guess, math troubles gotcha down?” he asked. The tone he used made it sound like he was trying to sell insurance. And succeeding.

They nodded and pointed to the problem that was troubling them. In no situation in life would they ever need to know the answer to 487 times 12.

Levi made a show of thinking very hard about the answer. Like it was easy. Levi really annoyed Chara sometimes.

“Okay, so here’s whatcha gotta do. First you multiply the top number by the number in the ones place. What’s 487 times 2?”

<<Not something an ambassador should have to know,>> Chara signed.

“Bzzzt, nope! Let’s try it another way. What’s 487 plus 487?”

Chara tried to work it out in their head for all of five minutes. Asking Frisk was pointless when Frisk was doing sentry duty at the START MENU, so Chara was on their own for this one.

Levi chuckled. Caroline lifted her head from helping Penelope. She’d been done with her work for the past twenty minutes.

“Lemme guess. 487 times 12?”

“Yep.”
“Why don’t they just work it out on some scratch paper?”

Chara widened their eyes. Of course. How could they have been so stupid?

“Aww, I was having fun watching them try to figure it out on their own…”

“If you wanna watch someone struggle with basic math, Brian and Hunter are literally right next to me.”

“You could help us too, you know,” Hunter mumbled.

“Sorry. Hands’re full.”

Brian groaned. “I swear it’s like you have a crush on her.”

“But I hate people,” Caroline pointed out. “I want to crush them, not have crushes on them. What does a ‘crush’ even feel like, anyway? It sounds painful.”

Chara was pretty okay with Caroline. Hatred of people and love of books? Pros. Love of math and indifference toward dark chocolate? Cons.

“Whaddaya mean, what does a crush feel like? You have one on Penelope, right?”

A few kids gasped.

“Are you sure you’re not projecting your crush on Hunter onto me and Penelope?”

The gasps following that statement were even more numerous and interspersed with oohs.

“Wha…” Penelope seemed confused and slightly embarrassed.

“What was that!” Brian shouted.

“Caroline, strike one. Brian, strike two. One more and it’s the principal’s office for you.”

Mrs. Chang’s three-strikes-you’re-out system was highly effective. Especially when she proved that she would carry out the punishment. Not even Miranda was willing to push her luck with Mrs. Chang.

Caroline shrunk in on herself. “I’m sorry.”

Brian grumbled, saying nothing.

The Water Elemental kid next to Levi - Frisk had told Chara that her name was Marilla - tapped him and passed him a folded-up scrap of paper and pointed to Penelope. Levi turned to Penelope, then back to Marilla and nodded in thanks. Marilla returned the gesture before returning to her work.

Levi glanced at the scrap. The initials PD were inscribed on it in pink glitter pen.

“Penelope, Miranda wrote you a love letter,” Levi whispered.

Penelope snatched the scrap and opened it to read the contents.

*Meet me at the tethrbol pole tomoro at reeses. Be thar alone or els! ~Miss Miranda M. Mosley~*

She showed the message to the rest of the group. “What do I do? I don’t even LIKE her like that - I don’t even like her at all, I mean she’s a total jerkface, but the jerkfaces are the ones who hurt the
most when they’re rejected, and even if she’s a jerkface I don’t wanna hurt her feelings, what do I DO?”

“I’ll go with ya!” Levi said. “I wanna see Miranda get her heart broken!”

“B-but Miranda’s had a crush on Brian since kindergarten,” Hunter pointed out.

“I’ll go too then,” Brian said. “Wanna go watch Miranda get rejected by Penelope, Hunter?”

“Well…”

“Well what? You afraid she’s gonna rat you out to your mom?”

Hunter paused. Normally when someone said this, it was a taunt along the lines of “you’re a dirty coward”. But when this was said to Hunter James Thompson, it was said with genuine concern and sympathy. And few said these words to him with more concern or sympathy than Brian Green.

Hunter nodded.

“Yeah, that’s something she’d do…” Brian paused to think. “I’ll cover for ya.”

“Wha- REALLY?”

“Hunter, strike one.”

Hunter yelped and shrunk in on himself. “Sorry! Please don’t tell my mom!”

Mrs. Chang sighed sympathetically. Just what does Linda even DO to make this poor child so terrified of her? “Hunter, I’ve promised you before that I will not tell your mother if you get a strike. Strikes one and two do not leave my classroom. Okay?”

Hunter nodded. It wasn’t much help, but he was grateful for the intent.

“But...are you for real?” Hunter asked Brian. His voice wavered with genuine fear. “I mean, you know how my mom is! She’d never let us hang out anymore…”

“Yeah, at your place or my place. At school she doesn’t need to know.”

Brian paused. “Look Hunter, your mom’s a butt. You and I both know that. Everyone knows your mom’s a butt except maybe Miranda’s mom, but she’s dumb so she doesn’t count.” He sighed. “Honestly, your mom kinda scares me too. But it’s not like she’s gonna try to hurt one of us or anything! Other than insulting me and my family what is there that she can really do, force feed me pecans?”

Hunter would have cried if he weren’t so surprised. Brian was so Brave...he was nothing like Hunter.

“Hunter, you’re my best friend. You’ve been like a brother to me since we were in diapers. Your mom didn’t really have anything to do with that. Now, are ya gonna join us an’ watch Penelope crush Miranda’s heart to bits?”

Hunter smiled. “Yeah...let’s watch Miranda get rejected!”

And with that it was settled. Tomorrow they’d go out to the tetherball pole during recess to back Penelope up.
Hunter glanced at Penelope. She seemed a bit sad after Caroline said she didn’t have a crush on anyone.

At least Caroline didn’t compare them to siblings. Hunter had to wonder if this is what heartbreak felt like…

He didn’t like it.

Sans was startled awake from his Nap Dream by his phone vibrating against his tenth through twelfth thoracic vertebrae, and who should it be but his verte-bae, Toriel.

He unlocked his phone and wrote down ‘verte-bae’ in his notes before answering the text. It had been sent a few hours ago.

He read through the account of Linda’s pitiful attempts at trying to shut down the spring concert up to their ultimate failure.

He chuckled.

*sounds like youve had a verte-day

*LOL! Yes, it has been quite a day so far!

*so ms roths kids have you today

*im so sorry

*Sans, do not apologize to me. If there is anyone you should apologize to, it is the poor children in her charge.

*I swear that they've lost their spark over the course of the year.

*losing their spark

*that shouldnt happen until theyve hit high school

*Sans.

*I am being very serious about this.

*so am i tori

*these are just kids

*they should have more time to be

*you know

*kids

It took Toriel a few moments to respond.

*I know. Thank you for your explanation.

*But you are aware that Frisk and their friends will be in the fifth grade next year, are you not?
*Sans, if Frisk or one of their friends were to be put into that dreadful person’s class I don’t know what I would do.

Sans looked at the last message and sighed. Damn. This Ms. Roth lady...he’d heard the rumors to be sure, but then one day Monica was frustrated almost to tears when she tried to file a complaint with the principal about her only to be ignored - apparently whatever Theo must have done was deserving of being thrown out of the classroom. Seriously? The kid dropped his book. On accident. Who kicks a kid out of a classroom for accidentally dropping a book? That’s fucking stupid. Yeah, Theo could be a brat sometimes, especially to Penelope. But he was a good kid deep down.

Sans recalled the promise he made to Toriel. The promise to protect the Human who came through the Ruin door. The one he’d kept even though the obligation was explicitly rendered Null by Royal Decree. The one that was still being kept, not out of obligation or moral fulfillment, but because he genuinely cared about the kid who came through that door.

The one he kept because it made the woman he loves happy.

He was going to keep the kid not just safe, but happy. He’d give Frisk the happiest life he could, and he’d make sure that Chara had the chance to live a happy life too - as much as they could while being attached to Frisk’s SOUL.

He was going to keep that promise. No matter how many timelines got reset or destroyed by The Player, he would always make that promise. And he would always keep it. For their sakes.

Sans knew what he had to do.

*tori

*sin time before that

*ft for now you got kids to inspire and amaze

*goat get em tori

Sans closed out of the messaging app and attempted to resume his nap. Then his phone vibrated again.

He opened the app again.

It wasn’t a text this time.

It was a selfie. Toriel had take a selfie with her students in the background. They were all making goofy faces and doing weird shit and just...genuinely having fun. Theo was aiming a paper airplane at the camera. Toriel was smiling and playfully sticking her tongue out, assuring that the army of fifth graders were not the only adorable goofballs here.

It was the best picture he’d seen in a good while.

She was too perfect.

He saved the photo to his SIM card and managed to upload it to a file on his laptop before returning to his nap.

Another Nap Dream. Toriel was in it.
After Toriel’s students had settled down from the excitement of the impromptu selfie, they started giggling.

There were two reasons for this. One of them being that Benjy had managed to moon the camera without being caught, the other being that they Knew.

They Knew.

Toriel was putting in the grades for Ms. Roth’s students.

She heard the giggles.

“I know Benjy mooned the camera.”

There was a brief aww of disappointment before the giggles started up again.

Toriel sighed.

“Who else mooned the camera.”

Sofie, a Human girl at the front of the class, spoke up. “Your big fat crush on Mr. Saaans~”

Toriel managed to look slightly affronted. “Sofie!”

“Oh my god, he’s a doctor, Sofie,” Theo said. “Show some respect, jeez.”

“Ooh, AND he’s a doctor?” a little Cat Monster girl named Moira said. “You sure know how to pick ‘em, don’tcha Miss Toriel?”

“If he’s a doctor, then why isn’t he working at a hospital?” a Human boy named Jacob asked. He was one of those Humans who had reached a point in his life where he’s starting to see that perhaps his parents are wrong about some things.

“Because he’s not that kind of doctor.”

Someone had opened the door. It was Brian.

“Sorry, forgot to knock.” Brian knocked a few times. “Anyway, I don’t have much time. I got a message for Theo and anyone else willing to listen.”

“What is it?” Theo asked.

“Show up at the tetherball pole tomorrow at high noon. We’ll explain everything then. Spread the word. Now if you’ll excuse me, I wasn’t lying when I told Mrs. Chang I had to use the bathroom. Later. Also, Ms. Toriel, Frisk says hey.”

“Wait!” Theo said. “Which tetherball pole?”

Brian didn’t hear him. He’d already ran off toward the bathrooms.

Theo sighed. Sofie tapped him and whispered to him under her breath.

“Just letting you know since you’re new here, fourth grader fights are at the tetherball pole by the music building.”

“Thanks, Sofe.”
Sofie gave a thumbs up in response. “See ya there.”

The bell rang three o’clock. Time to go home.

Chara packed up Frisk’s backpack when they felt a tap on their shoulder.

It was MK. They seemed worried.

“Uh, hey, Frisk. You okay? You seem kinda sad lately.”

Chara was surprised. Frisk had mentioned that MK was perceptive, and Chara had no reason not to believe them, but still. This was unexpected.

Chara smiled. No wonder Frisk had a crush on them.

<<I’m fine,>> they signed. <<I’m just tired is all.>>

MK seemed somewhat reassured. Only somewhat, though.

“Okay. But you know you can talk to me if you need to, okay?”

Chara nodded. <<Thanks, MK.>>

MK smiled. “No problem, dude!”

“Oh my GAWD, MK, Frisk is a GIRL!” Miranda interrupted. “You KNOW that!”

MK looked irritated, but still kept his snaggletoothed smile. “Miranda, you’re doing that thing where you butt into other people’s’ conversations again.”

“But monsters aren’t people,” Miranda said in the tone of voice reserved for arrogant know-it-alls. “My mommy said so.”

“Miranda, your mommy’s an idiot,” Brian said. “My mom said so.”

“So did mine,” Hunter said. “My mom also said that your mom needs to stop sending her Candy Crush game requests. It’s annoying everyone.”

Miranda looked like she wanted to claw Hunter’s eyes out.

“Guys, save it for the tetherball pole,” Caroline said. “We don’t want anyone to die yet.”

The group looked at Caroline in slight fear.

“Caroline, what the heck. No one’s gonna die tomorrow.”

“Actually, approximately 151,600 people die each day around the world on average, and about two people die every second.”

“Caroline seriously,” Penelope said. “Please stop. You’re scaring me.”

Caroline blinked before hugging her book to her body. “I never said it was gonna be you…”

She sighed. “C’mon, Levi. Dad’s picking us up today.”

“Oh, okay. Bye guys. See ya tomorrow.”

There was a brief silence as Caroline’s statement fully registered with the group.

“Bye,” Hunter said before leaving.

“Wait up,” Brian said as he followed behind Hunter.

“C’mon Frisk, let’s go,” MK said.

Chara nodded and grabbed MK’s shirt. They left Miranda to stew with her lackeys.

Chara pondered Caroline’s statement.

It was no statement. It was a death threat.

But whether Caroline knew that or not was completely up in the air. She might have thought she was being reassuring by saying that, but instead it came across as very terrifying.

It reminded Chara of themself back when they were alive and in their own body.

“aaaand that's everything. you’re all packed and ready to go.”

“ALRIGHT! I WILL TEXT METTATON TO LET HIM KNOW!”

Sans chuckled. They were leaving on Saturday. But hey. They were very excited for this Chicago trip. It was going to be the moment they revealed their relationship to the world.

Honestly, Sans considered it a miracle that one of them didn’t scream it out for the whole internet to hear the minute it became official. But then again, that probably meant that it was real.

Sans wasn’t sure how to feel about that.

He was happy, yeah. Papyrus was in a healthy, committed relationship with the love of his life - he was happy, his boyfriend was happy, what more could they ask for at this point?

But there was also that fact that this meant that his brother was growing up. His little brother, who he’d practically raised after their dad got erased, who it seems like just yesterday was half his height, who he could have sworn was still trapped in that vending machine a few hours ago.

Papyrus was growing up.

No. That was wrong. Sans knew it. Papyrus had grown up years ago. He hadn’t even really raised him, now that he thought about it. Not entirely.

Looking back, Papyrus had raised him too. They were still here despite everything because they had each other.

Whoops. Sans had to stop thinking like this before -

“SANS, ARE YOU ALRIGHT?”

Shit.

No matter how much Sans tried to hide from Papyrus, there was so much more that not only could
not be kept inside under any circumstances, but would keep trying to get out and cause problems if they ignored it. It had happened before. And it would never happen again. Not if they could help it.

Sans sighed and shrugged.

“yeah, ‘m fine. it’s just…it seems like it was yesterday that dad brought ya home from the lab, handed ya to me without a word and then passed out on the couch for three days. and now…”

Sans gestured vaguely and sighed. “where does the time go?”

Papyrus shrugged. “I’M NOT SURE. PROBABLY WHEREVER DAD IS, I GUESS.”

Papyrus smiled wistfully.

Sans stared at his brother for a moment before chuckling. “tell me again why you didn’t go into philosophy?”

“BECAUSE IT’S TOO VAGUE.”

Sans chuckled again. “y’know, the same could be said for physics.”

“YES, BUT AT LEAST PHYSICS CAN’T MAKE YOU CRY.”

“oh. oh, papyrus. my poor, naive little brother papyrus. you have no idea how hilariously wrong you are.”


Sans shrugged. “i still think it’s you being lazy vicariously through me.”

“AND I STILL SAY THAT’S THE DUMBEST THING YOU’VE EVER SAID.”

“i thought the prize for the dumbest thing i’ve ever said was ‘what could possibly go wrong?’.”

“NO, THAT’S THE DUMBEST THING SAID BY ANYONE EVER IN GENERAL!”

The brothers were silent.

“DAD’S BIRTHDAY’S IN FOUR DAYS.”

“So it is.”

Another brief silence.

“I’M GOING TO TELL HIM, SANS.”

Sans’ eyelights shut off.


“tell who what?”

Papyrus sighed. He really should have expected this reaction. He knew he’d gotten too complacent.
“SANS. I’M GOING TO…” Papyrus swallowed. “I’M GOING TO TELL METTATON ABOUT...ABOUT DAD. ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED - I-I MEAN, WHAT I KNOW HAPPENED, WHICH REALLY ISN’T MUCH, YES, BUT -”

Papyrus stopped when he felt Sans’ hand on his radius. A calming bit of his Magic flowed through at the contact.

“i get it. it’s fine if ya wanna tell ‘im. just remember the outline, okay?”

Papyrus nodded.

Sans sighed.

The outline. A basic how-to guide for explaining The Doctor.

Sans thought they’d never have to use it.

Or did he hope they’d never have to use it? Somewhere in the timelines he’d begun to lose sight of the fine line between hope and belief. If it even existed in the first place.

Sans was never much for either of those things. He was a scientist. He preferred being certain over being hopeful. That’s why he went into science. It was easy in ways he liked, and challenged him in ways he liked. It gave him a chance to be certain in a universe of chaotic uncertainty.

It gave him stability. It gave him a...a sort of SAVE point to return to whenever he was confused about what to do next. It gave him a chance to be his own person, not just The Royal Scientist’s Kid.

Not that Sans wasn’t proud of that fact. There was literally only one other person who could say that he was the son of the Royal Scientist of Monsterkind. And perhaps, if all went well, there might be another Royal Scientist’s Kid by next year at the latest.

At that moment Sans realized that he had begun to hope again.

Huh.

This timeline was just full of surprises.

Frisk stood watch at the START MENU. They laid their chin on their trusty Stick. They looked at the expanse of pure nothing that surrounded them.

They never realized that sentry duty was so...so…

...BORING.

The knowledge that sentry duty was so boring filled them with DETERMINATION.

FILE: SAVE.

Frisk gave a start. They felt something.

It was not DETERMINATION. DETERMINATION was like electricity, swift and sharp and warm and energizing.

No. This feeling was cold. It was dark. It was…
It was kind of like what they felt just before they went back to a SAVE point after they got a GAME OVER.

It felt like death.

Frisk held onto their trusty Stick even tighter.

They looked around at the nothingness.

It must have been their imagination.

They turned back to the front.

They gasped and held up their Stick in a defensive pose.

They weren’t defending just themself this time.

They were defending the RESET button.

They glared at the person in front of them.

No.

They glared at The Player in front of them.

The Player stared back. Only Frisk didn’t see it stare. They felt it.

They felt The Player say something as well.

**Move:**

Frisk shook their head.

**Move:**

Frisk stood their ground.

**Fine. If you won’t move now, you’ll move later. You always have. You always will. We will return in three days’ time. And you will move.**

The Player disappeared.

No. That was the wrong term.

The Player ceased to exist.

But it would come back. It always did.

But this time, Frisk will not be alone.

Everything will change

And Frisk will not be moved.

They doesn’t know it yet. But they do know this.

The future of the world their family lives in is in danger.
And they were \textit{DETERMINED} to save it.

For good this time.

Chapter End Notes

...it's very one-sided. Whoopsies~

But hey. Don't you little darlings fret. There are many, many, MANY more chapters in store. And more chapters means more opportunities to develop these characters.

So. After these next three chapters, what do you guys want? Random shit, or skip straight to the spring concert arc? Let me know in the comments.
Get In The Ring

Chapter by Spazzin

Chapter Summary

Chocolate chip pancakes. Jerkfaces are jerkfaces. Robots are pretty petty. Graphic design is her passion. Foreshadowing. Flirty Australians. Mother was right all along. Kindness versus Integrity - who will win? Depression. Angst. There is success somewhere. You will save them someday. Don't give up.

Chapter Notes

Holy SHIT. It's three in the morning and I shat out 42 pages of HELL. I'm too tired for this.

Enjoy. It's nice and angsty.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*Midnight, January 11th, 20XQ*

Chara awoke with a gasp. They were shivering and in a cold sweat. But they were not going to cry. They were 109 years old going on 110. Big kids don’t cry.

They sat up on the edge of Frisk’s bed. Chara was really glad that they decided to wear socks to bed. Frisk was smarter than they looked.

Chara gripped the bedsheets in a mix of rage and fear. They were sickened. How could that...thing...have ever claimed to be them? What kind of creature could be so cruel?

Chara gripped the sheets hard enough that their nails would have torn holes in them if Frisk hadn’t eaten them.

They let go of the sheets and stood up. Three days. That wasn’t very long at all. It was one of those phrases people use as a threat.

Chara walked slowly and shakily toward the door that led out to the hall. By the bedroom door was a vanity that Mettaton had gotten Frisk for their ninth birthday. They glanced at Frisk’s body in the mirror. Frisk was like them. Red eyes. Everyone often said that Frisk and Chara both had a look of hope in their eyes. Chara scoffed mentally at that. The only hope they’d ever had was given to them by Asgore, Toriel and Asriel.

Asriel. Chara still had trouble grasping that that...flower had a part of Asriel in him. He wasn’t Asriel. Asriel was a fluffy little goober who cried if he thought about how snakes have no arms. Flowey is a dick.
Chara opened the door as quietly as they could before closing it just as quietly. They tiptoed down the hall before reaching the door they wanted - no, needed.

They opened the door slowly and tiptoed their way around dirty socks and a few trombones until they reached the poorly-made bed.

Toriel was far too lenient with Sans. Chara was certain that love was a potentially fatal disease. It was how they died, after all.

They tiptoed up to Sans. He wasn’t actually sleeping. Chara just really liked tiptoeing. They were physically incapable of that while they were alive.

A clubbed foot isn’t just debilitating because it’s painful, after all.

They gripped at the hood of his Blue Hoodie and tugged on it.

Sans opened his right eye. When he did that, Chara felt just a bit more like the Good Kid Sans thought they were.

“what happened?”

Chara opened their mouth to speak, only to find that they couldn’t. Not this time.

They hated this. They hated that they were so scared, and sad, and angry, and frustrated. They hated that, for whatever reason, they were chosen to die for what seemed to be no reason. They hated how weak they were.

They cried. They felt even weaker for crying so they cried even harder and started a vicious cycle of crying because they felt weak and pathetic for crying.

Sans turned their SOUL Blue and levitated them into his arms.

He mumbled calming nonsense words as they cried. He rubbed their back and let out a small flow of Magic.

When they calmed down they struggled a bit until Sans let go of them. They tried to speak again but failed. This time they merely shook their head in exasperation and chose an alternative communication method.

<<Frisk saw The Player.>>

Sans eyelights shut off.

“what happened?”

<<They Player threatened them. It promised to come back in three days to force Frisk to RESET.>>

Sans was shaking so hard his bones were starting to rattle. Chara was getting scared again. They hugged him to make him stop rattling.

Sans stopped rattling, but he was still shaking. Chara let go once more.

<<I want to help them, Sans. But I don’t know how. I’m scared that if I try to help I’ll just make it worse again. I always end up making things worse for people.>>
Chara was about to cry again.

Sans held them close again. They moved their mouth as if to say “i’m sorry”. The wheezing sobbing sounds that came out sounded almost like they were saying “Asriel”.

Sans sighed shakily. “kid. chara, listen ta me. sometimes, trying to help may make things worse. but believe me when i say this. no one blames you for anything. asriel knows more than anyone that you wanted to help your people.”

<<But I didn’t. I wanted to kill the Humans.>>

“not your species. your people. monsters are your people, no matter what some might say.”

Chara hugged Sans a little bit tighter.

They felt their voice come back.

“Y...you know how you s-sing to Frisk when they have nightmares…?”

“yeah? what, do you wanna hear my shitty - err, crummy voice too? you two have bad taste.”

“I don’t care. I’m fine with swearing.”

“you may be, but yer mother ain’t.”

“Just fucking sing already.”

“only if ya stop swearing, kid, geez.”

“Fair enough.”

“so, ya want the one i sing to frisk, or d’ya want somethin’ else?”

Chara thought a bit.

“The one you sing to Frisk. Play it, Sans.”

Sans chuckled. Has this kid even seen that movie?

“okay. prepare your eardrums, ‘cuz here goes nothin’...”

Toriel woke up and went downstairs to start breakfast. On days with PTA meetings, she made chocolate chip pancakes.

She prepared the batter and then went to wake up Frisk.

She knocked on the door and opened it.

Frisk wasn’t in their bed.

“Flowey. Have you seen Frisk?”

“Not since they fell asleep last night. They were kinda twitchy for some reason. Probably the nightmares startin’ up again.”

Toriel sighed. “Thank you, Flowey.”
“Whatever.”

Toriel left the door open a crack. She went to the most likely candidate for nightmare remedies.

Frisk and Sans had a rather unique relationship. Father and child was merely a facet. There was also a bit of siblings and, possibly one of the most mysterious to her, confidants.

It almost reminded her of Chara and Asriel…

Toriel knocked on Sans’ door. The door opened on it’s own.

Toriel ran to get her phone.

She came back to the messy, messy room where her child was snuggled up asleep with one of her housemates.

Sans was smiling up at her.

He held up a finger to his teeth and winked his left eye. She took a picture of the sight.

“they’re out like a light.”

Toriel giggled. “So I see! But if Frisk is asleep, then I guess that means…”

“…more chocolate chip pancakes for us?”

“Mm-hmm!”

Chara shot up once the words “chocolate chip pancakes” registered in their head.

They ran out of the room like a flash.

Chocolate chip pancakes filled them with DETERMINATION. And chocolate chip pancakes.

FILE: SAVE.

Chara was going to SAVE quite a few more times than usual over the next three days. Frisk needed it.

Chara got all dressed and went downstairs where two Skeletons, a Boss Monster, and three chocolate chip pancakes awaited them.

Chara liked Frisk. They had a lot in common. Even more than they thought. Especially since their discovery of the glorious condiment that is Nutella. Frisk even frequently ate it straight from the jar.

Chara spread the Nutella on their pancakes and made them into a sort of sandwich. Then they decided that, since Sans went to the effort of getting them some silverware, they’d put some syrup on it just so they could use the fork and knife provided.

Sweet, sweet homemade chocolate chip pancakes smothered in Nutella and artificial maple flavoring. Come to Chara.

Papyrus was mildly disgusted as he watched the Human child down the sugary abomination which went against all laws of nature and nutrition.

The the disgust went from mild to regular when he saw Toriel deftly place approximately eight snails
on her pancakes.

Then Papyrus achieved five-alarm disgust the minute Sans placed the nozzle of his ketchup bottle within two inches of his pancakes.

“I’M EATING IN THE DINING ROOM! YA NASTIES…”

“okay.”

<<Have fun with your sad pancakes!>> Chara signed.

“NYEEEGH!”

Papyrus stomped out of the kitchen and into the dining room with his reasonably besyrupped pancakes. How on earth did he live with such heathens. How dare they besmirch the sanctity of pancakes. How dare.

He supposed it was a little harsh. He decided to finish his pancakes in the dining room and drink his milk in the kitchen. He wanted to see Frisk off to school properly since he wouldn’t be able to do so from Chicago.

This plan was changed somewhat as Frisk came in to sit across from him with a glass of chocolate milk. Chocolate milk was fine. Milk was a versatile source of calcium and vitamin D. A little sweet was fine.

Frisk held their milk in their hands and sipped it through their favorite crazy straw - the one that looked like a pair of glasses.

Then he got a text from...Toriel? She sent it to a lot of people.

He opened it up to see the photo of Frisk sleeping on Sans.

He squealed at how positively adorable it was.

He looked up to compliment a Frisk that had temporarily left to grab their backpack.

Papyrus decided to text Mettaton

*GOOD MORNING HONEY! DID YOU SEE THE PHOTOGRAPH TORIEL SENT THIS MORNING?

*Yas~

*Frisk is worth every missed second of beauty sleep~

*OH, I’M SORRY! DID I INTERRUPT YOUR SLEEP?

*No, no, sweetie, I was already wide awake!

*OH! OKAY THEN!

*Wait, before I start my morning routine!

*I’ll be having dinner at your place this evening since I’ve decided to join Sans at the PTA meeting this evening~
Oh.

Well.

Papyrus was not sure what else to say to that.

*ALRIGHT!  I SHALL SEE YOU THIS EVENING.*

*You’re worried about it, aren’t you?*

Wait, how could he tell?

*When you’re worried or upset you use periods rather than exclamation points.*

*Papy, sweetie, I’ll be fine! I’ve dealt with that woman before, and I can do it again!*

*THIS IS TWO HOURS, NOT TEN MINUTES.*

Papyrus was getting a bit stressed. He fidgeted with his scarf and bounced his leg.

*I know. If it’ll make you feel better, I’ll send updates when I can find the time.*

*OKAY. SEE YOU THIS EVENING THEN!*

*See you then, Sugar Skull~*

Papyrus sighed. Then he smiled a bit. He was really, really lucky to have such an amazing boyfriend…

He really didn’t understand why people always assumed that Mettaton was shallow. That couldn’t be further from the truth. Mettaton had many facets. To be a successful entertainer, one has to be more than they seem. For many reasons.

Papyrus was so, so glad that Mettaton trusted him with so much. That was why he planned on telling him about his father. Mettaton trusted Papyrus, and Papyrus wanted Mettaton to know that he trusted him in turn.

But he still wanted to ask Sans. Their father’s sudden disappearance was a rather sore subject for Sans, and Papyrus knew that there was good reason for that. That’s the reason why Papyrus wanted Sans’ permission to tell Mettaton about him. He didn’t need it, he was a grown Monster, but The Doctor was Sans’ father as well. If it was okay for Papyrus to trust someone with the truth, then maybe it would let Sans know that he could trust someone too.

Frisk came down the stairs with Flowey and their school bag, their jacket on and ready to head off to school. They set Flowey down so that they could hug Papyrus goodbye. Papyrus hugged them back. They let go of the hug and ran out to the car with Toriel.

Papyrus wondered if Frisk knew about him somehow. It wouldn’t surprise him. Sans may have even been the one to tell them.

But somehow, Papyrus doubted that.

Caroline and Penelope sat in silence.

T-minus three hours and thirty minutes until Penelope would cruelly reject Miranda’s love
confession.

Caroline had some sick burns prepared. One of them involved swear words.

Hunter and Brian entered the classroom, Frisk and Flowey and MK trailing just behind them. They set down in their seats in silence.

As much as everyone had teased about Miranda’s message being a love letter, they all knew deep down that it was actually a battle summons. Caroline and Penelope didn’t until the others told them about the tetherball pole being the arena for fourth grade fights. Then Penelope was not sure she wanted to fight. She hated fighting.

So she was still going to reject her, just for a different reason.

Miranda came in with Naomi and Olive a few minutes after class started. Miranda’s lip gloss was even wetter and shinier than usual. She was obviously sure that she was going to win if the smirk on her face when she saw Penelope was any indication.

Penelope wondered if she should be fearful for her life.

No. That was stupid. Miranda looked pretty weak. But then again, the weak-looking ones could surprise you.

Besides. Penelope had backup. Brian said that that would be a good idea because Miranda would be bringing some boys from Mr. Steiner’s class across the hall to do her dirty work for her.

Oh. That’s why she was smirking.

Miranda was a jerkface. Jerkfaces smirk and talk down at you. They don’t respect or care about you no matter how much they claim otherwise. Sometimes they don’t even try to say they care. Those types aren’t as big of jerkfaces because at least they’re honest.

Yeah. At least Miranda was honest.

“Hey, Frisk?” Levi said.

Chara turned toward him.

“Randy’s comin’ to the PTA meeting by himself this time. Mom has a project for work due by midnight and she’s been working on it non-stop since last Friday…”

Chara nodded. <<I’ll let Dunkle Sans know.>>

Chara turned to face Hunter and Brian. <<Did you guys hear that?>>

“Yeah,” Hunter said. “My mom’s gonna be pretty happy when she realizes that.”

Hunter seemed cautiously happy as he said that. That made what Chara was about to say ever so slightly more painful.

<<Mettaton’s coming too,>> they signed slowly.

Hunter’s happiness lessened somewhat, but not as much as Chara had expected. “Oh. Okay then.”

Everyone was quiet again.
“I’ll ask Dunkle Sans if we can all have another sleepover,” Chara signed. “Does that sound okay?”

“Hey, good idea!” Levi said.

“I’m fine if everyone else is,” Brian said.

“I’d like that,” Hunter said, a small smile on his face.

“Okay,” Caroline said distractedly. Apparently her book was particularly good if one-word responses were being given. Usually two or three-word responses were the norm.

Penelope smiled. “That sounds fun! Let’s do that!”

And that was that.

Penelope sat back in her seat and smiled. Having friends was awesome.

And they said she’d never have friends. In their jerky jerk faces.

Alphys stirred to life in Undyne’s arms, blinking her eyes to adjust them to light of the morning sun.

That still amazed her.

She looked up into the eyes of her wife. Undyne had been awake for a while now.

“Anything yet?”

Alphys shrunk in on herself and shook her head.

Undyne smiled encouragingly. “Hey, it’s fine! We’ve still got all week to keep trying until next time!”

Alphys nodded. Undyne was right. There was still around four or five days of Alphys’ current estrous cycle remaining. And even if they didn’t succeed this time, there was another one in two months. If they were to try during Undyne’s cycle, Undyne would be the one to get pregnant, and they had both decided that that was plan B.

Unlike Humans, Monsters know if they are with child six hours post-conception. And Monsters can only be impregnated when both parties desire offspring. This is true for all Monsters, no matter what race. Beyond that, there are slight differences in many factors such as length of pregnancy and ease of conception and birth.

Alphys was really glad that the huge project for work was finished. The next was wasn’t for another month, so Alphys had a bit of time to herself.

Undyne was still smiling.

Alphys sighed. “W-what is it?”

“I don’t hafta go to work for a few hours…”

“Yyyeah?”

“Maybe we could…try again?”
Alphys was only too happy to oblige.

Mettaton was completely lost. I mean, really. What do people WEAR to PTA meetings that isn’t pantsuits or hoodies and Uggs? Seriously. Someone please tell him before he gives up and wears a fucking ball gown.

Mettaton’s phone vibrated. He’d completely forgotten to turn the ringer back on.

*1 text from: Smarmy Potato*
*hey*
*need anything for tonight*
*A fucking clue about what to wear for tonight would be nice.*
*pastel pink pantsuit*
*Ewww, pastels?*
*long story*
*just know that wearing it will piss off linda*
*As fun as that sounds, why would me in a pastel pink pantsuit piss off PTA Linda?*
*remember the pta meeting back in september*
*The one where Caroline threw up on Linda?*
*the very same*
*she was wearing a pastel pink pantsuit*
*be petty*
*if not for me*
*than for the sake of being petty*
*Already done~*
*ok*
*see ya at 3:30*

Mettaton was SO relieved. Not only did he know what to wear, wearing it was a well-deserved act of pettiness. Oh, what sweet satisfaction.

Only one problem remained.

What shoes should he wear?

Sharona stared lifelessly at the computer screen before her as she clicked the keys and moved the stylus along the tablet surface in accordance with muscle memory.
She continued to move the stylus and stare blankly at the screen as she ceased pressing the keys on her keyboard to grab at her coffee mug. She missed it twice before accidentally swatting it.

Oh no.

OH NO.

OH HELL NO.

Sharona abandoned the screen and the stylus to grab the falling coffee.

Time seemed to slow to a standstill.

Sharona caught the mug. Her work was safe.

She took a celebratory sip of coffee.

She turned back to her work.

The motion of her stylus as it was abandoned had made a streak on the project. In the wrong brush type. And the wrong color.

Sharona had not been this terrified in her 37 years life since her septum piercing got sneezed out.

She took a few calming breaths and a swig of coffee.

She clicked CTRL+Z.

The mistake was gone.

As was another 3 hours of work.

Well then.

This was fine.

Just motherfucking fine and dandy.

Just peachy fucking keen.

The only thing that could make this finer was the sweet embrace of death.

Monica put a Spiderman bandaid over the site of the girl’s injection.

Poor thing had stepped on a nail. How she wasn’t crying at her injection was more than a little impressive.

This girl was pretty Brave.

“Okay, all done!” Monica chirped. “Can you walk a few steps for me?”

The little girl, Hailey, nodded in response before proving it. By jumping down off the exam table and doing a few somersaults before getting up and twirling.

Her grandmother looked on in considerably less surprise than Monica expected.
The grandmother noticed this and chuckled a bit and rolled her eyes good-naturedly.

“Her pawpaw lost a few toes in a freak accident with a tractor without so much as a curse at John Deere’s good name. This ain’t that surprisin’.”

Monica smiled.

Children simply weren’t given credit. They got into some crazy stuff that they would eventually become would balk at in amazement. They were stronger than all hell.

Next to children, adults were pathetic..

Just one of many reasons Monica came here to Ebott in the first place. To get a new start.

Away from the pathetic adults that blamed “her freak of a daughter” for Tony leaving them.

Monica had honestly never been happier in her life than she was here. Her children were happy. They were safe. She had a group of wonderful friends helping her.

This was nice.

The bell rang for lunch. Everyone fled from the classroom to the cafetorium. They called it that because it was the cafeteria and the auditorium in one. It also doubled as the school gym.

They sat at the table that didn’t have Miranda and her pet snot rags at it.

“You know,” Levi said through a mouthful of coconut macaroon, “I see Naomi at the synagogue. Her parents are really strict. Like Hunter’s mom, only in double.”

“Wow, really?” Hunter said, sparing a sympathetic glance in Naomi’s direction.

“Yes. Only her parents push her to get straight A’s, while your mom just pushes you around.”

Hunter bowed his head. Levi had said that like he just let his mother push him around. Like he wouldn’t fight back if he weren’t so afraid.

“Aw, c’mon, Hunter, don’t feel bad!” Penelope said. “You’re not the only person your mom pushes around!”

“That’s not helping, Penelope,” Hunter mumbled.

“Oh. Sorry.”

“It’s fine. I mean, it’s true.”

This got a bit of a laugh from the others.

Then there was silence. No sounds except for the chatter of students at other tables.

“You’re brother’s gonna be there,” Brian said. “At the fight, I mean.”

“I know,” Penelope said. “He said so when we got home yesterday.”

“Oh. Okay. There’s also gonna be some other fifth graders there too.”

Penelope shot up from her seat. “What?!!”
She was promptly shushed a gently lowered back into her seat.

“How the heck?” Penelope asked.

“Seriously?” Hunter said. “What the HECK, Brian?! Are you trying to get us all in trouble?!“

Brian was clearly affronted. “Wha- NO, no! I wasn’t trying to do THAT!”

“If you weren’t trying to get us all in trouble, then what were you trying to accomplish by spreading news of the coming duel to the fifth graders?” Caroline asked.

Brian sighed. “I thought that maybe if I told Ms. Toriel’s class, some of ‘em would help Penelope, I guess.”

This caused a moment of pause for thought.

“Well,” Caroline said, “Theo is popular with some of the fifth grade girls.”

“I don’t blame them,” Levi said. “he IS really pretty…”

“Ew, Levi, what the heck?” Penelope said. “That’s my BROTHER, you nasty!”

“He’s also on the soccer team,” Hunter said. “He probably knows some people who’d be willing to help.”

Penelope tugged thoughtfully on her lower lip. “That’s true, too…and a lot of them have mentioned being upset with Miranda for some reason or another…”

“You guys’re being careful right?” Flowey said. “I mean, yeah, you’re plotting, that’s great, I’m proud of ya, but keep it on the down low, okay? After all…”

Flowey turned to glare at Miranda, who had only just started eavesdropping. “…you never know what kind of rats might be listening!”

Miranda’s eyes widened in fear before turning into a glare of someone who’d been caught red-handed and was indignant about it.

She continued to glare at the group while munching on her grapes.

Chara noticed Miranda glaring at them while eating grapes.

Chara gave her their Creepy Face.

Miranda noticed this and went to throw away her trash in fear.

She didn’t come back.

Naomi and Olive looked at Chara weirdly.

Caroline watched as all of this unfolded, from Naomi’s second-hand sob story up to Miranda’s mysterious flight.

She checked her phone for the time.

Fifteen minutes til showdown.
The Heart of Gold is now online.

And it has been for about ten minutes. Difference was that now everyone could get started.

Replay was in school today, so he wasn’t present. He would be updated tomorrow via email.

Sans’ question for Kindred yesterday was answered.

“Sorry, mates! Been out on the job, you know how it is!”

Kindred sighed.

“Extempore, next time you sod off for months on end to go surfing, do tell someone.”

The way in which Kindred managed to say “surfing” with the type of vitriol typically reserved for the word “heathens” was quite impressive. They had a real knack for making the innocuous things sound like crimes against nature.

Sans wondered if they had kids. Parents had a way of making the innocent sound dreadful.

“He could at least send some pics,” Jessamy said. “Preferably selfies. Wet t-shirt selfies.”

“Well, then, dear Jessamy, I shall send them your way posthaste!” Extempore said.

“Extempore, please do not make fun of my speech patterns,” Kindred said, exhausted as fuck.

“Then don’t be such a knocker. Cross as a frog in a sock, you are…”

“I wouldn’t have to be a ‘knocker’ if you weren’t such a bloomin’ idiot.”

Heh. Bloomin’. Sans wrote that one down.

“Uh, hey, guys,” Hyperion said, “as nice as it is to have Extempore back, we really should get to work.”

“Right then. Timeline, you mentioned a dead bird to me yesterday?”

“yep. got into the database of the regional hwc.”

“Really,” Kindred said, mildly impressed.

“They still use windows xp.”

“Well there goes my excitement.”

“but wait til ya see what i did to their system.”

“Wotcher mean by that?” Extempore asked, enthusiasm apparent.

“Yeah, man!” Jessamy said. “Tell us whatchu got!”

Sans chuckled. He sent out the news article outlining what happened.

Extempore, real name Liam Knox from Queensland, Australia. Surfer on the professional circuit, internationally renowned. He often leaves on spontaneous surfing trips without telling anyone. He’s a free-spirit hippie type. The type of guy people like Linda complain about to the neighborhood association. The type of guy that everyone actually likes and respects, even if they claim otherwise.
Even Kindred, the Heart of Gold’s resident prick, couldn’t help but admit some admiration for the
guy.

“‘Ayo, Timeline, yer in Ebott?’” Extempore asked,

“‘yep.’”

“Dude, who cares?” Hyperion said through laughter, “Look at the computers! Look at them!”

“I know,” Jessamy said through tears of pride. “So petty...so beautiful...so…”

“Timeline.”

“yes, kindred?”

“You invaded the database your region’s chapter of the HWC. And set it up so that any time
someone tried to do something. A different Homestuck meme pops up.”

“yep.”

“This is so cruel that I am tempted to report you to Doc Verne. And I would if I wasn’t so certain
that she’d absolutely love it.”

“Timeline, you’re a bang-up bastard if there ever was one.”

“i’m flattered, extempore.”

“Oh, AND!” Extempore began. “I’ll be in Ebott this summer for the surfing competition!”

“nice. see ya then, and watch out for angry fish.”

“Been doin’ THAT all my life!”

“but have they been able to walk on two legs?”

“New challenge, then!”

“she’d really like you.”

“But ain’t the Fish woman gay fuh the Dino lady?” Jessamy asked.

“she’d gay in general, jessamy. she’s married to the dino lady and they’re actually trying for a kid
together.”

“Not even gonna ask,” Kindred said.

Sharona was now successfully back to the place she had fucked up on. She could do this. She
could finish this.

Wait.

Hold on.

Does Randy know about the PTA meeting tonight?

Does he know about the meeting but not that she’ll be absent?
Can Randy behave himself this time?

Wait. Of course he can’t. Sharona wasn’t quite sure why, but she got the horrible feeling that Randy and Sans together at a PTA meeting was going to end...poorly. For everyone.

Then her phone rang. She shot up. She looked back at her work. Safe for now. Thank GOD. She went to answer the phone.

“What.”

“hey sharona.”

“Oh, heya Sans. Can this wait? I’m ALMOST done with a project due midnight.”

“don’t worry. i’m just callin’ ta say that mettaton’s gonna be at the pta meeting tonight.”

“Oh, alright. Thanks for letting me know.”

“no problem. good luck on yer project.”

“Ugh, you just HAD to remind me.”

“okay, sorry ‘bout that. bye.”

“Bye.”

Sharona slammed the phone down onto the receiver.

Randy and Sans on their own were bad enough. But this. This was the ULTIMATE in poor planning. Randy and Sans on their own with Mettaton...she shuddered at the thought. God only knows what sort of fresh hell those three together could dish out.

How she wished she could join them to watch it all unfold.

Penelope, Caroline, Levi, Brian, Hunter, Chara, MK, and Flowey stood at the tetherball pole by the music building.

The music building was one of those collapsible buildings used during construction or remodelling. The tetherball pole next to it was older than the school building itself. And it showed that by proudly displaying the flat dirty tetherball flapping in the wind on an old fraying rope. The teachers who went to school here were very much surprised that the old thing hadn’t been taken down as a safety hazard. But now it was as much a part of Mountainside Elementary as Ms. Roth or the cafetorium or the terrible fake rib sandwiches the lunch ladies insist on serving every Tuesday.

Slowly but surely some other kids started to show up. Theo, Sofie, Moira, and Jacob were among the first. Marilla and some of her friends came next.

Then came more fifth graders. Then more fourth graders. Then some third graders.

By the time Miranda showed up with Naomi and Olive and the boys from Mr. Steiner’s class that would be doing the fighting for her.

These boys looked like they should not have been in elementary school for years. Penelope thought
the largest one of them had prison tats. Upon closer inspection it was a temporary tattoo of a Lisa Frank dolphin.

That one meant business.

“Nice tattoo,” Penelope managed.

“Oh, uh, thanks,” the boy said. “My sister did it for me.”

“She’s good.”

“Yeah…”

“No accepting compliments from the enemy, Bruce,” Miranda snapped.

Poor Bruce was so easily cowed it was sad. “Sorry…”

“If you’re sorry, then you’ll do what I say. Naomi?”

Naomi looked up nervously at Miranda. Clearly she wanted to be anywhere but here.

“Yes, Miranda?”

“What time is it?”

“11:53. Seven more minutes.”

“Okay then! Everyone, pick your sides.”

There nervous silence. Being asked to pick sides in a girl fight was like being asked if you wanted death by cyanide or arsenic. Either way you’re completely and truly fucked.

Bruce tentatively stood up and lumbered over to Penelope’s side.

Miranda was shocked. Her best fighter, a traitor. How typical. Dogs going to the first person to offer them a pat on the head.

Too bad for him she had his lackeys on her side -

Wait. Bruce’s lackeys joined the enemy.

No. This wasn’t supposed to happen. They were supposed to beat the ugly freaks to a pulp. Not join their side.

What the heck was going on here?

Miranda was clearly not going to win this.

She growled. Time to bail. “Come on Pretty Committee. Let’s go.”

“Wait!” Caroline shouted.

Miranda paused. “What do YOU want? Cuz I’m NOT giving you my blood.”

“I wouldn’t accept it if you had, but what I WANTED to say was something about your name.”

Miranda was confused now. “What about my name?”
Caroline smirked. Not what she expected to hear, but definitely better.

“Miranda is the name of a moon orbiting Uranus.”

It took all of ten seconds for the mob of schoolchildren to register exactly what Caroline had said. And when they did, howls upon whoops of laughter ensued.

“Wait!” Sofie shouted above the noise. “Someone might hear us!”

So they stopped. Before laughing again, only quieter this time.

“No wonder she’s such a butt, eh Brian?” Hunter said as he elbowed Brian in the ribs.

This got the laughter up and going again.

Brian, of course, joined in.

Miranda glared at all of them.

“I am telling on ALL of you, I hope you know this!”

“Won’t work,” Theo said. “They already know.”

“Ex-ca-USE me?”

“You clearly have a farting problem, but thanks for excusing yourself,” Penelope said.

Miranda shrieked and lunged toward Penelope.

An encounter was triggered.

The Heart of Gold went offline. Sans made a mental note to make the the HWC’s propaganda comic strips link to a random loss.jpg edit. When he was motivated enough to do so.

He was feeling far less motivated than he had been. In fact he was less motivated today than he was yesterday. Sans knew that tomorrow and Sunday would be far, FAR worse. Because those were the only days he could throw any guesses at when it came to possible happenings.

He already dreaded the 14th of January every year. But this year? Not only was Papyrus not going to be there, but Frisk - his KID, his OWN KID…

No. There were three more days until then. After that…

NONONONONONONONONONONON. Time to force his mind elsewhere.

He was in no mood to get off the ratty foldout couch. He used his Magic to move a book toward him. It didn’t matter which one. Any book would do right now.

Devil In The White City. Randy had lent it to him back in November. He’d read through it but never gave it back. It was about the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893. It was written not unlike a novel.

Sans was NOT going to read this one.

He didn’t want the flashbacks to things that didn’t happen to start up again.
Papyrus would be at home all day today. He didn’t need to hear that again.

Does even know about them? It doesn’t matter. Nothing does.

Nothing ever does.

Penelope and Miranda stood in the encounter screen.

“What the heck did you do?!” Miranda screeched.

“Me? What did YOU do?” Penelope countered.

Flowey popped up.

“Oh, here’s what’s happening, you two. This is an encounter. That thing in the white box is your SOUL, the very culmination of your being.”

Penelope and Miranda looked at their SOULS.

Penelope’s was Green. It had a sort of paddle/shield thing by it. When Penelope tried to move, the paddle/shield thing moved instead.

“Whoa, cool!”

Miranda stared at the Blue heart that Frisk’s dumb flower thing called her SOUL. How could that thing be her SOUL? Yeah, it’s a heart shape, but it’s Blue. Blue is a boy color.

Miranda tried moving around. She got the hang of the mechanics of it before long. Penelope had it down quicker.

“Oh, if you two are done playing with yourselves, start doing stuff. Just move your SOUL over the buttons down there and you’ll figure it out.”

Flowey fled from the screen again.

Penelope and Miranda both stood at the spot where Flowey had been in confusion.

Huh.

Penelope moved her SOUL over each option, starting with ACT.

Penelope>ACT>Check

Miranda

LV: 1

HP: 20/20

AT: 1

DF: 0

She’s a jerkface, but at least she’s honest. Sort of.

“What the HECK are you DOING?!”
Miranda’s turn.

Miranda>ACT>Check

Penelope

LV: 1
HP: 15/15
AT: 5
DF: 10

She’s ugly AND weak. Wow.

“Huh. Cool!”

Penelope chose MERCY.

Penelope>MERCY>Spare

“Uh, look, I-I really don’t wanna fight you. Fighting is kinda stupid and I really don’t want something bad to happen. Let’s...let this all go? I don’t even know why I’m here.”

“You’re here because I want you GONE! Everyone wants you gone! THAT’S why you’re here!”

Penelope’s face darkened.

“I know that.”

“Then why are you -”

“I KNOW everyone wants me gone. I know that’s why I’m here. That’s why my mom and brother are here. Because everyone wants me gone...and no one will tell me why they want me gone…”

Penelope started to sob.

Miranda was starting to get irritated. What the heck is this pathetic loser talking about?

Miranda>FIGHT

The hit connected.

HP: 14.5/15

Penelope>MERCY>Spare

“Why do you want me gone? And DON’T say because I’m a loser or a nerd or whatever the heck I am! Be honest. Why do you want me gone?”

Miranda grimaced. This was getting stupid. Did this girl really not get it?

“Why do YOU think I want you gone?!”

Miranda>FIGHT
Penelope had HAD it. She’d tried to be nice. But it just wasn’t going through.

But she still didn’t want to fight. Fighting is cowardly.

Penelope>ACT>Cheap Shot

“Because I have actual FRIENDS while you have...have…”

Penelope was trying think of a term that was suitable yet not too offensive. She had none.

“...I dunno. But they’re not really your friends, are they? They’re clearly terrified of you -”

“Well they SHOULD be!”

“Then that makes you a bad person AND a bad friend too.”

Miranda’s eyes widened in shock and indignation.

“How DARE you say that! I don’t have to listen to YOU! You know what? This is OVER! You don’t wanna fight me? FINE! You won’t fight me!”

…

Miranda>ACT>Demand

“Well? What are you waiting for? Do that stupid sparey-thingy.”

Penelope rolled her eyes.

Penelope>MERCY>Spare

Miranda>Accept

Miranda was spared! Penelope won!

Everyone was gawking at them. Flowey was reading a newspaper.


Then Flowey turned to the sobbing, bruised Penelope and the no-worse-for-wear-but-clearly-very-upset Miranda.

“Aww, man. No one died. But which of you won?”

Miranda turned her head away.

“Come on. Let’s go.”

Miranda grabbed her backpack and turned back toward the building.

Naomi and Olive looked toward her, then at each other.

“Naomi. Olive. I said let’s go.”

The two betas scrambled to grab their bags and follow their alpha.
Everyone watched them flee, still gawking.

“That did not answer my question at all,” Flowey said. “Which of you twerps won?”

Penelope thought for a moment. “I...I think I won? Some weird voice said I won…”

“Kid, in encounters, weird voices are almost always right.”

“Huh. That was...kinda like a video game. That was cool!”

“Penelope,” Caroline uttered suddenly, “you’re hurt.”

“Really? Huh. All I feel is my head and arm throbbing - oh hey bruises. Not even bad ones...”

“Are you kidding me?!” Brian shouted. “Look at those things, they’re completely gnarly!”

Penelope’s eyes darkened. “I’ve had worse.”

Theo wrapped Penelope’s arm about his shoulders. “I’m takin’ you to the nurse.”

“But they’re not that bad -”

“Not to us, but to them -” he flicked his head toward the crowd “- it’s a different story.”

“I’m coming with you,” Caroline declared.

Theo opened his mouth to protest before closing it again. He looked down at Penelope.

“Do ya want her to…?”

Penelope nodded fiercely before clutching her throbbing head.

“Okay, okay. Caroline, come on.”

Caroline nodded once and grabbed her bag.

She checked her phone for the time. 12:24. Class was starting again shortly.

Sans laid on the ratty foldout couch in the basement. He hadn’t budged since nine. Four hours of nothing worthwhile. It was like he was binge watching The Mettaton Hour with Papyrus all over again.

Funny thing. Sans thought back to a vague memory of a timeline long RESET - a True Pacifist timeline once again.

Another one where Papyrus had told Sans about his feelings toward Mettaton. Sans considered the differences between that timeline and the current one.

In that particular timeline, Sans hadn’t told Papyrus of his feelings for Toriel, ever. In the current one he had told Papyrus the moment he’d realized his love for Toriel - for some reason. In the dead timeline, Alphys and Undyne hadn’t married before it RESET. As a result, Papyrus never told Mettaton his feelings.

Sans thought back to every True Pacifist timeline he could muster up memories of. All of them held differences, but as with anything pertaining to the universe, with all that chaos comes constants. These constants increase in number with each RESET. And as the number of constants increased,
so did the length of time between them as well.

Sans wondered if The Player knew this. Probably not. If it did, and whether or not it saw the same connection Sans did, there was a 99.9999 percent chance that it did not give a shit. Chances of it knowing this and using it to toy with the universe are about 87.6 percent.

Sans found himself wondering about the true nature of The Player for the first time. Who or what was it, exactly? Where did it come from? How did it find their universe? What made it want to play with it?

What is The Player?

Mettaton sipped at his coffee and checked his phone for the time and any missed messages.

The time was 2:43 P.M. Two missed (read: ignored) messages from Lola Leigh. Delete and delete.

Mettaton sighed. That woman did NOT know when to give up. So he’d give her a sign. Oh he’d give her a sign. He’d give her a motherfucking billboard tricked out in neon lights in the shape of his middle finger right outside her Central Park penthouse.

He wondered if that was legal. Probably not. But it was nice to fantasize.

Mettaton decided to text Sans to let him know that he was on his way.

From his earliest incorporeal days, Mettaton had dreamed of himself doing so, so much with his corporeal life - singing, dancing, acting, all three at once, all three at once on the Surface, and more. Attending PTA meetings on the Surface on behalf of a Human child with his boyfriend’s brother was not one of those things.

Wait, was it?

Sans texted back.

*ok

Mettaton sighed. Did Sans not know that replying ‘ok’ to a text is rude?

Wait. Of course he did. He was just too lazy to do much else.

No, no, no. It wasn’t laziness - not entirely. Papyrus knew that too.

Sans was probably in the midst of another depressive episode…

*You sure I can’t go on my own?

*pap would kill me

*Alright, alright, just making sure~

*another time

*Another time what?

*you can be alone

*Alright then! See you in half an hour!
Mettaton closed out of the messaging app with a sigh. He opened it up again.

*You need anything?*

*no*

*Alright!*

Sans was surprisingly hardheaded for someone so consistently laidback. Just another one of those times where he could not believe that Sans had multiple doctoral degrees.

But then again, there were times that he couldn’t believe that Alphys was the Royal Scientist of the Underground - often for similar reasons as Sans.

But he knew Alphys had some reason. And although not everyone has a clear reason for a mental illness, Mettaton really couldn’t help but wonder if Sans did.

He had seemed much...happier in those old movies…

Mettaton wanted to know, he really did. But he knew that any inquiry into that subject was to be done on their terms, not his. But he just couldn’t help but wonder...

What had happened to those two?

Linda took a drag of her third cigarette and glanced around the parking lot.

Diana’s Lexus was in its usual spot (the one reserved for teacher of the month), but there was no Diana in sight.

Strange, yes, but Linda certainly wasn’t complaining.

At least not for that reason.

Once again she appealed to the principal to ask her - nay, BEG her to cancel the spring concert. Not only was her request so RUDELY denied, she was threatened with brute force!

Okay, maybe grabbing the principal by the shirt collar was a teensy bit much, but it’s not like Linda was actually going to DO anything! It DEFINITELY didn’t warrant attempting to call school security.

The last of the cigarette petered out. Linda grabbed another from the box and lit it up. She’d need to buy more on her way home.

Linda watched as Helen parked her Pontiac. You’d think being married to the owner of a car dealership would get you something better.

Linda felt a twinge of smugness as she thought of her beautiful white Cadillac.

Helen stood next to Linda, her scarf covering her face except her eyes. Helen always had the prettier eyes of their friend group. The bitch.

“Diana’s with the principal,” Helen said.

Linda seemed to brighten somewhat. “Really? What for?”
“Don’t hold your breath, Lin. Miranda got into a fight.”

Linda raised her eyebrows at this. “Really? You must be lying.”

“Brian was there, along with the entire fourth grade and maybe half of the fifth grade. All the kids I asked confirmed that Miranda was in fact wailing on someone.”

Linda couldn’t believe her ears. Sweet little Miranda Mosley, getting into fights? Couldn’t be. Impossible.

Then Linda thought back to the PTA meeting in September.

Suddenly it didn’t seem all that unlikely for Miranda to get into a fight.

Linda glanced around. “You wouldn’t happen to know who she fought with, do you?”

Helen shook her head. “Nope. No one telling. All I know is that there was a fight attended by dozens of kids and that Miranda started it.”

Linda sighed. “I knew that girl was trouble. Next thing you know she’ll be just like her mother…”

“Hm.”

Linda checked her watch. 3:26.

“Oh, shit. Helen, hold my purse, I need to dig around in it for a bit.”

Helen had no time to protest as Linda shoved her pursed into her sternum hard enough to have the wind knocked out of her.

As Linda dug through her purse and Helen gasped for breath like a dying fish Randy Marlow walked by.

Randy glanced at them and quirked his eyebrow. Helen mouthed something that could have been either “help me” or “kill me”. Randy mouthed sorry and held up his palms apologetically as he walked through the front doors of the school.

Randy pitied Helen. Not only did she have Diana to keep from hurting herself, but she was also effectively Linda’s pack mule now.

He entered the library and sat down next to Shiva.

Randy observed the crowd of PTA kids as they interacted with one another.

Shiva’s daughter Shashi was looking at a picture book of animals with Hannah. Frisk, Flowey, MK, Hunter, Brian, and Levi were playing a card game - Levi was winning as usual. Naomi and Olive were off talking about something or another. Theo was chatting with Caroline it seemed. Penelope was nowhere to be found.

“hey. sorry i’m late, i had a guest to pick up.”

“Hello, everyone~”

Sans and Mettaton walked in like they owned the place. They probably could. Mettaton had the money and charisma, Sans had the knowledge and connections, both had the salt and the...more salt.
They took their seats.

“Mettaton.”

“Randy.”

“How’ve ya been?”

“I’ve been well, thank you. Papyrus and I are flying out to Chicago tomorrow, and tonight I’ll be having dinner over at Toriel’s.”

“Sounds nice. Sharona couldn’t make it, she’s got a huge project for work due midnight.”

“Oh, dear…”

“She’s been at it nonstop since last Friday.”

Randy sighed. “She reeeally needs a break…”

“Sure sounds like it -” Sans sniffed the air. “Oh no. randy, make sure levi has his mask on. shiva, get shashi as far away from hannah as possible. monica, you go and -”

Sans paused. “Where’s monica?”

A chorus of shrugs and “I don’t know’s came from the PTA.

Sans sighed. “She’s probably at work.”

But where’s Penelope…?

Levi laid down his cards. Four of a kind.

The groans from the other kids was music to his ears.

While Levi played to win, he still had a conscience.

He smirked. “You guys know what? I’m gonna go easy on you guys and stop playing. I’ll just watch you guys play through the next few rounds without me.”

Levi watched as their face became awash with relief.

“Wait,” Hunter said, “you’re still dealing though, right?”

“Yeah, dude,” MK added. “None of us know how to deal cards.”

Levi acquiesced to their desires and dealt the cards.

As soon as he was done, he got up to leave.

Brian, Hunter, Chara and MK started playing again.

But with Levi gone they no longer had a clear idea of who was winning because he won so often.

So they degraded themselves to playing Uno.

Hunter saw Mettaton. Eye contact was made. Hunter smiled and waved.
Mettaton smiled and waved back. So did Linda.

Oh well. Let his mom think that he was waving at her.

Linda got out her tablet to take roll. It wasn’t something that needed to be done, it was just something she did because it gave her leverage to use against people she didn’t like. And anything was better than nothing.

Diana was absent...so were a few other parents...Ms. DeMartino too, but she has a job.

Linda really did not like single parents. How could they possibly raise their children properly without a spouse? Those children were NOT going to amount to anything in life.

Wait.

Someone... _important_ was missing.

“Mr. Marlow,” Linda said, trying her hardest not to look as happy as she felt, “where is your wife at this evening, hm?”

“She has a deadline due tonight at midnight for work,” he said.

“Hmmmm. Yeeees. Isn’t she a...what was it? A cartoonist?”

“Graphic designer.”

“Yeeees, I see. Must be difficult, drawing pictures on a computer all day long…”

“As a matter of fact,” Randy said, “it is. If you’d actually seen samples of her work, she’s actually quite skilled.”

“Puh-leeese. No one can make a living doodling all day long. It’s not even that hard.”

“And yet she makes over 50 grand a year. Without my salary being added onto that.”

Linda was starting to get unnerved. “You’re lying.”

“God smite me if I am.”

Randy glanced around the room.

“Huh. No smiting. Anyway, enough about my wife’s job. We’re here for the kids.”

Linda’s eye twitched.

“i thought everyone was here for the free bags of dead leaves.”

Ugh. Sans.

Wait. Was that…

Linda forced herself to smile. Be pleasant. People are watching. “Sans. I see you’ve brought a guest with you…”

“indeed i did. but from what i’ve heard you’ve...metta him before?”
Sans winked, smiling. Linda growled, twitching.

“What is sh... he wearing?” Linda growled through clenched teeth.

“It’s called a pantsuit, Margaret,” Mettaton said, casually filing his nails. “You’re literally wearing one right now, only in powder blue. Not your color at ALL, by the way.”

Linda’s eye twitched. Again. “My name is Linda.”

“Whatever, Carol.”

“uh, you okay there, linda?” Sans asked.

“I’m fine!” Linda snapped.

Sans barely even blinked. “okay, geez. no need to yell.”

“I am NOT yelling!” Linda shouted.

“if you say so.”

Linda growled. “Aaaanyway, does anyone have questions before we get started?”

Sans raised his hand before Linda could continue.

Linda glared, her smile practically stapled in place.

“Sans?”

“uh, yeah, i heard from a few people that you tried to cancel the spring concert, could you elaborate on that for me? the details i received were a bit odd.”

There was whispering. Linda KNEW they were whispering about her.

That would not stand.

“Weeeeell, you see, Sans, I recommended postponing the spring concert due to lack of funding going toward it.”

“Bullshit.”

Mettaton had stood up, banged his hands on the table and stared Linda in the eye.

“There is no lack of funding. I’ve done my research, Lana, and it would appear that the funding is going...”

Mettaton got out his phone and scrolled down a few swipes.

“Oh, look at that. Over a thousand dollars is going toward a dead baseball team. Why is that?”

“Because it’s not really dead, unlike your... boyfriend!”

The entire library was silent.

“Well.”

Mettaton stood up straight, plastered the most beautiful smile he could muster in this situation.
“Welly well well well well.”

The silence suddenly became so thick that Linda swore she heard someone choke.

She was suddenly afraid.

“W-well, what I meant by that was-”

“Don’t even think about justifying that statement you xenophobic bitch.”

Oh no.

Everyone, even the children, were watching the debacle as it unfolded.

Some of the parents hightailed it out of the library with their children as quickly as they could. Those who remained did so out of fear.

Sans’ left eye was flashing Cyan and Yellow.

Mettaton’s visible eye was glinting furiously as well.

“Linda.”

Helen spoke up. Her voice was calm, if wavering slightly from fear. Not even Helen herself was sure if she was more afraid of Sans or of Linda in this moment.

“I am saying this as someone who does NOT want a repeat of…” Helen swallowed back a small amount of bile, “…That Day, just take it back. Forget your stupid pride for one measly second, and take. Your words. Back.”

Linda was shocked. Was Helen…telling her what to do?

No. That could wait.

Linda gulped.

She didn’t want to do this. Not again.

“Lucinda,” Mettaton warned, “you’d better listen, and you’d better listen good. I don’t know about you, but right now, I just want all of this -” Mettaton gestured all over the room “- to be over with. I have a plane to catch in the morning. So just take it back. Even if you don’t mean any of it. And I am not leaving this spot until you do.”

Linda looked around the room. Her church group, her neighbors, her parents, the HWC - what would they think of her if she gave up now?

Wait. This wasn’t giving up. This was just...keeping her life intact.

Linda swallowed before doing exactly what she didn’t want to do.

Toriel graded papers in her classroom. There were a few B’s in here, to her surprise. They were mid-high B’s, practically A’s, but B’s nonetheless. She was finally challenging her students a bit, and they delivered. Boy, did they deliver.
There was a knock at her door.

“Come in, the door’s unlocked.”

The sensation of excessively-powerful Magic smothered the surrounding air.

It was Magic that she recognized.

Toriel sighed before slowly, cautiously turning her head toward the door.

Sans’ eyelights were gone. His bones were rattling with barely-repressed rage. He seemed even more tired than usual.

And Frisk...poor Frisk, they were still crying in Sans arms, holding onto him for dear life it seemed.

And Mettaton...he seemed like he wanted to cry almost. He was shaking like a leaf, whether from rage or something else entirely Toriel knew not.

Toriel had only about a quarter of the papers graded. It was barely after 4.

She sighed, resigned. She knew that they all needed to go home.

She had chicken and dumplings in the crockpot. Frisk loved crockpot chicken and dumplings...

Undyne nearly kicked down the door, then decided against it. She wasn’t sure why. She just chose not to.

She opened the door. “Alphy, I’m home.”

Alphys was on the couch wrapped in a blanket with a bowl of ramen watching Yuri On Ice. For the eleventh time. Without her.

Not that Undyne could blame her - it was the best anime of 201Z hands down, after all. It made the year worth it, in Undyne’s eyes.

No. No, Yuri On Ice was only the icing on the cake.

Alphys becoming her wife. That made the year one of the best in her life.

Undyne was nervous.

“Well?”

Alphys looked up at her.

“Well w-what?”

“Are you...?”

Alphys turned back toward the television. Undyne was worried for a second until she noticed that it was episode 7. Worry diminished.

The crowning moment of the episode flew by. It got to both of them every single time.

And so, the end credits rolled past.
They were silent.

“You haven’t answered me, ya know.”

“I-I know.”

“And?”

“A-and what?”

“Alphys. Quite messin’ with me, and tell me.”

Undyne took Alphys by the chin and turned her head to face her.

“Are you...are we pregnant, Alphy?”

Alphys looked down for a moment.

Then she gazed back up at Undyne, beaming more widely than she ever had before.

“Y...yeah. We are.”

Undyne’s expression became one of shock. Then she began to tear up.

Alphys was a bit scared for a moment. Then Undyne hugged her.

“Thank you...thank you so, so much Alphy...Oh stars above Alphy I love you so, so much!”

Undyne just started sobbing in wordless joy and she held Alphys close.

Alphys teared up and hugged back.

“No...thank you, Undyne. You...you saved my life, that night we first met at the dump...and...I’m so glad you did...I am so, so happy right nowww...”

Alphys’ joyous tears started to well up as well.

Only a lucky few can claim to have cried themselves to sleep on tears of joy. But Alphys and Undyne would proclaim if asked that none were luckier than they on that night.

Mettaton came home from dinner at Toriel’s and stomped up to his room and tossed himself gracelessly onto his bed and proceeded to feel like garbage. Family tradition. When things got tough, when you felt like you weren’t worth anything, that’s fine. Just lie back for a moment and think about nothing at all. Good for what ails ya.

His phone vibrated in his back pocket.

*1 text from: ~Sugar Skull~*

*HEY, HONEY. ARE YOU ALRIGHT? SANS TOLD ME ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED. NOT IN DETAIL, BUT ENOUGH.*

*I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I’M VERY PROUD OF YOU FOR HOW WELL YOU HANDLED IT.*

Mettaton read the texts over and over again in his head, letting them set in. He was in tears.
He opened the contacts and clicked the number.

It barely rang once before there was an answer on the other end.

“YES? WHAT IS IT, METTATON?”

“Nothing much, dear. I just wanted to hear your voice...to talk for a bit…”

“OH. WELL IF THAT’S THE CASE, WHAT DO YOU WISH TO TALK TO THE GREAT PAPYRUS ABOUT?”

Mettaton giggled. It was adorable and so...reassuring when Papyrus got all excited about something as simple as talking to him over the phone. It made him feel special. It made him feel wanted and loved in ways he could never have fathomed.

They talked about what all they wanted to do on their trip to Chicago, not stopping until Mettaton’s phone and Mettaton himself needed charging.

Toriel was appalled. No matter what Linda Thompson did, she always got off lightly. And by lightly, Toriel meant “how in all the hells has that woman not been fired yet”. Perhaps in another universe Mrs. Thompson would not only be fired, but imprisoned for the shit she’s pulled.

But alas, that is not what is. It is merely wishful thinking about what should be.

Toriel finished putting the last of the dishes in the dishwasher and began to get started at putting away the remaining chicken and dumplings into tupperwares for leftovers tomorrow.

Papyrus came in from the den, tired and giggly and aflush with affection.

Toriel smiled. Those two were so in love…

“I do not suppose that Mettaton is feeling better?”

Papyrus jumped nearly a foot in the air he was so startled. But he calmed down quickly enough.

“NYEH HEH, MUCH BETTER!”

“That is good to hear.”

There was a silence.

“SANS IS STILL AWAKE, IF YOU ARE WONDERING.”

Toriel was embarrassed enough that she was more red in the face than white. “I was not - I mean, that is -”

“MS. TORIEL, IT’S PAINFULLY OBVIOUS TO EVERYONE WHO KNOWS YOU TWO THAT YOU AND SANS HAVE VERY MUTUAL ROMANTIC FEELINGS TOWARD EACH OTHER. EVERYONE, THAT IS, EXCEPT FOR THE TWO OF YOU. NEITHER OF YOU BELIEVES YOURSELF TO BE DESERVING OF THE OTHER FOR SOME FOOLISH REASON OR ANOTHER.”

Toriel was about to provide a counterargument when she registered Papyrus’ statement in full. Or rather a very specific portion thereof.
“Mutual...romantic...feelings...?”

“AS I LITERALLY JUST SAID!”

Toriel took the time for the words and their associated implications to settle in.

“Is Sans in his room, Papyrus? Or do you know for certain -”

“HE IS IN THE BASEMENT. ON THE RATTY OLD FOLDOUT COUCH.”

Toriel sighed. “Thank you, Papyrus.”

“YOU ARE VERY WELCOME.”

Toriel gave Papyrus a brief hug before going down into the basement.

---

Sans was exhausted.

So exhausted he couldn’t think. Or feel. Or...anything, really. He just couldn’t.

So he didn’t.

He heard the basement door unlock and then lock back again. Then he heard footsteps go down the creaky wooden steps.

He felt someone sit beside him. He knew who it was.

“Sans?”

Oh. He was wrong.

It wasn’t him.

Sans didn’t budge. Not even an atom’s worth of movement.

“I do not wish to bother you, I...simply wish to sit awhile with you. If you don’t mind, of course.”

Sans didn’t make any motion, but something told Toriel that it was alright to sit. So she did, albeit a tad cautiously.

Toriel sat down and wrapped her arms about her. She glanced briefly toward Sans.

She was nervous. But she knew what she wanted to do and by the stars above she would.

Toriel leaned a toward Sans until she was lying between him and the back of the couch, spooning him from behind. She wrapped her arms around him.

“I...I am sorry, if this is not something you want,” Toriel whispered hoarsely. “I just...I need this. For a moment. Please...”

Sans shuddered. Toriel...she sounded so...it sounded like she was about to cry.

Sans grabbed her hand. He choked out a sob. Toriel hummed a tune unknown to him, and yet at once the tune held memories of timelines so old and dead that they had disappeared from all memory, save for this one song that spoke everything they were...
Wise men say— Only fools rush in— But I can’t help— Falling in love with you—

Wrapped in the strong, loving arms of the only lover his SOUL would ever allow him, slowly drifting off in her embrace as her very being vibrated to the sound of her voice, as her SOUL beat strongly and beautifully against him...

The world could RESET right now for all Sans cared.

Just let him keep this one memory…

Dark, darker yet darker.

And yet, becoming undark.

Or would it be unbecoming dark?

No, becoming undark was far more accurate. Unbecoming dark could easily be misconstrued as a very unattractive shade of dark.

As Dr. Gaster wallowed in the semantics of the state of the Void, he felt something.

Something familiar.

It was returning.

How very, very interesting...

The Player has finally grown complacent.

Gaster only hoped he could make it this time.

His family needed him. And this time he will not let them down.

He needed to find it. He needed to see it finally come to a conclusion.

He would not rest until his family was free from this wretched being’s dreadful little game.

This he swears by the stars.

Oh how he missed the stars...

You are tired. You want this to end. But it can’t. Not now.

Too many happy people. Too many people who need someone like you to listen to them. Too many people who deserve a happy ending once and for all.

Too many people who love you, and who you love in return.

They need you, and you need them.

Your friends and family are only just starting to finally heal.

So many who had lost all hope have acquired a spark, however small.

You won’t let that spark die.
You are filled with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

Get In The Ring - Guns N Roses
Can't Help Falling In Love - Elvis Presley
Stars - Les Miserables
Chapter Summary

Pain. Pain and fluff and near-sex experiences.
And pillow forts. You can NEVER go wrong with pillow forts.
Unless you belly flop onto one and it's made of books. That might be a mistake.

Chapter Notes

Okay. Sweet and cute chapter before we get into the deep shit.
I also referenced my other fic One And Only: Or; Insecurities, Switzerland, and a Yellow Submarine. Both it and Some Things Are Meant To Be are both connected to this story's canon.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

8:57 A.M., January 12th, 20XQ

Sans woke up from a deep and dreamless slumber.
Toriel was no longer there.
He flipped around half-expecting to see Dust.
Nothing.
He didn’t want to move. He didn’t see the point.
But there was no point in not moving either.
No point in general, really.
Especially when everything is going to RESET.
At least now he knows that it wasn’t their fault.
Sans turned his peripheral vision toward the end table.
Scrambled eggs and hash browns swimming in ketchup.
There was a note. Next to it.
Good morning Sans! Here is your breakfast, please let me know if it needs reheating. Papyrus and Mettaton are leaving/left at noon for the airport.

Have a nice day!

~ Toriel

Oh yeah. Papyrus was leaving with Mettaton for Chicago in...

...about three hours. Wow.

No point in going back to sleep again.

No point at all.

Sans decided to take the path of least effort. He took a shortcut upstairs into the living room.

From the way Toriel and Papyrus stared at him he must look like garbage.

Not surprising since he sure as hell feels like it.

"SANS! USE THE DOOR NEXT TIME! SCARING PEOPLE HALF TO DEATH WITH SPACE-TIME SHENANIGANS…"

Sans hummed noncommittally and sat down. So he probably didn’t look like garbage. Any more than usual, at least.

He didn’t accept the pun that was practically offered to him. Death puns were only to be used when applied to himself for the rest of this timeline and the next.

And besides. He wanted Papyrus’ trip to go well.

Sure, he would be alone this year for his father’s annual memorial rites. But hey. Papyrus was honoring their old man in a new way this year.

At least he didn’t forget.

At least they didn’t forget.

Don’t forget…

Chara was awake. They had been all night long. SAVING again and again every five or ten minutes.

There had to be a way. There had to.

They needed to do something. Anything.

They just want to help…

They lie awake in bed for another ten or twenty minutes before getting up and grabbing Flowey.

Chara checked the mirror.

It’s them.
But it’s not them.

They walked down the stairs and into the living room. They sat next to Sans on the couch.

They leaned into their Skeletal dunkle.

He understood them.

Mettaton used the window on the front door of Toriel’s as a mirror so he could adjust his lipstick.

This was thwarted as Papyrus opened the front door.

Mettaton was frozen in place, lipstick tube still held to his lower lip.

He grabbed his compact from his purse and finished the rest of his touch-up as quickly as he could.

They both laughed nervously.

Papyrus cleared his throat.

“DO COME IN…”

“Thank you~”

Mettaton stepped through the doorway. From the entryway of the house one could easily see into the living room. Sans and Frisk were on the couch, staring off into space.

It would have been adorable had the two of them not been so... tired. It would have been fine if they were tired but right now they were tired.

“Late night last night?” Mettaton asked no one in particular.

Toriel sighed. “Sans was up until around four in the morning. It is very likely that Frisk did not sleep at all.”

Mettaton hummed sympathetically.

There was a sort of silence after this. It began to get a bit heavy.

“I’m going to go see if Papy needs any help,” Mettaton said.

“You do that,” Toriel said. “I’ll go pack some snack bags for the plane ride. Is there anything in particular you’d like?”

“Do you have any of those chocolate chip granola bars?”

“I’ll go and see. Frisk eats them a lot, and they don’t always throw away the box when it’s empty…”

“Alright. If it is I’ll take some cheese nips.”

“That I believe I can handle.”

“Thank you, Toriel~”

“You are very welcome, Mettaton.”
Mettaton went up the stairs to Papyrus’ room. His bags were already packed, it seemed. He was fitting some books and games into his carry-on bag.

Mettaton had been in here quite a few times. The first time he’d actually expected a race car bed. Papyrus admitted that he did in fact have one until his twenty-first birthday. Well, the morning after at least. That’s when he got a REAL car.

“Do you need any help, sweetie?”

Papyrus started a bit at the sudden intrusion.

“OH! NO, NOT QUITE YET,” Papyrus said. He turned around to smile at Mettaton. “I WILL LET YOU KNOW IF I NEED ANYTHING, THOUGH!”

Mettaton blushed a bit and smiled in return. “Of course sweetie! Toriel is packing a snack bag for me. Did she get you one already?”

“YES, SHE DID!”

“Ah, alright then!”

There was a brief silence. This particular silence was far more comfortable than the ones Mettaton had experienced downstairs with the rest of the household.

Mettaton sat down on the edge of the bed and glanced around.

The sexy robot action figures. Two thirds of which were of Mettaton himself - Classic and EX in equal parts. All of them in mint condition.

Speaking of mint, did he remember gum?

Mettaton dug around a bit in his purse. Nope. No gum.

“Shit…”

“What is it?”

“I forgot my gum. I always chew gum on airplanes and if I don’t I get anxious and if I get anxious I get all -”

Papyrus went to his nightstand drawer and got out a few packs of raspberry gum - Mettaton’s favorite flavor.

Papyrus gave it to Mettaton while he kept talking.

“- and you do NOT want to know what happened LAST time I had regular M&Ms -”

Mettaton stopped talking when he registered the pack of gum in his hand. He turned to Papyrus, who was almost done packing.

Papyrus paused to look up and smile at him. Papyrus winked.

Well if that didn’t make Mettaton blush.

“And done! All packed and ready to go!”
“Alright! Our flight in leaves in...two hours, and the airport is about twenty minutes away -"

“DEPENDING ON TRAFFIC, OF COURSE!”

“Of course. And it says that the amount of airport-bound traffic at this time means that it will take up
around 45 minutes to make it to the airport if we leave right now.”

“I THOUGHT WE WERE LEAVING AT NOON?”

“No, sweetie, that’s when our flight leaves.”

“OH.”

“We should probably tell them…”

“WE SHOULD DEFINITELY TELL THEM.”

“We should definitely NOT tell them!”

“And why NOT, huh, Alphys?!”

“B-because Papyrus and Mettaton are leaving for Chicago and Sans is having an episode.”

Undyne grimaced. She really didn’t like that Papyrus was dating that can of glitter, but there was
nothing she could do about it. Especially since Sans was very much fine with it, and Sans had the
final say as Papyrus’ brother.

But the fact that Sans was having an episode...she remembered the first - and thankfully the only -
time she witnessed one of those.

It actually gave her a reason to respect Sans.

“Fine. We’ll wait. When do ya wanna tell ‘em?”

“I-I was thinking when Papyrus and M-Mettaton come back from their trip next week…”

“Okay. Sounds good to me.”

Undyne was very excitable and impatient by nature. She wanted to shout the news of her impending
motherhood from every rooftop and mountaintop in Ebott, maybe even the entire state. But Alphys
was like 85 percent of her impulse control, so that was not going to happen. Yet.

Undyne already knew that this kid was going to be an asskicking supergenius. The best attributes of
both their parents in one badass baby.

And even if that wasn’t the case, she didn’t give a flying fuck. This was her and Alphys’ child, and
that fact alone made them the best baby in whole the damn universe.

Anyone who says otherwise can suck it.

Sans lay facedown in the crook of the couch, Chara stacked facedown on top of him.

This was fine.

Sans blocked the world from his vision. He didn’t want to see something so...doomed.
“SANS…?”

“hm.”

“THERE...WAS A MIX-UP IN COMMUNICATION. THE FLIGHT LEAVES AT NOON. WE...WE'RE GOING TO LEAVE NOW TO BEAT THE TRAFFIC.”

“okay. have fun bro.”

Papyrus sighed.

“SANS, YOU CAN CALL OR TEXT ME IF YOU NEED TO TALK, OKAY?”

Sans paused.

“yeah.”

“OKAY THEN.”

Papyrus turned his attention away from his brother and toward his Human nibling.

“SEE YOU IN A WEEK, FRISK. DO NOT TURN INTO ANOTHER SANS WHILE I AM GONE, YOU GOT THAT?”

Chara gave a thumbs up in response.

Papyrus sighed.

After some more words that did not completely register with either of the depressed ones, the front door opened and closed.

Sans would have cried if he weren’t so goddamn exhausted.

Before long he felt the weight of Chara lifted off of him. Then he felt himself lifted up by a pair of soft, strong arms. The same ones that held him so affectionately last night.

There was a bit of jostling and the opening of a door.

There was creaking.

Sans was placed carefully on the ratty foldout couch in the basement. He felt Chara be set down opposite him.

Then he felt Toriel set herself directly between him and Chara.

She relaxed and held him and Chara close.

She didn’t know it was Chara. And Sans, Chara and Frisk all planned on keeping it that way.

The TV turned on. Corazón Espinado was on.

Sans recognized this episode. It was the one where protagonist Sol Guzman first became pen pals with Talía, thus starting him down the path of healing from his father Guillermo’s sudden disappearance.

You know what? Forget what he said last night.
This was a memory Sans wanted to last forever, no matter what happens to this timeline.

This was one of Sharona’s favorite episodes of Corazón Espinado. And the doorbell just HAD to come and interrupt it.

Seriously. Placido was about to watch La Hora de Milagro for the first time. That was like, one of the HIGHLIGHTS of the entire series.

She opened the front door in exasperation. Which quickly faded into neutrality.

Helen was at the front door, along with Brian and Hunter and Hannah.

“Hey,” Helen sighed. “Do...do you mind if we come in?”

Sharona sighed. “Come on in. Do you guys want somethin’ to eat? We got stuff for sandwiches.”

“Yeah, that sounds nice,” Helen admitted. “We didn’t exactly get to have lunch.”

Sharona turned to them and put her hands on her hips. Her eyes grew fierce.

“Oookay. Forget sandwiches. I am COOKING.”

“But -”

“Upupup - No buts! I am feeding ALL of you a decent home-cooked meal and THAT is THAT.”

“Why are you shouting so mu-”

Caroline had come out of her room in thick flannel pajamas far too big on her with a book in her arms. She looked at the crowd like a deer looked at a car’s headlights. Her eyes were about the same size in proportion to the rest of her. She used the book to hide her face. She ran back to her room and slammed the door behind her.

“Why’d Caroline slam the - ohhh.”

Levi was out of his room. He was wearing similar pajamas to Caroline. One would think it was impossible for his already messy red hair to get any messier. One would be very, very wrong.

“What’re you guys doin’ here?”

“Surprise sleepover,” Helen said.

Sharona and Levi suddenly looked slightly uncomfortable.

“Well...Caroline...doesn’t do well with unannounced group gatherings and the like,” Sharona explained. “It’s...she doesn’t adjust to new things too well in most cases.”

“Yeah, even Randy was surprised with how well she adjusted after the move!” Levi said in agreement. “It takes time, but she comes around.”

“Uh…”

Everyone turned to the source of the sound.

“I hate to interrupt,” Brian said, “but where’d Hannah go?”
There was silence.

Hunter stood up. “Do you guys have any pets?”

“Not with MY allergies,” Sharona said.

“That makes this harder…”

“I’ll show ya guys around, how’s that sound?” Levi said.

“Like you made a rhyme, now quit wasting time!” Hunter said.

Then a door slammed open.

Caroline walked into the living room.

“Your sister is in my room. We made a fort out of books and blankets, plus a smaller one for Carl, Dúlamán, Ramses, Shiny, Layla, Iroh, Marauder, A’Tuin, Crobat, and Archie.”

Everyone stared at her.

Hannah ran down the hall and into the living room.

“We need more blankets!”

“ Heck yeah we do. You guys, help us get some blankets. Sharona, thanks for the snacks. And Mrs. Green, hi.”

Caroline and Levi led the other kids down to where the blankets were stored.

Sharona and Helen watched.

“Trouble adjusting, you said?” Helen asked.

Sharona huffed. “She adjusts easier when she’s allowed to talk about her interests…and don’t even THINK about calling it selfish!”

Helen was taken aback by Sharona’s sudden sharpness. “I wasn’t…”

Sharona seemed to notice this. She sighed. “Sorry about that. I think I’m still a little...on edge, yanno? Especially after what happened last night…”

Helen relaxed a bit. “It’s...it’s fine, really. That’s actually a part of why I’m here unannounced. Sorry again, by the way.”

“No need to apologize. Linda’s a goddamn kook.”

Helen snickered a bit at this. Linda wasn’t the only reason she was here, but Sharona didn’t need to know that. David was Helen’s problem, no one else’s.

“So…” Helen continued, “Penelope was the one Miranda fought with.”

“You couldn’t tell from the fact that Monica and Diana were both gone but theo was still there?”

“Wait, how do you know that? You were absent.”

“I was, but my husband wasn’t. I’m coming to the next meeting with samples of my work.”
Helen raised an eyebrow. “Can I see?”

Sharona smirked. “I thought you’d never ask.”

*Attention passengers, this is your captain speaking. We will be landing at O’Hare International Airport in about 45 minutes. I recommend returning to your seats at this time. I mean, you don’t HAVE to, but hey, it’s your expensive lawsuit.*

Mettaton felt a tap on his hand. He looked into Papyrus’ face and put his headphones around his neck.

“CAPTAIN SAYS WE’RE LANDING IN 45 MINUTES.”

Mettaton smiled at him gratefully. “Thanks for telling me, Papy.”

Mettaton kissed Papyrus on the nasal bridge. Papyrus blushed in response every time he did that. Mettaton couldn’t help but giggle a bit at how positively ADORABLE his boyfriend was when he blushed.

Mettaton decided to keep his headphones about his neck. It looked better in selfies when he did that.

Of course, he did need to ask. No matter what it is, consent is important.

“Papyrus?”

“YES, METTATON?”

“Um, you wanna take a selfie with me?”

Papyrus’ face brightened. Oh no. He’s too adorable for the internet. He must be protected from the evils of Twitter and Instagram. Too precious for this sinful, sinful earth.

“HECK YEAH!”

Mettaton smiled. “Let’s DO this~”

Mettaton adjusted his camera.

They set up their pose - it took a few minutes to get one that was not awkward. A few of them were funny enough to add to the set.

Their favorite pose, however, was one were Mettaton had his hand cradling Papyrus’ skull while kissing his zygomatic. Papyrus was hugging him with both arms while facing the camera.

They added a few filters and ran it through Blingee.

Perfect.

“Should we upload it to social media?”

Papyrus was confused. “YOU MEAN YOU WEREN’T PLANNING ON IT?”

“Well, not without your permission, sweetie!”

“OH. WELL, THEN, UPLOAD AWAY!”
“Where to, though?”

Papyrus was about to speak, then paused to think.

“WHICH ONES ARE MORE YOU MORE POPULAR ON?”

“Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, and Snapchat.”

“ALL OF THOSE. PUT OUR HANDSOME FACES ALL OVER THE INTERNET.”

Mettaton giggled. “No need to tell ME twice~”

And it was done.

And thus the internet broke due to sheer overwhelming response to their handsome faces.

It would probably be years before Mettaton realized that that was their first selfie together. They actually MADE OUT before taking their first selfie together.

Rebels, the both of them.

Penelope laid down on her bed in her room.

She was grounded until Monday. She could still spend MLK Day with Caroline, though. That more than made up for being grounded in Penelope’s book.

There was a knock on her bedroom door.

“What?”

Her mother opened the door. “Hey, get your clothes on. You’re goin’ to Caroline’s,“

Penelope was up like a shot. She struggled out of her clothes and into fresh ones, falling over them no more than eight times in the process of changing.

Monica smirked. And they call it puppy love~

Penelope was finished putting her clothes on.

Theo was brushing his teeth. He looked into his sister’s bedroom.

“Your jersey’s on inside-out AND backwards. Moron.”

“Theodore Francis, was that last comment necessary?”

“No, just funny.”

Monica groaned, head cradled in her hand. These two were so aggravating sometimes…

Penelope turned her hockey jersey right side out. Perfect. She put on her hat - Caroline had gotten it for her for Christmas. It was black with a green Nordic design on it and a green puffball on top. Penelope loved it.

She packed a backpack with pajamas and games. Penelope had gotten Pokemon Sun, and Caroline had Moon.
When everyone was ready, they got in the car and drove off.

The phone rang just as Úrsula and Alma were about to meet for the first time, sealing their ship’s status as canon once and for all.

Sans, Toriel, and Chara all groaned.

Toriel paused the television to answer the phone.

“Hello?”

Sans tuned out every bit of the conversation until Toriel addressed Frisk.

“Frisk, Caroline and Levi are having a sleepover at their house. Brian, Hunter, Hannah, and Penelope are there. Would you like to go?”

Chara thought for a moment. They eventually nodded.

“Alright! They said okay. Uh-huh. Okay, bye!”

Toriel hung up the phone with a sigh.

“Sans, I’m taking Frisk to Sharona’s. Would you like to ride along?”

Sans shrugged. “okay.”

Toriel picked them both up and carried them out to the car.

She really hoped they felt better soon. She couldn’t stand to see her loved ones hurting like this…


“I like Shiny and Archie best!” Hannah said.

Brian and Hunter stared in slight horror. Shiny, they could understand why she liked it. Archie, no. Just no.

Penelope shook her head in disagreement. “Look, Archie’s cool, but Iroh is flippin’ awesome.”

<<I like Archie.>> Chara signed. <<Ramses is cool too.>>

“For your information, Crobat and Layla are actually MINE,” Levi said with an air of mock superiority.

“You think that, Jane, if it gives you comfort,” Caroline said in a teasingly condescending tone.

The sound of someone trying desperately and failing to hold back laughter came from outside the door.

“Hey Dad,” Caroline said.
“Sup Randy,” Levi said.

“Hey, sorry, don’t mind me, I’m just full of paternal pride…I’m gonna go to my room now, Sharona’s calling in pizza.”

“Oh.”

And then they heard Randy walk down the hall before breaking down in a fit of laughter.

“I don’t get it,” Hunter admitted.

“I quoted Pride and Prejudice,” Caroline said. “The BBC one with Colin Firth, not the book. I haven’t read the book yet.”

Brian gasped dramatically. “How terrible! Our Caroline, good ol’ Caroline Marlow, hasn’t read a book before watching the movie?”

“It was a TV show, the movie sucks. And yes, I am actually a bit ashamed of myself…”

“Oh. Sorry.”

“Sorry won’t buy me a copy of Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen, Brian!”

Everyone just stared blankly at Caroline.

“Okay, AND Sense and Sensibility.”

The staring continued.

“Oh, if you guys want me to be so cruel and unforgiving -”

“PILLOW FORT DIIIIIVE!”

“Penelope, NO!” Hunter shouted.

“PENELLOPE YES!”

Penelope bellyflopped onto the larger fort made of books. The pile collapsed underneath her. She held up a thumbs up as she remained facedown in a book that was placed on a pillow pages down for use as a decorative dormer.

“I’m okay!”

Papyrus and Mettaton arrived at their hotel room with no significant delay.

They set up their luggage in the closet.

They decided to relax for the remainder of the day. They had a whole week ahead of them, after all.

But what to do.

They sat on the bed - the only bed in the room, a king-sized bed - and thought of options.

“I THINK I’LL GO TAKE A SHOWER.”

“Awww, but I wanted to go first…” Mettaton whined. He made a pouty face and folded his arms.
“NICE TRY, BUT ALPHYS TOLD ME ABOUT HOW YOU USE ALL THE HOT WATER. I’M GETTING IN FIRST.”

“Awwwww, but Papyrus~”

“NO. I WON’T BE LONG. I PROMISE.”

“Ugh, FINE~”

“GOOD. NOW BE PATIENT.”

Papyrus entered the bathroom. The sounds of amazement at the amount of settings in the shower aroused Mettaton FAR more than they really should have.

Mettaton bit his lip to fight back his arousal with pain. Not only did this fail terribly, it actually had the effect of making him even hornier. Shit.

Shit shit shit.

DAMN his sadomasochistic streak. Damn it to hell in a handbasket.

He had to think of something terrifyingly unkinky, and fast.

Okay, okay. Deep breaths.

Unkinky thoughts, Mettaton, unkinky thoughts.

Lola Leigh in a clown suit.

Wow. That was fast.

Mettaton sighed with relief. He didn’t want to make Papyrus uncomfortable before they even -

“METTA-HONEY, SHOWER’S FREE!”

...brought it up.

Wowie.

Papyrus in nothing but a towel around his pelvis was even better than just the audio.

And it...showed, to say the least.

The only thing that could be more awkward than an almost-completely nude Papyrus seeing Mettaton with a raging erection was…

Okay, nope. Nothing is more awkward than this.

“I’LL JUST...GO...SHOWER NOW...SORRY…”

“OKAY. ENJOY YOUR SHOWER!”

Mettaton nearly choked. Did this man have ANY idea what he DID to him?!

Mettaton stepped into the bathroom and slammed the door behind him.

He opened the door slightly again. “Sorry!”
He closed it more quietly this time.

Papyrus was confused. Then he realized what had just happened.

He still wasn’t sure of what the big deal was. Mettaton had the same effect on him, after all. He was starting to feel it a bit right now, in fact.

Oh boy.

This was probably going to be a long week.

And being forced to share a single bed…

Oh stars.

Oh SHIIIT.

As soon as Mettaton got out of the shower Papyrus would have to have a talk...

But for now, Papyrus was content to listen to Mettaton sing in the shower while he worked on a word search.

He managed to complete exactly two word searches before Mettaton got out of the shower.

The steam filled the area in front of the bathroom. Mettaton emerged from the steam wrapped in a towel with another about his hair.

“Hello, Papy-dearest~”

Papyrus closed his word search book and took off his reading glasses.

“METTATON, I WISH TO DISCUSS SOMETHING...IMPORTANT WITH YOU…”

Mettaton walked over to the bed and sat down next to him.

“I’m listening…”

Papyrus blushed.

“UM...PUT SOME CLOTHES ON FIRST, PLEASE?”

Mettaton was confused. “Alright…”

Mettaton got up, stepped over to the closet, and reached in to grab some pajamas. He dropped his towel and -

“IN THE BATHROOM! PLEASE…”

“Papyrus, what is WITH you right now?” Mettaton snapped in exasperation.

Papyrus looked at him pleadingly.

Mettaton felt guilty almost immediately. He sighed.

“Fine. I’ll change in the bathroom, if it’ll make you more comfortable.”

“THANK YOU...”
Mettaton stepped back into the bathroom to change. What WAS with Papyrus?

Wait. Maybe he wanted to bring up the topic of…

Realizing this made Mettaton hurry a bit.

He calmed himself. Breathe in, and out.

He stepped out of the bathroom, walked over to the bed and got comfortable next to Papyrus.

“I’m decent now, darling,” he said teasingly.

“THANK YOU,” Papyrus said, sighing with relief.

Now Mettaton was getting worried.

“Is everything alright darling…?”

Papyrus took a few deep breaths before speaking.

“I WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS THE TOPIC OF...S-SEXUAL INTERCOURSE…”

Okay, something about the way Papyrus said that really worried Mettaton.

“What about it, Papy?”

Papyrus looked into Mettaton’s eyes, almost as if searching for something. He sighed and turned away.

“Y-YOU SEE...THE THING ABOUT SEXUAL INTERCOURSE IS…” Papyrus sighed again. “SORRY, I...I’M TRYING TO THINK OF THE RIGHT WAY TO SAY WHAT IT IS I WANT TO SAY…”

Mettaton’s heart simply melted at this. He placed his hand on Papyrus’ shoulder.

“Take your time, Sugar Skull. There’s no rush. Go at a pace you’re comfortable with.”

Papyrus looked back up at Mettaton. Mettaton smiled reassuringly.

Papyrus smiled in return. He held a hand, gesturing for Mettaton to wait a moment.

He stepped off the bed and grabbed his Red Scarf off the TV stand.

He sat back on the bed and started fidgeting with the Scarf. He relaxed visibly as he did so.

He took another breath.

“OKAY. I KNOW WHAT I WANT TO SAY NOW.”

Mettaton sat at attention, crossing his legs. “I’m listening.”

“OKAY. SO, THE THING WITH SKELETONS AND...SEX, IS THAT...WHENEVER WE ENGAGE IN INTERCOURSE, THE FIRST PERSON WE DO SO WITH IS THE ONLY ONE THAT...THAT WE’D EVER WANT TO DO IT WITH. IT’S...IT’S LIKE…”

“Like...with swans?”
“...SWANS?”

“Well, swans, when they mate, mate for life. It’s...is it like that?”

Papyrus thought for a moment.

“SOMEWHAT. IT’S A BIT MORE COMPLICATED THAN THAT, BUT IT IS A RATHER NICE COMPARISON!”

A brief silence passed between them.

“Um, if you don’t mind my prodding, Papy-dear, complicated how, exactly?”

“UM...I THINK THAT MUCH CAN WAIT...I HOPE YOU DON’T MIND…”

Mettaton simply smiled and began to snuggle into Papyrus, laying his head on his sternum. “Papy, sweetie, this is OUR relationship. Not yours, not mine, but OURS. If you’d be more comfortable with waiting to go that far, I’m just fine with that.”

“SEE, THAT’S KIND OF THE PROBLEM…”

Mettaton looked up at Papyrus. “Explain please…?”

“THE THING IS, YOU SEE...I WANT TO HAVE SEX WITH YOU. I...REALLY, REALLY DO. BUT IT HAS TO BE A COMMITMENT, FROM BOTH ENDS, YOU SEE?”

Mettaton seemed surprised.

Papyrus noticed this and sighed as he wrapped his arms around Mettaton.

“I...I’M SORRY, I’M NOT TRYING TO PRESSURE YOU. THAT’S...THAT’S WHY I TOLD YOU ALL OF THIS, SO YOU’RE AWARE OF IT ALL…”

Mettaton said nothing, simply returning the embrace.

“Papy, I’m not feeling pressured or anything like that!” Mettaton assured. “I’m actually very glad you trust me with something personal like that.”

Papyrus held Mettaton tighter and sighed with relief.

“Wait, quick question.”

“YES? WHAT IS IT?”

“By sex, do you mean sex or SOUL contact?”

“OH. SECOND THING. I REALLY SHOULD HAVE SPECIFIED…”

Mettaton chuckled. “Don’t worry, Sugar Skull. I had a feeling that was what you meant. I just needed a bit of clarification just in case…”

Papyrus hummed.

They lay in comfortable silence. Papyrus ran his phalanges through Mettaton’s hair while his other arm was at the small of his back.

Papyrus looked down at Mettaton. He was deep asleep.
Papyrus maneuvered himself carefully so as not to wake his sleeping boyfriend and plugged him into the charge port on the nightstand before slipping back into place.

He simply stared at Mettaton, listening to the whir of machinery.

Papyrus checked the time. It was almost 9 P.M. All the moving around must have worn them out.

But that clearly didn’t stop Mettaton, and it wasn’t going to stop Papyrus.

He kissed Mettaton goodnight on the top of his head and turned out the light.

Papyrus thought back on their earlier conversation.

Maybe someday they’d do that. Not today, or tomorrow. But someday.

Sans and Toriel continued watching reruns of Corazón Espinado in the basement on the ratty old foldout couch.

Sol was writing to Tali about his father’s disappearance. It was a huge turning point in their relationship as realizing that he trusted her with such deeply personal information that he realized that he was in love with her.

Watching as Sol sobbed and wrote the letter to Tali seemed to strike a chord with Sans.

He grabbed at Toriel’s hand and said nothing as Florito once again overwrote the world inside the Compound.

Toriel saw a few tears roll down Sans’ cheek.

She debated on what she should do for a moment before making a decision.

She set her hand on Sans’ cheek and wiped the tears away. Sans sobbed and leaned into her hand.

He hoped that wishes on stars reached the START MENU.

Because he was wishing on a mental picture of UY Scuti that Frisk would succeed safely in their defense of the RESET button.

He had never felt more helpless.

---

*Frisk sensed something.*

*Not The Player. Something good.*

*Something that fills them with a bright, fiery*

**DETERMINATION**

*Someone else felt it too.*

*He hastened onward to his destination with more haste.*

*His grandchild needed him.*

*He could not bear the weight of determination.*
Perseverance would have to suffice.

Chapter End Notes

Come Fly With Me - Frank Sinatra

Also I just want you guys to know that my fave one-off characters are Gene, Bruce, and the salty pilot.
Turn Of A Friendly Card Pt. 1

Chapter by Spazzin

Chapter Summary

We seem to have reached a possible endpoint.

Chapter Notes

I already had this written out when I uploaded chapter 12 so I thought, why not get this up now?

It's snowing where I am. How about you guys? It's 17 degrees Fahrenheit outside here...might as well be inside too...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

10:42 P.M., January 13th, 20XQ

Sans sat at the bar of Grillby’s, his usual ketchup replaced with whiskey. With a shot of ketchup.

“‘ey grillbz, lemme...lemme ask ya somethin’...” Sans slurred. “...if the world was gonna end t’morrow, what wouldja do with...with the time ya got left?”

“...I’d ask you...to pay your fucking tab...” Grillby crackled.

“grillbz, this’s - i’m bein’ serious ri’ now.”

“...So am I...”

“o-okay okay, aside from making me pay my fuckin’ tab, wha’ wouldja do with the time ya have left? tell - tell me honestly...”

“...Well...if I were you...I would tell the people I love...how much I love them...”

“but - but grillbz, you...yer you, ya ain’t a smiley trashbag...”

“...And you are?”

Sans gave Grillby a look that tried to say “really”, but instead just made Sans look drunker than he was. It took a LOT to get him well and truly Drunk. As of this moment he was just very, very buzzed, just bordering on tipsy.

One of his eyelight was completely off, the other frantically blinking on and off. It made Grillby very uncomfortable. All of Sans’ episodes did.

But he hadn’t gone on a bender in nearly eight years.
He left Sans under the watch of another, less drunk patron for a moment while he went to the other room.

He picked up the phone in the back room and dialed the intended number. One he had never expected to call.

The line rang seven times.

Toriel was just about to fall asleep entirely when the sound of the phone ringing sprang her from her near-slumber.

She sighed and stood up from her bed, grumbling all the while.

She reached the phone just in the nick of time.

“Who is it?”

“...Hello, Toriel…”

“Oh. Good evening, Grillby. What are you doing, calling me at this hour?”

“...I need you...to pick up Sans…”

Toriel’s heart felt like a stone in her chest.

“Is...is something wrong? Did something happen?! Is he alright - ”

“Sans is fine...physically...by his own standards...if drunk…”

Toriel was confused now. “Then why do you need me to…?”

“...He needs...someone to talk to...someone he trusts…”

“And how, exactly, do I fill that category?” Toriel said, mildly skeptical.

“...He cares deeply about you...from what I’ve heard...he’s told you of his father…”

Toriel’s eyes widened somewhat. “Well, he did once mention a father who disappeared…”

“...Tomorrow would have been his...and Papyrus’...father’s birthday…”

Toriel gasped. Oh. Perhaps that was why he’d been so depressed lately. Come to think of it, it had happened again last January as well…

“I’ll be there in half an hour. Make sure he drinks some water. Keep him in place, do NOT move him. I will be right over. Frisk is asleep, but Flowey can keep watch over them well enough…”

“...Thank you…”

“It is no trouble at all. See you in a bit.”

The other end of the line clicked. Grillby had hung up.

Toriel gave a shaky sigh, holding back a few tears.

She put on a coat over her pajamas and some slippers. She went out to her van. Sans had taken a
shortcut to Grillby’s - his motorcycle was still in the garage.

Toriel peeled out into the street.

She was a mom on a mission. And she’d be damned if she wasn’t going to help out her dearest friend.

Well, no. She supposed he was far more than just her dearest friend.

It was time Toriel admitted it - to herself, at least.

She was very much in love with Sans.

And she was going to help him through this, in any way she possibly could.

After all, he had done the same for her. Even if it weren’t for her romantic feelings toward him driving her onward, she’s certain would have done this for him.

It was but basic **Kindness**, after all.

Sans was rambling in his semi-drunkenness. From outside the bar doors, Toriel could just barely make out the words “string theory” and “Bohemian Rhapsody”.

As soon as she entered, Sans almost started to sing.

Then he noticed her.

“ah, h-hey tori…” Sans slurred. “wh...what’s a classy lady like you doin’ at a dive like this?”

Toriel sighed to brace herself for what she was about to say.

“Sans. You are drunk. I have to pick you up and take you home.”

Sans stared blankly. His eyelights flickered unevenly, the right one turning off completely before flickering to life once more and fizzling out again.

The sight was unnerving, to say the least.

Toriel took a breath and picked up Sans to carry him out to the car.

She set Sans down in the backseat and buckled him in place.

Sans snapped out of his stupor somewhat.

“heh...pick me up...i geddit…”

Toriel sighed.

“Sans, if this were literally ANY other situation, I’d have laughed.”

There was silence.

“i...i fucked up...i fucked up, didn’t i…”

“Well,” Toriel admitted, “you are drunk. I never really took you for the drinking type.”
“that’s cuz i ain’t. not anymore i ain’t.”
Toriel reached a red light. “What do you mean by that?”
“i mean i don’t wanna talk about it. like...like, ever, yanno? bad point in my life, y’see?”
“Was it after you lost your father?”
Sans seemed to choke on nothing.
Silence ensued.
The light turned green.
“you remember that…”
Toriel quirked an eyebrow in the rearview mirror. Sans looked as shocked as he sounded.
“Yes, somewhat. Is...is that surprising to you?”
Sans blanched - quite a feat for a Skeleton. He even started sweating.
“w-well, yeah...bu - but not for the reasons you’d expect.”
Oh. He thought she was insulted by his statement.
“Sans, it’s alright. We can talk about it when we get back to the house.”
Sans yawned. “zounds lige a blan…”
Toriel sighed. She supposed she’d let him sleep first.
“wait.”
He shot up in his seat.
“what time is it?”
Toriel checked the clock on the dashboard.
“It’s a bit before eleven. We have a while until midnight.”
Sans sighed in relief.
“that’s...that’s good. cuz…”
Sans swallowed. “there’s...somethin’ i wanna tell ya. before midnight. it’s important.”
Toriel was suddenly worried.
“Okay…”
There was an awkward, heavy silence.
“tori…”
“Yes, Sans?”
“can ya... turn on some music? i wanna...get my mind off some shit…”

Toriel turned on the radio.

*And they think it will make their lives easier~ For God knows up til now it’s been hard~ But the game never ends~ When your whole world depends~ On the turn of a friendly card~*

Well. This song was rather depressing. And fitting, in Sans’ case.

*Sans unbuckled and launched himself at the radio to turn it off. Toriel was VERY glad to be at a red light right now.*

“SANS!”

Sans looked up at her. His grin was shaking, his eye sockets empty. He was sweating.

He let out the shakiest sigh she’d ever heard. “s...sorry bout that, t...i just...that song…”

Toriel looked at him sympathetically. She grabbed him and set him in the shotgun seat.

“Your seatbelt won’t be necessary. We’re just down the street from home.”

Sans grunted.

Toriel drove into their garage and closed the door. She got out of the car and took Sans as well.

She held him even closer to her than she had previously. Like if she let go of him, he’d float away.

She took him with her down into the basement.

She set him on the bottom step and unfolded the ratty old foldout couch.

She laid Sans down on the left side of the bed. She decided to sit down opposite him.

They were silent.

“guess i should ‘splain m’self, huh?”

“If you wish to, I will not stop you.”

“thanks.”

Another silence.

“So you remember...when i told ya ‘bout my old man?”

“Yes. And upon learning your surname, I suddenly remembered...more? I’m not sure how to explain it.”

“What’dya mean by that?”

“He was the Royal Scientist before Alphys, was he not?”

Sans’ eye sockets widened in surprise as he turned toward Toriel. “y...yeah, he...he was…”
“His name was Dr. WingDings Gaster, was it not?”

Sans nodded, his voice negated to barely a whisper. “yeah…”

Toriel was quiet. She didn’t want to move too quickly.

“You...you and Papyrus both greatly resemble him.”

“do i? i mean, i see a lot of ‘im in papyrus, but me…”

“You have his eyes. And you both share a deep interest in the stars. Almost like it’s...bred in the bone, I suppose?”

Sans didn’t laugh. Not even a shift in his smile.

“And...you both keep your emotions under wraps, so as not to burden the ones you love. And may I say, both of you do a VERY good job of THAT.”

Sans sat still. Then he started to shake until his bones rattled.

Toriel realized her mistake.

She reached to hold him close once more. She rubbed his skull tenderly as he sobbed into her shoulder.

“Oh, Sans, I...I’m so sorry, I-I didn’t mean to...it’s just...I just wish that...that you would trust me with your emotions more often...oh listen to me, telling you to open up more...I should really practice what I preach…”

Sans continued sobbing.

Toriel waited patiently for him to calm down.

“Are you ready?”

Sans sniffled. “y-yeah, i...i guess…”

“Okay. Whenever you’re ready.”

Papyrus and Mettaton lay cuddling on the hotel bed. The were watching a movie. Papyrus wasn’t even sure what movie it was. His mind was elsewhere.

Mettaton recognized this.

“Is...is something wrong, Sugar Skull?”

Papyrus was a tad startled by this.

“HM? NO, NO, NOT...NOT REALLY…”

“Well, what do you mean by ‘not really’?”

Papyrus sighed. Now or never...

“WELL...THERE IS SOMETHING THAT...THAT I WISH TO DISCUSS WITH YOU…”
Mettaton’s eyes widened. He was blushing heavily. Could Papyrus be talking about…

Papyrus realized exactly what Mettaton was probably thinking. “NOT THAT! NOT...NOT THAT, THAT'S...FOR A DIFFERENT TIME. I MEAN...SOMETHING ELSE.”

“Oh.”

Well that was slightly disappointing.

“What is it you wished to talk about…?”

Papyrus took a few deep breaths, steeling himself for the ensuing conversation.

This was it.

Now or never.

“METTATON...HONEYBOT...BEFORE I BEGIN...I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW HOW MUCH IT MEANS TO ME THAT YOU WOULD TRUST ME WITH SO MUCH ABOUT YOURSELF.”

Papyrus brushed Mettaton’s bangs out of his unfinished right eye and rested his hand on Mettaton’s cheek. Mettaton was very self-conscious about it. Papyrus loved it just as much as he loved every other part of Mettaton.

Mettaton leaned into Papyrus’ touch, placing his own hands over Papyrus’.

“SO I WANT TO TELL YOU SOMETHING ABOUT ME...WELL, MY FAMILY, ANYWAY.”

Mettaton was confused for a moment before he realized.

“I do remember when I watched those home movies of yours with Sans the day after Christmas...some videos mentioned a father…”

Papyrus’ breath hitched.

“THAT'S...THAT’S EXACTLY WHAT I WANTED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT. MY FATHER.”

Mettaton’s eyes widened.

“Go on. Whenever you’re ready. I’m listening, Papy.”

Frisk stood in front of the RESET button. They leaned on their Stick. Their eyes pierced through the darkness of the START MENU area.

The Player appeared. Or rather, it had there the whole time.

**Move:**

Frisk stood their ground.

**Move:**
Frisk glared at The Player.

**Move:**

Frisk moved their stick into a defensive position.

**MOVE.**

“No.”

The Player paused.

Frisk felt something wrap around their throat.

**Sprites should be seen and not heard. -Move.**

Frisk managed to lift their middle finger.

They tried to cry in pain as it broke.

**Move:**

Frisk spat at The Player.

The pressure around their throat grew tighter. Frisk swore that anymore would crush their windpipe.

Their vision was tunneling. The Player seemed to know this and released its hold on Frisk’s throat.

Frisk nearly fell to the ground, gasping for breath. They leaned on their Stick for support.

“I wo-won’t...let y-you...destroy them...They’re f-finally...happy…”

Frisk stood up straighter. They glared at The Player.

“And no matter...how hard you try to destroy that...remember that...it’s not you who is filled with D E T E R M I N A T I O N.”

**MOVE.**

Frisk twirled the Stick like a baton.

They felt The Player glare at them.

Frisk smirked. It told them to move. They were moving. Why was it so angry, hm?

An encounter was triggered.

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* Exact Time Unknown, June 6th, 200T

* The Core, Underground

“doc, you sure you’re okay?”

“Y-Y-Yes, Sa-Sans, I-I-I am su-sure t-tha-that I am f-f-f-fine.  P-P-Peak con-condition.  I-I know
exactly what-what I am doing-doing-doing.”

“Y-you d-d-didn’t even ask that l-last one…”

“It-It-w-w-was im-implied, Al-Alphys.”


Dr. WingDings “W.D.” Gaster, age ???. Doctorates in theoretical physics, computational physics, particle physics, and astronomy. First Royal Scientist of the Underground.

They were in the Core to work on their machine.

It seemed like a simple enough machine. It looked like an ATM almost.

Sadly anyone that dared try to use it for that purpose would be dismayed to find that not only was there no money inside, there was also a Gaster Blaster specifically deployed for guarding it.

The machine’s purpose?

To peer across the void into other timelines and universes.

So far very little progress was made. And by very little progress, what was really meant was that this endeavor was looking more and more futile each day they continued work on it.

And it was beginning to wear on all of them. Especially Dr. Gaster. His voice was glitching out even worse than usual, and his movements were spasmodic enough to cause worry. Sans kept close watch on him in case of a larger seizure.

“Alri-Alright. Le-Le-Let’s ge-get to wo-wor-work.”

Three of the greatest minds in the history of Monsterkind.

One would lose hope.

One would gain burdens.

One would cease to exist.

But none of them would ever be quite the same again.

=/=

Frisk moved around the bullet board.

It had been a while since their last encounter.

The Player stood before them.

It attacked.

Frisk dodged the attacks with ease enough to surprise even them.
Frisk’s turn now. Frisk rarely took the second turn. It was a nice change of pace, if they were being honest.

Frisk>ACT>Check

Player
LV: ???
HP: ???/???
AT: ???
DF: ???
You can’t check something that has no SOUL!

Frisk’s eyes widened. If The Player had no SOUL, how was it even alive…?

It attacked once more.

Frisk dodged every attack as they had last time, once again taking no damage.

Frisk>ACT>Interrogate

“You called me a sprite. Why?”

**Why should I tell you something like that?**

The Player attacked again. Frisk realized that it could only used one attack, and that attack moved around the bullet board the same way every time.

At least, that’s how it seemed to go. It was more likely that The Player was underestimating them.

Frisk>ACT>Interrogate

“You have no SOUL. Why?”

**Shut up.**

The Player attacked again. This attack moved...faster than the last ones had.

Had Frisk’s words made it react like this?

Frisk>ACT>Callout

“You have no SOUL. So you used me and Chara...you used us to pretend you had one.”

**SHUT-UP.**

The Player’s attacks sped up once more. Frisk dodged once again. No damage.

Frisk>ACT>Interrogate

“Why did you choose this world?”

**SHUT-UP.**
Another attack. Frisk was hit.

**HP: 15/20**

Frisk>ACT>Interrogate

“Why do you insist on keeping this world from moving?”

**SHUTUP**

Another attack. Frisk was hit again.

**HP: 10/20**

Frisk>ACT>Interrogate

“Why do you want to RESET this world?”

**DIE.**

Another attack. Another hit.

**HP: 5/20**

Frisk>ACT>Interrogate

“Do you really hate us that much?”

“No.”

Another attack.

**HP: 661/666**

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Chapter End Notes

Turn Of A Friendly Card Pt. 1 - The Alan Parsons Project
Exact Time Unknown, June 6th, 200T

The Core, Underground

Something had gone wrong.

They aren’t sure what. But someone or something had gotten in while they were gone and reset everything.

Sans and Alphys looked to each other, then to Gaster.

Gaster wasn’t there.

Sans’ eye sockets widened. “doc, where -”

Gaster was putting everything back into position.

His eyelights were red.

He was melting.

Sans’ eyelights went out.

His smile turned down.

“dad…”

Gaster summoned some Hands.

<<Sans. Take Alphys and run.>>
“dad, what are you saying?”

<<Whatever it was that got in here last night did more than simply erase all of our progress.>>

“D-d-octor, w-w-w-what are y-y-you -”

<<It sabotaged The Core as well. Meltdown is in T-minus 10.5 seconds from completeion of this sentence.>>

“dad, no. i’m not leaving without you. the underground needs you, papyrus needs you -”

“Sans!”

“...i need you...”

Gaster sighed.

“I am sorry, Sans. This always happens. In some way or another, it always happens.”

“dad, no, what’re you doing -”

“Farewell, Sans. I love you and Papyrus so much. I know that you will take good care of him in my absence. You boys have such bright futures ahead of you. I only wish I could be there to experience it with you...”

“dad, please, we can -”

Sans was outside of the lab in Hotland. Alphys was suddenly arranged next to him. She grabbed onto his lab coat as if it would keep her from going to dust.

Then there was a strange wave from The Core.

The Underground blacked out.

=/=

Frisk waited for Flowey’s voice to introduce them to the Underground.

There was no sound save the sound of static.

They slowly opened their eyes.

They’d only met him once.

But that one meeting was enough to imprint the memory of who he was - who he is - who he wasn’t - who he isn’t.

Frisk gaped at the Monster before them.

The Skeleton turned to face them.

“Hello, Human. It has been quite some time.”

He turned to face The Player.

“This creature - The Player, you call them - bears your universe no ill will. Quite the contrary, they
love you and your family.”

You know nothing.

“Tell that to my four Ph.D.s shitstain.”

The Player attacked.

Gaster summoned a Blaster. This one bigger than any of the Blasters summoned by Sans and Papyrus that Frisk had seen.

The Player screamed. It - no, they. They were still standing. And they were glitching terribly.

“Now. As I was saying before I was so RUDELY interrupted.”

Gaster glared at the player briefly. They were angry, but glitching to badly to move.

“They care about this universe. They care about it so much that they disregard their own universe in its favor.”

The Player screeched.

“That was not a denial. The Player comes from a dimension separate from our own. There they have no Monsters, no SOULS or Magic. There are only Humans.”

There are animals too.

Frisk and Gaster looked up at The Player. They weren’t glitching quite as bad.

“You see our dimension as a game. A method of escaping reality.”

It is a game.

“In your dimension, we are merely caricatures in a virtual simulation of a fantastical reality. Well, it seems fantastical to you and your ilk, at least.”

You’re a character sprite in an RPG.

“And what makes you so certain that you are not one to some other entity?”

The Player was silent.

“Precisely. You aren’t. There is no way for you to be certain.”

You can tell me.

“No, I cannot. I have no access to your dimension. I am merely aware of its existence.”

Then stop claiming you know me!

“I never did.”

You thought it!

“Again, no.”
“Um, excuse me, Player.”

Gaster and The Player looked over at Frisk. The Player had started glitching again.

<<You said that...that there are animals in your world. What...what kind?>>

Gaster and The Player paused to stare at Frisk.

I...I have a pet cat.

Frisk smiled.

Time to do what Frisks do best.


6:06 A.M., June 6th, 200T

Snowdin

Papyrus woke up having heard his name called.

He got out of his bed and ran out of his room and down the stairs.

Sans was at the bottom of the steps. His eyelights were out. He was shaking so hard his bones were rattling. The sound was loud enough that Papyrus was afraid that Sans would crumble into a pile of bones - or worse.

Sans teleported over to Papyrus and held him close.

“SANS? WHERE’S DAD?”

Sans clenched his eye sockets shut.

“h...h-e’s gone pap.”

“GONE...? YOU MEAN LIKE...LIKE ON A VACATION?”

Sans choked out a sob.

“no. like...like fallen down.”

Papyrus gasped.

“there...there was an accident at the core. dad’s gone. he’s - he’s gone, papyrus, there’s nothing left...”

Sans simply cried into Papyrus’ shoulder.

Papyrus started crying as well.

Sans Gaster, age 16. Older brother of Papyrus.

Papyrus Gaster, age 6. Younger brother of Sans.

Orphaned sons of [REDACTED].
When the lights came back on, nothing was the same.

Sans made a promise to himself that day.

He promised that he would bring back his father, no matter what it cost him.

It would be twelve years before he made another.

/==

Frisk, Gaster, and The Player stood silently. There was an understanding now.

The Player was just as sapient as Gaster or Frisk or anyone from their dimension. They simply didn’t know that Frisk and the Monsters and the Underground were as well.

<<Are there other...games...you could possibly play?>>

Yes, actually! I have lots of them. I’ve been meaning to play Animal Crossing again...

<<That sounds good!>>

...can I come back here sometimes? I won’t be RESETTING anymore. I just want to see how you’re all doing.

Frisk looked up at Gaster warily. He gave them a look that seemed to say “it’s up to you”.

Frisk nodded toward the player.

Frisk felt them smile.

No.

They saw them smile.

Chara stood next to them.

Frisk turned to Chara and smiled.

Chara looked at Frisk like they were crazy.

Chara rolled their eyes and sighed.

“Wow, Frisk. Of course YOU of all people would manage to make the cause of all our suffering chill the fuck out.”

The Player shrunk in on themself.

I don’t expect forgiveness. I don’t see how I could. Especially since my actions affected you worst of all, Chara. But I still wish to express regret for my actions. I know it’s nowhere near enough compensation, but I don’t have any other way to make it up to you, if there are any others.

Chara glared at The Player out of the corner of their eyes. “You’re right. I don’t forgive you. And neither does Frisk. But your regret is appreciated and acknowledged.”
The Player smiled sadly.

**Thank you.**

<<Dr. Gaster, are you coming with me?>>

Gaster glanced at Frisk and smiled sadly.

“No. I am sorry, young one. There is much to be done in your world before I can return.”

Frisk looked down at their feet. They looked Gaster in the eye with all the **Determination** they could muster in their exhaustion.

<<What needs to be done?>>

“I beg your pardon?”

“Wait, what the heck?”

<<Is there something I can do to make you come back faster, Gaster?>>

Gaster quirked a brow ridge in interest.

**I would like to help as well.**

Everyone stared at The Player.

**I want to atone for my actions. If there is anything I can do, anything at all, I want to know what it is.**

Gaster smiled enigmatically.

“Do you know anything about coding, Player?”

“...AND THAT’S WHAT I KNOW. UNBELIEVABLE, I KNOW. I CAN HARDLY BELIEVE IT MYSELF SOMETIMES. TOMORROW WOULD’VE BEEN HIS BIRTHDAY...”

Papyrus looked up at Mettaton. His hands were clasped over his mouth in shock and sympathy.

He was crying.

“Papy...I had no idea...that such a terrible thing happened to you...”

Mettaton grabbed onto Papyrus, as though letting go would mean for him to join his father wherever he was, and cried into him.

Papyrus didn’t know when he’d started to cry. But now he was at it fullforce.

He held onto Mettaton with equal fervor.

He was so glad to have what he did.

As long as Papyrus had his brother and his boyfriend and everyone else in his life, he felt like he could do anything he put his mind to.
He was worried about Sans. It would be the first year since their father’s disappearance that Papyrus wouldn’t be there to participate in the Memorial Rites.

But somehow, Papyrus felt as though it would all be okay.

Toriel held Sans as he cried. She cried as well. To lose a father at such a young age and be left to care for a sibling nearly half your age...Toriel wasn’t sure she could have done the same thing at that age.

She simply leaned into the back of the ratty old fold-out couch and held Sans close.

Sans calmed down not much later.

Eventually Toriel was sure he was asleep.

“tori…”

Whoops. Wrong about that.

“Yes, Sans?”

“i…” Sans swallowed nervously and sat up. “...i got somethin’ to say t’ya. somethin’...somethin’ important.”

Toriel sat up as well.

“What is it?”

Sans breathed to calm himself.

“tori. i want you to know somethin’. i was terrified of tellin’ ya because…” Sans chuckled mirthlessly. “well, look a’ me.”

Sans breathed again.

“tori. i love you. with every last bit of me. you’re so strong, so kind, so...so smart and beautiful and...you’re everything to me. and it scares me, ‘cause...i don’t deserve...any of this, i...i…”

Sans broke down into more sobs again.

Toriel wiped away a few of his tears and pressed her forehead to his, cradling the back of his skull in her hand.

He looked into her eyes. She looked into his and smiled.

“I love you too, Sans…”

Sans’ eye sockets widened. They seemed to sparkle with excitement and disbelief.

Toriel giggled.

She kissed him.

Sans was stock still for a moment before kissing back. He brushed back her ears and played with them a bit.
Toriel was a bit startled. The knowledge that Sans could, in fact, kiss, was not expected, but not altogether unpleasant.

She held him a bit closer.

There was a knock at the basement door that startled them out of their kiss.

They looked at each other and laughed.

“i’ll geddit. ‘s prolly the kid.”

Sans hopped off the bed and paused at the bottom of the steps. Nope. Too tired to climb these fuckers.

He teleported to the top of the steps and opened the door to be greeted by the excitedly smiling child on the other side.

He chuckled and picked Frisk up to carry them down the stairs. “c’mon, kiddo. i gotcha.”

and i ain’t letting go of ya that easy.

They couldn’t wait any longer.

It took some deliberation as to exactly how they would announce it, but it soon became obvious.

Alphys took a selfie.

She and Undyne uploaded it to a file on their desktop computer.

Alphys edited the image onto the photo.

God this was so 201W.

Undyne took a far goofier selfie.

It was uploaded to every last one of their social media accounts.

The amount of responses expressing congratulations and exasperation was expected.

The good old Anime Pregnancy Announcement Meme was probably the only way they could have expressed it on the spur of the moment.

Because really. Where does anyone find a baby-sized Kingdom Hearts Keyblade at one in the morning?

Chara and Gaster sat at the START MENU.

Chara’s legs and arms were crossed, their lips pouting. They were avoiding eye contact with Gaster.

Gaster sat on his knees, his hands clasped in his lap.

“So,” Chara started, “Sans and Papyrus really are your sons, huh.”

“Yes.”
“Huh.”

There was more silence.

“Do ya really think that Player’s gonna keep to their word?”

“I am not sure,” Gaster admitted. Even if they are not, I know that they are truly regretful of their treatment of this world.”

“That still doesn’t excuse their actions, Doc!”

“I know, Chara Dreemurr. I know better than you expect I do.”

Chara gave him a sideways glance, still pouting.

“I wanted to see Frisk kick that idiot’s ass…”

Gaster chuckled. “You know very well that Frisk does not work that way, Chara.”

“I know, but what if they did?!”

“Who knows. Perhaps where that choice was made, the other option was chosen by another Frisk, and perhaps the consequences differed. We may never know for certain.”

Gaster sighed.

“And though it may not be the case for you, I am glad that Frisk made the choices they did, for where would our family be today without them?”

Chara said nothing. They couldn’t argue with that.

Gaster chuckled.

“Well. I must go now, young Dreemurr. The Void is calling me back, and if I do not answer…”

Chara groaned. “Fine…see ya ’round old man.”

Gaster bowed respectfully before fading back into The Void.

Chara noticed that his form had taken longer to fade this time around.

Their eyes widened as they smirked.

Gaster really was coming back to reality.

This timeline just kept getting better and better, didn’t it?

---

*Your family keeps growing.*

*The timeline keeps flowing.*

*And you are filled with*

*DETERMINATION*
Chapter End Notes

And that's a wrap.

I'm done for now.

Arc II begins...whenever, I guess.

Turn Of A Friendly Card Pt. 2 - Alan Parsons Project
8:45 A.M., February 1st, 20XQ

It’s a cold day in Ebott.

Wind is blowing.

Clouds are gathering.

On days like this, kids like you…

...are waiting on the morning announcements.

And the eardrum-destroying feedback that heralded them blasted forth from the intercom.

Damn you Mrs. Miller.

*Good morning Mountainside Elementary. I’m your principal Mrs. Miller, it’s time for the morning announcements,*

And your hideous monotone, too.

Today though. Only today will children be listening.

For today Mrs. Miller was to announce the dates and times for…

...The Spring Concert Auditions.
*Valentine’s day is coming up. Make sure to buy your Valentine a candygram for 25 cents.*

“Ugh, hurry UP, old lady!”

“Brian, strike one.”

Brian banged his head on the desk.

Hunter put his hand on Brian’s shoulder.

“Just be patient, Bri. It’ll all be over soon.”

Brian grumbled in response.

Hunter smiled.

*The third quarter Bake Sale is coming, fingers crossed once again that there’s not another incident like last year’s.*

Frisk smirked somewhat proudly and high-fived Levi and MK.

Levi turned to the confused Caroline.

“Long story, tell ya later.”

And five to ten minutes of droning principal later…

*The spring concert is coming up on March 20th, four lucky fourth graders and four lucky fifth graders have a shot at a solo part, auditions for fourth graders are on the fourth during recess, auditions for fifth graders are on the fifth at the same time.*

Hunter tuned out the rest of the announcements immediately. He got what he wanted to hear. Nothing else mattered at this point.

He knew what he had to do.

He had to work fast.

When Sans first heard from Frisk that Gaster was slowly becoming more and more real, for lack of a better word, he knew that he had to work twice as fast and twice as hard as he would have otherwise.

With Alphys being pregnant, he couldn’t risk having her help, no matter how fervent her claims to the contrary. There was also little to no way that Alphys was going to join the Heart of Gold for the next few months. Alphys had enough anxiety without pregnancy hormones and international cyberpolitics making it worse.

But Sans knew that Alphys would help however she could. He’d learned long ago that Alphys, while weak in body, was very strong in mind. When her mind was made up, it was made up.

Sans decided to check up on the moms-to-be, see how they were holding up this morning.

*hey al

*how you holdin up this mornin*
Sans put down his phone and sighed. He really felt for poor Alphys.

He took a shortcut from the basement to his upstairs bedroom and put on some sweatpants. He wasn’t sure if they were clean. They had no discernible stains and were not on the ground. That was good enough for Sans.

He put on his Blue Hoodie. He breathed in the scent of ketchup and - he noticed now - static.

He put on his sneakers and tied them.

He took the shortcut to Toriel’s classroom.

Toriel was explaining singular and plural possessives.

“May I have some examples of singular or plural possessives?”

Hands went up.

“Yes? Sofie?”
Sofie smirked. “Your boyfriend’s at the door. Your, singular possessive.”

Many of the students laughed.

Toriel rolled her eyes. “Sofie, while you did provide a good example of a singular possessive, you ruined the opportunity for a perfectly good joke. Come in, Sans!”

Sans opened the door. “tori, you’re s’posed ta say who’s there, but i’m not here for jokes.”

The mob of fifth graders oohed and tittered. Sans and Toriel blushed with deadpan expressions.

“or that. so anyway, alphys’ morning sickness symptoms are startin’ up. you know of anythin’ that could help?”

“Oh! Ginger or mint tea might help with that. Some plain toast might be good for it as well.”

“thanks, tori. we’ll letcha know if we need anythin’ else.”

Sans turned Tori’s SOUL Blue and leaned her toward him for a kiss on the cheek before returning it to normal.

He turned and winked at her. “see ya.”

He walked out the door.

Toriel was blushing so heavily that she was sure her fire magic would act up.

Her students’ giggling was getting somewhat bothersome.

Moira spoke up. “Ms. Toriel’s boyfriend is smooth~ Ms. Toriel’s, singular possessive.”

“But she’s not singular if she has a boyfriend,” Jacob said, confused.

The laughter that followed was almost too much for Toriel.

She put her head in her hands.

Sometimes teaching fifth grade could be such a pain in the ass.

Sans shortcutted back to Alphys’ place and put some water on to boil and put some bread in the toaster.

He walked into the bathroom where Alphys was on the floor in the fetal position and sat down in the edge of the bathtub.

He blushed so hard from the fact that he kissed Toriel in front of a mob of fifth graders that he nearly fell backwards wheezing like a boiling-over kettle into the bathtub.

Nearly. Alphys grabbed him by his pants leg and stopped him just in the nick of time.

“Saaans…”

“yeh, al?”
“Am I g-gonna m-m-make it?”

Sans sat up and sighed, a bit of a cyan glow still stuck to his face.

“you’ll be fine, al. i got some water for some tea on boil and some bread in the toaster. ya just gotta eat plain if you’re feelin’ nauseous.”

Alphys’ sat up a bit. “T-thanks, Sans…”

“no prob, alphys.”

They were silent for a bit until the toaster popped up.

“stay here. i got it.”

Alphys moaned and put her chin on the edge of the toilet bowl.

Sans returned with two sliced of toast on a paper towel and a bottle of water.

“hydration is important alphys. especially in your state.”

“Sans, ’m pregnant, not dying,” Alphys moaned as she took the bottle and a slice of the toast. “No matter how much I feel like I am.”

“okay, geez. eat a bit slower, al.”

Alphys groaned and ate a bit slower.

There was a scream from the kitchen.

“that’d be the water for the tea. mint, ginger, or both?”

“M-mint, please…”

“okay, gotcha.”

Sans got a sachet of mint tea from the cupboard and put it in a Tuxedo Mask mug.

Alphys was walking out of the bathroom with the other slice of toast.

“B-bottle’s empty.”

“okay. here’s the tea for ya. want i should getcha a bowl? y’know, in case ya hurl while we watch cowboy bebop?”

“S-sure. Why not?”

“okay.”

Sans grabbed a bowl and brought it into the living room.

“okay. ready, al?”

“R-ready when you are!”

“okay. science squad anime day; commence.”
They turned on the DVD player.

“O-oh man, it’s been YEARS since we last d-did this.”

“been about twelve years hasn’t it?”

Alphys nodded in excited agreement before lurching to a stop and grabbing the bowl. Dry heaves. Sans rubbed her back.

“T-thanks…”

“it’s all good. what episode were we on, again?”

“I-I think it was H-Heavy Metal Queen…”

“heh, heavy metal queen…” Sans smirked. “sounds like mettaton.”

Alphys snorted. “W-well, you’re not wrong …”

“Well, how ‘bout instead of startin’ from wherever the fuck it was we left off, we start over?”

“Y-yeah, good plan.”

“okay. imma go make some popcorn.”

“M-make enough for me!”

“okay.”

Sans walked into the kitchen are and put some kettle corn in the microwave. Sans was reeeeally glad that Alphys managed to convince Undyne to use more...conventional appliances. He grabbed a bottle of ketchup from the fridge and went to sit down.

“y’wanna start now or wait for the popcorn?”

“L-let’s just start,” Alphys replied. “We’ve stalled long enough.”

“okay.”

And so began a day of liveblogging the entire Cowboy Bebop series.

Sans really loved the Cowboy Bebop theme song.

“So,” Caroline asked, “are ya gonna use the song Penelope ‘n I picked for ya?”

Hunter hummed in thought. “Well, I do know all the words…”

“That’s not a real answer~” Penelope sing-songed.

Hunter rolled his eyes good-naturedly. “Sure, why not?”

“Yesss!” Penelope hissed as she high-fived Caroline.

“Glad we could be of service, good sir,” said Caroline. “Oh, and after lunch, I’ll be passing out
invitations to my birthday party. At the Arctic Edge ice rink. Slumber party afterwards.”

“Oh, that’s cool!”

Frisk bit back a laugh at Hunter’s accidental pun.

“You know, you could just give ours to us right now,” Brian said.

“Okay.” Caroline conceded. “You guys ARE the only people I’m inviting since you’re the closest thing I have to friends.”

There was a pretty heavy silence.

“You guys are the closest thing I have to friends too!” Penelope said.

“Oh, you two are just sad,” Brian said.

“Brian, what the heck?” Hunter mumbled as he facepalmed.

“He IS right, though,” Miranda interjected with a sneer. “They are pretty desperate.”

“If I were desperate I’d’ve actually invited you to my birthday party,” Caroline said.

Miranda looked offended. She knew that telling on Caroline of all people out was a bad idea since she was one of Brian’s friends, and getting into Brian’s good graces was Miranda’s Number 2 Priority.

So she settled for glaring at her.

Caroline paid no attention. She was too caught up in a book.

Miranda cleared her throat.

Caroline continued to ignore her.

Miranda cleared her throat even more loudly.

Okay, now Miranda was getting impatient.

“A-HEM.”

Caroline made no attempt at acknowledgement.

Okay that did it.

“HELL- OOO? I AM TRYING TO GLARE AT YOU!”

“Miranda, strike one,” Mrs. Chang said.

“But-but-but Caroline was ignoring me!” Miranda protested.

Mrs. Chang glanced over to Caroline. Caroline looked around. “Oh, she was trying to get my attention?”

“AAAAAAAAUGH!”

“Aaand I never thought I’d have to do THIS, but that’s a twofer. Principal’s office, Miranda.”
Miranda scoffed. “I didn’t even DO anything! SHE’S the one who’s IGNORING me!”

Now everyone was staring at Miranda like she was a complete moron.

“Aaaand you’re the one disrupting my class. Now go to the principal’s office.”

“But FRISK is the one who’s always flapping her hands around like a -”

“DON’T. Finish that sentence. Unless you WANT to be suspended for more than two days this time.”

“But -”

“I’m calling the office.”

“OKAY, I’m GOING! Gawsh…”

Miranda stomped toward the door.

As Mrs. Chang contacted the office to explain the situation, the other students muttered amongst themselves.

Caroline shrunk into her desk and book until she was technically underneath her desk. She was rocking back and forth so that the back of her head hit her chair.

She continued reading as if nothing had happened or ever would happen.

MK turned to Frisk. They were rocking back and forth and biting their nails.

MK rubbed Frisk’s back until they calmed down enough to communicate.

“You okay, Frisk?”

Frisk nodded. <<Thanks, MK.>>

MK smiled. “Don’t worry about it, yo! I got your back!”

Frisk smiled back.

This was why they liked MK. They always had their back.

Mettaton sat on his king-sized bed painting his nails. He had been so busy lately that he hadn’t had a chance to try out the new metallic fuchsia nail polish Papyrus had bought him in Chicago on the shopping trip they’d had on the last full day there.

As he was finishing up on one of the toes on his left foot, his phone rang.

Mettaton clicked his tongue and huffed as he reached over to check the caller ID.

Boyfriend calling. Face smiling. Phone being answered.

“Hey, Sugar Skull~”

“HELLO, HONEY BOT~ ARE YOU FREE THIS EVENING?”

“Why, I do believe I am! Why do you ask?”
“WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO ON ANOTHER DATE THIS EVENING?”

“Oh, YES, of COURSE! Where and when?”

“WEEELL, DESPITE THE PRESENCE OF...CERTAIN PEOPLE...I HAD A LOT OF FUN AT THE MYRIAD! DOES...DOES THAT SOUND OKAY TO YOU?”

Mettaton smiled. “Sounds PERFECT~! How about times?”

“WE’LL MEET FOR DINNER AT MY PLACE AT FIVE AND LEAVE AT AROUND SIX! SOUND LIKE A PLAN?”

“Sounds like a WONDERFUL plan! I’ll see you then!”

“ALRIGHT! GOODBYE!”

“Buh-bye, Papy! I love you~”

“I LOVE YOU TOO! BYE~”

“Bye~”

Mettaton hung up.

After finishing up his toenails, it suddenly clicked.

He actually just said Those Three Words to Papyrus.

Oh stars.

OHHH STAAAARSSSS.

Mettaton briefly shorted out and collapsed on his bed before rebooting again moments later.

He shot up and checked the time. 11:22 A.M. Less than six hours to get ready.

He had to rush his fingernails a bit.

Thank the STARS that he’d already showered.

Toriel was finishing up her lunch - leftover parmesan chicken - when her text tone went off.

*I text from: Papyrus*

*GOOD DAY, MISS TORIEL! I HOPE YOU ARE ENJOYING YOUR LUNCH!*

*I am, Papyrus! Thank you very much! How is your day going?*

*QUITE WELL, THANK YOU! METTATON IS COMING OVER FOR DINNER TONIGHT BEFORE WE GO OUT ON OUR DATE! SORRY IT’S SO LAST-MINUTE!*

*It’s quite alright! I will let Sans know so you can have more time to get ready!*

*WOWIE, REALLY? THANK YOU!*

*It is no trouble at all! :)
Toriel sighed and began texting Sans with the news.

*Hello, Sans! Papyrus just texted me to tell me that Mettaton is coming over for dinner tonight before they go out on their date.

*okay

*thanks for letting me know tori

*You are very welcome! How is Alphys doing?

*a lot better now actually

*good enough to watch anime

*That is good to hear! I am glad she’s feeling better! Do tell her I said hello?

It was another few moments before Sans responded with a selfie of himself and Alphys relaxing on Alphys and Undyne’s couch. Alphys was holding up the peace sign and Sans was holding up the sign for ‘i love you’ and winking his left eye.

*alphys says hey and thanks for the help

*Well, tell Alphys I said “anytime”! ;)

*will do

*love ya tori

*see you this evenin

*I love you too, Sans! ;)

Toriel was amazed at herself.

How could something so simple as sending a winky goat face make her blush so goddamn hard?

How could something so simple as a winky goat face send Sans reeling face-first off the edge of a goddamn sofa?

Feelings were weird. So very, very weird.

The sound of the front door unlocking did nothing to rouse Sans from off the floor.

“Hey, I’m home for lunch.”

Undyne stared at the Sans facedown on the floor and the Alphys stuffing a fistful of kettle corn into her face.

“Do I even wanna ask?”

“if the question is “can i join you in watchin’ anime’ then sure, why not, it’s cowboy bebop.”

Undyne scrunched her face in confusion before shrugging it away.

“Sweet! What episode’re you guys on?”
“S-Sympathy for the Devil,” Alphys said.

“Awright! Let’s DO this!”

“okay. aaand play.”

Mettaton was choosing a gown.

And now, after two hours, he had chosen an empire-waisted gown of fuchsia satin with a black velvet off-shoulder long-sleeved bodice and black heels. With it he was going to wear a fuchsia satin headband.

This night was going to be AMAZING.

His text tone went off.

*I text from: Smarmy Potato*

It was a photo of a title card for Cowboy Bebop’s seventh session, Heavy Metal Queen.

*i think its about you*

Mettaton glared at the phone.

*How dare you.*

*Watching Cowboy Bebop without ME? How could you?*

*easy*

*i put in the dvd while you werent here*

*That is NOT what I meant you smarmy potato.*

*I’m coming over there. With Papyrus.*

*okay*

*see ya in a bit*

*Shut the fuck up.*

*im pretty sure it impossible to shut fucks in any direction but okay ill try*

Mettaton glared at the phone and sent a middle finger emoji. All texts from Sans were to be ignored until further notice.

He opened the contacts and selected Papyrus’ number.

It only rang once.

“YES, METTATON? DID YOU NEED ANYTHING?”

“Get your tux on ay-sap, we’re goin’ to Alphys and Undyne’s. I don’t know how you haven’t mauled that smarmy potato yet, but I APPLAUD you, Papy, APPLAUD.”
“I’M GOING TO NEED DETAILS, BUT OKAY? I’LL SEE YOU IN A BIT?”

“See you in a bit, darling. Byeee~”

“WAIT!”

Mettaton huffed as he put the phone on speaker and tossed it onto his bed. “What is it, Papy?”

“EARLIER, WHEN I CALLED YOU TO SET UP OUR DATE…”

Mettaton removed his house clothes and tossed them wherever.

“What about it?”

“…YOU...SAID YOU...L-L-LOVE ME?”

Oh shit. He’d completely forgotten about that.

How to explain it…? There was no use lying to Papyrus of all people…

He sighed as he sat on the bed.

“Yeah…I did, didn’t I…?”

“DID...YOU MEAN IT? DO YOU...LOVE ME?”

“Yes…”

Mettaton didn’t even need to think about his answer. It was as if it was a part of his code, as if the knowledge that he loved Papyrus had been hardwired into him for so long that it had been accepted by Mettaton as basic fact.

The silence was heavy, yet comfortable. It was odd.

“I’M COMING OVER.”

“Oh, o-okay then -”

The busy signal rang throughout the room. Mettaton returned the phone to its charge port and curled up on his bed.

Mettaton could safely say that never had he felt more afraid than he had at this moment.

No. He wasn’t just afraid.

He was terrified.

Caroline sat on a beanbag chair in the back of the library reading her other book. She’d finished the one from earlier, just as she knew she would, so what else was there to do but read another book? The correct answer to that question is always nothing. There is absolutely nothing else to do but read another book aside from maybe writing one.

Caroline was surprised that she hadn’t considered holing herself in here during recess sooner. I mean, come on. What child in their right mind spends recess in a library?

Caroline felt a sort of heavy peace wash over her as she basked in the silence of the empty library
and absorbed the words on the pages of her book.

This was her element. Books and words and all things associated with them. They were hers.

Books don’t stand and stare. They don’t gawk or glare. They cause her no despair.

Books are simply there.

When Penelope sat on the beanbag next to her, Caroline pretended not to notice.

“Hey, Care.”

“Nell.”

“Too crowded for ya?”

Caroline shrugged and gave a noncommittal grunt.

“Frisk’s right behind me. They’re just talking to Ms. Toriel then they’ll be here.”

Caroline simply hummed.

“If you want me to leave you alone, then I can -”

“You can stay if you want.”

Penelope looked up at Caroline in shock. Caroline was still reading her book, her glasses on the ground next to her.

Caroline always had a tiny smile on her face whenever she read. Penelope liked that smile.

She didn’t notice Frisk walk in and then leave once more after deciding that they needed some alone time.

Hunter looked up the lyrics to Hallelujah on the computer in the library.

He’d have to see if there was any way that there could be another sleepover scheduled at some point. Maybe even at Mettaton’s like back on New Year’s...yeah...that was a fun one.

Hunter took a photo of the screen with his phone and closed out of the window.

He grabbed his backpack and slung it over his shoulder before he noticed Naomi watching him from behind.

They stared at each other silently.


Hunter smiled and gave a thumbs up in response.

He let out a breath as he walked over to the back of the library.

Naomi went back to her work. Kids of strict parents had to stick together, after all.

Papyrus parked in the driveway of Mettaton’s. He walked up to the gate and rang the bell.
The gate opened.

After a moment’s hesitation, Papyrus stepped through the gate.

He went up to the front door and opened it slowly.

“METTATON?”

“I’m in my room, Papyrus.”

Papyrus walked up to Mettaton’s room. Before he could knock the door opened.

Mettaton was breathing heavily, his hair a tousled mess, his fans whirring at warp speed. He seemed nervous.

And shirtless. And pantsless. Mettaton in nothing but underwear. Ohhhh stars.

“Come in…” Mettaton…mumbled? Mettaton must be unwell if he was MUMBLING.

Mettaton sat on his bed and patted the space next to him, signaling for Papyrus to sit down.

Papyrus obliged.

The silence was...strange. It was heavy, of course. But it was at once awkward AND comfortable. A feat that should, for all intents and purposes, be impossible. And yet here they were, in an awkwardly comfortable, comfortably awkward silence.

Mettaton glanced nervously up at Papyrus. No tux. Just a simple polo and slacks with a jacket and his usual Red Scarf.

“UH...SORRY I’M NOT IN A...TUXEDO…”

“Oh, it’s fine, don’t worry about it...I’m not exactly dressed to the nines myself at the moment…”

“WELL, I STILL THINK YOU LOOK GREAT!”

“Oh, thanks, so do you!”

Then came another silence.

“SO…”

“So…”

“YOU LOVE ME.”

Mettaton nodded, squeezing his eyes shut and biting his lip.

There was a moment of silence - the tensest silence Mettaton was sure he’d ever come across.

“YOU KNOW I LOVE YOU TOO, RIGHT?”

Mettaton opened his eyes and looked up toward Papyrus. His Skeletal face betrayed nothing but his true intentions - to assure Mettaton that his love was indeed reciprocated.

Mettaton started to cry a bit. How could he have been so foolish as to get all worked up over this? Papyrus had even said the words outright just after Mettaton himself had - hell, he’d even said it
once or twice before that!

Papyrus held Mettaton to calm him down. Mettaton held him back and moved to look into his eyes.

They kissed each other. Many, many times they kissed until Papyrus picked Mettaton up and moved them both further toward the center of the bed, where he set him down and loomed over him on all fours.

Mettaton’s hair was slightly messier, his bangs out of the way of his unfinished right eye. His lips were slightly swollen and his eyes were half-closed. Papyrus’ eye sockets were half-closed and he was smirking.

Both were panting heavily.

Mettaton reached up to grab Papyrus’ face and pulled himself up to kiss him.

Papyrus kissed back, his Magic forming an Orange tongue at the whim of his subconscious.

Mettaton went with it. He’d known about the tongue thing since the first time they’d made out, but something about the mood this time around made something about this scenario seem...different.

And Mettaton was VERY familiar with that difference.

No one at Alphys and Undyne’s noticed that Papyrus and Mettaton were missing. They were too engrossed in the Mushroom Samba to even consider them. Sans had contacted Toriel to let her know that those plans were cancelled.

“duuude, flashbacks to my stats final…”

“A-as soon as I am no longer pregnant, w-we are getting high and w-watching this s-series again.”

“Can I join you guys?”

“sure.”

Goat scream.

“Sans, it’s your girlfriend.”

“yep.”

Undyne was slightly bitter about the effect that statement no longer had on him. But she wasn’t going to complain. Soreil had been a long time coming, and Sans had been pretty damn happy lately. Who was Undyne to put a dent in that happiness?

Sans checked the text.

*Hello Sans! I am on my way home with Frisk! How does pizza sound?*

*great*

*see ya in a bit*

*I will see you shortly, Sans! :)*

Sans clicked out of the texting app and stood up.
“gotta go guys. tori’s on ‘er way home. pizza tonight.”

“O-okay. See you here next week, then?”

Sans turned back and smiled.

“sure thing, al.”

Alphys smiled back and waved as Sans walked out the door.

She settled back in to continue watching the show.

Undyne put an arm around her.

Alphys couldn’t believe she was here. The surface, friends with Sans once more, married to the love of her life with a kid on the way…

This. This is what happiness feels like.

Frisk was completely thrashing Flowey’s butt into the dirt. Err, further into the dirt than it already was.

Anyway, he was getting his butt beat in at Pokemon again.

“home.”

Sans was back.

Frisk abandoned the battle and ran into their dunkle’s arms.

Sans grunted with the force of the Human’s tackle-hug.

He chuckled as he rumpled their hair. When he was done they looked up at him and giggled.

Stars above this child was a-freaking-dorable. He hugged them and went into the kitchen where Toriel was calling for pizza.

“Okay! Thank you, goodbye!”

Toriel hung up the phone and turned to see Sans sitting on the kitchen table.


“Sans,” Toriel deadpanned, “just because we are dating does not mean you can sit on the table.”

“okay.”

Sans hopped off the table and stood in place for a moment.

“how ‘bout the counter though?” he asked.

“The counter is fine so long as I am not in the process of preparing food.”

“sounds fair to me.”

Sans walked up next to Toriel and teleported onto the counter.
They waited in comfortable silence until the doorbell rang.

“Ah, that would be the pizza.”

Toriel stood to get the door.

But first she turned around and kissed Sans on the forehead.

Sans blushed and blue screened.

Toriel giggled. “That’s for the little display in front of my class earlier~”

Frisk watched their interactions and giggled.

They started formulating wedding plans in their head as they grabbed a slice of pizza from the box.

The amount of love your family and friends have for each other fills you with

**DETERMINATION**

Chapter End Notes

Start Of Something New - High School Musical

So about the Papyton, I wrote out that scene. Would y'all wanna read it? It'll be M for Mature, so be warned.
Chapter Summary

Audition time, folks. There’s a deal made, a crime attempted, a cold war brewing, and so much more.

Chapter Notes

Hey, guys. Music time.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

11:19 A.M., February 4th, 20XQ

It’s a beautiful day in Ebott.

The sun is shining.

The warmth is unseasonable.

On days like this, kids like you…

...are helping your friend prepare for his audition.

Frisk, Flowey, MK, Levi, Caroline, Penelope, Brian, and Hunter sat on the blacktop outside the music building to eat their lunches, as did about twelve other fourth graders outside of the friend group, all of them there for one reason…

...The Mountainside Elementary School Spring Concert solo auditions.

Frisk recognized everyone in the crowd, but their eyes caught Marilla, Bruce and his friends Eddy and Nicko from Mr. Steiner’s class, and Miranda and her lackeys.

They wondered which of Bruce’s gang was trying out.

“Hi Bruce!” Penelope called, waving her arms in the air in order to get his attention.

Bruce noticed Penelope and waved back before getting his friends and joining Frisk’s group.

“Hey Penelope,” Bruce said. “Are you auditioning, or one of your friends?”

“Oh, uh…” Penelope stammered out as she looked to Hunter for help.
“Uh...actually,” Hunter muttered, “I’m the one auditioning…”

Frisk and their friends glanced over at Miranda. She’d been so busy talking her lackeys’ ears off she paid Hunter’s declaration of intent to audition absolutely no attention. The friends breathed a sigh of relief.

“Um, would you mind keeping that a secret?” Hunter asked nervously. “If my mom knew I was auditioning she’d KILL me.”

“I’ll keep your secret,” Bruce said with conviction. “You can count on it.”

“Yeah, man,” Eddy agreed. “We’ll tell no one unless you ask us to.”

Nicko nodded in agreement.

Hunter was happily surprised at this. “T-thanks…”

“No problem, man!”

“So Bruce,” Penelope asked, “your sister give you any new tattoos?”

“Uh, yeah, actually,” Bruce admitted. “Check it out.”

Bruce showed off the tattoo of a heart on his bicep.

“Cooool,” Brian said in reverence.

“Very nice!” Levi said as he gave a thumbs up.

“That shade of pink really suits you,” Caroline said.

“Oh, uh, thanks,” Bruce mumbled bashfully.

“So,” MK asked, “Which of you guys is auditioning?”

“That’d be me,” Eddy admitted.

“Oh, that’s cool!” Hunter said. “Good luck!”

“Thanks, man, you too!”

And then the bell rang 11:30. Time for recess.

Time for auditions.

Mettaton had just gotten out of the shower when he received the text from Frisk.

*Audition time! Wish Hunter the best of luck! -v-

*Hunter has a GIFT, Frisky-darling. He doesn’t need luck.

*But a little luck never hurt anyone~ I’ll send some over anywaaaay~

He sent his good-luck wishes over via seven glitter emojis.

Frisk responded with a thumbs up emoji.
Mettaton closed out of the messaging app and put his house clothes on.

He had some time off for a while and he was going to enjoy the hell out of it.

Frisk received the texts.

They showed them to Hunter.

Hunter was suddenly filled with determination.

Everyone was sitting inside the music building either on the floor or on beige metal folding chairs that were probably older than their parents.

The green-eyed blonde music teacher Aimee Halsey sat at the upright piano older than she was at the front of the room. She was smiling. Clearly she was pretty psyched to be here.

“Mornin’ everyone! Hope you all’re ready, ‘cause there’s no turning back!” Miss Halsey said cheerfully. “Unless you want to, in which case you know where the door is!”

This got a few laughs from the students.

“Okay, now the reason I had you all sign your names on the slips of paper I gave you as you walked in is because I’ll be calling on you all randomly when I pull your slip out from this hat.”

She pointed to a very nice velvet top hat with a shiny red satin band around it.

“Hope you guys’re ready because we’re starting NOW!”

The kids cheered. Miss Halsey’s enthusiasm was contagious.

“Okay first up we have…”

Caroline read her book. This kid was okay. Not the best, but okay.

Frances Hodgson Burnett was better by far. The Secret Garden wins this round, ten out of ten, no contest.

The group clapped as the kid finished.

“Okay next up is…”

Miss Halsey reached into the hat for a slip of paper. One came out.

“...Eddy Suarez, will you please come up?”

Eddy got up to the front.

He took a deep breath in.

And -
“Shot through the heart– And you’re to blame, Darlin’ you give love– A bad name–”

Wow.

Eddy was actually really good.

“Paint your smile on your lips– Blood red nails on your fingertips– A school boy’s dream, you act so shy– Your very first kiss was your first kiss goodbye–”

Frisk wasn’t exactly sure what they expected, but in hindsight it should have been Bon Jovi. It really should have been Bon Jovi.

As he completed the song the cheers of the students could be heard outside the building. Some kids were now looking inside the windows. Miss Halsey closed the blinds.

“If they wanna watch you guys sing, they can go to the spring concert,” she muttered loud enough for the potential performers to hear.

Hunter let out a breath he knew very well that he was holding. He panted a few times to get his bearings.

A few kids gave up after Eddy’s performance, but chose to stand outside and listen to the others.

A couple of other kids were called on to try out.

“Up next, we have Miranda Mosley. Step up to the front, please?”

Miranda practically sashayed up to the front.

“The snow glows white on the mountain tonight– Not a footprint– To be seen–”

Wow.

The song is overplayed enough already. Miranda was just…beating a dead horse at this point.

Miss Halsey was clearly trying not to grimace as Miranda overperformed the overperformed.

Miranda went for a big finish. The effects cannot be described in positive terms. They just can’t.

Miranda went back to her seat. Everyone was silent.

Caroline, Frisk, and Penelope were curled up in such ways that would prevent too much noise from entering their ears.

Miranda glanced their way and sneered. “Top THAT, weirdoes.”

“Up next, Hunter Thompson.”

Hunter glanced at Miranda with a smile so sweet that someone somewhere got a cavity. “I’ll try.”

He went up to the front and looked out at the small crowd.

He took a few deep breaths to calm himself. This was nowhere NEAR the amount of people that would actually be at the concert itself.

This was NOTHING compared to THAT.
He took a breath in and began.

“I heard there was a secret chord— That David played and it pleased the lord— But you don’t really care for music do you— Well it goes like this, the fourth, the fifth— The minor fall, the major lift— The baffled king composing hallelujah—”

Everyone watched and listened. There was something about Hunter’s singing that mesmerized.

He had a gift, that much was certain.

“Maybe there’s a god above— All I’ve ever learned from love was how to shoot at someone who outdrew you— It’s not a cry that you hear at night— It’s not somebody who’s seen the light— It’s a cold and it’s a broken hallelujah—”

Caroline glanced about at the small crowd - she decided to call a crowd of five to ten people a crowdlet. Crowdlet...yeah, that sounds nice…

She took notice of Brian.

She followed his eyes to where Hunter was concluding his audition piece.

His face seemed...weird. Not ugly-weird, but something’s-going-on-in-that-head-of-his-weird.

Caroline recalled his reaction to her claims of him having a crush on Hunter.

She smirked. Best to keep somethings to yourself until such time as they could be of good use.

She glanced over toward Miranda.

Someone was NOT happy.

At least she recognizes talent.

Caroline was pretty sure that Miranda was going to rat on Hunter. It was definitely something she’d do.

Miranda turned around as Hunter finished his song to immense applause.

She caught Caroline’s eye.

Caroline stared in Miranda’s general direction owlishly. She didn’t quite grasp real eye contact most of the time. It made her nauseous.

Miranda shuddered and turned to the front.

“Up next, Marilla Acquafredda.”

Marilla stepped up to the front. Miranda flinched as she walked by.

Marilla cleared her throat and began to sing.

“Once upon a dream— I was lost in love’s embrace— There I found a perfect place— Once upon a dream—”

Marilla was pretty good. Frisk didn’t recognize this song. They’d have to ask Mettaton about it later.
“Once upon a dream~  You were heaven-sent to me~  But it wasn’t meant to be~  Now you’re just a dream~  Could we begin again~  Once upon a dream~”

The crowdlet applauded.

“Okay, that’s all the auditions,” Miss Halsey announced. “It’s almost noon, so get yer fourth-grade butts outta here. You’ll find out who’s got the parts over the announcements on Monday. I will see you all next week.”

Everyone stood and walked out the door.

Hunter approached Marilla.

“Hey, I really liked your song. You did great!”

“O-oh, thank you!” Marilla said. “You were a LOT better, though.”

“Eheh, thanks! What song was that, anyway?”

“I-it’s called Once Upon A Dream from Jekyll And Hyde.”

“That’s been turned into a musical?” Caroline asked.

Marilla nodded.

“I wonder what other songs there are…”

“Well, see ya in class!” Hunter said.

“See you then,” Marilla said as she walked over to her little friend group.

Miranda stalked over to Hunter and co. Hunter turned toward her, his expression neutral.

“You’re not gonna win, you know.”

“Maybe. But if I do…” Hunter began.

“If you do, what?” Miranda said.

“If I get a solo part, you don’t rat me out to my mom. Because either way, she’s gonna find out and kill me.”

Miranda scowled. He had a point.

“Fine. We have a deal.”

Miranda and Hunter shook on it.

“Don’t cross your fingers.”

“Shut up, sissy-boy.”

Mettaton was watching Corazón Espinado reruns. He was on the episode where Milagro told Alma and Úrsula of his love for Placido.

His cell went off.
Frisk had sent him the video.

He opened it and played it.

Hunter seemed nervous at first, but he eased his way into calm right as he began the song.

He seemed to be in another world, almost.

Mettaton was more certain now than ever.

Hunter had a gift.

Mettaton’s doorbell rang.

Mettaton blew his bangs up and paused the video to see who was at the door.

Boyfriend at the door.

Mettaton opened the gate to let Papyrus in and waited on the other side of the front door.

Papyrus opened the door. Mettaton jumped into his arms.

Sadly the average velocity of an unladen Mettaton in flight is just slightly too much for a Papyrus to handle.

Neither of them really care though.

Papyrus sat up with Mettaton in his lap and kissed him before standing up with him bridal-style in his arms.

He carried him across the threshold.

“So what are you up to this fine day?” Papyrus asked.

“I was watching Corazón Espinado reruns when Frisk just sent me Hunter’s audition video! Wanna watch?”

“Heck yeah!”

Papyrus carried Mettaton into the home theatre room.

“Um, Papy,” Mettaton started, “I can walk you know.”

“I know,” Papyrus said. “I just want to carry you like this for a bit.”

Mettaton blushed.

Papyrus sure knew how to make him feel like a prince…

---

Sans was just chilling, watching Corazón Espinado.

Placido was telling Sol about his newly-discovered romantic feelings for Milagro.

Kind of reminded Sans of when Papyrus told him about his feelings for Mettaton.

Come to think of it, a lot of the plotlines in Corazón Espinado reminded him of his fucking life. He
had already declared Sol his spirit animal on Tumblr by reblogging the “This user spiritually identifies with Sol Guzman” userbox.

His cellphone went off.

It was a reminder telling him that he was taking Frisk to the ice rink for Caroline’s birthday party on Saturday.

He pushed the reminder up to Saturday at noon. He made it red. Frisk’s favorite color.

Sans wasn’t exactly sure what else to do. Corazón Espinado was great and all, but he’d seen this episode countless times. It wasn’t even one of his favorites, if he was honest. It was one of the better ones, just not a favorite. It did provide character development for the Guzman Brothers, though.

He turned off the TV and decided to grab a second lunch at Grillby’s.

Maybe he’d call Tori and ask if she wanted anything…

---

Perhaps Toriel was challenging her students a bit TOO much. The War of 1812 wasn’t one of her particular favorites when it came to history, but common core said it had to be done.

Really, what even is the point of “common core”? Really. This was just confusing - not just to the students, but to their parents and Toriel herself.

But she wasn’t allowed to complain. No one was. If they were, the person they told would just brush them off with a “that’s just how it is”.

Uh, NO. That is NOT just how it is. It SHOULDN’T be. But hey. Don’t listen to someone who’s seen the effects first hand. Keep shoving bullshit down these poor children’s throats.

Toriel’s anger at the public school system was interrupted by a very particular text tone.

*I text from: Sans*

*hey tori*

*i’m goin to grillbys for lunch*

*you eaten yet*

Toriel smiled. Sans was so considerate of others. If only he’d extend the same consideration towards himself once in awhile.

But who was she to think that? She really hadn’t eaten much of a lunch today.

*If you could bring me some french fries, I would appreciate it!*

*okay gotcha*

*see ya in a bit*

*I will see you then! :)*

Toriel closed out of her phone
“Okay, next question. Who did Tecumseh and the Native Americans side with during the war and why?”

Few hands were raised. But one stood out to her.

“Yes? Jacob?”

“Um, they sided with the British because they didn’t want the Americans to go west?”

Toriel smiled. “That’s correct! Well done!”

Jacob seemed proud of himself for the answer.

*knock knock*

The students oohed. They knew who it was just by the knocks.

“Who is there?”

“food…”

Toriel smiled. “Food who?”

“food you believe how nice the weather is today?”

Toriel laughed at this, as did some of the students. The rest of the students either groaned or stayed silent.

“Yes, the weather is quite nice! I almost thought it was springtime already…”

“yeah, ‘s great out there. how’s a picnic in the park sound, since it’s so dang nice out?”

Toriel blushed as her students oohed. She put her hands on her hips and gave Sans a Look. “Really, Sans? Asking me out on a date in front of my entire fifth grade class?”

Sans shrugged unapologetically. “that’s not a no~”

Toriel rolled her eyes affectionately. “No, it is not. Will Frisk be joining us this evening or not?”

“nope. i got somethin’ arranged with alphys and undyne, they’ll be babysitting ‘em this evenin’.”

“Alright, then! I’ll be waiting!”

“as will i…”

Sans’ voice seemed to deepen as he kissed her hand and stepped out of the room with a wink and a smile.

Stars above that Skeleton was going to be the death of Toriel one of these days.

Not that she minded, of course…

She shook off her infatuation and cleared her throat before going back to teaching.

“Okay, now that that little display is over with…”

The students giggled.
“...why was the U.S.S. Constitution given the nickname Old Ironsides?”

It was time to go home now.

Frisk waved their friends goodbye and went out to wait for their ride.

They saw Undyne.

They jumped and waved to get her attention.

Undyne smiled and ran over to Frisk and lifted them Lion King-style. However, Frisk posed like they were in Titanic. It made for an interesting sight.

“You ready to head on out, punk?”

Frisk was a bit confused.

<<What do you mean by that?>>

“Fufufu! Yer mom and dunkle have a date, so yer stuck with us this evenin’, punk!”

Frisk’s expression brightened and they squirmed and applauded.

“I think that’s a yes! C’mom, ya lil booger, we’re gettin’ Olive Garden! Just don’t tell Papyrus.”

<<Some people just don’t appreciate free breadsticks.>>

“I know, it’s SAD! Who CARES if it’s not ‘real Italian Cuisine’?”

Undyne and Frisk complained about Papyrus’ disrespect toward Olive Garden all the way out to the car where Alphys was waiting.

“- and they have pretty darn good tiramisu! TIRAMISU, Frisk!”

<<What’s that?>>

“Delicious. Now buckle up, kiddo. Free breadsticks are a-waitin’!”

Frisk buckled in as Undyne peeled out of the parking lot.

They held onto the safety bar above the door for dear life.

They hadn’t SAVED since before lunch, and they did NOT want a repeat of the little deal between Hunter and Miranda. They were pretty anxious about that, even though Hunter was pretty much a shoo-in for a solo part.

This was Miranda after all. Frisk didn’t have much faith that she’d keep her word.

But Frisk was inclined to give Miranda the benefit of the doubt. Frisk did that for almost everyone.

Even The Player.

If someone like them could be redeemed, or at least feel regret, then who’s to say someone like Miranda can’t be?

Undyne peeled into the Olive Garden parking lot.
“Okay, family! Free breadsticks ahoy!”

Alphys glared at Undyne. She was clearly about to puke.

“Either we call an Uber next time, or I’m driving from now on.”

At 4:30 P.M., Toriel finished grading the quiz papers from last week. The amount of A’s surprised her. There were a few B’s and C’s, yes, but the A’s far outnumbered them.

She felt a smidge of pride in her students. Even the ones with B’s and C’s have greatly improved since the semester began. Maybe they just needed to get back into the swing of things, as the saying supposedly went.

She put the papers away and walked out of her door.

As she locked the door behind her, she locked eyes with none other than Ms. Roth.

If Toriel was self-professedly good at one thing, it was icy civility.

“Good afternoon, Ms. Roth.”

“Mrs. Dreemurr,” Ms. Roth countered.

“Ms. Dreemurr,” Toriel corrected. “I have not been Mrs. Dreemurr for years.”

“Hmm, I see,” Ms. Roth said dully. Her withered face moved little, as if it were carved into her flesh. As if all emotion and empathy was discarded long ago and all that remained was a withered husk.

They were silent, doing little save glower at each other. Cinnamon eyes pierced icy blue. Icy blue pierced back. Neither woman shrank under the other’s glare, though Toriel was taller than Ms. Roth by a solid two feet or more.

“I suppose will see you tomorrow.”

“Hmm, likewise.”

Toriel walked away as regally as she could remember how. It had been years since she was a queen in any sense of the word, but the cold war brewing between herself and Mrs. Roth required as much Determination as a Boss Monster could hold.

She unlocked her phone and ran through the contacts.

She held the receiver to her ear as it rang.

“yellow.”

“Sans, I finished early and I’m on my way home now. Is the picnic still on?”

“uh, yeah?”

“Good. I had a bit of a rough afternoon and stars know I need this. Thank you Sans, I’ll see you at home, bye~”

“wait, tori -”
“What is it, Sans?”

“...you wanna talk about it when ya get back?”

Toriel paused briefly and sighed, much of the stress leaving her almost instantly..

“Yes. As a matter of fact I do. Thank you Sans.”

“okay. see ya in a bit.”

“Of course, Sans. I love you.”

“love ya too, tori. bye.”

“Goodbye!”

She hung up.

She smiled as she walked out to her car.

It really was rather warm out for early February…

“Okay, maybe this will change your mind?”

Miss Halsey looked down at the check in Diana’s hand and looked back up at her with a bored expression.

“No.”

“Oh, come ON! What’ll it take for you to give my sweet little Miranda solo part?”

“All it really takes is you not bribing me, Mrs. Mosley,” Miss Halsey explained. “Now unless you want me to call school security, please leave.”

Diana was getting frustrated. If this woman wouldn’t bribed, maybe something a little more... forceful was necessary.

“Listen, my husband -”

“Is a business analyst for Elecom Corporation, you already told me. If you think threatening me with poverty will work, think again, I actually went to college. Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m calling security.”

“OKAY, I’ll go!” Diana shouted angrily, slamming her hands on the desk.

She calmed down instantly and cleared her throat. “Sorry. Just know that I’ll be back.”

“Whatever.”

Diana stormed out of the music building and headed back to her car.

She always parked in the Teacher of the Month parking space - it wasn’t even a real title. And she would be yelled at for parking there like she would when she parked in handicap spaces. What were handicapped people doing driving in the first place? Could they even drive?

Diana peeled out of the parking spot.
Just wait until her husband heard about this...

Toriel and Sans spread out the blanket on the golden-brown grass. They were rather hard-pressed to find a spot that wasn’t covered in cockleburrs, but they’d found it.

They set the basket and cooler down on the blanket before admiring their little set up.

“Why, this looks quite nice, does it not, Sans dear?”

“eh,” Sans muttered as he shrugged, “I think the cooler could be moved a bit to the left, but it’s alright I suppose.”

Toriel giggled at the pun.

“Well, then, let’s dig in!”

Sans rubbed his hands together as he sat down on the blanket.

Toriel sat down and glanced down at her cardigan sleeve.

“Speaking of digging in…” she mumbled as she picked out a few burrs and discarded them in the grass.

“Wow, those things really do get everywhere,” Sans said as he plucked one from the hem of his Blue Hoodie. He reached over and opened the picnic basket. “Let’s just hope the damn things didn’t get into our food.”

“Fingers crossed!”

They giggled a bit.

“Good news. No cactus pellets in the German potato salad.”

Toriel just started giggling.

“Why are you giggling? You didn’t actually want spiky bits in your potato salad, did you?”

“Wha - no, no! It’s just...that sentence was hilarious!”

“What sentence? ‘No cactus pellets in the German potato salad’?”

Toriel was absolutely bleating with laughter now.

Sans thought for a few seconds. First about how much he adored Toriel’s laugh. Second about how “no cactus pellets in the German potato salad” was actually kind of funny.

Now there were two laughing Monsters in the middle of the park.

And they couldn’t care less whether or not there were cactus pellets in their German potato salad.

Alphys, Undyne, and Frisk left the Olive Garden.

“Well, punk? What’d I tell ya? Isn’t tiramisu the BOMB?”

Frisk nodded happily.
They drove off back to Alphys and Undyne’s house.

They walked through the front door when everyone’s phones went off.

Sans and Toriel had taken a selfie captioned...weirdly.

What the fuck is “no cactus pellets in the german potato salad” supposed to even mean?

“I do NOT understand these two,” Undyne admitted.

“It’s p-probably some k-kind of inside joke,” Alphys mused.

Frisk just shrugged in confusion.

Grownups were weird.

Papyrus and Mettaton were watching a movie. Dirty Dancing was one of Mettaton’s favorites. No, scratch that - it was his all-time favorite movie ever. He had a poster signed by Patrick Swayze that had fallen in the dump years earlier.

It was approaching the end of the movie - about ten or so minutes left - when their phones went off.

They groaned in perfect two-part harmony.

Papyrus grabbed Mettaton’s and his phones.

They opened it to the same thing Frisk, Undyne, and Alphys had.

Papyrus glared at the phone like he was trying to say “what the fuck” with only his eyes. He didn’t do half-bad a job at it.

Mettaton just stared blankly at his phone. “What the fuck even.”

“THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT I WAS THINKING AND I CANNOT FIND AN ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION AT ALL.”

“Knowing these two it’s likely no one ever will.”

Papyrus hummed in agreement as he unpaused the movie.

The final scene of this movie always got to Mettaton.

Mettaton mouthed along with Johnny as he monologued.

Then the final dance scene came on.

Papyrus noticed how it made Mettaton’s eyes sparkle, how it made him chew on his lip in wonder and excitement.

Mettaton glanced at Papyrus out of the corner of his eye and stopped gnawing at his lip. He giggled nervously as he teted a strand of hair behind his ear.

“Sorry about that…”

Papyrus looked confused. “WHY? THERE’S NO NEED TO BE SORRY. BUT I FORGIVE YOU ANYWAY!”
Mettaton smiled and giggled - less nervously this time.

He was quiet as the scene continued.

“You know, Papy, I’ve always wanted to do that.”

“DO WHAT? PATRICK SWAYZE?”

Mettaton bit back a laugh. “NO, no darling - well, yes, but that’s really not what I meant!”

“I KNOW! I JUST LIKE SEEING YOU LOSE YOUR COOL…”

Mettaton gasped dramatically in fake offense and swatted Papyrus on the ribs. They laughed a bit before Mettaton continued.

“I mean...the dance scene. I’ve always wanted to do that with someone, you know?”

Papyrus hummed thoughtfully as he held Mettaton just the slightest bit closer.

He had a lot to think about…

There’s a lot happening this weekend. The knowledge fills you with DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

On Broadway - All That Jazz
You Give Love a Bad Name - Bon Jovi
Let It Go - Frozen
Hallelujah - Leonard Cohen
Once Upon A Dream - Jekyll & Hyde

Fun Fact: Miranda was a name of a girl I went to preschool with who made fun of my name. Yes I am still salty. It's been like seventeen, eighteen years and I am still salty enough to enact this little bit of pettiness against someone I haven't seen since I was like three.
I'm Still Here

Chapter by Spazzin

Chapter Summary

Ice skating, birthdays, pinball, and dead people. What a day.

Chapter Notes

So, little children. You can now contact me on Tumblr here: https://spazzin-writings.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

11:30 A.M., February 6th, 20XQ

It’s a beautiful day in Ebott.

The sun is shining.

The weather is still too warm for February.

On days like this, kids like you…

...are SO glad to be going ice skating for a friend’s birthday party.

“Why the heck are you taking ME? Why don’t you take Cactus Everdeen over there, huh?”

<<Because she doesn’t understand sign language or English, Flowey.>>

“Psh, never stopped you before…”

Frisk rolled their eyes.

Frisk was packing their bag with books, games, and Flowey for the sleepover tonight. They’d already packed their clothing the night before.

And they were set.

They hopped down the stairs, Flowey grumbling all the while.

He just didn’t wanna be away from his girlfriend~
Okay, Cactus Everdeen was technically not Flowey’s girlfriend. Frisk just hardcore shipped them five-ever.

They were gonna ask Caroline to write a fanfiction about Flowey and Cactus Everdeen.

Frisk made it downstairs and walked into the den where Sans was watching his soaps.

Frisk recognized the depressed and immunocompromised little person and his hyperactive cop wannabe brother.

Frisk had no idea who was who or what they were saying.

But they had about thirty minutes to find out.

They tugged on Sans’ sleeve.

Sans looked toward them, his right eye open. “what’s the haps, kid?”

<<Who are those guys?>> Frisk signed, gesturing to the television.

Sans chuckled. “those, friskito, are sol and placido guzman, sons of guillermo guzman. sol is a depressed sack of sad feelings, placido is his emotional crutch with a youthful vibrance. sol is deeply in love with talía, who was married to mayor arturo however many years before the series started until it fell apart after season sixteen spoilers -”

Frisk decided to tune Sans out. They asked for the names of the two characters on the screen, not a character analysis of the entire cast.

Sans seemed to notice this and stopped.

Sans would have taken Frisk and left early, but there would be food available at the skating rink. There was going to be pizza and cake.

Well, cherry cheesecake. Sans wasn’t in the mood to debate with himself about whether that stuff was pie or cake.

He’d have to ask Tori about that later…

Linda was touching up her roots when the doorbell rang at noon.

Oh shit. She completely forgot that Helen was taking Hunter and Hannah for a sleepover. The neighbors couldn’t see her like this! She told them she was a natural blonde - what would it do to her reputation if they found out she was - of all dreadful things - a brunette? Brown eyes was bad enough (DAMN Helen and her perfect blue eyes, DAMN her to HELL), but brown hair on top of that? Had she known pregnancy hormones would make her go brunette, she would have opted for a surrogate to carry Hunter.

Oh well. Too late for that now.

“Richard, get the door!”

“Dad’s at work, Mom!” Hunter called out.

“DON’T TALK BACK TO ME, HUNTER JAMES THOMPSON!”
Seriously. She would never understand why Hunter talked back at her so damn much. And after ALL she did for him…

“Like what?”

“Oh, I don’t know, feed him, clothe him, give birth to him - I ruined my figure to bring him into the world, you THINK he’d be a little more grateful!”

“Maybe if you’d stop being so JEALOUS of yo own damn kid -”

“SHUT UP!”

Linda turned around to smack whoever was there with the root comb.

But nobody came.

And she got hair dye in the bathtub.

Shit.

Penelope was absolutely stoked.

She’d never been invited to a birthday party before.

Wait, did we say stoked? We meant nervous. Like really, really nervous.

What do people even do at birthday parties?

Penelope tried googling it. The Wikihow article was really quite helpful.

Well it WOULD be, if she were the one throwing the party.

So yeah, Penelope was pretty much screwed.

Did we also mention that she can’t skate? Because she can’t.

She sat in the back of her mother’s Chevy Avalanche anxious as heck.

Theo noticed this. He started to play the ol’ “I’m Not Touching You” game that has driven countless siblings younger and older to unstoppable rage.

Penelope noticed nothing. She stared off into space wondering what the heck she was going to do.

Theo growled at the lack of reaction.

So he decided to do the equally-annoying “I’m Actually Touching You” game that siblings resort to if the “I’m Not Touching You” game fails to incite a reaction.

Poke on the arm. Nothing.

Poke on the shoulder. Still nothing.

Poke on the neck. Zip.

Poke on the cheek. Zilch.
Then Theo decided to poke Penelope on the cheek while singing a little tune.

“Puh-puh-puh-poke her face puh-puh-poke her face~”

“Theodore Francis, stop poking your sister before you lose a finger,” Monica warned.

Theo held his palms out and rolled his eyes.

“I’m gonna die…” Penelope mumbled as the car turned into the parking lot of the Arctic Edge Ice Rink.

Caroline really should have thought this whole “birthday party” thing through.

When her dad said that she couldn’t bring a book because “inconsiderate of the guests” she should have cancelled everything then and there.

But she didn’t because ice skating and it’s too late to back out now.

At least she looked nice.

Black long-sleeved shirt, purple tiered skirt, black tights and black flats. Purple and black, her two favorite colors. Dad she didn’t HAVE to dress so nicely, but it was her birthday and Caroline and Randy only went to church on Christmas and Easter - last year not even then.

Her glasses were about to slip off her nose, so she pushed them up by the bridge with her finger.

She stared at her hands.

Eight fingers. There used to be ten.

The doctors said she was lucky to still have her LIFE after that.

It’s been five years since then.

Sometimes Caroline wonders if she’s still in a coma and this is all a weird dream. Coma dreams are weird, after all.

But she’s not stuck in some coma dream. Though there are times she wishes she were. She keeps those to herself.

It would only make people upset. She doesn’t like people, yeah, but she wants them to ignore her, not pity her or tell her “it’s all in your head” or “you’re just making it up for attention”.

Besides. Nine-year-olds shouldn’t think like that. They should be happy and hating math.

She failed on both counts, really. Instead she was totally unsure how she felt most of the time and actually kind of liked math.

Seriously, what kind of kid likes math?

But then again, Levi likes math too. She wasn’t alone on that front.

“Hey, Caroline!”

Speaking of Levi.
“Everyone’s here. C’mon!”

“Okay.”

Caroline picked up her white skates and grabbed onto Levi’s shirt hem.

She didn’t like holding hands. Not since she lost her fingers.

She missed liking that.

Frisk, Sans, Penelope, Theo, Monica, Hunter, Hannah, Brian, and Helen were waiting in the lobby.

Caroline ran behind her dad. Too many people. There were regrets.

Randy looked at her and sighed.

“Go on back into the rink. We’ll join you in a bit.”

Caroline nodded and ran off.

She hit Randy in the hip with her skates.

Randy stared back after her.

He looked at everyone. And chuckled nervously.

“Sorry, she’s kinda new to the whole...party thing.”

Penelope sighed with relief.

“it’s all good,” Sans assured.

Randy sighed heavily. “Thanks.”

Randy lead everyone to the rink area, where Sharona was helping Caroline tie her skates.

As soon as she was done Caroline looked at the group and walked over to the rink.

Somehow she had more balance on ice skates than on solid earth.

She entered the rink and began to skate.

“...and twist, and loop-de-loop, and pull. there. ready to skate like...uh...i dunno any figure skaters.”

<<Like Yuri Katsuki and his husband Viktor Nikiforov!>>

“...you might wanna cool it on the yaoi figure skaters, kiddo.”

Frisk giggled in response.

Frisk and Sans looked out at the rink.

Caroline was pretty good. She was better at skating than she was at walking on solid ground.

Her outfit made her look kinda like a figure skater.

Frisk hobbled over to the rink while holding onto Sans. They got on the ice and nearly fell. They
thrashed their arms around instinctively.

They got maybe twenty yards before falling right on their butt.

Sans saw it and flinched slightly. He walked over to the ice and helped Frisk up.

“you okay there, kid?”

Frisk nodded.

They were Determined to skate like Yuri Plisetsky.

They skated forward. Slowly but surely so they wouldn’t fall.

So far so good.

Until Caroline passed them.

And then Sans passed them.

And then Caroline passed them again.

Frisk was halfway through their first lap around the ring when Caroline passed by them a third and fourth time.

It took a while for them to move through their first lap on their own.

Victory.

They held up their hands in two victorious fists.

A number of people clapped for them.

They bowed and face planted.

Brian was okay at skating.

Better than Frisk or Hunter or Hannah for sure. And it was pretty hard not to be worse at ice skating than Penelope.

But Caroline was just making everyone else look bad.

It annoyed him.

“Hey, yo, Caroline!” Brian called out.

Caroline skidded to a stop skillfully. Why couldn’t she just FALL already?

“What is it?” Caroline asked, clearly wanting to keep skating.

“Race ya ’round the rink. Three laps, winner take all.”

“All of what?”

“I dunno. Whoever wins chooses.”
Caroline shrugged. “Sounds fair.”

They set themselves up by the rink entryway.

“Ready?” Caroline asked.

Brian nodded.

“Aight. On three. One…”

“THREE!”

Brian was off like a shot.

But then Caroline proved herself faster than a speeding Brian.

Brian watched incredulous as she glided past.

Now he was Determined.

He moved even faster.

He moved past Caroline.

Caroline watched him.

Brian smirked.

Then Caroline passed him.

She looked back at him to smirk.

But was the sticking out of the tongue really necessary?

Brian was filled with a new fire.

The fire of rage brought about by being taunted.

Brian went as fast as he could.

Lap one ended with Caroline still in the lead before Brian whizzed up behind her.

She seemed almost disinterested.

She skated faster.

Lap two, Caroline shot back into the lead.

Brian was breathing heavily. He felt like he was gonna pass out.

“Brian, just give up!” Hunter cried out. “She’s too powerful for you to defeat just yet!”

“He’s probably right,” Caroline said without even a hint of exhaustion.

“Brian, you need two more badges to challenge the Elite 4!” Penelope shouted.

“And you still need your freaking starter, ya noob!” Brian countered angrily.
Final lap. Caroline was in the lead.

Brian was doomed. The only way to win was by cheating. And Brian did NOT cheat. Not in athletics at any rate.

But his pride did not allow him to give up.

No.

Only the **Brave** truly win.

Brian summoned a last surge of deeply-buried energy to run across the ice rather than skate.

Caroline was rather surprised at this.

But no matter.

Final lap complete. Winner: Caroline Marlow.

Caroline skidded to a stop and flipped her hair out of her eyes.

She looked back to Brian who was jogging across the ice.

The dude was nuts, like for real.

Props for ingenuity, though. Caroline did not expect that from Brian.

Brian passed the designated “finish line” and promptly fell to his knees with a triumphant cry to the heavens.

Yep. Totally and completely nuts.

---

Miranda rode along the trail.

The trail went for five miles. She was about halfway around.

Miranda wasn’t lonely, though. She had Diamonds. She trusted Diamonds with her life.

Diamonds was a girl’s best friend, after all.

“Hi Miranda!”

Oh no. Not Emma.

“How’ve you been? Haven’t seen you and Diamonds in a while! What’ve you been up to?”

Oh my GOD. Just GO AWAY, Rootbeer. And take your dumb rider with you.

“I got into a fight with some weirdo who felt sorry for herself and ended up getting suspended.”

Emma seemed surprised. “You got into a FIGHT?”

“I don’t wanna talk about it.”

“Were you hurt at all?”
What the heck? Was Emma actually WORRIED about her?

What an idiot.

“No. You should’ve seen the other girl.”

Wait, why was Miranda telling her all this? Emma had no right to know.

The two girls were quiet for a bit. The silence was tense.

“Is she okay, though?”

“She’s alive and not crying, if that counts for anything.”

“That’s...good, I suppose. But why did you say that she was feeling sorry for herself?”

“I don’t know. Something about everybody wanting her gone or something.”

Emma gasped slightly. “Oh my gosh...that can’t be true, can it?”

“Oh pshaw. She has like six friends and an older brother on the school soccer team.”

“Well, that’s nice! She’s got some good friends looking out for her.”

Miranda hummed. “So how’ve you been?”

Wait, why the heck did she just ask Emma Reese how she’d been? Was she crazy?!

Emma smiled. Ugh.

“Well, my grandpa’s back in town finally! It’s been WAY too long since Granny and I last saw him...”

Yeah. Miranda was going crazy.

Brian was STILL screaming in triumph.

Everyone was now ignoring him and skating around him.

Except for Penelope, who was still struggling to stand up on her own.

Even using the railing on the sides, she was clearly still having some trouble.

Caroline skated around a few times watching her.

Caroline felt a twinge of sympathy for Penelope’s troubles.

She continued her lap and stopped in front of where Penelope was in the process of tripping.

The song switched.

Caroline knew the song well.

Tarzan was her favorite movie of all time, after all.

*Whatever you do~ I’ll do it to~ Show me everything and tell me how~ It all means something~
Caroline caught Penelope by her shirt and set her up right.

“You need help there, Nell?”

Penelope looked around. She nodded bashfully.

Caroline smiled. “It’s fine. Come on.”

Caroline held out her hand. “Grab on, I’ll lead you.”

Penelope’s eyes widened in shock. She looked down at Caroline’s hand.

She hesitated for only a few seconds before grabbing on.

“You ready, Nell?”

Penelope nodded.

“Alright! Let’s go!”

And Caroline was off, Penelope in hand.

She really had missed holding hands…

Randy returned with a cup of tea. Actually, he just asked for a cup of hot water so he could steep his own teabags in it. Ever since the PTA meeting back in September with Diana and the moldy tea he carried a few bags of tea from home with him. Randy considered himself a connoisseur of sorts when it came to tea. And Tex-Mex cuisine.

He sat down on one of the bleachers outside of the rink and watched as his daughter held hands with Penelope while skating.

Wait, what.

The sight nearly made him spit out his tea.

He must be seeing things. What is IN this water? Did they just recycle some old rink shavings or some shit?

He tapped Sharona.

Sharona looked up at him. “What’s up?”

“Are you seeing what I’m seeing?” Randy asked tentatively as he gestured toward the rink.

“Depends on what you’re seeing,” Sharona said.

“Well, I think it might be Caroline and Penelope holding hands, but it could also be me hallucinating because the water I’m steeping my tea in is made from rink shavings.”

Sharona widened her eyes in a sort of pleased surprise. “Ya ain’t seein’ things, hon. It’s actually happening!”

“Hey guys!”
Monica came up to them and sat next to Randy with some cocoa.

“Hey, Mon! Check out our girls!”

Monica looked to where Sharona was pointing.

She smiled and gasped. “Oh my gosh, you guys want them to get together too?”

Randy and Sharona just stared at Monica.

“Well…” Randy started, “It’s not that I don’t want our daughters to date - if they were older, I really wouldn’t mind as long as they were happy, but you see, they are literally in fourth grade, ergo they are children in American society, which would make the fact that we want to set them up really creepy.”

Sharona and Monica stared up at Randy. Then at each other.

“Our daughters are so cute together,” Sharona conceded.

“Exactly!”

Randy sighed and glanced out at the rink.

He supposed his wife had a point. They were cute together, and Caroline was happy.

His daughter was happy. Really and truly happy.

Randy was so happy he could have cried then and there.

Caroline really was starting to heal a bit.

And seeing her interact with people who were willing to both accommodate and challenge her in equal parts…

Maybe Randy was starting to feel a bit better too.

Hunter watched as Caroline held Penelope’s hand to steady her.

He was really glad for Penelope. A bit jealous, maybe, but mostly he was happy.

Penelope caught his eye. Hunter gave her a thumbs up.

Penelope smiled nervously and returned the gesture.

Hannah was being helped by Sans. She was really frustrated about how slowly she was getting it.

Brian skated up to him.

“Wassup, Bri?” Hunter greeted. “You finally done screamin’ at the ceiling?”

Brian rolled his eyes. “Ha-ha, very funny. You think they got skates with trainin’ wheels for your sister over there?”

“Pft, she wishes. Maybe someday she’ll find a Caroline of her own,” Hunter said, gesturing toward where Penelope was skating alongside Caroline with a smile on her face.
“Dude, you know full well that your mom wants your sister to stay in the kitchen.”

Hunter Shrunk in a bit. Brian was right.

But Brian noticed that Hunter started to feel bad.

“Uh, h-hey man, check it out, uh…”

Hunter looked around for something weird and/or hilarious.

“…look, I think Caroline might actually be taller than Sans!”

Hunter looked up. “What? For real?”

“Yeah man, look.”

Hunter looked over to where Caroline was reassuring Hannah. Caroline stood up and continued to lead Penelope about the rink.

Brian was right.

“Holy crap…”

“I know. I can’t believe Caroline’s taller than my mom.”

“I’m pretty sure that if your mom took off of her heels once in a while, HANNAH would be taller than her.”

“Ehaahah, you’re probably right…”

The song changed. Hunter thought he recognized the song. Caroline did too, judging by the fact that Caroline was starting to dance with the song.

No. Caroline was doing an improvised figure skating routine.

She seemed to be having fun.

Hunter looked around.

He skated up to join her.

He tried pulling off the moves she was.

Hunter failed pretty badly.

But Caroline seemed to calm down. She toned down the difficulty of the moves so he could move along.

*FAME!~ I’m gonna live forever~ I’m gonna earn how to fly - HIGH!~ I feel it comin’ together~ People will see me and cry - FAME!~ I’m gonna make it to heaven~ Light up the sky like a flame - FAME!~ I’m gonna live forever~ Baby remember my name~*

Until the word “remember” repeated eight times, at which point she twirled.

And thus the song ended.

Everyone applauded. Caroline was brought out of her post-skating reverie by the sound of dozens of
clapping people.

Out of the rink and into the fire.

She tensed her entire body before relaxing JUST enough to run off the rink and outside the building.

Too many people.

Far too many people.

Penelope was amazed.

Caroline was so...AWESOME. She was smart, pretty, AND talented! And really nice, too!

But the people were definitely too much for her.

Frisk was having a bit of trouble too.

Penelope herself was starting to get a bit tired.

She ran out to the lobby to see where Caroline was.

Sans was trying to distract Frisk with some pinball in the arcade area.

Penelope walked over just as Frisk made it onto the high score board.

Sans noticed her. “sup, penelope? caroline’s outside gettin’ some fresh air.”

Penelope heaved a sigh she didn’t know she’d been holding.

“Thanks, Dr. Sans.”

“no problem, kid.”

Penelope ran out the door.

Sans watched as Frisk broke past the third highest score.

He thought back to a time when his dad would take him to the arcade after school was out and when the doctor wasn’t busy with work. His dad sure played a mean pinball.

Sans got out his phone and turned on the Tommy album. Because Pinball Wizard.

He sent the video of Hunter and Caroline figure skating along to 80s pop music to Mettaton. It was definitely his thing.

Mettaton was bored at home. Nothing to do, nothing to do.

Time off was always like this. Nothing to do, nothing to do.

His phone went off.

*1 text from: Smarmy Potato*

*yo mtt*
Sans sent along another video with Hunter in it.

Oh my god. Caroline can skate. Was...was that a double lutz?!

Hunter fell down quite a few times before getting the hang of Caroline’s reduced intensity. Despite the tumbles, he was clearly having a good time.

*Oh my stars THAT WAS AMAZING!!~
*ikr
*also frisk is playing pinball
*theyre doin pretty good
*second highest score and still playing
*I guess they’re a little Pinball Wizard then~

Mettaton smirked at the little music reference/pun. He simply couldn’t help himself. Oh, if Papyrus were to find out about this…

*okay its official you have full permission from me to marry papyrus
*welcome to the family brobot

Okay, CLEARLY Mettaton misread something.

He read the texts again.

Okay, scratch that, Sans OBVIOUSLY mistyped something.

*LOL, autocorrect, am I right, Sans?
*wrong actually
*i am completely serious when it comes to family and promises
*and puns

Huh.

Well then.

Mettaton needed to take a long, cold shower. He was about to overheat.

But first he texted the video to Papyrus.

He NEEDED to see these little starshines twinkle with the light a thousand and one suns reflecting off the ice. He NEEDED to.

Penelope walked around the building until she found Caroline rocking and hyperventilating beneath an awning above a rear door.
Penelope approached carefully.

“Hey, Care,” she said softly. “I’m just checkin’ on ya. You need anythin’?”

Caroline grunted.

“Okay. But I’ll get you some water just in case. Okay?”

Caroline nodded.

“I might join ya if you’re okay with that,” Penelope said as she turned back toward Caroline.

“Please do.”

Penelope looked back in surprise before smiling and walking away.

Linda wanted nothing more right now than to reach through the phone and STRANGLE Diana. ANYTHING to get that crazy woman to STOP TALKING ALREADY.

Time to turn to a tried-and-true tactic - turning off the phone and faking connection troubles.

It always worked.

After turning off the phone, Linda flopped back onto her bed and groaned.

Diana had been following her around since high school. Linda was a junior, Diana a freshman.

Speaking of crazies following her around…

Linda sighed before summoning the nerve to speak.

“Look,” she said her wavering with anxiousness, “I know you’re here, and you know I know, and I know you know I know, and - and…”

But nobody came.

“Of course,” Linda sighed, some of her nerves leaving her. “What the HELL am I thinking? You - She can’t be here! I mean, Estelle Crawford’s been DEAD for like, fifteen years!”

Linda went downstairs to grab a bottle of chardonnay.

Fuck glasses, Lindy needs her bottle.

Toriel sat in her favorite armchair reading a book of Sans’ she had found - Devil In The White City.

It was really gripping - just where did Sans find this book?

“home.”

Well. Now’s a good time to ask him, she supposed.

>Welcome back, dear! Did you and Frisk enjoy yourselves?”

“yep. they beat the record high score on the pinball machine in the arcade area, and when i told mettaton about it after sending him the video of hunter and caroline doing a figure skating routine to some 80s pop number, get this - he made a reference to the who. the who, tori. the who.”
Toriel giggled. “Sounds like you two had a lot of fun.”

“Yeah, we did. Wanna see the vid?”

“Why not? Come, sit down!”

Sans sat down on Toriel’s lap in the armchair and got out his phone.

“Devil in the white city, huh? You enjoyin’ that?”

“I am! I haven’t put it down since you and Frisk left!”

“Well, I’m glad you like it. Remind me to return it to Randy next time we see ‘im, I’ve been borrowin’ it from ‘im since the November PTA meeting.”

Toriel rolled her eyes. “Will do!”

“Thanks, T.”

Sans kissed her on the cheek.

Toriel looked down at him playfully and started a makeout session.

She knew Sans could manipulate his mouth, but not quite so skillfully as this.

And was...was that a tongue?

Toriel paused in surprise and released the kiss.

Sans was gasping for breath and looked up at her, his eyelights widened under lidded sockets in a sort of eros-filled haze.

He shook off his lust and blinked a few times.

“Too much?”

Toriel blushed. “Oh! No, no, it was just...unexpected, is all.”

“Sorry, uh, should I warn ya next time...?”

“You don’t HAVE to, I mean it certainly was not unpleasant...”

Sans’ eyelights went out and he blushed. “Oh.”

They were silent for a while.

“Should we, ah...keep goin’?”

Toriel hummed thoughtfully. “Perhaps not right this minute. I only have a few more chapters left to read, and you have that video to show me...”

“Yeah, good point.”

And with that they continued their evening in peace.

But something nagged in the back of their minds.
Oh well. They could take care of it later.

Things are starting to look up. You are filled with

**DETERMINATION**

Chapter End Notes

I'm Still Here - Treasure Planet
Poker Face - Lady Gaga
Strangers Like Me - Tarzan
Fame - Fame
Pinball Wizard - The Who

Fun Fact: So far, I have twice mentioned the book Devil In The White City by Erik Larson. It's a true crime novel about the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. And it is really, REALLY good, and I recommend it highly.
Chapter Summary

The soloists are chosen. Someone is disappointed in the results. Everyone else is fine.

Chapter Notes

So. I know I update like, every day, but I don't ALWAYS do that. I've just been depressed lately and writing this story has been helping me cope with that as well as my anxiety.

All you guys' comments help too. Thanks.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

8:45 A.M., February 8th, 20XQ

It's a cold day in Ebott.

Clouds are gathering.

The air finally feels like February.

On days like this, kids like you...

...are once again waiting on the morning announcements.

Cue feedback.

*Good morning Mountainside Elementary, I'm your principal Mrs. Miller, it's time for the morning announcements.*

Hunter was nervous, yes. This moment would be the one that sealed his approximate date of death. It was either next week or next month.

The announcements were the same old-same old. Candygrams, bake sale, la-dee-flippin-da.

Then came the final announcement - the one that many had been waiting for.
Students, it’s time to announce our soloists for the Spring Concert. Miss Halsey will be giving the names.

Hunter held his breath.

First up, the fifth grade soloists!

“Oh, come ON! Hurry UP already!”

“Brian, strike one.”

Sofie Gutierrez, Moira Kittredge, Robin Mason, and Morgan Sweet.

Penelope clenched a victorious fist.

And now the fourth grade soloists!

So many breaths were held it was insane. A sea of blue but instead of water it was children.

Marilla Acquafredda…

Cheers rang out. Hunter and co gave her a thumbs up. Marilla couldn’t see because she was covering her face in bashfulness.

Eduardo Suarez…

Sounds of surprise and happy confusion rang through the fourth grade.

Penelope clenched her fists victoriously and hissed out a yes.

Azaria Peterson…

Mr. Steiner’s class cheered loudly once more.

Hunter was probably shaking in his chair.

Too bad he didn’t care.

He looked around. It was as if time had stopped.

Miranda looked smug, like she KNEW she was going to win.

…and Hunter Thompson! Congratulations to all of our soloists and thank you to everyone who auditioned! Soloists, if your name was called, please come to the music building during recess today to go over requirements!

Everyone was silent. It was a silence that was at once shocked, mournful, and proud.

Brian stood up to applaud. Followed by Frisk, Levi, Caroline, Penelope, Marilla, and all of the other students.

Olive even stood up, followed by Naomi.

Miranda did nothing. She sat in shock - almost catatonia.

Then she looked up and glared at Hunter.

Some of the Monster children shivered. One of them was almost crying.
Hunter was still in shock.
He...he’d actually done it. He’d gotten the solo.
He felt like he could laugh, cry, scream, explode, sing out from the rooftop -
He just felt like he could. He had never felt this strong in his life.
He liked it.

Mettaton was still in the shower when his phone went off.
“Papyrus,” he called out, “would you be a dear and get that for me?”

“ON IT!”

Mettaton sighed. It wasn’t as though Papyrus LIVED here - for all intents and purposes he technically still resided with Toriel and Sans. But he might as well live here with how often he...stayed the night…
Papyrus screamed.

Oh no.

Mettaton stepped out of the shower and threw on his towel as quickly as he could and ran to his room.

“What happened?!”
Papyrus seemed elated, his eyes sparkling.

“HUNTER GOT THE SOLO!” he announced.

Now it was Mettaton’s turn to scream and be elated.

He ran into Papyrus’ arms and kissed him senseless.

“MMF...MMWAIT, WAIT!”
Papyrus pushed Mettaton off him briefly.

“I don’t need a silly excuse to kiss the best boyfriend in the universe~”

“HMM...WELL, ALRIGHT!”

Alphys was on the couch in Undyne’s arms munching on some toast with butter and cinnamon sugar when her phone went off.

Alphys checked the phone and squealed.

Alphys snorted. “I-I wish. Hunter got the solo!”

“YAAAS! We are going to do some SHIT this weekend!”

“Undyne, language.”

Undyne was confused for a moment before realization hit.

“Ah, cra - crud, sorry babe - I mean, babes.”

Undyne patted Alphys’ still-unswollen abdomen.

She sighed. “I can’t WAIT til September…”

Alphys hummed in agreement.

Dear stars above she was screaming internally just thinking about it.

The Heart of Gold was online.

But today they were doing nothing.

Nothing meaning “playing Cards Against Humanity”.

Sans was the Card Czar.

Everyone has now entered their cards.

“okay. ‘war! what is it good for?’ hate to break it to ya guys, but whoever picked ‘pretending to care’ was just asking to win. who got that one?”

“WOO!”

“yeah, extempore totally gets me. ‘strong female characters’ is a close second though, props to whoever that was.”

“That was me!” Hyperion said.

“nice. jessamy, you da card czar.”

“Aww yeah! Show me what you got!”

Then the princess kissed the frog, and all of a sudden the frog was…

Sans looked over his cards and chose.

After a few minutes time was up.

And his phone went off.

“hold up a sec, guys, kid just texted me. their friend got the solo he’d been aimin’ for in the school concert.”

“Sweet!”

“Good on ‘im!”
“Aight, who had ‘whining like a little bitch’?”

“Yeah! Woo!”

“nice one, hyperion. mine was ‘an ether-soaked rag’.”

“Alright, peasants, I am your Card Czar. Amuse me.”

“Kindred, don’t you think you might be getting a little too into this?”

“Fuck you, Extempore!”

“Don’t mind if I do, mate!”

“dude. no sinning on monday sessions, remember?”

“Bugger. My bad…”

“Nah, man, it’s cool,” Hyperion assured. “Just don’t do it again.”

“Hyperion,” Kindred said in exasperation, “this is Extempore we’re talking ‘ere. Now, ‘My new favorite porn star is Joey ‘blank’ McGee.”

The winner of that round ended up being Jessamy. Joey “Sexual Tension” McGee...nice.

“Miranda wants you DEAD, yo.”

“Yeah, I know, MK. I dunno what I’m gonna do about that.”

“Join the club,” Caroline said. “She wants me an’ Penelope dead too. We should all form an alliance and tag team when the time comes for her to snap.”

“Dude, I WANT her to want me dead,” Brian admitted. “Better than havin’ her cling all over me during Sunday brunch.”

“Why dontcha just bring a crowbar with you?” Penelope asked.

“Too obvious.”

“Oh.”

Lunch was almost over. Miranda had been glaring at Hunter all morning.

“Miranda,” Hunter said. “Remember you made a promise. Don’t tell my mom. I already know I’m gonna die.”

“Oh my GAWSH, quit being such a SISSY!” Miranda spat. “You’re not gonna DIE just because you got a solo!”

Hunter was confused. “You mean you’re not gonna kill me?”

“Wha - NO!” Miranda said, affronted. “I keep my promises, and I don’t kill people. I’m not a monster!”

Frisk and MK just stared at her.
“Ugh, you KNOW what I meant!”

“Anyway, you should probably head on out to the music building,” Caroline said. “I’ll be in the library if you need me. Wanna come with, Nell?”

“Okay!” Penelope said cheerfully.

<<I have to do some of the homework since I have a diplomacy meeting at the capital this weekend, so I’ll be in class,>> Frisk signed.

“I’m goin’ with Frisk,” MK said.

“I’ll join you two, if ya don’t mind,” Levi said.

Brian shrugged. “I’ll go with Hunter, see if Miss Halsey’ll lemme hang around a bit.”

“I guess that’s everyone,” Hunter said. “C’mon, let’s go.”

Miss Halsey had never liked the songs traditionally used during school concerts. They’re boring, no one knows them, the kids HATE them...and a few parents have complained as well.

So pulling a few strings with the superintendent wasn’t hard. He DID owe her after she found the kid who stole his car stereo back in 200W.

Hunter was the first to show up.

“Hello, Hunter! Go on, have a seat wherever. Hello to you, too, Brian.”

“Hey, Miss Halsey,” they said in unison.

She’d like to see them try that in two-part harmony.

“So, Brian,” Miss Halsey began, “you here to watch or distract Hunter?”

“I’m just gonna watch Hunter here kick butt with nothing but his voice.”

Miss Halsey chuckled at that while Hunter blushed.

“I dunno why everyone thinks it’s a big deal…” Hunter mumbled.

“Hello? Anyone here?”

Marilla poked her head in and looked around before sitting down next to Hunter.

“Hello, Marilla! Marilla, Marilla, such a pretty name…”

“Oh! Uh, thank you…”

“Wassuuup~”

“Eddy, how are you? Oh, and hello to you too, Bruce and Nicko.”

Bruce and Nicko waved.

“C’mon, Azaria! Sit down!”
A Human girl with her hair in afro puffs sat down between Eddy and Marilla.

“Ah, Azaria, hello!” Miss Halsey said.

“Now we juuust have to wait for those fifth graders.”

“Diiiiid someone say fifth graders?”

Sofie and Moira clambered in, Sofie falling on top of Moira thus forming a giggling pile.

They stood up and went to take their seats.

Sofie reached into her backpack and grabbed a brush. She had thick, curly dark brown hair that needed brushing every few hours or so to prevent tangles.

Robin, a Human boy with brown hair and blue eyes, and Morgan, a Human girl with dirty blonde hair and blue eyes, were the last ones there.

Miss Halsey looked over the roll sheet. “And that’s all eight of our soloists! I have some song sheets for all of you to choose from over on the piano! Let me know of your choice by next Monday, I will see you on Thursday and/or Friday!”

The students stood up and looked at the songs.

Eight copies each of eight songs.

Hunter looked at all of them. He grabbed one of each.

He was going to have to consult some people…

“So, how’s grillby’s sound? we’ll hang around there fer a while til your mom gets off work. we’ll work on that dumb book report while we’re at it.”

<<What’s the catch?>>

“to get that chocolate milkshake, you gotta finish up at least half of it.”

Frisk put on their helmet and got in the sidecar of Sans’ motorcycle.

Sans put on his helmet and sat down.

“you strapped on okay, frisket?”

Frisk gave a thumbs up.

“okay. let’s ride.”

They rode through traffic for twenty minutes until they reached Grillby’s.

He opened the door.

“Hey, Sans and Frisk, how ya doin’!”

“Sans! Frisk! What’s up?”

“Sansy~ Frisky~”
“hey, guys. wassup.”

Frisk waved.

Sans and Frisk sat at the bar in their usual spots.

“What’ll it be this time, frisklet?”

Frisk thought for a few moments.

<<Cheese fries!>>

“huh, that don’t sound half bad. better make it a double, grillbz.”

The fiery bartender gave a thumbs up and set to work.

Frisk got their homework and the required reading material out of their backpack and set it out on the counter.

Caroline would have been useful right about now. She got her book report done by the day after it was assigned - and PASSED.

Tales Of A Fourth Grade Nothing by Judy Blume. Frisk thought it a bit of a tough read, but they got the gist of it.

Grillby set down the basket of cheese fries that they were going to share with their dunkle and set to work.

Mettaton was listening to music and touching up his nails on his bed - they were starting to flake a bit. Then again, he HAD forgotten the top coat in his little rush last week.

Then a familiar song came on. He HAD to sing along.

“Every shalalala~ Every whoa whoa~ Still shines~ Every shingalingaling~ That they started to sing~ So fine~”

Papyrus read his book and listened to Mettaton sing, absorbing the feeling it gave him. He loved hearing Mettaton sing. After they’d gotten together, he’d discovered that something about the way Mettaton sang when away from the public eye was...different. A good different. He wasn’t really sure how it was different, but it was.

As the song finished up, Mettaton gave his now-finished nails a once-over and decided that it was good.

He leaned on Papyrus’ shoulder, held onto his humerus, and started to read along with the book.

Another Hercule Poirot. Maybe Mettaton would do something Agatha Christie whenever he decided to start directing…

But that would be years from now, if ever. For now, Mettaton was more than content to read The Big Four over Papyrus’ shoulder.

Another song came on.

“There were bells~ On the hill~ But I never heard them ringing~ No I never heard them at all~ Til
there was you~”

Papyrus rested his head on Mettaton’s. 
This was heaven, he was certain.

Caroline stared at her reflection in the bathroom mirror. 

Her hair was starting to grow past her waist. But she didn’t want to cut her hair. What a conundrum she had here…

She grabbed her hair and made an experimental ponytail with it.

Huh.

She went further and made a sort of bun with it.

Nah. Ponytail was better.

Caroline let go of her hair.

Wow. She had a LOT of hair.

Miranda sat in her room brushing her yorkie-poo Cherry.

Her mom had to make some phone calls before they went out for froyo.

She flipped Cherry over to brush her belly.

Wait. Did Cherry always have a little white patch there?

Miranda flinched a bit as her mom shouted at her dad over the phone.

What was she upset about this time?

Oh well.

Miranda continued to brush Cherry’s belly.

Toriel was making dinner when Sans and Frisk finally came home.

“Let me guess,” she deadpanned, “Grillby’s?”

“yep.”

“Did you two save room for dinner?”

“i know i did. how ‘bout you, kid?”

Frisk nodded. They always had room for their mother’s cooking, even when they had a chocolate milkshake in their hands.

“yeah, see? now why dontcha go put that milkshake in the freezer?”

Frisk was confused. They made this fact known by looking from the milkshake to the freezer and
back to Sans.

Sans got the message.

“put a milkshake in the freezer overnight, ya get ice cream. you didn't know that?”

Frisk’s face brightened with wonder. They ran over to the freezer and set the milkshake on a shelf inside.

Toriel looked on in bemusement.

“Can you really do that…?” she asked no one on particular.

“yeah, actually,” Sans answered. “i found that out one evening after i got home from the lab with my dad. we’d stopped over at grillby’s for dinner, and i’d gotten a shake i ended up not finishing.”

“So you put it in the freezer...why?”

“well, papyrus hates when people waste good food. so i thought that since milkshakes are frozen, they should go in the freezer.”

“And thus a new way to make ice cream was discovered?”

“exactly.”

Toriel hummed, impressed.

“I do suppose that some of the most amazing things are a result of happy accidents, are they not?”

Toriel looked nostalgically happy as she asked that.

Sans hummed, not inclined to disagree.

Pretty much everything in his life up to this point came about as the result of some accident. Sans himself was a lab experiment of his “father’s” that inexplicably achieved sapience. He met the love of his life by knocking on some random door that he thought was completely abandoned.

It was like Toriel said. Happy accidents.

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*Your family and friends are doing such big things. You are filled with*

**DETERMINATION**

Chapter End Notes

Move Over Darling - Move Over Darling
Yesterday One More - The Carpenters
Til There Was You - The Music Man

Fun Fact: While there are a number of same-sex couples and crushes, the only characters that I truly see as being homosexual are Undyne, Levi, Penelope, and Naomi. However, Alphys is bisexual and homoromantic.
9:53 A.M., February 13th, 20XQ

It’s a beautiful day in Ebott.

Birds are singing out of season.

The warmth is also still out of season.

On days like this, kids like you…

...are watching TV in the basement.

Oh no. This can’t be happening.

The screams of Corazón Espinado fans rang throughout the internet.

Sans was blogging his disapproval and texting Mettaton.

*can you believe that they would put corazon espinado on a three month hiatus so suddenly

*I know, it’s like the most popular series on that channel and it has been for years!

*why would they do this to us

*our saturday afternoons are slightly ruined
I think it might be for the same reason Cartoon Network is trying to kill Steven Universe.

but it’s not even that gay

its like

maybe 47 percent gay

Exactly! Bullshit if there ever was any.

sharons ranting about it on facebook

ill send screencaps

Please do, I’ll post them on Tumblr.

no

the children are already salty about it
dont give them more

Sans.

I’m adding salt to the shitstorm.

i know

you wouldn’t be you if you didn’t

Sans made the screenshots and texted them to Mettaton.

If anyone could intensify the saltiness of Tumblr, it’s Mettaton.

The doorbell chimed.

“I’ll get it!”

“thanks t.”

Sans looked over at Frisk. There was nothing “real” to watch, so they had settled on an old episode of 60 Minutes.

Their appointment with the state representative was postponed until some time in July. They were a bit grumpy because they did all their homework early for nothing.

“Sans! Helen’s here with Brian and Hunter and Hannah!”

“okay, let ‘em in. i’ll be up with frisk here in a bit.”

Sans turned to them. “ya hear that, frisk?”

Frisk was already halfway up the stairs.

Helen, Brian, Hunter, and Hannah were sitting on the sofa in the living room when Frisk rushed in and waved.
“I need some help picking which song to do for my solo,” Hunter said. “I’ve narrowed it down to two choices…”

“frisk has a point y’know,” Sans said as he came from the basement. “they were pretty hyped when they heard ya got the part, hunter.”

“Wha - really?!” Hunter exclaimed.

Frisk nodded, a smile in their face.

“yep. you want their help?”

Hunter seemed a bit nervous. He didn’t really like troubling people, he didn’t really think he was worth any trouble.

But Mettaton WOULD know what to choose...and Papyrus WAS dating him…

…so it shouldn’t be much trouble if any, right?

“...Sure. If they want, I mean…”

Frisk giggled. <<You’re so cute when you’re nervous, Hunter…>>

“cool it with the flirting there, kid. poor thing’s already finna combust he’s so nervous.”

Sans was right. Hunter was in fact holding his temples and blushing and sweating. Brian seemed a bit irked about something. Hannah was just sitting on the sofa, swinging her legs back and forth with a smile that suggested that she was plotting something.

“Got any appa juice?” she asked.

“As a matter of fact, we do!” Toriel said from the kitchen. “Brian, I know you are allergic to pecans, but what about peanuts?”

“Peanuts are fine,” Brian said.

“Alright, thank you! What would all of you like on your peanut butter sandwiches? We have honey and both grape and strawberry jellies.”

“Strawberry jelly,” Brian said.

“Same here,” Hunter followed.

“HONEY!” Hannah shouted.

Sans smiled a bit. Hannah was a lot like Papyrus was at that age - loud, curious, loves honey, and wearing a tutu.

He started texting Mettaton.

Mettaton had JUST finished uploading Sharona’s Facebook rant when his phone went off.
*1 text from: Smarmy Potato*

*yo

*the double hs and the brian are here

*hunter needs your expert opinion on which song to choose for his solo

*bring papyrus

*How do you know Papyrus is here and not at Undyne’s?

*dude

*read what you just typed

*and think of all the reasons why thats not possible

Mettaton squinted at the texts.

*I’m on my way with your brother.

*okay

*see ya in ten

*Make it thirty, I need to change.

*forty it is then

Mettaton huffed his bangs out of his eyes and stood up off the couch and stretched.

He walked up the stairs and into his bedroom.

“Papyrus, we’re going over to Sans and Toriel’s. Hunter’s there and needs help picking a song.”

“WHA - O-OKAY! LET ME FIND A BOOKMARK FIRST…”

Penelope was stressed.

She’d done all her homework. She’d made like three batches of cupcakes - in three different flavors, at that. She’d even bodyslammed Theo so that the wind was knocked right out of him.

And after all that, she was actually more stressed if anything.

She lay on her bed and snapped her coil bracelets against her arm in the particular order she always did - green purple orange pink, pink orange purple green…

What to do, what to do…

Then it hit her like a bolt from the blue - err, like a snap from the purple.

She bolted from under her covers and dug through her closet for something.

She found it.
Penelope grabbed her camera bag and hung the strap around her neck. She unzipped the bag.

Yes. Camera inside.

She took the camera out to check the charge and film.

She groaned and proceeded to look for her charger.

Not in the closet.

Not under the bed.

Not under the mattress.

Not buried in a dresser drawer.

Where oh where could her camera charger be…?

“MOM!” Penelope shouted.

“What?”

“WHERE’S MY CAMERA CHARGER?”

“IT’D BE SOMEWHERE IN YOUR ROOM!”

“WELL IT’S NOT! I CHECKED EVERYWHERE!”

Penelope heard footsteps.

Monica opened the door.

What was inside shocked her.

Clothes, strewn about. Toys, all over the damn place.

It wasn’t a tornado that ran through here.

It was fifty tornados, give or take a motherfucking hurricane or two.

Penelope didn’t notice Monica’s face warp in fury.

“PENELOPE MICHELLE DEMARTINO!”

Penelope flinched. “Yes…?”

“If you are still thinking about going on a Photo Hunt, stop right now, and don’t think about it again until you CLEAN. YOUR FUCKING. ROOM.”

“But...but I checked everywhere...I can’t - I can’t find the - I looked everywhere, and -”

Monica froze as Penelope started crying.

She took deep breaths. Anger would only make things worse.

“Did you check the camera bag?”
Penelope sniffled. “N-no…”

Monica’s anger was back full-force. “That should have been the FIRST place you checked!”

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry! I’m sorry! I’m sorry! I’m -”

“Quit saying you’re sorry!”

“I’m sorry…”

Monica screamed and slammed Penelope’s door behind her.

She didn’t want another fight. They’d been doing SO well lately...

But if Penelope didn’t stop crying, that’s where this day was going to be headed.

Sans and Frisk were watching Hunter, Brian, Flowey, and Hannah play Mario Kart when the doorbell rang.

“I’ll get it!” Toriel called.

“thanks,” Sans replied.

Toriel answered the door.

Enter Mettaton and Papyrus.

“Hello, you two! Sans told me you’d be here…” She checked the clock. “...twenty minutes from now.”

“I’m trying fashionably early for once,” Mettaton deadpanned sarcastically.

“HELLO, MISS TORIEL!” Papyrus chimed as he put his sunglasses in their case.

“Hello, Papyrus! I didn’t think sleepovers lasted...how long has it been now, two weeks?”

Papyrus blushed and looked off to one side. “ONE AND A HALF, ACTUALLY…” he mumbled.

Toriel smiled innocently. “Either way, do come in! The children are in the den playing at the moment.”

The sounds of exasperated screams rang throughout the house.

“Did we ACTUALLY get our butts beat at Mario Kart by a flippin’ kindergartner?!”

“well, if you have to ask, chances are that yes, you did in fact get your butts beat at mario kart by a kindergartener.”

“This is degrading and I hate this.”

“Did I win?”

Papyrus and Mettaton tried not to laugh. Toriel simply smiled and led them inside.

“So, how was your week and a half together?” she asked with a conspiratorial smile. “I take it you’ve been...enjoying yourselves?”
Mettaton gaped and blushed.

“WE HAVE, ACTUALLY! WE’VE BEEN ON MORE DATES IN THE PAST TEN DAYS THAN IN THE FIRST THREE MONTHS OF OUR RELATIONSHIP!”

“Such is cohabitation…” Toriel mused to no one in particular. “I’ll go let them all know you two are here, and then we’ll all conjugate - I mean CONGREGATE in the backyard to go over everything and see what else there is to do for the concert.”

“SOUNDS LIKE A PLAN!”

“Wonderful idea!”

Toriel stood up to fetch the rest of the group.

Papyrus and Mettaton waited until she was out of earshot.

“PLEASE TELL ME YOU HEARD HER SAY CONJUGATE TOO.”

“UGH, thank GOD, I thought I was the only one!”

“AND WHAT IS ‘COHABITATION’, ANYWAY?”

“in what context?” Sans asked knowingly.

Frisk waved at Mettaton and Papyrus.

Hunter, Hannah and Brian walked in next, followed at last by Toriel.

“Alright, everyone! To the backyard!”

Everyone stared. It was hard not to.

“Why are there weirdly-shaped burnt spots in the grass?” Brian asked.

“papyrus ‘n i let the pets out back in december,” Sans explained.

“The grass really should have grown back by now…” Toriel mused.

“maybe, but it is winter, tori. give the ground some time to get its grass in gear.”

Toriel bit back a laugh.

“You got PETS?” Hannah asked excitedly, clearly ready to run off and search for the nearest non-sapient living being to pet.

“OF A SORT, YES,” Papyrus admitted.

“What do you mean by that?” Hunter asked, hesitantly curious. He had grabbed Hannah by her shirt collar to keep her from petting a robin she’d spotted.

“They’re giant, person-sized animal skulls that shoot lasers at bad guys,” Sans stated bluntly.

The non-Frisk children stared at him owlishly.

“Really?” Hannah asked in amazement. “Wooow!”
“That sounds dangerous and awesome,” Brian said. “Show us the giant laser skulls.”

“They do sound pretty cool,” Hunter said with a cautious smile on his face.

Sans scratched the back of his skull nervously. “that’d be up to tori, i’d think.”

“You all can play with the Gaster Blasters later, we have a day to plan,” Toriel said.

The kids awed in disappointment.

Hannah pouted. “I wanna pet somefin’...”

Frisk ran inside and returned moments later with Flowey.

“Frisk, what are you doing?”

Frisk simply smiled and gave Flowey to Hannah.

Flowey made the connection quickly enough. He turned to face the girl he’d been handed to.

“Consider this your prize for winning at Mario Kart,” he grumbled.

Hannah’s face seemed to light up. “I win...” she whispered.

She petted Flowey’s sepals and giggled.

“Good flower.”

Sans was now slightly terrified at just how much this kid resembled Papyrus.

And now she was hugging Flowey. The Flower was clearly trying not to scream in sheer humiliation.

Sans took a picture of this moment. He wasn’t sure why. It just felt necessary.

Toriel and Mettaton were going over the sheet of requirements for the spring concert. All of the fourth graders were going to need new outfits. Papyrus was watching the kids embarrass Flowey with a smile on his face.

Sans decided to start listening to some music.

He plugged in his headphones and tapped the shuffle all button.

He watched the children play to the tune of 25 Or 6 To 4.

*Waiting for the break of day~ Searching for something to say~ Dancing lights against the sky~ Giving up I close my eyes~*

“should have tried to do some more~ 25 or six to four~”

The adults ceased what they were doing in favor of hoping that Sans would stop singing if they stared at him just the right way.

It failed. It failed so terribly that Sans fell asleep.

“I have no idea what to do, should someone wake him up?” Mettaton asked in exasperation.
“I say we drag him along and fill him in when he wakes up,” Toriel said with a sigh.

“GOOD PLAN,” Papyrus deadpanned.

Toriel stood up as soon as all was decided and began to speak.

“Alright, everyone listen up!”

The kids all stopped what they were doing to listen to whatever Toriel had to say. She had entered Teacher Mode.

“The plan for today is as follows: first, we head off to the mall to buy your concert outfits.”

Brian raised his hand.

“Yes, Brian?”

“We’re not gonna hafta wear suits, are we?” he asked, managing to say the word suits with the tone of voice Toriel would use when referring to Asgore.

Toriel rolled her eyes. “Yes, Brian you will have to wear a suit.”

“Dangit.”

“Next, we will stopping somewhere to eat dinner, where we will go over the options for Hunter’s solo piece.”

Now Frisk had their hand raised.

“Yes, Frisk?”

<<Where will we be eating?>> they signed.

“We will be deciding that later. We will be taking the van since we obviously cannot fit eight people in a Corvette.”

<<We could at least try,>> Frisk signed.

“No,” Toriel said in the firmest Mom Voice she could muster.

Frisk pouted. Oh well. Maybe in high school they could try to set the world record for Most Teens Stuffed Inside A Corvette.

But first they’d have to find what the record was. Caroline definitely knows.

“Now, to the van!”

Frisk pumped a fist in the air and ran to the garage.

“I’m gonna make it first!” Brian shouted as he ran after them.

Hannah followed, giggling in excitement.

Hunter left with the adults. He was kind of anxious about...a lot of things, actually. Sometimes he was anxious but he just wasn’t really sure why.

But something about the company he was in at the moment quelled it somewhat. It was still there,
nagging at the back of his mind, screaming that something bad was going to happen if he went through with this. But, as with even the worst moments of his anxiety, he waited patiently for it to go away.

It always went away eventually.

“Ooh, how ‘bout -”

“No.”

“But you don’t even know what I was about to say!”

“W-we are NOT naming our firstborn child Naruto Uchiha if it’s a boy.”

“Uh, ACTUALLY, I was gonna suggest Yuri Phichit.”

“A b-bit too on-the-nose…”

“UGH, we can discuss this after the Sailor Moon S movie!”

“F-fine by me.”

To say that Alphys and Undyne were having difficulty agreeing on a name for their baby would be an understatement.

Alphys munched on a slice of toast smothered in Nutella and rainbow sprinkles as she and Undyne watched as Tuxedo Mask bought the Senshi time to gather their energy and combine their powers to defeat Princess Snow Kaguya.

The final attack, needless to say, was really fucking cool. Err, hot. Because leggy chicks in short skirts. And earth-blanketing snow is all gone.

“The name Artemis cool with you, Alphy?” Undyne asked nonchalantly.

“I-I honestly prefer M-Mamoru for a boy, a-and Ami for a girl…”

Undyne stared blankly at Alphys. “Mamoru. As in random dude in a tux who throws exploding flowers at bad guys and is just a regular dude who is really just Sailor Moon’s backup?”

Alphys gulped. “Y-yes…”

“And Ami. The nerd of the bunch.”

Alphys nodded.

Undyne gave her biggest smile. “I love them.”

“Wha - r-really?”

“Well, YEAH! That way they’ll be badass AND smart no matter what!”

Alphys smiled a bit, so touched that she was almost in tears.


“O-oh god, wh-what did I say?” Undyne asked nervously.
“T-the best thing e-eveeerrrrr…”

Undyne held her wife closely, rubbing her back in order to calm her down.

“I’m pretty sure the mood swings’re s’posed to come out later, but that’s okay. I gotcha, babes.”

It had been nearly two and a half hours since the argument.

Penelope sat on a pile of jerseys, her knees held up to her chest. She snapped her coil bracelets to her wrist as she sniffled - green purple orange pink, pink orange purple green.

There was a knock at her bedroom door.

She sniffed. “What?”

Monica opened the door and widened her eyes in surprise as she glanced about the room.

Penelope had cleaned up her entire room. Not just the clothes or just the toys. All of it. She even cleared off her dresser.

Except for the pile of jerseys off in the corner that the little curly-topped girl sat on, everything was perfect.

Penelope was lost in her coils, as Monica and Theo referred to Penelope’s bracelet-snapping stim.

Monica walked over to the closet. She carefully, quietly opened the doors.

The clothes were hung up all wrinkled and askew, but that they were hung up at all was amazing - almost a miracle.

There was nothing on the closet floor either.

“Can we go now? The charger was in the bottom zipper pouch of the camera case.”

Monica stared at Penelope briefly.

“Let me get clothes on first,” Monica sighed. “The world isn’t ready for Mom Thighs.”

“I know I’M not ready for Mom Thighs,” Penelope giggled.

“No one is ready for Mom Thighs, not even Momma,” Monica stated.

Monica left the room to at least put on pants.

Penelope breathed a sigh of relief. She grabbed her camera off her dresser. The cord of the charger whipped her in the face, causing her to flinch.

She blinked a couple of times before unplugging the now-fully-charged camera.

She stared at the camera. A Canon AE-1. She had to remember to ask for a tripod for her birthday. She also needed a new lens cap. The old one was still available, but you could never have too many spare lens caps.

She also wanted some new film rolls - 35mm film was hard to find in Ebott, so maybe for her birthday or Christmas she’d ask someone. She had ten unused film rolls, but they were all color. She wanted black and white - ooh, or sepia if they had any. Penelope LOVED sepia-toned photos.
They just looked so COOL. Especially the ones from the turn of the 19th century. Her favorite was one taken of her Nonna on the boat from Naples to Ellis Island taken in 1908.

She set the camera strap about her neck and grabbed her cellphone, stuffing it in her pocket. She put on her Photo Hunting Boots - a pair of hiking boots older than she herself was with neon green laces. Warm, comfy, and suitable for most terrain.

“Momma, I’m headin’ out to the car!” Penelope called out.

“Okay!”

Now there was the question of WHERE to Photo Hunt…

“But I set fire~ To the rain~ Watched it pour as I touched your face~”

The entire population of the ‘97 Chevy Venture sang along to the music pouring from the speaker with widely varying degrees of enthusiasm.

“Ebott Galleria, next right!” Mettaton called out from his seat on the right side of the second row of the van - Papyrus was at his left.

Hunter could see the mall from his seat in the middle of the rearmost row. He recognized the weird...thing jutting out of the Macy’s and the old lady-ish vibe he got from the Dillard’s sign. Did anyone even shop at Dillard’s? Mettaton would know.

“Uh, hey, uh Mr. Mettaton…?”

“Aw, sweetie, it’s fine if you call me Mettaton!” the Android said, giving a semi-genuine 100-watt smile.

“Okay, uh...does anyone even shop at Dillard’s?”

“Not anyone with a shred of common sense, I can tell you that much. Seriously, the reviews are terrible and they’re headquartered in Arkansas. I don’t trust anything remotely related to Arkansas after the goodwill trip in summer of 201Y.”

“Why, what happened?” Brian asked.

The way Mettaton, Papyrus, Sans, Toriel, Flowey, and even Frisk all flinched and hissed in unison told him he did NOT want to know.

“tori punched a redneck,” Sans said.

“That was literally the highlight of our trip through the American South,” Flowey grumbled.

“WELL, FOR ARKANSAS AT LEAST!” Papyrus said with his usual optimism. “TEXAS AND FLORIDA WERE NICE!”

“Oh my gosh, Miami was AMAZING!” Mettaton groaned.

“i’m still bitter that we didn’t go to cape canaveral…” Sans mumbled.

“I honestly can’t think of much there could be at Cape Canaveral,” Mettaton said, picking at a fingernail without a fuck to be given.
“uh, try the kennedy space center,” Sans said indignantly. “it was the launch site for, oh i dunno, explorer 1, mercury-redstone 3, mercury-atlas 6, gemini 3, surveyor 1, apollo 7, mariner 9, mars pathfinder…”

Hunter tuned Sans out. Space stuff was cool and all, but the little details bored him. He knew all the zodiac signs and all the planets, so what does any of this matter?

The van parked outside of the mall. Everyone stepped out in what appeared to be an organized pattern.

Brian waited for everyone else to get out first before carefully stepping down.

“So...what’re we gonna do first?” Brian asked.

“My mom already got my suit for the concert, but she doesn’t know that soloists have a different vest color from the rest of the performers - well, she has no idea I’m a soloist, I mean if she did she’d kill me, but I mean, still…” Hunter rambled.

<<Brian, do you have your suit yet?>> Frisk signed.

“Not yet,” Brian admitted.

Mettaton was taking notes in his phone. “Okay, so that means we need to get Frisk and Brian fitted, and we need a different vest for Hunter...in other words, shopathon, two hours, no cash limit, I’m buying!”

“Are you sure?” Toriel asked.

“Depends,” Mettaton said, checking his email for anything that wasn’t social media notifications or his agent bitching about something or another. “Are we standing in a mall parking lot questioning my financial decisions?”

“no, we’re in a mall parking lot questioning your common sense, or lack thereof,” Sans said. “but then again, who needs common sense when you got a crapton of money?”

“Exactly!” Mettaton said, as if this topic of conversation was one he had heard far too often and Sans had just explained why it was pointless.

“Really…?” Hunter said with a mixture of awe and apprehension.

Mettaton smiled warmly. “Absolutely! Now come along! After we get the required outfits, we are free to throw my money about with reckless abandon for a whole two and a half hours!”

“WOWIE! JUST LIKE CHICAGO ALL OVER AGAIN!” Papyrus said with enthusiasm with the infectiousness level of the black plague and about the same casualty ratio.

Hunter’s eyes seemed to sparkle.

“I think I’m gonna like this…” he said more to himself than anything.

“I think you look like you’re gonna have a heart attack,” Brian said.

“I’m saving that for when my mom sees me on stage in the soloist’s vest.”

<<She’ll probably kill you before your nerves do, actually,>> Frisk signed.
“Geez, Frisk, let the kid dream before the time comes, god,” Flowey said in sarcastic admonition.

<<But I’m just repeating what you said earlier but with less swear words.>>

“What is this I’m seeing about swear words?” Toriel said in a coldly even tone.

“Nothing!” Flowey blurted.

“As I should have. Now. Let’s go.”

Flowey was regretting so much. He dug into Frisk’s pocket for their 3DS. They had Pokemon Sun in the game slot. Flowey noticed that they had five Z-Crystals.

He considered deleting Frisk’s file and starting his own.

Asriel decided against that in the end.

The camera flash glared off the store windows and temporarily blinded some poor Human.

Penelope, being the one who caused the flash, paid no heed to any disruption she might be causing. She wasn’t one to think about others before acting much.

She took a picture of a sparrow in a rafter that came in either through one of the skylights or one of the entrances.

Then she spotted some familiar faces leaving the Macy’s. She took a photo of the group.

Mettaton and Papyrus posed together. Frisk flinched. Hunter jumped literally a full foot in the air. Brian blocked the flashing light with his hand. Hannah blacked the light with Flowey. Flowey made a frankl very terrifying face. Toriel blinked a few times to rid herself of the eyespots. Sans dabbed.

“Fuhaha, hey guys!”

“What the heck, Penelope!”

“My eyes!”

“Did you get my good side?”

“METTATON, ALL OF YOUR SIDES ARE GOOD SIDES! ESPECIALLY THE BACK ONE…”

“i never wanted to hear you say those words ever. at least not in front of me.”

“Hello Penelope…”

“Yeep…”

“I’m on a photo hunt! I haven’t gotten the chance to do that since the day before I moved here, and I needed to get my concert outfit,” Penelope explained enthusiastically. “I hate skirts. Like, SO much.”

“Skirts’re weird,” Hannah concurred.

“Yeah. They look good on Caroline, though…’
“What do skirts feel like when you wear them, anyway?” Hunter thought out loud.

“The wind on your thighs feel weird, like ugh. Wind belongs in hair, not legs."

“You want to try one out?” Mettaton asked Hunter.

Hunter’s eyes widened. “Um...I guess? I’m really just wondering what it’s like.”

Mettaton already decided. “We’re buying you a skirt. And maybe some dresses. If you want.”

“But-but-but-but my mom, she -”

Hunter’s panic was interrupted by Frisk tapping his shoulder.

<<She won’t know. I can keep them at my place.>>

Hunter’s eyes widened. “A-are you sure?”

Frisk nodded. They were Determined to help Hunter in any way they could.

Hunter hesitated for a moment.

“Do they have anything in aqua?”

Helen sat on the couch doing paperwork for the PTA. She would have done it on her bed, but David was drunkenly sprawled across the entire bed.

Years earlier, when she was young, stupid, and not a mother, she would have compromised by sitting on top of him.

Things were different now. David had a job that took up six days of the week and an alcohol addiction that took up the time he wasn’t working, Helen had PTA meetings to go to and a Linda to keep happy.

Why did she even bother anymore? It didn’t matter. She had the chance to turn back, but that chance flew away before Helen was even out of middle school.

And David. He was another story entirely. Linda was the one who introduced them in the first place. From the very first date, Helen was overtaken by lust. Not love. Helen never really admitted this to anyone, but she never really felt the desire to settle down, not really. She never even fell in love with anyone, male or female. She tried to force it, tried to normalize herself. It never felt right.

Some time after they got engaged and moved into their current home, they hired a contractor to fix the garage door since it kept on getting stuck no matter how much WD-40 David used on it.

That’s how Brian was conceived. David was none the wiser. Not even when it was completely obvious by his eyes. Helen and David both had blue eyes, Brian had hazel. He was also far less stocky than either of them. He wasn’t lean by any stretch of the word, but he wasn’t as thick as his “parents”.

Helen was halfway done with the part of the paperwork she was working on when a big red Irish setter jumped onto the recliner.

“Rocco, down.”
Rocco dutifully stepped down from the recliner and onto the couch.

“Good boy. We don’t want drunky upstairs mad at us again, do we?”

Rocco tilted his head as if he were trying to understand.

Helen returned to work, scratching Rocco behind one of his ears.

She had no idea where Rocco had come from. He just showed up one day and never left.

Brian loved him. Helen loved him. Helen was sure that she didn’t care for David half as much as she did for her son. Even the dog was more decent company, and he stuck a dead squirrel in the toilet once.

She may have considered David an alright guy once upon a time.

But hey. First impressions are often wrong.

“Wow, aqua really IS your color.”

“Not bad.”

“You look reeeeal pretty, bub!”

“Well? Do you like it?”

Hunter stared at his reflection. A black short-sleeved blouse with a flaring aqua-blue skirt with black polkadots. He...could get used to this. He really really shouldn’t. But he could.

He nodded. A small smile came onto his face. He twirled a bit. He liked this.

Pants would never really be the same after this moment.

Penelope snapped a few photos.

Hunter shied a bit at that.

“Penelope, he’s getting uncomfortable,” Brian said.

“Oh,” Penelope said. “Sorry...you look great for a boy, though!”

Hunter blinked a few times. “Uh...thanks?”

Penelope smiled, not quite recognizing that she had made a minor social faux pas. “Your welcome!”

Hunter changed back into his more traditionally masculine clothes.

Huh. That’s funny.

He never realized how uncomfortable his everyday clothes were…

Everyone decided that, rather than exacerbate Hunter’s anxiety and give Frisk a sensory overload, they would eat dinner at Toriel’s.

And who, I ask you, would dare deny spaghetti and meatballs?
The correct answer to this question is no one. No one dares deny it. Especially when Toriel is the one making it.

Papyrus protested. Very staunchly, at that. Toriel, however was equally insistent that since this was technically her house she should be the one to cook, since it is her duty as a hostess. Papyrus relented, but still pouted about it.

“I LIVE HERE TOO…”

“I honestly thought you moved in with Mettaton by now,” Brian said.

“yeah, pap, you’ve been stayin’ over with your botfriend for enough time that it was just silently accepted that you technically moved out,” Sans said teasingly.

“I’VE LITERALLY BEEN STAYING OVER FOR A WEEK AND A HALF, SANS!”

“And?”

As the Skeleton Brothers bickered, Hunter went to grab his backpack where the song printouts were stuffed. He was known for being the tidy one among the friend group.

He sat next to Mettaton, who seemed to be taking all this in stride. By which we mean clearly ignoring it in favor of his nails.

Hunter waited for Mettaton to finish the nails on the hand he was working on currently.

He eventually did.

“Uh, Mettaton? I uh, need to pick out my song.”

Mettaton seemed distracted. “Hm? Oh, that’s RIGHT! Sorry about that.”

“Oh, don’t worry about it, it’s fine!” Hunter insisted. “Are uh, you okay? You seem kinda...distracted, I guess?”

Mettaton stared at Hunter for a bit. It wasn’t a stare of anger or frustration, but one of contemplation.

He sighed as he made a gesture like he was brushing the very thought of having been distracted out of his general area.

“It’s not important right now.” Mettaton clapped his hands together, getting the attention of everyone else at the dining table. “Now! You said you had your choices narrowed down?”

Hunter nodded quickly. “Well uh, I was thinking about doing either one of these two…”

Hunter got out two packets of sheet music.

Both were familiar to Mettaton, but only one spoke to him.

But this wasn’t necessarily for him to decide - not for himself, at least.

“Well, Hunter, which of them do you think speaks to you?”

“The heck kind of question is that?” Brian asked, his voice laced with skepticism.

Brian went unanswered as Hunter looked over the pieces.
“Uh, well,” he cautiously began, “I already know this one,” he pointed to the packet titled Bless The Broken Road, “but I honestly really don’t like Rascal Flatts, Gary LeVox’s voice just really annoys me. I’m honestly not familiar with the other one, but I like the lyrics a lot, if that counts for anything…”

“Hold on, I have it on at least one of my playlists.”

Mettaton searched through his playlists. Thousands of songs on each one.

Papyrus ended up grabbing his phone from him with a huff of impatience. “WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?”

Mettaton rolled his eyes and passed Papyrus the packet.

Papyrus glanced at it. He looked back up at Mettaton, and then at Hunter, switching between the two of them a few more times before looking back at the song.

He typed the title into the search bar.

He waited a bit. 64 gigabytes his sacrum. How had this phone not exploded from the memory use yet?

The song came up.

“GOT IT.”

“Thanks, Papy.”

Mettaton kissed him on the zygomatic.

Brian made a gagging gesture. Hannah looked ready to squeal. Hunter was clearly unsure what to make his face look like, so he settled for an awkward smile.

Mettaton played the song.

Hunter listened to it. His expression changed from eager, to contemplative, to “oh my god i just had an epiphany”.

He smiled widely, his eyes wide with an almost manic excitement.

“I want this one.”

Penelope was in her bedroom. She hadn’t heard from Caroline since yesterday. Was she okay? Was she sick? WAS SHE STILL ALIVE?

Penelope grabbed her phone and texted Caroline.

*hey.

*are you there?

Caroline took a very long time to answer. That was saying quite a bit, since she was a slow texter.

*Yeah. Sorry. Not feeling good.

Penelope learned very quickly that whenever Caroline was feeling something negative she spoke and
wrote in short, clipped, or fragmented sentences.

*oh. should i leave you be?

A few anxious minutes passed.

*Better than I was earlier.

*Please stay?

Penelope noticed that Caroline had used a question mark. Odd.

*sure! wanna hear about my photo hunt today?

*Yes.

Caroline sat on the throne she made for herself out of books and a pillow.

She read the account of the day with a feeling in her chest.

She’d been feeling blank and lethargic lately. It happened. She could make herself do things well enough.

Feeling wasn’t exactly one of those things.

But this. Maybe this moment of feeling was fleeting.

But it was better than nothing, she supposed.

---

* Your friends accepting themselves, slowly, but surely, fills you with determination

Chapter End Notes

Baubles, Bangles, And Beads - Kismet
25 Or 6 To 4 - Chicago (the band)
Set Fire To The Rain - Adele
Bless The Broken Road - Rascal Flatts

What song did Hunter choose? Wait and see, wait and see~

Fun Fact: I have quite a few ships in here, some of which are in fact same-sex. A lot of character orientations are spoilers for now, but I can say the following with certainty: Undyne, Levi, and Penelope are all homosexual; Alphys, Hunter, Shelby, and Chas are all bisexual, however Alphys is homoromantic and Chas is heteroromantic; Asgore, Toriel, Randy, Helen, and Diana are all heterosexual, however Helen is aromantic; Frisk and Mettaton are pansexual, however Mettaton is grey-aromantic; Sans, Papyrus, and Chara are demisexual; Caroline and Sharona are asexual, however Caroline is demiromantic and Sharona is biromantic.
My Funny Valentine

Chapter by Spazzin

Chapter Summary

Secret admirers, dates, and love love love.

Chapter Notes

So. How goes it.

I started school again last week, so that's a thing.

So here's a thing. Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

9:54 A.M., February 15th, 20XQ

It's a cold day in Ebott.

Clouds are out.

Wind is blowing in from the north.

On days like this, kids like you...

...are starting to remember something.

How? How could Frisk have been so careless?

How could they have forgotten Valentine’s Day?

Looking back at yesterday, maybe that was why Papyrus stayed over at Mettaton’s place again. How could were they not living together yet?

Frisk sighed internally, trying hard not to be angry at their math test. They didn’t like it, but here it was. Math.

Frisk felt the tip of a familiar tail tap on their shoulder.

They looked up toward MK.
“Yo,” they whispered, “you okay?”

Frisk shrugged.

<<We’ll talk about it later.>>

MK nodded in understanding, returning to their work.

Frisk stared at the test.

Fractions. They were pure evil.

Frisk looked around them.

Brian was balancing his pencil on his upper lip, completely disregarding his test. Hunter was working, constantly stopping to erase a supposed mistake or uneven mark. Caroline was reading, having finished her test long ago. Levi was at Mrs. Chang’s desk, turning his test in. Penelope was snapping her bracelets between problems, apparently kind of stressed. Miranda was staring into a compact, putting on even more lip gloss. Naomi was standing up to turn in her test, clearly trying not to think about something. Olive was staring into space, smiling without a care in the world.

Frisk looked at their test paper. Not even halfway done.

But they had to finish. They were Determined.

They set to work.

Thank the stars for calculators.

Heart of Gold, online.

“So, Timeline what did you and the bae end up doing together yesterday?” Hyperion asked.

“whaddaya mean?” Sans asked.

“Yesterday was Valentine’s Day,” Jessamy said.

“And?”

RP=>TL/ did bae give you candy

TL=>RP/ no why

“Because Valentine’s Day is the day everyone gives candy to their S/O or someone close to them,” Hyperion explained. “I bought myself a box of Hershey’s Kisses for Valentine’s because I’m perpetually single…”

“I’ll date you!” Jessamy said.

“Me too!” Extempore said.

“So...why should i have done somethin’ yesterday?”

“Uh, because Valentine’s is THE day to show ya bae how much you luuuuv them,” Jessamy said, as if it were obvious.
“With material possessions and sweet stuff,” Hyperion added.

“huh,” Sans mused, “maybe that’s why pap went home with metta saturday night...and stayed…”

“Nah, more like definitely,” Jessamy said.

“okay. guess i’ll plan an evenin’ alone with tori. can’t hurt anythin’.”

“THAT’S the spirit, Timeline!” Hyperion said.

“our one month anniversary was yesterday, too…”

“And you didn’t do nothin’ fuh THAT?” Jessamy exclaimed.

“no? it’s not like it’s our wedding anniversary or anythin’.”

Sans’ phone went off.

“hold on, i just got a text.”

*Dunkle Sans, Valentine's Day was yesterday. -_-*

*so i heard

*You should do something nice for Mom~ -w-

*im planning something right now

*youre stayin with aunt alphys and aunt undyne tonight

*Okay! -u-

Sans sighed.

“What’s up?” Hyperion asked.

“kid texted me, same topic we’re goin’ on about.”

“Ah. You wanna log off and plan your date?” Hyperion asked.

“dude, kindred would flip their shit. of course i do.”

“Aight, Timeline, we gotchu covered!” Jessamy said.

RP=>TL/ good luck timeline

“thanks guys. i’ll letcha know how it goes.”

After saying goodbye, Sans logged off and closed his laptop.

He groaned loudly and rubbed his palms against his eye sockets.

This was bad. Frisk would be home in about five hours.

Five hours to plan something -

Wait.
They could just make dinner together, add a few candles, eat chocolate, stuff like that. It’s so SIMPLE.

And best of all, he finally had a use for the bouquet of fake daisies.

Better break out the most romantic puns he could think of.

Maybe lunch with Tori would be great too…

Toriel sat in her classroom eating leftovers for lunch and grading test papers. This English test went over great. All A’s, a couple of B’s. Toriel was so, so proud.

*knock knock*

Toriel perked up even more, recognizing the knock.

“Who is there?”

“olive…”

“Olive who?”

“olive you, tori.”

Toriel smiled and opened the door. Sans had a bouquet of quite-obviously fake daisies and some Chinese takeout. He had a nervous smile on his face.

“i only just found out about valentine’s today. sorry…”

Toriel smiled warmly. “Oh, Sans, it is completely fine! I wasn’t really expecting anything, but that just makes this all the nicer!”

Sans blushed, his eyes sparkling. Stars, this man was a-DOOR-able (Hah, door).

Toriel cleared her throat. “Do sit down!”

Sans took a chair and set it next to Toriel.

“beef lo mein is your favorite, right?” Sans asked.

“Yes, it is!” Toriel said. “And yours is sweet-and-sour chicken?”

“heh, you got me.”

They ate a few bites of their food.

“So,” Sans started, “i’m plannin’ on workin’ on the astronomy degree this fall.”

“Really?” Toriel said curiously.

“yep. the university wondered why i was trying for my fourth doctorate, like i could study astronomy properly from under a mountain.”

“Yes, glowing crystals are lovely and all, but they are not quite as…” Toriel paused for effect, “…stellar as the real thing!”
Sans chuckled. “exactly.”

There was a brief pause. Something about it was tense.

“they offered me a position as a professor. said i’d be perfect for the position, since the old one’s retirin’.”

Toriel’s eyes widened a bit. “They offered you a professorship?”

Sans shrunk in a bit, scratching behind his head.

“In what field?”

Sans looked up at her in surprise. Her curiosity clearly shocked him.

“uh, physics…”

“Wow, that’s…”

“yeah…”

They were quiet once again.

“What did you tell them in response?” Toriel asked.

Sans shrugged. “i said i’d consider it. i dunno if i wanna do it or not, i wasn’t even plannin’ on replying.”

“Did they give you a deadline for your response?”

“april 30th.”

“Then you have a couple of months to figure it out.”

Toriel hugged Sans. “I’m very proud of you, Sans!”

Sans hugged her back. “thanks, t.”

They hugged a few minutes more before reluctantly letting go.

“So, uh...i’ve arranged for alphys and undyne to pick up frisk, so we can uh...spend the evenin’ together...if you want…”

Toriel paused while taking a bite of her lo mein. She chewed it slowly and swallowed. “O-okay...what will we be doing?”

“Well, i’ll help make dinner, just the two of us...maybe candles or something sappy like that…?”

Toriel looked at him in surprise. Just because he forgot Valentine’s Day, he planned a whole evening for just the two of them? Toriel smiled fondly.

“That sounds lovely. I can’t wait!”

Sans looked at her in surprise for a moment. His mouth curled into its signature smile before growing into something even more genuine. His eyes sparkled like the night sky. He was blushing.

“okay! see ya at 5?”
Oh goodness, he was so adorably excited Toriel thought her SOUL would burst then and there.

“I will!”

“r-right then! see ya!”

Sans left the classroom.

Toriel smiled and held back her giggles as Sans cheered victoriously.

---

Sans walked down the school hallway to the entrance, where he’d take a shortcut back home.

He was on top of the world, on cloud nine, gravity could suck his coccyx. Nothing could bring down Comic Sans Gaster at this moment.

“What are YOU doing here?”

Not even Linda Thompson.

“oh, nothin’ much. just settin’ up a little date with tori, wonderin’ if i should accept the professorship position i was offered at ebott u.”

Linda looked down at him. “Professorship?”

“yep. if i reply by a certain date, i will be the new physics professor at ebott university.”

Linda scoffed. “Oh puh-LEASE. You don’t even have a real doctorate!”

Sans said nothing, simply showing her the proper accreditations that he could at the moment. Linda’s eyes widened in anger.

“welp. i should be gettin’ home. i have this thing called a date, ‘n i wanna get ready. heh. never thought i’d say that…”

Sans waved Linda off and went outside the door before shortcutting back into the basement.

He texted a warning to Frisk that PTA Linda was on the school grounds before opening his laptop.

Time to do a little research...

---

Hunter was in the music building with the other soloists practicing their pieces with Miss Halsey when he got the text from Frisk.

Oh no.

Miss Halsey clearly noticed his panic.

“Your mother?”

Hunter nodded.

Miss Halsey sighed. “You can go if you need to. We’re meeting here again tomorrow.”
Hunter nodded again in thanks and ran from the building.

He knew where at least one person was.

He went off to the library where, as always, Caroline was reading. She’d already finished the book she’d been reading this morning, apparently.

Caroline barely glanced up at him.

“You’re not in practice,” she stated.

“I heard my mom was around so I’m hiding in here,” Hunter explained. “Miss Halsey gave me permission.”

“Okay. That’s good. I saw Brian trying to sneak into the teachers lounge with Levi, Frisk and MK are in Ms. Toriel’s classroom, and Penelope’s in the bathroom.”

“Okay, thanks.”

“No problem. Go grab a book and a beanbag and sit down. Thirty more minutes left til class is back on.”

Hunter went to grab a comic book. The school library didn’t get comics often, and when they did it was usually an old manga. But Hunter was fine with that. He liked some of them.

Today, though, there was a Batman comic.

Score.

He grabbed it and checked it out before sitting down in a beanbag chair. Penelope had come back while he was gone. She was chatting with Caroline about something or another.

Hunter noticed early on that Penelope had the world’s biggest crush on Caroline. Caroline claimed to not get crushes, but clearly Caroline was closer with Penelope than she was with the rest of them. Hunter chalked it up to a shared background of sorts - they moved to Ebott from Colorado over the summer, they had Asperger’s, they’d been raised by one parent…

Hunter thought it was sweet that they’d become close like they had.

Hunter sat on his beanbag and discreetly watched them from the corner of his eye as Batman tried to stop The Riddler.

He wondered if Mettaton or Papyrus liked Batman. Papyrus at least probably did…

Alphys was exhausted. She was due back to work on Wednesday, and she was pretty sure that Brad and Sydnee had a little surprise planned for her as both a “welcome back to work” and “congrats on the pregnancy” party. Brad and Sydnee were rather enthusiastic, but that’s why she’d chosen them as her interns - they were excited to do every little thing, almost.

Alphys sighed and closed her laptop. One month into her first pregnancy and she was already terrified as all hell.

She wasn’t sure if she was ready for this.
But it was too late now. She loved the little thing inside her with all her SOUL, and Undyne did as well.

And she would do the best she could. No one is perfect. Everyone make mistakes. It’s just the way life goes. When someone makes a mistake, they learn from it and try to do better next time.

Sans said that to her once after she had a panic attack when she made her first - and final - B on a test. She thought she’d taken the words to heart…

Looking back, that was how she had first met Sans.

How long had it been since then…?

Alphys decided to think about that later.

She had a baby shower to plan.

She’d go over the plans with Undyne later and see what she thought of them.

The things people do when they’re bored.

Linda was bored.

She’d come home from the school with some paperwork. She texted Helen telling her to pick the papers up at her house before Saturday.

So she decided to run through a random box in the attic.

She brought down a cardboard box filled with stuff from when she was in high school.

Old scrunchies, her cheer uniform, her senior yearbook…

Ooh, her senior yearbook! Let’s have a look-see…

Linda opened the yearbook - Breedlove High School, Class of 199X. She never got the chance to look at it properly, what with graduating and going to college then deciding to do as God intended for women and get married and start a family.

She turned the page of Seniors to find herself.

**Linda Murphy**

**Most Unpleasant Personality**

Linda cringed. This couldn’t be right.

She looked for Helen’s yearbook photo.

**Helen Waggener**

**Best Eyes**

Linda glared at the yearbook.

She looked for a few more familiar names.
Sharona Fieger

Most Pierced

Well duh. She still had about a third of those piercings that Linda could see.

Turned to the sophomores.

Diana Foss

“Turn to the juniors page.”

Linda turned to the juniors. One name stood out like a rusty nail.

The photo of the name’s owner bore a girl with box braids and a wide, bright smile.

Estelle Crawford

“It’s me~”

“It’s DEAD.”

“Ain’t no diff and you know it, Lindump.”

“You’re supposed to be DEAD, Crawford! Dead dead dead dead DEAD!”

She threw the yearbook at Estelle.

But nobody came.

Sans looked at his reflection in the bathroom mirror.

Black slacks, white buttondown shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows, black crocs, his usual Blue Hoodie tied around his waist by the sleeves.

Was this getup too nice or not nice enough? Sans didn’t know, he hadn’t been in a date in years, give him a break.

He sighed and went downstairs. No shortcuts, we walk down stairs like men.

Toriel wasn’t home yet. Sans checked texts. Nothing from her.

Should he ask how she’s doing, what time she’ll be here?

No, wait, she said she’d be here around five.

Sans checked the time. Barely half-past noon.

He had like five hours.

Maybe a nap would make him less nervous…

After calling Papyrus for advice. A cool dude like him HAD to know what to do for five hours after getting dressed for a date.
Heaven. That’s what this was. Heaven.

No, that…that wasn’t right either. Too…not right. It was a nice comparison but…it was wrong.

Papyrus and Mettaton lay under the covers. Mettaton was asleep and charging, his head laying on Papyrus’ sternum, hand over where his SOUL would be. Papyrus had his hand cradling the back of Mettaton’s head.

Papyrus had thought Sans was a heavy sleeper, but Mettaton while charging had him beat by a long shot.

Last night took a LOT out of Mettaton if he was still charging nine hours later. It made Papyrus a bit worried about what SOUL contact would do to him…

No. Not yet. It was still too soon. Papyrus and Mettaton had promised each other that SOUL contact would happen when Mettaton was ready. Papyrus understood that it might be a while before Mettaton was ready for that step, especially considering what that would mean for their relationship.

For all Monsters, SOUL contact was to them what Humans would call “making love”. Having sex and making love are different because of the intent behind them. And procreation is also different for the same reason.

Papyrus watched Mettaton sleep, listening to the whirring of his cooling system and the ceiling fan. He smiled and pressed a kiss to the crown of his head, humming a tune to himself that reminded him of Mettaton.

And then his phone went off.

Papyrus sighed and answered it. “WHAT IS IT SANS?”

“bro, i need your advice because i have a date with tori in five hours, i’m already dressed, i have no idea what i’m doing, and how do you…”

Sans sighed.

“how do you do this whole ‘dating’ thing, anyway?”

Papyrus was in a state of disbelief. Sans was asking him for dating advice? Well, he IS in a steady relationship, and HAS been for exactly six months and ten days longer than his elder brother, so it wasn’t THAT much of a surprise, but still.

“WELL,” Papyrus started, “I WOULD RECOMMEND TAKING THE ADVICE YOU GAVE ME BEFORE MY FIRST DATE WITH METTATON.”

“wear clothes?”

“WELL, YES, OF COURSE, BUT THAT’S NOT WHAT I MEANT! JUST GO WITH THE FLOW, DON’T DO ANYTHING YOU’D BE UNCOMFORTABLE WITH AND…HAVE FUN, YOU KNOW?”

There was a silence at the other end for a few minutes.

“heh. okay. thanks bro. you’re the greatest.”

“NYEH HEH, OF COURSE I AM! I WAS RAISED BY THE BEST BROTHER IN THE
UNIVERSE, AFTER ALL!”

“heh. love ya, pap. talk t’ya later.”

“LOVE YOU TOO, SANS.”

Papyrus hung up and set his phone down again.

He lay still for a moment, combing his phalanges through Mettaton’s raven hair.

“How long have you been up, mister?” Papyrus teased.

“Long enough…” Mettaton pouted.

“And long enough means about a third of the way through my phone call?”

Mettaton groaned.

They laid in silence.

“Wanna do the hot tub thing again?” Mettaton asked eagerly.

“HECK YEAH!” Papyrus replied with equal fervor as he shot up out of the bed.

Frisk tried to wait until they’d gotten home to look through their candygram pile. Really they did. But the siren call of the cherry-flavored Tootsie Pops was simply too much for them to ignore. Now they were paying the price for their gluttony.

Oh, woe is Frisk. What was to be done now? For they, Frisk Eternal Dreemurr…

...had a Secret Admirer.

This was awful. Was it someone they knew well, like a friend? Was it a total stranger, like that one Human kid in Mr. Steiner’s class who ate a scab on a dare? Was it their mom? They really hoped it wasn’t their mom, that would be kind of creepy since they flirted with her in the Underground. And she was TOTALLY smooching with Sans when no one was around.

Anyway. Frisk had a Secret Admirer and it scared them a little.

They looked around the classroom, wondering who it could be.

It’s MK. It’s totally MK, Chara said like it was completely obvious.

Frisk had to disagree. MK would be a bit more OPEN with something like THAT, wouldn’t they?

Yeah, no.

Frisk huffed their bangs out of their eyes and decided to let it go.

They saw a candygram on the ground without its associated candy.

They picked it up.

To: Brian
Frisk looked from the candygram to Brian, who had shoved about ten Tootsie Pops in his mouth and was working on the eleventh while Levi was filming him on his cell phone and Hunter was cheering him on.

Okay, maybe someone was giving one of these “Secret Admirer” candygrams to everyone.

This is obviously from Hunter.

Chara was probably right on that count.

Frisk bit into the Tootsie Roll center of their Tootsie Pop and grabbed another one from a random candygram.

They sucked on it for all of two seconds before grimacing and tossing it out.

Frisk hated the grape kind. They taste like cough syrup.

Old family movies, new family movies, dad’s record collection section D-H, a busted trombone…

...a-HA. THERE it is.

Sans took the ukulele from the attic and took a shortcut into the den.

He strummed it lightly and cringed at the sound that brought images of cats being slowly crushed by steamrollers.

He tuned it until it was deemed satisfactory.

Time to practice.

Down down-up, up-down-up down down-up, up-down-up down down-up, up-down-up down down-up…

Sans did this until he realized that he probably looked really fucking stupid.

And the tune was so easy that it wasn’t even practice. It was just wrist exercises if anything.

He decided to practice a tune he knew and loved, one that always stuck with him throughout the timelines and never betrayed him…

“somebody once told me the world was gonna roll me~ i ain’t the sharpest tool in the shed~”

The doorbell interrupted the chorus.

Sans got up to answer it.

Chas was at the door in a pointy wizard hat and had a wooden staff.

“hey chas. what’s the dm need this time?”

“Got any broken trombones?” Chas asked.

“i saw some in the attic just now while i was grabbin’ my ukulele, lemme grab one for ya. any particular type of break you need?”
“Nah, just grab one.”

“okay, brb.”

Sans walked down a hallway, took a shortcut to the attic, and grabbed a busted trombone before shortcutting back.

“here’s your busted trombone my dude. say hi to phil for me, and tell jay he still needs to return my vaporwave uggs,” Sans said as if this was a regular occurrence.

“Will do, thanks Fezzik.”

“don’t sweat it caemlaeth. sorry i couldn’t make it to today’s session, i got a date with tori t’night.”

“Aw, sweet, you planning to serenade her?”

“yep.”

Chas got a wistful look on his face that Sans didn’t see to often.

“you okay there, chas?”

Chas blinked a few times. “Huh? Uh, yeah, I was just thinking. I’d do something like that with Esperanza every year for our anniversary.”

Sans looked at him for a moment and sighed.

“welp. guess i’ll see ya wednesday then.”

“Yeah, you take care man.”

Sans closed the door as Chas went back out to his car.

He wondered what brought on the comment about Esperanza.

Sans shrugged it off. It was none of his business after all.

He started playing another tune.

“somewhere over the rainbow~ way up high~ there’s a land that I heard of once~ in a lullaby~”

In the gymnasium of Ebott North Middle School, a whistle blew.

“Ten minutes til the bell rings, punks! Haul yer butts on over to the locker rooms so you can get home!”

The crowd of eighth graders scrambled toward the locker rooms while bidding Coach Undyne a good afternoon, one or two still sparing a congratulations on her future child.

Undyne waved them all off with her usual wide smile before getting the equipment put away. Hopefully there wasn’t another couple making out in the supply closet again.

Undyne had known she’d wanted to be a gym teacher ever since she’d first heard Toriel remark on her supposed “way with children”. She knew she’d wanted to be a middle school gym teacher after realizing that she scared a fair number of elementary schoolers and that high schoolers were just not all that PASSIONATE during school hours.
Dealing with parents was a particularly sucky aspect of the job, but in teaching it was par for the course.

And in two years, Frisk and their friends would be part of her class. For three whole years. Hell yeah!

Undyne got in her car and drove home.
Alphys was on the couch eating corn chips and watching Owari no Seraph.

Alphys turned to her and smiled for all of ten seconds.

“W-where’s Frisk?” she asked. “Y-you were supposed to pick them up from school, remember?”

Undyne scrunched her face in confusion before realization dawned.

“FUCK!” Undyne shouted as she ran out the door and into the car once more.

Alphys sighed and rolled her eyes. But she still kept a small smile on her face. She faced her abdomen. She had been starting to feel a small hard lump - almost certainly her expanding womb.

“P-please don’t repeat those words ever. It’d p-probably give me a SOUL attack if you did…”

“I am sorry about my son’s behavior in your class, Ms. Toriel, I assure you that it won’t happen again.”

“We will see. Thank you for your time Mrs. Martin.”

Toriel waved the mother off and sighed the minute the door closed. Yeah, Travis was NOT going to stop his bullshit anytime soon - not while he was still in her class at any rate.

Toriel graded the last of the social studies worksheets and headed out to her car.

Teaching was harder than it seemed. Not every child is a perfect little angel, and the parents are often far worse.

But knowing that those types are the exception rather than the rule makes each day far more bearable. And knowing just what - or rather who - awaited her at home each day…

It gave her the strength to **Persevere**.

Toriel got into her van and drove home, humming along to the song on the radio.

She pulled into her driveway and got out of her van.

She walked up to her front door when she heard someone playing a guitar.

No, wait. It wasn’t a guitar, it was too high-pitched.

She knocked on the door, only for it to creak open at her touch.

She decided to change out of her work clothes and into more event-appropriate attire. She walked up the stairs and into her room where she changed into a sleeveless burgundy polo dress that ended just above her knees and a black cardigan.

Wait, was this too “fancy” for a simple dinner at home?
Oh well. It was too late to think about that now.

She walked down the stairs and into the den where her date was…
…playing the ukulele without a care in the world.

“hush my darling, don’t fear my darling, the lion sleeps tonight– hush my darling, don’t fear my
darling, the lion sleeps tonight– a-weema-weh, a-weema-weh, a-weema-weh, a-weema-weh, a-
weema-weh, a-weema-weh, a-weema-weh, a-weema-weh, a-weema-weh~”

And with a final strum, Sans finished the song. Upon hearing applause he looked up in surprise at
the source and blushed. “thank you, i’ll be here all evenin’.”

Toriel giggled at this. “Well, I certainly would hope so!”

Sans’ blush grew even stronger. Toriel wondered why this would be for a moment before the subtle
implication of her words hit her like a ton of bricks.

Now they were BOTH blushing heavily in the awkward silence.
“ahem, ah, should we...get started?”

Toriel relaxed a bit. “Shall we?”

Sans smiled with relief.

“Ai to Seigi no, Sera Fuku Bishoujo Senshi, Sera Muun! Tsuki ni kawatte, oshioki yo!”

Frisk hopped in place and clapped at Sailor Moon’s intro. Again.

They stuck another cherry Tootsie Pop in their mouth and watched Sailor Moon kick Dark Moon
butt.

Frisk didn’t much like violence, but Sailor Moon wasn’t them.

Frisk offered a Tootsie Pop to Alphys. She liked the chocolate ones, right?

“O-oh, thank you Frisk!” Alphys said.

Clearly she was flattered since she was blushing.

Frisk smiled and turned back to the television.

“Just how DID Papyrus get trapped in a vending machine, and eleven times at that?”

“hell if i know, tori. i’ve asked him the same thing. the great papyrus himself has no idea how it
happened.”

Sans and Toriel sat at the kitchen table together. They were laughing, telling bad jokes and old
stories, and eating the dessert they’d made together. All in all a wonderful night.

They calmed their giggles down and continued eating in comfortable silence. Toriel took a sip of
riesling. Sans took a bite of his slice of butterscotch cinnamon pie.

Once they’d finished with their dessert, Sans stood up for a bit. “want me to take that for ya?”
“Thank you, Sans.”

Sans used his Blue MAGIC to levitate their used dishes into the sink.

“i’m pretty sure dishes cheating, but hey.”

Toriel laughed at the pun.

“shall we, uh…head down to the basement? watch some movies? do absolutely nothing?”

Toriel smiled. “That sounds lovely!”

“okay, let’s grab some movies and shit outta the den first though.”

“Good plan…”

They went into the den looking for some movies.

“princess bride sound good?”

“Yes, very!”

“okay then.”

Sans held out his hand. “i know a shortcut to the basement.”

Toriel quirked her face in confusion and bemusement, but complied.

She and Sans took a step forward.

Black static filled Toriel’s vision as they entered the basement.

Huh.

She blinked a few times until the static fully dissipated from her retinas.

Sans chuckled at the sight. “takes some gettin’ used to. i remember being nauseous for about a week after I first found out I could that…”

Toriel’s eyes widened. “A week? Really?”

“yep. ‘cos my stats are...what they are, it takes me a bit longer to get over illnesses as quickly.”

“Oh.”

They were quiet for a moment.

“Did you...did you get sick often?”

Sans shrugged. “eh, not as often as you’d think. once, twice a month maybe.”

“That’s actually more often than I thought.”

“oh.”

The silence became tense.
“Let’s start the movie?”
“good plan, babe.”

Brian got off the bus and walked toward his house.
Rocco met him partway. He always did.
He walked with Rocco until he heard shouting.
“THAT BITCH KEEPS FORGETTING THE DAMN GROCERIES!”
David was awake. And drunk.
Welp. At least he knew how to get to Mrs. Undyne’s and Mrs. Alphys’ house from here…
Brian sighed in resignation.
“C’mon, Rocco. We’re gonna go visit someone.”

“Yaaaas, kick it, Chibi Moon! Show ‘em whatcha mama gave ya!”
“Aaaaaaah!”
Frisk hopped in place in anticipation.
And there. There. Sailor Senshi win again.
They always, ALWAYS win in the end.
*BING*
“I’ll get it, it’s probably the delivery guy,” Undyne said as she did a back handspring over the back of the couch.
Needless to say, she did not expect an Irish setter to run between her legs.
“Brian, hey, what’re you doing here?” Undyne asked with mild concern. “And why do you have a dog with you?”
“Dad’s yelling at nothing again, that’s Rocco, he’s mine, he followed me.”
“Ah, okay. Come on in, we’re watching Sailor Moon!”
“Thanks.”
Brian walked in and toward the living room where Alphys and Frisk sat on the couch. He sat on the rug in front of it and leaned against the couch.
He felt a tap on his head.
He turned toward the Frisk that was trying to get his attention.
They gave him a candy-less candygram with his name on it from a…

Oh crud.

“You didn’t send this, did you?”

Frisk made a disgusted face.

“Oh thank goodness.”

<<I think it was Hunter,>> they signed.

“Gross, why would he do that? Maybe it was Miranda.”

<<Miranda would have made sure you knew it was her.>>

“Crud, you’re right. Maybe it was someone else?”

<<Maybe. I got one too.>>

“Seriously? Do you know if anyone else did?”

Frisk shrugged.

“Huh. You think there’s a way we could find out who sent these?”

Frisk crossed their arms in a thinking-type gesture.

Then they brightened. They got it.

<<We’ll do an investigation!>>

Brian looked confused. “We’ll do a what now?”

Frisk shook their head. <<We’ll ask around school tomorrow and see if anyone knows. We’ll even get the others in on it!>>

“Sweet. But we gotta have Caroline do the names and Penelope’s gonna take pictures and bring the cupcakes.”

<<Always.>>

---

Turns out the DVD player in the basement is broken.

Sans and Toriel just sat on the ratty foldout couch for a while.

Until Toriel noticed Sans scrounging around in his pockets.

“Sans, what are you doing?”

“checking my inven-tori.”

Okay, Toriel was almost definitely drunk because that should NOT have been quite this funny.

Sans found what he was looking for and waited for Toriel to stop laughing. Which was more than fine by him. Her laughter was music to his non-existent ears.
Toriel started to calm down, gasping for air.

“Hoo, okay...okay, I’m done now…”

Sans smiled as smoothly as he could. “good. any requests?”

Toriel stared at him and his ukulele for a moment.

She sighed and rolled her eyes with a smile on her face. “Surprise me.”

“heh, you got it pretty mama.”

Toriel blushed at that nickname. Oh my, those butterflies in her stomach are now on fire and rushing slowly downward.

Sans took a deep breath and began to play.

Toriel watched and listened intently.

“wise men say~ only fools rush in~ but I can’t help~ falling in love with you~”

Toriel felt her face heating up again, smiling uncontrollably.

“shall i stay~ would it be a sin~ if i can’t help~ falling in love with you~”

Toriel was practically mesmerized. Sans in that shirt with a ukulele serenading her and calling her “pretty mama”...her thoughts were more than a little improper.

“take my hand~ take my whole life too~ ’cause i can’t help~ falling in love with you~”

And then the song was finished,

Sans looked up and noticed that Toriel was crying.

“that bad, huh?”

Toriel giggled. “No, no, quite the opposite! I loved it!”

Sans blushed. “oh, uh, thanks…”

Toriel blushed in turn. Oh no. Sans was too cute.

She leaned in to kiss him on the zygomatic when he turned toward her as well, resulting in her kissing his teeth.

Not that either of them particularly minded.

Seeing all the love around you fills you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes
My Funny Valentine - Babes In Arms
All Star - Smash Mouth
Somewhere Over The Rainbow - The Wizard Of Oz
The Lion Sleeps Tonight - The Tokens
Can't Help Falling In Love - Elvis Presley

Fun Fact: I love all of you and you all deserve the best of everything life has to offer you. Your comments and kudos keep me going and I can't thankyou guys enough. I've been going slow with updates the last couple of weeks for my mental health. Thank you all for your patience!
Chapter Summary

The penultimate chapter for this arc. Close calls, selfies, food, and cats.

Chapter Notes

EDIT: Now with notes~

I couldn't get the notes on last time bc it was 3 am and I was trying to go to bed asap after editing this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1:16 P.M., March 19th, 20XQ

It's a pretty nice day in Ebott.

Birds are singing.

Flowers are blooming.

On days like this, kids like you...

...are practicing for the Spring Concert tomorrow.

In the cafetorium, the sound of a choir of fourth graders could be heard.

As the children sang the song, Frisk signed the words they were singing. This was not only meant as an accommodation for the young Ambassador, but so that any hearing-impaired concert-goers could understand the words being sung.

The song completed.

“Very good, guys, not bad!” Miss Halsey said. “Maybe next year you’ll be able to do harmony! Now I’m gonna be working with the soloists, the rest of you can either go on back to class or stay and watch.”

Half the fourth graders left.

As soon as they were out the door, Miss Halsey turned to the remaining students and shrugged.
“Guess they thought there were gonna be spoilers. Oh well! Marilla, come on up, please!”

Mettaton was bored.

Papyrus was back at his house. Meaning Toriel’s house.

But the thing is, Mettaton wasn’t just bored. There was something...deeper than boredom living next to the boredom. Well, not living, more like brooding.

He recognized it somewhat. It was the feeling of being on top of the world and everyone else is too afraid to come close.

Loneliness. That’s what it was.

While Mettaton loved the warmth of the spotlight, the sound of applause, the many wonderful shiny things the money can buy, he knew that all that was as superficial as a Kardashian’s personality.

Fame could blind you. But something will always peek through the blinds and remind you that there’s more to life than this.

Mettaton had a choice to make.

He could call or text his beloved boyfriend Papyrus to let him know that he’s thinking about him.

Or he could call or text his beloved boyfriend Papyrus to ask him if he’d like to move in with him.

Or he could lie back and feel like garbage.

Mettaton chose option 3.

“You are going to kick BUTT tomorrow!”

“Yeah, dude, you’re gonna do GREAT!”

“I’m gonna ask my dad if I can get that song on iTunes. But maybe asking Sharona’s a better bet…”

“Seriously Hunter, how do you DO that?!”

“I don’t know! I just do!”

The core fourth graders chatted on their way back to class.

“Seriously, I’d be surprised if your mom doesn’t feel at least a teeny bit of pride,” Penelope said. “I mean, she’s a jerkface, but she can’t be so much of a jerkface she’d hate you for doing something like singing.”

<<Penelope, Hunter’s mom tried to cancel the Spring Concert,>> Frisk signed.

“Hunter’s mom tried to kill me,” Caroline said.

“Wait, what?” Hunter squeaked.
“When? Where is she? I’ll kill her!” Penelope growled.

“Remember the PTA meeting back in September, with the blanket fort?” Caroline asked, gripping her left shoulder.

“She didn’t try to kill you, she just tore down your blanket fort,” Brian said. “That was an awesome fort though.”

“She didn’t?” Caroline asked in disbelief. “Huh. Musta been some other beady-eyed chain smoker lady.”

“What are YOU kids doing out of class?” Diana stood in front of them, hands on her hips, smugness oozing from her very existence.

“We were watching the soloists,” Caroline said calmly.

“Uh-huh, right, I don’t believe you. I’m afraid you guys will just have to go to the principal’s office.” Everyone turned to the source of the statement.

Brian glared at Diana, who gaped in indignation.

The other kids fled while Diana was collecting herself.

Diana grabbed Brian by the arm and dragged him to principal’s office.

“OW!”

“Shut up!”

“I’ll tell my mom if you don’t let go!”

Diana paused at this.

“You DO know who my mom IS, right? The PTA vice president? She’d be pretty pissed if she found out what you were doing.”

Diana released her vice grip on Brian.

Brian ran off toward his classroom.

He entered the classroom and sat down gasping for breath.

His friends started bombarding him with questions as soon as he’d calmed down.

“You okay, dude?” MK asked.

“Yeah, I’m good.”

“How did you escape her evil clutches?” Levi asked.

“Threatened to tell my mom.”

“Thanks, Bri,” Hunter said quietly, almost shyly.

Brian smiled. “No problem.”
“Hey, Timeline, your kid’s birthday’s on Saturday, right?” Hyperion asked.

“yep. frisk is turning the big one-oh,” Sans declared proudly. "i’ve forbidden them from entering the basement since their present is down there.”

“Must be a big present then,” Kindred said.

“big enough that it needs to be fed frequently.”

“What is it?” Kindred asked in a warning tone.

“cat. frisk gets to name him.”

“Awww, you got Frisk a kitty?” Jessamy cooed.

“yep. she is currently playin’ with my brother. say hi to my coworkers, papyrus.”

“HI SANS’ COLLEAGUES!” Papyrus shouted. “I HOPE YOU ALL ARE HAVING A NICE DAY!”

“didja hear that?”

“How could we not?” Hyperion deadpanned.

“Tell him he’s hot!” Jessamy shouted.

“he and mtt went public with their relationship back in january.”

"And?"

The line went silent.

“Jessamy, you’re a ho,” Hyperion said.

“And Extempore is a rake,” Kindred intercepted, “now has anyone made progress with the thing Timeline gave us last...July, was it?”

“tail end of august, actually.”

The nebelung cat hopped onto the ratty old foldout couch, her tail slapping Sans’ face.

“speaking of tail ends, the cat just hit me with hers.”

“Wait til you wake up with cat butt in your face, then you can complain. Now what do we got, guys?”

Sans listened to the excited updates from his co-conspirators - no, his friends - and smiled as he petted the cat.

Soon. It would be very soon now.

His dad would be coming home at last.

He just had to be Patient.
Papyrus set up the stopwatch and grabbed the 3x3x3 Rubik’s Cube.

He started the timer.

Red side, orange side, yellow side, green side, blue side, white side, done.

8.23 seconds. 0.78 seconds more than his personal best, third personal best overall.

Wowie he was bored.

Papyrus sighed and opened a cabinet. He chose the jigsaw puzzle with the third-most pieces - a 5000 piece puzzle depicting the Carina nebula.

“SANS?” Papyrus asked.

“hold on a sec,” Sans said into the headset. “need somethin’, bro?”

“I-IF YOU’RE BUSY, I CAN WAIT A WHILE!”

Sans looked at him...strangely, for a moment.

“hey, i’m gonna log out here guys. thanks for the help, see ya ‘round.”

Sans waited a few seconds before logging out of the server.

“imma ask again - need somethin’, bro?”

Papyrus smiled. “WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO A JIGSAW PUZZLE WITH ME?”

“i dunno, would i?”

“How would I know? I’m NOT YOU!”

“fair point. i guess the answer to your question, then, is yes, i would.”

Sans moved his laptop off to the side.

“You can set it up here.”

Papyrus smiled. Between work, romance, and lots of other stuff, the Gaster Brothers hadn’t spent much time together as a family.

So he was going to make the most of this time with Sans.

Undyne came home to find her ten-weeks-pregnant wife sprawled out on the floor in a patch of sunlight coming through the big picture window.

She snapped a few pictures.

When Alphys stretched and yawned in her sleep, Undyne had had enough of her wife’s kawaii desu ne ways.
She lifted Alphys into her arms to carry her to their bedroom.

Then Alphys shivered.

Undyne suddenly felt a surge of protectiveness. She laid her wife back down and decided to be the big spoon. Undyne was ALWAYS the big spoon. ALWAYS.

The one time she was the little spoon, Alphys had a nightmare and dug her claws into Undyne’s breasts. It took a few days for those to heal up.

Looking back now, it was kind of funny. Not many people could say that their girlfriend had a nightmare and nearly shredded their tits.

Undyne posted the pics of Alphys on her social media accounts. Then she took a selfie of herself and Alphys in the position and posted that too.

And now to rest…

They were more than three-fourths of the way done with the jigsaw puzzle.

They had just finished putting the pieces featuring bok globules in place.

“SANS, IS IT JUST ME, OR IS IT POSSIBLE THAT WE ARE MISSING SOME PIECES?”

“i dunno pap, how many we got left?”

“1,604 PIECES AND WE SHOULD BE FINISHED.”

“how many pieces do we have though?”

“ANYWHERE FROM 107 TO ALL OF THEM.”

“huh.”

“WHICH PART IS MISSING THEN?”

“the trumpler 14 star cluster at the most, none at the least.”

“SHOULD WE KEEP GOING?”

“i dunno. you wanna?”

Then their phones went off.

They checked the text from Undyne.

*Just hanging with the waifu after work~

Sans and Papyrus looked at each other.

“WE ARE SO FINISHING THIS.”

“damn right we are. and we are gonna send this on all of our social media accounts.”
“EVEN YOUR MYSPACE?”
“even my myspace.”
“METTATON ASKED FOR YOUR MYSPACE BLOG SO HE COULD FOLLOW YOU.”
“mtt has a myspace? whoda thunk. i’ll send it to ‘im later. you might wanna remind me though.”
“CAN DO.”
“now let’s finish this, and to hell with any missing pieces.”
“RIGHT!”

The bell rings.
And they’re off.

Teachers and students filed out of Mountainside Elementary School in a massive hoard.

Spring Break. One full week of fun and, best of all, no school.

Who wouldn’t be excited about that?

Frisk was excited. They rode on their mother’s shoulders through the mob as they headed out to their car.

Frisk was lifted up and set down in their seat. Toriel sat in the driver’s seat.

And they were off.

“Say, Frisk?”

Frisk looked into the rearview mirror.

“Do you know what tomorrow is?”
<<Spring concert?>> they signed.

“Yes, but that is not what I was thinking of…”
<<First day of Spring Break?>>

“Again, yes and no.”

Frisk folded their arms in front of them and wracked their brain.

What else could possibly be happening on March 20th?

Of course!

<<The spring equinox?>>

Toriel quirked an eyebrow and giggled.
“Yes and no.”

<<Louis Sachar’s birthday?>>

“Well, it IS a birthday…” Toriel said teasingly.

Frisk KNEW they were getting close!

They just had to guess birthdays!

Who else had a birthday on March 20th…?

<<Spike Lee’s birthday?>>

Toriel shook her head.

<<Mr. Rogers’ birthday?>>

“Nope!”

Frisk wracked their brain for another few minutes. They were DETERMINED to find out whose birthday is tomorrow.

But they don’t know anyone who could share the same birthday as them -

Oh.

<<My birthday?>> they signed, a smile on their face.

Toriel smiled widely.

“That’s correct! Well DONE, my child!”

Frisk hopped up and down in the back seat in excitement. Just one day more and they’d be ten.

One day more…

“I CAN’T BELIEVE IT, SANS! JUST ONE PIECE MORE AND WE’RE FINISHED!”

“yep.”

“WE CAN DO THIS!”

“yep.”

“WE CAN TOTALLY FINISH THIS!”

“yep.”

The brothers were silent and still, staring at the empty space in the puzzle.

“THE PIECE IS MISSING ISN’T IT?”

“yep.”
“NYEEEGH…”

Sans watched as Papyrus rubbed his eye sockets with his carpals.

“still wanna take the photo?”

“OF COURSE!”

“okay.”

Mettaton was lying on the floor, feeling like garbage, as per Blook Family Tradition. As he had been for the past two hours.

Then his phone went off.

*I text from: ~Sugar Skull~*

*JUST SPENDING QUALITY TIME WITH MY COOL BROTHER!

Attached was a photo of Papyrus, Sans, and a giant puzzle.

Papyrus and Sans were smiling brightly, their eyes sparkling with unabashed joy.

Mettaton smiled warmly at the image and posted it to all of his social media accounts with the caption:

*Look at my super-cute boyfriend~! (he’s the tall sexy one~)*

He pretended not to notice the out-of-focus cat in the backdrop. Frisk’s present was VERY important and VERY secret.

How dare he. How DARE that little brat talk back to her like that.

She broke a nail because of him.

Diana grumbled unintelligible obscenities to herself as she filed her nails.

This had been her chance to usurp Helen’s position as vice president of the PTA and as Linda’s right-hand woman.

Diana filed even harder until her nails were nubs and her fingertips were raw.

She noticed too late once again that Cherry was lapping up her wine.

Time to find another black yorkie-poo on Craigslist…and buy some fake nails at the drugstore...

There it is. Children’s Tylenol.
Linda grabbed the cherry-flavored liquid and proceeded to the checkout area when she saw something.

Something terrible.

Something ANNOYING.

Diana.

Linda immediately came up with a plan of avoidance.

She hid herself and observed where Diana was headed - the nail care section.

Linda slipped around the opposite side of the store and around to the checkout.

She walked up to the cashier - a woman in her mid-late forties with an afro whose name tag said Iris - and set down her basket of Tylenol and migraine medication.

“Step on it, and get me some Newports!” she hissed. “WITH menthol!”

Iris moved at her usual pace. She’d dealt with people like Linda before, and she’d probably do so again in the next hour.

“I said STEP ON IT!” Linda shouted.
Iris merely glared at her. She’d been done for the last two minutes.

She gave Linda her purchased items and said the usual “Have a nice day, ma’am.”

Linda glared at her. “I am NOT a MA’AM.”

She stomped out of the drugstore with her nose turned up.

Iris sighed and shook her head. “That’s what ALL the ma’ams say…”

Then a girl of around nine or ten came in through the front door and ran toward her.

“Gramma, you ready to go?” she asked.
Iris smiled at the girl.

“Almost ready, Azaria. Why don’t you coma help me for a bit, love?”

Azaria smiled. “Okay!”

Iris and Azaria cleared up what they could to prepare the station for the next worker.

Owning a drugstore and raising a granddaughter on one's own is tough, but Iris manages pretty well.

She’s got help, after all.

And Azaria’s health and happiness make it all worthwhile.

Toriel pulled into the garage for the evening and stepped out of the van. Frisk followed excitedly.

“Sans! Papyrus! We’re home!” she called.
“WE’RE IN THE BASEMENT!” Papyrus called.

“we did a puzzle.”

“So we saw!”

Frisk ran over to the basement door and opened it.

There was indeed a giant puzzle missing a piece with two Skeletons standing over it.

<<I already know about the cat,>> Frisk signed.

“What cat?” Sans ask with his typical nonchalance.

<<The fluffy gray one over there on top of the bookshelf.>>

Frisk pointed to the bookshelf, where the cat was indeed lying atop it looking down upon her kingdom.

“huh. how’d that get in here?”

“I already told Frisk that she was theirs, Sans,” Toriel said as she walked down the basement steps.

“Oh.”

There was silence.

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY, HUMAN FRISK!” Papyrus shouted.

“happy birthday, you get a cat,” Sans said as he rumpled Frisk’s hair.

Frisk’s entire being vibrated with joy.

They looked up at their cat.

They were Determined to pet her.

They walked over to the bookshelf.

They prepared to climb it.

Then they felt their SOUL turn blue and rise.

They were suddenly face to face with the cat.

Oh my gosh she was even cuter up close.

Frisk held out a hand to pet her.

The cat accepted the pet.

Pet pat pot.

She purred softly and jumped onto Frisk’s shoulder, settling in.

Sans gently lowered Frisk down to the ground, their cat still on their shoulder.
Toriel and Papyrus were still taking photos of Frisk as they were set on the ground.

Frisk blinked a couple of times and then nuzzled the new friend on their shoulder.

Sans took a photo of the nuzzle and put his phone back in his pocket.

“so,” Sans started, “whaddaya gonna name ‘er?”

Frisk suddenly realized that they had a conundrum on their hands - err, shoulders.

They scratched the cat’s ear and thought.

Then they straightened up a bit and smiled.

<<Her name is Isolde!>> they signed.

“Isolde?” Toriel said, testing the name. “My, how elegant! It suits her well!”

“isolde, is for short…” Sans mumbled.

“IS WHAT FOR SHORT?” Papyrus asked, confused.

“is.”

“IS WHAT?”

“is.”

“IS WHAT?!”

Toriel watched the accidental skit continue.

“Frisk, would you like to help me with dinner?” she asked, resigned.

Frisk nodded.

The mother and child walked up the steps and into the kitchen with the cat as the brothers bantered.

This could take a while…

Mettaton made a decision.

He would make Surprise Visit to Toriel’s house for dinner and to spend the night (in Papyrus’ room, of course).

And tomorrow, post-concert, he would ask Papyrus That One Question…

After he got his lipstick done (black matte is the best thing ever and any who disagree can fight him), he decided to practice his lines in the mirror.

He did a few breathing exercises before beginning.

“Papyrus. Move in with me. No, too demanding, he might feel pressured...Papy, would you like to move in with me? Better, but it’s a bit vague and he might not understand…”
Mettaton sighed and pushed his hair back a bit.

He checked the time. 6:08 P.M.

He had about 24 hours. He could wait.

He could totally wait.

He could totally convince himself that he could wait.

Toriel set the water for the rice on boil.

Now to wait a bit.

Frisk stared at the water intently, waiting for it to start bubbling.

Isolde stared as well before hopping from Frisk’s shoulders to Toriel’s.

The Boss Monster was caught briefly by surprise, but quickly composed herself and scratched the cat’s chin. The cat rubbed against her cheek in response before settling down to sleep.

Then the doorbell rang out Westminster Quarters.

Isolde bristled and jumped onto the fridge.

Frisk ran toward the door and opened it.

Enter Mettaton with a wagonload of presents plus a very large balloon bouquet.

“Hey, Frisk! Happy Early Birthday~” he sang.

Frisk suddenly brightened. They smiled and clapped and hopped in place. They giggled and hugged their Glamorous Robot Uncle.

Mettaton hugged back and saw Papyrus step out from the basement.

“WOWIE, WHOSE BIRTHDAY IS IT?”

Frisk turned around and signed <<Mine!>>

“NO, THAT CAN’T BE! YOUR BIRTHDAY’S NOT UNTIL TOMORROW!”

“Hello, Mettaton!” Toriel called from the kitchen. “Put the gifts in the den, please. Papyrus, if there’s any gifts like last year’s, please help him.”

“YES, MA’AM!”

Papyrus grabbed an armful of presents and passed Frisk the Balloon Bouquet, which they took up to their room.

It took them three trips to get all the presents inside.

“So, what’re we having?” Mettaton asked.
“Meatballs and gravy with rice!” Frisk signed.

“Ooh, that sounds nice!”

“It is!”

“Dinner will be ready in ten minutes, if anyone wants to set the table!” Toriel called.

“She means me,” Frisk signed. They walked into the kitchen to grab some plates and forks.

Papyrus and Mettaton were left alone.

“So…"

“So…what?”

“What are you doing here? You usually let me know if you’re coming over!”

Mettaton was suddenly very interested in his nails.

“I had a lot on my mind the past few days. I just made a spur-of-the-moment decision, decided to surprise you guys…” he said, as if it were obvious. Then he suddenly seemed a tad anxious. “If that’s alright, of course.”

Papyrus smiled warmly - but then again, that was just how Papyrus smiled most of the time. Papyrus’ smile was one of Mettaton’s favorite thing about his physique.

“Of course it’s alright!” Papyrus assured him. “It’ll save us the trip to your house! It is in the opposite direction from the school, after all!”

Mettaton sighed with relief.

“Hey, you two, dinner’s ready,” Sans said. “We’re eating in the dining room tonight due the surprise guest dropping in unannounced.”

“I prefer the term ‘Special Guest Star’, actually,” Mettaton corrected. “But thanks for letting us know.”

“Of course.”

Levi did NOT like packing.

He liked what packing IMPLIED, because it implied going places. The act of packing itself was tedious.

Why were they packing tonight? They were leaving for Florida on Sunday morning. Why not wait until tomorrow evening?

Oh. Right. Spring Concert.

Levi was gonna look GOOD tomorrow night. Everyone was.

He wondered how Theo was going to look in his concert outfit…

“Levi! Caroline! Dinner’s ready!” Sharona called.
“Coming!”
Levi zipped up his suitcase and ran toward the kitchen, nearly bulldozing Caroline.
He loved lamb chops.

“This is really good…”
“Would you like the recipe? It’s very easy to make!”
“Email it to me?”
“Okay!”

Who knew something as simple as meatballs and gravy over rice could be so good? Well, Mettaton was one answer.
Toriel took a bite of meatball with some rice when she caught something out of the corner of her eye.
Isolde was on top of the curio cabinet in the far corner. It was empty currently since the intended curio was still in the attic, but Toriel still couldn’t help but worry.
She decided to keep an eye on the cat. She was content to merely watch the action from her perch at the moment it seemed.
She noticed that Sans was doing the same, watching the cat from the corner of his eye sockets.
<<wait for it,>> he signed cryptically.
Isolde hopped down from the perch and rushed under the table as if someone had dropped food (Toriel hoped for everyone’s sakes that this was not the case).
Papyrus and Mettaton shouted in surprise. Sans, Toriel, and Frisk laughed at their shocked and embarrassed expressions
All the eyes in the room followed Isolde as she hopped onto the mantelpiece to continue her observations from a different vantagepoint.
“geez, what were you two doin’ under there, huh?” Sans teased.
<<Get a room you two!>> Frisk signed, sticking their tongue out in mock disgust.
“Are you two alright?” Toriel giggled, still managing to sound concerned somehow despite herself.
“I'M FINE, JUST A BIT SHAKEN UP IS ALL!” Papyrus assured.
“yeah, you did look a bit -”
“SANS DON’T YOU DARE -”
“- rattled.”
“...For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever, Amen. NOW we can eat.”

Linda’s glare was directed at Hannah, who shrunk in on herself shamefully.

Hunter felt bad for her. But he couldn’t do anything about it right now.

He took a bite of cordon bleu - or, as he referred to it whenever his mother made it, cordon bleugh.

He’d have to tell Sans that one.

Hunter successfully swallowed the burnt piece without gagging. Somehow.

Either his gag reflex was getting better, or his mom did something right.

The first thing was more likely, when he thought about it.

He mentally sang one of the ensemble pieces for the concert.

At least then if he accidentally ended up singing out loud he’d have an excuse. It probably wouldn’t be good enough for Linda, but it was better than the solo piece.

Oh look, THERE’S the gag reflex.

Thank goodness he was done eating, otherwise he’d be dead earlier than planned.

He even had his last will and testament written out.

Alphys was three-quarters of the way through the first trimester. Her morning sickness - which actually lasted all day, contrary to the name - had abated for the most part, but the queasiness was still present.

So plain ramen noodles were on the menu tonight. No broth. Just plain, boring noodles.

She dipped her chopsticks in peanut butter and twirled some noodles around so they stuck to the spread.

She’d been craving peanut butter lately. In ramen it was actually pretty darn good.

Undyne watched Alphys eat in slight disgust. Pregnant people eat weird. The peanut butter and gummy bears on toast was the weirdest so far, but this was pretty up there.

She tried not to imagine the ramen with the broth in it.

She failed.

That night was spent with both Alphys and Undyne in the kitchen puking.

“Is it the second trimester yet...?” Undyne moaned.

“T-two more w-w-weeks...” Alphys wheezed before she leaned into the sink and hacked again.

“Fuck everything...”
“You really didn’t have to that.”

“NEITHER DID HE!”

“He made a pun, you literally started a food fight, Papyrus!”

“HE STARTED IT!”

“And you continued it. You could have easily groaned and been done with it, but nope, clearly a bad pun is punishable by a gob of gravied rice to the eye socket. Hold still, darling, you’ve got some rice in your neck joints…”

Mettaton could safely say that he had never seen a Skeleton pout before he met Papyrus. He honestly didn’t think it was possible. Boy was he wrong.

Papyrus shivered a bit. The grains were jammed in a sensitive spot on his neck.

“HURRY UUUUP…” he moaned.

“No,” Mettaton declared. “After that little display, you need a little punishment.”

“CAN’T I JUST HAVE NO TELEVISION FOR A WEEK AND BE DONE?” Papyrus whined.

“Yeah, no. You’re a grown man Papyrus, and you are going to be punished like one.”

“oh my god you two, i am literally across the hall and frisk is right next door!” Sans shouted.

“Shut up, you’re part of the reason for this!” Mettaton shouted back.

“Oh for the love of MERCY, will you three be QUIET!” Toriel screamed “Frisk is being more mature about this than the three of you are! You should be setting an example for them!”

“Yes ma’am,” the three men said in unison.

The silence in the house was deafening.

Frisk was sound asleep despite the shouting down the hall.

They had to be for tomorrow. It was a big day, after all.

Flowey was so done.

First Cactus Everdeen, now THIS? What’s next, a pet whale?

Actually that sounds pretty freaking cool. Maybe Frisk could ask for a pet whale for Christmas.

For now, however, Flowey was very much content with his Wailmer.

“C’mon Wally, c’mon, just a little more…”

And there. Wally won. Flowey now had the Firium Z.
In Salazzle’s dumb face.

One more dawn, one more day. You are filled with

**DETERMINATION**

Chapter End Notes

**One Day More - Les Misérables**

Fun Fact: I have a LOT of OCs. That's because I really enjoy creating them and making them do my bidding.
What I Did For Love

Chapter by Spazzin

Chapter Summary

Here we go. It's showtime.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

12:38 P.M., March 20th, 20XQ

It's a beautiful day outside.

The sun is shining.

Music is playing.

On days like this, kids like you...

...are having your tenth birthday lunch at Grillby's.

“Happy birthday to you~ Happy birthday to -”

“wait, i got a better song.”

“What.”

“just listen to it, undyne. mtt, you got a speaker?”

“Sans, darling, who do you think you’re talking to?”

“is that a yes?”

Mettaton rolled his eyes and gave Sans the portable speaker.

Everyone watched in wary anticipation as Sans plugged in his phone and searched for the song he wanted.

*They say it’s your birthday~ It’s my birthday too, yeah~ They say it’s your birthday~ We’re gonna have a good time~*

“SANS, ISN’T YOUR BIRTHDAY IN MAY?” Papyrus said in confusion.

“yeah. your point?”
“Is this the Beatles?” Undyne asked.

“What makes you think that?”

“The singer dude sounds like that dude from the Beatles, what’s his name? Paul McCarthy?”

“It’s Paul McCARTNEY, Undyne,” Mettaton corrected. “And yes, this is in fact The Beatles.”

“McCartney, McCarthy, same diff! British dudes with bowl cuts, that’s all I know about ‘em.”

Everyone stared at her.

“What?”

“UNDYNE, WE NEED TO HAVE A TALK ONE OF THESE DAYS ABOUT YOUR LACK OF WESTERN POP CULTURAL AWARENESS!”

“Yeah, we gotta tell you about the birds and the beatles.”

The laughter actually outnumbered the exasperated groans this time.

“OH MY GOD SANS, THAT WAS…ACTUALLY KIND OF CLEVER???”

Sans merely winked and whispered “nailed it.”

The song ended and everyone turned their attentions toward Frisk.

They looked around at their family and smiled before blowing out the candles on their cake and making their wishes.

Frisk wished for their family to happy and healthy forever.

Chara wished for Gaster to return to Frisk’s timeline safely.

Frisk kind of took their wish, after all.

_____________________________________________________________________________________

Hunter forced a smile for the camera.

He was really good at forcing smiles. They looked as real as they felt painful.

“And done!” Linda announced. “You can have lunch now, Hunter. I’ll be uploading these to Facebook, so you’ll have to make it yourself.”

“Yes, Mom.”

Linda smiled and leaned to kiss his cheek. She patted Hunter’s head and went upstairs to use the computer.

Hunter waited until he heard the door close to rush into the kitchen to grab a grocery bag to hyperventilate into.

It took ten minutes for him to calm down.

He was still breathing a bit heavily as he grabbed some pretzels and cheese cubes for his lunch.

He went over the planned course of action for the evening in his head.
Frisk would be bringing his soloist vest with them. Miss Halsey had the soloists’ performances arranged in alphabetical order by last name. Frisk claimed that it was because she was “saving the best for last”, but Hunter wasn’t too sure. He would be on the middle level of the risers with the other fourth graders with T names. If his mom suspected anything before he was announced as a soloist, his friends would all do something to distract her.

He finished his pretzels and cheese cubes and went up to his room to go over his solo piece one last time.

He skimmed over it, taking in the notes, the lyrics, the meaning. He could see why Mettaton liked this song - when you have a particularly strong passion for something, it can really feel like that.

The song’s title might also have a little something to do with it. But hey. If it fits, it fits.

Hunter hummed the song quietly, smiling to himself.

He felt a little less anxious, knowing that someone understood him a little, at least on that front.

Caroline was starting to get frustrated.

She kept trying and trying and TRYING to put her hair up in a ponytail, but it just. Wasn’t. WORKING.

She was on her eighteenth attempt. She stretched out the rubber band with her fingers, grabbed her hair in the other hand, tried to loop it through -

And there goes the rubber band.

Caroline yelled out in frustration and started crying. But she wasn’t about to give up. She wanted her ponytail, and by the Inklings she’d HAVE that ponytail even if it KILLED her.

“Caroline, what’s the matter -”

Sharon came into the bathroom to find Caroline sobbing and scratching at her left shoulder, her hair a mess, the floor strewn with broken rubber bands.

“Aw, sweetie, what happened, what’re you trying to do?” Sharona asked.

“I’m trying to make a ponytail but I keep breaking the rubber bands…” Caroline sobbed.

Sharona was more than a little surprised at this. “Do you want my help, or do ya want me to give a demonstration? Just lemme know if I can do something.”

Caroline sniffed. “H-help, please?”

Sharona smiled a bit in spite of herself.

“Okay! First we should probably brush ‘n comb your hair again...”

---

Penelope grumbled in the back seat of the Chevy Avalanche.

She REALLY hated this outfit.

The shirt and vest were okay, pretty cool in fact. Miss Halsey even allowed ties.
But the skirt was mandatory. Miss Halsey TRIED to ask for shorts, she even BEGGED. But stupid old Mrs. Thompson and Mrs. Miller were ADAMANT that the girls wear skirts.

But Penelope decided to adapt. Shorts under a skirt made a difference. Not much of one, but better than just a skirt.

Skirts were more than just uncomfortable as heck, she also didn’t look too good in skirts. Caroline could rock them, she had the right legs. Hunter was pretty nice-looking in a skirt, too, for a boy. Penelope hated being a stump.

Seriously, why were boys allowed to wear shorts but girls weren’t? Heck, maybe there were a few boys who’d like to wear skirts! What was even the deal with that? Dudes wear skirts all the time in Scotland! There were Scottish-Americans all over the place! It’s just not that big a deal!

Then Penelope started snickering.

“What’re YOU laughin’ at?” Theo asked.

“You wearing a skirt!”

The bruise on her arm was totally worth it.

Frisk was the last of their friend group to show up at Mountainside Elementary. Mrs. Miller directed them to the music building where the other performers were practicing one last time before the concert.

They opened the door to the music building. Currently Robin was practicing his solo piece, so the ensemble was chilling until he was done.

Frisk walked over to their friends.

“Hey, Frisk!” MK called. “Happy birthday!”

“Happy birthday, Frisk!” Hunter said.

“Happy birthday,” Caroline said.

“Happy b-day, Frisk!” Levi chimed.

“Happy birthday, bud,” Brian said.

“Hold up a sec!” Penelope said, digging into her backpack. “Aha! Found it!”

Penelope grabbed a tupperware with seven red velvet cupcakes inside.

“One for each of us, see? Frisk gets the first pick since it’s their birthday!”

<<Thanks, guys!>> Frisk said as they opened the tupperware and grabbed the cupcake with the most frosting.

“And whoever’s birthday is next gets the next pick!”

“That means I’m last,” Caroline summed up.

Penelope flinched a bit. “Ah! Sorry, w-would you like next pick?”
“No, it’s fine. I was just pointing it out.”

“You mean showing off?” Brian asked, taking a bite out of his cupcake. “Hey, these have filling! Sweet.”

“Hehe, thanks!” Penelope said, blushing. “I learned how to do that recently, so I was testing it out! I guess I did good, then…”?

“Heg yah!” MK said through a mouthful of cupcake. He swallowed and said, “You should own a cupcake shop when you grow up!”

“Wh-wha - no! I wanna be a photographer!” Penelope said with as much conviction as she could muster through her flustered state.

“You could make a cookbook,” Caroline said as Hunter passed her the tupperware with the sole remaining cupcake. “You can make cupcakes, take pictures of them, and put them all together with the recipes.”

Penelope thought for a moment. Writing a cookbook DID manage to combine her two great loves of photography and cupcake making. And since it was a book (in a way she supposed), Caroline might want to read it or help her with it!

“I’ll think about it! Thanks Care!”

“No problem, Nell.”

“Alrighty, everyone!” Miss Halsey announced. “Time to practice the next two ensemble songs! Find your seats and siddown!”

“C’mon, let’s go!” Hunter said eagerly. He seemed a strange mixture of excited, anxious, and resigned.

Frisk held up their hand, signalling everyone to wait. They dug through their bag and grabbed the bag with Hunter’s soloist vest.

Hunter’s eyes widened. He started tearing up a bit while he smiled. He held the package close to him.

“Thanks, Frisk…”

He ran up to Miss Halsey to tell her that he had his soloist vest.

He changed from his black vest into the satiny green vest and then moved to his place in the ensemble.

He was more psyched than ever.

This was gonna be great.

________

“damn. lotta people here.”

“So I see.”

“want some tictacs? i managed to smuggle some in.”
“What kind?”

“babe, lemme take you down.”

“W-what?” she wavered.

“calm down, tori, ‘s nothing to get hung about.”

Toriel relaxed, the remnants of the blush thankfully hidden by fur.

“Strawberry Fields, then?” she asked.

“strawberry fields forever~” Sans sang.

Toriel giggled a bit and held out a hand to receive the candies.

“wanna go look for us some seats?” Sans asked. “we don’t wanna end up forced to sit next to linda or worse.”

Toriel smirked playfully. “And what, dear Sans, could be worse than being forced to sit by Linda Thompson?”

“being forced to sit by linda and diana.”

“Of course, what was I thinking?”

The family members had all congregated in the cafetorium. There was a table in the back with program handouts. There were dozens of old beige metal folding chairs for the audience to sit on.

Sans picked up one each for himself and Toriel. MK did a good job on the cover image the school mascot.

Who knew a fourth grader’s drawing of a hornet in a top hat could look so frighteningly realistic?

Sans opened the pamphlet as he sat down next to Toriel.

He glance at the first page when he saw it.

What he saw made him beam with pride.

“oh. my. god. tori, check out the acknowledgements page of the pamphlet.”

Toriel opened the pamphlet, read down the page, and beamed with pride along with Sans.

*Special thanks to tonight’s American Sign Language interpreter, Frisk E. Dreemurr*

“That’s my child! Oh, I can’t WAIT to see them!”

“Why wait for someone who won’t even be performing though, hm?”

Sans and Toriel turned around and glared at Linda.

Linda flinched with a grimace before regaining her twisted version of neutrality.

“Well, why come to an event you actively set out to cancel?”

Linda scoffed as she turned toward Mettaton, who was latched onto Papyrus’ arm as though they
were on the red carpet.

“Now you listen here, I may not have supported this, but I DO support my son!”

Mettaton gave a Condescending Smile. “Sure, Jan.”

“My NAME is LINDA,” Marsha - err, Linda growled through clenched teeth.

“i’m sure it is,” Sans said. “wait, isn’t that diana over there going through the donation box?”

“Wait, what - DIANA, DO NOT TOUCH THAT!”

As Linda stormed off, Sans gestured to the seats to his left.

As Papyrus and Mettaton were seated, a rotund bespectacled woman in her 50s hurried onto the stage.

As she took the mic, the shrill scream of feedback rang throughout the auditorium, causing even the feedback-familiar Mettaton to flinch.

“Good afternoon, parents and family members of Mountainside Elementary School. I’m Mrs. Miller, and I am the principal here at Mountainside Elementary School. The Spring Concert will begin in ten minutes, so please take your seats.”

“Oh my GOD, she has a worse monotone than Christopher Walken!” Mettaton hissed.

“i keep expecting her to say ‘all glory to the hypnotoad’, but it’s just...not...coming.”

“Hey, I didn’t know Johan Lieber was Frisk’s principal!”

Undyne and Alphys had shown up.

“hey guys, what kept ya?” Sans asked as he gestured to his right, where Toriel sat next to two empty seats.

“A mix of t-traffic and c-continued m-morning sickness,” Alphys explained.

“aw, man, ‘s gotta suck,” Sans said.

“W-well, I DID acknowledge that w-when you made the ‘morning suckness’ t-typo.”

“Morning suckness?” Toriel asked. “Why did I never think of that one?”

“if it helps, tori, i give you free reign to use it as you see fit from now on,” Sans said, laying a hand on her forearm.

Toriel rested her hand on Sans’. “Thank you, dear, that is a comfort.”

“anytime, babe, anytime.”

One of the group members’ cell phones went off.

“Hold up guys, it’s mine, be right back,” Undyne announced.

She went off to the side to have her phone call.

“So,” Toriel started, “aside from the morning suckness in traffic, how have you been on that front?”
Alphys seemed a tad flustered. “O-oh, uh, p-pretty okay, actually! I feel like t-the worst of it has p-
passed, honestly!”

“That’s nice to hear!” Toriel said with a smile.

“Hey, it was Asgore,” Undyne said as she walked back up to the family. “He and Shelby are on
their way, Chas can’t make it tonight, he’s...not well.”

“Oh, that’s too bad,” Toriel said.

“MRS. MILLER SAID WE CAN PAY TO ORDER COPIES OF THE PERFORMANCE ON
DVD,” Papyrus said.

“Asgore’s bringing a camcorder, though,” Undyne explained.

“Actually, he left it at his place and didn’t even realize until we’d been parked!”

Everyone in the group turned around.

“Sup, Shelby!”

Shelby shrugged. “Not much, you?”

“Alphy’s morning suckness is starting to clear up a bit, so there’s that,” Undyne said.

“You mean morning sickness, right?” Asgore asked.

“What’s the difference!” Sans and Toriel exclaimed in unison before laughing.

Asgore was both confused and slightly uncomfortable.

Shelby glanced up at him. “Come on, let’s have a seat.”

Asgore glanced back at her and smiled before following her.

Hunter completed practicing his solo piece one last time, and the final ensemble pieces were all
practiced out as well.

“Okay performers, are you ready?” Miss Halsey asked.

The yeahs were not reassuring.

“Did you not hear me or something? I said, PERFORMERS, ARE YOU READY?!”

The chorus of cheers was more than satisfactory.

“THAT’S what I like to hear! Line up, single file, and let’s get this show on the road!”

The kids cheered and chattered as they lined up shortest to tallest and filed out of the music building.

This was going to be fun.

The cafetorium lights dimmed.

Showtime.
In the darkness the children filed onto the risers.

The lights came up.

Hunter looked out into the crowd. That was a lot of people to disappoint.

Miss Halsey stepped to the microphone. No feedback.

“Friends. Family members. Teachers. My name is Aimee Halsey, and I am the music teacher here at Mountainside Elementary. Tonight, we would like to welcome you to the annual Mountainside Elementary School Spring Concert!”

The crowd applauded and cheered.

As soon as they stopped, Miss Halsey continued.

“Now, this is my first year teaching, and may I say that you all should be very proud to know such wonderful, amazing people like our performers. I know I am. They all worked so hard for tonight’s performance, practicing right up until the very last minute. Tonight, we will make sure that you enjoy our performance as much as we did rehearsing it.”

More applause.

“Before we begin, I would like to thank the teachers of Mountainside Elementary. If it weren’t for your tireless efforts, none of this would be possible.”

Miss Halsey glanced in Linda’s direction.

“I would also like to extend my thanks to Frisk E. Dreemurr! They are in fourth grade, and they will be translating tonight’s performance into American Sign Language!”

Frisk had been standing near Miss Halsey in view of the audience translating. They curtseyed since they had been forced to wear a skirt.

“And so family and friends, without further ado, we present to you: Mountainside Elementary School’s Spring Concert for 20XQ!”

And so began the concert.

The ensemble pieces and solos came and went until finally, at long last, it was time.

“Our final soloist this evening will be performing Electricity by Elton John. Please welcome, Hunter J. Thompson.”

“Wait, WHAT?!” Linda shouted.

The people who heard her either stared at her, clapped louder out of sheer spite, or both.

Linda was very pissed for many reasons.

Hunter walked down from his place on the risers and stood at the microphone.

He looked out at the crowd.

His mother was glaring at him, almost purple with rage.
He knew he didn’t have long.

Then he saw Papyrus and Mettaton and the rest of Frisk’s family.

Papyrus and Mettaton waved at him in what seemed to be a mixture of excitement and pride. They and the rest of Frisk’s family group gave him a thumbs up.

Hunter took a deep breath.

Here goes...

“I can’t really explain it~ I haven’t got the words~ It’s a feeling that you can’t~ Control~”

Linda crossed her arms in front of her, her left eye twitching.

“I suppose it’s like forgetting~ Losing who you are~ And at the time~ Something makes you whole~”

Mettaton watched as Hunter performed. He leaned on Papyrus and held his hand.

Mettaton felt a strange kind of pride watching this child perform. He wasn’t sure how to describe it, but he knew it was a type of pride.

“Then suddenly I’m flying~ Flying like a bird~ Like electricity~ Electricity~ Sparks inside of me~ And I’m free~ I’m~ Free~”

As Hunter sang through the song, he became more confident. And with the confidence came something else.

Belonging. He knew then that he belonged on the stage. He could forgot how much he hated himself, he forgot his fears, he forgot even himself in favor of the music.

Hunter was filled with electricity.

He was free.

“Oh oh whoa~ I’m~ Free~”

The song ended.

He returned from the high.

There was stunned silence.

Then the applause began.

A standing ovation. Everyone was standing and applauding him.

Hunter couldn’t believe it.

He was in tears when he bowed and returned to his place on the risers.

He read a quote this morning while looking for some songs to listen to, a quote by Kurt Cobain taken from a song by Neil Young. It suited his situation well he thought.

Better to burn out than to fade away…
He could hear them talking. He knew that she could hear them too.

All of them were praising Hunter’s performance in some way or another. He knew he’d gotten carried away. He also knew that his mother was out for his blood.

Why else would he be hiding under the piano in the music building crying and hyperventilating in a fetal position?

He squeaked when he heard a knock on the door of the music building.

Hunter trembled, not even breathing as he remained hidden. He heard voices outside of the building. Familiar ones.

The two Monsters to whom the voices belonged opened the door.

He suddenly realized that he was shaking so badly that the piano was shaking too.

He whimpered in fear.

“HUNTER?”

The footsteps of Papyrus and Mettaton came closer to the piano.

They crouched down as close to Hunter’s eye level as possible.

“HUNTER, THERE YOU ARE. A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE LOOKING FOR YOU.”

Hunter whimpered.

“Papyrus, go see if you can find a bottle of water, okay?” Mettaton asked quietly. “Let Sans and the kids know if you see them, but tell no one else. Hunter needs a little space to calm down.”

Papyrus nodded. Before standing up to leave he put a hand on Hunter’s head and patted down his hair.

Hunter stopped shaking as much.

After Papyrus left, Mettaton moved to sit next to the panicking child.

He rubbed Hunter’s back in slow, calming circular motions.

“Hunter, sweetie, take a few deep breaths, okay? In for seven seconds, out for ten seconds, okay?”

Hunter breathed as he was told. He calmed down a bit more. He was no longer whimpering, and his shaking was reduced to slight trembling.

“I’M BACK WITH A BOTTLE OF WATER,” Papyrus announced as quietly as he could. “THE VENDING MACHINE IN THE TEACHERS LOUNGE WAS EASIER TO GET TO SINCE EVERYONE IS IN THE CAFETORIUM.”

He sat on Hunter’s other side.

“Thanks, Papy. Hunter, do you think you can keep some water down?”

Hunter nodded. Papyrus opened the bottle and gave it to him.

“SLOW SIPS, ALRIGHT?” Papyrus said.
Hunter nodded as he took a few small sips.

Mettaton continued to rub Hunter’s back.

“You were absolutely beautiful tonight, Hunter.”

“Mmm.”

“YOU REALLY WERE! MANY PEOPLE WERE IN TEARS! MYSELF INCLUDED!”

“Mmm?”

“Yes, really. You’re a star, and you shone brilliantly tonight!”

“WE ARE SO PROUD OF YOU!”

Hunter looked up at the Monsters with wide eyes.

“Mom’s not though...nothing I do is ever good enough for her...I try and I try and I TRY, but it’s NEVER ENOUGH! I know what makes her ANGRY and-and DISAPPOINTED, but I don’t know what could possibly make her HAPPY or PROUD, i-it’s like there’s something about me that she hates so much that-that she can’t feel proud! It-it’s almost like she HATES me -”

Hunter was interrupted by a hug from Mettaton and Papyrus on either side of him.

There were no more words.

Hunter hugged them back as he cried.

Why couldn’t his parents be like these two?

Linda stood outside the building smoking. It wasn’t helping. She was still pissed.

Hannah was inside with Helen. Hunter had run off somewhere. Linda was worried about him.

“shouldn’t you be out looking for your kid?”

“Fuck off, Sans, I’m not in the mood to deal with your bullshit.”

Sans, as always, showed no reaction. “no one’s ever ready to hear their faults from the point of view of another person, but they’ve got to eventually.”

“I said fuck off, are you braindead!!”

“yeah yeah, you hate off, we get it.”

Linda grabbed another cigarette and lit it.

“If you’re not going to leave, just tell me what the hell you want from me.”

“the truth.”

Linda raised her eyebrows in confusion. “About what?”

“do you really support hunter? or is that only when he does what you want him to?”
“Excuse me?!”

“you heard me. and if you keep dodging the question, i’ll keep rephrasing it in terms that can and will make you look bad. now answer the question. truthfully. because if you lie, linda…”

Sans’ eyelight dimmed, his left eye socket flickered Yellow and Cyan.

“i’ll know.”

Linda shuddered. She swallowed.

“O-of course I love my children, w-why would you -”

“that wasn’t the question, linda,” Sans snapped. “would you support your children if they made choices you don’t agree with as long as it would make them happy in the long run?”

“T-that would depend on the choice, I mean -”

“what choices would you not support? and if you suggest something that no one in their right mind would support, keep guessing.”

Linda blanched a little.

“maybe i should be more specific,” Sans said with a sigh. “are you proud of your son’s performance tonight? even just a little?”

“He went behind my back and -”

“is that a no?”

Linda shut her mouth.

“okay then. how ‘bout in general? are you proud of your children, and would you love them no matter what?”

Linda went red in the face. What kind of question is that?

“As long as they follow the word of God, I will love my children.”

“which version, yours or the original?”

“I beg your pardon?!” Linda shouted.

“if you truly followed the bible as you claim to do, you would follow all of it, not pick and choose whichever part makes you feel better about yourself.”

“You have no right to judge me, you filthy demon.”

“nor do you have any right to judge me, but you do it anyway.”

Linda growled.

“now if you’ll excuse me, i gotta get back to my family. and i want you to think about what makes you proud of your children, what you love about them. because a parent should love their children, and support them no matter what. see ya.”

Linda watched as Sans reentered the building.
She threw out the empty cigarette packet and got her phone out as she walked out to the car.

She needed some time alone.

Helen’s phone went off.

Linda wanted Hunter and Hannah to spend the night. Again.

“Hey, Linda just texted me,” she told Toriel. “She mentioned needing to be alone for a while, so Hunter and Hannah should stay with you guys tonight.”

Toriel nodded in understanding. “But we still haven’t found Hunter…”

“WE GOT HIM!”

Papyrus and Mettaton walked down the makeshift aisle with Hunter in tow.

“Sorry for worrying everyone,” Hunter said quietly.

Caroline put a hand on his shoulder. “It’s fine, I understand. We’re just glad you’re okay.”

Caroline turned around. “Right?”

Every one of Hunter’s friends expressed their agreement.

“You did AWESOME!” MK exclaimed excitedly.

Frisk nodded excitedly in agreement. <<I nearly stopped signing along because I was so caught up in listening!>> they admitted.

“Totally worth being trapped in a suit for two hours,” Brian said with a smile.

Hunter smiled back.

“Well, how did it feel?” Mettaton asked excitedly.

“Amazing!” Hunter said. “It was like...it was like the song said, y’know? I was free! I was doing what I love and it was…”

Hunter took a few breaths to calm himself down. He was getting a little TOO excited.

“I’d never had more fun in my life, I don’t think,” he admitted.

“Well, we’re glad you enjoyed yourself,” Toriel said with a smile. “It seems that the children will be spending the night at our place for Frisk’s birthday.”

The group of children cheered at this.

“hey, what’s with the cheering, did i miss the encore?”

Toriel giggled. “No, Sans, the children are simply excited to be spending the night.”

“oh, okay. hope no one’s allergic to cats.”

“I’m honestly amazed that of all things, the one you’re NOT allergic to is cats,” Brian said to Levi.
“All of Levi’s and Sharona’s allergies appear to be associated with hay fever,” Caroline said. “I don’t think animals have much to do with hay beyond eating it, and since cats are carnivorous they don’t eat hay.”

Sans quirked a brow ridge. Caroline’s logic made a weird sort of sense in this situation.

Caroline was petting Isolde, who purred softly in the Human’s lap.

“You know the story of Tristan and Isolde?” she asked suddenly.

“Uh-uh.”

“Would you like to?”

Frisk nodded.

“Birthday Kid wants it, all other votes are overruled. Let’s begin.”

Everyone gathered to listen to Caroline tell a tale of the tragic romance of the Cornish knight Tristan and his adulterous affair with the Irish princess Isolde, the bride of his uncle Mark of Cornwall.

As the girl expertly wove her own improvised adaptation of the legend, Mettaton received a phone call.

And it was JUST getting to a good part.

He excused himself to take it.

He stepped into the backyard and answered it.

Papyrus watched him go out the back door. He waited for Mettaton as he listened to Caroline tell of the moment Tristan and Isolde accidentally imbibed the love potion that caused them to fall in love.

Metatron came back in ten minutes later.

“WELL?” Papyrus asked. “WHAT IS IT?”

Mettaton looked at him strangely and sighed. “Papy, may...may I speak with you in private for a moment?”

Now Papyrus was more than a little concerned.

He followed Mettaton into the backyard and sat next to him on the porch swing.

Mettaton turned to face Papyrus and held his hands.

“Papy...” Mettaton started nervously. “I just received a call from my agent.”

“WHAT DID HE SAY?”

Mettaton tightened his grip on Papyrus’ hands and took a few deep breaths to brace himself for what he was about to say.

“My first tour’s been scheduled. I’m going on a nationwide tour starting next summer.”

Papyrus was quiet.
Mettaton always got a bit nervous when Papyrus was quiet. It made him a bit scared that he’d done something wrong.

Papyrus hugged him.

“THAT’S WONDERFUL NEWS, HONEY! I’M SO HAPPY FOR YOU!”

Papyrus kissed Mettaton.

Mettaton kissed back before stopping Papyrus before they got TOO into it.

“Papyrus, you do realize what this could mean for...for us? Right?”

Mettaton looked up at Papyrus, eyes pleading him to understand what went unsaid.

“I DON’T WANT TO...BUT I DO.”

They held onto each other in silence.

“What are we going to do?” Papyrus squeaked out. Mettaton could feel him fidgeting with his scarf.

“We’ll figure something out, baby. For now, let’s just...do what we always do, alright Papyrus-darling?”

Papyrus nodded and nuzzled Mettaton.

He didn’t want to let go. Not yet.

Not ever.

Mettaton wasn’t sure he wanted to either.

“...but when Mark went to lay flowers on his beloved Isolde’s grave the third day, the roses and brambles had grown back, intertwining once more. Mark believed this to be a sign that Tristan and Isolde were indeed truly in love, and so he erected a stone marker inscribed with their named, which can be seen in Cornwall to this day, a testament to their tragic love.”

There were tears in the eyes of all who heard.

Caroline had the wan smile she wore whenever she read a book. Some might take it to be mockery.

The clapping came and went.

Caroline still had Isolde in her lap, petting her as a villain would their right-hand pet.

Penelope applauded. The rest followed.

Caroline flinched, causing the cat leap from her lap and slip off into a shadow.

She blushed and hid her face in her hands.

<<She’s so cute when she’s all flustered,>> Frisk signed with a flirtatious smile.

“I know, right?” Penelope giggled. “She’s almost like a cat herself!”
“She really is, kind of,” Hunter said.

Caroline peeked out from between her fingers. She hid herself again.

“Children, the pizza will be here in ten to twenty minutes!” Toriel called from the kitchen.

“Hey Frisk, what kinda cake do you have?” Brian asked.

<<Chocolate cake with buttercream frosting.>>

“Dat sounds yummy!” Hannah exclaimed in excitement.

“I’m sure it is!” Hunter said.

“Hey punks!” Undyne shouted. “Guess who jacked the karaoke machine from the basement?!”

“A Fish?” Caroline asked, her voice deadpan.

“Yep! Or are you kids all musicked out?”

<<Let’s DO this!>> Frisk signed.

The other kids agreed.

“Awright!”

“Have any of you seen Sans?” Toriel asked.

“I was just in the basement, and he wasn’t there,” Undyne said. “But I got a karaoke machine!”

Toriel sighed and returned to the kitchen to text Sans.

She really hoped he was alright.

He didn’t come here often. Not anymore.

This was only the second time in three months. He’d been here more times in the last three months than he had over the course of ten years.

But he had his reasons.

It was almost time.

Sans stood before a dusty old tarp covering a broken machine that resembled an ATM.

The machine that took everything from him.

His hope. His father. His peace of mind.

Wait, no, that wasn’t everything. He still had so much. He’d even gained some things and gotten others back.

He had a little more hope than he used to.

He still had his brother.
He found love.

Sans sighed. He felt guilty for running off without a word to anyone. But this was important. If they knew... who knows how they would react. So far the only ones who knew that Dr. Gaster would be returning aside from Sans were Alphys, Papyrus, Frisk, Chara, The Player, and the Heart of Gold.

He removed the tarp.

The machine had wires jutting out in random places. The screen was cracked - it would definitely have to be replaced. Some buttons were missing. The main lever was completely gone, the wires that connected it hanging limply from where it used to be. Some of the metal parts were rusting.

The rear panel was still attached. He wasn’t going to mess with it now, though. Too much work involved that could easily be done later.

He briefly wondered who could have sabotaged it. Maybe they were still alive, living their life with nary a regret for their crime.

It made Sans sick to think that. He shuddered and tried to focus his mind somewhere, ANYWHERE else.

His phone going off provided the desired respite.

*I text from: tori*

*Sans, where are you? I am very worried about you.*

Oh shit. He’d made her worry. Not good.

*sorry tori*

*i just have some stuff to take care of for work*

*i'll tell you about it later tonight*

*i promise*

He sighed. He was very much afraid to tell Toriel about this endeavor in case it all went kaput, but he felt as though he owed it to her. She’d been a good friend of his father in the past, after all. She deserved to know.

*Okay then. I'll be waiting! I love you! :)*

Sans smiled at the message. He always did whenever Toriel said that she loved him in some way.

*love you too babe*

*im on my way back home now*

He’d finished what he’d come here to do anyway. Assess the exterior of the machine and take note of anything that needs fixing.

He took a few photos of it with his phone to send to Alphys in case she needed them.

He sighed.
“welp. looks like we’ll be seein’ you soon, dad. i dunno how soon exactly, but i know it’s gonna happen. love ya, dad.”


Dark.

It was just dark. No darker yet darker. No darker.

Just...just dark.

It wouldn’t be long now -

Wait. What was that sound.

“...seein’ you soon...dunno how...it’s gonna happen...love ya, dad.”

Gaster’s eye sockets widened. A few purple tears formed and fell.

He was coming home.

W.D. Gaster was coming home.

But not yet. It would be soon, though.

Until then, he would just have to **Persevere.**

____________________

*Never in your life did you think you would be quite this filled with*

*DETERMINATION*

____________________

Chapter End Notes

What I Did For Love - A Chorus Line
Birthday - The Beatles
Strawberry Fields - The Beatles
Electricity - Billy Elliot

ARC II: END

Fun Fact: I respond to all comments. All. No exceptions. Because I love comments and the encouragement they provide, so I want to thank the commenters in some small way.
3:37 P.M., April 9, 20XQ

It’s a stormy day outside.

Wind is blowing.

Thunder is crashing.

On days like this, kids like you…

...are listening to PTA Linda get riggity-rekt.

“...and that is my Spring Break. A yacht trip around the southeast coast of Florida, a tour of the Everglades, and a deeper understanding of Darth Vader’s grudge against sand.”

The members of the PTA who weren’t Linda clapped.

“Good for you Randy,” she said through clenched teeth. “Now that THAT’S out of the way, today we will be discussing the upcoming school field trips. Have we settled on anything in particular?”

“The survey handouts show that first graders unanimously chose the zoo, second and third graders the science museum, and fourth and fifth graders chose the Ebott Historical Center,” Helen said. “And since kindergarten and pre-k are going to the zoo already, I’m guessing we have our field trips
lined up for 20XQ?”

Linda blinked a few times in surprise. “Okay?”

“Alrighty then.”

Linda narrowed her eyes and grabbed her purse. “Ten minute break.”

Linda walked out of the library tailed by Diana.

The other parents were finally free to chat amongst themselves.

“So, I take it Florida’s pretty nice this time of year?” Sans asked.

“A balmy 80-something, yep,” Randy said as he leaned back in his seat with his hands behind his head.

“Seriously, I almost thought it was August!” Sharona mused. “Then I came back here and remembered what Antarctica feels like.”

“At least we’re not in Colorado anymore though,” Monica added.

“You got THAT right,” Randy said. “I still get daily weather reports, and it is currently -2 degrees with a foot of snow in Silverton.”

There was a hush among the crowd. A single unidentified parent uttered the word “Damn.”

“I’m sure the Animas River is dammed.”

Sans high fived Randy for his pun.

“It’s 64 in Trinidad right now,” Monica said.

“That’s quite the disparity in temperatures,” Sans mused.

“Yep,” Randy said.

“I can’t believe it’s been a year and a month since we’ve been married already…” Sharona sighed.

“Tell me about it,” Randy said, draping his arm over Sharona’s shoulder. “Time either passes too fast or too slow.”

“I just came to the conclusion that time does whatever the fuck it wants,” Sans said.

No one could argue with that.

Frisk jumped one of Caroline’s pieces.

Caroline looked at the board and blinked a few times.

She jumped three of Frisk’s pieces and landed on the opposite edge of the board.

“King me.”

Frisk blew their bangs up and flipped the piece over to distinguish its status as king.
They moved one of their pieces from its starting point.

Caroline’s king piece jumped over it and another piece.

Frisk had only one piece left on the board. One poor, doomed little piece that they’d named Enrique.

But Frisk would not give in. It was better to lose than to give in.

They were filled with Determination.

They moved the piece to a spot further away from any of Caroline’s pieces.

Caroline moved a random piece.

Frisk moved their piece.

Caroline moved one of her kings.

Frisk moved their piece. They smiled. One more move and Enrique would be king.

Caroline looked from Frisk to the board and back again.

She moved one of her pieces from its starting point.

Enrique had been jumped.

“That’s 3 for Penelope and me, none for you and MK,” Caroline stated. “I’m getting bored, so I think I’m gonna go read a book. Wanna join me, Nell?”

“Sure!” Penelope replied with a smile.

Penelope followed Caroline over to the beanbags as she fiddled with the chewable seahorse necklace Caroline had gotten for her in Florida. Penelope loved seahorses.

She considered herself honored to be so trusted by Caroline.

She wanted Caroline to know that she trusted her too.

Hunter was challenging Brian at Pokemon. Brian had Sun, Hunter had Moon.

“Dude, why are you playing as a girl?” Brian asked.

“B-because I wanted to see if it’s any different from playing as a boy!” Hunter stammered.

“Okay, geez. I was just asking.”

Hunter slumped.

He’d named his player character Charmaine. He liked the name Charmaine.

Brian named his...Brian. He always named his characters either after him or the default character name.

Brian had started with Litten. Hunter chose Popplio.

Brian sent out his Incineroar. Hunter sent out his Raichu - Alolan form, naturally.
Hunter knew that his Raichu was weak against Incineroar. It was all part of the plan.

When his Raichu lost, Hunter sent out Lumineon.

Lumineon used Water Pulse and won.

Brian sent out Xurkitree.

Xurkitree used Charge Beam and won.

Hunter sent out Bewear.

Beware’s Quick Claw let it move first. Its Bulldoze was super effective.

Brian was starting to get a bit angry.

He sent out Hariyama.

Beware used Aerial Ace.

Hariyama fainted.

Brian sent out Toucannon.

Beware used Rock Slide.

Toucannon fainted.

Brian was clenching his jaw now.

Brian sent out Araquanid.

He suddenly realized that that decision was really stupid when Bewear used Aerial Ace.

He sent out his final Pokemon, Solgaleo.

Solgaleo was defeated with a Quick Claw and a critical-hit Hammer Arm.

Hunter realized that Brian was growling a bit.

“Bri, chill. It’s just a game. It’s not like it’s a Nuzlocke run, okay?”

Brian groaned. “Fine…But next time you’re dead meat, got it?!”

Hunter smiled patiently. “If you say so.”

Hunter didn’t notice Brian’s light blush.

Caroline had overheard the upcoming field trip plans. She loved museums.

She decided to look up the Ebott Historical Society on the library computers.

The article on the EHS webpage said that it was headquartered at Breedlove Manor, former home to one of the founding families of Ebott, the Breedloves.

Caroline clicked on the link to Breedlove Manor.
Breedlove Manor was built in c.1850 by Tophet Breedlove (March 3, 1820-January 10, 1864). The stately French Colonial-style plantation home housed four generations of Breedloves from 1857 to 1932. It was purchased from the family of Tobias “Old Dog” Edgemere in 1973 upon the passing of its last residential inhabitant, Old Dog’s grandson Alfred Edgemere-Sanchez.

Caroline clicked on the link attached to Tophet Breedlove’s name.

**Tophet Breedlove (March 3, 1820-January 10, 1864)** was one of Ebott’s Five Founders, along with Tobias “Old Dog” Edgemere, Andrew Olsen, Elihu Todd, and Philip Trent. He and his wife Ruth Jenkins Breedlove (April 10, 1825-September 17, 1852) had seven children: sons Zebulon (c. 1840-September 17, 1862), Yuval and Xenobius (c. 1841-September 17, 1862), Waldo (c. 1844), and Uriah (c. 1851-October 26, 1922); and daughter Charity (c.1843-July 13, 1852).

Caroline clicked on the named of each son. Zebulon, Yuval and Xenobius died in the Battle of Antietam during the Civil War if the coinciding dates are to be believed, and Waldo was stillborn. Charity died of mysterious means at a young age; the shock of her only daughter’s death caused Constance to rapidly weaken and subsequently die. As a result Uriah was the only Breedlove of the generation to bear children.

Uriah had four daughters; Annie, Marie, Rosie, and Janie; and one son, Ambrose.

**Ambrose Breedlove (March 16, 1880-November 11, 1918)** was a clergyman. He and his wife Constance Parker Breedlove (c. 1882-September 15, 1956) had two children; a son, William (September 2, 1900-September 11, 1915), and a daughter, Charity -

“Caroline, time to go home!”

“Just a second Dad!”

Caroline finished the article, closed out of the dozen or so tabs, and shutdown the computer.

She recalled what she’d read.

The Breedloves had ISSUES.

But then again, don’t all families have a few of those?

Sans looked at the loading PDF file Hyperion had mailed him. He could appreciate the guy’s attempt at making it look like a research paper. Well, that’s technically what it was, but the circumstances deemed the format unnecessary by default. But Tom had a flair for the dramatic, what could he say.

Tom Erikson, AKA Hyperion. Born and raised in Los Angeles, he was the one who invited Sans onto the Heart of Gold in the first place. His Tumblr dealt in fandoms, memes, and technology help. If anyone on the Heart of Gold was having technical difficulties or needed a meme for a particular fandom, Tom was your go-to guy. Tom also partook in WoW sessions with Sans and Chas once in awhile.

The PDF finally loaded. These guys and their fucking huge-ass files.
Sans read through the first twenty pages of sheer breakthrough with a hand over his mouth to keep his overwhelming emotions back.

Stars above, these guys are amazing.

Sans downloaded the 420-page file and closed his laptop so he could process all that he’d covered so far.

So far, twenty pages had agreed with his father’s theory - that time and space are intricately connected. They are one and the same, and yet completely separate. Liam added in a footnote on that page that compared them to “twins conjoined at the head” - A really weird but accurate comparison. They share countless fundamental elements, but even a complete idiot can tell that they’re different even if they can’t explain how.

His father had planned to test this theory by combining science and Magic to create The Machine that Sans had been working on fixing regularly for the past few weeks.

But he realized far too late that there had been flaws in the theory. Those unseen flaws had gotten him erased from the fabric of existence.

But the thing about theories? Until someone else comes up with a better idea, they’ll always be accepted. That’s how the geocentric model of the universe remained untouched for thousands of years.

So Sans kept his faith in his father’s theory. And seeing it here, not only with with proof to back it up, but expanded upon…

It filled him with so many emotions he couldn’t name a single one. It was overwhelming.

But through all those emotions, one as yet undeniable truth remained.

Dr. WingDings Gaster was coming home. Any time after The Machine was fixed, he would be coming home.

Maybe even sooner if The Player kept their promise.

Sans forced down most of his emotions - at least the ones known to cause ocular leakage in certain amounts - and plugged in his laptop for the night.

He briefly considered asking to sleep in Toriel’s room that night before a...certain something advised against it.

She probably understood Skeleton mating and courtship, but Sans wanted her to be the one to bring up THAT particular topic.

He decided to take a shower before going to a bed.

A nice, long, COLD shower.

Toriel sat in her room at her computer going through emails.
She reported the spam and deleted the Pinterest one. She checked each of the work emails in chronological order. All of them notified her of things she ALREADY KNEW ABOUT DAMMIT.

She deleted them and took a sip of lavender mint tea.

Toriel opened a game of solitaire. Of all things associated with technology, Toriel held a special place in her SOUL for solitaire and dank memes.

She suddenly heard the shower turn on.

Toriel briefly paused her game to consider her options.

Frisk was asleep. Isolde was in Frisk’s room. Papyrus was at Mettaton’s (and had been for the last week or so).

Maybe joining Sans in the shower wouldn’t hurt…

Oh what was she THINKING? Of COURSE it would. It was MUCH too early in their relationship for something so...INTIMATE to occur between them. And what if they woke Frisk? No, wait, that child slept like a log, the end of the damn world wouldn’t wake them.

Toriel sighed. She did want to be more intimate with Sans, and she knew Sans wanted to be as well. She was aware of Skeleton mating and courtship rituals, and how important they were to a Skeleton.

She was ready, but by the same token she was...apprehensive, due to what it would mean for them in the long run. She had time that he didn’t. Unless they were to somehow have a child together…

Wait.

Was that possible? And if so, what was the rate of conception? Would childbirth have any complications?

Toriel made a note to herself to read through her biology, history, and genealogy books for answers if any existed.

Wait.

What the hell was she thinking, contemplating the possibility of children with Sans not three months into their relationship? Either Toriel was crazy, or she really had it bad.

Perhaps it was a bit of both. There wasn’t much difference when she really thought about it.

She couldn’t believe how very wrong she was.

Alphys still had a few more weeks of morning suckness/sickness, maybe more. With her luck, she’d have this morning sickness until the very end of her pregnancy.

This was going to be a long six more months…

“Hey Alphy.”

Alphys moaned into her pillow in response to her wife’s greeting.
“I got some mint tea and saltines for ya,” Undyne said quietly. Stars Alphys loved Undyne’s quiet voice.

Alphys removed her face from the pillow. “Thanks, Dyne…”

Undyne smiled and took her place on the bed, trying to jostle it as little as she could.

She spooned Alphys, lacing their fingers together and nuzzling into her neck.

“Haruka~ Tooku~ Kokoro~ Yureru~ Kawasu~ Hitomi~ Setsunaku~”

Alphys relaxed as she listened to Undyne sing. She loved Undyne’s voice…

“Ah~ Kirameite~ Yasashiku~ Utau umi~ Ah~ Usure yuku~ Kioku no~ Sazanami~”

Alphys made a mental note to herself to rewatch Please Save My Earth. Or reread it. If she could find the copies. She’d have to ask Sans, he liked the sci-fi elements enough to ask to borrow the first few volumes back in high school.

She fell asleep in her wife’s arms, anime OVA theme tunes being idly hummed to her all the while.

Shelby jumped when she heard the doorbell ring.

She sighed. She knew she had to be the one to get it. With Chas in the state he’s in, it’s really not surprising. And she was very much fine with it.

She got off the couch and answered the door to the apartment.

The Boss Monster on the other side smiled shyly.

“Ah, howdy Ms. Wong!” he greeted.

“Asgore. Do you need something?”

She led him inside.

“No, I’m simply checking in. I uh...take it that Chas is still…?”

“I know it’s hard for him, he experienced it differently, but it’s…”

Shelby sighed and plopped down on the couch, holding her head in her hands. “…it’s been seven years since the accident, and it’s STILL the same. It’s like we only just told him, and it’s all so...so…”

She felt a large, warm hand on her shoulder.

She looked up at Asgore. He looked at her with sympathy and understanding in his eyes.

He understood what Chas was going through.

Shelby felt her eyes burn with forming tears.

She tried to fight them off and failed miserably.

She knew she had no right to feel frustrated at him for still mourning. His wife Esperanza was dead at the scene, his daughter Mercedes was never found and presumed dead. The guy in the other
vehicle was arrested for DUI and got off practically scot-free.

Things like that don’t just go away. Not when you were in the accident too, the sole survivor.

Shelby knew this. But it didn’t change the fact that she was frustrated.

She just felt so helpless. She wanted to help Chas, but she couldn’t do that if he didn’t know how to any more than she did.

She wanted Justice for her family.

Asgore simply held Shelby close to him.

It was the best he could do right now.

They flopped back onto the bed, blushing and sweating and panting from the physical exertion their task required.

“We should TOTALLY do that again...”

“I AGREE. WHO KNEW WII HIP-HOP DANCE BOWLING WAS SO FUN AND YET SO THOROUGHLY EXHAUSTING?”

“I know, right? Jane Fonda can suck it, THIS is where it’s at.”

“TOTALLY.”

Papyrus and Mettaton lay in silence, no sound but the Wii background music and their breathing.

“RICHARD SIMMONS TIME?”

“Richard Simmons Time.”

*I’m safe~ Up high~ Nothing can touch me~ But why do I feel this party’s over~ No pain~ Inside~ You’re my protection~ But why do I feel this good sober?*

Hunter hummed along to his music as he wrote in his diary.

*Dear Diary: Today was pretty good! I passed my math test - a 92, yay~! I also beat Brian at Pokemon again. He wondered why I had a girl character. Is it really that big a deal? I just felt like being the girl character. I always do. It just feels more right, if that makes sense? Well it makes sense to me. In other news, mom STILL hasn’t mentioned the Spring Concert Incident. That’s probably a good thing, though. But then again I’m terrified that when she DOES bring it up -

“Hunter! 9 o’clock! Lights out!”

“Okay! Night Mom!”

*Mom just called lights out. Ciao, Diary! ~HJT*

Hunter closed out of the notes app and changed the playlist to one with slower songs and hummed along quietly.

*Love me tender~ Love me sweet~ Never let me go~ You have made~ My life complete~ And I
Okay it’s been hours now, he should REALLY be done by now.

Toriel had tried going back to sleep, but too much kept her from sleeping.

She checked the clock at her bedside.  11:43 P.M. Now bathing for two hours she could fathom, but showering? Just what on earth was Sans doing if not showering?

Then she suddenly recalled an incident from long ago when WingDings used the bathhouse in the capitol to test...something about how being underground affected the speed of water drainage.

Those first few decades in the Underground were rather...hectic, to say the least.

Oh look, a memory that showed how the Doctor was like Papyrus. So eager and excitable...and more than a little accident-prone…

Toriel pulled herself from her reverie. She’d been remembering more and more about the Doctor since Sans had told her of his existence from behind the Ruin Door.

She sighed decided to check on Sans. It’s possible that he was dissociating. It was a somewhat-common symptom of depression, after all, and she dissociated once in awhile.

She walked out from her room and down the hall to the bathroom.

She knocked on the door. But nobody came.

She turned the knob and slowly opened the door.

Apparently the shower was cold. Toriel could of only two reasons someone would do this, and only one of those two could possibly apply to her boyfriend right now.

“Sans? Is everything alright?”

No response.

His silence was more than a little disconcerting.

“Sans, I’m opening the curtain, okay?”

She grabbed at the curtain and slowly slid it open.

Sans was...definitely not clothed.

But he was also definitely not awake.

Toriel couldn’t believe her eyes. This man had actually fallen asleep standing up in a cold shower.

Toriel pondered her options. She could leave him in the shower with or without a sticky note on the mirror explaining what happened. She could also turn off the shower, dry him off, clothe him, and take him to bed. Or she could shou and startle him awake - no too dangerous, he could slip and hurt himself.

Toriel smirked and blushed at the brilliant idea she just had.

Well, it seemed that she was indeed ready for the next step in their relationship.
She really hoped it worked.

She couldn’t believe it worked.

Penelope had taken Frisk’s advice and put her leftover milkshake in the freezer. She’d been skeptical of the determined child’s claims that the milkshake would turn into ice cream, but they had been right. This was indeed ice cream.

Penelope removed the cup from the freezer, shoved a spoon into it, and started eating.

But something was missing.

She opened the fridge and took out the whipped cream, shook it and squirted it onto her treat.

There. Perfect.

“What are you eating?”

Oh no.

Penelope turned around slowly, coming face to face Theo.

She swallowed the bite of ice cream in her mouth and said, “Remember last night we got milkshakes and I didn’t finish mine so I took it home?”

“What about it?”

“I put it in the freezer. It’s amazing. Wanna bite?”

Theo looked at her weirdly before snatching the spoon from her and taking a bite.

“Dang,” he whispered to himself in awe.

“I know right?” Penelope asked. “Frisk told me about it, they said that Dr. Sans was the one who told them about it.”

“Huh. Wonder what else that guy knows.”

“A lot, probably. Frisk said he’s a scientist, and that his dad was a scientist too!”

“Wow.”

“Yeah, and -”

“What are you two still doing up?”

The kids turned to Monica.

“Hi Mom.”

“We’re eating ice cream! Want some?”

Monica was confused. “But we don’t even have ice cream,” she said.

Theo handed her the cup and spoon.
Monica took a bite.
“Dang.”

Theo and Penelope gave each other smug glances.

Chara laid on the back, limbs splayed like those of a starfish, staring into the Void.

Their brain was flooded with countless thoughts. From the flood of thoughts questions bubbled to the surface.

When, if ever, would Sans fix The Machine? Could The Player be trusted to uphold their promise? Why are Mini M&Ms better than the regular ones?

“The answers to your questions are sooner than you think, I’m still unsure but cautiously hopeful, and higher candy shell to chocolate ratio.”

Chara bolted upright and searched for the source of the answer to their thoughts.

Directly behind them was the culprit, Dr. W.D. Gaster.

“Stop reading my mind, old man!” Chara snapped.

“I was not reading your mind, young Dreemurr,” Gaster said calmly. “Although it is rather easy to do when your thoughts appear in red text in front of you, as happens when you are stressed.”

Chara mentally swore.

“Language, Chara.”

Chara growled.

Gaster smiled knowingly.

“I understand that you are troubled. The future bears many mysteries, and when he have an idea of what the future holds, it can be terrifying and thrilling in equal measures.”

Gaster placed his right hand on Chara’s head.

“Just let the future do what it will. Learn from the past, take advantage of the present. The future, no matter how prepared we think we may be for it, has ways of surprising us.”

Chara was silent. Even their thoughts were silent.

“You’re almost there, huh, old man?” Chara asked quietly.

Gaster smiled. “That I am. And I cannot wait to see my boys once more.”

The two were silent.

“I’m afraid I must be going. I can feel myself fading back. Do take care, young Dreemurr. And extend those same sentiments to dear Frisk for me, if you’d please.”

Chara nodded and smiled. “See ya around, old man.”

Gaster placed a hand over where his heart would have been had he been Human and bowed as he
finally faded back into the Void.

Chara sighed and plopped back onto their haunches and crossed their legs, leaning back onto their hands and staring up into the “sky”.

He really was going soon.

Chara didn’t like it, but they knew they’d be alone in the Void again.

Maybe they’d take over for Frisk more often. Frisk would probably like the space, and Chara knew they would enjoy the company.

Even here in the Void, things were changing.

The future is a mystery, the past is a memory, and the present fills you with

D E T E R M I N A T I O N

Chapter End Notes

The Longest Time - Billy Joel
Toki no Kioku - Please Save My Earth
Sober - Pink
Love Me Tender - Elvis

Fun Facts: The SOUL traits of the Human characters introduced so far are as follows, in alphabetical order:

Alexis - Blue for Integrity
Brian - Orange for Bravery
Caroline - Purple for Perseverance
Chara - Red for Determination
Chas - Cyan for Patience
David - Blue for Integrity
Diana - Blue for Integrity
Emma - Green for Kindness
Frisk - Red for Determination
Hannah - Yellow for Justice
Helen - Cyan for Patience
Hunter - Cyan for Patience
Ioniq - Yellow for Justice
Levi - Blue for Integrity
Liam - Orange for Bravery
Linda - Purple for Perseverance
Miranda - Blue for Integrity
Monica - Yellow for Justice
Naomi - Cyan for Patience
Olive - Green for Kindness
Penelope - Green for Kindness
Randy - Blue for Integrity
Richard - Yellow for Justice
Sharona - Blue for Integrity
Shelby - Yellow for Justice
Theo - Orange for Bravery
Tom - Purple for Perseverance
Yuu - Cyan for Patience
Get A Job
Chapter by Spazzin

Chapter Summary

Wildberry poptarts, gayness, and inevitability.

Chapter Notes

Oh look more Carolope at last. It's about damn time.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

8:30 A.M., April 13, 20XQ

It's a pretty nice day outside.

The sun is shining.

Rain puddles are everywhere.

On days like this, kids like you…

Are waiting for the rest of your friends to show up.

Frisk wasn’t late for school often. When they were, though, it was because their mother forgot to set the alarm, or felt like sleeping in for a bit. Two things that happened maybe thrice since they legally became Toriel’s child.

And they only happened when she was having a worse-than-usual depressive episode. What it could have been triggered by, Frisk didn’t know, but they were going to team up with their Dunkle Sans to help her cope with it as best they could.

Frisk was filled with Determination as they took a bite of wildberry poptart. Frisk liked the wildberry kind because of the colors.

They reminded them of themself.

“Hey, Frisk.”

Frisk turned to their front left to look at Caroline’s hair. Neither Frisk nor Caroline could bear much eye contact, if any at all, so both settled on staring at something on or near the other’s person.
Frisk tilted their head in question, taking another bite from their poptart.

“Your poptart is your family,” Caroline said as if it were a fact.

Frisk stared blankly at Caroline’s hair, briefly reminding themself to ask when the heck she started wearing a ponytail.

<<Explain?>> they signed in confusion.

“Well,” Caroline began in the tone of voice she affected when showing off her knowledge, “it’s got purple on it, like Ms. Toriel’s dress. Then there’s the bluish drizzle, like Dr. Sans’ jacket. Then there’s the red filling, that’s your favorite color, if I remember right.”

Frisk widened their eyes, their poptart hanging from their mouth. How Caroline picked up all of that from a freaking poptart they had no idea.

But it was kind of adorable.

They texted Sans about it, knowing that their dunkle told their mom everything. Almost everything, anyway. There are some things she’s just not ready to know yet.

She probably never will be.

Sleep. Sweet, sweet sleep. That sweet, wonderful near-sleep that came between clicks of a snooze button. They never lasted long, but consensus was that it was the sweetest of sleeps.

And Sans, being Sans, really enjoyed his sleep. So right now he was in a sort of heaven.

The key words here being “a sort”. There was something missing, something that detracted from an otherwise perfectly sweet experience.

But hey. He was meeting that something missing in her classroom for lunch like he always did, so what was a few hours?

He was thrust from his sweet sleep when his phone went off.

*1 text from: frisky business*

*Our family is a wildberry poptart dunkle sans -_-*

*explain*

*Purple is mom*

*Blue is you*

*Red is me*

Sans stared at the text, his eyes bleary. He put on his reading glasses and read it again.

Holy shit that was adorable.

*oh*

*my*
Sans sighed. His family really was a wildberry poptart, sweet and colorful and wild.

And he wouldn’t trade it for anything.
“Morning, babe~” he sang.

“GOOD MORNING, HONEY!” Papyrus replied, arms still holding Mettaton close. “YOU DID SLEEP LAST NIGHT, DIDN’T YOU? DID YOU AT LEAST PLUG YOURSELF IN?”

Mettaton giggled. Papyrus always took such good care of his loved ones…

“Yes, Papy, I did in fact sleep last night,” Mettaton laughed.

Papyrus gave him a look that seemed to say “yeah right”.

“FOR HOW LONG?” he sighed in exasperation.

Now Mettaton felt a little bad. “Three hours…?”

Papyrus stared at him, saying nothing. Whether it lasted a few minutes or a few hours, Mettaton wasn’t quite certain. But he was certain that Papyrus picked him up, slung him over his shoulder like a (very sexy) sack of potatoes, and carried him to his bedroom.

Mettaton started flailing and protesting to no response from his captor when his complaints were interrupted by being tossed onto his bed.

“What the hell, Papyrus?!” Mettaton yelled, his voice high in exasperation.

“YOU, MISTER, ARE GOING TO TAKE A BREAK! THIS TOUR OF YOURS IS NOT FOR ANOTHER -” Papyrus checked something on his phone. “- ONE YEAR, TWO MONTHS, THREE DAYS, FOUR HOURS, AND EIGHTEEN MINUTES! YOU HAVE MORE THAN ENOUGH TIME TO GET IT ALL PUT TOGETHER!”

“But -”

Papyrus placed his finger over Mettaton’s lips. “SSSSHHHHHSHHHHHHSHSS! NO BUTS, MISTER! JUST SLEEP!”

Papyrus sighed, some tension clearly being released. “I AM SORRY, METTATON, BUT I AM BECOMING VERY WORRIED ABOUT YOU! I’VE SEEN WHAT A LACK OF SUFFICIENT REST CAN DO TO PEOPLE, AND I DON’T WANT TO SEE YOU LIKE THAT, ALRIGHT?”

Mettaton felt a pang in his SOUL. He nodded.

“OKAY,” Papyrus said quietly as he played with Mettaton’s hair a bit. “YOU KNOW I LOVE YOU, RIGHT?"

Mettaton nodded as he lay down.

“Mmhmm. You know I love you too, right darling?”

“NYEH HEH, I KNOW. I JUST CAN’T BELIEVE IT SOMETIMES…I REALLY AM THE LUCKIEST MONSTER IN THE UNIVERSE…”

Mettaton nearly overheated at his words. He really DID need some rest.
“Mmm...I think I’m the lucky one…”

A whistle blew in the gymnasium of North Middle School.

“Hussain! You’re out! Miller, Salinas, Grant! You’re back in!”

The dodgeball game resumed with renewed fervor. Undyne sat back and continued watching. She checked her stopwatch for the time. 10:52 A.M. She blew her whistle once more. “Alright punks! Ten minutes til the bell! Game over for today, time ta hit the showers!”

The kids cheered, leaving the balls behind them.

Undyne sighed and stretched. Being a middle school gym teacher was...interesting. It was like training hundreds of mini-Papyruses. Or was it Papyri? Who cares. She’s a gym teacher, not an English teacher.

She felt her phone vibrate.

She got it out and checked it.

She had so many regrets.

The uncaptioned image of a shirtless Papyrus cuddling a clearly-unconscious Mettaton was NOT something she should be looking at on the job. There were KIDS here. Sure, they were in seventh grade, but they were still minors under American law! They KNEW this! Undyne groaned, promising to kick that sparkly tin can’s shiny metal ass next time she saw him.

She decided to step out for a bit once she heard the bell ring.

If she was fast enough maybe she could stop by Mettaton Manor™ and kick some shiny metal ass before getting back to work.

Oh who was she kidding? If she did that Papyrus would cry and she’d be at the mercy of thousands if not millions of rabid fans. She wanted to live to see her kid, dammit.

Her kid.

Undyne sighed happily. Amazing what that kid could do even though they didn’t have a set physical form yet. Not ten seconds ago she was plotting a murder, and now she’s internally gushing about a delivery not coming until September.

This kid was SO taking after Alphys.

The lunch bell rang out.

The friends stood up and headed off to the cafeteria.

Penelope had a weird, almost cat-like smile on her face. It made quite a few people uncomfortable.
Once they sat down, she was giggling like crazy, but trying to hold it all back. Like some kind of giggly timebomb.

She squealed while reaching into her backpack for her lunch.

And some strawberry cupcakes.

“Happy birthday, ya flippin’ loser!” Penelope said with a smile.

Brian blinked a few times. “Uh...thanks?”

“Your welcome~” Penelope sang.

“Oh, this is a thing now?” Hunter asked. “You make cupcakes for everyone whenever one of us has a birthday?”

“Yes!” Penelope said, popping the p on the end.

“So, Brian,” Caroline started. “Welcome, young one, to the big 1-0. How does it feel?”

Brian, Hunter, Levi, Frisk, and MK all stared at her.

“What?”

“I’m eleven,” Brian deadpanned.

“Really?” Caroline asked. “What grade did you flunk?”

Brian’s face was getting a bit red. Caroline noticed nothing. “Kindergarten,” the boy said through clenched teeth.

Caroline blinked a few times.

“Caroline,” Levi said in a warning tone, “if you’re about to say what I think you’re about to say, I beg you to stop now and remember the New Year’s party.”

Caroline looked confused for a bit before mouthing an ahh in realization. “Oh. Okay. I guess you just got a chance to befriend Hunter then, huh?” she teased.

Levi facepalmed. Frisk winced. MK facedesked - err, face-lunch tabled. Penelope covered her mouth at the accidental shade of it all.

Hunter grabbed Brian’s arm before he had the chance to stand up. “Brian, calm down. She really didn’t mean it like that.”

“Mean it like what?” Caroline asked.

Brian glared at her. Caroline returned to her peanut butter and grape jelly sandwich.

“See? She’s got a point, anyway, if you think about it…” Hunter said, turning away as he blushed.

Frisk looked toward Caroline and Penelope. The three smirked, trying their very best not to giggle.

They ship it hardcore.

Caroline reached into her backpack and got out a purple notebook with skulls on it and her favorite pen and began to write.
*What should we call them? -Caroline

gay -Frisk

*Besides that. -Caroline

*Brunter? -Penelope

*I like Briter better. It sounds like brighter. -Caroline

*i love it -Frisk

*Same! Your so good with names, Care! -Penelope

*It’s you’re, not your. And thank you, Nell. -Caroline.

“What’re you guys doing…?” Brian growled.

“Writing,” Caroline said.

“Writing what?” Levi said teasingly.

<<Fanfiction,>> Frisk signed.

“What the heck is that?” Brian asked.

“What the heck is that?” Brian asked.

“Whatever you want it to be, Brian,” Caroline said, “whatever you want it to be.”

Brian wasn’t sure why, but he was very uncomfortable all of a sudden.

Toriel was typing in some emails asking for some spare time at the copy machine to print out some permission slips. It was very important that she get this right, written as politely as possible, but not too formally. After more than a century, you’d think she’d be less formal in her correspondences with others, but alas, she still had too much of a queenly edge for a fifth grade teacher.

*knock knock*

Toriel brightened somewhat. “Who is there?”

“wanda.”

“Wanda who?”

“wanda have lunch with me, babe?”

Toriel stood up and opened the door.

“But of course, Sans! Do come in!”

Sans smiled up at her. “i got italian today, hope ya don’t mind.”

“Not at all! What did you get us?”

“for you, mia regina, risotto. for me, spaghetti bolognese,” Sans said. “i also got some zeppole, i
know how much you love those little things.”

Toriel was so grateful to have this man in her life.

Wait.

“Did...did you just call me your queen?”

Sans suddenly turned cyan. “well, that is, uh...technically i called you, uh...mia regina…”

“Which is Italian for...?”

Sans hid himself in his hoodie, drawing the string so his face was hidden.

Toriel sighed. “Sans, it’s alright. In fact...”

She slipped the hoodie of his head. “I’m quite flattered.”

She kissed Sans on the zygomatic and patted his head.

The Skeleton made a sound not unlike a tea kettle boiling over.

Toriel giggled. “Get rekt. Now, let’s ‘dig in’, I believe is the phrase?”

Sans was still out of it. “yeah,” he wheezed.

Toriel smiled at him.

Sans blinked a few times shaking off the rest of his lovesickness.

They settled down to eat.

“oh yeah, that reminds me,” he said smiling with pride, “check out what frisk sent me before class started.”

Toriel quirked an eyebrow and crossed her arms in front of her. “I certainly hope that they do not text you during class save for during emergency situations?”

“nope.”

Toriel rolled her eyes, arms still crossed.

“Fine then. Show me this text they sent you.”

Sans smiled wider, his eyes sparkling with pride and excitement.

He took out his phone and opened the messaging app.

“behold.”

Toriel beheld.

As she read the comparison of their little makeshift family to a wildberry poptart, her smile grew and her eyes crinkled.

She squealed a little bit.

“Screenshot it and send it to me, I am posting it on every last one of my social media accounts!” she said. “How many of them do I have, Sans, can you recall?”
Sans held his chin in thought. “I know you have a twitter, facebook, and pin, and we share a tumblr, so...as far as i’m aware, three and a half accounts.”

“I’ve been meaning to ask you if you could show me how to use Reddit…” Toriel says.

Sans shrugs. “eh, why not? just don’t ask me to teach ya ‘bout 4chan, ‘cuz those were dark days.”

Toriel quirked her eyebrow as she received the screenshot from Sans.

“Fortune…?”

“no, 4chan. remember those three weeks i stayed holed up in my sock drawer and then pap found me during his laundry pickup rounds?”

“Oh my.”

“yeah.”

“That’s -”

“i know, don’t remind me.”

“Ehh.”

“ehh.”

They were silent as they nibbled on their zeppole. Well, Toriel nibbled hers and Sans stuffed the whole thing in his mouth in one go.

As Sans chewed on his zeppola, he leaned back and set his feet on Toriel’s desk.

Toriel leaned back in her chair and let her arms dangle at her side, lifting one only to stuff the last bite of her zeppola into her mouth.

They lazed for a few moments until Toriel spoke up.

“Sans?”

“yeh, tori?”

“Remember what’s going to happen on the thirtieth?”

“yeah.”

“What is it then?”

“i got until then to decide if i wanna be a professor at the nearby university.”

“Sans, that’s just a little over two weeks, have you really been thinking about this?” Toriel asked with worry.

“like fucking crazy, tori,” Sans said, exhaustion seeping through his usually lazy voice, his head dropping over the back of his chair. “‘cuz i’ve been wanting to get my astronomy degree, but that would cost money i know, but a professorship, it takes up a lotta time, but by the same token it gets in some money that could go toward payin’ bills and stuff and…”

Sans suddenly widened his eyes.
“huh.”

Sans smiled a bit and looked back at Toriel.

“i think answered my own question.”
Toriel smiled back excitedly.

“If you need any help, just knock!”

Sans chuckled deeply. “you got it, pretty mama.”

Toriel blushed heavily and squeaked.

Sans simply winked as he walked out the door with the ring of the bell.

But not before turning back around to give Toriel a kiss.

Water splashed onto the children’s legs as they jump through the puddles on the blacktop.

Caroline sat cross-legged on a bench reading The Deathly Hallows. She’d stopped reading the Harry Potter series for a bit after she started reading The Scarlet Letter again once she’d finished The Goblet Of Fire.

She had just three more chapters until she was finished, and she’d be damned if she was interrupted.

“Why don’t you join us, Caroline?” Hunter asked.

“It’s ‘cos she’s boring,” Brian said.

“It’s actually because I’m reading, moron,” Caroline said. “But of course reading is seen as boring to those who were raised to see it as a waste of time in favor of getting a concussion.”

Brian stared at her before narrowing his eyes. “If you wanted to read, why aren’t you in the freaking library like you’re supposed to be?”

“Because I wanted fresh air” Caroline explained. “And besides, it smells nice outside after it rains.”


“Okay,” Hunter said.

“Fine, but you’re getting a ball to the face for insulting my sister.”

“She started it!”

“She really didn’t, dude.”

“She called me a moron!”

“You called her boring first, Bri.”

Caroline watched the quintet leave before settling back into her book. She paused upon hearing someone sit next to her, looking up to see Penelope’s short black curls. She tilted her head downward to get a slightly better look before turning back to her book.
Penelope was on her phone looking up where to find sepia film in the area.

Caroline tousled Penelope’s hair for a moment before returning to her book. She didn’t notice Penelope’s resulting blush.

Their peace was interrupted when the bell rang.

Caroline marked her place with a finger and stood up to return to class.

Then she felt something grab at her hand.

She yelped and yanked it away, dropping her book and wringing her hand.

She turned to Penelope, who was staring in shock.

Penelope shrunk back, turning her head away. “Sorry, I-I shoulda asked first, I’m sorry, I-I’m really sorry…”

Caroline suddenly felt guilty. She grabbed Penelope’s hand again.

“I accept your apology, Nell. Thank you.”

Penelope blushed a bit, looking toward Caroline.

She was smiling a bit.

Penelope smiled back as they went back to class together hand in hand.

“I like your ponytail, by the way,” Penelope said suddenly.

“You say that everytime you see me in one,” Caroline said.

“That’s ‘cause it’s true! You look GREAT in a ponytail!”

Caroline blushed, covering her embarrassed face with her book.

“Eww, stop holding hands, weirdoes!” Miranda called.

“Stop wearing fifty tubes of lip gloss at the same time and maybe we will,” Caroline called back.

“Nerd!”

“Poser.”

Miranda growled and sashayed away.

Caroline turned toward Penelope, who seemed embarrassed.

“Don’t listen to her nell, she’s stupid. Come on,”

Penelope smiled.

“Thanks, Care.”

“No problem, Nell.”

Three protists wriggled about on the slide, flagella wiggling. Alphys thought them kind of cute.
Too bad she got a teensy bit nauseous watching them thrash around.

Hey, at least it wasn’t as bad as it was last week. The first trimester was finally almost over, and Alphys was feeling it.

A knock at the door made her jump slightly. “W-who is it?”

Brad opened the door with a smirk on his face. “You’re waifu’s here to pick you up, ma’am.”

Alphys brightened immediately. “Th-thanks Brad! I’ll be out in a bit, just gotta w-write down my observations and conclusions!”

“I’ll let her know. See ya tomorrow, Doc?”

Alphys paused briefly. “S-see ya tomorrow.”

She finished up her writing and shut off that which needed shutting off.

She pushed back her rolling chair and looked down at her abdomen. It was definitely a bit bigger than it was last month. And it would only get bigger for the next six months.

She sighed. She still wasn’t used to being called Doc. Doctor Alphys, she was more than used to. But Doc? She wasn’t sure she liked that one.

It reminded her too much of the Royal Scientist before her.

She sometimes wondered if he hated her. It was generally accepted by his followers that Sans would take over the role of Royal Scientist of the Underground. But then the accident happened, and Sans quit to raise Papyrus, and Mettaton needed her help, and the Amalgamates, and -

No. She needed to breathe. Too much stress was bad for the baby. She breathed a few times. She had gotten more nauseous, so she threw up in the sink by her station.

After washing her face and gathering her things, she locked up her station and stopped by a vending machine to grab some water before heading down to meet Undyne.

The minute she saw Undyne, Undyne turned to face her and smiled.

As they walk out to the car, Alphys wonders how she got so lucky.

She always does.

The line rang once. Twice. Thrice.

An answer.

“*Ebott University, President Albertson’s office, this is Kelly, may I help you?”*

“hey, kelly, it’s sans gaster.”

“Oh, I’ll get the president on the line for you right away, Dr. Gaster.”

“please, just - just sans is fine, dr. sans if you must. dr. gaster’s my dad.”
“Uh, okay, if you insist.”

“okay.”

Sans listened to the generic public domain tune that always plays when the line is being held. It went on for another three minutes until there was an answer.

“John Albertson speaking.”

“hey, how’s it going?”

“Dr. Ga - err, Dr. Sans, we were wondering if you’d call!”

“yeah, just tell me what i gotta do.”

“Oh, well uh, I’m going to have you come up to the campus on May sixteenth for your interview, bring a resume, wear decent interviewing clothing, and we’ll let you know if you’ve got the job! By the way, that’s all just formality, the head of the math, engineering and science department already has you down, he just needs your John Hancock and we’re crystal! That sound good?”

“yep.”

“Alright! See you next month, Dr. Sans, I look forward to working with you!”

“see ya then.”

Sans hung up. Good lord that guy talked more than Papyrus on a sugar high. He was surprised he got ANY of that spiel.

His phone made a goatscream.

*1 text from: tori*

*Sans, I just received an email from the principal about the field trip. I have just forwarded it to you. Could you please check to see if you received it successfully?

*sure thing t

Sans got opened his email to see if there was anything from Toriel.

There was.

The field trip to the Ebott Historical Society was on the seventeenth of May from 10:30 A.M. to 2:30 P.M.

*got it

*thanks tori

*i also just called the university

*interviews the day before the field trip

*Really? Congratulations! We should do something to celebrate!

*its just an interview but ok whatever floats your goat
*LOL! But I never said it would be on the sixteenth, did I?*

*it was implied

*Happy early birthday, Sans. :)*

Oh. Well then.

*thanks tori

*love ya

*see ya when you get home

*I love you too, Sans!*

Sans closed out of his messaging app and sighed.

This was going to be one hell of a birthday. He could feel it in his bones.

Floral screams of loss and frustration rang through Frisk’s ears. Isolde did nothing, sitting in their lap and cleaning herself.

“How do you keep WINNING? CLEARLY you’re CHEATING!”

<<I don’t even think it’s possible to cheat at Pokemon, Flowey,>> Frisk signed.

“Wow, you really ARE an idiot. Whaddaya think Mystery Gift is for?”

<<Getting eggs?>>

Flowey was starting to get real pissed.

<<My Volcarona got Pokerus, though!>>

Flowey’s eyes widened. “What.”

<<My Volcarona got Pokerus.>>

Flowey was suddenly filled with Determination.

“Wanna trade your Volcarona for my Hoopah?”

<<Vesta doesn’t have Pokerus anymore.>>

Oh.

Well.

Flowey was done. With everything.

He glared at Cactus Everdeen. “I blame YOU for this.”

Frisk giggled. Flowey didn’t even HAVE a Hoopah, he had a Klefki that he NICKNAMED
Hoopah to troll people on Wondertrade.

Frisk still had the Magikarp named Giratina he gave them.

It was now a level 100 Gyarados with 10 contest wins and a Gyaradosite.

“Frisk! Flowey! It’s 9 o’clock! Time for bed!”

Frisk saved their game and turned it off, covering themself with their blanket and waited for their mother to come in and turn out the lights.

Your wildberry poptart family fills you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

Get A Job - The Silhouettes

Fun Facts - Character birthdays are as follows:
- Alphys - July 9
- Asgore - October 20
- Brian - April 18
- Caroline - February 7
- Chara - March 20
- Chas - February 1
- Diana - December 31
- Emma - June 9
- Frisk - March 20
- Hannah - October 10
- Helen - January 23
- Levi - November 12
- Linda - November 5
- Mettaton - July 28
- Miranda - April 20
- MK - July 13
- Monica - May 29
- Naomi - September 1
- Olive - August 31
- Papyrus - June 12
- Penelope - August 13
- Randy - November 9
- Richard - November 14
- Sans - May 17
- Sharona - February 19
- Shelby - January 4
- Theo - October 1
- Toriel - September 15
Undyne - March 31
Dr. Gaster - January 14
A new Keyboard Cat appears, meatloaf happens, and someone disappears.

Hey, what up. I'm literally in Astronomy class uploading this.

I also got my braces off and now I'm wearing a retainer.

Also, please welcome my new co-author eney! Please make them feel welcome!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

9:34 A.M., April 23rd, 20XQ

It's a stormy day outside.

Rain is falling.

Thunder is crashing.

On days like this, kids like you...

...are watching a movie in class.

“That’ll do, pig. That’ll do.”

As the credits rolled on Babe, Frisk clapped with tears in their eyes.

They loved this movie.

They looked around them. Caroline was on her phone reading something and chatting with Penelope. Levi was playing Mario Kart on his 3DS. Brian was asleep, drooling on his desk. Hunter was singing the song the farmer sang to Babe.

“If I had words~ To make a day for you~ I’d sing you a morning~ Golden and true~ I would make this day~ Last for all time~ Then fill the night~ Deep in moonshine~”

Frisk and a few other kids clapped for Hunter’s song.
Hunter noticed and hid his blushing face in his arms. He was clearly smiling, though.

Frisk decided to see what Caroline and Penelope were looking at.

They moved their chair over toward them and got their attention.

“Hey, Frisk!” Penelope whispered.

<<Hey, what’s up?>> Frisk signed.

“We’re reading about the Breedlove family,” Caroline said. “It’s really fun to read about stuff like this. Scandal, tragedy, mystery…”

“How did the Charities die again?” Penelope asked.

“Charity Ruth died of a mysterious illness, Charity Constance mysteriously disappeared upon the death of her brother William,” Caroline explained. “I’m actually a little more concerned about the lack of pictures of Charity Constance. It’s too suspicious. I might look up more about it before and during the field trip…”

Frisk felt something strange in their SOUL. They weren’t sure what it was, but they weren’t sure they liked it.

They mentally asked Chara about it.

But nobody came.

The Heart of Gold was online. It had been a while since they’d done any “real work”. And now Kindred was riding their asses.

“You bunch of bloomin’ idiots! You’ve done NOTHING while I was gone, NOTHING! What ‘ave you bums been doing the last two months, eh?!"

“Physics homework,” Hyperion admitted.

“Same,” Jessamy added.

“Kindred, we’ve all been doin’ physics,” Extempore said. “Doc Verne gave the okay, remember?”

“Doc Verne is a bloomin’ tosser, that’s what he is…”

“well, since you’ve clearly been workin’ your buns off, tell us what you’ve got,” Sans countered.

The line was silent. “Gobshites, the lot of you…”

“I thought we were the heart of gold.”

Kindred’s screams of rage were music to Sans’ external acoustic meatus.

“I’m also getting interviewed for a full-time job next month.”

“Nuh-uh!” Jessamy exclaimed.

“yep.”

“Nuh-uh!”
“yep.”

“Nuh-UH!” Extempore interjected.

guys, i know i’m a fuckin’ lazybones, but really? is it so hard to believe?"

“He’s got a point, guys,” Hyperion said. “It could depend a lot on the kind of job whether he’s telling the truth.”

“thank you, hyperion.”

Silence.

“What job you goin’ for?” Jessamy asked.

“i was offered a position as a physics professor at ebott university.”

More silence.

“Wow, you really WEREN’T lying.”

“toldja.”

“Look, listen to me for a bit guys, it’s important,” Kindred said.

“we’re listenin’,” Sans said.

“Doc Verne’ll be sitting in on us next meeting.”

Silence. Silence so heavy Sans thought he would dust.

“I’m emailing Replay,” Hyperion said.

“i’m wonderin’ when the next meetup is,” Sans asked. “the interview’s may sixteenth, and i’m chaperonin’ the kid’s field trip day after that.”

“Next meeting’s May tenth.”

“okey-doke. i’ll put it down in my schedu -”

Sans was interrupted by Isolde sitting on the laptop keyboard.

“What happened over there, Timeline?”

“keyboard cat.”

Silence.

“What.”

“the cat is literally laying on my keyboard guys, i can’t type shit.”

“Snrk, oh my god, take a pic, take a pic!”

“okay okay, hold on…”

Sans positioned his cell cam, Isolde’s green eyes facing the camera.
Sans snapped the pic.

He texted the picture to the Heart of Gold’s personal texts, and uploaded it to Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr.

He could hear the phone notifications over the line.

He heard Hyperion gasp. “Oh my god she preettyyy, such a pretty kitty she is, who is she, she so pretty…”

“her name is isolde.”

“Isolde, oh my GOSH, such a pretty name for such a pretty kitty…”

“Bode,” Extempore interjected.

“bode and brash.”

“Ayyyyy, Spongebob!” Jessamy said.

“guys, it’s after 11:30, i gotta meet tori for lunch here in a bit so imma head out.”

“Right then, see you on the tenth?” Kindred said more than asked.

“see ya.”

After saying goodbye to the rest of the Heart of Gold, Sans logged off and removed the cat.

Sans was on a sort of high. He grabbed an old boombox with an ipod deck and stuck in his old ipod mini.

He turned it on as he sauntered out to his motorcycle and strapped the boombox into the sidecar.

Before setting out, he sent Toriel a quick text and the pic of Isolde on the keyboard.

She’d get a kick out of that.

*1 text from: Bonefriend*

*hey tori*

*im on my way up*

Toriel was a bit anxious.

She looked up at the three students - Travis, Benjy, and Jacob - who had been forced to stay behind for recess.

“Is it your boyfriend?” Tate asked.

Toriel sighed. “Yes, it is. He comes by every day with lunch.”

“Gross,” Travis said.

“Not as gross as wiping a booger on someone, but everyone has their opinions.”
“Ooh, burn,” Benjy tittered.

Travis glared. Toriel did not give a damn.

*Knock knock*

She smiled widely. “Who is there?”

“Bacon.”

“Bacon who?”

Sans opened the door before answering, bearing a boombox.

“don’t go bacon my heart~”

Toriel smiled. “I couldn’t if I tried~”

Sans smiled back. “oh honey if i get restless~”

“Baby you’re not that kind~”

“true.”

Toriel giggled and stood up to help Sans with the stuff.

The Skeleton looked at the three kids, then back to his girlfriend.

“detention?”

“Yep.”

“huh. there’s a punishment, watching your teacher and her boyfriend eat stuffed crust pizza while you are allowed to do absolutely nothing.”

Jacob and Benjy’s eyes widened. Travis looked like he couldn’t care less.

Toriel looked at Sans briefly. “That sounds rather cruel, actually.”

“i guess. at least i skipped out on garlic bread, these poor kids would explode with want and agony.”

“Such a saint,” Toriel snarked, rolling her eyes. She nonetheless wore an affectionate smile on her face.

The couple got their meal set up. “so didja get the pic of isolde i sent you?”

Toriel smiled brightly. “I did! That was so adorable!”

“it’s a lot less adorable when you’re trying to type code, but yeah it was.”

“Keyboard Cat 2.0 is a perfect caption.”

“aw man, i meant to send the bode one.”

“How many of those do you have anyway?” Toriel laughed.

“the one i sent you, bode, shakespearean insult, trollface, and emo myspace.”
“Show me all of them.”

“You got it.”

“Can I see?” Tate asked.

Sans and Toriel looked at him. He shrank under their gaze.

“Sorry, I just really like cats…”

Sans and Toriel looked at each other, then back at Tate. Sans smiled and shrugged.

“Sure, why not.”

“You know something? I woke up this morning, you know, and the sun was shining and it was nice and all that type of stuff. Then the first thing - I saw you and, uh, I said, ‘Boy, this is gonna be one terrific day, so you better live it up, ‘cause tomorrow you’ll be nothing.’ See? And I almost was.”

Papyrus and Mettaton really enjoyed cuddling. If they weren’t cuddling in silence on the bed, they were cuddling in Mettaton’s home theater watching a movie. Tonight they were watching Rebel Without A Cause.

“Papy?”

“Yes, Metta?”

“Sans’ birthday is coming up, right?”

“On the seventeenth of May, why do you ask?”

“Just wondering if we should plan something, that’s all.”

“We have a whole month until then!”

“Good, that means more time to plan!”

Papyrus sighed. He and Mettaton were surprisingly similar in many ways - including their inherent need to be doing something at any given moment.

“His favorite cake is German chocolate.”

Mettaton grabbed his phone and wrote the information down in the notes. “Uh-huh, how about flowers?”

“Periwinkle.”

“Colors?”

“Purple and cyan.”

“Age?”

“Of what?”

“Sans.”
“THIRTY-ONE.”

“Okay, that’s the big stuff. I’ll text Toriel what I have down so far so she can help - ooh, where should we hold the venue?”

“GRILLBY’S, IT’S THE ONLY PLACE HE’LL ACCEPT.”

“I should’ve guessed.”

Papyrus hummed.

As soon as Mettaton had the text sent out, he rolled over onto his abdomen and wrapped his arms around his boyfriend, nuzzling into his sternum. Papyrus wrapped his arms around Mettaton in turn, combing his phalanges through raven tresses.

“Whose birthday is after Sans’, Sugar Skull?” Mettaton asked.

“The next one after Sans’ would be mine.”

“June twelfth?” Mettaton asked.

“That is correct! And then Alphys’ is July ninth, and yours is July twenty-eighth, and Toriel’s is September fifteenth, and…”

Mettaton stopped listening to Papyrus in favor of watching him. Sometimes words registered, but only rarely.

“…And I think Alphys and Undyne’s son is due around Miss Toriel’s birthday -”

“Papyrus, I’m going to stop you right there,” Mettaton interrupts, putting a finger over Papyrus’ teeth. “Alphys and Undyne’s baby...is going to be a boy?”

“IS THAT NOT WHAT I SAID?”

Mettaton was getting a little exasperated, because did Papyrus not hear himself just now?

“No, that’s...that’s pretty much exactly what you said, but…” Mettaton shook his head in disbelief. “How do you know? Did-did they tell you, how did -”

“THEY DIDN’T TELL ME. THEY DON’T KNOW.”

Mettaton was about to excuse himself from this oven because he was done. He took a few calming breaths before speaking again.

“Then how do you know for sure that the baby’s a boy?” he asked.

Papyrus smiled innocently and shrugged. “I AM NOT REALLY CERTAIN. IT’S REALLY JUST A HUNCH.”

Mettaton blinked a few times in utter disbelief.

“If you say so,” he sighed, laying back down onto his boyfriend.

Sometimes Papyrus could be a bit of a handful. But hey. Mettaton never claimed to be low-maintenance himself.
It was just one of many reasons he was so happy with his boyfriend. They meshed together in just the right ways - contrasts and similarities in just the right aspects.

Sometimes Mettaton wonders if he and Papyrus were somehow meant to be.

The thought scared him a little.

Quiet. Too quiet.

Libraries were typically, by virtue of being libraries, quiet. But the silence was worse than usual from Frisk’s perspective. Every page turned, every book closed, every whisper and footstep and breath, every sound they heard was discernible.

It just made Chara’s unexplained absence all the more obvious to them.

They tried mentally calling out to them once again.

But nobody came.

Frisk was scared and uncomfortable and anxious without Chara. They were Frisk’s passive grounding force, keeping them down-to-earth, a voice of caution, a personal narrator.

Chara was the sibling they never had. And now they were gone, and Frisk didn’t know where they could be.

It scared them.

The bell rang, signalling the end of recess.

Caroline and Penelope grabbed their bags and stood up to leave.

“Frisk, you okay?” Penelope asked, voice laced with concern. “You seem kind of out of it, even for you.”

“Nell’s right, Frisk, you’re acting a little out-of-character,” Caroline said. “Is everything alright?”

Frisk shrugged. <<Just mentally exhausted, you know?>> they signed.

“Oh, I get it,” Caroline said. “If you need help with anything, you can tell me, okay?”

“I’ll help too!” Penelope added. “I’ll bring some cupcakes tomorrow! No one can be sad around cupcakes!”

“Especially if they’re Nell’s,” Caroline added.

Penelope blushed at the compliment.

Frisk smiled gratefully. They had some really good friends.

But they still worried about Chara.

Maybe tonight they’d be back. This wasn’t the first time Chara disappeared on them. It’s just that they usually tell Frisk before they do so.

This was bad.
“Alphy, ’m home!”

Undyne looked around the living room for Alphys. No waifu to be seen.

Not on the kitchen or bedroom, either. Undyne was suddenly worried.

She got out her phone to text Alphys.

*Alphy where r u? I just got home*

She heard a door open. Alphys ran out to greet her with a hug.

“S-sorry, I was in the f-future n-n-nursery g-going through some s-stuff…” she stammered.

Undyne smiled. “Impatient much?”

“A-a little…” Alphys giggled.

Undyne chuckled and gave Alphys a peck on the forehead.

“You and your boss go over maternity leave?” Undyne asked.

Alphys nodded. “I can return to w-work anytime within the f-first year.”

“Sounds great, babes!”

Alphys hummed happily in response.

“Sooo…” Undyne said in a tone of voice that never failed to make Alphys shiver. “…what kinda stuff were you goin’ through, eh?”

“A-a-actually I-I was g-going through boxes of old manga a-and organizing them in alphabetical order a-and by cringiness.”

“Can I help?”

“I-I thought you’d n-never ask.”

Toriel bid the last of her students farewell for the day as she packed up the rest of her things.

She heard a single knock on the door.

“Come in!”

The door opened. Frisk was there.

Frisk seemed stressed for some reason. They were chewing their nails one one hand and scratching their bare arm with the other.


Frisk shook their head. They shook it faster and more times that was necessary.

Then they stopped and blinked a few times. They took their fingers out of their mouth. To sign.

<<I’m fine, Mom, it’s nothing.>>
Toriel looked at her child and sighed. “If you say so. Do let me know if you need anything, my child?”

Frisk nodded, once again faster and more times than was necessary.

They latched themself onto Toriel as they walked out to their car.

Toriel ran her hand through Frisk’s hair. They calmed down a little bit.

As soon as they returned home, Frisk went up to their room to do their homework.

This wasn’t like them. Toriel was more than a little worried about them by this point.

Sans was napping on the ratty old foldout couch in the basement when he heard the door open.

He rolled over onto his back and put his hands behind his head. He opened his right eye, a nonverbal cue for his girlfriend to come down the steps.

As Toriel made her way down the stairs, Sans realized that something was up. She was too hurried. Usually she’s more cautious.

“something’s up.”

“Frisk is anxious about something, I know it,” she sighed. “Something happened today, but I have no idea what it could have been.”

As Toriel sat next to him, Sans laid a hand on her shoulder. “what’d they tell ya it was?”

“They said it was nothing, but I still can’t help but worry…”

Sans hugged her. “i’ll see if there’s anything i can do.”

Toriel hugged him back and kissed the top of his skull. “Thank you,” she whispered.

“no problem, tori.”

They stayed locked in their embrace for a while.

Toriel was the first to released her hold. “I should go make dinner. Does meatloaf sound okay to you, dearest?”

“sounds good to me.”

“Alright. Can you check on Frisk for me?”

“sure thing.”

Toriel started back on up the basement stairs before turning back briefly toward Sans with a smile.

“Thank you, Sans. For everything.”

Sans smiled warmly back at her. “no problem.”

Frisk was NOT naturally good at English. That was Chara. They sighed as they mentally called Chara for help.
But nobody came.

They slammed their head on their desk and held their breath to keep from crying.

Then came a knock at their door.

They got up to answer it.

Sans looked down at them.

“you doin’ okay there, kid?” he asked.

Frisk nodded slowly.

Sans sighed. “frisk, please be honest with me. tori’s noticing that you’re down, and it’s really stressin’ her that she can’t help you.”

Frisk looked down, feeling guilty.

They started to cry.

“oh - oh no, man, don’t cry, frisk…”

Sans picked Frisk up and carried them to their bed, sitting down with them in his arms, gripping and crying into his hoodie.

Sans rubbed circles into their back. He waited Patiently for them to calm down enough to explain what was wrong.

When Frisk was finally done sobbing, they sat up in Sans’ lap and lifted their hands.

They clenched them into fists and took a deep breath.

<<Chara’s missing and I can’t find them. I keep calling them, but nobody comes.>>

Frisk was about to start crying again.

Sans’ eyelights were gone.

<<do you know when they left? what was goin’ on when they did?>> he signed.

Frisk wiped at their eyes. <<It was earlier today, before lunch. Caroline and Penelope were talking about the field trip.>>

<<what about it?>>

<<Caroline looked up some stuff about the family that made the house we’re going to, and mentioned some kids that disappeared…>>

<<disappeared kids?>>

<<Actually, one died, and the other disappeared. They shared the same name.>>

Sans realized something. Two kids with the same name, one who disappeared mysteriously.

He remembered Frisk telling him at one point that people who climb Mt. Ebott never returned…

...well, not alive at any rate.
Sans was shocked. Was it possible?

He squeezed his eye sockets shut before opening them, eyelights on once more.

“frisk, try talkin’ to ‘em in your dreams tonight, if you can’t reach ‘em then, keep trying until you do. if you still haven’t by the day of the field trip, well…”

Sans sighed wearily.

“...we’ll figure somethin’ out before then, i’m sure. Just...don’t give up hope yet, okay kiddo?”

Frisk was in tears. They nodded. <<I’ll stay D-E-T-E-R-M-I-N-E-D, Dunkle Sans. Thank you.>>

Sans put his forehead to Frisks, pulsing a bit of magic through the contact to help them calm down.

“no problem, kiddo. dinner should be ready in a bit. how’s meatloaf sound?”

<<Like paradise by the dashboard light.>>

The Skeleton barked out a laugh and rumpled Frisk’s hair as he lifted them up onto his back to piggyback them downstairs for dinner.

“i’m totally stealin’ that one, just lettin’ ya know now.”

Frisk giggled.

Alphys and Undyne cuddled, watching a fluffy anime. One that would make Alphys cry from happiness instead if, you know, literally anything else.

So Ouran Highschool Host Club was on.

“I swear that Mettaton is literally Tamaki Suoh,” Undyne commented

“I-I know, right?” Alphys replied.

“Just have ‘im go blond and boom, obnoxious idiot.”

“H-he’s already an obnoxious idiot, though?”

Undyne snorted at that and kissed her wife. “You are so perfect, you know that?”

“W-why, though? All I said was that M-Mettaton was an obnoxious idiot.”

“Yeah, but it ain’t just that! You’re so smart and kind and strong and kawaii and YOU that I find myself wonderin’ what I did to deserve someone like you…”

Alphys sniffled.

“Oh fuck, what’d I do?”

“E-e-everything r-riight…”

Undyne sighed and held Alphys closer, kissing her crest.
Alphys snuggled into Undyne, sighing happily.

Then Hunny kicked Tamaki in the face and they laughed.

“Hunny is Frisk, called it.”

To say that Toriel’s fears were assuaged when she saw Sans walk down the steps piggybacking a smiling, giggling Frisk. She smiled warmly at the sight and took a photo with her cellphone.

“We didn’t have enough brown sugar, so the only condiments we have are brown gravy and ketchup, I do hope that’s alright,” she said.

“Oh, c’mon tori, don’t be sad,” Sans said.

<<Because two out of three ain’t bad!>> Frisk signed.

Toriel laughed loudly as the family sat down to eat.

She’d overheard Frisk crying while Sans spoke to them, then stopping as Sans told them something. The silence probably meant that they were signing to each other.

She knew that there were things the two of them shared that they never told her. It didn’t bother her much. Though she couldn’t help but feel that some of those things hurt them inside, at least they had someone to share it with in each other.

And that was more than enough for her.

You are surrounded by people you love, even when it doesn’t seem like it. The knowledge fills you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

I'm In Here - Sia
If I Had Words - Scott Fitzgerald
Don't Go Breakin' My Heart - Elton John
Paradise By The Dashboard Light - Meat Loaf
Two Out Of Three Ain't Bad - Meat Loaf

Fun Fact: I currently have an idea for a Yuuri!!! on Ice fanfic. A nextgen fanfic. Because I'm garbage. If I upload it at some point, who'd be willing to read it?
Lonely

Chapter by Spazzin

Chapter Summary

Breakfast in bed, interviews, and motion.

Chapter Notes

Hey, guys! Sorry it's been so long! College is tough shit, and my new co-author eney and I have been discussing some sideplots. And meemz.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Frisk woke up in a cold sweat. They hadn't seen Chara in their dreams for a few days now, and they were starting to worry a lot more.

Just where could they have fled off to? Why were they so quick to run at the mention of what appeared to be their dead name?

Just why DID Chara run away?

Frisk felt a throbbing pain in their skull. Stress headaches didn't come often, but they were hell when they did. It was best to try and calm down for now.

They got out of bed, careful not to wake Flowey or Isolde, and tiptoed to their bedroom door.

They walked down the hall to Sans and Toriel's shared bedroom and knocked softly on the door before opening it a crack.

They peeked inside before walking over to the bed and tapping their mother to get her attention.

Toriel moaned groggily and fluttered her eyes open, leaning on an arm to support herself.

"What is it, Frisk?" she groaned.

<<Headache, can't sleep.>> they signed.

Toriel sighed and sat up. Sans stirred a bit beside her.

"wus wrong, sumth'n' happ'n?" he said into his pillow.

"Frisk has a headache, so I'm going to get them some Tylenol."

"mmkay, i'll make some room for 'em."

"Alright. Frisk, wait here while I get the medicine, okay?"
Frisk nodded as they crawled into the bed and snuggled up to their dunkle. Sans wrapped his arm around them.

After Toriel left the room, they began to talk - well, sign, anyway.

<<still no chara?>> Sans signed.

Frisk shook their head. <<I'm scared Dunkle Sans, what if they're hurt, what if they never come back, what if >>

Sans hugged them and rubbed circles in their back until they calmed down.

Toriel came in to find Frisk breathing heavily and Sans calming them down.

"they had a nightmare too," Sans said. It was true, in a way.

Toriel sighed as she got into bed, Frisk laid between her and her lover.

She wrapped her arms around the two of them, Sans setting on of his hands on her arm.

Sans started singing.

"when you're weary~ feeling small~ when tears are in~ your eyes~ i will dry them all~ i'm on your side~ oh, when times get rough~ and friends just can't be found~ like a bridge over troubled water~ i will lay me down~ like a bridge over troubled water~ i will lay me down~"

Toriel basked in the song. She relaxed as Sans sang Frisk back to sleep.

As soon as Sans sang "sail on, silver girl", Toriel was sound asleep herself.

Sans finished the song and looked up at his sleeping family. He smiled and went back to sleep.

Twas the night before the interview, after all.

Later, when Sans woke up to his alarm, Frisk and Toriel were still sound asleep. Wait, scratch that.

Frisk was still sound asleep and Toriel was stirring.

"mornin’, t" sans said quietly as not to startle her.

"Mmmmmm, good morning Sans..."

"i have a few hours before my interview, should i get you some tea or something?" He felt like being nice to Tori for some reason or another. Breakfast in bed was a nice way to do that. Sans didn’t cook much, but he could do simple things like oatmeal and scrambled eggs. Maybe some french toast.

“That sounds nice…” Toriel mumbled.

Sans smiled. Stars above, half-asleep Toriel was just too cute.

He leaned over Frisk to kiss Toriel's cheek before shortcutting down to the kitchen to get to work.

He sang a little song to while the time away.

"well it's one for the money~ two for the show~ three to get ready, now go cat go but don't you~ step on my blue suede shoes~ you can do anything, but step off of my blue suede shoes~"
He was almost finished with the french toast when the phone rang.

He flipped the slices onto a plate to cool and started up the stove for the oatmeal and scrambled eggs before answering the phone just as the seventh ring died down.

"electric light orchestra, you've reached the diary of horace wimp, this is mr. blue sky, how may i help you?"

"SANS HAVE YOU BEEN UP ALL NIGHT AGAIN BECAUSE WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT."

Sans brightened slightly more at the sound of his younger-yet-taller brother's voice. Today was gonna be a good day, he could feel it in his bones.

"pap, hey, how's it goin'?"

"OH, EVERYTHING IS FINE, METTATON AND I ARE PLANNING YOUR BIRTHDAY PARTY TOMORROW EVENING!" Papyrus said excitedly.

Sans quirked a brow ridge. "huh. aren't those things usually s'posed to be a surprise though?"

"WELL OF COURSE, BUT WE ALL KNOW YOU WOULD HAVE FIGURED IT OUT EVENTUALLY."

Sans shrugged, shifting the phone so it was held between his skull and collarbone while he listened to Papyrus' persistent prattling.

"SANS, WHAT IS MAKING THOSE SOUNDS OVER THERE? IS THE CAT BOONDOGLING WHERE SHE SHOULDN'T BE BOONDOGLING?" Papyrus asked.

Sans chuckled. "nah bro, i'm making breakfast in bed for tori 'n frisk. kid woke up from a nightmare with a headache last night so they slept in our room."

"OH, YOU AND MISS TORIEL ARE SHARING A ROOM NOW?" Papyrus enquired.

"yep. have been for a couple months now. 's pretty great."

"WELL THAT'S NICE! I'M GLAD TO HEAR THAT YOU ARE DOING WELL!"

"thanks bro. gotta go get this stuff up to the fam now. see ya tomorrow?"

"SEE YOU THEN, BROTHER! GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR JOB INTERVIEW!"

"kay, thanks, bye."

"GOODBYE!"

Papyrus hung up and Sans put the phone back on the receiver. He carried the tray of french toast, oatmeal, scrambled eggs, and tea up to his family.

His family. He chuckled a bit at the warm fuzzy feeling the thought gave him.

When Papyrus got off the phone with Sans, Mettaton snuck up on him and then promptly started to smother him with kisses.
The kissing then evolved into a tickle fight. Papyrus was much better at those. Afterwards, they both lay on the floor, panting.

"THAT WAS FUN, BUT WHAT WAS THAT FOR?" Papyrus asked.

"What, can’t I suddenly show affection for my boyfriend?” Mettaton replied with mock indignation.

"YOU CAN DO THAT, BUT NOT AFTER I GET OFF THE PHONE WITH MY BROTHER!”

“Oh, it’s the day of Sans’ interview, isn’t it?”

"YES IT IS - WAIT ARE YOU TRYING TO CHANGE THE TOPIC?"

"Noooooo?

Papyrus gave Mettaton a look that said "yeah right". Nonetheless he let it go. Mettaton would talk about it when he was ready, whatever it was.

They lay on the floor cuddling. Mettaton started humming a random song. Papyrus recognized the song - in fact, it was one he'd heard his father sing once in a while.

"YOU ONCE THOUGHT OF ME~  AS A WHITE KNIGHT ON HIS STEED~  
NOW YOU KNOW HOW HAPPY~  I CAN BE~  OH OUR GOOD TIME STARTS AND 
ENDS~  WITHOUT ALL I WANT TO SPEND~  BUT HOW MUCH, BABY, DO WE 
REALLY NEED~"

Mettaton smiled widely as he joined Papyrus for the chorus. He loved impromptu duets with his boyfriend.

"Cheer up sleepy Jean~  Oh what can it mean~  To a~  Daydream believer~  And a~  Homecoming 
queen~"

They lay on the floor together, singing whatever song flew into their heads.

Whatever Mettaton wanted to talk about was all but forgotten for the time being. It could wait.

Right now he needed the happiness.

Toriel took a sip of her tea as Frisk finished the last of their french toast.

"okay. since we seem to all be done here, i'm gonna take this stuff back to the kitchen, get dressed, and head on out," Sans said.

"But isn't the interview at noon?" Toriel asked.

"yeah, i just felt like wandering around the campus for a while before then."

"Ah, alright then."

Sans smiled and took the tray and dishes downstairs and came back up to get dressed.

Blue buttondown, black blazer and pants, black necktie, black crocs. Blue hoodie wrapped around
his waist.

Good to go.

He kissed Toriel and Frisk goodbye before leaving.

"I'll be back by about three. Don't have too much fun while I'm gone."

Toriel giggled, Frisk saluted.

"We won't, dearest. Best of luck, Sans!"

<<Good luck, Dunkle Sans!>>

Sans rumpled Frisk's hair and waved his family goodbye as he hopped on his motorcycle and zoomed off toward Ebott University.

The sky above him was blue and cloudless. The streets were bare of cars. He would definitely have time to chill before the interview.

He drove across the Olsen Bridge and glanced at the sea from the corner of his eye sockets. The sun glinted off the waves. There were some boats out and about on the water, along with some surfers.

Sans returned full focus to the road for the rest of the ride to the university.

He parked his bike and took the appropriate measures to ensure its safety and checked the time. 10:57 A.M. He had an hour before he was due, and Sans was very diligent about doing everything at the very last minute possible.

So he decided to find the science-engineering-math wing and sit for a bit.

He looked for the perfect spot when he found a chess board. A very much undisturbed chess board with wooden pieces.

He sat down at the side of the board with the light colored pieces.

He remembered playing chess with his father when they had downtime at the lab.

The Doctor would always win, no matter how well Sans played.

Sans could, however, beat anyone at the lab at chess as long as he could remember. It only got easier as he got older. He had actually been beginning to grasp his father's playing style when he had...

Sans moved a pawn from its place. He pondered what move his father would make were he playing against him.

A hand moved the piece directly to the right of the one Gaster would have.

Sans glanced up at the bearer of the hand. They shrunk a bit in nervousness.

"Sorry, I uh, hope you don't mind if I join you?" the person asked.

Sans shrugged and smiled. "Sure. Have at it."

Alphys was streaming an anime when she felt it.
At first she thought it was indigestion. It was one of the less pleasant aspects of pregnancy to be certain, but something about it seemed...off, somehow.

And it hadn’t gone away for the last few days. So she realized that it could be only one thing.

She squealed and texted Undyne about it. Undyne, being Undyne, went to her beloved waifu with all the haste of on who has received good news.

She slammed the door open hard enough to completed wreck one of the hinges.

"Is it true??!!" the Fishwoman shouted at the top of her lungs.

Alphys nodded beaming. "I felt kicking!"

Undyne quirked the corner of her lips into a smile. That smile only grew wider until she walked over to her Lizard wife and held her close.

She held her head to Alphys' bump and waited.

She felt it. Movement. It was small, it was weak, it was real.

She chuckled as she nuzzled into Alphys' belly.

"Um, c-can I at least sit down?"

Undyne said nothing, lifting Alphys bridal style, abdomen still pressed to her ear as she carried her to their room.

She set Alphys down gently on the bed and laid next to her, ear still to Alphys' belly.

Alphys sighed as she picked up her cell phone to take a picture of Undyne laying on her swelling abdomen.

Undyne was so absorbed in the dwindling movements of their child that she noticed nothing else.

They were in heaven.

Frisk sat on the porch swing with a cherry popsicle in hand. When they were finished they were going to help Toriel with gardening.

They would be planting lantanas at last. Sans had said that they were Dr. Gaster's favorite flower.

Frisk briefly wondered if it was possible for Chara to come back with him.

They bit into the last of their popsicle. They let it melt in their mouth for a moment before tossing out the stick and joining their mother in the garden.

The put on gardening gloves and sat cross-legged next to her.

All of these pretty flowers filled them with Determination.

Toriel glanced over at Frisk and smiled at their fierce expression.

"Frisk, would you please go and grab the watering can and fill it please?" Toriel asked.

Frisk saluted and stood. They marched over to the watering can and took it inside to the kitchen sink
to fill it.

"Frisk, use the hose to fill the watering can! Remember last time?"

Frisk remembered. It was hilarious.

But the hot water heater exploded, so it was also very bad.

Frisk went back outside and tried to turn on the hose before remembering that they had to turn it counterclockwise to turn it on.

They filled the can and took it to their mother.

They set it down and waited for further instruction.

"Frisk, water the flowers in color order from red to violet?"

Frisk nodded and did so.

Then, as they reached the roses, they saw it.

A slug.

Slugs, Frisk knew, were pests who ate roses. But it was merely trying to survive, just like every other creature. Frisk nibbled on their lip as they wondered what to do.

Then they knew.

They set down the watering can, scooped the little slug into their gloved hands and carried it to their mother.

They lightly headbutted Toriel to get her attention.

The Boss Monstress looked down at her child, their hands apparently holding something.

"Frisk, what is that in your hands?"

Frisk opened their hands, revealing the slug.

Toriel's eyes widened at the little creature in Frisk's hands.

"My child, where on earth did you find this?" she asked.

Frisk walked over to the rosebush, gesturing to it.

Toriel put a hand to her muzzle. She knew this was not good. But she also knew that Frisk would not want to harm the little slug.

Toriel thought for a moment as she stared at Frisk's pleasing eyes.

She sighed.

"Put it in a tupperware, we'll wait until your father gets home to discuss what to do with it."

Frisk hopped in place before pausing to pick the slug off their arm and run inside for a tupperware.

Toriel paused and removed her gloves. She stood up and made ot to the doorway when she fully
realized what she had said.

Apparently Frisk had as well. And Frisk, when they noticed something like that, they became **Determined** to tell someone, anyone. And knowing Frisk, they were going to tell...

"Frisk Eternal Dreemurr, if you are thinking what I think you are thinking..."

Frisk smiled and shook their head.

<<Your secret it safe with me,>> they signed.

Toriel soghed with relief. "Thank you, my child!"

<<No problem! I won't tell DAD a thing!>>

Frisk smirked. Toriel hid her face in embarrassment.

What a day she was having...

---

Sans left the office of the head of the science department.

He'd gotten the job.

When he heard that he was pretty much guaranteed the position, he thought he'd at least have some competition for it. Turns out that no one in the area - in the state, even - was willing to take the job. And since Sans had considered it and came to be interviewed, boom. Sansy's got a brand new job.

He'd have his schedule emailed to him within the week, so he planned on telling everyone once he got the email.

As he headed toward the lot where he'd parked his motorcycle, he took out his phone to send his girlfriend a text.

*hey tori*

*interviews done*

*wanna bring frisk along and get some lunch*

*Certainly! What did you have in mind?*

*hows grillbys sound*

*Sounds lovely! Frisk thinks so too!*

*great*

*be there in half an hour*

*Alright! I will see you then! :)*

Sans chuckled a bit. "what a cutie-pie..." he mumbled.

Then his text tone went off.

*I text from: friskito*
Aww, how cute, they called him dad - wait what?

Sans was pretty sure his eyelights were off as he walked into a lamppost.

He sat down on a nearby bench to make sure he didn't do THAT again.

*frisk

*did you jsut

*Did i jsut what? -v-

*you know what you did

Sans sighed and ran his fingers through his nonexistent hair. What the hell was this kid saying and why?

*Do you not like being called dad?

Oh no.

Time to rectify another upset Frisk.

*i didn't mean it like that

*i mean

*idk why me of all people

*but ok

*if ill make you happy

Sans sighed and stood up to walk to his motorcycle.

He had sat fully on the seat when Frisk texted him back.

*Okay!!! ^v^

Oh. My. Gosh.

What did he do to deserve to be called dad by this kid?

As he placed his phone back in his pocket, he wondered if Gaster ever wondered that same thing.

Mettaton and Papyrus were still sitting on the floor by the time they’d received the text from Sans saying that his interview was over. Only instead on sitting on the kitchen floor where they had been previously, they were instead cuddling on the floor of the home theater watching Labyrinth.

And it was giving Mettaton Ideas.

"Say, Papy?" he asked.

"YES HONEY?"
"What do you think about us dressing up as Jareth and Sarah for Halloween?"

Papyrus thought about it briefly.

"THAT DOES SOUND NICE, BUT..."

Mettaton leaned away from him briefly. "But what, Sugar Skull?"

"WELL...I WAS HONESTLY CONSIDERING GOING AS JACK AND SALLY FROM NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS, IF THAT'S FINE WITH YOU?" Papyrus asked, scratching the back of his skull nervously.

Mettaton smiled warmly. "I absolutely love it!"

"NYEH HEH, R-REALLY?"

"Mhm~ After all, if ANYONE could pull off The Pumpkin King, my dear, it would be YOU."

Papyrus brightened at the compliment, figuratively AND literally.

Mettaton had to pause the movie and wait for his boyfriend to stop glowing. It happened a lot. But Mettaton didn't mind. They usually ended up making their own, BETTER show when this happened...

Sans, Frisk, and Toriel waved the Grillby's patrons goodbye and got in the car to head home.

But what was waiting for them when they got home was enough to nearly ruin such a wonderful day.

"Sans," Toriel said.

"yeah, t?"

"Whose turn was it to close the garage door?"

"i did close it though. you saw."

"I know. That's why I am having trouble believeing just what the hell I am seeing."

"well, what's it look like to you?"

"It looks like a dog broke into our garage and tore up everything."

"well babe, it just so happens that i am seeing the exact same thing."

The garage was a mess. Towels strewn about, boxes peed on, old toys chewed to bits, and a little brown fluffy puppy with pale blue eyes sat in the midst of the carnage, seemingly unaware of its crime.

Then it ran up to Frisk.

It stood on its hind legs, supported by its forepaws on Frisk's leg.

That's when the family realized that this was a huge puppy. Huge meaning almost as large as Isolde.
Frisk lifted the puppy in their arms and looked it in the eyes.

The puppy stared back briefly, panting, before smothering the Human with affectionate licks.

Toriel and Sans watched the scene before them cautiously before turning briefly toward each other.

"welp," Sans said, "guess we should schedule an appointment with the vet. get Isolde her rabies shots 'n all...see what we can do about...this..."

Toriel hummed. "I do suppose you are correct. But what to do about it until then...?"

"keep an eye on it, take care of it as best we can...set it lose in linda's petunias..."

"Sans, you are a genius."

"thanks, babe. we're setting the slug on diana's roses though."

Toriel giggled a bit.

"I'm sure Mettaton will appreciate that."

They ran.

They ran from nothing, from everything, from they don't know anymore.

They thought that running to Mt. Ebott; that finding parents that truly love them; finding a brother, best friend, and maybe even more had things gone differently; finding freedom in being someone's hope; finding some semblance of happiness for the first time in their life; they thought all of it would allow them to leave that pain behind.

They were wrong. They were so, so wrong and it hurt so, so bad.

It hurt even more because they were crying. Chara hated crying. They hated crying and they hated seeing people they care about cry.

William and Asriel were so similar in that regard. Such crybabies, the both of them...

Chara would have given anything to stop their tears.

But thinking back, neither of them could cry anymore. No more pain or sorrow for them.

No more anything.

No more.

No more.

They ran.

Head on into a viscous yet skeletal figure, they ran.

_Tomorrow is going to be a big day for you. You are filled with_ 

_TESTERMINATION_
Chapter End Notes

Lonely - Akon
Bridge Over Troubled Water - Simon and Garfunkel
Blue Suede Shoes - Elvis Presley
Daydream Believer - The Monkees

Fun Fact: The puppy is a husky-chow mix.
Chara stopped running.

They looked up at the being that blocked their way.

“Ah, young Dreemurr!” Gaster said. “And where are you running off to?”

Chara shuddered. They could feel the bile rising in their throat, even though such things didn’t happen to the dead as far as they knew.

But neither did tears. And yet here they were, bawling their eyes out like some child who woke up from a nightmare to find out it was real all along.

But no matter how much they wished it wasn’t so, they knew deep down that that was exactly what they were, and exactly why they ran to Mt. Ebott in the first place.

Chara looked up at Gaster, half-expecting him to be a mindreader. They knew that he was no more a mind reader than Sans, but the fact that he knew just how to help made them wonder.

Chara started sobbing even harder. Both they and Gaster knew that they couldn’t explain what was wrong - not like this.

So they decided to wait for Chara to calm down.

But Gaster knew that, even in this state, Chara was just “there” enough to answer basic yes-or-no questions.

He decided to open with the most simple of his concerns.

“Does young Frisk know you are here?” he asked.

Chara shook their head.
Gaster sighed. Whatever happened must have been pretty horrific if it caused Chara to run off without telling Frisk.

“I shall wait for you to calm down, young Dreemurr,” he said, wrapping his arms around the young Human in a hug. “You may explain everything then. But I do believe that young Frisk is about to wake up. Today is the day of their field trip, after all.”

Chara widened their eyes. They had completely forgotten about that. Chara shook their head rapidly, not wanting to go back to their old home, not wanting to see their old room… and their brother’s.

Chara breathed deeply, trying to calm themself enough to be able to explain themself and be understood.

But they didn’t want to. That was the problem.

But they had another way.

They decided to wait until Frisk woke up to tell them about this other way. Because they were going to need all the help they could get.

The alarm clock on the bedside table rang. Then a vine wrapped around it and smashed it against the table, breaking it.

Frisk bolted awake at the sound of something breaking.

They looked around their room frantically before turning toward Flowey with an exasperated look on their face.

Flowey suddenly looked a bit nervous. He gestured a leaf at the non-sentient plant next to him.

“What the heck, Cactus Everdeen! Why are you breaking Frisk’s things? Shame on you!”

Frisk blew their bangs out of their eyes. They would probably have to get them cut soon.

They knew Flowey was lying, and Flowey knew as well. It would have at least been believable if he’d blamed Isolde for it.

Or the new puppy at the foot of their bed.

Frisk smiled and crawled up to the puppy, who yawned and blinked into wakefulness.

The puppy sat up eagerly.

Frisk smiled and scratched behind the puppy’s ear. Yasmin, they thought, for a girl, and Blue for a boy. If they could keep it, of course, but the puppy will not go to the shelter if Frisk had any say in the matter.

Isolde just stared at the canine intruder from atop Frisk’s dresser. She didn’t trust dogs, but she could tolerate them as long as her family was unharmed.

Cactus Everdeen just sat on the windowsill, being a cactus. But Flowey, on the other hand...

Flowey just glared at the temporary resident of the household, disgusted. What if it peed on him? What if it chewed on him?

He did not like this. But he knew that if he did anything, the Smiley Trashbag would come after him
with one of those giant laser skulls.

Frisk finished petting the puppy and hopped out of bed to get dressed for the day. A red-and-white striped tank-top, light blue sweatshirt, and black jean shorts were put on, along with their favorite red hi-tops.

They were so ready.

Sans was in that sweet state of sleep between alarms. That sweetest of sleeps.

But it was different. He heard someone singing to him.

Okay, was he dead or something, because he was hearing an angel sing to him.

He turned over onto his back to see who or what was singing.

He opened his eyes to see Toriel singing softly to him, her white fur pearlescent in the morning sunlight. He swore he saw a halo.

He smiled groggily and reached out to touch her cheek, to see if this was real.

The feeling of flesh and fur on bone, the sight of the Boss Monster before him leaning into his touch, the sound of her voice wishing him a good morning…

This was real? He couldn’t believe it. Just how had he gotten so lucky to have heaven itself brought down to him?

“mornin’ babe,” he said, his voice slightly raspy with sleep.

Toriel smiled warmly back at him, leaning down for a quick kiss.

He sat up on his elbows to do the same. Once their mouths met, they moved to deepen the kiss. Sans cupped Toriel’s face in his hands, his alveolar processes and ectoplasmic tongue reacting to her flesh lips and tongue.

Before they could react, Frisk slammed open the door to announce that they were ready.

The trapped adults and the shocked child stared at each other for a moment.

Frisk blinked a few times. Their parents blinked back.

They turned up their mouth into a smirk and backed out the room while making finger guns.

They ran from the room, regretting that they hadn’t brought their phone with them to take pictures.

Sans and Toriel were blushing. Then they broke into giggles, which evolved into full-blown howls of laughter.

Toriel wiped a tear from her eye as she spoke up. “I think I should go downstairs and make breakfast!” she said, her voice still trembling with residual laughter.

Sans chuckled. “good plan, i’ll grab the stuff for the field trip.”

“Alright, I packed you both some sandwiches and chips,” Toriel said as she stood from the bed and
stretched. She yawned widely, her teeth glinting in the light.

“sounds good,” Sans yawned as he sat on the edge of the bed. “i might stop by the store on my way up to the school to grab some cookies for the kids. do any of ‘em have trouble with gluten? i wanna piss linda off and bring the most glutinous cookies possible.”

Toriel giggled and shook her head. “I don’t mind if you do, since none of the students in the fourth or fifth grades have a gluten processing issue.”

Sans pumped a fist in victory. “thanks, t. you’re the greatest.” He leaned to kiss her on the cheek. “love ya, pretty mama,” he said with a wink.

Toriel blushed and swatted him affectionately. “Perhaps I would have been more receptive of that had Frisk not interrupted us.”

Sans grinned and shrugged. Her words would have held slightly more weight had she not been smiling as she said them.

Caroline and Penelope were hyped for this field trip. Being from a state where being outdoorsy was almost a law, they were excited to finally be able to wear hiking boots and backpacks.

Caroline was wearing a black skort, a lavender tie dye t-shirt, and black hiking boots.

Caroline texted Penelope from her couch while Randy tied her bootlaces and Sharona tied her long black hair back into a ponytail

*Are you ready yet, Nell?*

*almost! i just gotta pack my camera! :)*

*Is it charged?*

The pause between texts allowed Caroline to crack her knuckles.

Randy stood up and ran his hair through his fingers. “Alrighty, all tied up!” he said. “Sharona’s almost done with your hair, too.”

“I AM done, actually,” Sharona said, pride running through her voice. She help up a compact mirror for Caroline to see herself in.

Caroline liked her hair in a ponytail. She smiled at her reflection before she heard her phone go off.

She reached for it and read the message.

*it’s at 100! :)*

*Good, because I have a list of scenic spots on the grounds we can walk to to take picture at.*

*you know how much i love scenic spots! :D*

*Indeed I do.*

*see you at school!*
Caroline sighed as she put her cell phone in its case.

She stood up and walked to her bedroom and grabbed a book from the shelf.

Ah, yes. The Three Musketeers, by Alexandre Dumas. It was one of the many books from Randy’s collection that she hadn’t yet read for one reason or another. And she couldn’t WAIT.

She walked back out to the living room as Sharona tied her long, bushy red hair into a ponytail as easily as she had with Caroline’s.

Sharona wouldn’t be joining the field trip group, but Randy would. Levi made his way down the hall and to the living room. He wore khaki cargo shorts, black tennis shoes, and an orange-and-blue striped tank top.

His eyes widened when he saw Caroline.

“Caroline,” he said, “you DO realize that we’ll be on the bus for most of the day, right?”

“And?” Caroline said, her face completely even.

“That means we won’t be able to hike much.”

“But Dad said that we’d stay behind and hike around a bit once the rest of the group leaves,” Caroline explained. “We haven’t been able to go hiking much since we moved because of work and school and stuff.”


“Chocolate rice krispies sounds good…”

Levi gave Caroline a gap-toothed smile.

“I was gonna have some too!”

“But I don’t WANNA go to some dirty old house in Nowheresville! I wanna go to the Ebott Plaza!”

“I know, Miranda, but we’ve already signed the permission slip,” Diana said. “We can go to Ebott Plaza this evening after dance, how does that sound?”

Miranda crossed her arms and pouted. “Fine…”

Diana smiled sweetly. “There’s a good girl. Now go on upstairs and get dressed sweetpea, we’ll leave when you’re ready.”

Miranda groaned and stomped up the stairs and slammed her bedroom door behind her.

She changed out of her pajamas into a sequined fuchsia tank top, a black skirt, and sequined pink flats.

She packed her dance bag and walked down the stairs with a very loud, obnoxious sigh.

“Okay then!” Diana said. “Let’s go!”
Hunter had just finished tying his shoes when his mother barged in.

“Hunter James, time to wake u-”

Linda looked at the completely-dressed child on the bed. He had on a blue polo with white rugby stripes, black cargo shorts, and white tennis shoes.

Linda crossed her arms. “Were you awake all night?” she asked, her voice lined with undue suspicion.

“No,” Hunter said. “Wouldn’t you know if I did?”

Linda narrowed her eyes and pursed her lips. “Just head downstairs.”

“Yes Mom.”

Hunter stood up and kept his eyes averted from Linda as he walked past her to go brush his teeth and hair.

“By the way, Hunter,” Linda called after him, “I’ve made an appointment to get your hair cut on Friday since it’s getting long.”

Hunter stared at himself in the mirror. His platinum blond hair didn’t even reach his jaw.

“Is it really that long?” he asked nobody in particular.

“Yes, Hunter, it is,” Linda responded. “Any longer and you’ll look like a girl, now hurry up and brush your teeth so we can go.”

Hunter waited for his mother to walk down the stairs.

A girl, huh?

That didn’t sound half-bad, actually.

But he knew that saying anything remotely like that out loud would get him in way too much trouble - just thinking about what his mother would say if he asked to keep his hair growing made him a little bit sick to his stomach.

As he spat out the bubble gum toothpaste, he heard a small knock at the doorway.

He turned to see Hannah there. She was wearing a pink Peppa Pig t-shirt, yellow shorts, and pink tennis shoes.

“Hey Bub,” she whispered, “can you do my hair for me when we get to school? I want buns, but when mommy does my hair it hurts an’ also she said that buns are ugly…”

Hunter smiled and nodded. “Sure, Hanners. You want pink or yellow hair ties?”

“Both!” Hannah said.

“Okay then!” Hunter said as he grabbed the hair ties and slipped them in his pocket. He also grabbed a black wristband just in case Linda heard the drawer open.
He and Hannah walked down the stairs - Hannah actually hopped down the stairs.

“Hannah, stop hopping, it’s not ladylike!” Linda snapped.

“But I’m not wearing a skirt or tutu, so it’s okay, right?” Hannah asked.

Hunter saw Linda’s face turn red and knew that Hannah had said something that their mother disagreed with.

“Hannah, just do as she says, okay?” Hunter said, praying that his nervousness wasn’t too obvious. “She probably just doesn’t want you to hurt yourself.”

“But she said -”

“Hannah,” Hunter said, placing a hand on Hannah’s head. “Please, just do as she says, okay?”

Hannah looked down at her feet. “Okay…”

Hunter nodded and looked at the flabbergasted Linda. “We’re ready to go, Mom. How about you?”

Linda blinked a few times and then shook her head and sighed. “Just let me get my shoes and purse.”

Linda went upstairs to get some shoes.

“You know, Hannah made some good points.”

Oh God, not this again. Linda sighed. “I don’t CARE, Crawford. Go back to wherever the hell you went when you died.”

“I can’t, I’m tied to this plane of existence for a reason.”

“Oh please, what reason -?”

“You know the reason why, Linda Murphy.”

Linda gasped.

Estelle said nothing else after that.

Linda pushed Estelle’s words to the back of her mind as she went downstairs.

She made a reminder in her phone to call David at some point.

Brian sat with his feet on his desk, his hands behind his head. He was waiting for the rest of his friends to show up. He was wearing a basketball jersey and black athletic shorts with his favorite basketball shoes.

He was rarely the first of his friends to get to school, so he was going to bask in the glory that was not-tardiness.

The first of his friends to show up were Levi, Caroline, and Penelope.

Penelope had on a neon green t-shirt, black cargo shorts, her favorite hiking boots, and a green sweatband.
He looked at the two blackheads and one redhead smugly. “Hello, Levi. Caroline. Penelope.”

“Hey, Brian!” Levi said as he sat in his seat.

“Hey,” Caroline said, not even bothering to look up from her book as she sat down.

“Yo!” Penelope exclaimed as she sat down. “Hey Care, what’s goin’ on in your book now?”

“D’Artagnan just found out that his letter of recommendation to Monsieur de Treville has been stolen,” Caroline said. “Now nobody bug me, I’m reading.”

“Hey Hunter!” Levi said suddenly. “Why’s Hannah with you?”

Brian waved at Hunter. “Wassup, dude.”

“Eh, not much,” the blond said with a shrug. “Hannah’s here because I’m doing her hair for her before class.”

“Really?” Penelope asked curiously. “What’re you gonna do with it?”

“I’m gonna have buns!” Hannah said with an excited smile on her face.

“Really? Cool!” Levi said. “But will they be Princess Leia buns or just plain ol’ buns?”

Hannah just stood there, smile still in place.

“I don’t know how to do Princess Leia hair, so just plain buns’ll have to do,” Hunter admitted.

“I have some spare ponytail holders if you need any,” Caroline said.

Hunter smiled. “Thanks, Caroline! I’ll let you know if I need them.”

Caroline simply gave him a thumbs up.

“Hey dudes, sorry we’re late! Traffic was pretty bad!”

MK, Flowey and Frisk had walked in.

“Hey you guys!” Penelope said. “Now that everyone’s here, guess what I’ve got!”

“No,” Brian said pointedly.

“Wrong!” Penelope said. “I have with me…”

Penelope dug into her backpack and pulled out her camera. “Ta-daaa!”

“Sweet, you’re gonna take pictures?” MK asked.

<<I was hoping for some cupcakes,>> Frisk signed with a pout.

“We can do that on Friday, how’s that sound?” Penelope asked.

“Frisk, Smiley Trashbag’s birthday party’s tonight, remember?” Flowey asked.

<<But Penelope’s cupcakes are so good,>> Frisk signed.

“Does it really look like I give a -”
“Oh my GAWSH, what’s a KINDERGARTENER doing here?”

Hunter looked up from Hannah’s half-done honey-blonde hair to glare at Miranda. “She’s standing.”

Miranda scoffed. “I can SEE that, sissy boy. I MEAN why isn’t it back in its classroom where it belongs?”

“Because of nunya,” Hunter responded.

“Nunya…?”

“Nunya business.”

“Wow,” Caroline deadpanned. “I can’t believe she just fell for the most obvious nunya I’ve ever heard.”

Miranda growled before going to sit down.

Hunter finished Hannah’s hair buns. “And done! Whaddaya think, Hannah?”

Penelope squealed at how cute Hannah in buns was. She took out her camera and took a picture.

Frisk, Caroline, Levi, and Brian all took pictures with their phones.

“Okay, I gotta take Hannah back to Ms. Knacket’s class,” Hunter announced as he stood up. “Be back in a bit.”

“Okay, I’ll tell Mrs. Chang where you are,” Brian said.

“Thanks Bri,” Hunter said with a smile as he led Hannah from the room.

“Bye!” Hannah said as she waved at the group.

The group waved back as the Thompson siblings closed the classroom door behind them.

Hunter led Hannah toward her classroom when Hannah spoke up.

“When’re you gonna ask Brian to kiss you?” she asked.

Hunter stumbled over nothing and choked on air.

Hannah just watched Hunter stumble over his words in his attempt to explain...something. His words were coming out like garbled wheezing and whimpering while his hands flapped around as if to fend off the idea.

“Bub, quit bein’ a drama queen, I gotta get to class.”

Hunter hid his face in his hands and whined a bit before coming back.

“O-o-okay, s-sorry, I-I just -” Hunter sighed. “H-he doesn’t like me like that. And if Mom found out I like-like Brian, she’d kill me.”

“Not if I kill her first,” Hannah said with a smile.

Hunter sputtered out a laugh. “D-don’t do that, I’m pretty sure she has a horcrux somewhere.”

Hannah’s eyes widened. “What’s dat?”
“Long story, just don’t tell anyone I said that, okay?” Hunter asked, his voice hurried with fear.

“You got it, dude!” Hannah said with a thumbs-up and a smile.

The buses came at 10:30. The chaperones - Linda, Sans, Randy, and three parents of fifth graders - were waiting.

The fourth and fifth graders filed out to get on the buses. They got on the buses by grade.

As soon as everyone was seated and tallied and on the road, the bus driver turned on the radio.

Hunter hummed along to the music as quietly as he could. Since the other kids were all chatting, it was easier than he thought it would be.

Brian decided to doze off, absently listening to the chatter around him and Hunter’s humming along to the radio.

Caroline was reading her book. Porthos and Aramis have just been introduced by name and were now having a tiff in front of Monsieur de Treville’s place.

Penelope was trying to keep up with Caroline’s reading. It was difficult, but seeing the taller girl’s eyes sparkle as she read made it worth it.

Levi tapped his fingers against the seat, as though he was playing the piano to the song on the radio.

MK stared out the window at the world passing by, trying their hardest not to grab Frisk's hand with their tail.

Frisk leaned their head on MK’s shoulder and dozed off. If Chara wasn’t going to come when they called them, maybe they’d look for them.

**No need for that, Frisk.**

Frisk shot up with wide eyes. Luckily, the bus had just hit a pothole, so it wasn’t suspicious.

They blinked a few times and leaned back in their seat.

Where had Chara been these past few weeks?

...I don’t wanna talk about it. But I have a job for you.

Frisk assured Chara that they were listening.

**Good. I want you to wait until the group has more free range, or at least until you’re out of Linda’s line of sight. I’ll tell you what to do. And you may want to bring your friends along, you might need help.**

Help? Why? Just what was Chara plotting, anyway?

**Frisk, trust me. I lived at the place you’re going. I know almost everything about that place, where every hideaway is, the best trees for climbing, the best watering holes...I know what I’m doing. I just need you to trust me and follow my directions, okay?**
Frisk was hesitant. But Chara meant well, whatever happened. They agreed.

_OKay. Thank you for trusting me. I’m sorry I ditched you like that. I just...I had some bad memories come back and I needed some time away to think on my own for a bit. I really hope it’s still there..._

Frisk was confused, but they didn’t say anything. Chara would explain it once they reached the Ebott Historical Society.

They decided to talk to their friends and let them know about their plans.

*Frisk: hey guys
*Frisk: i got an idea
*MK: what’s up?
*Brian: ?
*Hunter: what is it?
*Levi: this is gonna b fun
*Caroline: Do tell. I’m curious.
*Penelope: tell us tell us tell us! 8D
*Frisk: we’re going on an adventure~ ^v^
*Penelope: gasp! An adventure? :o
*Caroline: Color me intrigued. What kind of adventure?
*Brian: dis bettr b gud
*Caroline: Holy crap Brian, your spelling is almost as bad as Miranda’s.
*Brian: shit up u txt lik an ol prsn
*Hunter: brian, caroline, both of u stop.
*MK: tell us what the adventure is, frisk!
*Frisk: it’s a secret! i’ll tell you all when we get there -w-
*Caroline: Great, now I can’t focus on my book because I’m too curious.
*Brian: lol no its cuz ur nosy
*Levi: speaking of nosy, linda’s coming this way. idk y tho.

The kids stopped texting for the time being and put their phones away as Linda walked by, lowering their heads to avoid eye contact with her.

Apparently Linda didn’t want to talk to any of them, since she walked right by them toward the back of the bus. They sighed with relief.

_Sans finished the bit of work he could do from his cell phone on a school bus on the outskirts of the city.

*yo lex

*works done

*Right then. I’ll check it later.

*thanks

*brb pta mom incoming
Sans closed out of his messaging app and put his phone away as Linda came and stood over him.

“linda,” Sans said. “do you need somethin’?”

“Well, Sans, since you are a chaperone on this field trip, we are going to have to discuss how we are doing to arrange the students,” she explained. “I assure you that I don’t want to do this any more than you do, but -”

“okay, what arrangement didja have in mind?”

Linda blinked. “I’m sorry?”

“I asked what arrangement you had in mind. and shouldn't randy be here?” Sans asked. “he’s a chaperone too.”

“I was going to talk to him next,” Linda said sharply, almost as if she was eager to keep going.

“well, shouldn’t all the chaperones be kept in the loop? make it easier on them?”

“Well, that’s -”

“i’m texting him about it right now.”

Linda’s left eye twitched. This was not what she’d wanted.

Randy stood up and walked toward the back of the bus where Sans and Linda were and sat in an empty space.

“You called?” he asked.

“hey randy,” Sans said. “linda and i were just about to discuss how we should arrange the kids.”

“Okay, how’re we gonna do this?” Randy asked.

“Weeeell,” Linda began, “I’ve decided to have the Monsters go with Sans -”

“aaaand i am gonna stop you right there,” Sans said, “and i am gonna call racism.”

“Sans, we have been over this,” Linda said tiredly. “I am not a racist, I simply want the children to be comfortable.”

“Linda, I can see where both you and Sans are coming from,” Randy added. “However, I think we should wait until we get to the site and then arrange the kids at random.”

“i like that idea,” Sans concurred. “and since we live in a democracy, i do believe that we have a majority agreement.”

Linda growled. “Ooookay then, that settles it.”

“Alright. Talk to ya later.”

“Whatever.”

And with that Linda stalked off to return to her place at the front of the bus.

Randy and Sans sat in silence.
“thanks,” Sans said.


“i’m almost afraid to ask, but okay.”

It took another hour and a half for the buses to reach their destination.

The Breedlove Manor house was a two-story house of red-painted wood panels. The paint was chipping in places, and on one of the panels it had completely peeled off. The shingles were grey. There was a red brick chimney, with a few bricks missing from the top.

Otherwise, the place was all together very lovely. The grounds were well-kept, and the pathways were clear of any debris.

It hasn’t changed a bit. I can’t believe it…

Frisk wondered what Chara was thinking as they said that.

It’ll make your and your friends’ job easier. Trust me.

Frisk really wanted to know what Chara meant, because they were starting to worry.

Frisk, please, don’t worry. I know what I’m doing. But if you want more details, I guess I could spare you a hint, since you’re such a good vessel.

Frisk didn’t really like the term “vessel”.

Sorry. But we are going on a treasure hunt!

Frisk brightened a bit. A treasure hunt!

Okay, chill out a bit, the grownups are talking.

Frisk started to listen.

“Ookay, everyone, line up, we’re going to arrange everyone into three groups! I’m head of group one, Mr. Marlow here is head of group two, and Sans is group three!”

Frisk moved into the line.

They made note of the groups each of their friends were in. Caroline and Penelope had arranged themselves so that they were both in group two, along with Hunter; Brian, Levi, and MK were in group three; and Frisk, to their chagrin and horror, was in group one. And they KNEW that no one would want to trade with them.

Frisk looked around their group to see if there was anyone they knew. They spotted Azaria, Marilla, and Naomi, so at least SOME of the kids were familiar.

“Okay!” Linda announced suddenly, causing Frisk to flinch. “First, we are going to tour the building itself. Then we’ll meet back here for lunch. After that, we’ll have an hour for free time before we have to leave.”
That’s good. We can do an hour.

Frisk swallowed a bit. They fidgeted with one of Flowey’s petals between their fingers to calm themself down.

This is going to be a long day.

Group two entered the building to start their tour first. Caroline was excited, if the fact that she had been looking around at every little thing in sight was any indication.

Before long, they reached the end of their tour.

“Alright, that’s it, that’s the tour!” the guide announced. “Any questions?”

Caroline had way too many, and she needed to ask them. ALL of them.

So she raised her hand.

“Yes, you with the ponytail?”

“Um, when I was doing some research on the history of the house online, I got curious and decided to study the Breedlove family, and I couldn’t help but notice that there are no photographs of Charity Constance. I found that a bit weird. Do you have any idea why that could be?”

The guide looked kind of nervous. “W-well, the simple answer is that no photographs of Charity Constance remain -”

“But those of her brother William can be found, along with those of her parents and grandparents. Why is that?”

“Caroline, that’s enough,” Randy said.

“But it’s really weird,” Caroline said. “Not only did Charity Constance herself disappear without a trace, but so did all photographic evidence of her existence. Isn’t that suspicious?”

There was some muttering among the group.

The guide seemed a bit nervous, like someone who was being confronted.

Caroline stood her ground. She would have answers if she just held her ground.

“Well?” Caroline asked. “If you know, say what you know, if you don’t, maybe you know someone who does.”

The guide looked like he was about to wet himself.

The group was silent. Randy didn’t know what else there was he could do. And maybe, just maybe, he too was a bit curious.

The guide decided to answer as best he could in the end.

He sighed before answering. “W-well, you see, there are no photos of Charity Constance because...they disappeared.”
Caroline was getting tired of being circumvented. “What.”

“Miss, I kid you not, any photos of Charity Constance there might have been disappeared at the same time she did. No one knows what happened.”

“No one?” Caroline repeated. “Are you positive? Because there has to be someone with at LEAST a THEORY on what happened. There HAS to.”

“Well if there is, I haven’t heard it,” the guide said, his voice tensing.

“But maybe you know someone who has!” Caroline implored. “Like, maybe there’s an older guide or something! Or something in the archives! And - and Charity Constance musta KNOWN that Mt. Ebott was known for its disappearances! Maybe…”

Caroline’s silver eyes widened.

“Maybe she ran away for a reason…”

Caroline’s eyes stayed wide as she walked back to Penelope’s side. She grabbed at Penelope’s hand.

Penelope looked down at Caroline’s shaking hand, and then at Caroline again. Caroline was holding her left shoulder.

Penelope squeezed her hand and rubbed her thumb over Caroline’s knuckles.

Then came lunchtime.

The friends sat together with their lunches plus one cookie.

They ate in silence.

“So…” Caroline began. “The adventure.”

Frisk swallowed their bite of roast beef sandwich before signing the plan.

<<I’m going to need you guys to follow me into the woods,>> Frisk signed.

“I’m in,” Brian said. “I dunno what you want us to do, but it involves nature, so I’m in.”

“I admit, it does sound tempting,” Caroline said. “But my question is why we’re going into the woods in the first place. Is there something there, you think?”

Frisk nodded.

“Uh, guys?” Hunter uttered. “I dunno if that’s a good idea, I mean, we could be caught!”

<<I know a few hidden routes,>> Frisk signed.

Caroline and Levi perked up at this. “Hidden routes?” Levi breathed in awe. “How do you know of these?”

<<I have my sources.>>

“Okay, now I’m getting excited!” Caroline said. “Now I have TWO mysteries to solve…”
Everyone but Hunter and Penelope stared at her.

“Long story, I’ll explain after we solve THIS mystery.”

“But when do we go…?” MK asked.

Frisk looked around for an opening. Chara saw one.

<<Let’s go now!>> Frisk signed.

“Don’t gotta tell ME twice,” Brian said as he stood up.

Everyone else followed Brian and Frisk into the hidden pathway into the woods until they came across a small clearing.

I know this place. From here, go to the left of where you’re facing.

Frisk followed Chara’s instructions and gestured for the others to follow them until Chara told them to turn again.

This went on for an unknown amount of time.

“How long have we been walking…?” Brian said, a little out of breath.

“I dunno, I’m guessing about five miles,” said Caroline, not much worse for wear than she was at the start of the expedition.

“Frisk, PLEASE tell us we’re almost there,” Hunter pleaded.

**We are. Just make a right turn and walk until we see a tree with a heart carved into it.**

Frisk relayed the instructions and their friends followed.

They walked about a mile and a half before reaching the aforementioned tree with a heart carved into it.

Brian and Hunter collapsed onto the ground. Levi leaned against a tree to rest. Penelope and Caroline just stared at the weak males they found themselves surrounded by.

“Welp,” Penelope began, “now that we’re here, what do we do?”

<<There’s a gap in the tree roots with a box in it.>>

“You heard the genderless anomaly,” Caroline said. “Let’s get searching.”

Caroline and Brian searched the base of the tree for an opening. They found nothing.

“I’m really starting to think that this is a waste of time,” Brian grumbled.

“Giving up already, cityslicker?” Caroline said, her glasses glinting evilly. “I assumed that you of all people would keep going until you passed out. Where’s your fighting spirit, huh?”

Brian was suddenly reinvigorated by the new challenge.

He got down on his knees and dug around the base of the tree in between the roots.

The rest of the kids just watched him for a moment before taking pity and joining him in his
tunnelling escapades.

They were going to have to clean themselves off later, but right now these kids had a mission, and they were damned if they weren’t going to see it through to the very end,

Caroline checked her phone for the time.

“Guys, we have half an hour until we have to leave,” she announced.

“Does anybody know how far away from the group we are?” Hunter asked.

“About seven miles if we use the path we took to get here in the first place,” Levi said.

“Okay, but what if we cut through the trees? Will we make it back to a trail of some kind?” Brian asked.

<<Yeah, the trail is two miles to the east, and from there it’s three miles south until we get back to the group,>> Frisk signed.

“Okay, anyone got anything ye-”

“Guys, I got something!” MK called out.

“Whoa, what is it?” Levi said.

“Some kinda hollow! I think this might be what Frisk was talkin’ about!”

“Seriously?” Brian said incredulously. “We’re comin’ over.”

Everyone ran over to where MK was and helped him dig the rest of the way down.

When they made the hole big enough for one of them to reach into, they found, among scattered leaves and twigs and bugs and animal bones, an old candy tin with words carved into it. The words were indecipherable in the darkness of the hollow, so someone was going to have to reach in and get it out.

“Okay, which of us has monkey arms?” Brian asked.

“I’ll do it!” Levi declared. “I have better eyesight than Caroline, so I’ll be able to see it better!”

“Well, sorry I need new glasses, Levi,” Caroline said sarcastically.

“It’s not a BAD thing...” Levi mumbled as he reached into the hollow.

He had to use his fingertips to edge the tin toward himself until he could grab it.

He grabbed it and returned with a few scratches on his arms and some bits of dead leaves and tree bark stuck in his copper curls.

“Got it!” he said, almost out of breath. “Who wants to open it, ‘cause I feel weird opening this, and I don’t wanna hurt my fingers ‘cause I’ve got piano practice Wednesday.”

“Wait!” Caroline shouted. “I wanna read what’s scratched into it! Can I?”

“Pfahaha! You always wanna read everything, don’t you, Caroline?” Levi ribbed.

“Yes, now gimme,” Caroline said with utmost seriousness, her silver eyes flashing.
Levi blinked. “Okay…” he said slowly, passing her the tin.

Caroline took it as delicately as she could and read the surface.

The tin was for gumdrops - the only flavor names that weren’t worn with age were licorice, cinnamon, and allspice. The words carved onto the tin shocked Caroline into gripping it harder - possibly too hard since the container creaked a little.

“Guys,” she said, “you’re not gonna believe whose name is on this thing…”

“Why, did it belong to a president or somethin’?” Brian said.

“No,” Caroline said, her voice trembling a bit. “Look where I’m pointing, and read it.”

Everyone did as she said.

“Please tell me I’m not the only one seeing that name,” Caroline pleaded.

“You’re really not,” Hunter whimpered.

Everyone stared in shock at the name on the tin, including the one who led them to it the first place.

Charity Breedlove, September 1915

“I cannot BELIEVE you just let those children run off like that!”

“linda, you do realize that if anything has happened to this kids, as the pta president and head chaperone, it’s pretty much on you, right?”

Linda glared at Sans as the ranger cowered in his seat. Sans glared back, knowing that they were both aware of the truth in his statement.

But they were also both aware that Sans, as a minority representative, was going to land himself in a bit of hot water as well, if not more than Linda.

But even so, Linda greatly valued her perceived reputation. Any threats directed at her reputation were considered a threat directed at her personally, and would be treated as such. To Linda, reputation was everything.

“Uh, p-pardon me,” the ranger stammered, “b-but didn’t you guys say that t-there are t-three chaperones?”

“Why?” Linda said through gritted teeth.

“B-because there’s only two of you here…”

Linda and Sans blinked before turning behind them.

Randy had left.

“fuck,” Sans hissed. “i’m gonna text him. he mentioned once that he was part of an emergency rescue team back in colorado, so he’s probably out lookin’ for the kids on his own.”
“Wait, what?” Linda said, a confused grimace on her face.

“shush, linda, he’s typing a response.”

Linda glared at Sans as the response showed up on his phone.

Sans brightened at whatever was on the screen.

“the kids came back on their own,” Sans sighed. “they’re a bit dirty and stuff, but they’re otherwise unharmed.” Sans chuckled a bit. “they apparently went off on an adventure, can you believe it? heh, man, these kids...”

Sans had a look on his face that expressed pride, fondness, relief, and amazement all at once. It was a look Linda knew well.

It was the look of a parent.

As far as Linda was concerned, he had no right to look like that. But what did she care right now? She was too relieved that her son was back, safe and sound. She really didn’t care about much else at the moment.

Sans shook off his reverie and stood up from his chair.

“welp,” he said, “i’m gonna go check on the kids, see if they’re okay. you comin’, linda?”

Linda blinked a few times. “Who, me?”

“look, i know linda’s one of the most common names in the country, but you’re the only linda here right now,” Sans explained. “and even if i find you a very terrible person, you were clearly worried about your kid, and i’m sure you wanna see him now that you know he’s safe, right?”

Linda gawked at him a few times. Was this...monster serious?

The look on his face said nothing to the contrary, even if he was smirking.

Linda sighed and crossed her arms in front of her. “Let’s get a move on, the kids are waiting.”

Sans nodded and headed out the door.

As soon as Linda stepped out of the building, she realized that Sans was...running. Like Olympic sprint-level running.

She thought for a moment. Frisk must be really important to him if he was running like that…

Linda stopped her train of thought right there. What was she THINKING? Sans is a MONSTER, for God’s sake. Monsters can’t love. The Bible said so. The HWC pamphlet said so.

She walked over to the common area where the kids were at. Randy was holding Levi and Caroline and crying for whatever reason. Sans was putting a bandaid on Frisk’s knee while they sat on a tree stump. Frisk stood up and hugged the skeleton. The child began to flap their hands around.

“Frisk, don’t do that!” Linda warned.

“linda, they are trying to tell me something,” Sans said, his tone even.

“Sans, if your daughter wanted to say something, she would use her voice like a normal person,”
Linda explained condescendingly.

“linda, i could spend hours explaining to you how what you just said is very stupid, but right now i’m too happy that my kid is safe to give a crap,” Sans said as he hugged Frisk.

Sans lifted Frisk and carried them off to the bus. Frisk wrapped their arms around him and nuzzled into his hoodie.

Linda went over to Hunter and knelt down to hug him.

Hunter stood stock still.

“I’m so glad you’re okay…” Linda whispered. She let go and held him by the shoulders. “You’re not hurt or anything, are you? Those other kids didn’t try to hurt you, did they?”

“Mom, I’m fine,” Hunter said quietly. “And they wouldn’t do that.”

“And just HOW do you know THAT, young man?”

“Because they’re my friends,” Hunter said, shrinking in on himself as if in fear of Linda’s reaction. “I know you don’t like them for some reason, but they’re really nice and stuff. I trust them. You may not trust them, but I do.”

Linda blinked a few times. She sighed. “Whatever, I’ve had enough excitement for one day. Let’s go back to the bus. Randy, you coming?”

Randy looked up and blinked a few times. “What? Oh. Nah, I’m staying behind with Levi, Caroline, and Penelope. We’re gonna go for a hike and then head home later,” he said.

“But your car is back at the school,” Linda said. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah, Sharona’s going to pick us up, so we’ll drop by the school later on our way home and get my car.”

“Okay, if you say so,” Linda said. “See you around, I guess.”

“Bye guys,” Hunter said as he waved.

“Bye!” Levi said.

“See ya tomorrow!” Penelope said.

“Later,” Caroline said.

And with that, Linda and Hunter walked back to the bus.

Randy, Levi, Caroline, and Penelope watched the bus drive off.

They sat in silence.

“You got your camera Nell?” Caroline asked suddenly.

“Heck yeah!” Penelope said, holding up said camera with an enthusiastic smile.

“Alright then,” Randy said. “Levi, are you ready?”

“Heck yeah!” Levi cheered.
“Okey doke! Let’s go!” Randy announced, leading the kids to a trailhead.

On the bus going back, Frisk sat by Sans, leaning on his shoulder while the Skeleton himself leaned against the window. Frisk hugged him to keep themself from flying off at every curve and pothole.

Sans had an arm wrapped around them to keep them from flying off as an extra preventative measure.

He thought as he closed his eye sockets.

The kid wandered off into the woods for an “adventure”, returning filthy but otherwise safe. That was definitely a relief if there ever was one, but these results only raised MORE questions in his mind.

For example, WHY did Frisk and their friends run off into the woods? What were they doing that got them all dirty? How were they not hurt? How were they able to find their way back on their own?

Too many questions. It would have to wait until after his birthday party.

He chuckled inwardly at the thought. Seriously, he was thirty-one years old, he stopped having birthday parties when he got to college. Which was apparently sooner than most people. Apparently thirteen is not the normal age to stop, but Sans and Gaster didn’t know or care. They had better things to do, like science or blowing things up in the name of science.

But hey. He wasn’t complaining. It’s not every day that he got a chance to eat cake with his friends and loved ones to honor another year closer to his inevitable death. This was gonna be great. Especially if Toriel was the one cooking. And he was pretty sure that everyone agreed with him on that.

He could feel Linda glaring at him for some reason. He turned to face her and gave the most kindhearted smile he could give something like her.

Linda growled started texting someone. Maybe a hitman, maybe her husband, maybe a hitman hired to kill her husband so she could get his life insurance money. Who knew with Linda.

Frisk stirred a bit in Sans’ arms and yawned. They blinked and sat up to look around a bit. They got on their knees to look out across the bus like a meerkat looking out for predators. They sat back down and snuggled into Sans again.

Sans chuckled and tousled Frisk’s hair. When he stopped he found some chunks of dead leaf in the joint between the distal and middle phalanges of his middle finger and between his capitate and trapezoid bones, there was dirt smeared all over his hand.

Yeah, the kid was going to have to take a shower before the party…

Chara lay on their back, limbs splayed about them like a starfish, staring into the abyss above them.

Then Frisk popped their head into their field of vision unexpectedly.
Chara shot up in surprise and accidentally headbutted Frisk. Frisk flew backwards a bit and landed on their buttocks.

Both Humans rubbed their aching foreheads for a bit. When they stopped, they leaned against each other, back to back.

Chara tilted their head back and rested it on Frisk’s shoulder. Frisk did the same. Chara sighed. Frisk sighed as well.

“Quit copying me, Frisk,” Chara grumbled.

Frisk snickered.

The children were silent.

Frisk moved to sit on their knees and turned around so they could lean their head on Chara’s shoulder.

“Get off me,” Chara grumbled.

<<No,>> Frisk signed, a teasing smile on their face.


<<Okay, but first you have to tell me something.>>

Chara sighed. “What?”

<<What’s in the box?>>

Chara gasped. They stayed quiet for a minute.

“I don’t remember,” Chara said, their voice flat. That was a tell. Frisk knew that Chara was lying when their voice was flat.

<<Chara, please don’t lie to me. If you don’t want to talk about it, that’s okay. Just don’t lie.>>

Chara lowered their head slowly. A few minutes later their shoulders were shaking and they were sobbing.

Frisk had honestly never seen Chara cry, so they didn’t know how to help them. Maybe hugging them would help?

Frisk wrapped their arms around Chara from behind, hiding their face in Chara’s back.

Chara gripped Frisk’s arms hard enough that Frisk was probably going to have to check for bruises when they woke up outside the START menu.

But they didn’t really mind. As long as Chara felt better, what was a bunch of crushed leaves in their hair of a few bruises on their arm?

Frisk wasn’t sure how long it took, but Chara stopped crying eventually. Now they were just sniffling.

<<Feeling better now?>> Frisk signed.
Chara nodded. “Y-yeah, I’m fine now…”

Frisk nodded, their arms still wrapped about Chara.

<<If you’re not ready to talk about it, can I at least open the box?>> Frisk signed. <<Dad - I mean Sans - is the only other person who’s gonna know, unless you think Mom and Asgore can see too.>>


<<Yes.>> Frisk signed.

“Since when?”

<<Since yesterday. I found a slug in the rosebush, and I went to ask mom what to do with it, and she said to wait until my father came home.>>

Chara snorted. “Oh my god, Mom…”

<<I know, right?>>

The two children laughed.

<<You still haven’t answered my question,>> Frisk signed. <<Can I open the box?>>

Chara was quiet for a bit. They shrugged. “Sure. It’s not mine anymore, anyway.”

<<Okay…but what about Mom and Asgore?>>

“That’s best left up to you, Frisk,” Chara said with a shrug and a sigh. “I don’t really know for certain if they’d wanna see what’s in there anyway. I know I don’t.”

<<Then why tell me to look for it? Why involve my friends?>> Frisk signed, their hands loud with worry and frustration.

“Because it’s been hidden for far too long,” Chara said, their voice cold. “It hurts, yes, but all the more reason for it to be revealed.”

Chara sighed.

“People hated me, Frisk. They saw a spoiled little girl who ignored everyone in favor of her brother and her books. They saw a girl who, when she didn’t ignore people, she cursed them and smiled like the devil himself. They never tried to get to know the REAL Charity Constance Breedlove. They were too scared of…of Hiram to even try. They thought he was just a father who overprotected his daughter…”

Chara spat out a laugh, their face broken into their signature cold grin, their eyes blackening. “He wasn’t trying to protect ME. He was trying to protect his REPUTATION. As far as HE was concerned, Mother and William and I were just tools to keep his reputation intact. When no one was looking, he’d…”

Chara inhaled sharply. “No. Just…just open the box when you get the chance. The contents will explain everything better than I can. I was always better at putting my thoughts into writing than into words…”

Frisk was silent. They didn’t know what to say. What COULD they say? Even if they COULD
think of something to say to Chara, was it the RIGHT thing to say? They could never be sure with Chara.

So they simply wrapped their arms around Chara in a hug.

When they let go, they stood up to move in front of them so that they could see them.

<<I have to go now.>> they signed. <<Thank you for trusting me, Chara. I’ll see you tonight, I guess.>>

“Frisk, wait.”

Frisk paused to let Chara speak.

“Tell Sans I said happy birthday. And let him know that Gaster said so, too.”

Frisk’s eyes brightened at the mention of Gaster. <<I will! Tell Gaster I said hello, and to talk to me when he’s able!>>

Chara nodded. “Alright. See ya.”

Frisk waved Chara goodbye as they woke up on the bus.

The school was in sight. They sat up and stretched, only to push Sans’ face into the window as they did so.

The stopped once they realized what they were doing, only to see that Sans was still out cold. They giggled a bit and shook him to try and wake him up.

The bus moved into the parking lot. Frisk was still shaking Sans.

They stopped to pout. Then they got an idea and stopped pouting to smirk evilly.

Frisk got out their phone to text their mom.

*hey mom? we just got back and sans is still asleep. what do i do?*

*Do not worry, Frisk, I have an idea.*

Frisk stared at the phone in confusion until they heard something.

*Come on baby light my fire~ Come on baby light my fire~ Try to set the night on~ Fire~*

Sans shot up and frantically fished for his phone.

He took it out and answered it, his eyeilights dark and sweat rolling down his face.

“wassup, t?” he said, a little too quickly.

“Oh, Sans, you’re awake! Where are you right now?”

Sans’ eyeilights returned. He blinked a few times, looking around as the children got off the bus. “we just got back. Frisk’s gonna need a bath or somethin’, since they got caught up in a little adventure of sorts…”

“An adventure?” Toriel said. “I’d like to hear about it! I’ll be out in a bit!”
“okay, see ya then!” Sans said.

“Alright! I love you~”

“love ya too, tori.”

Sans hung up and sighed, turning to the smirking Frisk beside him. They had their hands on their cheeks and their red eyes sparkling as they listened to the conversation.

Sans sighed as he rumpled the Human’s mousy brown mop. What was he going to do with this kid…?

Randy sighed as he sat on the rock on the side of the trail opposite the small cliff Caroline was currently sitting at the edge of to gaze dramatically into the distance. Penelope was taking her picture, her green eyes wide and sparkling with excitement as if this were a once-in-a-lifetime photo op.

Caroline shifted once every few minutes to give Penelope something new to work with. What was she, a model?

Randy sighed and took a picture of the scene before him.

Then Caroline posed with her legs over the edge of the cliff, one crossed over the other at the knee, her hands holding her knee as she tilted her head back.

Then a gust of wind came, blowing Caroline’s long black ponytail behind her.

Caroline took off her glasses and put them beside her. She thought she looked more dramatic that way. She considered taking her hair out of its ponytail but decided against it.

Penelope’s photo output increased eightfold for the two-and-a-half minutes that the breeze blew. Penelope loved taking pictures of things she liked. The more things she liked in the frame, the more pictures she took. Who cared if people complained about thirty-nine pictures of the same scene? Certainly not Penelope.

Penelope checked the camera. The film was running low. She was going to have to stop here for the time being.

She lowered her camera so it hung around her neck by the strap and walked over to sit beside Caroline.

As she lowered herself, Caroline looked up at her curiously. Penelope smiled. “Don’t mind me, I’m just gonna sit down!” she said cheerfully. Then she was suddenly nervous. “Is-is that okay with you?”

Caroline shrugged. “If you want to, I won’t stop you.”

Penelope sighed with relief as she sat down next to Caroline.

She slung her legs over the cliff’s edge and kicked back and forth.

She was shy all of a sudden, unsure of what to say. Penelope didn’t get like this. She sometimes found herself stumbling over her words around particularly cute girls once in awhile, but this was completely new. She found herself staring at Caroline as she reached for her hand.
Once she grabbed it she turned away bashfully. Caroline didn’t move away. Was that good? Was that bad? What was wrong with Penelope? Why was she freaking out like this? Caroline was her best friend! She didn’t even LIKE people, much less like THAT!

But Penelope was happy like this. For now, this was enough. Caroline was the first real friend she’d ever had, and she wouldn’t trade that for anything.

When Caroline gripped Penelope’s hand in return, Penelope smiled widely.

“Hey Nell, look over where I’m pointing,” Caroline said suddenly, as if she was completely unfazed by the fact that her hand was being held.

Penelope looked where she was pointing and saw a herd of bison grazing.

“Whoa,” Penelope said in reverence.

“I know, I never thought I’d see one again,” Caroline said quietly.

“You mean you’ve seen some before?” Penelope asked.

“You mean you haven’t?” Caroline asked.

“W-well, not this many at once!” the petite girl defended. “And not outside of pictures…”

“Well, this is quite a lot of bison for somewhere so close to civilization.”

“How close to the city ARE we, anyway?” Penelope asked.

“About twenty miles from the city limits,” Caroline explained. “But the last suburb was about nine miles away.”

“A suburb?” Penelope asked.

“A community separate from a city but still considered a part of it because rich white people tend to gather there to live and raise their children.”

Penelope turned to stare at Caroline. “I have no idea what that means.”

“Then you’re lucky,” Caroline said. “For now, anyway. You’ll learn soon enough,”

“Will you be there to help me learn, though?” Penelope said suddenly. She slapped her hand over her mouth and blushed as she realized what she said. “O-oh, I-I’m sorry, I didn’t -”

“Sure, why not?” Caroline asked, as if what Penelope said was completely normal.

Penelope dropped her hand from her mouth and gawked at Caroline. “Wha - seriously?”

Caroline stared back in confusion. “Yeah, why?”

Penelope sighed. “No reason.”

“...Okay, if you say so.”

They were quiet for a bit.

“Wait, where the heck is Levi?” Caroline asked.
“I dunno,” Penelope said. “Probably looking for more treasure…”

“Maybe. Still kinda worried though…”

“Be not afraid!” came a voice from atop a large boulder. “For I come bearing nothing whatsoever!”

“Looks like we’ve found him,” Caroline deadpanned.

Penelope giggled. “Yep!”

“Wanna climb up behind him and scare him?” Caroline whispered.

“But what if he falls off and dies?” Penelope said.

“Good point...Let’s pretend he’s not there instead.”

“Good plan,” Penelope admitted.

Sans sat on the couch in the living room, leaning against Toriel’s shoulder as he waited for Frisk to get dressed so they could head off the the party. Toriel had changed into a short-sleeved knee-length indigo dress with white collar and trim paired with black flats.

The puppy hopped onto the couch and crawled over him to sit on Toriel’s lap. Toriel giggled and scratched behind its ears.

Sans watched and chuckled at the sight. Man, his family was just growing and growing, wasn’t it? He reached over to pet the puppy. Sans was honestly surprised that it didn’t try to chew on him. The annoying pomeranian back in the Underground sure seemed to like bones. He seemed to favor Papyrus, though. Maybe that was the case here. Maybe the pup was just waiting for better bones to bite. But maybe not. Who even knew?

Then Frisk came around the corner and slid down the bannister. They had changed into a short-sleeved white buttondown with a red ribbon tied around the neck, khaki shorts, red suspenders, white socks and black oxford shoes. A bit fancy for Grillby’s, but they wanted to look their best for the party, even if it was for the one person who could not have cared less about what they wore. Their mother had, after all, and Frisk had wholeheartedly accepted Mettaton’s belief that one should take every opportunity to dress up.

Sans chuckled and gave a thumbs up. “lookin’ good there, kid.”

Frisk put a hand on their face and swatted the air with the other in bashfulness.

The puppy trotted up to them and stood on its hind legs with its forepaws against them. Frisk picked it up and gave it eskimo kisses. Sans and Toriel took photos of the adorable sight before them and posted them to social media.

“welp, better get going,” Sans said as he stood from his spot, reluctant to stop snuggling his girlfriend. “the party's in ten minutes, so we’re already late.”

“Ah, that may be,” Toriel said with a smile, “but the party cannot truly begin until the guest of honor is present!”

“really?” Sans said. “is that so?”
Frisk nodded. <<It’s one of the most important rules of party etiquette, Dad!>>

“really?” Sans asked. “you think i’d remember. then again, it has been a while since my last birthday party…”

<<Two months isn’t THAT long!>> Frisk signed with a pout.

Sans chuckled and rumpled their hair. “nah, frisk, i meant my last birthday party for my own birthday,” Sans explained.

Frisk mouthed an “oh” of realization before their face settled into confusion. <<How long HAS it been?>>

Sans’ eye sockets widened. “well, uh, gee, uh, i dunno really. if i had to guess, i’d say…eighteen years? yeah, that seems about right. college really cut into that part of my life…”

“Wait,” Toriel interjected, “you started college at thirteen?”

“yep,” Sans said, popping the “p” at the end of the word. “i still have my high school class ring. still fits me, too…”

“After all this time?” Toriel asked in disbelief.

“always,” Sans said solemnly. then he chuckled a bit. “but for real, i was surprised too when i found it. though i was more surprised to find that i still had it after all these years, considering…”

Sans sighed. “welp. we’re already late as it is, might as well at least try to show up at all.”

Toriel leaned down to kiss the top of his head. “Right you are, my dear! Let’s not keep our family waiting!”

Sans looked up at his beloved and smiled. How did he ever get so lucky?

“Oh my god, they’re fifteen minutes late! They should have BEEN here by now!” Mettaton crossed his arms and leaned against Papyrus with a huff.

“MAYBE SANS FELL ASLEEP AGAIN…” Papyrus offered as he draped an arm around his boyfriend.

Mettaton hummed. Seriously, HE was the one who was supposed to be fashionably late. He even dressed the part. High-waisted white shorts, purple pumps, and a purple chiffon top with short black sleeves, plus gold bangles and a tattoo choker. He even did his nails in purple. The things he did for this family…

Papyrus had on a blue polo with a white collar and khaki cargo shorts plus his red boots.

Undyne and Alphys sat opposite them. Undyne had on a white v-neck t-shirt, a denim vest, and black skinny jeans with black boots. Alphys had on a blue gingham empire-waist sundress.

“Undyne, did you hear back from Asgore?” Alphys asked.

“Yeah, he had somethin’ to do for work, so he couldn’t make it,” Undyne said. “But I’m gonna bet 50 bucks that he’s with Shelby instead, fufufu!”
Then someone’s phone went off.

“THAT’S MINE, SORRY!” Papyrus said. He dug it out of his pocket and answered it. “HELLO?”

“hey pap, we’re almost there.”

“SANS!” Papyrus shouted into the phone. “YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN HERE TWENTY-THREE MINUTES AND EIGHTEEN-POINT-SEVEN-SIX SECONDS AGO!”

“sorry bro, lotta stuff came up. frisk had to clean themself up after going on a little adventure during the field trip, i told them about how i haven’t had a proper birthday party since i was thirteen, and there was a wreck off 23rd and jenkins. but we’re pulling in right now, so i’ll be in in a bit.”

“FINE THEN,” Papyrus said as he hung up. He turned to the rest of the party “SANS JUST PULLED IN, SOME THINGS CAME UP…”

“I’d ask what you mean by that but I don’t think I’d understand,” Mettaton said.

“HE SAID SOMETHING ABOUT FRISK GOING ON AN ADVENTURE, THE PAST EIGHTEEN YEARS OF HIS LIFE WITH NO BIRTHDAY PARTIES, AND A CAR ACCIDENT,” Papyrus explained.

The party was silent.

“I knew it, I just knew I’d be confused.”

“Hello everyone!” Toriel called. “Sorry we’re late, there was an accident on our usual route, so we had to take a detour!”

“D-don’t worry, it’s fine!” Alphys stammered reassuringly. “T-these things happen.”

“thanks al, we appreciate it,” Sans said.

“Aaaand, here he is beauties and gentlebeauties, the man of the hour!” Mettaton announced in his best announcer voice.

The Grillby’s patrons applauded Sans as he blushed and scratched the back of his skull sheepishly. This gesture evolved into bashful, grateful, thankful laughter when the entire establishment started singing For He’s A Jolly Good Fellow. How Mettaton managed to teach them how to sing in three-part harmony was a mystery, but Sans was damned if he wasn’t impressed by how much effort his family had expended on his behalf.

The evening wore on. Once it became nine o’clock, Frisk was starting to tire. Sans and Toriel were about to bid everyone a goodnight and a safe drive home when Sans’ phone went off.

“hey, i got an email from the university,” he said.

“Could it possibly be…?” Toriel asked, the words unspoken obvious.

Sans shrugged as he opened the email. It was indeed what he they had thought it was.

The patrons watched with anticipation. Sans looked up from his phone with the widest smile he’d had in a good while.

“i got the job.”
The bar was silent for a moment, then they erupted into cheers and congratulatory sentiments. Toriel had lifted Sans up to spin him around and kiss him. That expression of pride and affection incited some awws and wolf whistles. There were also probably photographs taken of the moment, but Sans couldn’t have cared less in that moment.

Nothing could have made this day better. He was certain.

When the family of three returned safely home and was almost settled in for the night, Frisk managed to get Sans alone.

<<Dad?>> they signed. <<I have something to tell you…>>

Sans looked down at Frisk. They were clearly very nervous. Whatever it was they wanted to say must be pretty important.

“what’s up, kiddo?” Sans said, a touch of barely-detectable concern underling his voice.

Frisk gave him a gesture that told him to follow them. Sans accepted and followed Frisk to their room where they closed the door and reached underneath their bed for something.

They turned to him holding a dirty old candy tin with scratch marks on it. They sat on their bed and patted the spot where they wanted him to sit. Sans complied and sat cross-legged on the bed, his eyes never once moving from the tin.

<<Read the box,>> they signed.

Sans looked at it, but wasn’t exactly sure what to read -

Oh.

He saw the name Charity Breedlove carved into the lid along with the date. Sans was sure his eyelights were gone and that his smile was either hard or gone. Whatever was in here belonged to that kid. Whether or not this kid was in fact pre-fall Chara Dreemurr, considering what he and the other groups had heard Caroline ask the guide (Caroline could be really loud when she wanted to be), it was still very important.

Then it hit him.

“frisk,” Sans said, “that little adventure you led your friends on...chara told you to, didn’t they?”

<<Yes. They knew what they were doing. They knew how to get to where they wanted us to go without us being seen, and they knew how to get us out in time. They knew what they were doing, Dad.>>

“i never said they didn’t. i know that chara would never do anything to hurt you or your friends on purpose.” Sans sighed and laid his hand on Frisk’s head. “well. time to get cracking.”

Frisk nodded. They picked up the tin and tried to pry it open. It was stuck. They tried to use their fingernails. It didn’t go as well as it would have had Frisk not chewed their nails to the quick. They tried using their teeth, to no avail. Sans watched in amusement.

“need a little help there, kiddo?” he asked, half-teasing and half-serious.

Frisk removed the dirty tin from their mouth and handed it to Sans, embarrassed that they’d stooped to trying to chew it open.
Sans gave them an understanding smile as he took the tin and pulled a letter opener out of his pocket. He slid the blade underneath the edge of the lid and edged it along, bits of dirt crumbling off onto Frisk’s bed.

Five minutes later, Sans easily lifted the lid from the tin. Frisk watched as he did so, feeling as though the world was in slow-motion.

Once Sans lifted the lid, he and Frisk peered inside the box.

Inside was a diary, bound in leather and embossed in gold with its owner’s name, in near-perfect condition despite a century of disuse and neglect - perhaps due to the nature of its storage?

Sans and Frisk stared at the diary, uncertain of what to do with it.

“So, do we open it now, or wait until we can get Tori and Asgore here with us?” Sans asked.

Frisk didn’t respond, having spaced out. Sans sighed, knowing that it was best to wait for the child to come back down from their dissociation.

So he waited.

Then Frisk jumped, blinking and looking about their room. They took a bit to remind themselves what they had been doing before.

<<I think we should go now,>> they signed slowly. <<Once we have what we need to know, we can tell Mom and Asgore. They deserve to know, but…>> Frisk sighed. <<I know that they wouldn’t exactly get along if they were in the same place together, so I plan on bringing it with me when I see Asgore again in July, if that’s okay?>>

Sans hummed. “That makes sense to me…we gotta see what Tori’s thoughts on the matter are, though.”

Frisk nodded, their face assured in the truth of Sans’ statement.

The two took deep breaths, steeling themselves for what was within the contents of the tin.

“Yes. Frisk, since Chara’s your friend and headmate, I honestly think you should open it. I don’t want to pressure you though, so feel free to tell me if it gets to be too much, okay?”

Frisk nodded, suddenly calmer. They knew Chara was a lot calmer too.

They still hesitated. Whatever was inside this book was the explanation for just how Chara found themselves in the Underground, how they came to hate Humanity so much. And they knew it had to be pretty bad if it made them disappear at the slightest mention…

**Not anymore.**

Frisk sat up straight. What?

I’m not going to run away anymore. If I cry, I’m…I’m gonna do my best to let it out. I hate people seeing me cry, but I hate seeing people I love cry even more. And since you, Frisk, and Asriel and…and William always came to me when you cried, I’m going to extend that same trust to you. Thank you, Frisk, for all that you’ve done for my family, and my people.

Frisk was almost in tears at Chara’s words. They wiped their burning eyes before anything came out
and took a deep calming breath as they gently picked up the diary.

They knew they wouldn’t be ready for what was inside, but they opened it anyway, the scent of dirt and old paper and a hint of chocolate wafted from the diary. They snuggled up to Sans and together they began to read the contents.

Saturday, March 8th, 1913

Father came home with a guest - Edgemere is his name, he says, an old family friend who’ll be staying with us until his wife recovers from typhoid fever.

Edgemere is a tall, burly man with white hair. He looks kind of like Santa would if he were real. I told father I didn’t remember him mentioning anyone by the name Edgemere. Father turned red and got that look he gets when he wants to hit me. I know it well enough to flinch. Edgemere laughed. He seems nice enough. He says he’ll have to bring his dogs over sometime, since they love children. I wonder what kind of dogs they are.

I also wonder if his words were supposed to be a threat.

Wednesday, March 12th, 1913

Edgemere was crying today when I woke up. He was holding a letter. I asked him what was wrong and he hugged me. I really don’t like being hugged, but he seemed sad, so I let him.

I found out later that his wife died of typhoid fever, and his son has it too now. He has to leave to be there for his final moments.

His son’s name was Toby. He said I would like him. I doubt it, but I’ll take his word for it.

Sunday, June 1st, 1913

William snuck me some candy. It was chocolate this time. I decided to give him a piece.

He started crying from happiness. I got scared. I knew Father would hear him. But I also knew that Father would come after me for having the candy.

I dragged him to our room. We hid under his bed with the candy. I read a book to him.

We knew father was going to find us. We didn’t care.

*A few pages are torn out. There are some dark brown stains. There is a black-and-white photograph of a man with dark hair and a mustache and creepy eyes, a woman with her hair in a
bun on top of her head and dead eyes, a boy with pale hair and kind eyes, and a girl with long hair in a bow and wide eyes. The girl’s blush was very obvious. She seems familiar.*

*There are also a few photographs of the boy and girl smiling. The girl’s smile is familiar. You decide to use neutral pronouns for the girl from now on.*

Saturday, November 21st, 1914

William’s arm is finally healing. Mother still won’t speak to anyone about what happened.

I don’t blame her. I wish I could stop talking. Maybe then people wouldn't get hurt because of me.

But then again, I may end up hurting someone again even if I stop talking. I wouldn’t be surprised.

Saturday, March 20th, 1915

Father threw me down the stairs. My left arm is broken.

He told them I fell. He tried to set my arm himself, he said, but he messed up.

He did it on purpose.

Doctors say I may never use that arm again. They have their suspicions, but they dare not voice them. Hiram Breedlove is too powerful. He could do to them what he did to me if they step out of line.

Some are considering just sending me home because I’m apparently “crazy”.

Someone wants me in the asylum, but everyone else knows that Father would kill him for even suggesting it.

Maybe I’d be safer there. At least they do their jobs, cruel though they are.

Saturday, June 19th, 1915

William is dead.

Fath Hiram killed him and forced me and Mother to watch.

Mother isn’t working. She won’t move or speak. She’s alive, but it’s like I don’t exist.

Hiram says I can never leave him, or else what happened to William will happen to me.
What does he know? Maybe I want that to happen to me.

September 10, 1915

I can't stay anymore. I can't. I'm running away.

I am DETERMINED to leave and never come back.

I left evidence of that miserable creature’s crimes. I left them everywhere I could get my hands on.

Who knows if it’s going to work? Who cares? As long as I can be free to do what feels right to me, I don’t care.

I just want to leave, and now I can.

I’m burying this under the tree William and I used to climb together. Inside are all the photographs of me I could find in our house. I even snuck out disguised as a boy a few times to get the rest of them. I cut my hair off before I left and put it on his nightstand.

It’s not so long it hurts my neck, but not so short my neck is cold.

It’s perfect.

I feel like me now. I never really felt like me before. It’d be nice if I could die like this.

I’m going to the mountain. They say that those who climb the mountain never return.

It’s perfect.

Knowing that I can finally leave all of this behind…

...it fills me with DETERMINATION

*The rest of the diary pages have been carved to make a secret compartment. Inside the compartment are all the photos of Charity Breedlove.*

*No. This isn’t Charity Breedlove. This is Chara Dreemurr. This was their life.*

*You are filled with sympathy.*

Frisk was in tears. So THIS is why Chara hated Humanity. They could understand. The things Chara withstood...they were so much stronger than Frisk. Frisk held so much respect for them already, and now…
Frisk, your hyperempathy is showing…

Frisk started bawling outright. They hugged themself. It was the closest they could get to hugging Chara right now.

Sans hugged Frisk as they cried. Sans was shaking, his bones rattling slightly.

Toriel opened Frisk’s bedroom door.

Frisk and Sans turned to face her. Sans had a few cyan tears running down his face. He wiped them away as he turned to Frisk, the unspoken question answered affirmatively.

He sighed shakily. “tori,” he said, as much conviction in his voice as he could muster. “while we were at the historical society, frisk and their friends ran off on a little adventure and they found…” he sighed, words failing him. “just come look.”

Toriel was slightly confused, but she obeyed.

Frisk handed her the diary. Toriel held it in her hands and stared at it blankly before opening it.

If a mere glance at the handwriting made her gasp and nearly drop the book, Sans wasn’t sure if she should read the rest.

“tori, you don’t have to right now, you can -”

“I am fine, Sans. I can do this. Just…” Toriel swallowed nervously. “…just…please, stay with me, alright?”

Sans laid a hand on her shoulder. “i’ll be right here, tori.”

*forever, if you’ll let me...*

Caroline tossed and turned in her room. She and the rest of the kids had agreed to let Frisk keep the tin for time being since they had been the one to lead them all to it. Caroline wondered if they had opened it yet.

There was a knock at her bedroom door that made her jump from her thoughts.

“Caroline? It’s Levi. Can I come in?”

“Yeah.”

Levi opened the door and closed it behind him before turning on the light.

Caroline got up and turned on the lamp on her dresser, causing Levi to turn off the light now that they had a less obvious light source. Caroline sat on the throne she’d built out of books, and Levi sat on the edge of the bed facing her.

Caroline crossed her legs, causing a book to nearly fall off before she caught it, causing more books to fall. Levi scrambled to catch them, and caught most of them.

The stepsiblings were silent, no sound aside from their heavy breathing from nerves.
“Not gonna do THAT again,” Caroline whispered as she adjusted the hem of her nightgown.

“Good plan,” Levi whispered, a bit of a laugh underlying the statement.

“So why’re you up?” Caroline asked. “Your hair’s a mess. Did you try sleeping only to fail?”

Levi smiled awkwardly and nodded, running his fingers through his messy curls. “I kept thinking about that box we found under the tree.” Levi chuckled. “Stupid, huh?”

Caroline shook her head wildly, long hair flying. Levi squawked and sputtered. “Your hair got in my mouth!”

Caroline shrunk in on herself and put her hand on her left shoulder. “Sorry…”

“It’s fine, just be careful.”

Caroline hummed. “But you’re not stupid for wondering. I can’t sleep either. I keep wondering if Frisk ended up opening it. If they did, what’s in there? If they didn’t why didn’t they? Clearly it’s important!” Her voice was getting louder as she spoke, her enthusiasm and curiosity becoming clearer. “Levi, it had Charity Breedlove’s name carved into it! Charity! Freaking! Breedlove!”

“Caroline, be quiet, Mom and Randy are -”

“Come ON Levi, aren’t you curious about any of this? That tin could have clues about what happened to Charity Breedlove in it, or why there aren’t any pictures of her! Why the heck DID Charity Breedlove run away, huh? What happened to her? Frisk might have the answers with them right now! They might be staring at them, they might not even know, but they might have the answers! Levi, this could change everyth -”

Levi put his hand over Caroline’s mouth and shushed her. He lowered his hand and sighed.

“Sorry, Caroline, but...we have to be quiet, it’s late on a school night. Okay?”

Caroline nodded slowly. She looked down at her fingers, rubbing the stumps of her missing fingers with her thumbs. “Yeah...you’re right...I’m sorry...but this is just so exciting!”

Levi smiled brightly and nodded in agreement. Then Caroline’s phone went off, signaling that she got a text.

Caroline picked up her phone.

*I text from: Nell*

*you up, care? i can’t sleep… :(  

Caroline smiled at the text. She would have ended up texting Penelope had Levi not come in.

*Same. I couldn’t sleep thinking about the box we found.  

*no way! me too! :o  

*what do you think could be in it? ^  

*Maybe the picture of Charity that disappeared? Who knows.  

*frisk probably knows more than any of us...
I agree. They knew where to find this, even though they'd never been anywhere near the place, they'd said so themself.

really? because they said they knew where the shortcuts were...

I know. That's why I'm honestly a little suspicious. Did someone tell them? If so, who?

yeah, it is kind of wierd...

Nell, you misspelled weird.

did not! i before e except after c!

Two words, Nelly: Weird Science.

if i were there right now i’d swat you.

Sure you would.

Levi watched Caroline text Penelope. She happier than she had when she and Randy had first moved here. She said she didn’t have a crush on Penelope, Levi thought that maybe she did and didn't know that that was what it was called. Caroline was good with words, but not with feelings and stuff like that.

Levi smiled and giggled as he stood up to leave the room. He tiptoed over to the bedroom door and opened it as quietly as he could.

He closed it behind him and turned to go back to his room when he bumped into his stepfather.

He looked up at the bearded man. Randy’s arms were crossed in front of him and he was looking at Levi with slight disapproval.

Levi gulped and avoided Randy’s gaze.

Randy sighed. “I was just getting up to make some tea. You and Caroline wanna join me?”

Levi looked up at Randy and smiled, his tooth gap visible. “Okay! But Caroline is texting Penelope right now, and I kiiinda don’t wanna interrupt her…”

“Ah, I see,” Randy said knowingly.

“Actually I just got done texting her. Her mom came in so she’s going to bed now.”

Randy and Levi turned toward Caroline. She seemed a bit sleepier, but not by much.

“Well? What are you boys waiting for?” Caroline said teasingly, her hands on her hips. “Let’s go have some tea!”

Randy and Levi stared at her for a few moments blinking, and then shrugged as they all went into the kitchen for some tea.

Toriel shook, tears running down her face, as she held her lover and child close to her for comfort.
Frisk and Sans had their arms wrapped around her in turn. Frisk was about to fall asleep, but they forced themselves to stay awake. They HAD to comfort their mom. She’d just found out why Chara had gone to the mountain in the first place, why they hated Humanity…

To find out that a child had gone through something so terrible, as a parent it hurt Toriel greatly, even more so since she saw that child as her own.

Sans fidgeted with her ear, a little habit he’d picked up. He noticed that it actually calmed her down when he did so.

The family sat in the child’s room in silence, unsure of what to do or how to feel, chests tight with emotion.

Toriel looked at the clock on Frisk’s wall. It was almost midnight.

Maybe singing that old lullaby will help her calm down…

It had been Chara’s and Asriel’s favorite once upon a time. She knew Frisk would love it as well.

She sighed before she began to sing.

“Hearts call~ Hearts fall~ Swallowed in the rain~ Who knows~ Life Grows~ Hollow and so vain~ Wandering in the winter light~ The wicked and the sane~ Bear witness to salvation~ And life starts over again~”

As Toriel sang the lullaby, Frisk could feel Chara begin to cry.

She remembers that...she actually remembers that…

Frisk knew that Chara was happy that Toriel remembered the lullaby. It was a very pretty lullaby, too. Frisk told Chara this.

Well, what can I say? You got good taste.

Frisk smiled at the praise. They snuggled deeper into Toriel, slowly but surely falling asleep to the lullaby. When Toriel was finished with the song, she let out a weak sigh and looked at the sleeping child and mesmerized Skeleton in her arms.

She smiled and carried them to her room for the night. Tomorrow was another day, after all. And she wouldn’t allow herself to dwell on the past. She would keep it close to her, and respect it, as those experiences made her who she is today, but she would not let them consume her. It wouldn’t be fair to her children’s memories, and it wouldn’t be fair to the child and lover in her arms.

She laid back on her bed with the loved ones in her arms. Before long Isolde and the puppy managed to join them on the bed.

Toriel smiled at her family.

“tori,”

Toriel looked down at the Skeleton that called her name. “Yes, dear?”

“you okay? i know that was...a lot to take in, especially all at once…”

Toriel smiled warmly at Sans and kissed him on the forehead. “I am calm now, if that is what you meant. You are correct, Sans, it is...it is quite a revelation. I am not sure what to think...but I know I
am feeling.”

She sighed, holding her loved ones closer.

“It hurts. Knowing that such things happened to my child, I just…” Toriel hissed in an attempt to prevent herself from shouting. “I know that I was in no position to do anything. But had I been in such a position…”

Toriel’s breathing became quick, ragged and angry and anguished. Sans stroked her ear, doing what he could to calm her down.

As Toriel’s breathing slowed, Sans placed a kiss on her ear, causing her to squeak and blush.

Sans looked up at her, a shy smirk on his features. “heh, sorry. you calm now?” he asked.

Toriel smiled back. “Yes…I do believe I am. Thank you, Sans.”

Sans and Toriel leaned in to kiss each other goodnight.

“anytime, tori. g’night, love ya.”

“I love you too.”

And she turned off the lights and they went to sleep.

Chara stood still. They didn’t know how to feel. So much had happened lately, and would continue to happen for the foreseeable future. But for now, Chara’s story was at an end, it seemed.

Their ending was bittersweet, like dark chocolate. They were dead to the world they knew, but their memory lived on. Their family was happy, even thriving now that they had reached the surface. Chara was a bit sad that they couldn’t take part in that happiness as much as they would have wanted, but even to watch and know that their family is happy is enough for them.

They wondered if Asriel was happy, wherever he was. They really hoped so.

They knew that Gaster stood beside them. They didn’t even have to look up at him.

“What?” Chara asked, their voice more tired than they thought it would be.

“I have successfully made contact with The Player,” Gaster announced. “They are doing their best to fulfill their end of the bargain. It is a slow process, but I estimate that I should be able to find my way out of here by the Humans’ equivalent of Gyftmas, give or take a month or two! Should I prepare a present for everyone, or do you think the fact I will be returning from nonexistence will be enough? What do you think, young Dreemurr?”

Chara took a few minutes to process all of Gaster’s words.

“Well aren’t YOU excited,” Chara deadpanned. “And why the hell do you think I care?”

“I never said you did,” Gaster stated matter-of-factly. “I simply wished to tell you my good news. Whether you Chara about it or not was of no concern.”

“So you only told me because I’m the only other -” Chara started before pausing. They glared at
Gaster upon realizing that he’d made a pun out of their name. “You son of a bitch.”

“Ah, but bitches are dogs, young Dreemurr, and as you can see, I am a Skeleton, and as such, there is no way that I could possibly be a ‘son of a bitch’.”


“Anywho, I feel myself fading. This is the longest I’ve lasted here before fading...I guess I really am coming home, uhehehe…” He stared at his hands and sighed. “My boys...I cannot wait to see you again…” He began to fade, even more slowly than he had last time. “Farewell, young Dreemurr. I hope to see you again soon.”

“Hmph, whatever old man,” Chara mumbled.

They stood in place for a while longer before collapsing to their haunches and sighing as they crossed their legs an leaned back onto their hands to look up at the abyssal ceiling-sky.

Since when was this place so lonely?

________________________________________________________

You feel so blessed to have these people around you. It fills you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

Confession - Undertale OST
Light My Fire - The Doors
Winter Light - Linda Ronstadt
Happy Days Are Here Again

Chapter Summary

22 years of The Great Papyrus, a puppy, Chas ets something for once, and Carolope at last.

Oh, The Player is back too.

Chapter Notes

This could've been better, I'll say that now. But hey, better than nothing. ~Spazzin

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2:36 P.M., June 12th, 20XQ

It’s a beautiful day outside.

The sun is shining.

Summer is practically here.

On days like this, kids like you…

…are preparing for your uncle’s birthday party.

“okay, frisk, you got your present?” Sans asked.

Frisk saluted, their face even.

“right. that’s all the presents. you got the ones from your friends too?”

Frisk held up a finger, signaling for Sans to wait for a moment. They ran up the stairs to their room and brought down the bags with the gifts.

They set them down at their feet. <<The blue one with Thomas The Tank Engine is from Hunter, Hannah, Helen and Brian. The one shaped like a cake is from the Marlow-Goldsbys. The one with race cars on it is from the DeMartinos. And the one with Mickey Mouse on it is from MK,>> they signed as they pointed to each bag.

“okay then,” Sans said, finality lacing his voice. “let’s put ‘em in the car. you ‘n i still gotta get our clothes on.”

Frisk quirked an eyebrow in confusion before looking down at their still-on pajamas. They chuckled
in embarrassment before running up the stairs to their room.

Sans chuckled as he stepped forward into the shortcut to his and Toriel’s room. He stepped over to the dresser and put on a tuxedo t-shirt and some black athletic shorts, along with some black hi-tops. He wrapped his Blue Hoodie around his waist, completing the outfits.

He stepped out of the room at the same time Frisk did. Frisk wore a light green sleeveless dress with a white peter pan collar with black flats.

They looked at him for a few minutes. They shrugged, waving their hand in a so-so gesture. Sans put a hand to his chest in mock indignation.

Frisk giggled and stuck out their tongue before running down the stairs. They ran up to the coat hooks by the front door and grabbed the green leash. They looked around the living room for the one for whom the leash was intended.

When they realized that the intended was not in the living room, they searched the den, where the intended was gnawing on a rubber toy. Frisk smiled at the three-month-old chow mix puppy and patted their thighs to get her to come to them.

The puppy perked up instantly, abandoning the toy and trotting up to her owner.

Frisk grabbed her before she could claw at their dress. They attached the leash to her collar and went out to the front yard, where their mother and father were waiting.

“looks like everyone’s ready,” Sans said. “c’mon, kiddo. let’s hit the road.”

<<Does Yasmin need a carseat?>> Frisk asked.

Toriel giggled as she buckled her seatbelt. “I do not think that dogs require seatbelts, my child,” she said.

“but yasmin’s no dog, tori, she’s a puppy,” Sans argued. “i think that qualifies her for a car seat.”

<<Dad, how old is Yasmin in dog years?>> Frisk asked as Toriel left the driveway.

“Well,” Sans said, “it all depends on the dog’s size, really. alphys’d prolly know more than me, she’s the biology expert.”

<<You’re not just saying that because she’s pregnant, are you?>> Frisk signed.

Sans did a doubletake at Frisk’s words. “wait, what?”

Toriel nearly slammed on the brakes at this. “Frisk. What do you mean by that?” She asked warily.

<<Don’t babies come from biology?>> Frisk signed, a look of confusion on their face.

Sans was sweating, tugging at his collar. “w-well, yeah, but i don’t think - i mean, it’s a little more complicated than that -”

Frisk gasped, their hands covering their mouth and eyes sparkling with amazement. <<Where DO they come from?>>

“That is a topic for when you are older, Frisk Eternal Dreemurr,” Toriel said sternly. “Just WHERE did you learn that, anyway…?”
Caroline. She said that babies come from biology, but she wouldn’t say anymore than that for some reason…} they signed.

Toriel and Sans looked at each other momentarily before sighing and returning their attentions to the road.

They would have to talk to Randy about this next time Frisk and the stepsiblings met.

“And you’re SURE you can go, Alphy?”

“Dyney, I’m pregnant, not paralyzed. I-I’m pretty sure I can handle myself.”

Undyne sighed as she picked up the presents and carried them out to the car, her pregnant wife at her side. “If ya say so. Doesn’t mean I’m not worried!”

Alphys rolled her eyes and smiled fondly. Sure, Papyrus and Mettaton could be quite rambunctious, but no more so than Undyne. After all, Papyrus’ boundless energy was part of the reason he and Undyne got along so well. And from what she could remember from her days as Gaster’s assistant and Sans’ colleague, he had hardly changed since he was six. He was merely older and a bit wiser.

And taller. Much, MUCH taller.

Alphys was beginning to have some trouble moving around. Not with standing and walking, but with bending to pick things up and such. Meaning that buckling her seatbelt became a bit more of a chore than she was used to.

Once she had it buckled she sighed with relief and frustration. She could just FEEL Undyne’s mocking gaze. She turned to glare. Undyne just looked amused.

“I coulda gotten that for ya, y’know,” the Fishwoman pointed out.

“You just like to watch me suffer,” Alphys hissed.

“Well, sometimes it’s cute!” Undyne said, a shy smile on her face.

“If it’s so CUTE, then YOU can be the pregnant one next time!” Alphys snapped.

Undyne merely hummed, a mischievous smirk on her face. Then Alphys words settled in once they were halfway there.

“Next…time?” Undyne said, slowly turning to look at Alphys.

Alphys then realized what her hormone-fueled statement had implied. She blushed, sweating like crazy. “W-w-well, I-I-I mean, uh…” Alphys hid her head in her hands in embarrassment.

“Babe, I would love that!” Undyne said, her voice breathy with happiness. “If you’re ok with it, of course!”

Alphys peered up at the widely-grinning Undyne from between her fingers. “I’m gonna be the one carrying though. And ONLY two more after this one.”

“Fufufu, you got it babe!”

Mettaton was really getting frustrated. Asgore was a dear, offering to help put up the party
decorations with no prompting of any sort, but really, his size was surprisingly counterproductive in this situation.

He ran his hand down his face in frustration, being careful not to ruin his makeup as he did so. “Asgore. The banner is wrapped around your horns.”

“Oh, yes, sorry…” Asgore said, trying to remove the banner, only to get it even more tangled.

Mettaton blew his bangs up in frustration. “Okay, okay, you know what Asgore? Why don’t you go help Shelby with…” He struggled to remember what he set Shelby about doing. “Just...go help Shelby, please. Okay?”

Asgore smiled and nodded, going off to find Shelby.

Mettaton sighed with relief, flopping onto the couch dramatically. He knew planning a party was difficult, but this was getting ridiculous. He decided to check in on the rest of the guests.

*Sans, where are you guys at?

*corner of ammonia and 4th

*why

*Asgore can’t put up decorations to save his life.

*oh

*should we take the dog back then

*No. Bring the puppy.

*ok geez

*we just turned on kelly

*see ya in a bit

Mettaton sighed. Finally, someone who could help was on the way. He decided to text the mothers-to-be next.

*Alphys, Mr. Dreemy can’t decorate for shit.

*and you think i care? (;_-;)

*Just letting you know that you made the right choice.

*thanks??? I guess?? (;0_0)

He sent a link to the song You’re Welcome from Moana.

He waited for the reaction.

*we are literally in your driveway. at least wait for your boyfriend to show up to be extra. (;_-;)

*Alphy. Sweetie. You are literally talking to the King of Extra.

The doorbell rang. That was definitely them.
He hopped up to answer the door.

He opened the door, the wives on the other side.

“Hey, you two~” he sang, hugging Alphys in greeting. “It’s been a while, hasn’t it?”

“Well, a month isn’t TOO long,” Alphys said, returning the gesture of affection.

“But then again, Mettaton is high-maintenance,” Undyne said, shutting the door behind her. “An HOUR would probably be a long time.”

“Undyne, please, you’re not that special,” Mettaton deadpanned.

Alphys sighed. Not even a minute and they’re already bickering.

Oh well. Better than her birthday party their first year on the surface. She was picking glitter out of her scales for weeks afterward.

“I-if you two are just going to fight, I’m going to grab some chips,” Alphys announced.

The Android and Fishwoman ceased their bickering to say “Okay” in unison.

Alphys rolled her eyes and went to the kitchen to grab some chips. She really hoped they had cheddar sour cream…

Toriel pulled up to the curb in front of Mettaton’s mansion. She sighed.

“I can already hear Undyne and Mettaton fighting,” she deadpanned. “This is going to be fun…”

Sans shrugged, his usual nonchalant grin plastered on his face.

Frisk unbuckled their seat belt and opened the car door, picking up Yasmin and running up to the front door.

“Someone’s excited,” Sans said fondly. Toriel hummed in response. “Sometimes I wonder if Frisk is aware of just what their presence does to people…” she mused.

Sans shrugged.

Meanwhile, Frisk rang the doorbell, Yasmin in their arms.

Mettaton opened the door and squealed at Yasmin looking absolutely adorable. “Oh my goodness, is that...?”

<<This is Y-A-S-M-I-N, our new puppy>> Frisk signed, looking at the squealing robot with a look of amusement.

“Oh, my GOSH, how PRECIOUS!” the Robot cooed. “Can I hold her?”

“Whoa there Tin Man, ladies first,” Undyne called.

<<If you guys are going to fight over Yasmin, maybe I should wait for Papyrus to come back or let someone else to hold her,>> Frisk signed.

Undyne’s and Mettaton’s lips tightened into thin lines.
They turned to each other. For Frisk? Mettaton mouthed. Undyne nodded.

When they turned to ask Frisk to let the other hold Yasmin and then argue about THAT, Frisk had already left.

Frisk sighed in frustration, blowing their bangs out of their eyes as they carried Yasmin to the kitchen for some snacks.

Then they saw Alphys sitting down on a stool at the kitchen island.

Frisk smiled and trotted up to sit next to her. Alphys didn’t even notice them sit down until they tugged on her top. She turned to them and gasped with delight upon seeing the puppy.

“O-oh my GOSH, is that HER?” she breathed in awe. Frisk nodded in response, a proud smile on their face. <<This is Yasmin! We found her when she destroyed our garage!>> they signed, still somehow managing to keep the puppy from falling off of their lap as they signed.

Alphys squealed. “C-can I hold her? O-oh my gosh she’s so fluffy I’m gonna diiiieee…”

Frisk rolled their eyes. <<Okay, chill,>> they signed, before passing the pup to the Reptilian woman.

Alphys gently took the puppy in her arms, settling it on her baby bump. Yasmin licked Alphys nose. Alphys squealed and nuzzled noses with the puppy.

Frisk took a photo and sent it out to everyone in their contacts.

*Frisk: look at my cute auntie alphys and puppy yasmin… b(-u-)d
*Undyne: YEAH, THAT’S MAI WAIFU
*Mettaton: My bestie~
*Sans: the snoot has been booped we can all go home now
*Toriel: You two look so adorable together!
*Asgore: My, how sweet!
*Toriel: Get out of the group chat Asgore.
*Levi: lol carolines begging randy to take us there to see the puppy
*Theo: so’s penelope your sister isn’t special
*Caroline: Says the only one is this chat without a special talent, Wait, is being a jerkfaced moron a talent?
*Penelope: it’s not a very useful one if it is lol XD
*Theo: i will kill you in your sleep
*Penelope: i kick and thrash in my sleep moron. I’d probably end up killing you instead :P
*Caroline: I’ll film it.
*Mettaton: No plotting snuff films in the group chat, darlings.
*Caroline: *plotting
*Hunter: im covering hannahs mouth so she doesnt wake our mom
*Brian: rocco.png
*Sans: are we seriously getting into a dogfight on the groupchat
*Papyrus: OH MY GOSH! IS THAT THE LEGENDARY YASMIN? AND WHEN DID SANS AND TORIEL REMODEL THEIR KITCHEN TO LOOK EXACTLY LIKE METTATON’S? NOT THAT I OBJECT TO THE DECISION, OF COURSE!

Frisk started to panic. They had NOT meant to send it to Papyrus. This was his SURPRISE birthday party, after all. He was never to know that they were here.
They snuck a nervous glance at the phone. Sans and Mettaton managed to team up to convince Papyrus that no, Sans and Toriel had not remodeled, and also dissuade him from coming back to Mettaton’s place earlier than he was supposed to. Frisk sighed with relief.

“Hey, I heard there was a puppy in here and boy was I right!”

Frisk looked up to where the voice was coming from, spotting Chas. They shied away a bit and waved at the man. Chas smiled and walked over to the counter, where some chips were set out. He picked up an entire bag of tortilla chips.

“I’m holding onto this,” he said, “I made a bet with Undyne that I couldn’t eat this entire bag in one sitting. If I do, she owes me fifty bucks.”

<<That’s a lot of male deer, Chas.>> Frisk signed.

“Ehahahah, Toriel and Sans must get a kick outta ya, huh?” Chas chuckled fondly.

Frisk smiled shyly. They never really got the chance to talk to Chas much, so they were still anxious around him. They knew he was Shelby’s brother, and good friends with Sans, but beyond that they didn’t know all that much. But they did remember Shelby mentioning Chas not being able to make it to events because he was sick, so maybe he got sick easily too.

Chas seemed a bit confused, slightly awkward actually.

Frisk started to wonder if they’d done something wrong. Their anxiety didn’t pop out often, but around new or newish people it felt everyone could see how odd they really were, like their worst flaws were put under a microscope for the world to judge.

Yasmin whined from Alphys arms. Frisk glanced at Alphys. Her anxiety was starting to come out as well.

Then Sans entered. Thankfully.

“hey guys, how’s it goin’?” he said, his perpetual casualness practically decimating the anxiety in the atmosphere of the kitchen. He grabbed a bottle of ketchup and sat next to Frisk, opposite Alphys. He took a swig from the bottle and set it down, wiping his mouth on his radius.

“Sans, hey!” Chas said suddenly, his reaction not only delayed, but clearly anxious since his words came out louder and more quickly than usual. Frisk didn’t physically relax, but their inner storm calmed down somewhat. So Chas had anxiety too. Maybe that was what Shelby meant whenever she said he was sick and couldn’t make it…

“chas, hey, how goes it?” Sans asked.

“Oh, it goes. I got a few commissions last week, so I was seriously worried I wouldn’t make to this!”

“hey, you got commissioned, that’s great,” Sans said. He seemed to notice Frisk’s curiosity (even though their anxiety felt more obvious to them). “chas is an engineer,” Sans explained calmly. “he does work for anyone willing to pay him.”

Frisk’s eyes widened a bit, sparkling with their curiosity. Snas chuckled a bit. He turned to Chas. “you wanna tell ‘em about it? you and alphys are the engineers here, i’m just the guy who tells you how fast it goes over a set amount of time and distance,” Sans said.

“S-Sans, you got better grades in physics than the p-professors did when they went there, I-I’d say
you’re a-a little more than just the guy who...does whatever you just said,” Alphys stammered. “S-sorry, I-I’m just a bit more t-tired than usual l-lately…”

“That’s fine,” Chas said, his previous anxiety having dissipated for the most part. “Pregnancy can do that sometimes;”

<<It can?>> Frisk managed to sign.

Chas looked toward them and gave an odd smile once he’d managed to translate their signs. “Yep,” he said. “I remember that happening back when Esperanza was pregnant with -”

Chas stopped speaking suddenly, as if he realized something.

Sans wasted no time. “do you, uh -”

“No, no, it’s fine, I’m fine!” Chas said, hands moving in a gesture of reassurance that ran almost directly counter to the panic in his voice.

Chas seemed to realize this. “S-sorry about that, I just…” He sighed, leaning against the wall and running a hand through his hair. “Memories, you know?” he chuckled. “Esperanza was sleeping almost constantly when she was pregnant with Mercedes. Well, at least she was when she wasn’t getting into the pistachio ice cream and putting caramel sauce and french fries all over it…”

He had a sad smile on his face as he recounted other bits of Esperanza’s pregnancy. Frisk really liked the story, but they didn’t know a lot of details.

Like who are Esperanza and Mercedes anyway?

Frisk, unsure of how else to get Chas’ attention, raised their hand until they got it.

“Yes, Frisk, you had a question?” Chas said.


Chas flinched once he successfully translated their signs. It took him a bit before he managed to speak. “E-Esperanza was my wife, a-and Mercedes was...my daughter, they uh...”. Chas swallowed, trying not to cry. Frisk suddenly felt guilty. Chas realized this. “Don’t worry, you - you didn’t know, you couldn’t have, it was - it was years ago! You couldn’t have been much older than...than Mercedes was when...” Chas smiled sadly again. “So don’t worry, okay Frisk?” he said, a sudden fondness lacing his voice.

Frisk felt better, but not much better. <<I’m sorry.>> they signed.

Chas smiled from his spot against the wall. “It’s fine. I get it.”

Frisk gave a smile. <<I’m going to see if anyone needs help!>> they signed.

Sans chuckled. “you do that, kiddo,” he said as he rumpled their hair. “somethin’ tells me that king fluffybuns could use a hand though.”

“Oh, if you’re talking about Asgore, he’s with Shelby,” Chas said.

<<I’ll still help.>> Frisk said. Then they smirked. <<Help them smooch each other, that is!>>

“You think I haven’t tried that?” Chas said.
“those two are denser than neutron stars,” Sans muttered.

<<Same with Brian and Hunter!>> Frisk signed. <<Those two CLEARLY like each other! Even Hannah can see it! And don’t even get me started on Caroline and Penelope! At least Penelope knows she likes Caroline!>>

Frisk continued signing about their frustrations involving their friends’ love lives. Alphys eventually got caught up in Frisk’s frustrations and lamented the lack of relationship development between characters from some of the shows she watched.

Chas and Sans stared at each other awkwardly.

“Yyyyeah, I think I’ll go see if Mettaton needs help with anything…” Chas said as he stopped leaning against the wall

“i’ll go check on tori,” Sans said as he got up from his seat and took his ketchup with him.

Yasmin attempted to wriggle free from Alphys’ grip. Sans picked her up and carried her with him.

Sans looked down at the puppy in his arms. “you sure know how to read a situation, don’tcha?” he said. “smart girl…”

Randy was typing out the coding for heard his phone go off. When he went to pick it up and read it, he only read a few words - really, no more than skimming - before removing his glasses and sighing as he rubbed his temples in frustration.

“Caroline Violet Marlow, get your ass in here!” he called.

A few minutes later, he saw long inky black hair and fearful silver eyes peer around the doorway to the home office.

“Come here, sit down,” he said. He was too tired to deal with both work AND a tactless daughter in quick succession.

Caroline slowly walked into the room and sat on the leather armchair by the big bookshelf. She lifted her legs to her chest and grabbed at her shoulder. She was avoiding even looking like she was making eye contact.

Randy sighed and tented his fingers. “I just got a text from Sans about something Frisk said. Do you know what they said, Caroline?”

Caroline shook her head, still avoiding eye contact but still managing to look confused.

“They said that you told them you knew where babies come from. Is this true?” Randy said, fighting to keep his voice even.

Caroline didn’t even bother to look up. “What do you mean by ‘this’?” she asked, her voice monotone and cold.

Randy suddenly realized that Caroline was absolutely terrified. Whenever she was fearful of what someone was going to say or do to her, she didn’t scream. Her voice didn’t waver. She abandoned all expression. Randy didn’t know why this was. The therapist back in Colorado (who was NO help whatsoever) hadn’t a clue either. But Randy it was how she expressed fear, by not expressing at all.

“Caroline, you’re not in trouble, okay?” Randy said, his voice softening. “I’m not going to hurt you.
I just want to know if you do in fact know where babies come from.”

Caroline relaxed - not too much, but it was something. “I do,” she said, her voice still lacking inflection, but the coldness was gone. Her usual voice when she was made to interact against her will.

“Then tell me, Caroline,” Randy said, fighting to keep from yelling in frustration. “Where do babies come from.”

“Biology,” Caroline said, her voice cold once more but starting to shake.

Randy knew she was starting to get frustrated, but right now he didn’t care. He was thankful that Sharona and Levi were out shopping, otherwise this would be a LOT more awkward and frustrating. Maybe Sharona’s presence might have calmed him down a bit, but right now he wasn’t focusing on that. He had to know where Caroline found this out. Though he had a feeling he knew the answer, he wanted to be sure.

“Caroline, I’m gonna need more explanation than just biology, you know,” Randy said.

Caroline blushed a bit and started to explain. Randy, while shocked that his little girl knew this, couldn’t help but be slightly impressed.

And, since she was his little girl, he couldn’t help but worry.

Once Caroline had finished explaining, she and her father sat in silence.

“Caroline,” he said, “where exactly did you learn this?”

“I read it in a book,” she said. “One of the anatomy books you’d let me read in church and stuff.”

Randy’s blue eyes widened. Then all the stress he’d had before the conversation left him and he slumped back into his chair, the seat creaking under his weight. “I had a feeling you’d say that…” he said, smiling despite himself.

Caroline looked up finally, her face contorted slightly in confusion. “You mean you’re not angry?” she whispered, her voice still loud enough for her father to hear.

Randy laughed to himself. “No, Care-Bear, I’m not angry. Shocked, yeah, but not angry.” He chuckled a bit. “Hell, I’m actually a bit relieved. This is gonna save me one more awkward discussion two years from now…”

Caroline sat up a bit more, her face still confused. “Seriously?” she asked.

Randy nodded. “Seriously. Now go back to whatever you were doing. Thank you for your time, Care-Bear.”

Caroline stood up and left the room. She was a bit more relaxed. She stopped, however, just as she reached the door.

“Hey, Dad?” she asked.

“Yeah?”

“If it helps any, I have no interest in getting into a relationship. People are gross anyway,” she said. “And NOT just because of the sex stuff.”
Randy laughed. “That’s reassuring, Caroline, thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” she responded. “If I ever DID end up in a relationship, it would probably be
with Penelope. She’s okay.”

Randy hummed in response as Caroline closed the door and he went back to work.

Then he realized what Caroline said.

Oh good LORD, does that girl have ANY idea what the HELL she says sometimes?

Wait, no, of course she doesn’t. She probably didn’t mean for it to come out like that anyway.

But Randy still couldn’t help but wonder...

*that pic of dr. alphys with the puppy made me want a pet…*

*I know. I kind of want one too…*

*we should totally have a pet together! :D*

*Okay. I want a llama.*

*yes! and we can name it jennifer love-hewitt! XD*

*Beautiful. He will be the best llama the world has ever seen.*

*you want jennifer love-hewitt to be a boy llama too?! :o*

*Too? You mean you thought the same thing? Weird…*

*lol yeah, it just makes sense to me, you know?*

*If I didn’t know would I have mentioned it?*

*well no, but still. :P*

*I also want a gecko. Her name will be Bob Ross.*

*yes! and jennifer love-hewitt will be her noble steed? 8D*

*Exactly!*

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otherwise inflicted.

Caroline didn’t really use exclamation points when writing or texting, but when she did, Penelope
knew it meant she was excited or otherwise happy. When she told Hunter this when they met up
before the game, he told her that the few times he’d texted Caroline, she’d never used exclamation
points. When he said that it was probably because Penelope was special, Penelope just laughed.
While it was nice to think that she was special to Caroline, she knew that that was almost definitely
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*Okay, have fun!

Penelope smiled at the SECOND exclamation point from Caroline IN A ROW.

Two in a row. Maybe she was special…

But maybe it was just special like best friends are special. Penelope sighed as she put away her phone. Linda would probably steal it from her if she was caught…

Papyrus had picked up the ten cartons of ice cream, and put them in the cart. He ran through the checkout line and put them in the trunk of his car and prepared to drive back home.

But first he had to text his magnificent boyfriend that he was coming back home!

*METTA HONEY!

*Papy-Sweetie~

*I AM CURRENTLY ON MY BACK TO YOUR PLEASANT METALLIC EMBRACE! I SHALL BE THERE IN EXACTLY 15 MINUTES AND 33.7 SECONDS, ADJUST TIME FOR TRAFFIC LIGHTS!*

*Alright, darling! I’ll be waiting~

Papyrus smiled, a warm and fuzzy feeling coursing through him to his very marrow.

He began the drive back home, happy as can be, nary a care in the world as always.

Mettaton would have swore had Frisk not been present. So he settled for dramatic screaming.

He picked up a megaphone and ran around the house screaming into it.

“EVERYONE DO YOUR JOBS! PAPYRUS WILL BE HERE IN T-MINUS FIFTEEN MINUTES OR SO AND WE DON’T EVEN HAVE A BANNER UP!!! EVERYONE AT LEAST PRETEND TO DO SOMETHING!!! THAT MEANS YOU TOO, SANS! EVEN THE DOG AND THE PREGNANT LADY MUST PRETEND TO DO SOMETHING!!!”

Everyone rushed to do things. Sans’ Blue Magic activated, doing far more in ten minutes than Asgore, Chas, and Shelby together had in an hour. Mettaton made a mental note to have Sans help him out more often - with appropriate compensation, of course.

Fifteen minutes passed. Papyrus came three minutes after.

Everyone was gathered in the parlor.

Papyrus passed by, not even noticing the crowd at first as he went to put away the groceries.

Once he had put away all but three cartons of ice cream, he realized.

He ran back to the parlor as fast as he could go.

He stared at everyone. Everyone stared back.

Sans blew a party horn. Frisk placed a party hat on Yasmin and lifted her paw so she was waving.
“Surprise, ya goofy goober!” Undyne shouted.

Mettaton ran up to Papyrus and jumped into his arms, kissing him.

Frisk took another picture and texted it to their contacts as everyone cheered. Even Yasmin got in on the action, barking like wild.

Once Mettaton had finally stopped kissing Papyrus, he gazed lovingly into his eyes.

“Happy Birthday, Sugar Skull…” he whispered, pressing his forehead against Papyrus’.

Papyrus was speechless. But he was clearly happy. His sparkling eyes were proof of that.

Undyne rolled her eyes and scoffed. “Can we party now that you two are done smooching?”

<<They can always do both!>> Frisk signed, helpful as ever in their own sweet way.

Undyne smiled as sweetly as she could. She loved Frisk. They were a cool kid. But sometimes they made weird choices and said weird things.

Sans simply blew on his party horn. Undyne gave him a death glare.

This was going to be a LONG day.

The game ended. Theo’s team won. Penelope texted Caroline the news while Monica and Helen chatted and Linda waited for them to stop.

*caroline! theo, hunter and brian won!

*Cool. Tell them congratulations for me.

Penelope looked toward them. “Hey, guys?”

“Yeah?” Brian said.

“What’s up?” Hunter asked.

“What?” Theo said.

“Caroline says congratulations,” Penelope relayed.

“Okay, tell her I said thanks!” Hunter said.

“Same,” Brian said.

“Tell her I said to stop texting you during my games,” Theo said.

“Okay!” Penelope said cheerfully.

*hunter and brian say thanks, leo says stop texting me.

*Why would Theo say that? I know he doesn’t like me, but that doesn’t give him the right to tell you to stop texting me.

*you know how theo is, he’s a jerkface.
*That’s no excuse.*

*i know, but theo doesn’t care.*

*Okay then.*

“Penelope, come on, let’s go!” Monica called.

“Coming!” Penelope replied. “See you guys later!” she said to Hunter and Brian.

“Okay, bye!” Hunter said. Brian merely waved.

Penelope ran off to get in her mom’s car. Nce she buckled in, she checked back with Caroline.

*lol sorry, had to go to the car and say goodbye to everyone!*

*That’s fine. As fun as talking to you is, I should get back to my book.*

*okay! you’re reading lord of the rings again, aren’t you?*

*Yes.*

*i knew it! :D*

Sans watched as his family and friends sang into the karaoke machine. He was pretty sure he was next.

“Sans, you’re up!”

Knew it.

Sans put in the song he wanted to perform. This was going to be good.

The groans and screams from the partygoers and the cheers from Toriel, Frisk, and Chas were music to his ears.

“we’re no strangers to love~ you know the rules~ and so do i~ a full commitment’s what i’m~ thinking of~ you wouldn’t get this from any other guy~”

Papyrus stared into space and curled into a fetal position on the floor next to Mettaton, who stroked the suffering Skeleton’s skull in sympathy. Undyne looked like she desperately wanted to skewer Sans with her spears, but couldn’t because Alphys was leaning on her drowsily. Chas was headbanging inappropriately as Shelby fought the urge to strangle her brother. Toriel watched Sans sing with a fond look her eyes. Frisk filmed the debacle on their phone. Asgore just looked uncomfortable.

Once Sans finished the song, he dropped the mic like a boss. The cheers were more from relief that he was done, but there were also genuine cheers. Just as he’d come to expect in his life.

As he went to sit down, his phone started ringing. The name on the caller ID made his eye sockets widen.

Once Sans was out of earshot of everyone in the room, he answered the phone.

“What up, tom?” he said.
“You’re not gonna believe this, Sans, but I’m getting some weird algorithm changes from my end of the project,” Hyperion said, words coming a mile a minute.

“weird algorithm changes?” Sans said, worry and curiosity bleeding through his voice in equal parts. “whaddaya mean weird algorithm changes?”

“The signal says they’re coming from...The Hub? I have no idea what that even means, and that’s not barring the fact that as far I know, the Heart of Gold are the only ones aware of this project.”

Sans’ eyelights dimmed. The Hub was the name his father had given to the universe every other universe was connected to - hence, The Hub. Gaster had no idea what it was about The Hub that caused so many universes to attach to it. It was around the time he started making breakthroughs as to why this was when he started slipping.

Apparently he’d lost himself in thought since Hyperion started asking him if he was okay.

“what are the changes doing, do you know? can you tell?”

“A-actually, Sans...they’re helping. Hell, at the rate they’re helping, your dad should be home by early August at the latest,” Hyperion said. “I’m still gonna see what’s up with them -”

“no need, tom,” Sans interjected. “trust me, i know this person. they owe me. a lot.”

Hyperion made an odd noise on the other end of the line. “Well, if you’re sure. Tell your brother I said happy birthday!”

“can do, thanks tom. bye.”

Sans hung up, fighting the urge to cry tears of joy.

The Player was upholding their end of the bargain. He couldn’t believe it...

Then he saw a familiar, Frisky mop of mousy brown hair and a pair of red eyes peek around the corner.

He smiled at Frisk, knowing that this was the kid that made this all possible. It was thanks to them that Monsterkind had made it to the surface and integrated as easily as they had. It was thanks to them that his world was slowly starting to look a little brighter.

It was thanks to them that his father was coming home.

Linda watched the trees rush by in a blur from the passenger seat of the Ford F-150. It was almost nine o’clock at night, and the lack of light pollution on the northern side of Mt. Ebott made for a beautifully starry night. Why didn’t she come out here and do this more often?

She cast a glance at the greasy, top-heavy balding blond driver and remembered exactly why.

Linda grimaced. She hated having to do this, but no one else knew anything about this - all thanks to David Green.

He parked the pickup in an abandoned gravel lot by a heavily wooded area.

Linda unbuckled and followed David as he got the necessary tools from the truck bed.

The silence, marred only by the clanking of tools and shuffling of canvas, made Linda even more
uncomfortable than if she had come here on her own. She decided to try and make a little light conversation, even though she had a feeling she knew how it would end.

“Thanks again for helping me out, David, you have no idea how much this helps me,” Linda said, putting that semester of drama class in freshman year to good use.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever,” David said dismissively. “I’m expecting you to pay me back the second we’re back here.”

Linda sighed, resigned. “Of course, David. I know the arrangement.” She’d known the arrangement for the past fifteen years.

David hummed in satisfaction as he turned on the flashlight.

David and Linda walked down an old, poorly-marked dirt trail through the woods for a few miles until they reached a particular opening in the trees and walked through it. David tied up some twine around one of the trees and unwound it as he went, looping around a tree at each turn until they reached an awkwardly raised spot in the ground. Despite how it was awkwardly raised, it was still covered in a layer of forest detritus. Undisturbed, even after fifteen years.

Linda sighed with relief and followed David back to the pickup.

David clicked his tongue and lit a cigarette as he leaned against the side of the truck. “Welp,” he grumbled through teeth clenched around a cigarette. “This was a waste of gas money.”

“I’ll pay you back,” Linda said, taking a drag from her own cigarette. “I always do.”

Linda gasped when David grabbed her buttocks. She didn’t dare turn around.

“Damn right you do…”

Linda bit her tongue as she and David got back in the car and headed further north to the motel. No complaining. This was all part of the agreement.

Chara hummed a tune to themself, one from their childhood. The lyrics escaped them, but it was something about a flower and a bicycle.

They felt an all-too-familiar chill overcome them. They turned around slowly to face The Player.

Hello.

“Whadda YOU want?” Chara snapped.

To let you know of my progress in upholding my end of the bargain.

Chara quirked up an eyebrow. “You mean you’re actually going through with it?” they said, genuinely surprised.

Yes. So far progress is as expected. I heard that at the rate things are going, Gaster should be home with his sons by late July or early August.

“Huh. Not bad,” Chara said, stretching their arms. “I’ll believe it when I see it.”

I understand.
Then The Player never was. Chara crossed their arms and looked at the abyss above them.

They sighed.

They were more lonely now than they had been in a long time.

More and more, your life gets better. This fills you with **DETERMINATION**

Chapter End Notes

Happy Days Are Here Again - Leo Reisman and His Orchestra
Never Gonna Give You Up - Rick Astley

Fun Fact: Eney and I are both students in the same time zone. This makes communicating and planning things easier.
Surfin' U.S.A.

Chapter Summary

A trip to the beach brings two surprise guests, plus a hermit crab.

Chapter Notes

This is almost pure filler. Almost.

but still...one of these things are not like the other.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

9:28 A.M., July 6th, 20XQ

It’s a beautiful day outside.

Waves are crashing.

Gulls are squawking.

On days like this, kids like you…

…are at the beach with your family and friends.

Toriel, Sans, and Frisk stepped out of the car. Toriel adjusted her dark purple bikinitop and tightened her sarong before putting on a wide-brimmed straw sunhat.

Sans had on an unbuttoned blue and yellow Hawaiian shirt and black athletic shorts as well as black flip flops. He had sunglasses taped to his head. He was also currently texting someone.

Frisk had on a red short-sleeved wetsuit and matching water shoes. Their hair was held back in a ponytail.

“okay, i just got done texting undyne,” Sans announced. “the marlow-goldsbys, demartinos, greens, and thompsons are already there and the fact that linda’s there is making things awkward. it is our job to crush that awkwardness with memes and puns. ready family?”


“okay then. let’s get the junk from the trunk and head on down.”

They made it to the waterfront where Undyne, Alphys, and the guests sat at a picnic table in uncomfortable, icy silence.
“well don’t you guys look happy,” Sans said, announcing his presence. Everyone save Linda calmed instantly.

“Hey, Sans!” Undyne greeted cheerfully. “I forgot to mention that Papyrus and Mettaton are running late since they ran into traffic over by the bridge.”

“I had a feeling,” Toriel sighed. “That’s why I took the detour through the warehouse district, less traffic down that way.”

“You know it’s illegal to drive through there, right?” Linda asked, smugness radiating through her voice.

“Through the part that actually has the warehouses,” Sharona corrected. “And you can’t get in without proper identification.” Then she glared at Linda over her sunglasses. “Or, you know...sneak in before the security cameras were installed in 96.”

Linda scoffed indignantly. “I would NEVER have done something like that!”

“That’s not what I meant, sweetie, but nice to know!” Sharona said, smirking as she pushed her sunglasses back up. One got the feeling that had her hair not been put into a messy bun she would have flipped it.

Linda’s face went white, then red with fury.

“Um, if it helps, Lin, pretty much everyone knew,” Helen offered.

Linda turned to glare at Helen.

“okay, i don’t know about some people, but i for one do not want my beach trip tainted by homicide,” Sans said.

Something in his voice made the group calm down. Maybe it was the sheer force of the vacuum that replaced the fucks he gave, maybe it was a bit of his past as Judge of the Underground peeking through unintentionally.

“Hello, darlings and Rhonda~”

“oh, pap and metta, there you two are;” Sans said. “i guess that’ll teach you two not to take the bridge this time of year, eh?”

“I WILL ADMIT THAT I HAVE REGRETS IN HINDSIGHT,” Papyrus said, scratching the back of his neck.

Linda just stared in disgust at Mettaton’s hot pink wraparound one-piece swimsuit and gold gladiator sandals.

“Take a picture, Brenda, it'll last longer,” Mettaton said.

“Why are you wearing a girl’s swimsuit?” Linda asked in disgust.

“Because it looks good on me,” Mettaton replied, as though this was a question everyone should know the answer to by now.

“Just because you look good in something doesn’t mean you should wear it,” Linda said smugly.

“Never stopped me before, Mindy,” Mettaton said dismissively. Everyone was looking at Papyrus
who, despite wearing his usual cheerful smile, looked surprisingly like he wanted to slap Linda. He most likely wouldn’t, but the feeling in the air that he was considering it was more than enough to cause concern.

“Just let it go Linda,” Helen said, placing a calming hand on her friend’s shoulder. “We’re here to have fun, not ruin it for other people.”

Linda simply glared at Helen.

“So,” Helen said, “now that everyone’s here, let’s go grab some food.”

Everyone agreed and stood up. The adults lined up normally, while the kids stood in a group.

Hunter was wearing a t-shirt with his swimsuit despite the 94-degree weather. Caroline was wearing a short-sleeved white sundress with black flats.

Hunter and Caroline glanced at each other.

“So why’re you not in a swimsuit?” Hunter asked.

“Because I can’t swim and have no desire to learn,” Caroline replied.

“But you could always just stand avoid the deep parts,” Brian offered.

“But I would get my dress wet,” Caroline retorted.

“But won’t sitting on the sand make it dirty?” Theo said.

“I’ll be sitting on a towel, not the sand.”

“If you’re just gonna sit around, why are you even here?” Brian asked.

“For the food and the ocean view. What more reason do I need?”

“The fact that Ma and Randy said that you’re still too young to stay at home by yourself?” Levi offered.

“That too,” Caroline mumbled.

“Well, I think the real reason you’re not in a swimsuit is because you hate yourself,” Theo said.

Penelope prepared to punch him in the guy when Caroline grabbed her arm.

“What does the fact that I hate myself have to do with what I wear?” Caroline said.

The kids were silent.

Hunter wringed his hands anxiously.

“That’s upsetting, please don’t say that ever again,” Theo said.

“That ever again,” Caroline said.

Theo blinked in confusion.

“What? I just said what you told me not to say,” Caroline snarked.
“You know what the heck I meant, tiny!” Theo snapped.

“I am literally two inches taller than you, I’m pretty sure that’s not tiny,” Caroline said.

Theo growled and moved to stand by Monica.

The ten-year-olds just stared at him.

Sans sat on a towel on the sand, resting his eyes and sucking a ketchup packet. He added a few more packets to his inventory, adding up to 34 of them now.

He suddenly felt a bit cooler. He opened one eye to see Toriel standing over him, framed by the sun - no angel is she, but a goddess.

He sat up and smiled at her - Sans really hoped that his smile didn’t look as goofy as it felt.

Toriel’s giggling was - while enchanting - not helpful in assuaging his nerves. But despite that, he was calm. He was always just calm enough around Toriel. Ever since Sans first heard her laugh, he was sure his life had been changed for the better. And seeing all the world around him, how things had changed and were continuing to change…

He’d been right all along.

“OI, IONIQ! I FOUND ‘IM!”

“Liam, wait up!”

Sans took a few moments to register the named he’d heard. Liam was a common enough name, but paired with a name like Ioniq plus an Australian accent? It could only be two people…

Sans lowered his sunglasses as a tallish young Human man with long, scruffy dirty-blond hair and stubble and green eyes in green bermuda shorts and a young Human woman with a curly dyed purple undercut and a vintage-styled yellow polkadot bikini walked up to him and Toriel.

“Um, may we help you two?” Toriel asked, somewhat concerned.

“it’s cool tori, i know these guys,” Sans said, putting a hand on her arm as he stood up. He turned to the two Humans. “lemme guess, scruffy’s extempore, undercut’s jessamy?”

Ioniq and Liam looked at each other. “Told you it was Timeline!” Liam said, smirking and poking Ioniq’s nose. Ioniq pouted and poked Liam in the ribs. Liam poked her cheek. She poked his gut.

“anyway,” Sans started, “ioniq, liam, this is my girlfriend toriel, she’s a teacher. toriel, meet my coworkers. the one with the undercut is ioniq campbell, a journalism student from chicago, and the scruffy one is liam price, a pro surfer from australia.”

“Nice to meet you!” Ioniq said. “Sans talks about you pretty much nonstop!”

“Yeah, it’s adorable!” Liam agreed. “He’s always askin’ us about date ideas and the like, wonderin’ what all you’d like…”

“hm, yeah, so how long have you two been together?” Sans asked knowingly.

“About a fortnight, to be honest,” Liam said, rubbing the back of his neck nervously. “This is actually our first date…”
“then why’re you talking to us? go smooch in the tide or somethin’ ya crazy kids,” Sans teased.

“Can’t. Your brother’s got that covered,” Ioniq said, side-eyeing the ocean.

“huh.”

“Well, what brings you two down to Ebott?” Toriel asked.

“I’m here for the surfing competition!” Liam declared. “I accidentally ordered two ticks side-by-side, so once I asked Io to be my girl, I invited her out here!”

“interesting first date idea.”

“Innit though?” Liam said proudly.

“How about you two?” Ioniq asked. “How’d you meet?”

Sans and Toriel glanced at each other a bit before smiling. Sans decided to speak up.

“Well,” he said. “we were back in the underground, okay? i had a job as a sentry - i know what you’re thinking, but sentry jobs in the underground were way better than they are up here - and my post was out in snowdin forest. so one day i was pretty bored. like bored enough to start telling jokes to a door. so i took a walk and found...?”

Liam raised his hand.

“Yes Liam?”

“A girlfriend!” he said enthusiastically.

“Well yeah, but that came later,” Sans said. “i actually found a huge door.”

“Behind which was a girlfriend,” Ioniq said.

Sans was quiet. “who’s telling the story here?”

“Sorry,” Ioniq and Liam said in unison. Toriel giggled.

“Okay then, as i was saying, walking through the woods, giant door. so me, being a reasonable guy, decide that this is a perfect door for practicing knock-knock jokes on. so i do just that for...well, i forget, the days sorta bleed into each other from there until...”

Sans looked to Toriel, who immediately understood what he wanted to do.

“knock-knock,” he said.

“Who’s there?” Toriel replied.

“Dishes.”

“Dishes who?”

“Dishes a very bad joke.”

Their laughter rang, they realized, as bright and as wonderfully as it had the very first time they’d met. And Ioniq and Liam saw it too if their knowing smiles were any indication.
“and that,” Sans began. “that right there. that’s when i realized. here’s someone who gets it. that was...not what i expected, as you can probably imagine. so what else was there to do besides keep going?”

“I was honestly rather surprised to find someone myself!” Toriel admitted. “Living alone in such a big place without meeting much of anyone, only to find someone...you’ll take what company you can get after a while…”

“so we started meeting every day,” Sans continued. “we’d tell jokes…”

“Stories…” Toriel added.

“personal info…”

“Eventually, however, I had something to ask of Sans,” Toriel said.

“OOH, IT'S GETTING TO THE GOOD PART!” a familiar voice said in what its owner assumed was a whisper.

Sans and Toriel broke their gazes away from each other and toward the crowd of friends and family that had congregated.

“Keep going, I’m taking notes for a story I’m writing,” Caroline urged, holding up a leatherbound journal and a pen.

Frisk looked up at their parents, eyes sparkling with anticipation. They nodded, urging them to continue.

Sans and Toriel turned back toward each other and smiled.

“As I was saying,” Toriel continued. “Eventually, I had a question to ask of Sans. I asked him…”

Toriel sighed. “I asked him...should a Human come through the ruin doors, I asked him to promise me that he would protect them.”

“to which i agreed,” Sans said fondly. “because yolo, amirite?”

This got a chuckle from everyone involved.

“and then what to my wondering eyes should appear, but a miniature frisk and…” Sans paused for a bit. “well, just a miniature frisk. that’s really it.”

Frisk giggled and ran up to hug Sans and Toriel. Penelope took a photo of them.

She smiled and said “Another one for the scrapbook~”

“You know, the scrapbook idea is looking more and more like a storybook,” Caroline said. The she looked around at the motley crew surrounding her.

“But then again, with these guys, what else would we get…”

Linda sat at the wooden picnic table watching Sans and Toriel tell their story. She turned up her nose and took sip of her mimosa as she pushed her blonde hair out of her eyes.

Seriously, whatever they were talking about couldn’t possibly have been that entertaining.
She looked at Hunter and Hannah and how happy they were as they listened to whatever the Monsters were saying.

She tried to remember the last time they looked as happy as they did now.

Nothing came to mind. Maybe she wasn’t thinking hard enough?

“Or maybe they just ain’t happy around you, but what do I know?” Estelle said. “I’m just a spirit stuck here because I can’t move on, it’s not like I’m ALIVE or somethin’, I mean, you’d know about stayin’ alive, wouldn’t you, Linda Jane Murphy?”

“Oh my GOD, shut UP already!” Linda cried.

The crowd around Sans and Toriel, as well as a number of random beachgoers, turned to stare at Linda.

Linda stared back. She saw that Hunter was holding a frightened-looking Hannah close to him with an odd look on his face. Was it concern? Fear? She couldn’t exactly tell. But she knew she didn’t like it.

Before long, everyone went back to whatever they were doing. Linda put her head in her hands and groaned before getting up to ask for a refill.

When would those goddamn MONSTERS stop humiliating her?

Hunter kept a closer eye on Hannah after Linda’s…little moment. He blew his bangs out of his eyes. He was pretty sure she’d make him get it cut again. It was starting to get past the tips of his ears. Wouldn’t want to look like a girl, would we?

Hunter sat down on the sand and leaned back onto his palms. He squashed the sand, running it through his fingers. The waves ran over his legs.

He looked out at the ocean before him. Undyne and that Liam guy were posing while surfing.

He wondered briefly if Mettaton and Papyrus would do something like that.

Wait, was Mettaton even waterproof?

He decided to ask later whenever he got the chance.

“Whoa, cool! Hey Hunter, get over here!” Brian called out.

Hunter followed Brian’s voice to a tide pool he was standing over.

“Dude, check it out! There’s a buncha weird stuff in here!”

“Whoa,” Hunter whispered as he stared into the tide pool.

“Hey, what’re you guys starin’ at?” Penelope asked.

“A tide pool,” Caroline said. “I’ve never seen one that wasn’t in an aquarium before…”

“Yeah, it’s so cool!” Levi said in awe.

“Bub!” Hannah said as she walked over with a shell in her hand. She stopped and stared at the tide
“Whoa.”

“Hannah, this is called a tide pool!” Hunter said. “Tide pools have different animals than the rest of the sea, like shells and starfish and stuff!”

Hannah’s eyes sparkled as she stared into the pool.

“HELLO, YOUNG HUMANS! WHAT ARE YOU STARING AT ON THE GROUND HERE?”

The kids looked up at Papyrus and Mettaton.

“Tide pool!” Hannah said. “It’s got shells and starfish and stuff!”

“I’m gonna stick my hand in and grab something,” Brian said.

“Brian no, remember what happened in first grade?” Hunter said, voice thick with concern.

“Brian yes! I don’t see any urchins, so I’m gonna stick my hand in!” Brian said.

“I dare you to grab a starfish and throw it at Theo!” Penelope said.

“I’ll grab the starfish for ya, but it’s your job to throw it at him, he’s your brother,” Brian said.

“Okay!” Penelope said, giving a thumbs up.

Brian reached down into the pool and picked up the first thing his hand came into contact with. He held out on his palm a small hermit crab inside an old colorful snail shell.

“That’s not a starfish,” Hannah said, shaking her head.

“I can see that,” Brian said. “You still wanna throw it at your brother, Nell?”

“Call her Nell again and I stick that crab down your shorts,” Caroline said, voice dark.

Everyone stared at her in shock.

“Don’t!” Hannah said. “The crab’ll get hurt!”

“And I won’t?” Brian mumbled.

“Don’t hurt the crab!” Hannah shouted.

“I won’t, the crab’s too cool to waste on my idiot brother!” Penelope assured.

<<And who in their right mind would wanna get in Brian’s shorts?>> Frisk added.

Papyrus and Mettaton’s eyes widened. They had to fight back laughter at Frisk’s statement.

After a few minutes of watching the children obsess over the crab, Payrus and Mettaton decided to start their own conversation.

“ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT SOMETHING?” Papyrus asked.

Mettaton looked up at him. “You know, I’m still amazed at just how tall you are…” he mused.
Papyrus smirked. “WELL, I AM STILL AMAZED AT JUST HOW SHORT YOU ARE!”

“I’m exactly six feet tall when I’m not wearing my heels Papy, you know that!” Mettaton chided, playfully swatting Papyrus’ humerus.

“NYEH HEH, AND I AND EXACTLY SIX FEET AND SEVEN INCHES TALL!” Papyrus said, wrapping arms around Mettaton as he slipped behind him and rested his chin on top of his head.

Mettaton giggled as he held onto his boyfriend’s arms. “How much do you wanna bet Frisk is going to be taller than you?”

“OKAY, NO.” Papyrus said. “CAROLINE OR LEVI, I CAN SEE. BUT NOT FRISK. THEY’LL PROBABLY END UP TALLER THAN UNDYNE AT THE MOST!”

“Probably,” Mettaton conceded.

Then the kids ran off to ask Alphys what gender the crab was.

Papyrus sighed. “I THINK WE SHOULD TELL SANS THAT HIS CHILD IS ABOUT TO BRING HOME ANOTHER PET…”

Mettaton laughed.

“Oh, there she is! Hey Dr. Alphys!”

Alphys turned toward the group of children running toward her and set down her cherry limeade.

“O-oh, hey guys, what do you need?” she greeted.

Hannah held out her hands, the hermit crab peeking out of its shell.

“Aww, cute...b-but why?”

“Is it a boy crab or a girl crab?” Hannah asked.

“W-well, let me see it for a moment,” Alphys said.

Hannah paused a bit, looking down at the crab before handing it to Alphys.

Alphys gently took the crab in her hand, suspending it briefly by its shell.

She held it up to the light squinted up at it. After a bit she nodded and gave it back to Hannah.

“It’s a male! Err, a boy crab, that is.”

“Sebastian…” Hannah whispered reverentially.

“Y-you’re gonna keep him?” Alphys said.

“Hanners, we - we can’t keep him,” Hunter said. “Mom will kill us!”

“We can keep him a secret!” Hannah said.

“Mom looks through our closets for things she doesn’t like once a month, we can’t. Keep him.”

“Frisk can keep him!” Levi said. “They already have four pets, what’s one more?”
Frisk replied, "A pain in my mom’s butt. Four is enough, especially since Yasmin, Isolde and Flowey could eat him."

"Hey, where is Flowey, anyway?" Caroline asked.

Flowey sat on Frisk’s windowsill. His grand trial on Ula’Ula Island was in progress.

He and Nanu were down to their last Pokemon.

"Come on Sans, who’s a good little Muk, come on - and you lost it. Great. This is EXACTLY why I named you Sans, I hope you know that."

Then the phone rang. Flowey checked the caller ID. Sans.

He answered the phone. "I hope you’re proud of yourself, you little shit."

"you know it," Sans said. "just callin’ to letcha know we’ll be back in an hour."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever."

"and by an hour i mean like five minutes."

"You little shit," Flowey hissed..

"someone sounds pissed," Sans teased.

"Fuck you!" Flowey screamed.

"your mother. buhbye now, see ya in a bit."

Sans hung up the phone as the garage door opened.

Flowey knew one thing for certain. Sans was going to die.

But the part of him that was Asriel would do anything to prevent that, and Flowey knew that that would make it worthless in the long run.

"Now, a formula to transform my beauty into ugliness, change my queenly raiment to a peddler's cloak. Mummy dust to make me old. To shroud my clothes, the black of night. To age my voice, an old hag’s cackle. To whiten my hair, a scream of fright. A blast of wind, to fan my hate! A thunderbolt, to mix it well. Now, begin thy magic spell."

As Toriel, Sans, and Frisk watched the evil queen magically disguise herself from their places on Toriel’s armchair, the phone rang.

"i’ll get it," Sans said, using his Magic to bring the phone over. He checked the caller ID.

"pause it, tori, it’s from the capitol."

Toriel paused the movie as Sans answered the phone.

"hello?"

"Yes, hi, this is Irma Lorence from the state legislator’s office, is Mrs. Dreemurr at home?" said the nasally voice on the other end.
“yeah, she is,” Sans affirmed. “though she’d rather you not refer to her as mrs. dreemurr. lemme get her on for ya.”

Sans handed the phone off to Toriel.

“Hello, this is Toriel Dreemurr speaking?”

“Yes, hello Mrs. Dreemurr. I’m Irma Lorence from the state legislator’s office, I’m calling to remind you of your meeting with Mr. Hollander on the 27th."

“Ah, thank you Ms. Lorence,” Toriel said. “And please, if you must, call me Ms. Dreemurr.”

“Of course, Mrs. Dreemurr,” Irma said. “Have a nice evening, please direct any and all questions you may have to Mr. Hollander’s email, goodbye now.”

“Wait -“

Irma hung up before Toriel could finish her sentence. Toriel turned the phone off and sighed, sinking back into her armchair.

“let me guess,” Sans said flatly, “she called you mrs.?”

“And she hung up on me after telling me to direct my questions to the state legislator’s email,” Toriel sighed.

“don’t let her get to ya, babe,” Sans said softly as he played with one of Toriel’s ears. “it ain’t worth the trouble. besides, it’s not like we’ll be talking to her again anytime soon.”

Toriel sighed, relaxing into Sans’ touch. “I do hope you are right…” she said.

“hmm.” Sans turned his attention to Frisk, who was staring up at their parents with concern. “you doin’ okay there, frisk?”

Frisk nodded. <<Are you guys okay?>> they signed.

“We’ll be fine, my child,” Toriel assured, laying a kiss to Frisk’s forehead. “Sans, would you be a dear and press play?”

“i won’t be a dear, but i will be a skeleton,” he replied as he pressed play.

Chara and Gaster sat at the START Menu, playing with the Uno game they got from The Player.

Chara scowled as they drew a card from the deck and slid it into their hand. Gaster laid down a yellow Draw 2 card. Chara was starting to get more than a little pissed.

“So The Player’s actually holding up their end of the bargain?” Chara said, drawing two cards from the deck and placing a yellow 3 card onto the pile. “Who’d’ve thunk it.”

“Indeed,” Gaster replied as he placed a blue 3 card on top of Chara’s. “Papyrus had a point when he said that anyone can be a good person if they just try.”

“Try being the key word here, right?” Chara said as they laid down a blue skip card and a Wild card. “I pick green.”

Gaster merely smiled and laid down a green Skip, a red Skip, another red Skip, and a red Draw 2.
“Uno. And right you are, young Dreemurr. To better a situation, effort must come from all sides involved.”

“But how can you be doing anything?” Chara said, drawing two cards and laying down a green Draw 2. “You’re not exactly...real.”

“Unreality can be as much a help as a hindrance,” Gaster said as he placed a green Skip and a green 7. “Uno.”

Chara laid down a green Reverse and a green 1. “I’ll believe that when I see it.”

Gaster chuckled as he laid down a red 1. “You’d make a fine scientist with that mentality, young Dreemurr.”

Chara tossed their cards in the air and watched them fall around them as they blew their bangs out of their face.

Gaster chuckled and shook his head. Chara was quite a bit like Sans was when he was a babybones…

Thinking about that made him all the more eager for his return.

Knowing that you’re going to help make the world a better place fills you with DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

Surfin’ U.S.A. - Beach Boys

Fun Fact: Spazzin is on Spring Break and uploading this from St. Louis Missouri.
What's Goin' On

Chapter Summary

Politics and the people who do them - Sometimes they really do just want to help.

Chapter Notes

This chapter may have some violent themes, so be warned right now.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

7:33 A.M., July 27th, 20XQ

It's a blistering day outside.

The sun is blazing.

The air is sticky.

On days like this, kids like you...

...are preparing to meet with the state legislator.

Frisk looked at their reflection in their vanity. Short-sleeved white shirt, buttoned. Suspenders, holding up their grey pinstriped balloon shorts. Red ribbon, tied around their neck in the best bow they could tie. Mary Jane shoes, buckled over white lace bobby socks. They were perfect.

Frisk then pulled out the Faded Ribbon and put it in their hair. They pulled out the Heart Locket and equipped it. They gripped it in their palm, sensing their strength combining with the good-luck wishes of Chara and Asriel.

They were filled with DETERMINATION.

FILE: SAVE.

They ran down the stairs, where their parents and designated bodyguards awaited them.

Sans had on a white short-sleeved buttondown with a dark grey waistcoat and black shorts with black crocs. Toriel had on a pale purple short-sleeved dress with white polkadots and black sandals.

Papyrus in a black suit. Frisk felt as though they were going to get heatstroke just looking at him.
Undyne was in a white v-neck tank top and black jean shorts with her usual boots.

“I assume everyone is ready?” Toriel asked as she stood from her spot.

Papyrus and Undyne stood and saluted with a hearty “YES, MA’AM!” Sans and Frisk gave a thumbs up.

“Alright, let’s head on out to the car. Shelby is waiting at the capitol. Is the backup in place?”

“K-9 unit is to ready be deployed in case of emergency, ma’am,” Undyne replied.

“METTATON IS TO BE DEPLOYED ONLY IF THE K-9 UNIT FAILS!” Papyrus said.

Toriel nodded. “And should Mettaton somehow fail…”?

Everyone turned to Sans. Sans simply stood up.

“i doubt it’ll come to that,” he said coolly. “but if it does, i’m more than prepared to do my part.”

Toriel nodded, satisfied. “Alright. NOW we go.”

The signs were ready. All they had to do was wait for the HWC to start their little “demonstration”.

Such a nice way of saying “hurling insults and racist slurs because they can”.

The group of a hundred strong Ebott University students plus 78 Todd Community College students was congregated randomly about the area surrounding the state capitol, some eating breakfast of some kind, some chatting, some getting in some last-minute shuteye before the event.

Two such students getting shuteye were a Human, brown-haired and blue-eyed and leaning against the wall of an alleyway in a Guns ‘n’ Roses tank and cargo shorts with black slip-on sandals, a black chest binder visible behind the straps of the top; and a Monster, a Cat with medium length light gray and black stripe fur and blue-gray eyes wearing athletic shorts and a cropped Panic! At The Disco shirt with sandals.

The Human was typing something into a laptop, focused on lines of code few could comprehend without a proper mindset.

The Cat jabbed the Human’s shoulder with a cold water bottle.

“Drink up, Tom,” she said. “It’s fuckin’ boiling out here.”

“Thanks, Rose,” Tom replied, taking the bottle without averting his eyes from the screen. He tore off the cap with his teeth and spat it out, chugging half of the bottle before setting it on the concrete.

The two sat, Tom typing and Rose doodling on her sign.

Rose turned to glance at Tom curiously. He had been on his laptop nonstop for days, and he wouldn’t talk to anyone. It worried her, so she’d taken it on herself to keep him alive by providing food and water regularly - she wasn’t the best cook by any means, but she could make some mean ramen noodles. And nothing else…

And she really couldn’t help but be curious about what he was doing on that laptop that was so
worthy of all his focus.

“Hey, what are you even doing on that laptop?” she questioned, looking over his shoulder hoping to try and glean some information from the lines of code on his screen.

“Nothing,” Tom replied, no reaction visible.

“Dude, if THIS is what YOU call ‘nothing’, I’m scared of what kinda shit you call ‘something’,” Rose said incredulously, putting her chin on Tom’s shoulder.

Tom paused for a fraction of a second before returning to work.

“Okay, that stuff is popping up way faster than you’re typing it. What’s really going on?”

Tom sighed wearily. “Rose, I’m very busy. Please get off my shoulder.”

“Aha!” Rose exclaimed, practically vibrating with excitement. “So it IS something! Can ya tell me? Huh? Huh? Can ya?”

“No,” Tom said, voice flat yet firm.

Rose groaned. “Ugh, why NOT? Is it like, top secret or something?”

“Yes.”

“Then why didn’t you just SAY so?!?” Rose shouted.

Tom placed a hand on her muzzle, his other hand still typing at warp speed. “You didn’t ask if it was top secret, you asked what I was doing.”

“YOU COULD HAVE SAID THAT IT WAS SOMETHING TOP SECRET!”

“Rose. Be quiet. There could be roaches…”

Rose shut up immediately. Roaches - codeword for HWC members. Tom had a point. Rose slouched, her head still attached to Tom’s shoulder, her eyes following the impossibly fast lines of code as they zoomed across the screen. It was as if there were multiple people typing in at once - Wait.

“Say, Tom,” Rose began, voice as quiet as she could manage it to be while still being heard, “just how many people are working on this top-secret dealio with you, anyways?”

“Eight that I know of, but there’s another one who’s in and out for health reasons,” Tom said, eyes not moving from the screen.

“Health reasons?” Rose asked. “D’ya know what kind?”

“Pregnancy and general anxiety,” Tom said. “Now please, Rose, let me work, okay? The march is in an hour, so I’m working as fast as I can, and I can’t afford to make a single mistake, no matter how small.”

Rose silently pondered Tom’s words. “This is important to you, huh?” she asked, voice quiet.

Tom sighed. “Well, yeah, but that’s because this is something I’m doing for a friend of mine. It’s part of his life’s work, and helping him with this isn’t just going to help him.”
Tom stopped short before returning to his work with a sigh. “I’ve said too much. I’m just glad you can keep a secret…”

Rose blushed. She wrapped her arms about the Human in a hug. “Thanks for trusting me.”

Tom heated up a bit and waved her away dismissively. “Yeah, yeah, whatever, now get off me, your fur is making me hotter than I already was…”

Rose giggled. Suuure it was…

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A young blue-eyed blonde woman walked up the steps of her London apartment, searching for something. She walked into a small room where a person with brown hair and stubble and green eyes in a black miniskirt showing unshaven legs and a cropped tank top revealing considerable musculature sat on a bed with a laptop, not even paying the woman attention.

The woman cleared her throat. The person ignored her. She cleared her throat again, even louder. She sighed, seeing no other choice.

She pounded on the door with all her might and shouted. “ALEXIS!”

“Sod off, Angela, I’m busy,” the person said.

“Too bad for you, sibling, because I need your help,” Angela said, barging into Alexis’ room and upturning the items on their dresser.

“What’re ya lookin’ for?” Alexis asked, still staring at the computer screen.

“My Manolo Blahniks, you know, the nude ones?”

“By my wardrobe, I wore ‘em out clubbin’ about a fortnight ago,” Alexis said, pointing toward said wardrobe.

“Without asking me first, Alexis? Really,” Angela huffed, grabbing her heels. “I know you’re good about returning things, but I really would rather you let me know before you do things like this…”

“Mhmm,” Alexis replied distractedly typing on the keyboard of the laptop rapidly.

“What are you even doing on that?” Angela asked, quite annoyed that Alexis wasn't even looking at her.

“Stuff.”

“You need to be more specific than that this time mix,” Angela said, her hands on her hips.

“Can’t say.”

“Why?” Angela was getting very pissed off at this point.

“Personal. Helping a colleague. Kept the shoes in in case all goes well and I feel like celebrating.”

“Helping them what?”

“HELPING THEM FIND THEIR FATHER, NOW SOD OFF ANGELA!” Alexis shouted in
irritation.

“Alright. God, you take in your displaced sibling and he -”

“They,” Alexis corrected.

“UGH!”

“That’s not a pronoun, Angela.”

Angela narrowed her eyes and stormed out of the room with her shoes.

Alexis sighed. Their sister was pushier than they liked, but she meant well enough. Most of the time. They just wished she’d either stop being curious about their work or get a job of her own. Alexis was already the sole rentpayer, with two jobs to boot, and they were certain of a coming rent hike. Lord help them if they ended up having to take a third job…

In a small bedroom in a small house in Aomori, Japan, a teenage boy sits on his bed with a laptop typing.

Until his mother knocks on his door.

“Yuu! Takagi-kun’s outside!”

“Send him in.”

Footsteps sounded and entered his room. A weight slammed onto the bed, sending his work flying.

“Morning Fujiwara-kun!” Takagi said. “What’s that you’re doing?”

“Typing,” Yuu replied evenly. “You can stay up here so long as you do not disturb me.”

“Okay, if you say so,” Takagi said with a shrug as he laid down on Yuu’s bed. “So how’re those grown-ups online you always talk to, Fujiwara-kun?”

“Fine.”

“That’s good!”

The two were silent.

“But seriously, what are you doing?” Takagi asked.

Yuu sighed. He liked Takagi a lot, no question, but he was…adventurous. Or stupid. Or both really. He often got himself and Yuu into trouble with his wild plans. And if Yuu wasn’t careful, he too could end up in trouble. This work he was doing was at the very least a crime that could net him a fine his father was incapable of paying off on his own.

“If I told you I’d have to kill you and then myself,” he replied.

Takagi blinked a few times before laughing. “You’re so funny Fujiwara-kun!”
“I was being serious, Takagi-san.”

“Sure you were!”

Yuu sighed and continued typing. This was going to take a while…

Ioniq sat on her bed in her dorm room typing up a storm. She’d removed her fake nails for this, so this had better be a success.

Her phone rang.

She didn’t look up from her work, tapping the screen to take the call on speaker.

“Hey Liam,” she said. “You typin’?”

“Yeah, not as fast as I’d like, but you know how it is,” Liam replied.

“Aw, baby~” Ioniq cooed. “When did the doctor say the cast is gonna come off?”

“Few weeks he said.”

“Damn,” Ioniq said. “Where you at?”

“In a McDonald’s in Canberra,” Liam replied. “I’m friends with the manager so I get free stuff sometimes.”

“Ooh, you best bring me with you one of these days!” Ioniq teased.

“You have no idea how much I’d love you here right now,” Liam whined. “But we’ll have to wait a bit, y’know? You have uni, I have competitions…”

“Yeah, I know…”

“I’ll come visit you again over Christmas, that sound ace?”

Ioniq smiled, continuing to type. “I’d like that.”

“Great! Gotta get back to work. If I have free wifi and McNuggets, I gotta earn ‘em, right?”

Ioniq laughed. “Yeah boo, go and earn yourself some some McNuggets. I’ll be waiting until you get back.”

“Okay. Bye, Io.”

“Bye.”

Ioniq hung up with a sigh. Her heart was pounding and her cheeks hurt from smiling.

She had a good feeling.

Liam hung up, shoved a whole nugget into his mouth and continued typing. He chugged down some
chocolate milkshake while typing.

He knew people were staring. He was a renowned surfer after all. He should be used to it.

But even now, after six years on the pro circuit, he still hated having people stare at him like he was a god. It made him feel like he’d swallowed live worms while lying in a tub full of them. It was a gross feeling.

But he could ignore it well enough - he’d done so for years, and with something important distracting him he could hold off on being consumed by social anxiety for even longer than usual.

Just as long as no one came up to ask for an autograph or chat him up he’d be golden.

Frisk stared out the car window at the skyline of the capital city as it came ever closer. The heat made everything look like it was melting. At least it was cooler than Hotland. But then again Frisk had been wearing a sweater and moving around a lot trying to avoid getting into fights, so maybe that had something to do with the heat in Hotland. Who knew.

Frisk checked the time. 9:08 A.M. The meeting with the legislator was at 10:30, and Toriel said that they’d make it to the capitol building at 9:30 if there was little traffic.

They turned to look at Sans. He was busy typing something into his laptop. They knew what he was doing. Everyone in the car with them right now knew what he was doing.

Sans looked up at Frisk, continuing to type. “what’s up, frisk?”

Frisk touched the ceiling. Sans chuckled and rumpled their hair with a free hand before smoothing it down again.

<<How much longer until you guys are done with your part?>> Frisk signed as they stared at the screen.

“i dunno,” Sans said with a shrug. “could be hours, could be days. but i’ll have to get off once we reach the capitol.”

Frisk leaned on Sans’ shoulder and watched the numbers, letters, symbols, and hands run across the screen.

The hands weren’t there last time Frisk checked. They smiled.

Gaster - no, their grandfather - was coming home. He was slowing becoming more real.

It filled them with DETERMINATION.

Gaster stood next to Chara, a somber silence enveloping the START Menu.

“So this is it, huh old man?” Chara asked, their voice carrying less than their usual confidence.

“I am afraid so, young Dreemurr,” Gaster sighed. “I have ways of checking back often, as does young Frisk. If there was a way to bring you with me, I would take without a second thought,
believe me.”

“But there isn’t,” Chara said. “Not yet at least…”

Gaster sighed, placing a hand on Chara’s chestnut hair, lacing his fingers through it. “I will work to the best of my ability to find a way to bring you back. Even if it takes me until my dusting day, I will find a way.”

“But what if the reason I can’t go with you is because I’m actually dead, huh? What if that’s the case?”

“Then young Frisk can allow you to take over whenever necessary,” Gaster interrupted, his voice firm. “But until we know for certain that your return is impossible, I will do all that is in my power to find a way for you be a part of this timeline.”

Chara looked up at Gaster in shock. Could he really think that he could…oh, who were they kidding? Of COURSE he does. This was Dr. WingDings Gaster. He said he would build a power source for an entire underground and he did so with nothing but garbage, lava and some Magic. He made Sans and Papyrus with nothing but his own Dust and Magic plus a bit of DETERMINATION. He would bring Chara back to life or die trying.

And if it did turn out to be impossible, he did have a point when he said that Frisk would let them front from time to time. It was the next best thing to actually being alive.

Chara hadn’t realized they’d started crying until Gaster wiped away a tear.

Some time later, Frisk and their parents and bodyguards safely reached the capitol.

Outside the copper-domed marble building was a crowd, some hundreds strong, all wearing HWC shirts and waving signs with hateful words written all over them. They were shouting slurs at the tops of their lungs.

Frisk held onto Toriel’s hand, squeezing their eyes closed. The words directed at them personally they’d heard several times, but the ones directed at their family made them want to cry.

Sans and Papyrus teamed up to whisk them off to a rear entrance, where Shelby was waiting for them. She was wearing a white sleeveless buttondown with a ruffled collar with a formfitting black skirt with black heels.

“Hell of a crowd out there,” Shelby said in an attempt to make light of the situation. “Could be bigger, but word is that not only are there more of them on the way in from out of state, but rumor has it there’s a counter-protest.”

“WHY WOULD SOMEONE PROTEST COUNTERS?” Papyrus asked. “WITHOUT COUNTERS WE WOULD BE FORCED TO PUT INGREDIENTS AND UTENSILS ON THE KITCHEN TABLE! AND THERE IS NOT NEARLY ENOUGH ROOM FOR THAT!”

“pap, a counter-protest isn’t to protest counters, but to protest a protest,” Sans explained.

“THAT JUST SOUNDS COUNTERINTUITIVE!” Papyrus complained.

Toriel giggled a bit at his accidental pun. Papyrus groaned once he realized what he’d said.
“i’m so proud of you,” sans said, wiping away an imaginary tear.

“SANS, PLEASE.”

“okay, since you’re being so polite about it.”

Shelby lead them through the hallway to the security checkpoint, where they went through without incident, despite one security guard’s insistence that they be detained just in case.

They found themselves surrounded by reporters from news stations across the country, cameras and microphones being aggressively thrust toward their faces.

It took a lot of Undyne’s effort not to go beyond glaring homicidally at one reporter who tried to get her attention in particular.

Shelby deflected the reporters’ efforts, stated that there would be a press conference later that evening.

They successfully made it to the legislator’s office without any further incident.

They stepped inside the office, where a grandfatherly-looking man with thinning white hair and large aviator glasses in a grey suit and a heavily spray tanned weaselly-looking woman in a grey and pink houndstooth-patterned pantsuit with dishwater blonde hair in a too-tight bun and beady brown eyes with clumpy mascara and blaring red eyeshadow with mismatched gold jewellery awaited them.

“Hi, I’m Tim Hollander, legislator of our fair state, and the woman next to me is my secretary, Irma Lorence! She will be taking notes for me to review later!” the man greeted, holding out his hand.

“It’s a pleasure to finally be able to meet you, ma’am!”

“The pleasure is ours, Mr. Hollander,” Toriel said, voice cool, crisp and regal. She shook his hand, hers larger than his by a fair amount. Frisk, Sans, Papyrus, and Undyne soon followed.

“Please, have a seat on the couch!” Mr. Hollander offered, gesturing to the aforementioned brown leather couch.

As soon as the group was seated, the discussions began. They agreed that since tensions were still rather high between Monsterkind and Humanity in much of the nation, it was best to take things slowly.

Frisk reached into their tote bag and retrieved a tube. They opened the tube and took out a roll of paper with a bulleted list of thing they wanted for Monsterkind on the surface and gave it to Mr. Hollander.

He looked it over and smiled. “Well! This is very well thought out! I daresay Frisk here has a bright future in politics ahead of them!”

“Excuse me, Mr. Hollander,” Irma interrupted, “it’s a bulleted list in pink marker made by a nine-year-old.”

<<I’m ten, Ms. Lawrence,>> Frisk signed.

“I’m sorry, but can you please use your voice Miss Dreemurr?” Irma said, her voice dripping with nasally saccharine condescension.

“Mx. Dreemurr is not comfortable using their voice at the moment, Ms. Lorence,” Shelby said, her
voice even and authoritative. “I will be translating for them as a result. Frisk is ten years old, by the
way.”

“Well, I like it!” Mr. Hollander said. “After all, we all start somewhere!”

Frisk smiled. They liked this man.

“Now, let’s see what can and can’t be done at the current point,” Mr. Hollander said. “For this, I
would like to discuss the matter with Ms. Dreemurr in private, if that’s alright.”

“Actually,” Toriel started, “I would feel more comfortable if Dr. Sans Gaster were to join us.”

Irma spoke up suddenly. “Mrs. Dreemurr, Mr. Hollander has requested -”

“If that makes you comfortable Ms. Dreemurr, then I’ll allow it!” Mr. Hollander said. “Mrs. Lorence,
you are excused until further notice.”

“B-but Mr. Hollander -”

“Mrs. Lorence,” Mr. Hollander said in a warning tone.

Irma growled and stood up to leave, heels clacking on the floor.

“COME ALONG, FRISK!” Papyrus said, enthusiastic as ever. “LET’S SEE WHERE THE BEST
SOCK-SKATING FLOORS ARE!”

Frisk hopped up and down, clapping excitedly. They squealed as Papyrus lifted them up onto his
shoulders and ran from the room, Undyne trailing them.

Mr. Hollander chuckled. “They’re a hyper one, aren’t they?” he said.

“Indeed,” Toriel said, a fond smile on her face.

“You know, Mrs. Lorence has a daughter herself,” Mr. Hollander stated. “Her name’s Elaina. She’s
usually at a daycare center around this time, but the building it’s held in is being fumigated, so she’s
hanging around here somewhere.”

“is that so?” Sans asked. “maybe frisk’ll find her while they’re out and about.”

“Perhaps so,” Mr. Hollander mused. “Now! Ms. Dreemurr, Dr. Gaster. Shall we get started?”

“sure thing,” Sans said. “but please, call me sans, dr. sans if you must. dr. gaster is my father.”

“Ah, alright then Sans! Now, let’s see what Frisk has in mind…”

Tom told the other hackers and physicists that he had to go. He put his laptop in his bag, and he
slung his bag over his shoulder. He grabbed his sign - a white poster board with the phrase “YOU
KNOW IT’S BAD WHEN PEOPLE WITH ANXIETY ARE PROTESTING” written on it in red
bubble letters outlined in black. The back of the sign was painted in the colors of the transgender
pride flag. He was ready to go.

“Ready to go, Ro?” he asked Rose, who was covering her mouth with the bandana that was
wrapped around her head. She nodded. “Ready whenever, Tommy-boy,” she said.
“Good, because the students are marching now,” Tom said, taking Rose by the hand while bearing his sign.

Leading the march was a group of Monster students on the back of a black pickup truck with flame decals. One of them held a megaphone, chanting.

The throng of student protesters grew and grew, increasing in number with each step. Tom got a number of compliments on his sign. Someone even asked for a selfie with him holding his sign. Rose practically begged to join, to which Tom acquiesced.

By the time the crowd reached the capitol square, the students greatly outnumbered the HWC members. Both sides of the protest were growing larger by the second. By noon, the number of protesters in capitol square numbered nearly a thousand from across the nation.

Both the HWC demonstrators and the student protestors were almost equal in number.

Suddenly, a bang and a scream rang out.

All hell broke loose.

Linda was leaning forward on the couch, completely absorbed in the breaking newscast.

She didn’t notice Hunter watching from the bottom of the stairwell.

“And now we return to Valerie Porter live from the capitol where a riot has just broken out between protestors. What’s going on over there, Val?”

A woman in her mid-thirties with brown hair and eyes appeared in front of a throng of fighting people. “Well Kent, after gunshots were fired by HWC member and local police officer Brock Turner, 19-year-old Ebott U forensic science student Ewan Pierce shielded a young Monster from a gunshot. Turner is currently being held on attempted murder charges, while Pierce is currently in the hospital in reportedly stable condition.”

Hunter nearly collapsed. Frisk was at the capitol meeting with a politician of some kind. Were they okay? Were they safe?

“Thankfully for many here today, the young ambassador for Monster-Human relations, ten-year-old Frisk Dreemurr, is safe and sound inside the capitol building.”

Hunter let out a breath. Thank goodness they were alright…

“I have here with me an engineering student from Los Angeles named Tom Erikson to explain the events from his point of view. Tom, why are you in Ebott protesting?”

Tom appeared in the shot, his sign turned so that the pride flag was facing the camera.

“Well, I’m protesting because to me, this is actually pretty personal,” Tom explained. Hunter was surprised at how high and feminine his voice was for a college student. “I’ve actually made very good friends with some Monsters - hell, I’ve… I’ve even got a crush on one. Rose, if you’re watching this, wanna be my girlfriend?”

“Well, this is a development! Rose must be a very lucky Monster!”
A squeal emanated from of screen, and Tom was almost tackled by a light grey and black striped cat monster in a cropped Panic! At The Disco shirt and athletic shorts. “Yes, of course I will be your girlfriend Tom! How could you have forgotten I was here?”

“I didn’t!”

“So, what does that flag stand for?” Valerie asked, clearly trying to change the subject, pointing toward the sign.

“Oh, that?” Tom asked, a smile on his face, hugging Rose with one arm “It’s a transgender pride flag. I thought, hey, since I’m protesting, why not spread awareness about a similar cause? Since transgendered individuals - myself included - are often discriminated against just because some people don’t like the fact that they’re uncomfortable with the bodies they were born in, since they don’t feel like they align with their biological sex, it’s very similar to how Monsters are discriminated against. They can’t control how they are any more than Humans can.”

As the interview went on, Hunter crept back upstairs. He was silently thankful that his mother hadn’t noticed him standing there watching.

He went into his room and pulled out his tablet, opening Google.

He started typing in the search bar. 

**transgender**

He tapped a few articles, skimming through them. They said the same things Tom said, but in more detail.

Hunter started realizing that he fit some of the symptoms - was that the right word? He wasn’t sure.

Hunter read a few more articles, even took a few quizzes.

It all came out the same.

Hunter wasn’t sure what to do with this knowledge except write it down in the notes app.

**Dear diary,**

Just learned something about myself. Not sure how to take it.

I hear my mom calling. I’ll explain later.

“Hunter, Hannah! Get in the car, we’re going to the grocery store!” Linda called.

Hunter James Thompson was filled with anxiety.

---

In the marble halls of the capitol building, a young girl with deep blue eyes and long black hair covering one of her eyes in a sky blue sundress with pink roses and black flats ran on her tiptoes with a handful of quarters, her gold charm bracelet tinkling with each step she took.

She eventually found what she was looking for. The vending machine.

She looked up and down at the options. She was craving something sweet - she knew her mother wouldn’t like her to eat anything sweet, she said it would make her fat.
The girl wasn’t sure if she believed her mother or not, but she knew her mother would get angry if she spoke her mind.

The girl started flapping her hands since she was getting anxious. But then she felt someone watching her, so she stopped. Her mother would get angry if she knew anyone had seen her flap her hands.

Her anxiety took over. She felt her chest tighten and her vision tunnel.

But then she heard giggles echoing through the halls and footsteps running toward her. She turned to the source of the footsteps, finding a child about her own age with brown hair and red eyes running toward her.

She yelped and shielded herself with her arms.

The footsteps stopped. The girl lowered her arms to see the child staring at her, their eyes wide.

“W-wh-who-who a-a-are y-y-y-yo-you?” the girl stuttered, her voice quiet.

The child smiled. <<My name is F-R-I-S-K!>> the child signed. <<What’s your name? If you’re okay with telling me, at least.>>

The girl brightened almost instantly. <<My name is E-L-A-I-N-A. It’s nice to meet you!>> she signed. <<I like your necklace!>>

<<Nice to meet you too! I like your bracelet! What were you thinking of getting to eat?>> Frisk asked.

<<I want something sweet, but my mom doesn’t like me eating sweets since I’ll get fat…>> Elaina signed, pouting.

<<What she doesn’t know won’t hurt her!>> Frisk assured. <<I’ll eat some of it if she finds us!>>

Elaina snickered. <<Thank you. Do you like brownies?>>

Frisk smiled and nodded.

Elaina smiled back. She could feel the start of a beautiful friendship…

“...okay, I think that’s everything for now!” Mr. Hollander declared. “So, full special integration on the state level, interspecies cohabitation on the state level, and full citizenship on the national level. Next year we’ll arrange national integration and interspecies marriage in the state level.”

“Thank you very much Mr. Hollander,” Toriel said. “Please let us know if you need anything. Monsterkind is truly grateful to you.”

There was a knock on the door. Mr. Hollander stood up to answer it.

Undyne was on the other side, gasping for breath and sweating up a storm. Some of her scales were flaking.

“Undyne!” Toriel gasped, running toward Undyne and activating her Healing Magic. “What
happened?"

“There’s a riot in the capitol square,” she gasped. “Shots fires, Human student injured by a local police officer unprompted. Frisk is nowhere to be found, got Papyrus and the K-9 unit on the lookout for ‘em…”

Toriel’s eyes widened before narrowing.

“Thank you for your time Mr. Hollander,” she said, her voice firm with resolve. “Sans, take a shortcut to any place they may be.”

“He already did,” Undyne said.

Toriel sighed. For someone so relaxed, when his family was on the line, Sans was more than willing to jump headlong into danger to keep them safe from harm.

She really loved that about him, as worrisome as the tendency was. She left the room to search for her child.

If a single hair on her dear Frisk’s head was out of place, there was going to be HELL to pay.

<<So the pretty blond one is Hunter, the tall creepy one is Caroline, the short one with green eyes is Penelope, the one with red hair and the gap in his teeth is Levi, the one with brown hair and pretty eyes is Brian, and the one with the nice smile and yellow scales is MK?>> Elaina signed.

Frisk nodded. <<There are others, but these are my best friends!>>

Elaina smiled. <<They seem really nice!>>

Frisk smiled back. <<They are!>>

<<If it’s not to much to ask, may I have your phone number?>> Elaina asked.

<<Sure!>> Frisk replied with a smile.

They exchanged numbers, high-fiving with a smile.

<<I’ll call you later, okay?>> Elaina signed.

Frisk smiled and nodded.

“Elaina, where are you?” Irma called out. “We’re going home!”

Elaine gasped. “C-coming Mother!” she called. <<We’ll talk later?>> she signed.

Frisk smiled and gave a thumbs up gesture. Elaina returned the gesture.

“Elaina Lily Lorence, I said we are leaving!!” Irma screamed.

Elaina flinched and ran toward her mother’s voice.

Frisk waved after Elaina, even though she wasn’t looking back at them.

They stood in place for a moment, spacing out.
“Frisk!” someone familiar called out. Frisk blinked away their distraction, turning toward their mother with a bright smile, climbing up onto her shoulders and giggling.

Toriel took Frisk from her shoulders and into her arms. “We’re going home now, Frisk. I will tell you which laws will be passed first when we get home. We have had quite a day, have we not?”

Frisk nodded. <<I made a new friend, Mom!>> they signed excitedly. <<Her name is E-L-A-I-N-A, and she had really pretty eyes! I even got her phone number!>>

Toriel smiled. So Frisk had found Elaina.

“hey, you two,” Sans said as he shortcutted behind his girlfriend and child. He was covered in what appeared to be mashed food.

<<Um, sans, you have something on.. all over>> Frisk signed looking somewhat sad but amused.

“yeah, toughest crowd i’ve ever seen,” Sans said. “luckily it’s dispersed in the last few hours, but we should still take a shortcut to be on the safe side. pap and undyne are waiting out by the car with mtt, so he and undyne are staying over for dinner. we’ll be picking up alphys as well, so the car’ll be crowded.”

Frisk nodded. Sans had told them ahead of time, so it would be okay for the most part - especially since it was their family.

Sans wiped a hind on a napkin and rumpled Frisk’s hair.

This had been a good day. Things had gotten rough, and maybe they’d get worse before they got better, but at least things would get better.

Things were definitely going to get better.

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Knowing that times are slowly changing for the better fills you with

**DETERMINATION**

Chapter End Notes

What's Goin' On - Marvin Gaye
Chapter Summary

He's back.

Chapter Notes

Here it is, the moment you've all been waiting for.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

_In the style of Undertale_

_Midnight, August 8th, 20XQ_

_It’s a muggy night outside._

_The air is heavy._

_Crickets are chirping._

_On nights like this, kids like you…_

_Are trying to stay awake to greet your grandfather._

---

Frisk put a red piece in the grid, blocking Papyrus’ yellow pieces from making a horizontal Connect 4.

Then Papyrus got a diagonal Connect 4 using the piece Frisk dropped. They had been played.

They sighed as they pulled out the stopper on the bottom of the grid and the pieces clattered loudly onto the concrete floor of the basement.

“keep it down if you two don’t wanna go to bed,” Sans warned, his voice tense.

Frisk and Papyrus apologized as they cleared away the pieces as quietly as they could.

What to do now?

Frisk yawned and rubbed their eyes. They were so…sleepy…

They shook their head in an attempt to stay awake.

They failed.

But hey. They could always watch from another point…
Frisk wasn’t sure what they expected - maybe they expected a glitchy Gaster or something.

They did not expect a portal into their basement.

They cleared their throat to get attention. Chara turned and ran over to them immediately.

“I tried going through just to see what would happen,” they said quietly. “It’s like I’m trapped in a fish tank of nothingness.”

The children were silent.

“You’ll visit me here, right?” Chara said, their voice wavering.

Frisk straightened their stance and nodded. <<I’ll visit every night I don’t have homework, and whenever I have English homework!>> they signed.

Chara giggled. Then it grew to full on laughter. But Frisk could tell wasn’t real. Chara’s real laugh was more…not-evil.

They were trying not to cry. They were scared that something would go wrong, that someone would be hurt or worse, that they would be all alone again -

Frisk hugged them. Chara’s laughter became sobs. They hugged Frisk back.

Frisk comforted them as they watched the portal grow, slowly and steadily. Wherever Gaster was, they hoped he could see it. He was needed.

He was wanted.

---

Gaster was deep in the Void. It no longer needed him. But there was one more element necessary for his return.

He needed a psychopomp to guide him to his destination - a role that could only be filled by The Player.

But they were certainly taking their sweet time getting here. He swore to leave a bad review on their Yelp if they had one.

Gaster sighed. Perhaps time ran differently in The Hub…

The The Player had always been there.

“You certainly took your time, Player,” Gaster said.

I am aware of my lateness. Do forgive me.

“Well, you’re here now, and that is what matters.” Gaster held out his arm to allow The Player to take it. “Lead the way.”

The Player paused, looking from Gaster’s face to arm and back. They touched his arm.

I must warn you, this will take some time. There are no visible borders, so I am unable to navigate by sight.

“That is fine. Just do the best you can.”
The Player deigned to smile at Gaster.

The Skeleton and his psychopomp were on their way.

Gatser was going home.

Frisk sat on the ground with Chara. They were wondering if they could find a way to give Chara some chocolate when they felt… something. Chara clearly felt it too, as they sat bolt upright.

The children looked all around them before relaxing and sighing. They leaned into each other.

“You felt it too, right Frisk?” Chara said.

Frisk nodded. <<The Player is nearby.>>

“Do ya think they have Gaster with them?” Chara asked.

Frisk shrugged. <<It’s possible.>> they signed. <<I remember how hard it was to find Gaster the first few times, even with The Player controlling me…>>

“When’re they gonna GET here, dammit?!” Chara yelled.

<<Chara, no swearing allowed,>> Frisk signed.

Chara growled and blew the bangs from their eyes. “THAT’S what you’re focusing on? The swear word?”

<<Well, I don’t know when they’re going to be here either!>> Frisk signed.

Chara snarled a bit before realizing that anger wouldn’t do much besides hurt Frisk. They slumped in place, raising their knees to their chest with their arms dangling at their sides. They put their head on their knees.

“Sorry…” they mumbled.

Frisk put a comforting hand on their back. Chara knew Frisk forgave them - they were incapable of holding grudges, it seemed.

Just another way Frisk was better than them.

Frisk put their arm further around Chara in a side-hug and leaned their head into their shoulder as they hummed a familiar tune. The words escaped Chara, but they were sure they’d heard that tune before.

But they were too worried about Gaster and The Player and that weird feeling and that big gaping portal into Frisk’s basement to worry about that right now.

The portal was still growing. Maybe it would swallow the whole Void…

But maybe that was just Chara hoping for the impossible again.

Sans continued typing, lines blurring on the screen with how fast they moved.

Papyrus leaned against the wall, tapping his foot against the concrete floor to make a clicking sound.
Sans was starting to get irritated. Papyrus did this a lot when he was bored growing up - make little noises to entertain himself. Getting his father’s and/or brother’s attentions was a plus if anything.

“pap, please stop that, i am trying to work,” Sans said, his voice raising slightly. “if you’re bored, try doing…literally anything but what you were just doing okay?”

Papyrus whined as he stood up and walked over to the couch. He knew exactly what he was doing, and he knew Sans knew that.

Papyrus leaned on the back of the couch, watching Sans’ computer screen.

He couldn’t read all of it very clearly without his reading glasses, but since Sans had his on, he could always ask him.

“What does this mean?” he asked, pointing to a line he could at least see some of.

“I don’t know papyrus, i’m not focusing on that one,” Sans replied, his voice starting to lose some of its usual cool.

Papyrus knew that Sans was stressed - extremely so. Sans was like his father in that regard; he never lost his cool unless he was under significant stress for personal or work reasons. And since this combined both, Sans was more likely to snap.

So Papyrus decided to ask less specific work-related questions.

“I see a lot of hands and stuff,” Papyrus said quietly. “What does all of that mean?”

Sans sighed. He knew that Papyrus wasn’t going to leave so easily. And he was old enough to understand the seriousness of this situation…

“The hands are like a summons of sorts,” he replied. “For dad. the more of them there are in a sequence, the more real he becomes to our timeline.”

“So when every line is in wingdings…”

“Dad’s home, right,” Sans said. “But -”

“But it’s not that simple, is that what you were going to say?” Papyrus said, standing up properly.

“Yeah, but -”

“Sans, I know it’s not that simple!” Papyrus yelled. “I know it’s never that simple! If it were that simple, dad would have been here this whole time!”

“Boys, please stop fighting,” Toriel said as she entered the basement with a plate of cookies, and a blanket. “I know this is stressful for all of us - especially you two, since this is about your father, but fighting amongst each other solves nothing.” She set the cookies on a card table and placed the blanket over Frisk.

“The cookies are chocolate chip,” she said. “There are also peanut butter and oatmeal raisin cookies, as well as butterscotch cinnamon and coconut cream pie. Do let me know if you two need anything.”

“You’re stress-baking aren’tcha?” Sans said suddenly. Papyrus glanced from his brother to Toriel.
Toriel sighed. “Yes and no. Some of it is for celebration.” She smiled a bit. “It is not every day that your bonefriend’s father comes back from an interdimensional vacuum, is it not?”

Sans chuckled. Papyrus wondered if he was just hearing things when he did so, but then he realized that this was very much real.

“That’s true, Tori. Thanks.”

Papyrus was bewildered then he sighed and decided to head upstairs with the rest of the group for a while.

“I will be upstairs. Let me know if you need me for anything.”

“You got it, Bro,” Sans replied. “Sorry I snapped atcha…”

Papyrus smiled. “It’s fine! This is a big deal after all, it is only natural that you are stressed!”

Sans sighed, a smile on his face. “Thanks Bro. Tell everyone that it’ll be another five hours at least.”

Papyrus nodded and ran up the stairs, leaving Sans and Toriel alone in the basement. The couple was silent.

Toriel went to sit by Sans as he worked. He was very deeply absorbed in his work, and she knew that it would be rude - and costly - to interrupt him.

But when Sans leaned against her shoulder, she knew that in some way, she was a necessary part of this.

She kissed the top of his skull and watched him work.

Gaster hummed a strange tune as he and The Player wandered through the Void. The Player bumped into something that wasn’t there and turned to the left.

What are you singing?

“I’m not singing,” Gaster replied. “I’m humming.”

What are you humming, then?

“A tune.”

Please give me a straight answer, Doctor.

“But I’m asexual, how can I give you a straight answer?”

Tell me specifically what song you are humming.

“Uheheh, alright,” he chuckled. “It’s called Caledonia. It’s an old Scottish tune.”

There was silence between them, no sound but Gaster’s humming.

I have never heard of that song.

“I can tell,” Gaster said. “And since I am in such a good mood, I shall sing the lyrics, see if you can
Please don’t.

“Well, I don’t know if you can see~ The changes that have come over me~”

The Player gave up. Gaster continued to sing old Scottish ditties as The Player intentionally rammed themself into the unseen borders to be put out of their misery.

But he was happy for a reason. So The Player would not stop him.

Papyrus sighed as he plopped down on the couch next to Mettaton and leaned on his shoulder.


“But it’s been DAYS!” Undyne griped.

“Undyne, don’t scream, I’m trying to sleep and it’s hard enough with a basketball-sized parasite inside of my abdomen,” Alphys hissed before laying her head back down on her wife’s lap.

Everyone became silent. Alphys and Undyne’s baby was due late next month, and everything was settled for the most part. They were even prepared for a premature birth, though they were even more rare among Monsters than Humans depending on the parents’ compatibility.

“How is he doing, anyway?” Papyrus asked. “The baby, I mean.”

“Papyrus, we have told you how many times now that there is NO WAY YOU COULD POSSIBLY KNOW THE GENDER OF OUR CHILD!” Undyne shouted.

“Undyne, if you want to be present for the birth of our child, SHUT UP!” Alphys said.

That got Undyne shut up real quick.

“And Mettaton?” Alphys asked.

“Yes, Alphy darling~” Mettaton sang.

“If you attempt to do the Circle Of Life scene I can and will end you.”

“Yes Alphys.”

Everyone was silent once more. Few things were more frightening than a tried, cranky and pregnant Reptilian.

At least there was only one more month of this terror.

Frisk and Chara were backing away in terror from the growing portal to Frisk’s basement. Sans and Toriel couldn’t see them, since the portal was one-way.

Chara was silently grateful that their mother and her boyfriend were only cuddling and talking. They had seen sights unsuited for children of any age when Toriel and Asgore were together, they NEVER wanted to see anything like them again.

But as the portal grew, the children weren’t sure if they would be crushed or vaporized or merely
pushed back, but they did NOT want to take any chances. They were young, not dumb.

Chara and Frisk turned to each other, fear evident on both of their faces.

“Run on 3?” Chara asked.

Frisk nodded.

“Okay then,” Chara said. They and Frisk turned back to the growing portal. “And one…”

“THREE!” Frisk screeched, grabbing Chara by the hand as they ran screaming together into the Void.

“And I would walk five hundred miles~ And I would walk five hundred more~ Just to be the man who’d walk~ A thousand miles to fall down at your door~ Lada da da!”

Gaster continued singing as The Player led him through the unseen labyrinth.

They had no idea how long it would take to find their destination, or even what their destination looked like. This was merely an extension of their imagining that was leading Gaster through the Void, so maybe that too depended on their imagination?

The Player tried picturing a gateway. Nothing appeared.

They continued on. And on and on and on and on. Gaster continued to sing songs of genres The Player was sure didn’t even exist. At least it was entertaining, watching a prestigious scientist sing and dance like a lunatic from sheer joy.

Then Gaster stopped singing and walking. The player kept going, attempting to drag him along.

**Doctor, please. We must hurry.**

“Player.” Gaster’s voice became even. “Do you hear something?”

The Player paused to listen.

**It sounds like the screams of frightened children.**

“Frisk and Chara!” Gaster gasped. “Where are their voices coming from? Can you tell?”

The Player focused.

Then their focus was interrupted when something ran into Gaster.

Literally.

Sans was having trouble keeping his eyes open. He’d been awake for more than a full day - he usually got 15 hours of sleep on weekends, but this was a dire situation.

Then the code from The Hub had stopped completely.

Sans’ eyelights went out as he gasped.

He shook Toriel’s arm to wake her. Once she stirred, moaning and blinking the sleep out of her eyes,
she turned to Sans.

The seriousness on his face wake her up entirely.

“tori, i’m gonna need you to get alphys down here stat,” he said. “tell her that the wheel fell off its axle and she’ll understand.”

“Sans, what happened?” Toriel asked, voice hurried with concern. “Is everything alright?”

“that’s why i need alphys down here, tori,” Sans said. “i don’t know.”

Toriel stood up to get Alphys.

Sans sighed as she closed the door behind her. The complaints of the Reptilian and her wife could probably wake everyone within five blocks of their house.

The basement door opened, Undyne carrying Alphys down in her arms and placing her on the ratty old foldout couch as gently as if she were a priceless glass figurine and putting her laptop down next to her.

“Don’t stress her too much!” Undyne growled, glaring at Sans as she backed out of the basement.

As the basement door closed, the two scientists began to speak.

“S-so we can’t communicate with The Hub?” Alphys asked.

“not at the moment, no,” Sans said. “the code just froze. i dunno if it’s because the player’s takin’ a break or if somethin’ happened to ‘em, but the code just stopped.”

“I-I have my laptop with me, l-let’s see if we can reach them…”

“okay. i’ll keep inputting my code while you do that.”

They set to work, typing swiftly and with purpose.

Gaster sat up on his elbows, regaining his bearings after having been toppled over by a pair of frightened Human children.

Frisk and Chara were rambling in gibberish and pointing wildly behind them.

Gaster looked up to see a growing pinpoint of light.

“Player, you may want to look where they’re pointing,” he said, a smile growing on his face.

The Player looked and gasped, yanking gaster up and pulling him along even faster than before. And then running into an invisible wall.

Fuck…

Gaster sighed. Had this occurred at any other time it would have been hilarious. But right now it served as a source of confusion.

“Just how did you two get in here?” Gaster asked.

“I live here you boney old fart!” Chara shouted.
“I ran,” Frisk said.

“No, no, I meant…” Gaster knocked on the invisible walls, his knucklebones making a clicking sound. “...in here.”

Chara and Frisk made confused faces. Frisk tried to knock on the same spot Gaster did, only for their hand to fall through nothing. They turned to look at Gaster and The Player.

“Okay, why can we walk normally but you two can’t?” Chara asked.

“I’m not sure,” Gaster said. “It might have something to do with The Player’s presence. Maybe the methods they used to get here altered the landscape mechanics…”

“Than how come whatever this is isn't affecting us, huh?” Chara asked, starting to get impatient.

“Maybe because The Player was touching Gaster?” Frisk offered. Everyone turned to stare at them as they continued talking. “Maybe something about The Player’s existence here causes whatever they touch to be affected by the laws that affect them. Maybe this is all a part of The Player’s presence, and whatever that presence touches becomes a part of it… I think?”

“Like a virus…” Gaster muttered to himself.

Are you implying that I am a virus?

“No, but your existence here in the Void is treated like one,” Gaster said, realization dawning on his face. “But like all viruses, the effects fade after a time.”

I feel like I should be offended.

“But isn’t The Player necessary for you to come back home?” Frisk asked.

“Maybe they are necessary, just not here?” Chara asked.

Gaster and The Player looked at each other.

“They may very well be right,” Gaster said, his smile growing even larger as he turned to face Frisk and Chara. “Frisk, Chara, you two are very intuitive. Minds like yours are ones that change entire worlds. Player, what do you think we should do now?”

The Player was quiet for a moment.

I will leave the Void and continue coding. From what I can see, my coding has the most effect on the outcome if Sans’ hypothesis is correct.

“Um,” Frisk interjected. “Is it really a good idea to just show up our basement? Maybe there’s a better route…?”

“Like where?” Chara asked. “The Machine in the workshop in Snowdin is just for looking in on other universes. What other places could there be?”

“Large Hadron Collider?” Frisk offered.

“I wish,” Gaster sighed.

That gray door in Waterfall appeared when I changed the FUN values to 66. Maybe I could
create that again?

Now it was everyone’s turn to look at The Player.

I will take that as a yes and be on my way. Good luck, and take care.

Then The Player never was.

Gaster, Frisk, and Chara looked at each other.

Gaster reached toward where the invisible wall had been, only for his hand to meet nothingness. He brightened.

“Well that’s one problem solved!” Gaster said cheerfully. “And now we wait!”

“Let’s sing songs while we wait!” Frisk said excitedly.

“I wanna die again,” Chara whimpered.

It was bright outside. The clocks said it was almost noon.

The heat permeated everything.

“Do you guys even have air conditioning?” Undyne whined. “Toriel, you have fur! How are you not dead or dying?”

“I have Fire Magic, Undyne, remember?” Toriel said as she molded the ground beef into balls. “And also immortality, but that is neither here nor there. You are free to adjust the thermostat as you see fit. Papyrus, once you are finished with the sauce, could you please get another fan from the attic?”

“OKAY!” Papyrus replied as he stirred the sauce vigorously.

Undyne turned the thermostat from 72 degrees fahrenheit to 66.

“Can I go out back and turn on the sprinkler?” Undyne asked.

“There’s an above-ground pool set up, just make sure you bring towels out there with you,” Toriel said.

“Woohoo!” Undyne cheered as she ran outside without towels.

Toriel sighed. Undyne was so…passionate, sometimes, that it could be overwhelming. But she meant well, for all her reckless enthusiasm.

She turned to Alphys, who was holding a bag of barbecue chips on her pregnant belly.

“Alphys, are you going to join Undyne?” Toriel asked. “The exercise might be helpful.”

“N-no thanks, Toriel, I’m fine,” Alphys said with a smile. “Th-thanks for the offer, though.”

“It is no trouble at all!” Toriel said with a smile. “And I see you have discovered one of the upsides of baby bumps.”

Alphys giggled nervously.

Then the front door opened.
“Guess who brought back ice cream~” Mettaton chimed.

The sound of a door opening from upstairs was heard, along with jingling and running footsteps.

Frisk ran down the stairs, followed by Yasmin. Yasmin was no longer the size of a puppy, being almost as tall as the back of the couch on her hind legs.

Frisk’s ruby red eyes sparkled as he hopped up and down, signing the word “ice cream” over and over again in their excitement.

Mettaton giggled. “Frisk, calm down! Ask your mother first!” he said.

Frisk turned toward Toriel. <<Can I, Mom? Please?>>

Toriel smiled. “After lunch we can all have some ice cream, alright?”

Frisk jumped up, thrusting a fist in the air victoriously before running to the basement.

They opened the door and hopped down the stairs, intentionally missing every other step.

Once they reached the bottom, they rushed over to Sans, who was still typing. The bags under his eyes - which as a Skeleton he really should not have - were even heavier than usual, making him look older than he was. He’d removed his shirt to relieve himself from the heat. There were two empty coffee mugs on the table next to him.

Frisk relaxed once they sat next to him, tapping him on his shoulder blade.

Sans turned to them and paused. “what’s up, frisk?” he said, voice slurring with exhaustion.

Frisk frowned up at him. <<You need a break.>>

“frisk, you of all people should know that i can’t stop,” Sans said, “not yet. not when we’re…not when we’re…”

Sans sighed. “whatever, but i can’t stop working.”

<<I didn’t say stop, I said take a break.>> Frisk signed, pouting. <<Mom and Papyrus are making spaghetti and meatballs for lunch, and Mettaton just came back with some ice cream. At least join us for lunch and ice cream, then you can go back to work. I won't interrupt anymore.>> Frisk shrunk in on themself a bit. <<I'm sorry I bothered you.>>

Sans paused and turned to face Frisk. “kid, it’s okay,” he said. “you’re just worried about me.”

He rumpled Frisk’s hair and returned to work. “tell everyone i’ll be up in a minute. Tell tori to have some coffee ready for me, okay?”

Frisk saluted with a smile and ran back upstairs. Sans watched after them until the door close behind them and returned to work.

He wondered if he should put his shirt back on and suffer for the sake of modesty or leave it off and experience relief and Toriel’s cute blushing face.

Papyrus was really not sure how he felt right now.

On the one hand, he was really happy that Sans was motivated again. He was happy his father was
coming back. He was happy that he had ice cream.

But on the other hand, he was very worried since Sans seemed almost TOO motivated, since he had been working nonstop for over 24 hours, fueled only by coffee, Patience and Perseverance, and the will to keep his promise to bring their father home. There was also the fact that Sans was shirtless, his bare spine and ribcage making Toriel somewhat flustered.

Papyrus finished his orange sherbet and put away the dish before going to the backyard where Mettaton was sitting on the porch swing and watching Frisk toss a frisbee around for Yasmin to catch.

Papyrus sat down next to him and put an arm around him, grateful for his boyfriend’s internal cooling system.

Mettaton snuggled up to Papyrus with a sigh.

They were quiet.

Papyrus could feel his stress melting away with his Mate by his side.

He just KNEW his father would love Mettaton…

Gaster and Chara sat in the grey room, playing Go Fish.

“Do you have any threes?” Gaster asked.

Chara set down a three of clubs and a three of hearts. “So Doc, d’ya know what time it is there?”

“Approaching midnight,” he replied. “A bit dramatic for my tastes, a midnight return, but that means that travelling on foot I would get there by six in the morning.”

“What is it with you and the number six?” Chara asked.

“I just like the number six,” Gaster said with smile and a shrug. “Many things come is sets of six. The traditional inner planets of the solar system, beer, the colors of M&Ms, the number of protons in the nucleus of the atom of the universal building block element known as carbon…”

“How many times you’ve lost at Go Fish…”

“The one game you can possibly beat me at and it’s meant for children half your age…”

“Yeah, yeah, got any queens?” Chara asked.

Sans sat at the table next to toriel, drinking coffee and eating ice cream, which went surprisingly well with coffee. He yawned and stretched, watching Undyne swimming in the pool excitedly.

“Well, Undyne seems to be having fun,” Toriel remarked.

Then Undyne splashed a passing Frisk, who squealed and started running.

“you don’t say,” Sans said.

“It’s nearly midnight, so we must go to bed,” Toriel sighed. “Is there…any way you could possibly join me?”
Sans’ eyelights went out, the only light on his face coming from his cyan blush.

Toriel suddenly realized just how her words sounded, eliciting a blush from her. “O-oh, I-I didn't mean it quite like that, I -”

“w-well, if you wanted to, i uh, wouldn’t exactly say no,” Sans said. “my part is done anyway, i was just keepin’ watch on the last part. so, uh, if you really wanted to…”

Toriel twiddled her thumbs, blushing nervously. Maybe now she could bring up something she’d had on her mind for a while now…

But considering the nature of that something, it would have to wait until they were alone.

“frisk, undyne, it’s late,” Sans called. “time to head on in for the night.”

“You ain’t the boss of me, punk!” Undyne countered.

“I'll tell alphys if you don't come in.”

Undyne growled and left the pool, grabbing a towel that Sans had held out to her.

Frisk trotted up behind, Yasmin tailing them. They yawned and went up to their room, but not before giving Sans a smirk and a thumbs up. Sans nearly choked on his coffee. Thank the stars that he had finished it long ago…

He shook his head as he gathered his things and trudged inside, Toriel following close behind him.

Once he had every thing put away, he went up to his and Toriel’s bedroom.

He sat down on the bed, Toriel taking her place next to him.

They were quiet. They listened for any sounds. When they were sure that no one was awake, they began their discussion.

Toriel took a few breaths to brace herself.

“Sans,” she began. “There is something…important that I wish to discuss with you, pertaining to our relationship…”

Sans quirked a brow ridge. “and that would be…?”

Toriel seemed nervous. Sans was getting concerned.

“tori,” Sans said, placing a comforting hand on her thigh and send some Magic through the contact, “whatever it is you gotta say to me, i’m sure i can take it, okay?” He sighed. “tori, you know you can trust me, right?”

Toriel looked at Sans, his skeletal features betraying concern and unabashed love.

She knew that her decision was the right one. She sighed, bracing herself once more.

“Sans,” she said, her voice wavering, “I wish to… to engage in SOUL Contact with you, if you will allow it.”

Sans gasped, his eyelights shining like a starry night sky. “tori…”
“Sans, I am aware of what this means to you as a Skeleton,” Toriel interrupted, placing a hand to Sans’ face. “And I am aware of how big of a step this is in our relationship. But I am also aware of just how much I want this.”

Sans’ face seemed to light up. He was positively dumbfounded.

And he had never been happier.

He nodded, a smile more genuine than any he’d borne in a long time gracing his features.

Toriel smiled warmly.

Yet another way in which that day became one of the most wonderful of their lives thus far.

The Gray Door phased into existence before them with a curious, yet oddly familiar sound. Gaster and Chara looked up, and then looked at each other.

“Well, I guess this is it, huh old man?” Chara said, voice quiet.

Gaster simply got up, pulled Chara up, and pulled them into a hug.

“Thank you, young Dreemurr, for brightening my loneliness all these years,” Gaster choked. “I shall try to come and visit you as often as I can, and I will work to bring you back with all of my ability.”

Chara slowly wrapped their arms around Gaster in turn, burying their face into the crook of his neck and sniffed. “I’ll miss you…” they whispered, barely loud enough to be heard even by themself. But Gaster heard, and he held them closer.

After an unknown amount of time, Gaster and Chara finally released each other. Gaster took a few steps toward the Gray Door.

He turned to look at Chara over his shoulder. They were crying.

He smiled.

“Don’t cry, child,” he said. “I shan’t be gone forever, no matter how much it may feel so.”

Chara sobbed and wiped their eyes on their sleeve.

<<See you around, Gramps,>>> they signed, smiling as best they could through their tears.

Gaster brightened, wiping away a teardrop of Purple.

And he opened the Gray Door, passing through into the reality he’d missed for so long.

Dr. WingDings Gaster was finally, truly, at long long last, going home.

6:06 A.M., August 9th, 20XQ

It’s a beautiful day outside.

Birds are singing.
Flowers are blooming.

On days like this, kids like you...

...couldn’t sleep a wink from the excitement.

Frisk lay on their back in their bed, Isolde on their stomach and Yasmin on the rug by their bed.

They had tried everything they could to fall asleep, but to no avail. They even nearly convinced Flowey to knock them out, but Flowey claimed that it would be too easy. Something about the way he said it made Frisk suspicious, but Flowey was a pretty seedy character.

They snickered to themself at the pun. They made a note to themself to tell it to their parents later.

Frisk sighed and stood up from their bed. No point lying around anymore - Papyrus at least was likely to be awake.

They opened their bedroom door and walked downstairs, where they smelled french toast.

Mettaton was definitely up. He made the BEST french toast.

Frisk plodded into the kitchen and scooted a chair out and sat down.

Mettaton turned to face them and smiled. “Good morning, starshine~” he sang. “I take it you didn’t sleep much either?”

Frisk laid their chin on the table and stuck out their tongue. <<Too anxious,>> they signed.

“I know, I’m a tad nervous myself,” Mettaton admitted and he put some french toast on two plates, one for himself and one for Frisk. “I’m worried about what Dr. Gaster will think of me honestly. Not really used to that, worrying about what others think of me…”

Frisk nodded sympathetically as Mettaton set down some maple syrup and powdered sugar and cinnamon.

<<Lowercase love is weird…>> Frisk signed.

Mettaton smiled and patted Frisk’s head. “Well, isn’t someone wise beyond their years!” he said fondly.

Papyrus came down the stairs in his pajamas, fresh out of the shower. He walked over to sit at the table with Frisk and Mettaton.

“GOOD MORNING, YOU TWO!” he said as cheerfully as ever.

Frisk hugged him good morning, while Mettaton kissed him so.

Mettaton was about to put some french toast on a plate for him when there was a knock at the door.

<<I’ll get it,>> Frisk signed. <<You two can stay and smooch!>>

Mettaton rolled his eyes with a fond smile as Papyrus managed to both laugh and groan at the same time.
Frisk stood up and trotted to the front door.

They opened the door and looked up into a familiar cracked, smiling face.

The bearer of the face cleared his throat in a boney hand with a hole in the palm.

“Good day, young one,” he said, his voice rough and slightly staticy, like an old recording. “I do hope this is the right place.”

Frisk blinked a few times in disbelief. They weren’t really sure what to do. Should they get someone? Should they keep this Monster occupied until further notice?

Then a gasp found the answer for them.

Frisk turned around to find Papyrus, orange tears running down his face.

His smile grew.

He went back into the kitchen briefly.

“Papy, what are you - why are you dragging me like this?!” Mettaton said from inside the kitchen, his laughter overriding any possible attempt to seem angry.

Papyrus dragged him into the living room by his hand, stopping in front of the open door where Frisk and the Monster stood.

Papyrus’ smile was unlike any Frisk had ever seen on him. It was one that made them think of sunshine. Pure, uninhibited sunshine.

“METTATON,” Papyrus said as he squeezed Mettaton’s hand and gestured the the Monster in the doorway, “I WOULD LIKE YOU TO MEET DR. W.D. GASTER, THE FIRST ROYAL SCIENTIST OF THE UNDERGROUND…AND MY FATHER.”

Sans stirred slightly when he heard speaking and laughter coming from the living room downstairs. Toriel’s arm was still draped over him.

Maybe five more minutes in heaven wouldn’t hurt…

Then it occurred to him.

He sat up as though awoken from a nightmare, despite last night having been one of the best of his life.

He watched with a small smile as Toriel slowly sat up and yawned, the cover falling from her unclothed body.

She turned to face him, the brightest smile he’d seen from her yet on her face.

“Good morning my love,” she whispered.

“mornin’ babe,” Sans replied. “i think we should get dressed and head downstairs.”

Toriel’s smile brightened further. Sans swore this woman would be the death of him one day…

“I take it we have some long-awaited company awaiting us?” she asked knowingly.
Sans merely nodded. They got up and dressed, going downstairs where said long-awaited company was in the midst of a most engaging conversation with his son, his grandchild, and his son’s boyfriend.

Everyone turned to look at them.

Toriel smiled. “I’ll go put on the water for some tea,” she said.

“In this weather, Toriel?” Gaster asked. “You always were rather partial to warmth, but this is ridiculous…”

Sans’ face brightened.

He wasn’t sure if the reason the rest of that morning passed by in a blur was because of the tears or something else, but Sans was sure that everything his life at this one moment was in its proper place.

He felt truly complete.

________________________________________

*Your family fills you with*

*DETERMINATION*

________________________________________

Chapter End Notes

Under Pressure - Queen ft. David Bowie
Caledonia - Dougie McLean
500 Miles(I'm Gonna Be) - The Proclaimers

Fun Fact: This particular portrayal of Gaster has epilepsy.
Frisk awoke to a knock at their bedroom door. Toriel opened the door as they sat up on their elbows and blinked.

“I am very sorry to wake you, my child, but I have big news!” Toriel whispered. “Alphys has gone into labor. She and Undyne are at the hospital with Papyrus and Mettaton right now. Since it is a Sunday, we will be going up to see them, so pack up anything you want to take.”

Frisk shot up out of bed to pack some books and games.

They were going have a cousin.

This filled them with DETERMINATION.

FILE: SAVE.

It took half an hour to get to the hospital. When they got to their destination, the waiting room on the second floor, Papyrus was rubbing a panicky Undyne’s back while playing with a sleeping Mettaton’s hair.

Undyne looked up at them, and smiled - well, she tried at any rate. What actually happened was she
bared her teeth in such a way that Frisk squeaked and hid behind Sans, who had managed to fall asleep standing up.

Toriel looked from Frisk to Undyne and sighed as she lifted Sans and Frisk and took a seat on the couch.

She took out a book and reading glasses and began to read as Frisk fell asleep between her and Sans.

Undyne had not meant to scare frisk. But it was okay now, since Frisk was asleep.

Undyne squinted her eyes shut and opened them again. Papyrus rubbing her back was helping her cope. That was okay too. Mettaton was asleep too. Undyne guessed that was okay as well. The only thing that was not okay was the fact that she could not be in the room with Alphys yet. She sighed.

This was going to be a long morning.

Levi woke up to sound of his phone notifications going off.

The time was 6:43 in the morning on his phone. What could be going on so early…?

*Levi: what the heck guys
Caroline: Stepbrother, you’re alive.
Penelope: he’s alive, muahaha!
Hunter: u didn’t hear the news did u levi?
Levi: what news?
Frisk: Auntie Alphys is at the hospital having the baby. ^v^
Levi: WHAT
Levi: OMG
Caroline: I know, right? So exciting… Penelope: I wonder what it’ll look like…
Brian: idk dum
Caroline: Brian please, save your self-hatred for tomorrow morning.
Penelope: yeah, we have ms. roth tomorow.
*Caroline *tomorrow
Brian: shut
Theo: im tryin 2 sleep u morons
Penelope: just turn your phone off, jerkface. :P
Elaina: !!!
Brian: ho thr hec
Caroline: *who *the *heck
Caroline: If you’re going to express shock do so properly, Brian.
Hunter: dangit moms up
Penelope: later dude,
Levi: dont die lol
Hunter: T.T
*Elaina: ?
Frisk: Elaina~
Elaina: hi frisk
Penelope: frisk, who is this?
Caroline: Apparently Elaina.
Frisk: Elaina’s my friend! I met her at the capital in july during the riot!
Levi: weird place to meet new friends
Elaina: is hunter ok
Frisk: He’s fine.
Caroline: He has crippling self-esteem issues, but he’s fine.
Levi: it’s nice to meet you, elaina!
Brian: welc
Penelope: we accept her we accept her!
Caroline: One of us. One of us.
Frisk: Guys, don’t scare her…
Caroline: Sorry.
Elaina: what school do u guys go 2
Caroline: Mountainside Elementary.
Frisk: What about you?
Elaina: upland elementary
Levi: frisk made friends with a rich kid lol
Elaina: does my mom's richness offend you?
Levi: --
Caroline: I’m going back to sleep.
Caroline: It was nice to meet you, Elaina.
Caroline: Frisk, keep us posted as much as possible.
Levi: im goin back to sleep to.
Levi: mornin
Caroline: *too

Levi sighed and closed his eyes.

Caroline was such a spelling nerd.

Hunter pretended to be asleep as Linda came into their room.

Once they heard the door close and Linda enter her room, they got their phone out and got ready to turn on their music.

Then they heard a knock on the door. And since Linda never knocked, and their dad was away on business until October, it had to be…

Hunter stood up to get the door.

“Come on in, Hannah,” they whispered. “Before Mom wakes up.”

Hannah nodded and sat down on the side of Hunter’s bed.

Hunter sat down next to her. “What’s up? Bad dream?”

Hannah shrugged. “It was weird,” she whispered.

“ Weird how?” Hunter asked.

“Well, in it I was in some weird white room. Then a lady with a pretty smile showed up an’ told me to tell you somethin’. ”

Hunter was confused. And a bit frightened. “What’d she say?” he asked.

Hannah shrugged. “I don’t know. She didn’t say. But it was weird.”

Hunter shuddered. “I bet. You should go back to bed, before Mom wakes up again.”
Hannah shook her head. “Nuh-uh. Sing first.”

Hunter blinked. Did their sister WANT them to die?

“Pleeease?” Hannah pleaded. “Just my favorite song? Then I’ll go to bed. Okay?”

Hunter sighed. “Fine. Just your favorite song. Then you’re going to bed, okay?”

Hannah nodded and snuggled up to Hunter. “Thanks, bub.”

Hunter sighed and wrapped their arm around her.

“Sunflower~ Blooming in your finest hour~ You have have come into your power~ And you spill it over me~”

Hannah started to sing along.

“Such petals~ standing shameless in the air~ Catch the eyes of other lovers~ With the colors that you wear~”

Hunter put a finger on Hannah’s lips, urging her to be quiet. “I have only seen you grow~ From the seed I used to know~ In the burning breath of summer~ Gardens off to glow~”

As they continued to sing the song, Hannah slowly fell asleep.

Hunter sighed. Hannah was getting too big for them to carry. They just moved her so she wouldn’t fall off the bed and fell asleep beside her.

They briefly wondered what it would sound like if Hannah called them sis instead of bub.

They liked it.

Frisk saw Chara lying on the floor of the Void with their limbs splayed out like they were a starfish.

Frisk went to join them.

“Alphys is having her baby,” Frisk said quietly. Chara just hummed.

The children were silent, no sound to be heard but the vague hum of the Void, and a barely heard song. Frisk wonder what that song was, and Chara wondered who was singing it. The song stopped, so they didn’t wonder anymore.

“So…” Chara began. “Wanna play checkers or somethin’?”

Frisk nodded.

At around seven, most of the family was hungry.


“No need to go to the trouble, Papyrus!” came a familiar staticy voice. “We even bought extra hashbrowns!”

Gaster had just entered the waiting room with Asgore, Chas, and Shelby.
“Howdy, everyone!” Asgore greeted.

“How’s everyone holding up?” Chas asked.

“If I don’t get to see my wife I will DIE,” Undyne said, the smile on her face contradicting her words, tone, and body language. “Other than that, I’m okay I guess.”

“So dad, how’s living with the gore treating you?” Sans asked.

“I can hear him snore from downstairs,” Gaster replied. “And the basement.”

Sans hummed.

“How about you, Sans?” Gaster inquired. “I trust everything is going well as always between you and Toriel?”

Sans smiled. “Yep,” he said. “Everything is perfect. We went out to eat for her birthday last week, that was a lot of fun.”

“It really was!” Toriel said. “I don’t think I thanked you for watching Frisk while we were out, did we Papyrus?”

“YOU DID!” Papyrus replied. “TWELVE TIMES NOW, I THINK!”

“That many?” Toriel asked. “Are you sure?”

Asgore looked on in confusion. What was that about taking Toriel out for her birthday and leaving Frisk with Papyrus…?

“You okay there, Asgore?” Shelby asked, looking up at him and adjusting her glasses.

Asgore looked down at her and smiled. “I am quite alright, Miss Wong,” he said, his tone very unconvincing. “Thank you for asking.”

Shelby narrowed her eyes at him. “You, Asgore Dreemurr, are one of the worst liars I have ever seen,” she said flatly. “Now tell me what’s wrong.”

Asgore hesitated. Then he sighed.

“It’s just… the way Sans mentioned taking Tori - sorry, Toriel - out for dinner for her birthday, and without Frisk…?”

“Well, they ARE dating,” Shelby pointed out. “It’s really not surprising that they’d want to do something alone.”

Asgore’s eyes widened. “Dating…?”

Shelby looked at him in confusion. “Uh, yeah? They’ve been dating since… I think February? No, wait, it was January.”

“That long?” Asgore said, apparently shocked.

“Yeah? You say that like you didn’t know they were dating.”

“That’s because I didn’t…” Asgore said.
Shelby blinked a few times. She turned to the rest of the group, who were currently chatting about
the best french fry shape - apparently tater tots were winning, even though crinkle-cut advocate
Papyrus and waffle-cut fan Undyne kept trying to convince everyone that tots didn’t count. Sans and
Toriel were giving a very well-thought out argument about why tots counted.

It was pretty obvious that they were dating. And Asgore was no idiot - he wasn’t gifted by any
means, but he wasn’t blind. It could only be on thing.

“You still have feelings for Toriel, don’t you?” Shelby said, hoping her voice didn’t sound as quiet to
him as it did to her.

Asgore stared down at the linoleum floor, a sad smile on his face.

Shelby sighed. She knew the Boss Monster still held a torch for his ex-wife, but for that torch to be
so bright that it blinded him to the obvious fact that she had long since moved on?

It was surprisingly painful to think about.

Helen stared down at the Facebook post.

A photo of Hunter and Hannah asleep together, Linda’s bragging caption directing the attention
toward her.

She scrolled past it, pausing when she came across a post from the Ebott High School alumni
association.

Their twenty-year reunion was coming up soon, it seemed. Helen was probably not going to go. She
didn’t really form bond with most of their classmates since she was too busy being Linda’s personal
workhorse.

Linda was definitely going to go, if only to brag about how perfect her life is.

Helen sighed. She checked the time - almost nine o’clock.

The rain had stopped an hour ago, at least. A good time to walk the dog with Brian…”

Penelope rang the doorbell of the Marlow-Goldsby house, her backpack slung over her shoulder.
She waited a few seconds until someone answered the door.

She looked up at Randy. Randy looked down at her.

“Is Caroline home?” Penelope asked. “We’re gonna work on our homework together.”

“Nice to see you too, Penelope,” Randy snarked. “Come inside, Caroline should be up any minute.
I’ll let her know you’re here.”

“Okay!” Penelope said with a smile as she sat down on the couch. She reached into her bag and
grabbed the history book, some paper, and a pencil.

She looked toward the hallway when she heard footsteps. Caroline peered around the corner for a
moment before coming out and sitting next to Penelope with her things.

“Mornin’!” Penelope greeted.
Caroline groaned.

“Not a morning person much?” Penelope said.

“Not on weekends or breaks, I’m not,” Caroline said. “Those are for sleeping in until noon, not homework and social interaction.”

“Yeah, but I wanna celebrate with you when Alphys and Undyne’s baby gets here!” Penelope said. “Isn’t it exciting?”

“It will be once it actually gets here,” Caroline mumbled.

Penelope giggled. “Okay, so we’re going over Columbus, right?” she said.

“He didn’t discover America, that was the Native Americans that crossed the land bridge connecting Russia and Alaska 15000 to 30000 years ago,” Caroline said. “The first Europeans to set foot on North American soil were Norsemen, commonly known as Vikings, led by Leif Erikson in the late tenth and early eleventh century.”

Penelope stared at Caroline in awe. “You mean Leif Erikson was REAL?” she gasped.

“Yes,” Caroline replied flatly.

“Wooowww…”

Caroline wondered at moments like this if she was surrounded by idiots. Then she would remember that most people don’t like books for some odd reason she couldn't fathom. Nor did they enjoy listening to her explain to them why their information is wrong.

But then she would remember, as she did now, that not everyone likes the same things she does. And no one likes being proven wrong, especially people in positions of authority who have a duty to dispense correct information.

And besides, Penelope seemed to really like listening to Caroline, much to the latter’s unending surprise.

She wondered what Penelope’s deal was.

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Sans stepped outside for some fresh air since the rain had stopped. The cloud cover was still heavy, most likely implying that it was going to rain again before long.

He saw Asgore on a bench by the door. He was looking up at the sky. Sans went and sat by him.

“i heard what you ‘n shelby were talking about,” Sans said. “i really thought you’d either figured it out by now or that someone else told you -”

“Please, leave,” Asgore rumbled. “Now.”

Sans quirked a brow ridge. “can i at least get an explanation here?” he asked. “this is gettin’ kinda weird, fluffybuns.”

“I said, leave!” Asgore growled.

Sans didn’t react. Didn’t even twitch. He just sat in silence.
Asgore sighed. “Why do you do this to me?”

Sans quirked his other brow ridge. “do what?”

Asgore sighed, putting his face in his hands. “Why did it have to be you…?” he whispered. “Why did she choose you…?”

Sans shrugged. “hell if i know,” he said with a sigh. “i really don’t know what she sees in me. i mean, i’m lazier than a stoned sloth, i only just recently got a real job, i have zero motivation…i dunno what’s goin’ on there.”

Asgore was silent. Why Sans was still so self-deprecating when he had EVERYTHING one could ask for, he had NO idea.

Then sans chuckled. “but that don’t change the fact that, for how shitty a monster i am, she still loves me…it makes me feel like…like i’m worth somethin’ to someone.”

“Please stop with your self pity!” Asgore roared. “Don’t you see how LUCKY you are to have what you do?!”

“i admit it could be worse,” Sans said, voice calm despite Asgore yelling at him. “but even so, i still have days when i can only see the bad in everything. it’s not like i want to. i try to feel happy, but it’s tough to do on my own. toriel is one of the things that makes me happiest.”

Asgore blinked. He sighed. “You make it so difficult to hate you, I hope you are aware of that,” he said.

Sans shrugged. “if you say so. i’m gonna go grab somethin’ from the vending machine. you want anythin’?”

Asgore sighed. “I will be fine, thank you.”

“okay, if you say so.”

Asgore watched as Sans went back inside.

The Skeleton’s words worried him somewhat. Days when you can only see the bad…? It sounded familiar.

But he wouldn’t think about it. He just wanted to take his mind off of everything.

He didn’t want to let her go just yet.

_________________________________________

The group was still in the waiting room. Frisk was awake now. It was 10:07 in the morning.

Undyne was clenching and unclenching her fists in an attempt to calm herself. An attempt that was slowly growing less and less effective.

Then a nurse came in.

“Undyne Bluemako, you can come back now,” she said.

Undyne knew what this meant. She stood up and took a deep breath before going back.

But first she turned to the rest of the group. No - her family.
“Wish me luck, guys!” she said, a nervous smile on her face. “I’m about to be a mom!”

Everyone cheered, including some random people in the waiting room.

Undyne followed the nurse through the doors to the room where Alphys was.

Stars, she looked like she was in pain. Well, that’s because she was, but still, knowing it and actually seeing it in action are two very different experiences.

Undyne came up to her wife’s side, taking her hand.

She smiled, knowing that her smile made Alphys feel better.

“We’re almost there, okay babe?” Undyne said. “You’re doin’ great. I am so proud of you.”

Alphys glared at her. “You did this to me,” she hissed.

Undyne flinched. Alphys never sounded this angry, even when she was…well, angry.

“Don’t worry, Mrs. Bluemako, that’s just the pain talking,” one of the nurses said.

“Oh, god here comes another!”

Undyne screamed along with Alphys as her hand was crushed.

“How long is this gonna take?” Undyne whined.

“Anywhere from twenty minutes to a few hours,” one of the nurses said.

Undyne and Alphys turned to face each other, eyes wide with fear.

“Still wanting those two more kids, babe?” Undyne asked.

“We’ll see,” Alphys replied wearily.

Levi, Caroline, and Penelope had been done with their homework for a long time and were in the middle of watching a movie when they received the text from Frisk saying that Alphys was almost done giving birth.

Penelope took a picture of the television screen with her phone since it had been paused with a character in a very humorous pose.

Then they started the movie up again.

“So what do you think the baby is gonna be Caroline, a boy or a girl?” Penelope asked.

“I dunno,” Caroline said, shrugging. “I think they seem the type to have a boy first.”

“Really?” Penelope asked. “Why d’you say that?”

“I dunno, they just do,” Caroline said.

“Makes sense to me,” Penelope said as she turned back toward the TV.

Then a ding rang rathrough the house.
“Popcorn’s ready!” Penelope chirped.

“I’ll get it,” Levi offered.

“Okay!” Penelope said. “We’ll pause the movie for ya!”

“Nah, that’s fine,” Levi said. “You can keep it goin’. I was getting bored of it anyway.”

“Oh, if you say so,” Penelope said.

Levi went into the kitchen to get the popcorn from the microwave.

He thought about how Caroline had changed since meeting Penelope.

She’d opened up a lot more. Not just with Penelope, but with others as well. It’s just that with Penelope it was different somehow. Like the difference between a friend and a best friend.

Levi remembered that around this time last year, Caroline was still pretty closed off from everyone. She didn’t quite want to be around anyone - even Penelope was treated distantly.

But clearly that was no longer the case. Now Caroline was willing to hang around others - even if she still needed some space to recuperate from the strain of social interaction after a while. She could spend as much time with Penelope one-on-one as she could on her own now.

Levi was glad that Caroline had come to like this place, or at least tolerate it.

He smiled as he grabbed a few water bottles and gave the girls the popcorn and a bottle each before going off to his room.

He wondered how everyone else was doing.

Brian and Helen returned home from walking Rocco.

A top-heavy spindly-legged man with receding dark blond hair and pale blue eyes with a ruddy complexion was waiting for them, brow furrowed in anger.

Brian’s eyes widened. Helen clenched her fists, ready to pounce if it came to it.

“Brian?” she said. “Why don’t you take Rocco around the block a couple more times?”

Brian rushed out the door, Rocco trailing behind him.

Helen sighed as the door closed. “What is it, David?” she said, voice low.

“You know what!” David shouted. “You left the house without my permission!”

“I don’t need permission to go around the fucking block, David,” Helen replied.

“My house, my rules bitch!”

“David, you’re drunk again,” Helen said, struggling to keep calm. “Please, go upstairs and lay down. Please.”

“ARE YOU TELLING ME WHAT TO DO?!” David bellowed.

“I am giving you a suggestion,” Helen said, teeth clenched to keep from shouting as that would
only make things worse. “You don’t have to accept it, but I know as well as you do how you get when you’re like this.”

“SHUT UP!”

Helen felt the familiar blunt pain course through her, the point of impact swelling quickly.

She watched as David turned to go out back with another beer, grumbling.

Helen sighed silently as she went into the bathroom to grab her concealer. She knew how to cover it up before Brian came back.

She’d been doing it for years.

It was almost noon - 11:46 to be exact - when Undyne stormed into the waiting room, hand in a cast, gasping for breath with the biggest of smiles on her face.

Everyone stood up in anticipation. Her smile gave away that there was good news.

“C’mon guys,” she said, voice surprisingly quiet. “I’d like you to meet someone.”

The group followed her back into the ward and to the room where Alphys was staying.

When they entered Alphys looked up to face them, a smile appearing on her face as she did so.

In her arms was a bundle wrapped in powder blue blankets.

Sans and Papyrus perked up immediately.

“called it,” Sans said, high-fiving Papyrus.

“Yeah, yeah, you’re baby psychics or somethin’, big whoop,” Undyne grumbled.

Frisk walked up to get a closer look at the bundle that held their new cousin.

He had glossy light green scales, red fins on each cheek, three tiny horns peeking out of his forehead, and a shock of red hair. He yawned, revealing a single, very sharp tooth.

Frisk fought back a squeal.

“So, what’s his name?” Shelby asked.

“His name is Mamoru Akira Styracorr-Bluemako,” Alphys said, voice barely above a whisper.

“But we’re callin’ him Mamo-chan for short!” Undyne said, voice accidentally loud in her enthusiasm.

Mamoru started crying at the disturbance. Alphys and Undyne scrambled to calm him quickly.

“Awww, s-shhhh, d-don't cry” Alphys said, stroking his hair and rocking him back and forth gently.

“howzabout we go outside while you two get junior here calmed down?” Sans offered.

“I-I think that would be great, thanks,” Alphys said, barely heard over her son’s cries.
Sans gave an “OK” gesture and backed out of the room, followed by the rest of the group.

The hall was quiet, save for the squeals of the infant in the room coming through the door.

“Well,” Sans said, “he certainly takes after Undyne in that regard.”

Hunter and Hannah were in the back of their mother’s car in their church clothes on their way to lunch when Hunter checked their cell phone.

A picture of Alphys and Undyne’s baby was on the screen.

They smiled.

“Hunter James, phones off in the car,” Linda warned.

“Sorry, Mom,” they mumbled.

“And don’t mumble, no one likes a mumbler,” Linda added.

Hunter wasn’t sure what else to do, so they stayed quiet and still, genuinely unsure if they were even allowed to breathe.

The sun was shining. The rain had stopped.

Randy jumped when he heard shrieks.

He disregarded his spilled tea and keyboard clattering to the ground and ran to the living room to find…

…three very much unharmed and in fact very happy ten-year-olds.

Randy sighed wearily. “For the love of god, PLEASE don’t scream like that again,” Randy whined. “I spilled my tea because of you guys!”

“Sorry,” Caroline said, shrinking in on herself and gripping her left shoulder.

“Alphys and Undyne’s baby was just born!” Levi said, his gap-toothed grin bright. “Frisk sent a picture! Wanna see?”

Randy blinked a few times before shrugging. “Eh, since I’m here, why not?” he said, walking over behind the couch where the children were sitting gathered around Levi’s phone.

Randy stared blankly at the baby on the screen. This kid was a baby dinosaur.

“He’s so cute…” Penelope cooed.

“People always go on about how babies are so cute, but they’re just fleshy lumps of sponge slowly becoming more sapient,” Caroline said. “It’s cool, but I wouldn’t call them cute.”

“Caroline, you’ve only seen maybe three newborn babies in your life besides this one,” Randy pointed out, “how would you know any of that?”

“I’ve seen my baby pictures Dad,” Caroline said. “My eyes were bigger than my hands and my hair was ugly.”
“Hey, you were an ADORABLE baby!” Randy snapped.

“Get the baby pics and let these two be the judge of that,” Caroline said, placing her hands on her hips and adjusting her glasses.

“Randy, the keyboard is on the floor and there is tea everywhere -”

Sharona stepped in to see the crowd on her sofa.

“What is going on here?” she said, hands on her hips.

“Alphys and Undyne had their baby and Caroline thinks she was an ugly baby,” Levi said, his smile still stuck to his face.

“Caroline wasn’t ugly!” Sharona said. “Now you, Levi…”

“Ma!” Levi whined.

“We should all bring our baby pictures to school tomorrow!” Penelope said.

“But Frisk was in a group home most of their life, they might not have any baby pictures,” Levi said.

“Really?” Caroline said. “I mean, I kind of figured, but still, it’s kinda sad.”

“But they’re happy now, right?” Penelope said. “So let’s be happy with that!”

Caroline gave a small smile.

So that was Penelope’s deal.

She liked people based on actions.

But what did Caroline do to deserve Penelope’s friendship…?

Brian had come back home. He and Helen were watching a movie, but exactly which movie was forgotten.

Then they got the text with the picture if Alphys and Undyne’s baby.

Helen texted the new mothers her congratulations, offering to help if they needed any.

Brian stared at the dinosaur-like child in a sort of awe.

“I’m gonna teach him to beat people with a hockey stick if they hurt his family,” Brian said.

Helen snorted.

Brian was a pretty Brave kid…

After Mamoru was calmed down and asleep, everyone went back in to sit with the new mothers.

Everyone was calm and quiet.

“Okay, so Alphys and I have been thinking,” Undyne said quietly. “And we got a question for Papyrus and Mettaton.”
“YES, UNDYNE?” Papyrus asked.

“Please don’t scream when I tell you this, but…”

Undyne sighed before continuing.

“Alphys and I would really appreciate it if you two would be Mamoru's godfathers,” Undyne finished.

Papyrus and Mettaton’s eyes widened, as did their smiles.

Something told the group that if the two men didn’t scream, they would explode, so their safest bet was to send them out to scream at the sky dramatically in triumph.

“If you two are gonna scream, do it outside where our son is slightly less likely to hear you and wake up screaming,” Undyne said. Then she started giggling. “Our son…fufufu, it’s actually happening…”

Gaster, Chas, Asgore, and Toriel gave each other knowing looks.

“Wait for it…” Toriel said.

Undyne’s smile fell, slowly morphing into panic.

“Oh my stars it’s actually happenning…” she squeaked in terror.

“THERE’S the crippling parental terror!” Gaster sang.

Frisk merely giggled as they watched their newborn cousin sleep.

“You wanna have a good time, Mamo-chan?” they whispered. “Because in this family, it’s love and be loved.”

---

*Your family fills you with*

*DETERMINATION*

---

Chapter End Notes

September Morn - Neil Diamond  
Sunflower - Heart

Fun Fact: I wanna take a fuckig nap.
Chapter Summary

Warning: This chapter contains abuse, blood, near-death experiences, and Magic.

Chapter Notes

This chapter was a bit tough for me (Spazzin) to write from an emotional standpoint due to the content. But here it is.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

10:04 A.M., December 3rd, 20XQ.

It's a cold, windy day outside.

Birds are flying south.

The anticipation of the coming holiday is thick in the air.

On days like these, kids like you...

...would rather be burning in hell.

Horrible.

That was the only word to describe this silence.

The clinically white linoleum tile floors…the bare brick walls…the scent of Purell and over-extracted coffee...

All combined to create a vastly uncomfortable experience.

And for anyone with sensory processing issues or just strong senses in general, it was more than just horrible or vastly uncomfortable.

It was a new kind of hell, specifically catered to them.

And it had been so for decades.

Yes, Ms. Roth’s class was one of those places that just oozed oppression.

And with Ms. Toriel out at an education workshop, her students were forced to suffer through Ms. Roth as a substitute.
The children were silent. Even breathing too loudly could mean being sent home for the day. But considering the circumstances, those that could stand to go home did, earning them glares of envy and loathing.

Nothing could possibly be worse than this.

Nothing could possibly be worse than this.

Mettaton stared at his email, his visible eye showing the Microsoft Windows Blue Screen Of Death.

Papyrus found him on the chaise lounge in the parlor, staring his laptop screen with his arms dangling. It was worrisome.

“M-METTATON?” he asked, voice cracking with worry. “I-IS EVERYTHING OKAY, HONEY…?”

Mettaton blinked, fans whirring as he returned to reality. He turned to Papyrus and smiled.

“Everything's fine, Papy,” he said, his voice soft. “There’s no need to worry, okay?”

“AND THAT, THAT RIGHT THERE, IS HOW I KNOW THAT I DO IN FACT NEED TO WORRY!” Papyrus said, sitting down on the edge of the chaise beside Mettaton’s hip. “YOU SAY THAT THERE IS NO NEED TO WORRY ONLY WHEN THERE IS A NEED TO WORRY! NOW PLEASE, TELL ME WHAT IS WRONG.”

Mettaton bit his lip and crossed his arms over his chest shily, hesitating.

“METTATON,” Papyrus said, his voice surprisingly calm and quiet. “I CAN TELL THAT THIS IS TROUBLING YOU, WHATEVER IT IS, AND I WANT TO HELP YOU. I REALLY HATE SEEING THE MAN I LOVE UPSET LIKE THIS, OKAY?”

Mettaton sighed. Papyrus always, ALWAYS knew just the right thing to say. He just could NOT say no to that Skeleton.

But the knowledge that the sentiment went both ways tempered any frustrations he had on the subject significantly.

Mettaton took a deep breath preparing himself for what he had to say.

“I have an interview with Lola Leigh,” he sighed.

“Oh,” Papyrus said. “I KNOW HOW MUCH YOU HATE HER, BUT I KNOW YOU’VE HANDLED HER VERY WELL BEFORE, AND YOU CAN DO IT AGAIN! WHEN IS IT?”

“The 23rd,” Mettaton sighed.

“That's a bit early,” Papyrus said. “Bad enough if you don’t take how close it is to gyftmas into account…”

“It’s almost like she wants me away from you for the holidays,” Mettaton remarked.

Then his and Papyrus’ eyes widened in realization.

“That bitch!” they exclaimed in unison.
They paused, letting their shared action sink in for a moment.

They laughed, touching foreheads and cuddling for the remainder of the day.

As terrified of forever with one person as Mettaton was, maybe it wasn’t so bad if it was with Papyrus…

Sans sat in his office at Ebott University grading papers. He had to give these kids credit, they were doing pretty good. All of them above a D.

They were great kids - even though some of them were older than he was.

He was done with the Tuesday-Thursday 2:30 class’ batch of grades, and since it was the largest group by a considerable amount, he could finish up the rest later. His next class wasn’t for another three hours, so he decided to check up on Toriel, see how she was handling the workshop.

*hey babe

*you doin ok

*Quite well, considering how close I am to an anxiety attack knowing that my students are under the charge of Betty fucking Roth!

*i know youre worried tori

*believe me, i am too

*but we cant do much about it at the moment

*i can have helen drop in unannounced as pta vice president for a sudden inspection

*Sans. This Ms. Roth we’re talking about.

*dammit youre right

*lets just hope nothing too bad happens

*Let’s. I will see you this evening Sans! I love you! :) 

*love you too pretty mama

Sans turned off his phone, knowing in his SOUL that Toriel was blushing like crazy, as she always did when he called her “pretty mama”.

He returned to work, his usual smile a bit bigger and brighter, a kick in his heels and a spring in his step as he went about the rest of his time grading papers.

It was fifteen minutes before lunchtime. Everyone had relaxed, but only barely. It was enough that they felt that they could breath.

A few, however, continued to sneak glances at Caroline out of the corner of their eye.

She was reading a book. And she was hopelessly absorbed in its words.

She made the slightest shift between expressions as she read. But she always went back to a tiny,
contented smile.

No one wanted to bother her. A small number of them had experienced the wrath of a Caroline whose book was interrupted. But Ms. Roth was slowly turning toward Caroline. They had to warn her before it was too late.

But no one knew how.

So all watched in terror as Ms. Roth locked her sight on Caroline and stood up. The old woman walked over toward the young girl, her withered, tree bark-like face unmoving.

“Miss Marlow,” she said.

Caroline looked up at Ms. Roth. “Yes, ma’am?” she said, voice inexplicably calm despite having Miss Roth standing over her.

“Put away that book,” Ms. Roth said.

“But why?” Caroline asked. The other students gasped quietly. Caroline was clearly not familiar with the unspoken law of “do not question Ms. Roth if you want to live”.

“Because I said so,” Ms. Roth said.

“But there must be a reason we can’t do anything in here,” Caroline said. “We haven’t been assigned any work. So why aren’t we allowed to quietly entertain ourselves?”

“Because I said so,” Ms. Roth repeated, voice hardening. “And that book is much too big for a child your age.”

“Ms. Roth, I have read this book before,” Caroline said. “I can assure you that it is one of my favorite books, as well.”

“You’re lying,” Ms. Roth asserted. “It’s very obvious. You’re not making proper eye contact.”

Caroline focused her wide silver eyes onto Ms. Roth’s cold blue ones. She stood up, her face level with the teacher’s, her back straight.

“Ms. Roth,” Caroline said, voice firm and unwavering, “I have never given you reason to believe me to be a liar as far as I am aware. If I have, it was not my intent, and so I apologize.”

“You sit back down and bite your tongue, Miss Marlow, or you WILL be sent out of the classroom,” Ms. Roth hissed.

Caroline picked up her book and turned to the first page.

“It befell in the days of Uther Pendragon,” she began, “when he was king of all England, and so reigned, that there was a mighty duke in Cornwall that held war against him long time. And the duke was called the Duke of Tintagel. And so by means King Uther sent for this duke, charging him to bring his wife with him, for she was called a fair lady, and a passing wise, and her name was called Igraine. So when the duke .”

Ms. Roth yanked the book from Caroline’s hands and tossed it in the wastebasket.

The gasps from the students were audible. Caroline’s eyes were wide, but there was otherwise no reaction from her.
But then Ms. Roth grabbed her by the shoulders.

A bloodcurdling scream pierced the air.

The lights went out in the classroom and the hallway.

“SHUT UP!” Ms. Roth screamed, digging her nails into the screaming Caroline’s shoulders.

“Stop, you're hurting her!” Penelope shouted.

“I don’t care! I will NOT be talked back to!”

“You just don’t like being proven wrong!” Brian shot.

Ms. Roth dragged a screaming and sobbing Caroline out to the hall and threw her out.

Ms. Roth slammed the door, Caroline outside still screaming.

Everyone stared in terror. Some children were crying.

“Anyone else care to talk back to me?” Ms. Roth.

A few moments of silence.

Penelope stood up.

“You can’t hurt children and call yourself a teacher,” Penelope said. “You’re a terrible person.”

“You’re a pretty crummy teacher too,” Levi said, standing up in his place. “You’ve always been a horrible teacher.”

“No one likes you,” Brian said as he stood.

Hunter stood up. Everyone gasped.

“If you think you can hurt someone just because they did something you don’t like, then you need think again,” Hunter said.

Frisk stood up and began to sign.

<<I know you don’t know what I’m saying, so I’ll say it. You’re a bitch.>>

A number of students actually laughed.

MK stood up next. “Not even Jerry likes you!” he shouted.

That got the crowd cheering.

Then more students stood up, all doing whatsoever they please as Ms. Roth looked on in barely-restrained fury.

No one noticed that the lights were still off or that Caroline’s screams had stopped.

Sans was about to dismiss his 10:30-12:00 Monday-Wednesday Physics I class. Most of these kids were smart, but way boring.
“so in conclusion, to quote richard feynman, for those who want proof that physicists are human, the proof is in the…?” Sans glanced around the room. “anyone? anyone know where the proof is?”

One student, a boring-looking Human of about thirty-something, raised his hand.

“yes? bellman?” Sans said, pointing to him with a yardstick.

“Is it in the pudding?” he offered.

“no, man, pudding is great,” Sans said. “especially butterscotch pudding. anyone else?”

Then a phone went off.

“welp,” Sans said. “that’s mine.”

He picked it up.

“hey tori, what’s -”

“Sans, I am about to send you a video that Levi sent,” Toriel said, her voice icy with anger. “I know that the wireless in your classroom is subpar, so I am sending it to you now since your class is almost over.”

“okay,” Sans said. “talk to ya later.”

Sans hung up.

“for those who want proof that physicists are humans, the proof is in the idiocy of all the different units which they use for measuring energy,” Sans finished. “i will see you all on wednesday, remember that your final exams are next monday. have a good day.”

Once the students had all left, Sans took a shortcut to the second floor of the library - a haven of great wifi at Ebott University.

Sans opened up his phone, the video having been sent successfully.

He pressed play.

He thought he would vomit.

If that were his child, Ms. Roth would be dead where she stands.

Hell, if he didn't know that the parents of this child wouldn't act on this incident, he would take a shortcut to the classroom and punch Ms. Roth in the face. But he knew that Randy and Sharona had the Integrity to fight for their children, so for now he was going to try and reach them.

And considering what he remember about last September’s PTA meeting, Randy was almost definitely on his was there now after having reported Ms. Roth to the proper authorities - maybe even before, leaving Sharona to contact the authorities.

But Sans wasn’t sure the authorities would do anything about it. They hadn’t for forty odd years, why would they start now?

But maybe this was the evidence they needed.

Sans decided, perhaps foolishly, to hope for the best.
When Caroline had calmed down enough to be semi-aware of her surroundings, she realized that she’d walked to a part of Ebott she didn’t recognize.

Great. Not only were her shoulders bleeding thanks to Ms. Roth’s nails - claws, more like - but she was lost in a part of the city she’d never been in before to her knowledge.

She looked down at her legs. Her cowboy boots were scuffed, her tights were running, her skirt was covered in mud, her sweater was covered in blood spots at the shoulders…

Her knees were throbbing. Apparently her tights were running because she’d tripped at some point. Now there was blood.

Caroline growled at herself. Three years since Bethany was removed from her life, and yet it was still as if she’d show up any minute and scream at her for being a disgraceful excuse of a person.

Caroline trudged onward. She couldn’t see much because the rain was thick and she’d left her glasses at school, but that wasn’t going to stop her.

She would **Persevere**.

A lightning bolt shot through the sky.

Caroline decided to follow it.

“What do you mean she’s NOT HERE?!” Randy shouted.

“We MEAN what we SAID, Mr. Marlow,” the secretary said, clearly annoyed. “Your daughter is not here. Now please leave before we call security.”

“I already called the authorities to report Ms. Roth for assaulting our daughter, Mrs. Schultz,” Sharona said. “We have video evidence.”

Mrs. Schultz’s eyes widened. “You wouldn’t dare.”

Randy and Sharona glared at Mrs. Schultz. “Are you telling us not to report a crime one of your teachers perpetrated on our child?” Sharona growled.

“W-well, I-I mean, the video could be fake -”

“It’s not!”

Levi, Brian, Frisk, MK, Penelope and Hunter had entered the front office.

“We saw the whole thing,” Hunter said, their voice quivering. “There was blood.”

“Did you know what that...that jerkface was doing this whole time?” Penelope growled, clearly about to cry.

“You know, you could go to jail too for your involvement,” Levi said.

“I’d punch you but I don’t hit girls,” Brian hissed.

“Well I do!” Penelope screamed, charging at Mrs. Schultz, only to be restrained by Frisk.
“Frisk, let me GO!” Penelope sobbed, struggling to free herself. “If it weren’t for people like YOU we wouldn’t BE here! People like you who ignore people who are hurting, you’re the WORST! Worse than the people doing the hurting”

“Penelope, sweetheart, please!” Sharona said, doing her best to keep calm despite the situation. She kneeled down in front if Penelope, placing a calming hand on her head like she’d seen Caroline do. “I know you’re upset, but right now violence will only make things worse. Violence won’t help us find Caroline, so let’s try to calm down, okay?”

Penelope sniffled, ceasing her struggling and nodding in understanding.

“Good girl,” Sharona said. “Sans is on his way here, along with Toriel, Papyrus, Mettaton, Undyne, Helen, and Monica, we’ll go over a plan of action once they arrive.”

Sharona turned toward Mrs. Schultz, who was too stunned to do anything. “You, ma’am, are going to tell me EVERYTHING you know about Ms. Betty Roth. Capice?”

Mrs. Schultz nodded dumbly.

“Okay then,” Sharona said, smiling so sweetly it made one feel like she wanted everyone in the room with her to die in a fire. She sat down next to Randy, who was holding his head in his hands and shaking.

She rubbed his back to calm him down.

She silently prayed for her daughter’s safety.

Ms. Roth had managed to silence the children. Some of them ended up crying, but she’d managed to silence them by moving their desks into the hall.

She stared down the remaining students. She would NOT be talked down to. She would NOT be defied.

There was a knock at the door.

“No one speak, move, or BREATHE,” Ms. Roth hissed. “Is that understood?”

The children remained still. Statues could have moved more than they did in that moment.

Ms. Roth went to answer the door.

A Human police officer with blonde hair and green eyes was on the other side.

Ms. Roth made no move to react.

“May I help you?” she asked.

“Yes, actually,” the officer said. “Are you Betty Roth?”

“Yes, that would be me,” Ms. Roth said. “Why do you ask?”

The officer flashed a badge. “I’m Cress Haventhy from the Ebott Police Department, you’re under arrest for assaulting a minor.”

“I assaulted no one,” Miss Roth said, indignant. “I have worked here for forty years, Officer
Haventhy, and not once have I assaulted one of my students.”

The officer cuffed Ms. Roth. “Come on down to the station with me and let’s see if your claims can stand to the proof.”

As the officer led her away, they turned to the students and smiled. “Don’t worry about your teacher. You all can wander the school for the time being, okay? Just don’t interfere with other classes.”

The children watched as Ms. Roth attempted to reason with Officer Haventhy while being led away. Once she was out of earshot, they stayed in place.

The students had no idea what to do with their newfound, if temporary, freedom.

Caroline looked up at the sky at the crosswalk, waiting for the next lightning strike to show her where to go.

The bolt streaked horizontally in the sky, from left to right.

Caroline took the crosswalk to the right, pressing the button for the crosswalk signal and waiting.

The rain was falling pretty hard now. It was clearly not going to let up anytime soon. The streets were flooded heavily, as were the sidewalks and medians.

Caroline wondered if it would snow. Maybe it would even become a blizzard.

The light changed. Caroline walked across the street.

Once she crossed, slipping on the flooded asphalt only once, she was startled by a bolt of lightning hitting a lamppost next to her.

She was in the Ebott University campus area. No wonder she didn’t recognize it, she really HAD never been here.

But Sans was. Maybe.

But then Caroline read the sign once more as a bolt of lightning lit up the sky.

The sign said:

**Ebott Metropolitan Library, University Chapter**

There was an arrow pointing to the left.

Caroline knew EXACTLY what she had to do.

She turned left at the signpost.

And she walked.

A bolt struck a pole in front of a large building with a sign.

It was the library.

She brightened and ran across the flooded parking lot, stumbling here and there but not once falling to the ground.
She made it up to the front of the building, standing underneath the awning for a moment and staring inside.

This was the biggest library Caroline Violet Marlow had ever had the privilege of laying her eyes on. Certainly it wasn’t the biggest in the world, or even the state. But it was by far much bigger than any she’d seen.

She stared at the door, debating whether or not to go inside before electing to do so.

She pulled on the door, boots and tights squelching and sloshing.

Only then did Caroline realize just how wet her clothes had become. She was soaked to the bone, her hair having fallen out of its ponytail somewhere on her way here.

She panicked. She had no idea what to do now.

“May I help you, Miss?”

Caroline flinched. She turned to find a plump, bespectacled oldish-looking woman with shoulder-length gray hair and warm brown eyes. She must be the librarian…

Caroline calmed down a bit, but she was still on edge. “I-I’m fine, thank you.”

“If you say so,” the librarian said. “Where are your parents?”

“They’re working,” Caroline replied. “I was taking a walk so I decided to drop by.”

The librarian put her hands on her hips. “In this weather? Don’t you have school?”

“Yes…”

“Well, where do you go to school that they would let you out in this weather, during school hours no less?”

Caroline gripped at her left shoulder. “Mountainside Elementary…” she mumbled.

The librarian widened her eyes. “Mountainside?” she gasped. “That’s nearly fifteen miles west from here and across the bridge! Just what kind of teacher…?”

“My normal teacher is out, so we have a subshi - subi - a sub,” Caroline said, voice shaking.

The librarian’s eyes widened. “Come with me, miss,” she said, voice hurried and worried as she led Caroline to a brown leather sofa. “Sit down right here, I’ll go get you some water and bandages.”

Caroline relented in stunned silence. She sat on the sofa, gripping her left shoulder with her right hand and hugging herself with the other.

The librarian returned some moments later with a water bottle and some bandaids. “This is all I have here, you can handle the bandages yourself, correct?” she asked.

Caroline nodded.

The librarian smiled. “Help yourself to any of the books, okay? I’m going to make a few calls -”

“Please don’t tell anyone I’m here!” Caroline burst. She slapped the hand not holding her shoulder on her mouth. She slowly lowered it. “S-sorry, I-I’m so sorry, I-I just really wanna b-be by
myself…”

The librarian sighed. “If that’s what you want. We close at 9 today.”

“Thank you,” Caroline said.

The librarian went back to her desk and sat down.

Caroline got up and grabbed *A Wrinkle In Time* and sat back down to read it as she removed her boots, careful not to mess up the book.

She wasn’t sure what the big deal was. She’d gotten lost in FAR worse weather than this.

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When Sans and Toriel finally arrived at the school, the sky was so dark from the storm clouds that it looked like it was nighttime.

Then they noticed something VERY wrong.

“What happened to the power?” Toriel asked. “It’s completely dead from here east…”

“damned if i know,” Sans said, lowering his hood as he walked into the entryway.

They walked into the office, where Randy, Sharona, Monica, Helen, and Undyne were already waiting.

“anything come up?” Sans asked.

“Not since last time you checked in,” Sharona said tiredly. “Linda and Papyrus and Mettaton are on their way up.”

“PAPYRUS AND METTATON ARE NOW HERE!” Papyrus bellowed as he kicked the door in.

“Sir, please do not kick the door,” Mrs. Schultz said.

“Not the point here, Barbara,” Sharona snapped.

Mrs. Schultz pursed her lips and widened her eyes.

Sharona sighed. “They’ve got a search party out looking for Caroline, but any traces could be washed away by the floodwaters…”

The door slammed open once more, fumes of menthol and nicotine washing over everyone, signalling Linda’s entry. Sharona started hacking and wheezing as she attempted to cover her face.

“There had better be a REALLY good explanation for this!” she warned. “Because if there isn’t -”

“Ms. Roth got physical with Caroline,” Randy said shakily. “There was blood.”

Linda’s eyes widened. “You’re lying,” she said.

Helen showed her the video.

Linda looked on in shock. “Well,” she began, “while the use of force was uncalled for, Caroline shouldn’t have…”

“Shouldn’t have WHAT, Linda?” Randy shouted. “Shouldn’t have stood up for herself? Shouldn’t
have explained herself? Shouldn’t have COME HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE?!”

“Mr. Marlow, that is not what I was going to say…”

“But it’s what you believe, isn’t it?” Randy sneered. “I know your type. You find something that defies what you’ve been taught, disproves what you’re trying to force down your children’s throats, and you HATE it. You want nothing more than for it to die so your beliefs can prosper, no matter how harmful or wrong they are.”

“You know NOTHING about me!” Linda growled indignantly.

“I never said I knew YOU!” Randy countered. “I said I know people LIKE you. I was MARRIED to one FOR EIGHT YEARS!”

Everyone stared at Randy. He was glowering at Linda. His breathing was ragged.

He sat down, hissing out a sigh. “If I knew that something like YOU would exist, I would have stayed in Colorado. You’d’ve liked that, wouldn’t you, you hateful, hateful ABOMINATION?”

“I am NOT an abomination!” Linda shrieked.

“But you’re not denying that you’re hateful,” Randy sneered.

Linda spluttered in fury.

“Wait!” Mettaton shouted. “Where are the kids?”

A cold silence washed over everyone.

The kids had run off.

“Did you find her yet, guys?” Penelope shouted into her phone in order to be heard over the howling wind and rain.

“She’s not at your house,” MK responded.

“Then where IS she?!” Brian screamed. “She’s not at school, she’s not at any of our houses, she’s not ANYWHERE!”

“Is there anywhere else she could be?” Levi asked desperately.

“Maybe there’s some clues about which direction she went when she left the school?” MK offered, Frisk humming in agreement.

Penelope tried to think of something, ANYTHING that could help.

Then she remembered something…

“Guys!” she exclaimed. “Remember last New Year’s Eve, when we were at the science museum?”

“What does that have to do with ANYTHING?” Brian shouted in exasperation.

“Remember when the power went out?” Penelope asked.

“To repeat what Brian said, WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH ANYTHING?” Levi screamed.
“Caroline said that she was touching a plasma ball when the power went out,” Penelope said. “She said she said something like a spell, pretending that it would make the power shut off!”

“Are you SERIOUSLY suggesting what I think you’re suggesting?!” Brian roared.

“I think we should try it,” Frisk said suddenly. “We don’t have any other options right now, so this is our last chance.”

“Let’s meet at the school, see what we can do,” Hunter offered.

Everyone had gathered ten minutes later. They turned to where the streetlights were dead.

“Let’s hold onto each other so we don’t get swept away,” Hunter offered. “Levi leads, followed by Penelope, then me, then Brian, then Frisk, then MK. Sound okay?”

“I say we hit the gym office for some supplies first,” Brian said. “They have some jump ropes, we tie ourselves together so it’s more difficult for us to get separated.”

“Brian, that idea’s actually not stupid!” Levi said.

“So let’s get the supplies and head out!” Penelope cried.

Once they had the desired supplies, they headed out. Before they went out the door for the last time, they looked into the office, where their parents were shouting at each other.

“Should we tell them?” MK asked.

“Are you crazy? They’ll KILL us!” Hunter responded.

“You got me there dude,” MK sighed. “Now let’s go! Time’s a-wasting!”

Levi turned on his phone’s flashlight.

“Let’s follow the trail of darkness, everyone,” he said gravely. “I’ve got a sister to find.”

And so the six kids tied the jump ropes around their waists headed out into the storm, DETERMINED to find their friend…

Caroline checked the time on the clock on the wall. Almost three.

She couldn’t believe it. Had it really only been two hours since she got here? It felt like it had been way longer.

Maybe that was because it was so dark outside.

No. That wasn’t it.

It was the memories. When Ms. Roth grabbed at Caroline, it was like she was back in time to when she was five again.

Everything became like that day all over again. Bethany was even…

Caroline shook her head and pounded on her temples. She really didn’t want to think about it.

No, not even thinking about thinking about it.
But being here, alone in a library, rain falling and thunder crashing and wind howling…

She was practically living out her dream, if only for the next few hours.

So she was going to embrace it.

All the parents sat together in icy silence.

All of them were alternating between trying to think up a way to find their kids and trying not to cry from fear.

“Your daughter VERY ill-behaved, I hope you know that,” Linda said.

“You shut your ugly face you nicotine-scented bitch,” Sharona growled through clenched teeth. “If you even gave two shits about your son, you’d be trying to think of a way to find those kids instead of blaming Caroline!”

“For your information, I care about my son very much!” Linda said. “And for you to assume that I’m not worried about him…!”

“Everyone, please listen,” Toriel announced. “I am very much aware that tensions are high right now, but we need to calm down and try to work together to bring our children home safely. I know what all of you are feeling -”

“And exactly HOW would YOU know?” Linda snapped.

Everyone stared at Linda.

Toriel tried give her deadliest glare, but really looked like she was trying very hard to hold back tears. “Mrs. Thompson, forgive me, but I had assumed that due to my past as Queen of All Monsters of the Underground, that it was common knowledge that I lost my own children many years ago. And forgive me for assuming that you would bother to sympathize.”

Toriel slumped back in her seat and put her head in her hands. Her shoulders started to shake with sobs.

Sans turned to glare at Linda. She flinched, expecting the Gaster Blasters. She expected anger.

She got resignation.

Then a sound pierced the atmosphere.

Monica sighed and got her phone out. Her eyes widened and she started crying.

“Oh thank GOD!” she exalted.

“What is it?” Helen asked.

“I just got a text from Penelope,” she explained. “She said that they went to go look for Caroline, and they’re… oh god…”

“Oh no, where are they?” Sharona whimpered.

“You guys aren’t gonna believe this…”
The six children huddled close together by Olsen Bridge, shivering. The way was blocked by abandoned cars and emergency vehicles. MK had used his Magic to light a small flame on the tip of their tail.

“I wanna go home but I don’t wanna go home and I don’t know what to want,” Hunter whined.

“Same here dude,” MK said quietly.

<<But we CAN’T give up yet!>> Frisk signed.

“Yeah, Frisk’s right!” Penelope agreed. “We just gotta cross the bridge and keep following the trail of darkness until we find Caroline! Easy-peasy!”

“This entire thing woulda been a LOT easier if we’d known you could do this, MK,” Brian said.

“Dude, I only just found out about this last weekend, and I was panicking!” MK countered.

<<Brian, shut up!>> Frisk signed, an angry look on their face.

“Guys, stop fighting, please,” Hunter whined. “We’re already gonna die, either out here by being swept away by the flood or my mom’s gonna kill us all, but we gotta move on! We just gotta wait for the policemen to move so we can cross the bridge without being seen!”

“You mean like they are now?” Levi asked.

“Yeah, just like that - wait, huh?”

Everyone turned to face the bridge

The police officers were getting in their cars and driving away. Where to, they didn’t quite know, but anywhere that was not here was good.

As soon as the last vehicle was past, the children tightened the jump ropes and stepped on the walking path on the side of the bridge.

They had no idea just how close they were to their destination…

The parents were arguing.

“Look, my car has all-wheel drive, so CLEARLY we should take MINE!” Linda argued.

“yeah, but you would probably make the monsters of the group walk using the argument ‘no room for inferiors’ or some shit like that,” Sans countered.

“I beg your pardon!” Linda scoffed.

“ACTUALLY, ALL-WHEEL DRIVE AND 4-WHEEL DRIVE DON’T MEAN MUCH IF YOU DON’T HAVE THE RIGHT TIRES,” Papyrus offered.

Everyone stared at him except for the Monsters and Sharona.

“He’s right, they really don’t,” Randy said. “But considering the situation, 4-wheel drive is our best bet since vehicles with it are more heavy-duty.”

“I have an Avalanche with new snow tires,” Monica stated.
“And our F-150’s doors are above the current waterline,” Sharona said.

“But all of these measures are for naught if we don’t know where our children are, as helpful as they are,” Toriel declared. “We need to come up with a way to look for them before we implement anything.”

Everyone thought.

“wait,” Sans said suddenly. “tori, the lights outside leading east, they were dead when we got here.”

“And they still are,” Toriel said.

“What does that have to do woth anything?!” Linda snapped.

“remember the trip to the science museum last year with the kids when the power went out suddenly?”

“Where are you going with this, Sans?” Monica asked nervously.

Sans looked around at everyone. He sighed.

“this is gonna sound hella crazy right now, but right now i’m guessing it’s the best bet we’ve got in the circumstances,” Sans said.

“Sans, I love you, and I am going to trust you on this matter even you claim that those children randomly teleported to the Bermuda Triangle, now tell us what you are thinking,” Toriel declared.

Sans looked up at his beloveds face, hardened with resolve and fighting back her emotions in order to keep a clear head.

He sighed. “tori, do wizards exist?”

Everyone stared at Sans in disbelief.

“What the fuck kinda question is THAT?!?” Undyne roared. “None of your statements in the past ten minutes are even REMOTELY connected!”

“Wait,” Toriel said. “As strange or impossible as it may seem to many of us here…yes, Wizards do exist. Or rather, they DID exist. After all, Monsters were sealed underground by seven of Humanity’s most powerful Wizards.”

“I can’t believe I’m getting sucked in, but my curiosity is too much to ignore, so I have to ask,” Randy said wearily. “What do you mean by ‘did’?”

“You see, when the Monsters were sealed, the Wizards used so much of their Magic to create the Barrier that they were killed,” Toriel explained. “But it cost those Wizards FAR more than just their lives.”

“What did it cost them, their reputations?” Linda snarked.

“Their very existence,” Toriel said. “The sheer force of the Magic that was exuded when the Barrier was erected completely erased from existence not only the Wizards, but much of the life surrounding Mt. Ebott.”

“YOU MEAN KIND OF LIKE WHAT HAPPENED TO SANS’ AND MY DAD,” Papyrus reasoned.
“so that’s why monsters where relegated to mythical status,” Sans said. “anyone who could possibly have proven their existence was erased from said existence.”

“I have a LOT of questions for later, but get to the goddamn point!” Randy said.

“okay then,” Sans said. “long story short, all the evidence i have points to the theory that caroline is a wizard.”

A hush fell over everyone.

“I beg your PARDON?!” Linda shrieked.

“no, guys, here me out,” Sans said. “so last year before heading off to mettaton’s for a new year’s party, we went to the science museum. we were in the electricity room, when suddenly the power for not just the museum, but an entire city block was completely shut down without warning. to this day as far as i know they haven’t found the cause. and then in the video, when caroline was…attacked, as soon as she started screaming, the lights went dead. and i got a text from the university saying that not only was the power cut there, but across the entire eastern half of the city.”

“So you’re saying that my daughter could be literally ANYWHERE on the eastern half of an 700-square mile city?” Sharona shouted.

“no, not just anywhere,” Sans stated. “there actually seems to be a sort of path of dead streetlights leading between here and the university district.”

“Oh come ON!” Linda shouted. “The University district is fifteen MILES from here! There is NO way that a bunch of fifth graders could POSSIBLY walk that far!”

“It’s been nearly seven hours since Caroline went missing,” Helen said. “I think that someone could walk fifteen miles in that time.”

“Really Helen? In THIS weather?!”

“She’s been farther in worse weather,” Randy said. His voice was so quiet and shaky as he said this that if it were for the fact that he stood up as he said it he may very well have been ignored.

But as it was, he was heard. Everyone but Sharona turned to face him, aghast.

“What?"

“I said that Caroline has been forced to walk farther in worse weather, are you deaf?!” Randy howled. “I know it was my negligence that caused this, but I -"”

“Randy, what that woman did was NOT your fault, and you know it!” Sharona asserted as she wrapped her arms around her husband.

“That doesn’t change the fact that it FEELS like it is…” Randy sobbed.

“What are you going on about?!” Linda asked, no longer having the energy to scream.

“Wait,” Toriel said, her calm voice cutting through the tense atmosphere, “I think I might understand somewhat.”

“whaddaya mean, tori?” Sans asked.

“While Wizards were rare even when they were at the height of their influence, they all had one
thing in common.”

“And that would be?” Monica asked cautiously.

“All of them suffered through at least one near-death experience at the hands of one close to them in their youth,” Toriel answered, her voice practically a whisper. “Once Monsters were sealed away, Wizards ceased to exist due to the lack of Magic pervading the air. Once Monsters were released, it is possible that any Human with the potential to become a Wizard became one without recognizing it.”

“So by moving here, Caroline’s power was unlocked and she became a wizard without realizing it?” Sans hypothesized.

“That is correct, yes,” Toriel said. “And this is not the first time it has happened, either…”

“You mean it happened with the other seven fallen children, don’t you?” Sans asked.

Toriel nodded, now closer to tears than ever. “All of them had the capability to use Magic, but only Chara and Frisk were truly aware of the power they held,” she said. “And, almost as if by coincidence, they both had the strongest SOUL color, Red…”

After a moment of silence, Randy stood up.

“I understand,” he declared, voice firm with resolve. “But first…if it will help, I…want to explain what I mean when I say that she’s been through worse. I never wanted to tell anyone outside of our family since it’s Caroline’s story to tell, but…desperate times call for desperate measures…”

Everyone looked at him.

“You can explain on the way,” Toriel said. “Let’s go.”

Everyone followed the cars.

This was it.

The seven children stopped walking as soon as they reached a still-lit streetlight.

“A library,” Brian muttered. “Of course she’s hiding a freakin’ library, it’s CAROLINE…”

“Let’s head in, guys,” Hunter said. “I’m sure that whatever shape we’re in, Caroline’s WAY worse off.”

“Hunter dude, she’s in a LIBRARY,” Brian argued. “She’s probably happier now than ever.”

“Yeah, but still,” Penelope said. “She’s probably here to distract herself from what happened earlier…”

<<Penelope’s right guys,>> Frisk signed. <<When Caroline is stressed she tends to distract herself so she can clear her head and stuff.>>

“Yeah!” Penelope said. “Just because she doesn’t always show it doesn’t mean she’s not hurting! Now let’s go see if she’s here, okay?”

Everyone went inside, bringing floodwater in with them.
The librarian stood up and hurried over to the group of children.

“Let me guess,” she panted, “you’re from Mountainside Elementary?”

“Yeah, how d’you know?” MK asked.

“Another little girl from there came in earlier,” the librarian said. “She was real upset, but she seems to have calmed down since then.”

“Where is she?” Penelope asked, looking around before spotting Caroline curled up on the brown leather sofa under a blanket reading a book, a stack of about twelve of them piled on the end table next to her.

“I found her!” she exclaimed, jogging over to Caroline and sitting on the couch next to her while the other kids looked on, unsure of what they could do to help.

The librarian, as if sensing this, spoke up. “You kids are free to read whatever you want, okay?” she said. “I wanted to close it earlier when the girl came in, but I see I made a good choice keeping it open despite the weather…”

The kids thanked her and went into the children’s section.

Meanwhile, Penelope and Caroline sat on the couch in silence.

Caroline looked up briefly from her book, a dull expression on her face, before returning to her book.

“You found me,” she stated, her voice flat and cold.

“Yep,” Penelope replied. “You’re pretty tough, coming all the way out here on your own in this weather.”

“I’ve trudged through worse,” Caroline said, turning the page of her book. “Now please go away.”

“No.”

“Yes, now go away, Penelope,” Caroline said.

“If I leave, you’re coming with us,” Penelope asserted.

“No I won’t,” Caroline argued. “Why would I leave this place? I love it here. I have my books and my poetry to protect me. I touch no one and no one touches me. It’s perfect.”

“But you can’t stay here forever, we’d miss you!” Penelope pleaded.

“Liar,” Caroline spat. “No one in their right mind would miss me.”

“Then I guess I’m not in my right mind!” Penelope countered. “I mean, me and Frisk, MK, Hunter, Brian and Levi all trudged through water up to my hips to get here and bring you back! Everyone’s worried about you, Caroline! And it’s really sad that you can’t see it…”

“I know they are,” Caroline whispered. “But it really doesn’t feel like it. They’d be better off if they didn’t care. I’d rather be ignored.”

“But that would be sad!” Penelope said. “No one deserves to be ignored, especially not someone as smart and cool and pretty as you!”
Caroline looked up from her book, closing it and placing a bookmark inside. “I don’t know why you’re saying these things Penelope, but -”

“I’m saying them because they’re the truth!” Penelope shouted, eyes starting to well up. “You’re one of the nicest people I’ve ever met, you’re okay with my weird tics and stuff, you’re so smart you read all of those books in five hours, you have a really cute smile, and I -”

Caroline put her hand over Penelope’s mouth.

“You can stop now, Penelope,” Caroline whispered. “I can’t stop you from feeling what you do, just as you can’t stop me from feeling what I do. I don’t know why you seem to think those things, but I won’t stop you since it makes you happy.”

“I don’t know why I think them either,” Penelope choked out. “I just DO, okay? I just think you’re really great, y’know?”

“You’re way better than I am,” Caroline said. “You’re far kinder than I could ever be. You can cook like nobody’s business, you can kick butts like a champ, you can keep up with my ramblings better than anyone I’ve ever met - you’re perfect…”

“You’re the perfect one,” Penelope countered.

Caroline stared through Penelope. She was silent for a moment.

Penelope stared back.

“You wanna know why I moved here?” Caroline asked. “Aside from my dad remarrying?”

Penelope perked up slightly.

“Okay,” she replied.

Caroline made eye contact. Silver eyes met green.

Caroline sighed as she broke eye contact.

“Here goes,” she said. “Forgive me if I start crying, okay?”

Penelope nodded.

Caroline began the story.

==

Time and date unknown, 201V

Silverton, Colorado

Caroline Marlow, age 5, was a bright and curious child. If something caught her eye, she had to know everything about it, however she could. And the one thing that never failed to catch her eye was books.

Randy Marlow, age 55, was a very busy man. While not often home, he would do his utmost to keep in touch with his wife and daughter. If there was one thing he loved more than books, it was his family.
Bethany Marlow, age 29, was a fickle woman. With lush brown hair, beady brown eyes, and no shortage of feminine charms, she seemed more like a woman at the peak of youth rather than a mother to a five-year-old.

So the story goes like this.

Caroline was sitting in her room, the door locked. Just outside her bedroom window, a storm raged outside.

She was very, very bored. Bethany had told her to stay in her room because of the storm. She even locked the door to ensure her safety.

But little bumps in the road to enlightenment, be they locked doors or blizzards, never stopped little Caroline before. Why would they start now?

She got out of her bed - little more than two mattresses on top of each other, and walked up to her bedroom door. She turned the lock, and opened the door.

She looked both ways, even though her room was at the end of the hall. She walked to the family study, entering the already open door and finding what she’d been looking for.

The family bookshelf. Countless tomes of knowledge, all at her disposal. Some of them were still far too big to keep her interest, and it would be years yet before she would set a finger on them, but that was fine. She already knew what she wanted to read.

She picked up The Neverending Story, and slipped into the empty space in the bottom of the bookshelf to read.

She was barely through with the third chapter when her mother’s giggling voice rang through the house. Caroline perked up. Her mother wouldn’t be too happy that she’d set foot out of her room.

So she stayed put, silent. She heard the voice of a man - her father? No, the voice was too different. She didn’t know who this strange man was.

Caroline wasn’t much for company, but if the strange man or Bethany were going to come in here, she would introduce herself politely then flee back into her room.

She continued to read, waiting until they did, in fact, come into the study. It took her a bit to notice, but when she did…

“Hi,” she said, quietly.

Bethany and the strange man turned to look at her, wide eyed. Bethany was straddling the man’s waist.

“Uh, who’s the kid?” the man asked.

“I’m Caroline,” she said, “But my mommy calls me Carrie. Are you friends with my mommy?”

The man chuckled nervously. “Uh, yeah, I uh, I guess you could say that…”

“I don’t know this child,” Bethany said coldly.

“Sure you do!” Caroline said. “There’s a picture of you and me and Daddy on the desk right there, see?”
Bethany and the man looked at the picture, then looked at each other.

“Uhhhh…” Bethany stalled nervously.

There was silence.

“I, uh… I’ll just go ahead and…” The man gestured vaguely at the door and left.

Bethany stood, dumbfounded.

Then her face darkened.

She stood up slowly, grabbing Caroline and lifting her by her shoulders, digging her nails in.

Ignoring her daughter’s cries, she stomped out of the room.

“You know, I never wanted you in the first place,” Bethany said darkly. “But hey, that’s why you’re here, to RUIN MY LIFE. I hope you’re proud of yourself. This is why no one loves you. No one ever will.”

Bethany opened the front door and tossed the sobbing Caroline onto the porch.

“And if you really love me, you won’t come back.”

And with that she slammed the door.

Caroline sniffled, the cold air biting against her bare face, hands and feet.

She dusted the snow off her pajamas and decided to wait for her mother to calm down.

To while the hours away, she decided to walk. No matter that she didn’t have any shoes or a coat.

She looked for a place with books. She didn’t care where, she just wanted more books.

She ended up nearly 20 miles away from her house before she collapsed.

Later that night…

Randy was exhausted. He wanted nothing more in that moment than to go home to his family and get some goddamn sleep. But alas, work was still piling up. He was starting to hear colors. His least favorite sound was the color brown.

He was starting to get desperate for a break. If he could just get the window open and manage to rappel down 15 stories without being seen…

Then Randy tasted his phone ringing. It tasted like copper.

He blindly picked it up. “Hi, you’ve reached Randy Marlowe in the pits of hell itself, how may I help you?” he answered, his voice slurring with sleep deprivation.

“Oh, Randy, thank GOD you picked up so fast!” sobbed a voice from the other end. “It’s… she was…”

The owner of the voice started crying so hard that the owner was unable to continue, so the phone was handed off to an emergency response worker.

“Sir, we’re terribly sorry to interrupt your work...”
“Don’t be, please continue,” Randy said, perhaps a little too eagerly.

“We found your daughter’s body by the river.”

Suddenly, Randy found himself wide awake.

“Is she okay?” he choked.

“Well, there’s…there’s a more than eighty percent chance she’ll never wake up…no one knew she was out here, so we weren’t exactly equipped for this, we…we’re sorry sir –”

“Where is she?” Randy pleaded. “WHERE THE HELL IS MY DAUGHTER?!”

“She’s at the children’s hospital, I expect you want to see her?”

“YA THINK?”

“Of course sir, we’ll send a chopper to you right away.”

“Thanks, I’m on the fifteenth floor of the Jones-Faller Office Complex,” Randy explained.

“Of course sir, just sit tight.”

Randy hung up. He decided to do as the rescue worker advised.

He knew that right now, it was best to do as they said.

A few weeks later...

When Caroline woke up from the coma, everything was blurry and painful. She felt something on her face blowing air into her mouth and nose. As her eyes adjusted to the waking world, she could see there was a needle on the back of her hand with a tube sticking out of it leading to a bag filled with clear liquid. She was hooked up to a machine that made beeping sounds and had a weird moving line on it.

She would never forget what she heard the doctors and nurses saying about her.

They said she was admitted for hypothermia, dehydration, and exhaustion among other things. She lost two fingers and six toes to frostbite. By all laws of medicine, she should have died in that blizzard, yet she’s still hanging on. They wondered if it would be easier for everyone they just let her go.

Caroline, although she couldn’t move since she was so weak, managed to make enough noise to get the attention of a passing nurse.

After that, everything was a blur of screams and clattering plastic and metal and being poked with needles until she fell asleep again.

After that, everything went black. Her entire sixth year of life was like a page had been torn from her memory.

Maybe that was for the best...

=/>
“Two years later I divorced her and a year after that I married Sharona and moved in with her,” Randy said. “But that’s…a different story.”

Randy didn’t cry as he told the story. Instead he seemed…tired. Like he’d told and been told it enough times to no longer be affected by the contents.

Sharona knew that it meant he was numb. She hugged him in the back seat of their F-150 that was being driven by Sans (chosen as the driver due to his ability to remain calm in dire situations), crying enough for both of them it seemed.

Toriel sat in the passenger seat in tears, seemingly ready to vomit.

They reached the bridge, where the children had said they were stopped by cars. The cars had left, the children nowhere to be found. The row of dead streetlights continued on into the cityscape ahead. If they weren’t convinced that the lights had been killed one by one as Caroline made her way through the city, they definitely were now.

They crossed the dark bridge slowly, care being taken to ensure that the vehicles didn’t slip on a slick patch.

They wove through the darkened stretch of road, assured in their course, encouraged by the knowledge that they were on the right path.

Penelope and Caroline held each other as they cried.

“Oh my god,” Penelope breathed in disbelief.

“I know,” Caroline agreed, her voice quaking. “It’s like my life’s a book and the author gave me a bad backstory for no good reason…”

“Do ya want me to break the author’s hands and legs?” Penelope said. “Cuz if it means you’ll be able to be happy, I’ll do it!”

Caroline huffed out a laugh, nuzzling her cheek into Penelope’s baby-soft black curls. “I bet you’d love to, but I know you’d feel bad and start feeding the author cupcakes…”

“Dangit, you’re right,” Penelope grumbled. Caroline hummed in response.

The girls were silent.

“Uh, hey,” Penelope uttered. “You do know that we’re friends, right?”

Caroline’s eyes widened. “We are?” she asked skeptically.

“Mmmmm!” Penelope hummed with a smile. “We are! You, me, Frisk, MK, Levi, Hunter, and Brian - we’re all friends!”

Penelope looked into Caroline’s silver eyes. “But you ‘n me - us two - we’re BEST friends! Like, friends only better!”

“I suppose that’s why they’re called best friends,” Caroline mused, “because they’re better together.”

“Aww, Caaare!” Penelope whined. “If you keep saying pretty things like that I’m gonna cry again!”

“Sorry, Nell…’
“It’s fine, don’t worry about it!” Penelope assured.

They sat in silence, still holding each other, though no longer crying.

“Hey, Nell?” Caroline asked suddenly.

“Yeah?”

“Thank you.”

Penelope was confused. “For what? I didn’t do anything.”

“For trying to understand me,” Caroline said. “For listening to me and comforting me and braving a storm to look for me…for being the first and best friend I’ve ever had…” Caroline held Penelope closer, starting to cry again. “Thank you so, so much Penelope…”

Penelope hugged back. “Anytime, Care. Just tell me where you are if you need me, and I’ll be there to listen.”

Caroline wiped her eyes by nuzzling into Penelope’s hair.

“Just don’t call me Carrie,” Caroline said. “Like, ever.”

Toriel wiped her eyes with the edge of her sleeve. She knew they were closer to finding Caroline and the rest of the kids. She saw that they were approaching a library. There the trail of dead lights ended, the brightness returning.

Of course she would be there, Caroline loves books. They stopped in the closest parking spot to the library. Which, surprisingly, was the highest out of the water.

Everyone stepped out of the vehicle into the water below. It went up to to the top of Sans’ pelvis. Sans hiked up his shorts, not wanting them to slip off and float away.

They trudged through the water until they reached the front door.

At this point, Linda’s car and its associated occupants finally drove in.

Everyone except Linda got out of the car.

“Get out of the car, Lois!” Mettaton cried.

“Are you crazy?!” Linda screamed. “And get the inside of my nice clean car wet?!?”

“Which is more important right now, your car or your kid?!” Helen shouted.

"It's the car, isn't it?" Estelle piped, heard only by Linda.

Linda growled as she left the car.

Once they were inside the library, they started searching for their children.

The librarian sighed. “If you’re looking for your kids, they’re over the children’s section,” she said. “Two of them are over on that couch over there.”

Randy and Sharona rushed over to the couch.
“Thank god you're ok!” Randy exclaimed as he sat down next to Caroline, wrapping her in a hug.

“I’ve walked through worse weather you know,” Caroline said flatly.

“I don’t care,” Randy said. “I am so, so sorry…”

“For what?” Caroline asked. “None of this is your fault. You don’t have to apologize.”

Randy chuckled. “It’s nothing. Let’s…let’s go home, shall we Care-Bear?”

Caroline let herself be picked up - she was too tired to protest.

“Uh, hello?” Penelope said. “Am I invisible!”

“No,” Caroline said, looking at her from over her father’s shoulder. “I can still see you at least.”

“Penelope!”

Monica ran up to the couch.

“Mom!” Penelope said in surprise. “Where’s Theo?”

“He’s at a friend’s house,” Monica sighed. She lunged to hug Penelope. “Don’t you EVER scare me like that AGAIN, do you hear me?!”

“Well, you ARE pretty dang loud…” Penelope said cautiously.

“Oh, shut up,” Monica sobbed with relief.

Once all the children were gathered, everyone gathered in the lobby.

“Please feel free to come back anytime when the weather is better!” the librarian said.

“Can we Dad?” Caroline asked eagerly.

“Sure, why not?” Randy replied.

When everyone made it outside, Caroline was the only one surprised by the dead streetlights.

“When did that happen?” she asked.

“doesn’t matter,” Sans replied with a noncommittal shrug. “why don’tcha try seeing what happens when you think about them being on?”

“What,” the silver-eyed child said flatly.

“just try it.”

Caroline was skeptical, but curious. She tried doing as he said.

When the lights flickered on, she yelped.

She tried doing the opposite and imagining them off. They shut off with a clunk.

Was…was she the one doing that?

She imagined the lights flickering on and off. She giggled as they did so.
“I will explain everything at the sleepover at our house this weekend,” Toriel said. “I think we all need to rest awhile, do we not?”

The agreement was reached.

Caroline waved goodbye to her friends with a smile on her face.

She looked around at the horizon.

It was still raining, but not near as hard as it had been. She could see the sunset in the distance.

She smiled. Things were DEFINITELY going to get better from now on.

All of these new discoveries fill you with

DETERRMINATION

Chapter End Notes

Have You Ever Seen The Rain - Creedence Clearwater Revival
4:27 P.M., December 8, 20XQ

It's a chilly day outside.

Wind is blowing.

Trees are leafless.

On days like this, kids like you...

...are waiting for your friends to get here.

The doorbell rang. Frisk got up to answer it.

They opened the door to find Helen with Brian, Hunter, and Hannah.

Frisk stepped out of the doorway and gestured them inside.

Yasmin ran down the stairs, barking at the new friends. She was now fully grown, almost as tall as Caroline and Sans when standing on her hind legs. Her thick brown fur was perfect for winter weather.

Helen whistled in amazement. “That’s a big ‘un you got here,” she said.

Frisk petted Yasmin with pride.

Hannah stared at the dog like she was the best thing in existence.

She reached out toward Yasmin, who pressed her nose into the little girl’s hand. Hannah giggled at the strange new feeling of the dog’s cold wet nose on her palm. She scratched behind the dog’s ears.

Hunter was nervous, but they too began to pet the dog. Brian joined them soon after.
Toriel came into the living room.

“Ah, hello Helen!” she greeted. “Do come in! The weather’s not near as bad it was on Monday, but that does not mean that the weather is pleasant.”

“Thank you,” Helen said. “I can’t stay too long since I have to pick up groceries. But if you have any Dr. Pepper, I’ll take it.”

“Understood, I will get one for you right now,” Toriel offered as she went into the kitchen.

Helen hugged Brian goodbye as he went upstairs with his friends to play with the dog.

She left once Toriel gave her her Dr. Pepper.

Randy’s F-150 pulled up and Sharona, Levi, Penelope and Caroline got out of the car.

Caroline was grabbing at her left shoulder nervously.

Levi noticed. “You’re gonna do fine,” he assured. “You did it before, you can do it again!”

Caroline nodded, gaining confidence. She dropped her hand from her shoulder.

They walked up to the door.

Caroline turned to face Levi, who turned to face her. They nodded at each other in unison.

Caroline rang the doorbell.

Toriel answered and smiled. “Well, that makes everybody! We just have to wait for Dr. Gaster to make it here -”

Then she was cut off by a familiar voice. “Well, I guess you don't have to wait long then!” the bearer of the voice said with a chuckle.

“And now we are ready!” Toriel said. “Caroline, follow me. Levi, Penelope, I am going to have to ask the two of you to join Frisk and the others for the time being. Alphys and Undyne will be by with Mamoru before long, so there is that.”

“Okay, cool!” Levi said. “Good luck, Caroline.”

“I wanna go with her…” Penelope mumbled.

Toriel smiled. “I understand Penelope, but considering why we are gathered here, it could be dangerous,” she explained.

“I walked through waist-deep floodwater for fifteen miles to save her,” Penelope said. “I’m sure I can take this.

“I have no doubt that you could, Penelope, but it is better to be safe than sorry.”

Penelope sighed. “Okay…but tell me once you guys’re done, okay?” she asked.

“Of course,” Toriel assured. “Come along, Caroline.”

Caroline nodded. She followed Toriel without a word.

She was nervous. But she was also excited. Like the feeling she got when she was about to read a
new book that she just knew she was going to love.

She followed Toriel down into the basement. She saw a ratty old foldout couch, on which Sans and Gaster were seated.

Caroline was suddenly more nervous upon seeing the older Skeleton.

Sans seemed to sense this.

“caroline,” he said, “this is my father, dr. w.d. gaster. he was the royal scientist of the underground before alphys. he will be helping us out today.”

“Nice to meet you,” Caroline greeted shyly.

“You as well, young one,” Gaster replied. Caroline tilted her head somewhat upon hearing his staticy, strangely-accented voice. It reminded her of a scratchy old recording of someone with an accent that could easily be either German, Russian, Scottish, or Bostonian. Maybe even an unholy hybrid of all four. All Caroline knew was that it was unique, at least from any she’d heard.

“So, uh, what’re we gonna do?” Caroline asked.

“First, we shall answer any questions you might have about Magic,” Gaster replied.

“Okay, good, because I have a LOT of ‘em,” Caroline said, taking a notebook out of her bag. “First of all, does Magic have limits? I would assume that the limit differs between users, but is there a limit that cannot be surpassed no matter what?”

The adults were silent as the stared at the eager and excited Caroline. “Yes,” Gaster answered. “There are limits. The spatial - or space-related - limit being travelling to other universes. The most one can possibly travel to is a space between universes known as the Void. The temporal - or time-related -”

“I know what spatial and temporal mean, Dr. Gaster,” Caroline interrupted. “I read the dictionary. If I don't know what a word means I’ll tell you.”

Gaster blinked. “Anyway, the temporal limit of Magic is more variable. It depends on how DETERMINED the Wizard is to change the course of events. That said, only one Human in each generation can bear a SOUL of pure DETERMINATION.”

“Um, sorry to interrupt again,” Caroline said, “but I have two questions about that.”

“Alright, go on.”

“Who is the Human with the pure DETERMINATION SOUL right now?”

“that would be frisk, actually,” Sans replied. “they have the pure red soul that comes about once in a lifetime among humans.”

“Wow,” Caroline said. “And you mentioned SOULs, which reminded me of last year when Penelope got into a fight. She said that she saw her SOUL, and that it was Green, and that the other kid’s SOUL was Blue. So I know of the colors Red, Green, and Blue, but what are the others? Are they the rest of the colors on the visible light spectrum?”

“Indeed they are, Caroline!” Toriel replied. “The colors also have correlated traits associated with them. Red, as you have heard, is DETERMINATION. Orange coincides with Bravery, Yellow with
Justice, Green with Kindness, Cyan with Patience, Blue with Integrity, and Purple with Perseverance.”

“Makes sense, I guess,” Caroline mused. “Penelope is pretty kind. But what is Integrity?”

“the tendency to hold fast to your beliefs and morals,” Sans responded.

“Well, I GUESS Miranda does that in a very bad sort of way,” Caroline mumbled. “But what about my SOUL? What Trait do I have?”

Gaster smiled strangely. “Why don’t we find out?” he said.

The area around Caroline went dark.

“I’m worried about Caroline,” Penelope whined. “What are they DOING wherever the heck they are?”

“Probably something boring,” Brian said dismissively. “Don’t worry about it.”

“You know, when you say that I just end up getting MORE worried,” Penelope said flatly.

The kids were all sitting in the den. Penelope was gnawing anxiously on her chewable necklace. Even that didn’t ease her anxiety.

Frisk’s phone went off.

*I text from: Elaina*

*hi

*hi! ^v^

*whats up~ ^v^*

*i just got out of dance class so i was bored

*hbu

*my friends are all over for a slumber party! -v-

*carolines a wizard! she can control lightning! ~(-v-)~

*wizard

*ya! ^=^=

*wow

*ikr?

*harry potter is real…

*whats harry potter

*you dont know who that is?! 0o0

Hannah snuck a peek over Frisk’s shoulder. “E…L…A…I…N…A…wuzzat spell?” she asked.

“Ooh, Elaina huh?” Penelope teased. “Whatcha talkin’ about?”

<<She doesn’t know who Harry Potter is,>> Frisk signed.

“I dunno who that is either…” Hunter admitted.

Frisk suddenly got an odd look in their ruby eyes.

They were DETERMINED to find what house their friends were in.

Caroline blinked a few times to adjust her eyes to the sudden darkness, only to find such adjustments unnecessary.

She was face to face with a Purple heart with white webbing similar to cracks in glass on three strings of the same shade of purple. She tried to move, only to find that the heart moved instead, jumping from line to purple line.

“Perseverance,” Caroline whispered.

“So it would seem,” Gaster said.

Caroline tilted her head away from her SOUL to face the Skeleton’s cracked face.

“Welcome, Caroline Marlow, to Encounter Mode!” he announced. “I am Doctor WingDings Gaster, and I shall be your guide on this route of your tour of the world of Magic!”

“No there WingDings Wonka,” Caroline said. “I got a few questions first.”

“Save any and all questions for the end of this section of the tour, Miss Marlow!” Gaster chided playfully. “First, I must explain a few things!”

“That heart in that box is my SOUL, I know that much,” Caroline said.

“That it is,” Gaster said, “but your SOUL is unique from those of normal Humans.”

“How so?” Caroline asked.

“Normal Human SOULs don’t have any white on them,” the Skeleton answered, “but Wizards do as a result of their creation. See that number next to your name? That represents your LV, or LOVE. LOVE means Level Of ViolencE. The yellow bar next to that number is your HP.”

Caroline stared at the numbers.
Caroline
LV: 1
HP: 30/30

“If your HP reaches zero, your SOUL will shatter, killing you. As a Wizard, your SOUL is around three-fourths the strength of that of an average Human, but should you undergo a second near-death experience, that three-fourths with double.”

“So I’m a Wizard because I shoulda died but didn't?” Caroline asked

“A rather pessimistic view of it, but yes, that is essentially the case,” Gaster admitted. “The act of surviving violent betrayal against all odds only to come out of the other side with Magical abilities is known as a Wizarding.”

Caroline brightened a bit at having learned a new word.

Gaster chuckled at the sight. “That line beneath your HP counter is your MP counter. MP is the amount of Magic occurring naturally in your SOUL - specifically, the White parts.”

Caroline checked her MP.

MP: 20/20

“A White SOUL’s Trait would be Magic then?” Caroline guessed.

“In the case of Humans, yes,” Gaster said. “You are quite astute, Miss Marlow.”

“Is it really that big a deal?” Caroline asked. “It seems pretty obvious to me. Maybe it’s another of those things people gloss over…?”

“MOVING ON THEN,” Gaster shouted. Upon seeing Caroline flinch, he clears his throat. “My apologies Miss Marlow, for while I admire your enthusiasm, why not save it for the REAL lesson?”

Caroline nodded quickly, stiffening so as not to suggest enthusiasm.

Gaster sighed. “Anyway, when your MP runs out, while your SOUL will not immediately shatter, you will have to take Magic from the surrounding aether each time you use Magic. This will cause your HP to decrease by a small fraction each time you use a non-physical attack.”

“You mean like in Pokemon, when a Pokemon’s PP hits zero on all four moves, they use Struggle, which causes recoil damage each time it’s used?” Caroline estimated.

“Yes, in a way.”

“Huh,” Caroline mused. “Okay then. But why show me all of this since I really doubt you’d wanna attack me?”

“Because while I have no desire to FIGHT, there may come a time when someone WILL mean you harm, so it would behoove you to learn how to defend yourself,” Gaster explained. “And to that end, I shall ask you to test out the options below.”

Caroline>ACT>Check

W.D. Gaster
Your friend’s grandfather. He seems weird, but really nice.

Gaster>FIGHT

Gaster sent some bones along the wires Caroline’s SOUL was on.

Caroline moved her SOUL away from the bones.

Caroline>ACT>Joke

“I wonder whose line THIS is,” Caroline joked.

Gaster snickered.

Gaster>ACT>Check

Caroline Marlow

LV: 1

HP: 30/30

MP: 20/20

AT: 2.5

DF: 15

MS: 10

Your grandchild's friend. She really should not be this strong without training…

Caroline>ACT>Ask

“How old are you?” Caroline asked.

“Six centuries, threescore and one year,” Gaster replied.

Gaster>MERCY>Spare

Caroline>Accept

The darkness phased out, the basement replacing it.

Caroline had to readjust her eyes to a less video game-like reality.

“You seem to understand the basic mechanics of encounters well enough on your own,” Gaster remarked. “Well done, Miss Marlowe!”
Caroline flushed under the praise. “T-thank you, sir…”

“well,” Sans said, “now that that’s outta the way…”

Sans held out his hand.

“hold on tight, kid,” he said. “this might tingle a bit.”

Caroline took his hand. Static began to fill her vision, then binary code, then the open sky from atop Mt. Ebott.

“well caroline,” Sans said, “let’s see what all that magic of yours can do.”

“What.”

“Okay, so let’s see here,” Levi started to surmise, “I’m Slytherin; Caroline’s Ravenclaw; Elaina, Penelope, and Frisk are Hufflepuff; and Brian and Hunter are Gryffindor, right?”

Frisk nodded. Then they perked up their ears at the sound of the doorbell.

They hopped up, running and ignoring their friends.

They answered the door. Enter Alphys and Undyne with baby Mamoru in Alphys’ arms.

Frisk waved at them and peered at their tiny cousin.

They made a blep face at him. He stared at them with a disinterested expression.

Then Mamoru sneezed in Frisk’s face.

Frisk blinked a few times, eyes wide. They walked over to an end table to grab a tissue with which to wipe their face free of baby dinosaur snot.

Frisk directed them to the den, where their friends were all sitting.

“Hey Mrs. Undyne, hey Dr. Alphys,” the kids managed in unison.

“Hey, punks!” Undyne greeted. “Have you guys met my son Mamoru? He’s only, like, the coolest baby EVER!”

Penelope stood up and walked over, leaning in to look at the tiny light green Monsterling.

She booped his snoot. Mamoru wrinkled his nose slightly. Penelope booped the snoot again. Mamoru giggled.

Penelope fought the urge to squeal at the cuteness.

Hannah got up next. She jogged up to the little baby and gasped. “A baby dinosaur…” she whispered in awe.

Alphys giggled. “W-well, you’re n-not wrong…”

“So where’s Caroline?” Undyne asked. “I know she’s supposed to be figuring out her Magic, but where at?”

The kids shrugged.
“Probably somewhere cool,” Penelope sighed.

“What,” Caroline said flatly.

“I want you to focus as much of your power as you can,” Sans said. He reached into his dimensional box on his phone and retrieved what looked like a handheld speedometer. “I’m gonna be using this to measure the energy output of your magic.”

Caroline was nervous. “Are ya sure?” she asked. “I mean, I know about your whole 1 HP thing, so like, what if you get hurt?”

“I can get outta the way just fine, kiddo,” Sans reassured her. “Thanks for worryin’, though.”

Caroline looked down at the granite beneath her boots. She took a deep breath.

She looked ahead toward the horizon.

She focused.

Caroline saw lightning bolts flash across the blue afternoon sky, many in quick succession.

She focused harder.

Caroline saw a sheet of lightning bolts, barely a hair’s width between them all.

It suddenly occurred to her that SHE was the one creating them.

She focused the hardest she could in this moment, creating an image with her mind’s eye.

Caroline saw the sky become a spiral of lightning, swirling around - slow at first, but speeding up the more she forced herself to concentrate.

“Okay, i think i got it, you can stop now,” Sans said nervously.

Caroline didn’t hear him. She was mesmerized by the swirling lightning in the sky above. The spiral grew and grew, filling the sky above the mountain with bolts and sparks and electricity.

She mentally envisioned the lightning forming a flower shape. The lightning looped and twisted on itself in the sky, forming the shape of an orchid. She willed the lightning to turn into a heart. She willed it to turn into the One Ring.

Sans was sweating, eyelights out, grin hard, teeth grinding. He looked at the screen on the measuring device.

Caroline should not have this level of Magic - not without a few years of training, at least.

He recorded the observations as calmly as he could. This should not be possible.

Just what has this kid been through?

Sans finished recording his observations and cleared his throat.

“Caroline, that’s enough,” he said seriously.

Caroline ceased focusing. The lightning patterns in the sky disappeared with a thunderous, deafening bang. She then realized that sans looked kind of… scared.
Which caused her to panic.


She started crying.

“no, no, you did nothing wrong,” Sans assured. “you - you did pretty good, actually. so calm down, okay? let’s go back to the house to finish up today’s lesson, capice?”

Caroline sniveled, nodding. She wiped her eyes and grabbed Sans’ hood.

Sans looked up at her and sighed as static and binary filled their visions.

How is it that everyone was taller than him?

When Sans and Caroline found themselves in the basement once more, the screams of a fussy baby could be heard.

Caroline covered her ears and shrunk in on herself to try and calm herself down again.

Undyne broke the basement door off its hinges, disregarding any locks that existed.

“How do I make my kid stop crying?!” she yelled.

“Well, first you should calm down -” Gaster began.

“How THE FUCK AM I SUPPOSED TO CALM DOWN WHEN MY CHILD IS CRYING FOR UNKNOWN REASONS?” Undyne shouted.


Undyne looked at Toriel, death glare in her eye. She snarled.

“Undyne, when either you or Alphys are agitated, Mamoru can sense it as well,” Toriel explained. “So if Mamoru was already crying to begin with, being angry will only make it worse.”


“Have you fed him?” Gaster asked.

Undyne nodded.

“Burped him?”

Another nod.

“maybe he needs sleep?” Sans offered.

“He already had his nap, before we got here!” Undyne claimed.

“And how long ago was that?” Toriel asked.

Undyne’s face fell. “Two hours ago…”

“Maybe he hates crowds too, didja ever think of that?!” Caroline shouted.
“Kid, what the he -”

“She has a point, Undyne,” Gaster said. “Babies are often prone to sensory overstimulation. Some time alone with either you or Alphys could be helpful.”

Undyne paused.

“Fine,” she said. “Thanks for the help.”

“Of course,” Gaster replied.

“Anytime!” chimed Toriel.

“good luck,” Sans said.

“You’re welcome,” Caroline offered.

Undyne stared at Caroline for a moment before retreating back up the stairs. She looked at the door. “I’ll come over tomorrow and fix this,” she offered.

Then she went back to where Alphys and the crying Mamoru were. “Good news, he just needs some space,” Undyne said.

“So do I!” Penelope said. Frisk nodded in agreement.

“O-okay then,” Alphys squeaked. She stood up from her place and left the room, followed by Undyne.

They walked into the living room with the crying Mamoru and sat down on the couch. “Okay, NOW what do we do?” Undyne asked nobody in particular.

“Um, w-we could try a lullaby!” Alphys suggested.

“Yeah, great idea babe!” Undyne said. “You’re so smart!”

Alphys never would stop blushing whenever Undyne praised her.

“I’ll try first!” Undyne offered, taking their son from her wife’s arms.

Oh no.

Undyne cleared her throat.

The sounds released caused Mamoru to cry louder.

Alphys sighed. “Give him to me,” she said. “I’ll do it.”

Undyne passed him off eagerly. She may not be the first to admit so due to her pride, but she… cannot sing. At all.

Alphys gently held her son in her arms and began to sing. “Dango~ Dango~ Dango~ Dango~ Dango~ Daikazoku~”
Alphys continued the song, Mamoru calming down within seconds.

Undyne watched in awe. Just when she thought she couldn’t fall more in love with Alphys, she was proven wrong. And that delighted her.

Undyne knew she was smiling. She didn’t care. Let the world see her smile. Because right now, she was in heaven.

Penelope was pouting. She wanted to see Caroline.

At least Mamoru wasn’t crying anymore. That was a relief.

Penelope thought. She never expected to meet someone from Colorado when she first moved to Ebott - much less someone so awesome, and ESPECIALLY not a Wizard. She didn’t expect to make friends, either. Especially not one like Caroline.

And now Caroline was a Wizard. That could only mean one thing,

Caroline would be going to Hogwarts next year. Without her.

The thought made Penelope cry.

“Are you okay, Penelope?” Hunter asked in concern.

“No,” Penelope sobbed. “Caroline’s goin’ to Hogwarts next year…”

“What the heck are you talking about?” Brian asked.

Levi’s eyes widened. “Oh my god, it all makes sense!”

“What? No it doesn’t!” Brian said in exasperation.

“No Brian, think about it,” Hunter said. “Caroline’s a Wizard, right?”

“Yeah…?”

“And Wizards go to Hogwarts when they turn eleven, right?”

Brian’s eyes widened. “Oh my god…”

Penelope started full-on bawling. “I don’t want Caroline to go to Hogwarts!”

Frisk patted Penelope’s back soothingly. They too were crying. Not quite as loudly as Penelope, but just as grossly. Snot was running from their nose, causing them to wipe their nose on their sleeve.

Levi was crying a bit, too. Hunter ran over to Penelope and Frisk, hugging them and sobbing.

Brian sighed. “Hunter, Levi…stop it, you guys - you’re guys, guys don’t cry.”

“Shut up, you sexist jerkface!” Penelope sobbed.

“But I wasn’t -” Brian started, before sighing, It wasn’t worth it. Besides, he felt a bit of something in his eye too.

He sniffed. “Oh, screw this!” he cried out as he ran to join the tear-stained, snot-filled group hug.
The group sobbed in each other’s arms.

“If one of you wipes snot on me, you’re dead,” Brian sobbed.

“Okay, tori, you can pick up the last leg of the lesson while me ‘n dad run over the results, okay?” Sans said.

Toriel nodded. “I will, Sans. Text me when you two are finished, please?”

“if we finish up first, sure,” Sans said. “but if you finish first, you’d better text, okay?”

Toriel smiled warmly and nodded. “Of course.”

And then Sans and Gaster shortcutted out of the basement, leaving Toriel and Caroline alone.

“So what now?” Caroline inquired.

“Now, I am going to briefly explain the history of Magic, as well as a summary of the lives of some well-known Wizards,” Toriel explained. “I will also give you questions to answer. How you answer them will give me insight as to the precise nature of your Magic.”

Caroline took out her notebook and a pencil. She glanced up at Toriel, positioning the notebook on her lap as she sat cross-legged and hunched over on the ratty old foldout couch.

Toriel sat down next to her, smiling at the young Wizard’s eagerness.

“Now, Magic has been used by Monsters since time immemorial,” Toriel began. “Humans only became capable of using Magic once they began interbreeding with Monsters.”

“So does that mean that for a Human to be able to use Magic, they would have to have Monster ancestors?” Caroline asked.

“That is correct, yes,” Toriel replied.

“But is it possible to tell what kind of Monster a Wizard is descended from?” Caroline asked.

“Well, while it is difficult to be exact, potential ancestral species can be identified through the type of Magic,” Toriel explained.

“Then what would I be descended from?” Caroline asked, awed by this new information.

“Well, going by what we have seen of your Magic, you could be descended from a variety of Reptilian such as a Snake or Dragon, or a Fire or Lightning Elemental,” Toriel explained. “There is also the possibility that one of your ancestors could be an Eagle, or even a Skeleton.”

“Wow, that is a lot of potential great-grandparents,” Caroline remarked. “So does my Magic say anything about me as a person? Like can it be a sort of personality test?”

“Actually, it can!” Toriel said. “Lightning has been said to announce the presence of deities or other such beings of great power. Lightning also symbolizes creativity and destruction, inspiration, power, clarity, revelation, and enlightenment.”

“I am very confused, but continue on with your original point, about how Humans didn’t get Magic until one of them made babies with a Monster. Tell me about that, it sounds like fun story.”
Toriel blinked. “Ookay then,” she said, utterly bewildered at this child’s thought process. “Allow me to tell the story of the first wizard, Alberto Malich…”

“Are you sure you recorded these things properly, Sans?” Gaster asked, not sure what to believe.

“Dad, I know that this is what I saw,” Sans said. “This kid can’t have gone through just one wizarding…”

“I suspected that much when I noticed her stats,” Gaster mused. “What kind of person would intentionally put a child through such a life?”

“No wonder Randy looked like he was gonna break down back on Monday,” Sans said. “He knows exactly what kind of person would do that.”

“But even with at least one more Wizarding than we were told of, the level of control she has if your observations are correct…stars above, I’ve not seen such skillful control since Papyrus…”

“Yeah, and in both cases they had no idea what they were doing,” Sans remarked.

“Perhaps it has much to do with their mental faculties,” Gaster surmised. “Both are on the autism spectrum, if I am not mistaken?”

“You were there for Pap’s diagnosis, and Caroline was diagnosed shortly before her move,” Sans said in confirmation.

“And one of the hallmarks of some autism spectrum disorders is the ability to hyperfocus…” Gaster muttered, more to himself than Sans by this point.

“I was talkin’ about that with the psych professor at the university,” Sans said. “Apparently in certain settings it would be more accurate to refer to hyperfocus as…”

“Perseveration!” Gaster cried, shooting up from his place, pointing a finger in the air. “Of COURSE! The level of control has much to do with the Color of the SOUL! And what color is Caroline’s SOUL, Sans?”

“Woul’nt know, never seen it,” Sans said, amused by his father’s enthusiasm.

“Purple, Sans!” Gaster cried, holding onto Sans by the shoulders. “She has the SOUL Trait best-suited for self-control!”

“Huh,” Sans remarked. “Never really noticed much of that when it came to books…”

“Uheheh, yes, but is that really a lack of self-control, or does she know what she is doing?”

Sans paused to consider.

“But I do believe that we have our results organized,” Gaster said. “Sans, do let Toriel know that we have concluded our studies and shall be returning shortly.”

“Already done, Dadster,” Sans said, putting his phone back in his pocket. “Already done…”

“…and so ended the life of Merlin,” Toriel concluded.

Caroline was positively enraptured. “Wow,” she breathed. “And here I thought Mordred was
Arthur’s kid and Morgana was his half-sister…”

“Arthur never had children, his line ended with his death,” Toriel said.

“Oh, okay then.”

“Do you have any more questions?” Toriel asked.

Caroline looked from Toriel to her notebook and back again. She opened her notebook and tore out three pages and handed them to the Boss Monster.

“You don’t have to answer all of them, just the ones you know the answers to,” Caroline tried to assure.

Toriel stared at the sheaf of papers. There were questions written on the front and back of the first two pages, and half way down one side of the third.

“I’m also gonna need a copy of that version of the Arthurian legend you told me,” the girl added.

“That was REALLY good.”

Toriel, though taken aback by Caroline’s enthusiasm, smiled warmly. “Of course,” she said. “I am glad you enjoyed it.”

Caroline smiled brightly.

Then Toriel’s phone went off.

She checked it.

“Sans and Dr. Gaster are on their way back,” she said. “I will return these questions to you on Monday answered as best I can.”

“And I’ll turn in MY homework Monday as well,” Caroline giggled.

“hey hey, party people,” Sans said as he shortcutted into the room with his father.

“I shall assume that you both are finished with this leg of the introduction?” Gaster said.

“I guess, but I have one last question,” Caroline said.

“go ahead,” Sans said.

“Is Hogwarts real?”

Flowey wasn’t a fan of being forgotten, but he would admit that it did have its advantages.

For example, it leaves one free to watch children cry without being noticed.

But watching children wasn’t particularly fun when it’s loud and annoying and involves someone Flowey would never in a million years admit to caring about.

Flowey saw the reason for the snot and tears walk through the entryway to the den where the children wept in each other’s arms.

Caroline stared at Flowey in confusion. Flowey shrugged as best a sociopathic flower could shrug.
“Hey, uh, why the heck are you guys crying?” Caroline asked over the sobs.

“Caroline!” Penelope shrieked as she shoved through the other kids and tackle-hugged her best friend. “I don’t want you to go to Hogwarts!”

“None of us do!” Levi sobbed.

“Hogwarts isn’t real,” Caroline said flatly. “Neither are Beauxbatons, Durmstrang, or Ilvermorny. There are no Magic schools in existence.”

The silence that came over them was interrupted by only sniffles. “What?”

“There is no Hogwarts, guys,” Caroline repeated. “I asked, and any Magic schools that could have existed would have been destroyed by either Humans or the passage of time from the sealing of Monsters in the Underground.”

“So you’re not leaving the country to learn Magic?” Hunter checked.

“Sadly, no,” Caroline sighed. “As AWESOME as that would be, not only do Magic schools not exist, I don’t have a passport, so any attempts to leave this dreaded place would end in failure…”

“You mean I cried for no reason?!” Brian screamed.

“You guys were crying because you thought I was gonna go to Hogwarts?” Caroline asked, bewildered.

“You mean I cried for no reason?!” Penelope whined.

Caroline sighed as she hugged the sobbing Penelope and rubbed her back. “You guys are so weird…”

“WE’RE the weird ones?!” Brian repeated. “YOU’RE the one with the Magical zappy-shocky stuff goin’ on!”

“Brian, you’re ruining the moment, now hush!” Hunter snapped as he walked over to hug Caroline and Penelope.

Frisk ran to join the group hug, followed by Levi.

“C’mon, Bri, get over here!” Hunter said.

Brian grumbled as he went to join the new group hug.

He had some weird friends…

That night, when the kids were asleep, Sans and Toriel cuddled and chatted about the day’s events.

“So you really think Caroline suffered more than one Wizarding?” Toriel asked, concerned.

“as much i don’t wanna believe it, all the signs point to at least one other Wizarding at some point in her life,” Sans said, playing with Toriel’s ear to calm both her and himself.

“Then Randy should have said something!” Toriel said.

“maybe it’s one of those things…where saying it happened would make it real, and you don’t want it
to be real, y’know?” Sans reasoned. “i mean, that’s a big part of why i was reluctant to talk about my
dad when we’d first met, because…i didn’t wanna admit he was gone, y’know?”

“But he’s here now,” Toriel assured him. “And isn’t that what matters? He’s here, you’re here, I’m
here…” Toriel sighed as she held Sans close to her. “I’m here, okay dear?”

Sans hummed, content.

“Good night, Sans,” Toriel said, pressing a kiss to her lover’s forehead. “I love you.”

“mmm, love ya too, toriel…” Sans yawned, turning out the light with his Blue Magic.

Then he realized something…

He was dating a pun.

“holy shit, how could i not have noticed?!”

Your expanding world fills you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

A King Of Magic - Queen
Dango Daikazoku - Clannad

Fun Fact: This chapter was a bit rough to write - after the doozy that was the last
chapter, where do you pick up? Well, we've managed, and I really hope y'all're ready
for Christmas in April.
Merry Christmas (I Don't Want To Fight Tonight)

Chapter Summary

Christmas in April? Sweet!!!

Chapter Notes

Merry Christmas in April.
Warning: Elements of eye trauma in this chapter. You have been warned.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

7:30 A.M., December 23, 20XQ

It’s a cold, wintry morning outside.

The lights are bright.

The sun has not yet risen.

On days like this, kids like you…

... are preparing for last-minute shopping.

Frisk screamed internally as they sat on the living room couch while Sans tied their boots.

With all the crazy stuff this past month, their family forgot to go shopping for the holidays ahead of time, and now they were shopping last-minute.

The fear of the crowds that surely awaited them filled them with dread.

“it’ll be okay, kid,” Sans assured. “this too shall pass. we’ll be hitting grillby’s on our way back, so there’s that to look forward to, okay?”

Frisk nodded.

Toriel entered the living room, purse slung over her shoulder.

“Are we all set?” she asked. “Papyrus is waiting for us at Mettaton’s.”

“i know i am,” Sans said. “howzabout you, merry friskmas? you ready?”

Frisk jumped to their feet and nodded.
They were now filled with **DETERMINATION**.

FILE: SAVE.

Caroline turned the volume on her phone all the way up and played Highland Cathedral, to the confusion of Randy, Sharona, and Levi.

She stood before her family, cleared her throat and prepared to speak.

“Family - Randy Duane, Sharona Mary, Levi Denzel. It is here we brace ourselves. For what? I’ll tell you what - last-minute shopping. There will be people there. Not just ANY people, either - people doing the exact same thing we will be. It’s going to be HELL in there. People with a mission, people with no idea what they need, people with no regard for the safety of themselves or others, people who don’t want to be here any more than we do. But one thing is certain. One of us may not make it. And so I say to you, one of us must live to tell the tale of this fateful mission. For who lives, who dies, who tells your story - there must be someone to do each of those things.”

The other three members of the Marlow-Goldsby family stared at Caroline.

“And so,” Caroline continued, as the bagpipe in the song swelled triumphantly, “as the youngest and only daughter of the Marlow-Goldsby family, I sacrifice myself. I shall stay behind to protect our vehicle from theft, while the men brave the elements to acquire our treasures.”

“Caroline, you’re coming with us whether you want to or not, I am NOT leaving you in the car after what happened over Spring Break,” Randy said firmly. “And no you can’t use your Magic to force people away, someone might have a pacemaker or something.”

Caroline slumped, whining.

She hated crowds enough as it was.

Wait.

“Hey!” Caroline said in realization. “Pacemakers react to magnetism, not electricity!”

“You’re still coming with us,” Randy said. “Believe me, I don’t want to do this any more than you do, but the wireless router was busted so we couldn’t shop online like we wanted at first, and when we finally could everything on our Amazon wishlists were sold out. So we have no choice, Caroline.”

“And if all else fails, there’s Barnes & Noble gift cards!” Sharona added.

“And that right there is why I love you,” Randy said to Sharona as he leaned over and kissed her on the temple.

“And there’s an ICE RINK at this mall~” Levi sang.

Caroline perked up instantly and grabbed her bag.

“Let’s go,” she hissed fiercely.

She didn’t want to do this at all. But she had to.

She would **Persevere**.
Linda wrapped Hunter and Hannah in their coats. She grabbed her purse.

Hunter and Hannah turned to look at each other. They were capable of putting their own coats on - Linda KNEW that. And yet she insisted anyway. “Because I do it better,” she’d said when they’d asked her.

Hannah had trouble moving, but she was too afraid to complain or adjust her coat so that she could.

Hunter wanted to hum - nay, needed to. Their chest was so tight they could barely breathe.

They needed a new jacket.

Or a new mom. That would be cool too.

But for now, there was shopping to do.

They would probably buy a jacket for themself - preferably something in blue.

But there was still time.

They would just have to have patience.

Mettaton’s alarm clock went off at 8:30 in the morning, exactly two and a half hours before he was due at the studio for his interview.

He got out of the hotel bed to get ready. He showered and put on his outfit - a red blouse and black slacks with red heels. He put on his red sparkly lipstick and gold eyeshadow and eyeliner and mascara.

And it only took him an hour and a half.

He put on his red trench coat and white cossack hat and sat in the lobby, awaiting his ride.

He got out his phone to text Papyrus.

*Hey babe~

*HELLO HONEY!

Papyrus then proceeded to send a selfie of him in Toriel’s van. Toriel was in the driver’s seat smiling, while Sans and Frisk sat in the back waving and smiling. Papyrus was in the passenger’s seat, holding the camera and winking with a smile.

*WE’RE DOING CHRISTMAS SHOPPING!

Mettaton smiled warmly at the image and sighed with his free hand over where his heart would be were he Human.

He took a selfie, holding up the peace sign and winking while making a kissyface at the camera.

*One hour until hell...

*GOOD LUCK HONEY! YOU CAN MAKE IT THROUGH!

*Well, now that YOU’VE texted me, I feel like I can do ANYTHING!
Mettaton’s phone rang.

He checked the caller ID and answered.

“How about now?” said the familiar countertenor on the other end.

“Okay, are you trying to overload me here darling?” Mettaton teased.

“What if I said yes?” Papyrus asked. “What would you do about it?”

“Well then, I would just have to punish you when I get back tomorrow,” Mettaton replied, voice sultry.

“Is that so?” Papyrus said, voice equally seductive.

Mettaton heard the other people inside the car express their disgust. He heard Sans chastise his brother for flirting in the car with a child present.

Mettaton couldn’t help the laughter that bubbled up.

Then he saw a man in a black suit holding up a sign with his name on it.

“Oh crap, my ride’s here,” Mettaton hissed. “I have to go to hell now darling, wish me luck~”

“Okay then! Good luck!” Papyrus chirped. “And goodbye! I love you!”

“I love you too, Sugar Skull!” Mettaton replied as he made a kissing sound into the receiver, which Papyrus managed to reciprocate (Skeletons never ceased to amaze him…).

Mettaton hung up his phone before standing and sashaying to the waiting limousine.

He knew exactly what he was going to do. He’d planned for every possible scenario. He had responses for every question, comebacks for every insult, and pictures of Papyrus to show off.

This could only go well. How could it be otherwise when he was going to show off his super-cute boyfriend?

Elaina put her pale purple winter coat on, and laced up her boots. She sighed, realizing that her mom would force her through an excruciating 1½-2 hours of shopping for all of her mom’s “friends”. At least her sisters would send her stuff that she actually wants. Too bad they couldn't make it home this year…

“Elaina, let’s go!” her mom called.

“C-coming!” Elaina cried out.

She ran to the stairs, stopping just before Irma saw her. She didn’t want to get called out for running in the house.

She didn’t dare jump from the next-to-last step, no matter how much her heart longed to do so. She did NOT want her mother to yell at her for jumping around in the house.
She walked into the kitchen, where her mother was filling a thermos with coffee.

Irma slung her purse over her shoulder and went out the car without a word.

Elaina was sorely tempted to just stay behind, fearful that her mother didn’t want her to come along.

“ELAINA!” Irma screeched. “CAR! NOW!”

Elaina squeaked and walked swiftly out to the car.

It never occurred to her that she had forgotten her gloves and earmuffs.

Frisk KNEW that this would happen.

This was the largest crowd they had ever seen, bar two or three.

They felt their rib cage squeeze their heart and lungs and crawl up to squeeze their throat.

Their vision tunneled around them.

Then they felt a pair of strong bony arms lift them high.

“FRISK, YOU’LL BE ALRIGHT!” Papyrus said. “JUST STICK WITH US AND IT’LL BE FINE!”

Frisk smiled weakly. He set them down as two people with rainbow dyed hair ran past, chased by a slightly overweight man with greasy brown hair.

“GET BACK HERE YOU TWO!!!” the brown haired man yelled. One of the two rainbow haired people turned around and flipped the man off. His face turned red. He continued to chase after the two people. Soon, he was out of sight. Frisk wondered what that was about.

Probably not important anyway.

They started walking toward the place they needed to go, ironically in the same direction as the two people went.

Frisk tapped Papyrus on the skull to get his attention.

Once they had his attention, they began to sign.

<<Where are mom and dad?>> they asked.

“OH, THOSE TWO ARE BUYING EACH OTHER’S PRESENTS!” Papyrus replied. “THEY’LL BE BACK SHORTLY, SO WHY DON’T WE STOP FOR SOMETHING TO SNACK ON BEFORE WE START?”

Frisk nodded eagerly.

“OKAY THEN!” Papyrus replied with enthusiasm. “JUST GIVE ME THE SIGNAL WHEN YOU SEE SOMETHING YOU’D LIKE!”

Frisk gave a grunt of acknowledgement.

Papyrus started moving. From their perch upon the tall Skeleton’s shoulders, Frisk could easily see across the sea of people.
Then they saw a familiar face by a pretzel stand. And since pretzel with cheese sounded delicious right now…

Frisk tapped Papyrus’ skull and pointed in the direction of the pretzel stand. Papyrus nodded in understanding and rushed to the stand.

Once they had gotten what they wanted, Frisk directed Papyrus over to the familiar face.

Papyrus brightened. “OH, SANS, THERE YOU ARE!”

“here i am,” Sans said, gesturing to himself. “but i doubt i could rock anyone like a hurricane.”

<<Mom would disagree,>> Frisk said with a smirk.

Sans’ eyelights shut off as a cyan blush covered his face and he choked on nothing.

“What did they say?” Papyrus asked in exhaustion.

Sans was still gasping for breath (despite his Skeletal nature).

“frisk…kid…wh-why?” sans panted.

Frisk shrugged, the smirk still on their face.

Once Sans has retained his bearings, they went to sit down on a bench.

Frisk looked around, wondering where to head off to next…

Caroline shrunk in on herself as best she could with her every muscle tensed in fear and anxiety.

She looked down, avoiding the gazes of the people as she held her father’s hand.

She wanted to die. But considering that she’d nearly died before and failed, she decided to force herself onward through this cesspool of capitalism.

Then she spotted it.

The promised ice rink.

Was this where her father had been leading her? It seemed a bit less crowded than the rest of the mall. Maybe there was a limit to how long one could stay in there…?

Randy led her to the front desk, where they got exactly one child’s ticket from a very skeptical-looking cashier and went to acquire their skates.

“You’re not staying,” Caroline stated rather than asked.

“Nope,” Randy said. “You’re on your own for a bit, Care Bear. You’re old enough now and strong enough that I trust you’ll be fine on your own.”

Caroline’s eyes widened in awe. “Really?” she asked, gratefulness and nervousness and excitement all in her voice.

Randy nodded, a proud smile gracing his bearded face. “Yes, really. Now get out there and show ‘em who’s boss, Care Bear.”
Caroline smiled, big and bright. “Okay!”

She pulled on her skates and ran off to the rink.

Randy sighed. His little girl was growing up so fast. He should have guessed she would the moment she came home from the hospital. He recalled her wide, silver eyes on her scrunchy pink baby face. No baby should have been capable of such focus at one day old.

He was so proud.

He still is.

He walked off to buy presents. Maybe a little something for himself from the bookstore while he got gift cards…

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Hunter had been ordered to watch over Hannah in the play area by Linda. “You’re her brother, it’s your job to keep boys away from her!” she’d said.

Hunter heard so many things wrong with that sentence that they were just going to not even bother.

Hunter knew what would happen if they told their mother that they were trans. They didn’t know exactly, but they knew it would be negative in some way. Most likely they would be kicked out of their house to fend for themself, but there was a voice in the back of their head nagging that she would actually literally kill them.

And then there was the whole “keeping boys away from Hannah” thing…

Hunter put their hands into their pockets and looked around.

Then they saw someone.

A girl in a pale purple coat. She seemed terrified for some reason. She was almost in tears. Maybe it was the crowd.

“Bub, what’re you lookin’ at?” Hannah asked as she walked up to where the platinum blonde was sitting.

“That girl in the purple over there looks lost,” Hunter said, subtly pointing to the girl.

“We should help her then!” Hannah said. “She’s lost, so we should help her, right?”

Hunter panicked a little bit. “W-well, yeah, b-but Mom would -”

“Mom’s not here right now, is she?” Hannah asked.

“W-well, no, but -”

“Then let’s help her!” Hannah asserted. “I mean, good people help people in need, so if Mommy’s a good person, she’d be okay with us helping that girl, right?”

Hunter thought for a moment before smiling. “Yeah, you’re right Hanners. Let’s go help her, shall we?”

Hannah smiled.
Elaina was panicking. She’d managed to get separated from her mother in the crowd.

Her mom was gonna be so mad. But that wouldn't matter if she didn't find her mom.

But then again, somehow her mother always found her whenever she got lost. Like she was always following her or something.

And Elaina thought being lost was terrifying.

Elaina trembled and whimpered, putting her hand on her temples and biting her lip to keep from screaming.

“Hey, um excuse me, you with the purple jacket?” someone said. “Are you okay?”

Elaina was afraid to look up - what if this person was with her mother? What if this person WAS her mother but in disguise?! What if -

“Hey, hey, it’s okay, we’re gonna help you!” the person said. The person had a pretty voice…

“Bub, what do we do?” someone else - someone far younger - asked.

“We wait for her to calm down,” the person - apparently named Bub - said. “Come on, follow us. We’re about the same age, I think, so you can trust us!”

Elaina finally managed to glance up at Bub.

Bub was way pretty.

“Come on, there’s a free bench over there,” Bub said.

Once Elaina and Bub sat down, Elaina finally remembered something.

“U-um, e-e-excuse m-m-me,” she stuttered. “A-a-are you a f-f-f-friend of F-F-Frisk D-Dreemurr?”

Bub seemed to widen their eyes. “Uh, y-yeah?” they said. “Why d’you ask?”

“O-oh, well um, t-t-they s-showed me a p-p-puh-picture of t-their f-f-friends a-and I recognized you, I-I’m sorry -”

“Oh!” Bub said. “No wonder you seemed familiar! You’re Elaina, right?”

Elaina nodded.

“I’m Hunter, and this is my sister Hannah,” they introduced. “Are you lost?”

Elaina hesitated a bit. She honestly wasn’t sure if she was lost, or if she even minded in the first place.

“It’s okay if you are, it happens sometimes,” Hunter assured. “We know where our mom is, we’ll uh…ask her if she can help…”

Elaina shrunk in on herself in fear, but nodded anyway.

“Okay, come with us,” Hunter said calmly.

Elaina grabbed onto Hunter’s sleeve while Hannah held her sibling’s hand.
Frisk had some amazing friends…

Mettaton stared at the bouquet - no, the fucking MOUND - of fake pink and yellow flowers in disgust.

He looked out the dressing room window into the alleyway and saw a conveniently placed dumpster.

He took the tacky mountain of silk and plastic and tossed it into the dumpster without a second thought.

He sat on the couch and began to file his nails.

Lola Leigh was going to ‘pop in’ anytime between now and fifteen minutes before filming.

Then came a knock at the dressing room door. Mettaton turned his phone on to record the audio.

“Come in!” Mettaton called.

In came a woman with straight blonde hair and aqua eyes and a heavy tan in a strapless red pencil dress with white fur trim and a black belt and boots. She leaned seductively against the doorway.

Lola Leigh had entered.

“Hello, Mettaton~” she sang.

“Hello Linda,” Mettaton said dismissively.

“Oh, Mettaton, you can’t POSSIBLY have forgotten me ALREADY?” Lola said, walking into the room, swishing her hips seductively.

“Kind of hard to do that when you’re calling and texting me every other day,” Mettaton replied. “Good job on cutting back from twice an hour, though, must’ve taken a LOT of work.”

“Go fuck yourself,” the woman said, tone shifting suddenly.

“I have a boyfriend who does that for me, thank you,” Mettaton said dismissively.

Lola growled. “You know, if you’d stayed with me, we could have taken over the industry together. You’ve doomed yourself.”

Mettaton did not expect that. But he didn’t let it show beyond pausing his nail filing. “Doomed myself to what, exactly?”

“Oh, you know…” Lola said cheerfully. “Obscurity, decreased fanbase…the usual!”

“Ah yes,” Mettaton said in realization. “The Usual™! Happiness, unconditional support, someone who loves me for me and not something so silly and fleeting as my fame…of COURSE people would be jealous!”

“What?” Lola said incredulously.

Mettaton was dropping the act, he knew. But Lola didn’t, that much was obvious. She never was the brightest jewel in the box.

“Come ON, Lola, PAY ATTENTION,” Mettaton said. “Surely as a fellow celebrity you know how
some so-called ‘fans’ react to some of our decisions, like who we date. They aren’t true fans. They don’t see us as people.”

“BAH!” Lola laughed. “Monsters aren’t people!”

“Neither are assholes, and yet here you are.”

Lola’s face turned an unpleasant shade of pink.

“Honey, that shade does not suit you.”

Lola growled and left the dressing room.

Mettaton felt a bit of pride. He had the best boyfriend. And tonight, the entire country plus a live studio audience would recognize that.

And screw them if they didn’t.

---

Once Sans had finished his pretzel, he moved on to continue his shopping. He’d already bought gifts for Papyrus, Frisk, Mettaton, Alphys Undyne, Mamoru, and even little bobs and bits for Frisk’s friends in case they decided to join them again this year.

Now it was time to buy Toriel’s present. He’d known exactly what he’d wanted to get for her the moment he got his first paycheck. There was just one problem.

How does one behave in a jewellery store?

Sans decided to do what he always does and just go with the flow.

He stood outside of the jewellery store and took a deep breath to calm himself. And then he entered.

It was way bright in there. The white walls and white tile floors and glass cases on white pedestals did nothing but make the uncomfortable brightness brighter.

He looked around for what he was looking for. Then he saw it. There was even a size chart.

He walked up to the chart and read it. He made mental notes and comparisons, coming up with the best estimate about what he wanted.

He walked up to the glass case and browsed his options.

Then he found it.

It was a cabochon of star sapphire inlaid on a band of gold. It was so deceptively simple. It was one of the less expensive options he’d seen so far.

It was perfect.

A heavyset Human man with dark curly hair in a suit cleared his throat, getting Sans’ attention. His name tag gave his name as Steven.

“May I help you?” Steven asked.

Sans smiled. “actually, yeah,” Sans said. “do ya have this star sapphire in gold in a size nine?”

Steven smiled kindly. “We do! We’ll have to adjust the size though, that’ll take a few days, maybe a
“Okay, so that means it’ll be ready by new year’s,” Sans reasoned. “I can do that.”

“Okay! I’ll take your payment right over here,” Steven said.

Sans paid, giving Steven his number so he could update him.

“Whoever’s getting this must be real lucky,” Steven said with a smile.

Sans chuckled. “I’m pretty sure I’m the lucky one…”

Levi wasn’t quite sure when it had happened, but he had separated from Randy and Sharona.

Huh.

He wondered what to do. He could go to a customer service desk - but there weren’t any in this wing of the mall. He could look for a security guard - but how would he go about doing that? He could call 911 - but they surely had more important things to do than help a lost kid find his parents in a shopping mall.

So Levi decided to do what Caroline would have done…

He chose to wander.

Levi hummed along to the song playing over the intercom system.

Then he saw it.

A grand piano.

It was behind a bunch of velvet ropes - surely it must be important then, right?

But there were no signs indicating any importance, so maybe it was just there and someone put velvet ropes around it?

Levi shrugged. He climbed over the velvet ropes and began to play.

First was a bit of Grandma Got Run Over By A Reindeer.

When he’d finished, he heard a bit of applause.

So he decided to play a few more songs. Maybe Randy and Sharona would show up if he did!

About seven songs later, he’d amassed an audience of significant size.

But his parents weren’t in there.

He wondered what to do.

Then it hit him.

For the eighth song, Levi decided on a song more in line with his own religious affiliation. And since it was his mother’s as well, as well as the first day of Hanukkah…

Levi cracked his knuckles and began to play.
It was a simple tune, but it was still close to his heart.

Dreidel, Dreidel, Dreidel.

It made him smile whenever he heard it, the catchy tune making him giggle.

The audience began to thin out, disinterested. That was good. It made it easier to recognize individual faces.

A few people remained, with some more stopping for a bit. A few were even starting to sing along.

Levi decided to keep playing until Randy and Sharona came back. This was fun, and these other people were having fun too, so why not?

Linda was in the Williams-Sonoma when someone tugged on her pant leg.

She looked down and saw Hannah.

She was about to ask where Hunter was when she saw him leading a girl in a pale purple coat.

“She got lost,” Hunter said.

“We’re helping!” Hannah said cheerfully.

Linda sighed. “Look, her parents might be looking for her. They’ll find her eventually. Now go back to the play area, I’m busy.”

“But Mommy -” Hannah started.

“No buts, Hannah, now run along.”

“But helping people is the right thing to do!”

“Hannah Grace Thompson, do as I said and go. Back. To. The play area.”

“If we were lost, wouldn’t you want someone to help us find each other?” Hunter asked.

Linda stared at her children.

“Oooh, the kid’s gotcha there!” Estelle said.

“Ugh, shut up shut up shut UP!” Linda cried out.

Hunter and Hannah flinched. The girl started shaking and crying.

Linda groaned. “Great, NOW look what you’ve done!”

Hunter stared at Linda, scared and concerned.

Linda sighed. “Just go already. I’ll be waiting in front of the play area when I’m done here.”

Then her kids left.

She was going to have to have a talk with someone about Estelle after New Year’s…
Mettaton sat in the airport gate, awaiting his flight.

The interview was FAR more stressful than he ever could have anticipated. But he’d done what he’d come here to do and then some. He was proud of himself.

A year and a half ago, he couldn’t see himself doing something like this. But Papyrus had changed him. In many ways.

And tonight, the whole country would know it - the world would know it once someone recorded it and put it online.

*Attention passengers. Delta Flight 180 to Ebott is now boarding at Gate C68.*

And there was his flight. Time to board.

It had taken Toriel nearly two hours (plus a few days searching online), but she’d found it.

A Celestron NexStar 5SE Computerized Telescope.

Sans would love it.

She smiled and grabbed the box at the same time someone else did.

Toriel turned to the red-haired, brown-eyed Human woman next to her.

They glared at each other.

“Excuse me, err, ma’am,” the Human said as she yanked the box, “but I saw this first.”

“And you would know this how, exactly?” Toriel asked, yanking the box toward herself.

“I’ll have you know, ma’am that I am a member of the HWC,” the Human sneered, yanking the box back toward herself. “I think I know better than you.”

“Don’t all bigots think that, though?” Toriel said coldly. She yanked the box.

“I am NOT a bigot!” The woman scoffed. “I’m just acting in Humanity’s best interests!”

“Ma’am, you are not acting in the best interests of Humanity, but of Leland Schwartz,” Toriel stated calmly. “He’s leeching money from the HWC and funneling toward his own pockets.”

“How DARE you!” the woman shrieked.

“Yes, how dare I use logic and facts against ignorance.”

“There is no proof!” the woman shrieked.

“Oh, there is, trust me,” Toriel growled, giving the box a final yank.

Toriel carried the box to the checkout as the woman looked around angrily for something. The sound of applause rang through the store.

Toriel gave the woman the most regal smile she could.

The woman shrieked in fury.
Toriel walked out of the store, extra pride in her SOUL.

Sans was going to love this gift, she just KNEW it.

Caroline skated around the rink. The crowd inside it had thinned out by a lot. She was practically the only person left in the rink.

She relaxed.

She sped up. She skated along the edge of the rink.

Then the song changed.

Caroline knew this song.

Wizards In Winter by Trans-Siberian Orchestra.

Caroline knew what she had to do. As a Wizard, and since the current season is winter, what else could there possibly be TO do?

Improv skating time.

She started with a few simple turns, getting into the groove. As the song continued, her routine increased in difficulty. Caroline was careful not to let her Magic be known. Humans, when faced with the unknown, are not exactly logical. That, and Randy said not to.

Halfway through the song, a pair of teens with rainbow-colored hair ran through the rink.

Caroline nearly bumped into one before turning sharply.

Then an older man came huffing and puffing through the rink. He was far slower than the teens, but also far larger, providing a new challenge.

Caroline skated around the older man as if taunting him.

The old man growled. “Oh for fuck’s sake, I don’t have TIME for this! SOMEONE STOP THOSE BRATS!”

He pointed to where the rainbow-haired teens were - were being the operative word here, since they were no longer present.

Caroline continued skating around the man. “Sir, I suggest you calm down and not swear,” she said. “I’m only ten, after all.”

“Oh my GOD, I don’t have TIME for thisBULLSHIT!” the man shouted, pushing Caroline down as he ran.

Caroline nearly fell over, but instead landed in a (slightly wobbly) sitting spin.

Then the final part of the song came on. Caroline skated, faster yet faster.

Then she did a split jump and landed in a scratch spin that combined with a layback.

Then the song ended. She posed dramatically, gasping for breath.

Enter unexpected applause.
Hunter, Hannah, and Elaina stood at the edge of the rink watching Caroline.

Once they recognized that she was done, they applauded.

“Man, Caroline’s at it again!” Hunter giggled.

“Why’s she look scared?” Hannah asked.

“This happened at her birthday party earlier this year, remember?” Hunter asked.

“Oh yeah…”

Elaina was confused.

Hunter noticed this. “Oh, that’s Caroline,” they explained. “She’s another friend of mine and Frisk’s. She’s the smart one.”

“Sh-sh-she’s r-really g-g-g-good,” Elaina stammered.

“Yep!” Hunter said with a smile. “Hey, you said you go to Upland, right Elaina?”

Elaina nodded.

“Okay, that means we’ll both be going to North Middle School! Maybe we’ll have classes together…”

Elaina smiled. “I-I hope so too…”

“Hunter. Hannah.”

Hunter and Hannah turned to see Caroline. She had slung her skates over her shoulder.

“Where did you find Elaina?” Caroline asked.

“Lina got lost, so we’re helping her find her mommy!” Hannah said with a smile.

“Wow, how very nice of you to do that, Hannah!” Caroline remarked.

Hannah giggled in response.

“So, you’re Elaina,” Caroline said. “I’m Caroline Marlow. It’s nice to meet you.”

“I-i-i-t’s n-nice to m-meet y-you…” Elaina said, voice so quiet as to almost be a whisper.

“My dad left me some money, so I’m gonna buy me a cinnamon roll,” Caroline said. “If you guys have time, you can join me if you want.”

Hunter, Hannah, and Elaina suddenly looked uncomfortable.


“She didn’t want us to help her, but I managed to convince her,” Hunter said, their voice shaky with fear but proud all the same.

“Wow, surprising,” Caroline muttered. “Good luck you guys. See ya New Year’s, Hunter and Hannah. It was nice meeting you, Elaina.”
Elaina nodded in agreement.

As Caroline walked off to get her cinnamon roll, Hunter turned toward Elaina.

“Ready to keep looking?” they asked.

Elaina nodded nervously.

She had an odd feeling that Irma would find her soon.

Irma looked around, very pissed.

“Where the hell are you…”

She thought about where her daughter would be. She was most likely at a bookstore, music shop, art supply store, dancewear store…too many places to look…oh, she must be terrified right now. Not that it mattered. She was going to choose a place to look first when a flash of rainbow hair caught her eye.

“What the hell…” she remarked. Looked annoyingly familiar. Could it be?…

“GET BACK YOU LITTLE SHITS!” someone screamed, cutting her train of thought off.

Irma turned to see a fat, sweaty man, wheezing from the strain of running.

“Why won't someone STOP them!!” the man shouted as he paused to catch his breath before running again.

Irma watched as they ran out of sight, confused as all hell. She shook her head and continued her search.

The she saw her.

Elaina was talking with some boy and what appeared to be his sister by the J.C. Penney entrance.

So THAT’S what it was.

Elaina glanced up and saw Irma, fear overtaking her. She turned to the boy and said something. The boy turned to look at her and walked up to her, followed by his sister and Elaina.

“Um, excuse me ma’am, are you this girl’s mother?” the boy said to Irma.

“I’m not a ma’am,” Irma snapped, “but yes, I am. Now WHAT do you think you are doing with my daughter, young man?”

The boy flinched a bit before straightening his back. “I’m sorry, but my sister and I found her wandering alone,” he said. “She seemed lost and scared, so we offered to help her find you.”

“Didja not want her?” the sister said.

Irma stared at the brother and sister.

“M-Mom?” Elaina stuttered. God, she hated it when she did that.

“Don’t stutter, Elaina!” Irma snapped. “Now come on, we’re going home.”
Irma grabbed Elaina’s wrist and dragged her away, Elania starting to shake and cry even more, appearing to be having trouble breathing. Irma noticed this, and sighed. This girl was such an embarrassment…

“Cut it out now!” she half hissed, half shouted.

Elaina started trying to take deep breaths to calm down. Irma squeezed at the girl’s wrists until she calmed down enough that she was no longer causing a scene. She was going to have to “talk” to the doctor about upping her medication dosage again.

The boy and girl looked on in fear. Irma turned to them. “What do you want a reward or something?” she snapped.

The boy glared at her briefly - but he stopped before she could recognize it fully. The boy shook his head and hurried his sister along.

Irma made a “hmph” sound as she dragged Elaina out to the car. It was gonna be another one of THOSE nights again, wasn’t it…

Sans, Toriel, Frisk, and Papyrus congregated in front of one of the Macy’s store before leaving for home.

“Do we have everything we came for?” Toriel asked.

“i know i did,” Sans said. “howzabout you guys?”

“WE DID!” Papyrus said cheerfully. Frisk gave a thumbs up from their perch on Papyrus’ shoulders.

“you been up there the whole day, kid?” Sans asked, amused.

Frisk nodded and giggled.

“you’re gonna freeze up there, yaknow,” Sans said. “and i dunno ‘about tori, but i for one don’t want a frisk-cicle for gyftmas.”

Frisk tapped on Papyrus’ skull and pointed down. Papyrus put them down.

Suddenly, the two rainbow haired teens that they had seen before ran into Toriel and Frisk respectively.

The teens were yanked off of both of them by the man with greasy brown hair.

“Finally, got you two little shits” the man huffed.

“And what’re ya gonna do to us, huh?” one of the teens said.

“Oh, come ON, Grace, it’s OBVIOUS that he’s gonna kill us!” the other teen said.

“Well, kill Felicity here first!” the first teen said.

The man shook them both by the shoulders. “Hand it over!” he practically yelled.

The teens - apparently called Felicity and Grace - looked at each other in confusion.

“Hand what over?” Felicity asked
“THE THING THAT YOU FUCKIN’ STOLE!!!”

“We didn’t steal anything!” Grace burst out.

“I have the receipts right here,” Felicity said, reaching into her shopping bag. “Gawd, you dye your hair the minute you move out of the house and suddenly you’re a criminal in the eyes of a grease bag…”

“I know, sis,” Grace sighed. “Such a shame…”

The man snatched the receipt out of Felicity’s hand.

He growled as he was proven wrong. He stomped off in a huff, grumbling something about “damn kids making me run around for no damn reason”.

The rainbow-haired teens turned to Toriel and Frisk and the Skeleton Brothers and apologized.

“We were just so sure that guy was trying to murder us!” Grace said.

“He probably would’ve if I hadn’t remembered the receipt!” Felicity snapped.

“Well if you had just done what I said and stayed at the university for Christmas we wouldn’t even be in this situation in the first place!” Grace countered.

The twins continued to bicker as they walked off.

Toriel, Frisk, and the Skeleton Brothers looked on in confusion.

“so,” Sans began casually, “anyone else wanna pretend that never happened?”

Caroline read one of the books she’d checked out last time she had been at the library - The Hogfather, it was called - as she sat on the Book Throne in her room, wrapped in a quilt and listening to music. This was nice.

Then her phone went off. The ringtone meant that Penelope had texted her.

*hey care! what’re you doing?

*Reading and listening to music. I’m on the Book Throne.

*sounds like you’re having fun! :)

*I am. What about you? What are you doing?

*making cupcakes for the new year’s party! :D

*What kind?

*chocolate candy cane! :D

*wait, are candy canes or chocolate kosher? :/

*Ghirardelli chocolates are kosher, since Sharona likes those, but I don’t know about candy canes. I’ll ask.

Caroline got up and went to Sharona’s and Randy’s room and knocked on the door before entering.
Sharona was in front of the dresser mirror cleaning her piercings.

“Um, Sharona?” Caroline asked nervously, voice quiet.

“Yeah, Caroline, what’s up?” Sharona asked.

“Um, Penelope said that she was making cupcakes for the New Year’s party at Mettaton’s, and she wanted to know if… um…”

Sharona looked at the anxious Caroline. “To know if what?” she asked.

“She um, wanted to know if candy canes are kosher…” Caroline all but whispered.

Sharona smiled. “I know of a few brands that make kosher candy canes! I’ll text Monica about it, okay?”

Caroline smiled. “Thanks.”

“No problem, Caroline.”

Caroline left to return to her room and give Penelope the news.

*There are brands that make them kosher. Sharona’s texting your mom about them.*

*okay! thank you! :)*

*Of course. Anytime.*

*what song are you listening to?*

*In The Bleak Midwinter.*

*never heard of it.*

*It’s a poem written by Christina Rossetti set to music.*

*sing it to me?*

*waiy ni nevermins sorru!*

Caroline was confused. Why was Penelope typing wrong?

Caroline went to her contacts list and hit Penelope’s number.

Penelope was extremely confused. Why the heck was she so nervous? She’d never been this nervous around Caroline.

Wait, she had. It was only recently that it had first started, though. What the heck?

Then her phone rang. She jumped in fright.

She checked the caller ID.

It was Caroline.

Oh no. Don’t answer it. She’ll go away eventually -
“Hello?” Penelope said into the receiver as she hit the answer button.

Dang it. Too late now.

“In the bleak midwinter~ Frosty wind made moan~ Earth stood hard as iron~ Water like a stone~” Caroline sang unprompted. “Snow was falling snow on snow~ Snow on snow~ In the bleak midwinter~ Long, long ago~”

Penelope still wasn’t sure why she was so nervous. But she suddenly wasn’t anymore once she heard Caroline’s voice.

Was it Caroline’s Magic or something? No, Caroline had Electricity Magic.

Penelope sighed. It could wait. She was too engrossed in Caroline’s song to think of much else.

Hunter stared at the selfie they’d taken with Caroline, Hannah, and Elaina. They smiled as they sent it to Frisk.

*look who i found at the mall 2day

*Gasp!!!! 0o0

*Elaina AND Caroline???

*lol yup

*Wait!

*?

*I was there earlier with Papyrus and Mom and Dad… T.T

*also this

Hunter sent Frisk the video of Caroline skating and being interrupted by the rainbow-haired teens and the greasy old guy.

*I can’t believe this.

*cool huh

*i know those two.

*the ones with the rainbow hair.

*?

*we ran into them as we were leaving.

*literally.

*???

*the fat guy thought they’d stolen something.

*did they?
*no.

*oh thank goodness

“Hunter! Time for bed!”

*mom says lights out

*okay then. goodnight! ^3~

*lol nite

Hunter turned on their music and turned off their bedside lamp.

They couldn’t wait for New Year’s.

Papyrus sat on his and Mettaton’s bed watched Mettaton’s interview with Lola Leigh on his phone.

Papyrus could tell that something had happened between his boyfriend and his ex-fling, but whether it had happened backstage or what he couldn’t tell.

But that didn’t matter. What did matter, however, was that Mettaton had become upset by something. Papyrus felt a twinge of pride in his SOUL whenever he successfully recognized how Mettaton was feeling, but that pride was vastly overshadowed by worry in this moment.

Just what had that woman done to him…?

Papyrus turned to the charging Mettaton at his side and sighed with a smile, running his phalanges through the Android’s raven hair.

At least he seemed happier once he came home. That made Papyrus feel a bit happier.

Elaina was fast asleep, just as Irma had thought she’d be.

Irma slipped into the child’s bedroom unnoticed, just as she had every week.

She took the syringe from her handbag. The faint luminescent blue glow was almost too much to ignore. Maybe just a little bit for herself wouldn’t hurt -

No. This was for her daughter’s own good.

She peeled open her daughter’s left eyelid and the needle pierced her cornea.

Elaina winced, but otherwise remained asleep.

Irma pumped the last of the syringe’s contents out bit by bit before removing the needle. She dabbed the tears, blood, and vitreous from the corners of Elaina’s eye and pushed her hair back over the eye.

She sighed and left Elaina’s bedroom.

If it kept this one from becoming like her father, Irma would do anything,

Flowey stared outside Frisk’s bedroom window. He spotted Cactus Everdeen out of the corner of his eye. She bloomed in mockery. He was sure of it.
He sneakily slipped a vine over to Frisk’s desk, opening a particular drawer and rifling through its contents until he found a sheaf of papers.

_Blossoming Romance; by Caroline Marlow - A Flowey x Cactus Everdeen fanfiction_. Why must these children mock him so.

The Flower sighed. He supposed this was Karmic Retribution for his innumerable sins.

He silently opened the window and put the papers in his mouth, chewed them up, and spit them out onto the cobblestone path below.

The crack fanfictions always taste best.

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_The holidays fill you with_

_DETERMINATION_

---

Chapter End Notes

Merry Christmas (I Don't Want To Fight Tonight) - The Ramones  
Highland Cathedral - Ulrich Roever and Michael Korb  
Grandma Got Run Over By A Reindeer - Elmo & Patsy  
I Have A Little Dreidel - Samuel S. Goldfarb  
Wizards In Winter - Trans-Siberian Orchestra  
In The Bleak Midwinter - Christina Rossetti

Fun Fact - Lately I've seen a lot of compliments on my writing, giving extremely high praises. I have no idea what I've done to deserve this, but whenever I see such a comment, I get all giddy and stuff - it makes my day. Thank you all so, so much for enjoying this story up until now, but believe me when I say that this story is FAR from over!
Christmas Eve

Chapter Summary

Merry Christmas...Eve.

Chapter Notes

I am so fucking tired...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

12:30 AM, December 24th, 20XQ

It’s a cold day outside.

The sun is shining.

The wind is blowing.

On days like this, kids like you…

… are preparing for the annual Christmas Eve Dinner,

Toriel stood before Sans and Frisk in her “Seasonings Greetings” apron, staring them down.

“Okay, everyone,” Toriel announced. “You all know the drill, do you not?”

“i’ve been following him on twitter for a year and a half, i think i know the drill,” Sans said.

Toriel pursed her lips, fighting back a smile. “That is not what I meant, but okay,” she said. “I meant battle stations. Do you remember what yours were last year?”

“i was on meats, pap was on sides, and frisk was on desserts, and you did a bit of everything,” Sans said proudly. “and since papyrus is coming later with mettaton, i’m gonna assume that you’re on side dish duty.”

Frisk stuck out their tongue at him and signed <<Showoff>>. Sans smirked.

Toriel nodded. “That is correct, Sans. This year’s selection is the same as last year’s, as is the guest list. You may begin!”

And so the Skeleton, Boss Monstress, and Human set to their tasks.
Hunter and Hannah busied themselves with Christmas dinner while Linda made some important phone calls. Hunter wasn’t sure who their mother could possibly be calling that was more important than Christmas dinner - no one liked her enough to call her casually, so it couldn’t be that.

Hunter decided to leave it be. It was probably one of those things that was important to no one but Linda, anyway.

Randy, Sharona, Levi, and Caroline sat solemnly around the table.

“So what’s going on?” Levi asked. “Why are we sitting around the kitchen table solemnly?”

Randy and Sharona looked at each other and sighed. Randy took a deep breath.

“My mother passed away late last night,” he said quietly. “We’ll have to leave for the plane tonight, but we’ll make it back home for the New Year’s party, but we might be too tired to stay for as long as we did last year.”

Levi gasped and went to comfort Randy.

Caroline wasn’t sure what she felt. In truth, she didn’t feel much. She knew that she should be feeling more, but she wasn’t. She couldn’t quite muster the will to do so. She wasn’t sure why. But she knew that it was wrong of her to not feel anything.

The fact that she wasn’t feeling much hurt more than the death of her grandmother.

She wasn’t sure how to react.

So she sat, immobile, watching her family grieve.

Penelope watched as Frosty melted away in the greenhouse at the hands of the incompetent hack magician dude.

She was BORED. So very very BORED.

“Momma!” she cried. “I’m goin’ over to Caroline’s! I’m taking my camera and phone and DS!”

“Okay, come back by six!” Monica replied.

Penelope gathered her things and changed out of her pajamas and set out.

She walked until she found the house and rang the doorbell.

It took some time before Levi answered the door.

“Oh, hey Penelope,” he greeted. “Now’s not a good time, sorry. Can you, uh, come back later?”

Penelope paused and looked at Levi. His face was red and puffy.

“What happened?” Penelope asked.

Levi opened his mouth, then closed it again. He sighed and began to speak. “Caroline’s grandma died,” he said. “We have to leave tonight for the funeral.”

Penelope’s eyes widened. “Is Caroline okay?” she asked.
Levi chuckled. “Of course you’d ask about Caroline…” he muttered under his breath. “She’s the same as ever. I dunno why. Maybe it just hasn’t hit her yet. I’ve never met Caroline’s and Randy’s family aside from Aunt Kathy, so this’ll be me ‘n Ma’s first time meeting them all.”

“Um…can I come in and see her?” Penelope asked nervously.

Levi turned to the kitchen, where Penelope saw Sharona holding Randy in her arms - an odd sight in most situations considering the disparity in their sizes, but right now it made Penelope feel a bit sad. Sharona nodded.

“Come on,” Levi said. “She’s in her room like always.”

“Thanks,” Penelope said, quickly walking to Caroline’s room.

She knocked, hearing no response. “Caroline, it’s Penelope. May I come in?”

Penelope heard some shuffling, some toppling books, and a swear word. The door opened. Caroline seemed fine as always. Her room was a bigger mess than usual - apparently her Book Throne had fallen over as she got up to answer the door. “Come in,” Caroline said, stepping aside to allow her best friend access.

Penelope walked in and stood in place, unsure of what to do.

“Um, I’m sorry to ask, but do you wanna help me rebuild my Throne?” the bookworm asked.

“Okay,” Penelope said, setting down her things and removing her coat, hat, and shoes.

The started picking up the books - many of them Penelope had never heard of. “So how are we gonna do this?” she asked.

“All books of similar thickness on the same layer,” Caroline said. “The thickest and heaviest go on the bottom.”

Penelope nodded and set the books on the bed, grouping them by thickness. Caroline added a few as well. Once they had gathered all the books, they set to work on rebuilding the Throne.

“Hey, Caroline?” Penelope said. “Ya think we could add cushions to this to make it more comfy? Or maybe make it into a Book Bench?”

“Why not both?” Caroline asked. “Book Sofas - the newest fad.”

Penelope giggled.

They started building the Book Sofa.

Asgore, Shelby, and Chas arrived at Sans and Toriel’s same time as Alphys, Undyne, and Mamoru. Undyne rang the doorbell. Sans answered.

“hey, undyne,” he greeted. “i see you’ve brought a crowd with ya.”

“Oh, no,” Toriel said.

“it’s cool, tori, asgore, shelby, and chas are the crowd,” Sans assured.
“Oh, okay then,” Toriel said. “Tell them to come on in!”

Sans turned to the motley crew outside the house. He stepped aside and gestured to the inside. “you heard the lady, come on in.”

Everyone filed in, one by one. Asgore went in last, only to be stopped by Sans.

“Sorry to stop ya like this, but i wanna have a little discussion alone with ya at some point this evenin’,” Sans said.

Asgore looked down at him in confusion and concern. “O-okay, if you wish,” he acquiesced. “But why…?”

“I’ll tell ya later,” Sans said. “Now get in there.”

Asgore entered the dwelling, turning his head to the left and spotting the sparsely decorated evergreen tree he’d seen from outside through the picture window in the living room. It was decorated with naught but colorful lights, the ornaments and presents reserved for the tree in the den. He turned to the right and saw Toriel and Frisk making the night’s meal.

Sans walked into the kitchen to set about his work, but not before pulling Toriel into a kiss, much to Frisk’s giggly glee.

Asgore fled into the den and sat on the couch next to Shelby. He could feel Shelby’s gaze turn to him.

“You okay there, big guy?” she asked.

Asgore turned to her and smiled. “Yes, Ms. Wong, I’m quite alright. Thank you for your concern.”

Shelby looked at him skeptically. But then she turned her head toward the television and sighed. He really was the worst liar she’d ever seen.

“So you’re free on New Year’s Eve?!” Linda gasped.

“Yes,” said the voice on the other end. “I will see you then, have your payment ready.”

“Of course, thank you sir,” Linda responded.

“Ma’am, actually,” the person on the other end said.

“I’m not a ma’am,” Linda snapped.

“Sorry sir, but I am a ma’am,” the person said. “Goodbye now.”

The person hung up. Linda hissed out a sighed between clenched teeth.

She finally found an exorcist free before next year. She was not going to let it go that easily.

“You hear that, Crawford?” Linda said smugly. “Time for you to move on whether you like it or not.”

“Yeah, not happening,” Estelle said.

“Aww, look you’re in denial!” Linda condescended mockingly.
“Girl, you talkin’ to yourself again.”

“Bullshit, I am NOT talking to myself!” Linda said.

“You keep tellin’ yourself that, Murphy,” Estelle said. “I’mma go back to wherever. You keep convincing yourself that I’m a Spirit instead of -”

“SHUT UP!”

Linda threw the phone at the wall where Estelle should have been. It smashed into pieces.

Linda was panting. She growled and went downstairs.

Hunter and Hannah were surely messing something up. They always were.

---

Penelope and Caroline stared at the Book Sofa with pride. The cushions were mismatched, but that just made it better in their opinion.

Caroline tested in out, sitting on a cushion. It held up perfectly.

Penelope tried next. It still held.

They sat in silence.

“I heard about what happened to your grandma,” Penelope blurted.

Caroline looked up at her. “Oh,” she said.

“Are you okay?” the shorter girl asked.

Caroline shrugged. “I dunno. I feel more numb than anything. I’m more worried about dad, if I’m honest.”

“Well, if ya wanna talk, I’m here for you, okay?” Penelope offered.

Caroline smiled at her. “Thanks, Nell.”

Penelope smiled back.

---

The doorbell rang. Frisk had just finished icing the cookie they were working on getting JUST RIGHT, so they got up to answer it.

Gaster, Papyrus, and Mettaton were behind it. Frisk hopped up and down and tackled their uncles and grandfather in a hug.

“It is nice to see you as well, young Frisk!” Gaster said, a laugh underlying his voice.

Frisk released their uncles and grandfather and dramatically gestured toward the inside of the house. Papyrus and Mettaton bowed dramatically and entered, followed by Gaster.

Gaster stood in the living room briefly, staring wistfully into the kitchen at his son and his girlfriend as they exchanged jokes while their child looked on. He managed to tear himself away and made his way into the den where the rest of the group was watching Home Alone.

“You know,” Chas said through a mouthful of popcorn. “I never understood somethin’ about this
movie."

“You mean the fact that the McCallisters have a mansion?”

“That too, but I mean… how have that kid’s parents not been arrested for child endangerment?” Chas questioned. “They left an eight-year-old alone in a mansion for Christmas to fend for himself. Who does something like that with a clear conscience?”

“Is it too late for me to admit that I trusted Papyrus to do the same when he was six?” Gaster asked.

“T-that’s different, Doctor,” Alphys said. “S-Snowdin is a tiny village, w-while this movie takes place in…uh…a-a little help here, Mettaton?”

“Chicago,” Mettaton replied from his spot in Papyrus’ lap as he picked at his nails. “The entire movie was filmed in the Chicago area, including the scenes set in Paris. The Chicago-O’Hare International Airport substituted for the Paris-Orly Airport.”

“I KNEW I RECOGNIZED THE ARCHITECTURE!” Papyrus remarked.

“So when’s karaoke?” Shelby asked.

“That depends,” Mettaton said. “Will you be singing?”

“Chas paid me three hundred bucks not to,” Shelby mumbled.

“Then we can start whenever,” Mettaton said.

“And if I was going to sing?” Shelby asked.

“In that case the karaoke machine blew up while WingDings was tinkering with it.”

“I already apologized for the rec room microwave oven!” Gaster said.

“There was a microwave in there?” Undyne asked.

“THERE IS NOW…” Papyrus sighed.

Hunter and Hannah had finally finished the cooking when they heard Linda yell and throw something at the wall.

Hannah squeaked and grabbed onto her sibling’s leg in fear. Hunter held her close, prepared for the inevitable fight.

Linda stomped down the stairs and turned into the kitchen, face red, mouth open and ready to scream at her children.

Then she saw that they were finished doing what she had told them to do.

“Uh, a-are you okay Mom?” Hunter asked nervously. “We heard something hit the wall upstairs and got a little worried…”

Linda stared at Hunter holding a frightened Hannah close.

She heaved out a weary sigh. “I’m fine, I just dropped the phone,” she lied. “You two run along while I make the cookies, okay?”
“Yes Mom,” the Thompson children said in unison.

“Remember not to use p’cans this year, since Brian’s allergic,” Hannah said.

Linda pursed her lips, her left eye twitching.

Hunter and Hannah cowered.

“Come on Hannah, let’s go play,” Hunter said hurriedly and fearfully.

And with that Hunter and Hannah fled upstairs.

Linda growled as she set to work.

She decided to use extra pecans out of spite.

With Penelope’s help, Caroline finished packing before they had to leave for the airport.

“You want me to tell my mom?” Penelope asked.

Caroline shrugged. “If you want. Just tell my dad before you do, okay?”

Penelope nodded. “I’ll see you when you get back, okay Care?”

Caroline nodded. Then she called out “Dad, Sharona, I’m all packed!”

“We don’t leave for another half hour!” Sharona responded.

“Okay!”

Caroline sighed and flopped back on her bed in impatience. There was time to kill, but little to kill it with.

So she settled for rolling Magic sparks between her fingers and staring until she was called.

Penelope left the room for a moment.

She found Randy still on the couch. She sighed before posing her question. “Hey, Randy?”

Randy looked up at Penelope tiredly.

“Sorry to bug you, but… I’m gonna tell my mom about what happened. Is…is that okay?”

Randy smiled sadly and nodded. “Go ahead,” he said. “I’ll be letting the others know. We can drop you off on our way to the airport if you want.”

Penelope nodded and thanked him and texted her mother the news as she went back to Caroline's room.

Elaina’s eye still hurt. She - no, they - were trying to read Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone and their eyes wouldn't focus when they looked up to make sure their mom wasn't at the door. They decided to text Frisk. They would probably know what to do…

*hef frisk*
yeah?

can you help me figure something out

sure! what do you need help with?

every time I look at something that is farther away than about a foot it looks super blurry

it sounds like you need glasses.

you think so

yeah! you should probably tell your mom so she can get an appointment at the eye doctor for you

thanks for helping me with that

no problem!

It happened once a week - they woke up with their left eye throbbing and watering, sometimes even bleeding. They told their mother about it, only to be deflect and ignored. But lately, their eyesight

They sighed and closed their book. They were grounded until New Years for “making a scene”, so there was nothing to do.

There was even less to do while being grounded now that their sisters were away at college. At least they’d promised to send birthday and Christmas presents, along with Halloween candy.

They would probably be grounded even longer if their mother found out they were reading Harry Potter.

So they put away the book in their closet, where their mother would never think of looking - their closet was used for hiding things no one liked. But that was exactly why Elaina liked it - it held so many cool things their mother didn’t know about, didn’t CARE about, and somehow that made those things exciting. There were old blankets, old books, old photographs…some much history, and their mother had no idea.

If only Elaina could open that wooden chest, all the wonders of their bedroom closet would be revealed…

“Kevin! What did you do to my room?!?”

And so the credits rolled.

“Buzz is such an asshole,” Chas grumbled.

“It’s just a movie dude, get over it!” Undyne growled.

“And yet Macaulay Culkin’s life was fucked up by his parents’ neglect and abuse,” Chas sighed.

“Dude, what is WITH you?!” Undyne said. “You’re bein’ a killjoy!”

“Undyne, I’ll explain later,” Shelby said, voice cold and clinical.

Undyne glared at her before settling back down with a huff.

Papyrus was pointedly ignoring the exchange, watching the empty credits roll.
Mettaton kissed him on the mandible to get his attention. Papyrus looked down at him and gave his best smile.

“You alright there, Papy?” Mettaton asked.

Papyrus shrugged. Mettaton gave him a look. “That’s not an answer, Papyrus. We can step out for a moment if you’re uncomfortable, alright?”

Papyrus sighed.

Then Mettaton’s phone went off.


Then Mettaton hung up and sighed, throwing his head back.

Papyrus looked at him in concern. “WHAT IS IT?” he asked.

“Randy’s mother passed away, so they’re going out to Denver for the funeral,” Mettaton explained. “They’ll be back in time for the New Year’s party, though, but they may end up having to leave early.”

“Oh,” Papyrus said sadly. He fidgeted a bit, unsure of how to respond.

“hey, dinner’ll be ready in an hour or so, letting you guys know now,” Sans said from the entryway. “what happened in here?”

“Randy’s mom died so they’re going to Denver,” Chas explained. “I feel for the guy.”

“man, that’s rough,” Sans said quietly. “send my condolences along.”

“Got it,” Mettaton said.

“I’m somewhat worried about how Miss Marlow will take it,” Gaster confided, rubbing his mandible. “We’ve not yet gone over methods of controlling her Magic in stressful situations…”

“Randy said that she’s handling it well enough,” Mettaton explained. “Though she may not have entirely registered what happened.”

“that could be it,” Sans said. “sometimes it takes time for certain events to completely register in an emotional sense, if you catch my meaning…”

Papyrus merely nodded sadly at his elder brother’s statement.

Gaster hung his head, his expression unreadable.

The Gaster Family was silent. They understood somewhat.

The doorbell of the Thompson household rang.

“Kids! Get the door, Mommy’s busy!” Linda called.

Hunter rolled their eyes before flinching. What if their mother saw?

They got up and walked to the front door to answer it.
Brian and Helen stood behind.

“Hey Brian! Hey Aunt Helen!” Hunter greeted.

“What’s up, Hunter?” Brian said.

Hunter shrugged. “Mom threw a phone at the wall. Scared the heck outta me an’ Hannah…”

“What does she think you did this time?” Brian sighed.

“No idea,” Hunter mumbled.

“Oh, hey, Caroline’s dad texted us on our way over,” Helen said. “His mom died, so they’re going to Denver for the funeral.”

“Helen, hi!” Linda said with a big - fake - smile as she walked in from the kitchen. “What was that about a funeral just now?”

“Randy Marlow’s mother passed away, so they’re headed to Denver for the funeral,” Helen explained.

“Oh…” Linda groaned. Her smile fell into a cringe for a moment before returning full-force as though nothing had happened. “Well, come on in! It is FREEZING out there!”

“No pecans this year, I hope?” Helen said.

“No,” Linda said, disappointment in her voice. “I could’ve SWORN I’d bought some recently, but the bag wasn’t in the cupboard.”

“Well, that’s too bad then,” Helen said with a shrug.

“Is David not here again this year…?” Linda asked.

“Nope. Busy again.” Well, more like drunk again. Same difference as far as the Greens were concerned. But Linda didn’t need to know.

“Aww, that’s too bad,” Linda said, insincerely. “Richard is busy too this year.”

Helen merely hummed.

While Linda was busy talking Helen’s ear off, Hunter and Brian went up to Brian’s room. As soon as they were sure Linda was busy enough to no longer care, they began to chat.

“Actually,” they admitted, “I threw the pecans out because I knew that she would use them.”

Brian stared at Hunter blankly, blinking a few times before breaking out into a manic grin. “You have NO idea how glad I am that your mom hasn’t killed you yet, bro.”

Hunter smiled, hoping their blush wasn’t TOO obvious.

Hunter wasn’t sure why their mother hadn’t killed them yet either, but there were many mysteries in this world that may never be solved.

The Monster Family had finished dinner and was now in the middle of karaoke. Toriel was called up to sing.
“What song is it?” she asked.

“Ooh, it’s one Randy told me about by some group called Nightnoise, Snow Is Lightly Falling,” Mettaton said.

Toriel cocked an eyebrow. “Well, let’s get it started then!” she said.

The music started. Toriel stared carefully at the screen.

“Snow is lightly falling~ In the forest after dark~ Wishing it would cover up~ The deep well~ Of my heart~ As I wait alone for you~”

Sans was mesmerized. He knew that Toriel had the most beautiful voice he’d ever heard, but this song sounded positively ethereal coming from her. He was pretty sure everyone else knew how transfixed he was.

As Toriel finished singing, the applause was instant.

Toriel pressed her hands to her face in bashfulness as she went to sit down on her archair.

Sans went to sit on the arm of the chair and leaned into her. “yanno,” he began, “i knew you were good, but that? that was something else.”

Toriel started tittering.

“Eugh, gross, you’re acting like an old married couple…” Undyne said with disgust.

“BUT THEY’RE NOT MARRIED, WHY WOULD THEY ACT LIKE THAT?” Papyrus asked.

“golly gee, papyrus, thanks for not denying the part where she called us old,” Sans deadpanned, his usual lazy smile stuck on his face along with a distinctive cyan glow.

“YOU’RE WELCOME!” Papyrus replied, blind to the sarcasm.

Everyone laughed. Except, that is, for Asgore.

Sans was one of the first to stop laughing. He turned to glance at the former king strangely.

Asgore’s cell phone went off.

*1 text from: Sans*

*meet me in the backyard in five*

Elaina sat in their room, surprisingly happy. They hadn’t expected to be allowed to eat dinner since they were grounded, but Irma had given her a plate with a slice of ham and some green bean casserole and said “You’re lucky it’s Christmas tomorrow.”

They sat, reading the final pages of Harry Potter And The Sorcerer's Stone. They smiled, happy that Harry had found friends in Ron and Hermione in spite of his circumstances.

Then they heard a banging sound on their window that made them jump. They landed in such a way that they ended up tumbling off their bed.

Elaina shook their head to rid themself of the shock and walked over to their window.
What they saw on the roof outside their window made them smile.

Two teens with short hair dyed with rainbow colors sat next to each other.

“Hey, sissy-poo~” they sang in two-part harmony.

<<Not sister, sibling,>> Elaina signed.

“Oh, okay,” Felicity said.

“From the top?” Grace asked.

The twins counted down from three. When they hit one…

“Hey, sibby-poo~”

Elaina giggled.

“So, have ya felt masculine yet?” Grace asked.

Elaina shrugged. They weren’t sure, but yesterday they felt like a girl.

“That’s fine, gender is weird,” Felicity said.

“Especially when it’s fluid like yours,” Grace said in agreement.

“Oh! Grace, aren’t we forgetting something important?” Felicity asked.

Grace snapped her fingers. “Darn it, you’re right, Fel!”

“Luckily for you, I didn’t forget!” Felicity said, hauling up a garbage bag full of wrapped gifts from the bush below the overhang.

Elaina’s eyes lit up in excitement. Then they remembered.

<<But what about mom? She’s gonna find out!>>

“Not so fast, we figured that out too!” Grace said, a small smile on her face.

“You can open a few of these right now, and we’ll give mom a small “surprise” by showing up mysteriously at the front door” Felicity said, bordering on cackling.

<<But I’m grounded!>>

“So what? We supposedly don’t kno - Wait why???” Felicity said, Grace joining in at the end.

<<I got lost yesterday and someone helped me find Mom, but she got angry at them instead, and then she yelled at me for making a scene because I got scared of what she might do to me.>>

Elaina had started crying.

Felicity and Grace moved to hug their sibling.

“We’ll figure something out soon,” Grace said.

“Yeah,” Felicity agreed. “We’ll get you outta here.
“We promise,” the twins said in unison.

Then the siblings heard footsteps downstairs.

“We gotta blast,” Grace said. “Hide the presents under your bed and open them tomorrow, okay?”

Elaina smiled and nodded.

“See ya ‘round, little sibling,” the twins said as they closed the window and jumped from the roof.

Elaina quickly shoved the bag under their bed and pretended to be asleep.

Irma opened their door and sighed before turning off the light.

Elaina slept soundly for the first time in months. Their last thoughts before falling asleep were: how am I going to tell mother that I need glasses? Oh well, let's not worry right now.

Sans sat on the bench in the backyard. Asgore shortly joined him.

“What did you wish to speak with me about?” the ex-king asked.

Sans looked up at him before turning forward and sighing.

"i’m plannin’ on askin’ tori to marry me sometime next year,” Sans admitted. “ideally before mettaton leaves for his tour.”

The two men were silent.

“Why are you telling me this?” Asgore growled. “To rub it in my face?”

“no,” Sans said firmly. “i’m telling you this because you deserve to be one of the first to know of my intentions as toriel’s sole surviving kin.”

“And you think I’ll just give you my blessing like that?” Asgore roared.

“your blessing’s not the one i need,” Sans said, avoiding the king’s gaze. “i’m just letting you know. i know you don’t like it, but that’s not gonna stop me.”

Asgore stared at Sans. He knew that Toriel had moved on, and that he should as well. But he just couldn’t.

He wasn’t ready.

“Fall~ On your knees~ Oh hear~ The angel’s voices~ Oh night~ Divine~ Oh night~ When Christ was born~ Oh night~ Divine~ Oh night~ O night divine~”

As soon as the song was done, the congregation sat down.

Hunter shrunk in on themself as Linda glared at them. Hannah grabbed onto Hunter’s arm as if to protect them from Linda’s death glare.

Hunter listened halfheartedly as the pastor droned on about peace on earth goodwill toward man and all that jazz. Then they mentally sang the song All That Jazz from the musical Chicago.

Then the congregation stood to sing once more.
Hunter sighed. They had to keep being **Patient**. Just one more week until New Year’s...

“Okay, who’s singing next?” Undyne shouted.

“The next one’s for Toriel also, and she’ll be singing something called Different Wings,” Shelby said.

“Never heard of that one,” Mettaton admitted.

“I think Randy said it was by Trans-Siberian Orchestra,” Sans said.

“Oh, okay so it should be epic,” Mettaton said.

Toriel sighed and stood up. She really hoped she didn’t have to sing anymore.

She noticed Frisk enter the den with baby Mamoru in their arms.

She could only hope that this song was appropriate for them…

Then the song began. It was soft, almost like a lullaby.

“Dream, child~  As childhood wants to do~  Dream all this night will allow~  Dream, child~  Dream with an angel’s view~  Out there~  Safe in your clouds~”

Well, that’s because it was a lullaby, it seemed.

Frisk passed Mamoru to Undyne and took a seat next to Sans, leaning into him as they drowsed.

“Wait for me now~  I will be there for you~  No matter what~  Tomorrow may bring~  This I will vow~  I will be there for this child~  With~  Different~  Wings~”

Sans was sure there was applause, but he was too enthralled by the reason it existed.

Frisk’s slow breathing suggested that they were asleep. Sans looked Toriel in her cinnamon-sugar eyes and smiled, pressing a finger in a shushing gesture.

Toriel smiled warmly at her little family.

---

Flowey was nearly done kicking Morty’s butt in *Pokemon SoulSilver* - just had to finish off his Gengar and he’d have the Fog Badge -

And he whited out. Flowey tried not to scream, instead turning his windowsill-mate.

“Thanks, Cactus Everdeen.”

Then the bedroom door opened, allowing Sans to enter, Frisk sound asleep in his arms.

The Skeleton tucked the child beneath the covers, leaving a kiss on their forehead.

Flowey pretended to ignore the sappy scene.

Asriel smiled inwardly.

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*This Christmas scene fills you with*
Chapter End Notes

Christmas Eve - Blackmore's Night
O Holy Night - Adolphe Adam + Placide Cappeau
Different Wings - Trans-Siberian Orchestra

Fun Fact: One of the founding members of Blackmore's Night is Ritchie Blackmore of Deep Purple.
Bringing In A Brand New Year

Chapter Summary

New Year's Eve again. Brian's complaining about everything, Linda's slowly losing her sanity, Asgore is having trouble letting go, Sans is finally moving forward, and Gaster is just having a grand ol' time.

Chapter Notes

Three in the afternoon and I already wanna go to bed.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

3:53 P.M., December 31st, 20XQ

It's a cold day outside.

The sky is overcast.

A north wind is blowing.

On days like this, kids like you...

...are heading up to your uncle's for the annual New Year's Party.

Frisk was flapping the sleeves of their favorite teal-and-purple striped oversized sweater and hopping up and down in their seat in anticipation. Then the car hit a bump and they were startled into no longer hopping. But they were still excited as all get-out. After all, MK was joining them today.

They continued flapping their sweater sleeves until they reached their destination, Helen’s Pontiac, Monica’s Chevrolet, and Alphys’ Mini Cooper having already arrived.

Frisk hopped out of the car as soon as it was parked, ignoring their mother’s protests.

Toriel sighed as her child ran up to the front door of Mettaton’s. Sans chuckled and shook his head.

Then Randy’s car pulled up, Levi hopping out and running up to join Frisk.

Randy, Sharona, and Caroline got out of the car afterward.

“hey, you guys,” Sans greeted. “how you holding up?”

Randy sighed. “Well, Caroline wrote a poem for my mom’s eulogy,” he said. “All the family
members who wanted to were allowed.”

“huh,” Sans said. “and how’d they like sharona and levi?”

“Pretty good,” Randy said, a sad yet genuine smile visible through his salt-and-pepper beard. “My niece kept complimenting their hair. She seems to have a thing for redheads…”

Sans chuckled. “well that’s good.”

Randy shrugged. He started walking up to the door, Sans following behind.

“Turns out Caroline’s the type who believes it when she sees it, if you, ah, catch my drift…” Randy muttered.

Sans looked up at Randy in confusion before making a an expression of realization. “oh yeah, humans, uh…stick around after death, don’t they?”

Randy nodded. “You mean Monsters don’t?” he asked.

“nope,” Sans said. “they’re unconscious for a while and then they turn to dust.”

“Wow.”

Sans hummed. “well, if ya need anything, lemme know, okay?” he asked. “sorry for your loss, man.”

Randy smiled in gratitude. “Thanks.”

“No problem,” Sans replied.

Linda checked her watch. Almost 5:30. The exorcist should be here any minute now. Thankfully the kids were with Helen. Sure, they were at some filthy monster’s house, but she trusted Helen to protect her kids in case anything happened.

She smiled smugly to herself. Finally Crawford would be gone for real…

Then the doorbell rang.

Linda stood up to answer it.

On the other side was a very tall Human woman with a long, angular face and long golden brown hair with sharp dark green eyes. She was wearing a black trenchcoat over a pink turtleneck with black slacks and kitten heels and gold hoop earrings with red lipstick.

“Linda Jane Thompson nee Murphy, I presume?” she said. Her voice came across as a tad deeper than the average woman’s, but not quite deep enough to be male.

Linda blinked. “Yes?”

The woman held out her hand. It was long and bony, with bright red nail polish. “Sienna Harper. I’m here about an exorcism?”

Linda was suddenly a bit nervous, but cautiously albeit awkwardly shook Sienna’s hand. When she let go, she wiped her hand on her jeans.
“Err, yes,” Linda replied nervously.

“First, I’m going to need details about the Spirit,” Sienna said, reaching into her trenchcoat and taking out a steno pad and a golf pencil. “Any and all information about the Spirit is useful. Lying or omitting information will ensure the failure of the procedure.”

Linda nodded dumbly.

“Alright then,” Sienna said, reaching into her trenchcoat once more and holding out a piece of paper. “Now all you need to do is sign in the blanks where it says ‘client name’ and you are set.

Linda signed as she was bidden.

Sienna rolled up the contract and reinserted it into her trenchcoat. “Okay. What is the full name of this Spirit?” she asked.


Sienna wrote something in the steno pad. “Okay, exact month, day, and year of birth?”

“O-of me or the ghost?” Linda asked.

“Spirit,” Sienna said. “The term Ghost has been considered offensive when referring to undead Human essences for some time due to the existence of Ghost Monsters. Now What is Estelle Monet Crawford’s date of birth?”

Linda was starting to get nervous. “I don’t know,” she said. “All I know for sure is that she was two years younger than I was when she was killed.”

“She was killed?” Sienna asked. “Do you know how?”

Linda tensed a bit. “N-no.”

“Mrs. Thompson, I asked you for honesty,” Sienna said. “The contract you signed also states on no uncertain terms that should it turn out that the client had been untruthful at any point, there will be consequences.”

Linda blanched. “I-it was a car accident.”

Sienna jotted the information given in the steno pad. “And where is the Spirit at this moment?”

“I-it’s not here right now,” Linda said. “I thought you would summon it and get rid of it, i-isn’t that how this works?”

Sienna crossed her arms and gave Linda a look that said “you can’t be serious”.

“The effort has to come from all parties, Mrs. Thompson,” Sienna explained, clearly becoming irritated. “So, since the Spirit is not with us at this particular moment, could you tell me where it typically resides?”

Linda suddenly felt somewhat afraid.

And if Sienna’s expression was anything to go by, it showed.

“She’s haunting you, isn’t she?” Sienna asked.
Linda nodded.  

Sienna sighed.  “Well, if she’s haunting you, this should be easy.  Hauntings of a person are actually easier to work with than hauntings of a building since there are less places for the Spirit to dwell.  Now don’t worry Mrs. Thompson, if you have any concerns, do voice them now before the encounter begins.”

Linda wanted to ask if it would hurt, but she couldn’t find the strength to speak.

She was ready.

Finally, Estelle Crawford would die like she should have fifteen years ago.

“Alright,” Sienna said.  “Let’s begin.”

Then Linda’s surroundings went dark.

“So what was it like?” Brian asked.

“What do you mean?” Hunter asked.

“I was asking Caroline,” Brian asked.  “I’ve never been to a funeral.  What’s it like?”

“I’m kinda curious too,” MK admitted.  “Do Humans turn to dust when they die?  Do they get their dust spread on their favorite things?”

“No,” Caroline said.  “They look like they’re sleeping really and could wake up any minute, but they don’t and never will.”

“Wow.”

“And everyone’s all sad for a while and then they’re suddenly laughing about something the corpse did when it was alive and I dunno how anyone really felt, like were they happy?  Were they sad?  Who knows!” Caroline rambled.

Levi grabbed Caroline’s hand.  “Caroline,” she said.  “It’s fine.  Right now, we’re at a New Year’s party with our friends and family.  And we are going to have fun.”

Caroline inhaled and sighed.  “Yeah.”

“Wait,” Hunter interjected.  “What kinds of songs were played?”

“Dude!” Brian chastised.

“No, it’s fine,” Caroline assured.  “I have a list on me.”

“No!” Brian shouted.  “This is s’posed to be Happy New Year, not…whatever you’re trying to make it!”

Caroline shrunk in on herself, grabbing at her left shoulder.  “Sorry…”

Brian looked very irritated.  “Stop apologizing!  What’s your problem anyway?!”

“Brian, stop!” Penelope ordered.  “Hunter asked her a question, and Caroline was answering it.  And besides, I’m kinda curious too since I’ve only ever been to one funeral and it was a Catholic one and
it was when I was like three.”

<<I wanna hear it too!>> Frisk signed.

Caroline seemed more shy than nervous. “Uh, okay, I guess…” she muttered, grabbing at her left shoulder.

She took a deep breath and began to sing. “This world is not my home~ I’m just a-passing through~ My pleasures and my hopes~ Are placed beyond the blue~ Many friends and kin~ Have gone on before~ But I can’t feel at home in this world~ Anymore~”

Hunter’s eyes widened. “I heard that song once in Sunday school!” they gasped, a bit of pride and excitement in their eyes. “Oh lord, you know~ I have no friend like you~ If Heaven’s not my home~ Oh lord, what will I do~ Angels beckon me~ Through Heaven’s open door~ And I can’t feel at home in this world~ Anymore~”

“I have a loving mother~ Up in Gloryland~ And I don’t expect to stop~ Until I shake her hand~ She’s waiting there for me~ in Heaven’s open door~ And I can’t feel at home in this world~ Anymore~”

Everyone turned to stare at Brian, who had started singing as well.

Then Caroline, Hunter, and Brian started singing together.

“Oh Lord, you know~ I have no friend like you~ If Heaven’s not my home~ Oh Lord, what will I do~ Angels beckon me~ Through Heaven’s open door~ And I can’t feel at home in this world~ Anymore~”

Silence.

“Well,” Caroline said suddenly. “I think that’s more than enough sadness for one year. Now let’s have FUN!”

The cheers signified unanimous agreement.

Frisk smiled to themself. They just KNEW that everyone was gonna love the video of their impromptu performance…

“…and then undyne vowed to never play earthbound again,” Sans finished.

“Can you really blame me?” Undyne asked. “The little squashy big-nosed dudes are creepy as fu-frick!”

“N-nice save,” Alphys snarked, hands covering Mamoru’s ears.

“i’m gonna text chas, see if he’d wanna do a let’s play of earthbound,” Sans said.

“Nah man, do Call Of Duty!” Undyne said.

“yeah, no,” Sans said. “we already have off, kingdom hearts, pokemon colosseum, and the entire mass effect trilogy lined up, and i doubt a game played by middle schoolers high on mountain dew is any good.”

“sorry al, chas and i already decided we want garrus,” Sans said.

Then the doorbell rang.

“I THOUGHT EVERYONE WAS HERE ALREADY,” Papyrus remarked.

“i’ll get it,” Sans said. “i’ll either let ‘em in or tell them we don’t want whatever they’re selling.”

Sans got up to get the door.

After he left, Mettaton’s phone went off.

“Oh, hey, Frisk sent a video,” he said.

“What of?” Papyrus asked.

“Hold on, I’m checking,” Mettaton said as he opened the video.

As the group played the video, Sans entered, followed by Gaster.

They listened to the song until it ended.

“damn,” Sans said. “that was…”

“Depressing as HELL!” Undyne finished.

“Well, that WAS a song from my mother’s funeral, so I think that was the point,” Randy sighed.

“I think we should check on them,” Sharona suggested. “I really don’t want our children to go through their emo phases yet.”

“oh man,” Sans said with a shudder. “flashbacks to pap’s emo phase…”

“SANS, YOU PROMISED TO NEVER SPEAK OF IT AGAIN!” Papyrus whined

“no i didn’t,” Sans said. “you said we should never speak of it again, and i agreed. i never explicitly promised.”

Papyrus narrowed his eyes at Sans.

“Wow,” Gaster chuckled. “I missed a LOT in the Void, didn’t I?”

Sans chuckled. “oh man, you have no idea…”

Linda looked around in the darkness. Then she set her eyes on the bullet board, staring at the purple heart in front of her.

She tried to move, only to find that the heart moved instead.

“Hold still, Mrs. Thompson,” Sienna’s warned. “Otherwise the Spirit haunting you won’t reveal herself.”

Linda stayed silent. She saw Sienna stand equally still, her face the only thing moving.

The world came back from the darkness.
Linda was speechless in her confusion.

“Sorry, Mrs. Thompson, but it seems that you’re not being haunted,” Sienna said.

“What?” Linda said incredulously.

“You’re not being haunted,” the exorcist repeated. “If you were, there would be a SOUL fragment attached to your SOUL.”

Linda blinked.

“Don’t worry, Mrs. Thompson,” Sienna assured. “You won’t have to pay since I didn’t do anything.”

Linda sputtered as Sienna left.

She heard the other woman’s vehicle drive away.

Linda gave up. She’d had enough insanity for one year.

“If I could~ Baby I’d give you my world~ Open up~ Everything’s waiting for you~”

The grownups entered just as Caroline hit the chorus.

“You can go your own way~ Go your own way~ You can call it another lonely day~”

As she ended the song, everyone applauded. Caroline hid her face in her hands and walked quickly back to her place.

“That was GREAT, Care!” Penelope said. “You looked like you were having fun!”

“No she didn’t,” Brian said. “She looked the same as always - like she wants to be anywhere but here.”

“Brian Alexander…” Helen warned.

“No, it’s okay, Mrs. Green,” Caroline said. “It’s half-true I guess.”


“Because I’m having fun, but I wanna take a break for a while even though I’m pretty sure it’s not allowed,” Caroline explained.

“Why would you think that?” Mettaton asked gently.

Caroline grabbed at her left shoulder and looked away.

Randy sighed. “Ex-wife,” he said. “Need I say more?”

“No need,” Monica assured. “I understand.”

“Stop being depressed, guys!” Levi said cheerfully. “We already decided no more sad stuff for the rest of the year!”

“That’s not even four more hours,” Caroline pointed out.
“Who cares?” Brian said.

“You, apparently,” Penelope said. “You get angry at a lot of stuff, you know.”

“I do not!” Brian snapped angrily.

“Brian Alexander Green, that is ENOUGH!” Helen snapped.

Brian shrunk a bit. “Yes mom…”

“Good. Now as punishment…”

Helen looked around.

“Add my name to the randomizer,” she said. “I’m singin’ tonight.”

Everyone but Brian cheered.

“How about you go up right now?” Sharona offered with a smirk.

The kids snickered.

“Please don’t,” Brian said weakly.

“Too late, I already picked a song,” Helen said.

Brian resigned himself.

“Yo, I’ll tell ya what I want what I really really want~ So tell me what you want, whatcha really really want~”

The cheers and laughter were really starting to piss Brian off.

He was trying really hard not to punch someone.

When the song ended, Helen sat down, laughing herself to tears.

Then Brian realized that he’d never seen his mom smile like that.

He was suddenly a lot less angry.

Asgore sat on the couch with Shelby in her and her brother’s apartment watching the Times Square ball drop. He had a bottle of whiskey in his hands, his face matted with dried tears. Shelby had a glass of beer in hand, really wishing she had a lower alcohol tolerance.

“Asgore, it’s been a hundred years,” she said. “I think it’s time to let the fuck go.”

“Shut up,” the former king sobbed pathetically, new tears falling.

“And besides the fact that your ex-wife is getting remarried, there’s a LOT of other stuff you need to accept,” Shelby said.

“I don’t wanna…” Asgore whined.

“News flash, mister, no one does,” Shelby pointed out. “Now if you wanna be happy, accept the fact that she’s happy.”
“But -”

“Oh my fucking GOD, Asgore!” Shelby growled. “Quit acting like you’re the only one who’s got problems!”

Asgore stared at her.

Shelby sighed heavily, chugging down the last of her beer. “Look, Asgore, you’re a great guy, and I love you, but you really need to accept the facts. Try to be happy for Sans and Toriel. It doesn’t have to be real happiness, but you could at least acknowledge that she’s not yours anymore, no matter how hard it is.”

Asgore said nothing.

Shelby groaned. “Okay Dreemurr, you win. I give. Wallow in your inability to move the fuck on with your life. Just know that by keeping yourself trapped in the past, you’re not just being unfair to Toriel and Sans, you’re being unfair to yourself. You’re not the only one who lost something, and you know it. I’m sorry, but some things just need to be said.”

Asgore stayed silent.

Shelby fought his silence with some of her own and went to the fridge to grab some more beer.

This was going to be a long night, and she wanted to be as not-sober as humanly possible.

Sienna pulled into the parking lot of her apartment complex and walked into the lobby.

She got into the elevator and clicked the button signifying the fifth floor.

When she got to her floor she heard the neighbors shouting - again.

Those Wong siblings…can’t they ever just get along?

When Sienna entered her apartment, she went into her bedroom and sat down on her bed, recalling the events of the attempted exorcism.

There had been no haunting, she was absolutely certain. But Mrs. Thompson’s terror was similar to that of someone being haunted, so why was there no evidence of a haunting?

Sienna decided that she would have to start an investigation into Mrs. Linda Thompson. But that could wait until the new year. For now, she would take her hormone pills and sleep.

Maybe look into other potential Wizards at the same time…

At some point, the group decided that karaoke was no longer necessary and chose to discuss their favorite events of the past year.

“Mine was actually going through with the Spring Concert auditions,” Hunter said.

“Yeah, you kicked butt that day,” Brian admitted. “Mine was winning the state championships in soccer.”

“I’m a Wizard,” Caroline said. “I think I win.”
“Well, yeah, of COURSE you do!” Levi said. “You can zap people you don’t like!”

“My best friend’s a Wizard, that’s the best thing ever,” Penelope said proudly.

“I went on a yacht, so yeah,” Levi said.

<<I got to meet with a legislator and work on laws to help Monsters!>> Frisk signed eagerly.

“I got my Magic!” MK added.

“Magic squad,” Caroline said, giving a thumbs up.

The grownups observed as the kids chatted amongst themselves.

“hey, pap? dad?” Sans asked. “can we talk in private for a bit?”

Papyrus smiled. “OF COURSE SANS!”

“Do lead the way,” Gaster said.

Sans nodded and led his father and brother into the backyard.

He sighed. This was it.

“my new year’s resolution…” Sans started.

“What of it?” Gaster asked.

“…i’m gonna ask tori to marry me…” Sans continued.

Papyrus’ eye sockets were wide and sparkling. Gaster’s eyes and smile were wide with excitement.

Papyrus tackled Sans in a hug, followed by Gaster. Sans returned the gesture.

Sans was no longer afraid of RESETs. But he couldn’t get complacent. The world was still unkind to Monsters. But he could manage. He could do this.

Sans could finally be truly happy.

After all, he had his family by his side. And really, that’s all he needs.

__________________________________________________________________________

“I told you.”

“Oh, can it, Crawford.”

“Can what?”

“SHUT THE FUCK UP!”

Linda tossed her - thankfully empty - wine glass at the kitchen wall where she was certain Estelle’s voice was emanating from.

“You know Murphy, the more you react to me like this, the more you’ll look like a psycho.”

“You shut your whore mouth,” Linda hissed.
“I’m just stating a fact. No need to bring up the fact that your ex-boyfriend asked me out.”

“SHUT UP!”

Linda threw a plate at the wall.

Once her pulse had slowed to a semi-normal rate, she pushed herself up from the bar stool and shuffled over to the wall to pick up the shards of glass and porcelain.

She looked at one of the porcelain shards.

Part of a small cobalt blue handprint was on it.

“Oh no…”

Linda was starting to panic.

She remembered how Hunter gave it to her as a Mother’s Day present when they were in kindergarten. The ceramic plate with one small blue handprint and a poorly-scrawled “Happy Mommy’s Day” in pink tempera paint with poorly-drawn pink and yellow flowers was not a pretty sight - nothing made by a kindergartener is.

They had looked so excited when they’d given it to her, hoping almost desperately that she’d like it - but how could she not? It’s a mother’s duty to love everything her child makes or gives her, no matter how ugly it is.

Linda ran to grab a broom and dust pan.

She really hoped that Hunter wouldn’t notice…

Sans and Toriel entered their house, giggling like love-struck maniacs.

“It’s not that I didn’t think he could, but - but it’s just -” Toriel managed between laughs.

Sans patted her reassuringly. “tori, i told you, my dad’s electric guitar skills are -”

“Shocking!” they burst in unison.

Their laughter became even louder.

Then they were interrupted by a boom.

The couple paused, uncertain of the source of the sound.

Then came another boom.

“guess people’re already lighting up out there, eh tori?” Sans said.

“It would seem so,” Toriel agreed. “And at ten minutes until midnight, at that…”

“What say you we watch ’em from the attic in a blanket with some hot cider?” Sans asked. “the adult kind, i mean.”

Toriel smiled warmly. “I would love that, thank you!”

“Well, i just thought that…since we’re home alone, i thought, hey, why not?”
“Let us hope that Papyrus and Mettaton do not do anything… *risque*, so to speak…” Toriel said cautiously.

“yyyyeah, i think those crazy kids learned their lesson *last* time you railed on ‘em for answering the door in nothin’ but body glitter and their underwear that one time…” Sans recalled as he grabbed a large quilt and a duvet from the storage closet.

“Their cover story could have been better,” Toriel grumbled as she put some cider in a pair of mugs - one shaped like a skull, the other a snail. “I mean REALLY, they filled a KIDDY POOL with GLITTER to cover for themselves, Sans.”

“And we can safely say that everything our kid touched had never been more fabulous.” Toriel rolled her eyes affectionately. “Nor had it been harder to clean, I hope you remember.”

“I was hoping i’d forgotten, actually,” Sans replied, usin his Cyan Magic to open the door to the attic stairwell.

The Monsters made their way up the steps and settled in front of the circular attic window.

The sound of fireworks came through, but no colorful lights.

“Wrong direction, sorry t,” Sans said nervously.

Toriel smiled. “It’s alright, Sans!” she said quietly. “That just means we can make some fireworks of our own…”

“whaddaya mean by - oh.”

Sans blushed, turning to Toriel as the neighbors started counting down.

10

He licked his teeth, his ectoplasmic tongue having formed subconsciously.

9

Toriel’s eyes were hooded, blushing hard enough for it to be visible.

8

“What did i do to deserve someone like you?” Sans wondered, his voice a whisper.

7

Toriel smiled reassuringly. “You were there for me. You knocked on that door just as I considered giving in.”

6

“You saved me, Sans. In far more ways than you could possibly imagine.”

5

They leaned in toward each other, eyes closing.
“i can try,” Sans said. “because you did the same for me.”

Their foreheads met. They allowed Magic to course through the point of contact.

“I love you, Sans.”

“I love you too, tori.”

Midnight, January 1st, 20XR

The neighbors shouts of new year’s greetings went unheard.

Sans and Toriel kissed, unheedful of anything but each other.

The kids were almost all partied out.

Their endless giggles pealed throughout the rec room, interspersed with the sounds of shuffling sleeping bags and hiccups.

“Shuddup, I’m tryna sleep!” Hannah hissed.

The kids shut up. Hell hath no fury like a tired six-year-old.

Caroline lay in her sleeping bag. Her once-oversized flannel pajamas were far too small now. She had to remember to tell her dad and Sharona.

Being the tallest kid in school was a mixed blessing.

She picked up her book - Alice’s Adventures In Wonderland - and summoned some lightning onto one of her fingers to read by.

Once she started to realize that her focus was worsening, she finished the chapter she was on and placed the ribbon bookmark where she’d stopped and closed her book, choosing to look around and see what everyone else was doing.

Frisk and MK were huddled together, MK using their tail to light a small Magic flame to warm themselves by. Sort of like a Charmander, but yellow.

“They are SO dating, huh Care?”

Caroline turned next to her, where Penelope was lying on her front and laying her chin on a pillow.

“But if MK’s a Charmander, then what would that make Frisk?” Caroline pondered.

Penelope stared at her and blinked. Then she giggled.

“MK does look like a yellow Charmander when they have their Magic going on their tail, don’t they?”
“Exactly, so what does that make Frisk?”

Penelope thought for a moment.

“An Eevee, I guess? Since they got brown fluffy hair?”

Caroline aahed. “I can’t believe I didn’t see it sooner.”

“I only just now saw it myself, honestly,” Penelope admitted.

“Wanna sneak out and get some cupcakes, Nell?” Caroline asked.

Penelope grinned. “Heck yeah!”

As they stood, Levi, Brian and Hunter watched them from the corner of their eyes as they played on their 3DSes.

“Should we ask them to grab some for the rest of us?” Brian asked.

Levi shook his head. “Let them go. We can get some for ourselves later.”

“I don’t think they realize how freaking loud they are,” Brian grumbled.

“My ears’re still ringing from Penelope’s screams of happiness!” Hunter giggled.

“Yeah, who knew she could screech like that?” Levi remarked.


Hunter grimaced. “It’s a video game, Brian. Does it really matter if I’m a guy or girl?”

“Well, no, but…”

“Then shut up and let me be me, okay?” Hunter snapped.

Brian stared at him. “Okay, geez. Don’t get all defensive.”

“The don’t tell me what you think I’m doing wrong. I know what I’m doing, okay?”

Brian said nothing, tapping buttons. “You could at LEAST pick a better name…” he grumbled.

“Charmaine is an AWESOME name,” Hunter countered. Way better than Hunter, at least.

“Whatever you say, man.”

“Guys, shut up,” Levi hissed. “Do you REALLY want Hannah to wake up and break our necks?”

Brian and Hunter shrunk in on themselves.

“Thought so.”

Meanwhile, Frisk and MK were in a state of near sleep. MK’s fire was waning, but the warmth remained.

Frisk wrapped their arms around MK’s body and nuzzled into their chest.
They felt MK’s flame fizzle out and their tail wrap around them.

They smiled.

Gaster unlocked the apartment door using the spare key Asgore had made for him and opened it.

He stared at the sleeping forms of Asgore and Shelby.

Gaster chuckled and shook his head. Shelby was laying her head on Asgore’s lap, a bit of drool leaking from her face onto his pants. Asgore’s head was thrown back, his horns having scratched up the wall and her left hand on the small of Shelby’s back.

Gaster decided to take a picture to eternalize this moment.

Ah youth…

Papyrus reclined on the chaise lounge in the parlor room, Mettaton snuggled into him and working on plans for the tour.

“SO YOU’RE LEAVING?” he asked.

Mettaton turned around and smiled sadly. “Not until July tenth, but yes.”

Papyrus wrapped his arms tightly around his boyfriend. “I DON’T WANT YOU TO GO…I KNOW THIS IS A BIG OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU, AND I AN VERY HAPPY FOR YOU, BUT STILL…”

Mettaton paused. Papyrus sounded…sad. Papyrus was meant to be a ball of sunshine and smiles, not…sad.

“It’s only for the summer and fall, darling,” Mettaton reassured as best he could. “I’ll be back by Thanksgivng, and DEFINITELY for Christmas, okay? And I’ll also be here for your birthday and our second anniversary, so there’s that!”


Mettaton whined. “Papy, don’t remind me, please!”

Papyrus sighed and held Mettaton all the closer. “I JUST…I’LL REALLY MISS YOU, YOU KNOW?”

Mettaton turned around and hugged Papyrus back. “I’ll really miss you too, Sugar Skull…but we have seven months to figure something out!”

“SEVEN MONTHS, NINE DAYS, TEN HOURS, AND THIRTY MINUTES,” Papyrus muttered.

Mettaton paused. When Papyrus put it in exactly mathematical terms like that, it somehow seemed like a lot less time than it was.

Mettaon pecked Papyrus on his zygomatic, then on the bridge of his nose. “Like I said, we have time. For now, let’s just enjoy what we have, alright darling?”
Papyrus smiled, manipulating his alveolar processes and kissing Mettaton on the lips. “I DIDN’T SAY I WASN’T ENJOYING IT…”

Mettaton giggled, kissing Papyrus with just a bit more passion.

Flowey was pissed. He had no idea who this Charmaine person was, or why they were ganging up on him and Levi with Brian, but he did know this.

Charmaine was going down.

Especially since their Bewear just thoroughly crushed Flowey’s shiny Lucario.

Maybe Charmaine was actually Cactus Everdeen. It made sense to him.

\[ \text{The promise of a wonderful new year fills you with} \]
\[ \text{DETERMINATION} \]

Chapter End Notes

Bringing In A Brand New Year - Charles Brown
This World Is Not My Home - Jim Reeves
Go Your Own Way - Fleetwood Mac
Wannabe - Spice Girls

Fun Fact: I have NO idea what to put here so, uh...I've been reading a manga called The Ancient Magus' Bride, and it is so fucking amazing. I recommend it to anyone with an interest in the occult and Beauty and the Beast-type romances and flowers and MMMMAGIC.
A Hard Day's Night

Chapter Summary

PTA savagery, dance moms, and plot. Also, Miranda's back, but who cares about HER?

Chapter Notes

idk what to tell you guys

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

3:26 P.M., January 5th, 20XR

It's a beautiful day outside.

The sun is shining.

The air is still.

On days like this, kids like you…

...are playing cards with your friends in the library.

“Got any fives, Frisk?” Levi asked.

Frisk pouted their lower lip and put down two of their six cards.

Levi threw down his hand of four cards - all of them fives. The group groaned.

“Someday, Goldsby, I WILL find your weakness, and vengeance WILL be mine,” Brian hissed.

Levi smirked. “Good luck with that, Bri-Bri.”

“Don’t call me Bri-Bri, jerk!”

“Hiii, Bri-Bri~”

Brian choked and gagged on air. He slowly turned around in fear to see Miranda, smiling down at him.

“What’re you doing here?” Hunter sighed in resignation.
“I’m just here to say hello!” Miranda said with fake cheer.

“And now you have, so unless you wish to join us for another round of Go Fish, kindly leave us alone and never speak to us again,” Caroline said, not even bothering to move her eyes from her book.

“I don’t have to listen to a NERD,” Miranda said, sticking her nose in the air.

“If you won’t listen to a nerd, you’ll listen to the guy you’re stalking and GO AWAY, Miranda!” Brian snapped.

Miranda’s eyes widened. She scoffed and turned on her heel to walk away.

The other kids stared at him.

“Hail Brian, he who hath defended us from the Duchess of Jerkfaces,” Caroline exalted sarcastically.

“Hail!” Penelope cried.

“Please don’t say it like that, Penelope,” Levi said uncomfortably.

“Oh, okay, sorry,” Penelope said nervously.

“It’s okay, you’re forgiven,” Levi said with a smile.

Then he and Caroline gagged loudly. Levi slipped his mask on over his face, and Caroline hid her face in her book.

Linda had entered.

Sans and Mettaton put down their phones with a sigh as Linda entered. They KNEW she was going to try and have the Spring Concert canceled again. They just KNEW it.

Linda placed the paperwork in front of Helen and cleared her throat.

“Helloooo, everyone!” she said, her voice falsely cheerful and her smile falsely bright. “I hope that everyone had a wonderful break, now let’s get started!”

Linda looked around the table, having expected applause possibly.

Her smile fell. “Aanyway, let’s get down to business!”

“To defeat~ The huns~” Mettaton finished.

The table broke out into giggles.

Linda’s left eye twitched. “As I was SAYING,” she growled, “the quarterly bake sale will be on Monday, February seventh this year! All in favor?”

More than half raised their hands.

“Ookay, then!” Linda said. “Did you get that, Helen?”

“Sorry, I was too busy doing your paperwork, could you repeat that?” Helen said.
Linda turned toward Helen fast enough that a few people heard a crack.

“Quarterly bake sale. February seventh. Write. It. DOWN. Helen.”

Helen just stared at Linda and shrugged. “Okay.”

Linda snarled.

Diana was sweating nervously. “S-so, uh… how about the Spring Concert?” she said, trying pathetically to move the discussion forward.

“well, i’m pretty sure linda’s gonna try to have it cancelled.” Sans said.

“Again,” Mettaton added.

A few parents oohed.

Linda glared at Mettaton and Sans. Mettaton was filing his nails. Sans was slurping on a juice box.

“Those juice boxes are for the children, Sans,” Linda said.

“you expect me to drink diana’s moldy tea?” Sans asked. “if i didn’t know better, linda, i’d say you had it out for me.”

“If you don’t want my tea, then have the coffee!” Diana snapped.

“your coffee is almost as bad as your gluten-free oatmeal cookies, and that’s a real accomplishment.”

“Well, I NEVER -!”

“never what, diana? learned how to bake?”

“Well,” Helen stated, earning everyone’s attention, “considering that the incident back in December that led to Mrs. Roth being fired led to Mrs. Miller and Mrs. Schultz being fired as well, we’ll have to turn to the vice principal for this, since he’s the acting principal until next year.”

Linda and Diana turned to gawk at Helen.

“Anyway, the teachers will have handouts about the bake sale on Monday, if you wish to take part just sign the attached form and state what you’ll be bringing, the signed forms are due next Friday at the latest,” Helen continued. “If you have any questions, feel free to ask me, Mrs. Thompson, or Mrs. Mosley. If there are any concerns, please take them to acting principal Mr. McBride.”

Everyone gawked at Helen.

“If someone didn’t actually do things in this meeting, we’d never leave,” Helen explained.

Linda’s face was flushed with rage.

“Ten minute break,” she hissed through clenched teeth.

She grabbed her purse and stomped out of the room, tailed by Diana. Diana turned briefly toward Helen, a smug smirk on her face. Helen paid no attention, to Diana’s ire.

Once the worst members of the PTA were gone, The collective sigh of relief changed the temperature in the library by one degree.
“That was INSANE,” Sharona wheezed. “Seriously, Sans, you coulda been KILLED!”

“eh, whaddaya gonna do,” Sans said with a shrug. “if i die, i die.”

“Hopefully not before you-know-what,” Mettaton said with a smirk.

“that heavily depends on the exact nature of you-know-what,” Sans said.

“Papyrus told me about your little New Year’s Resolution…” Mettaton drawled.

“New Year’s Resolution, huh?” Sharona said. “Please explain.”

“This oughta be good,” Helen said, leaning forward.

The rest of the table made noises of agreement. Sans chuckled and held up his hands in a gesture of surrender. “okay, okay, i’ll talk,” he said.

Silence.

“Well?” Brett said. “Are you gonna tell us or not?”

“i will,” Sans said. “someday.”

Everyone groaned.

“Just TELL US already!” Monica urged.

“i’m planning to ask tori to marry me,” Sans admitted.

Heavy silence descended. Then screams and cheers erupted.

Sans scratched the back of his head bashfully. Then he felt a weight on his back.

He turned around.

Frisk stared at him, ruby-red eyes glistening with sheer joy.

They hugged each other.

Sans laughed. “okay, calm down everyone! it’s not like i’m gonna do it tonight.”

<<When ARE you gonna do it, then?>> Frisk asked.

Sans merely shrugged. “i’ll do it when i do it, just know that i’ll do it and be happy.”

Frisk saluted and clambered onto Sans’ lap.

The Skeleton chuckled and nuzzled the Human’s fluffy brown mop of hair. “geez, kid, you’re gettin’ tall,” he remarked.

“Where’s Laura, Brooke? You talked to her once, didn’t you?” asked a girl with black hair in a high ponytail wearing a red leotard.

“Didn’t you hear, Alicia? She got put on pointe at the end of last year,” asked a girl with flaxen
blonde hair in a bob cut wearing a sky blue leotard.

“What?! Lucky…” said a girl with chestnut hair in a french braid wearing a magenta leotard.

“I know! Apparently she’s the right age or something…” said the girl in the sky blue leotard.

“But Skye and Amara are the oldest in our class! They’re gonna be in high school next year!” said the girl in the magenta leotard.

“Hey, I’m just repeating what Miss Jo said, Chloe!” the girl in the sky blue leotard defended.

Elaina tried to tune them out as she continued her barre warmup. She stared into the mirror to make sure she was keeping form. She was wearing the teal ¾-sleeved leotard Felicity had gotten her for Christmas with black leggings.

“But really, who do you think is gonna go on pointe next?” asked the girl in the sky blue leotard.

“I actually think it’s between Skye, Alicia, Miranda, and Elaina,” the girl in the magenta leotard said.

Elaina tensed at the mention of her name.

Oh dear.

“Okay, Skye and me I can see, I dunno who the heck Miranda is, but Elaina?” said the girl in the red leotard, apparently Alicia. Elaina never could keep track of who’s who in her ballet class…

“I heard Miss Jo and Miss Yvonne discussing who to move up to Miss Yvonne’s class, and Elaina’s name came up,” said the girl in the sky blue leotard, apparently named Brooke.

“Oh please, it’s GOTTA be a different Elaina!” Alicia pushed.

“How many Elainas do YOU know?” the girl in the magenta leotard questioned. This one was apparently Chloe.

“Does it matter? It’s totally obvious that Elaina Lorence can’t dance!” Alicia said, glancing smugly in Elaina’s direction.

“Alicia Berry, Brooke Lane, Chloe Phillips, you’re sitting out for the rest of the class.”

A woman with salt-and-pepper hair in a tight bun with frown lines in a grey short-sleeved leotard with black leggings and black ballet slippers entered the studio.

“Yes, Miss Jo,” the three girls mumbled as they slunk off to the lockers.

And with that, class began.

Linda stood at her place at the head of the table. Her smile was as sweet as high-fructose corn syrup and just as fake.

“Frisk, sweetie, please join the other children,” Linda said. “This is an adult discussion.”

“why do you think they have a coloring book, linda?” Sans asked.

“Sans, tell your daughter to join the other kids, she’s distracting us from our work,” Linda said.
“how so?” Sans asked.

“She just IS!” Linda snapped.

“sooo, you’re telling me that my kid, who you just misgendered twice, is distracting you just by existing?”

Linda sputtered a bit before growling.

“Fine, whatever. SHE can stay, as long as SHE doesn’t do that weird flappy-thing with HER hands.”

“okay then. they just have to be quiet.”

Frisk wasn’t paying attention. They were too busy coloring.


Repeat as necessary until you succeed or fall face-first into a puddle of your own blood, sweat, and tears.

Such is ballet. Such is life.

Elaina felt that she had it down, but that didn’t mean she could stop. In fact, it only meant she had to work harder so she could remain in top form and keep the motions retained to memory.

Pirouette. Leap. Plié.

Repeat as necessary.

“Alright class, let’s go over our new routine now!” Miss Jo called out.

Elaina moved to their new spot, which was right in the front, next to where Skye and Amara were. Skye gave them a small smile, and Amara gave a tiny wave. At least those two were nice. The pianist sat down at the piano. He poised his hands over the keys, and the class went into their beginning position. the pianist started playing Moonlight Sonata. Elaina smiled.

They were so hyped for the coming recital.

They glanced briefly at the clock. Two more hours until class is out.

“Okay everyone, that’s all for today, you’re free to go.”

The sounds of shuffling paper and people mutter to each other - plus one exultant cry of “Finally” from someone - summoned Frisk back to reality.

They looked back down at their coloring book page. Even the background was colored in, with some trees drawn in.

“ready to go, frisky business?” Sans asked.
Frisk smiled and nodded, standing up from their place in the father’s lap and walking to pick up their bag.

They noticed Miranda pointing at them and giggling.

Frisk sighed and looked inside their backpack to see if anything was missing or added unnecessarily.

There was a folded piece of pink construction paper. Frisk unfolded it.

Loosr

How was Miranda in fifth grade again?

Oh yeah, she copied off of Naomi. How could they forget.

Frisk stared at the paper then back at Miranda. They tore it in two, sticking the two pieces into their mouth and chewing, all while glaring at Miranda.

Chara managed to front for a moment and give their creepy face.

Miranda squeaked and turned back to their horse magazine.

Frisk mentally high-fived Chara and smiled proudly, turning back to Sans and Mettaton.

“What was that?” Sans asked, a confused expression on his face.

Frisk made a zipping gesture over their lips and smiled.

“You ate a piece of paper.”

Frisk shrugged and giggled.

“You sure you have room for grillby’s?” Sans asked. “I mean, that paper was pretty dang pink, kid.”

Frisk nodded. <<You’re never too full for french fries!>> they signed excitedly.

“Got me there, kiddo.”

“Hey, Sans,” Mettaton said. “Sorry to interrupt, I mean this moment is adorable, but I’m going to go talk with this Mr. McBride about the Spring Concert if he’s still here.”

Okay, you joining us at grillby’s after, or are you headed home?”

“Home,” Mettaton replied. “I have SO much to arrange for the tour it’s not even funny.”

“Well, I’m a little biased, but work in general isn’t funny,” Sans said.

Mettaton rolled his eyes. “Anyway, I’ll see you two around.”

“Okay, see ya,” Sans said.

Frisk hugged Mettaton goodbye and rushed on ahead to their mother’s classroom.

Sans waved Mettaton goodbye and went to catch up to Frisk.

Mettaton waved Hunter and Hannah goodbye before leaving to speak with the vice principal.
Irma mopped the living room furiously, music blasting in the background.

“Papa don't preach~ I’m in trouble deep~ Papa don’t preach~ I’ve been losing sleep~”

As she tried to hit the high note, the phone rang. She trudged through the mopped floor to turn off the music and reach the phone to answer it.

She picked up the phone.

“What?” she snapped.

“Whoa, chill lady,” said the voice on the other end.

Irma’s eyes widened.

“Oh, heyyyy, Kevin!” she said, adopting an air of fake cheerfulness. “This is Kevin Cooney, right?”

“Uhhhhhh, no, this is Grant McColl.”

“Oh, sorrrry! I don't think I've heard you before. Anyways, does Barry have my stuff?”

“Not yet. Your order comes in next week.”

Irma blinked a few times. “Next week?”

“Did I fucking stutter?”

“But I used the last of it an hour ago! You want me to wait another week?!”

“You can always go to another guy, you know,” Grant said.

“How much would it take to speed up production?” Irma said.

“Three hundred,” Grant replied.

“Deal!” Irma shouted.

“But ya need to calm your shit. How much did you take?”

“The usual twenty grams.”

“Jesus Christ woman, you need to cut back.”

Irma heard some voices on the other end, unintelligible.

“That was Barry. He said you’re stuff can be in Monday at ten, just bring the cash.”

Irma heaved a sigh. “Oh my GOD, you are a LIFESAVER!”

“Yeah, whatever, lady,” Grant dismissed. “Also, you gotta pick up your kid in half an hour.”

“Kid?” Irma said in confusion. “What kid?”

“The one in ballet every day of the week except Sundays? The one whose name starts with an E?”
Irma made confused noises before realizing. “Oh, right, THAT. Thanks.”

“Whatever.”

“Wait, where’s Kevin?” Irma asked. “He’s my personal contact,”

“Hell if I know. Somethin’ ‘bout a PTA meeting at his kid’s school. I’m just covering for him ’cause I owe him one.”

“Kevin has a kid?”

“Yeah, he’s apparently got a brat in the first grade at…uh…oh, for fucks sake lady, just HANG THE FUCK UP AND GET YOUR DAMN KID ALREADY!”

Grant hung up the phone. Irma scoffed and stared at the receiver in indignation. She growled and put the phone back on the charge port.

Irma started realizing that she was a bit peckish. Maybe she could leave early and grab something to eat.

She went to grab her things only to hear a squelching sound beneath her feet.

She looked down.

She’d mopped the carpet.

“Oh, my goodness!” Toriel said as she sat in her place at the bar of Grillby’s next to Sans. “Are you sure Helen actually did that?”

“really, i’m surprised she didn’t do anything sooner,” Sans said. “if i were her, i’d’ve lost my patience decades ago.”

“Well, I for one am VERY proud of her,” Toriel said.

“as am i, my love, as am i.”

Frisk, Sans, and Toriel toasted to Helen’s newfound backbone.

“so the bake sale’s on the seventh of february,” Sans said. “the teacher’s’ll be getting handouts on monday.”

“Let me guess, Linda’s bringing her lemon squares again?” Toriel sighed.

“god, let’s hope not,” Sans said. “you bringin’ your famous butterscotch cinnamon pie this year?”

Toriel smiled. “Well, it IS Frisk’s last year on elementary school…”

“that’s preeetty vague, toots,” Sans teased.

Toriel clicked her tongue. “Oh, I suppose…”

Frisk clapped and bounced in their seat.

“whoa, careful there kiddo,” Sans said with a chuckle. “don’t wanna bounce through the roof and
hurt yourself, do we?”

Frisk giggled and settled down.

Grillby shook his head fondly as he wiped down a glass.

Frisk dipped one of their fries in their heavily-sprinkled double-chocolate milkshake drizzled in hot fudge and bit into it.

The french fry-y, chocolatey goodness filled them with **Determination**.

FILE: SAVE.

Mettaton sat in the leather armchair, leaning his head into his hand.

The brown-haired, blue-eyed man across from him was messing around with his pen, balancing it on his upper lip.

The name placard on the desk said the following:

**Vice Principal Nathan McBride**

Only the word “vice” was covered by a strip of notebook paper scotch taped to the placard with the word “acting” on it in blue colored pencil.

The wastebasket in the corner had a little basketball hoop mounted on the edge.

“So, Mr. Mettaton,” Mr. McBride began, “you wished to discuss the Spring Concert?”

“That’s correct,” Mettaton answered. “You are aware of the incident last year in which Linda Thompson tried to cancel the Spring Concert in favor of the dying baseball team?”

“There is no more baseball team, actually,” Mr. McBride corrected. “The coach gave up a few days before the concert.”

“Oh,” Mettaton said. “I’m sorry to hear that.”

“It’s fine,” Mr. McBride dismissed with a wave of his hand. “He was getting close to retirement anyway. He qualified for early retirement with benefits, so…”

“Ah.”

“Yeah.”

“But what will you do if Mrs. Thompson tries to have it cancelled again?” Mettaton asked.

Mr. McBride shrugged. “Probably tell her to get the hell out of my office or I’ll spray her with bleach.”

Mettaton stared at Mr. McBride.

“You have some good ideas, sir,” Mettaton commended.

Mr. McBride snorted. “It’s not that big a deal,” he dismissed. “I went to highschool with her. She
hasn’t changed a bit, except for the fact that her roots are showing.”

Mettaton stifled a laugh. “If you told her that, she would KILL you,” he said.

“It’s her fault for walking into my office,” Mr. McBride said. “No one walks into MY office with a bad root touchup.”

“You have your priorities in order, sir,” Mettaton said. “It was a pleasure talking to you.”

“The pleasure is mine, sir!” Mr. McBride said. “Tell your boyfriend I said hello, and that he has great taste in men.”

Mettaton smiled.

“I think that BOTH of us have great taste.”

Mettaton left the office with a smile.

He and Papyrus really did have great taste…

Elaina took her cyan hi-tops out of her locker and nearly put them on when she heard something rolling around inside of them.

She checked inside of them.

Thumbtacks.

Alicia, Brooke, and Chloe giggled.

“Really? Some people are so childish,” someone next to Elaina sighed.

Elaina looked up at the tall, pretty, blue-eyed blonde in a pastel pink leotard. It was Skye.

“Right, Skye?” said Amara, a girl with thick wavy black hair and dark green eyes with long eyelashes. “It’s like they have nothing better to do with their lives!”

“Hey, SOME people have the potential to do more with their lives than dance!” Alicia snapped.

“That’s why you’re not on pointe,” Skye countered.

Amara snorted. Alicia scoffed in indignation and turned back to her locker to fix her lip gloss.

Skye and Amara turned back toward Elaina. “You okay there?” Skye asked.

Elaina nodded. “T-thank you…” she said quietly.

Skye smiled. “Don’t worry about it!” she said. “I just can’t stand people like her…”

“Yeah,” Amara agreed. “So much potential, wasted on petty tactics…”

“Uh,” Elaina interrupted, “f-f-forgive me for a-asking, but…wh-who’s M-Miranda again?”

Amara spoke up - she knew everyone in the class, so of course she would answer. “Miranda M. Mosley, age ten, fifth grader at Mountainside Elementary School,” she explained. “Her father’s a
businessman who’s away on business a lot, her mother’s a housewife and a member of the PTA. She attends classes on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays.”

“Oh, she’s the one with the tacky pink headband, right?” Skye asked.

“Mmhmm.”

“I didn’t even think she could dance, but apparently she can.”

“Nah, it’s because her mom tries to bribe Miss Jo and Miss Yvonne, as well as a bunch of other instructors,” Amara explained.


“Apparently to give her ‘one on one’ dance instruction,” Amara said, using air quotes.

Skye sighed and rolled her eyes. “One-on-one can only help so much…”

“Especially if you lack the motivation,” Amara added, side-eyeing Alicia with a smirk.

Alicia threw one of her slippers at Amara, who caught it without batting an eyelid.

“Nice try, Berry,” Amara said. “Maybe someday you’ll actually someone off guard.”

Alicia growled and turned to walk away. Chloe and Alicia followed her.

“So, Elaina,” Skye said, “when’s your mom picking you up? Do you know?”

Elaina shrugged. “L-last time she was t-t-ten minutes l-l-late to p-p-pick me up, so who knows?”

Skye gave a sympathetic whine and hugged the younger student. “Well, let’s hope she doesn’t take THAT long to get here, okay?”

Elaina gave a small smile and nodded.

Amara patted her head before slinging her bag over her shoulder and waving Skye and Elaina farewell.

Then a beep sounded.

“Oh, that’s my phone,” Skye said. “My ride’s here. See you Monday, Elaina!”

Elaina smiled and waved goodbye.

She went to the front lobby, only to find her mother waiting.

“Finally, I thought you’d NEVER leave,” Irma complained. “Come on, we’re eating out tonight. Italian.”

Elaina’s eyes widened, along with her smile.

Irma cringed. “Stop smiling, it doesn’t suit you at all.”

Elaina’s smile fell. “S-s-sorry…”

“And quit apologizing!” Irma snapped. “I HATE it when you do that…”
Elaina stayed quiet, her very existence seeming to ooze soriness in more ways than one.

Frisk sat in the den and stared at their homework as Sans watched some Mythbusters. Frisk was undeniably enthusiastic about science, but they still had trouble here and there.

“need a hand there, kid?” Sans asked.

Frisk shook their head in denial before changing it to a nod.

Sans chuckled. “okay, then, let’s see what we got here…when heat is transferred through a solid object, it’s called…what?”

Frisk wracked their brain for the answer, only to come up blank.

So they decided to let luck guide them.


“very good, kid!” Sans praised, rumpling Frisk’s hair. “and the sign for conduction looks like this.”

He balled his hands into fists and hit them together while moving them from right to left.

Frisk’s eyes lit up as they repeated the sign.

Sans chuckled. “yep, just like that.”

Sans picked up his phone and set the camera to record.

“okay, i got a request for ya, friskito,” Sans said, panning the camera toward Frisk.

Frisk cocked their head to one side.

“can ya show the camera what sign you just learned?”

Frisk shrugged and did as they were told.

“very nice, well done!”

Frisk smiled proudly.

<<You’re going to send it to grandpa, aren’t you?>> they signed.

“yep.”

Elaina twirled the spaghetti on her fork and took a small bite. She could feel Irma’s scrutinizing glare.

Her stomach felt tight. Her mouth felt dry. She felt her hands trembling.

She reached for the water and took slow sips until she calmed down enough that she wasn’t shaking.

She took slow, deep, quiet breaths in an attempt to calm herself further.
She tore off a chunk of a breadstick so she could dip it in the spaghetti sauce.

“No breadsticks, you’ll get fat,” Irma said as she took a bite of her spinach-stuffed manicotti.

Elaina put the piece on a plate off to the side and took a bite of meatball.

Irma glared at her child as she took a sip of her Bloody Mary.

Then raucous laughter erupted from a nearby table.

Elaina squeaked in surprise and looked around until she layed her eyes on the source of the noise.

A Skeleton in a tuxedo and a Robot in a sparkly berry-colored dress were laughing about something.

Irma turned toward the table and scowled.

“Just ignore them, Elaina,” Irma said coldly. “They’re heathens.”

Elaina didn’t respond, which Irma took as concession to her demands.

Elaina snuck glances out of the corner of her eye, paying attention to the little bits of their conversation.

They seemed to be having fun.

Elaina wondered if they would ever have fun like that while eating with someone.

Papyrus and Mettaton stopped laughing after a bit. Mettaton glanced around to see if anyone was mad. No, no, no…oh, there's someone. Looks like a mother and her…child? They looked nothing alike. The kid looked like they were going to have a panic attack. Oh dear…

They silently observed as the woman and the child tried to calm themself by sipping water and breathing slowly and deeply - it seemed as though they were used to this scenario.

Moments later, the child was calm once more. Papyrus and Mettaton breathed a collective sigh of relief.

“Anyway, I think we can be rest assured that the Spring Concert will go off without a hitch!” Mettaton said.

“THAT’S GREAT!” Papyrus said cheerfully. “HUNTER WILL BE MOST PLEASED WITH THIS DEVELOPMENT!”

“Indeed he will!” Mettaton concurred. “Linda, on the other hand…”

“IS LINDA, NOTHING MORE AND NOTHING LESS,” Papyrus finished. “YOU JUST SAID THAT SHE CANNOT DO ANYTHING, AND I TRUST YOU ON THAT! AND IF SHE DOES DO SOMETHING, I KNOW YOU WILL DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT, BECAUSE YOUR SENSE OF JUSTICE WILL NOT ALLOW YOU TO DO OTHERWISE! AND THAT’S JUST ONE OF MANY THINGS I LOVE ABOUT YOU.”

Mettaton smiled warmly at Papyrus and held his hand from across the table.
The rest of the world melted away, leaving just the two of them. It always seemed to do that at some point whenever they were together.

Both of them were at ease.

Flowey attempted silence as he had the little Pokemon heads form rows of four.

Pokemon Trozei was not to be trifled with, it seemed.

The only light in the sleeping Frisk’s bedroom came from the 3DS Flowey was using, the only sounds the stylus tapping on the screen and Frisk’s slow, sleepy breaths.

The backdrop started blinking red. Flowey had to move fast if he wanted to win.

Aaand game over.

He stared at the screen. The screen was full of Cacnea and Bulbasaur.

Cactus Everdeen ruins his Poke-Prowess once more.

Flowey was very tempted to quit Pokemon. But no. He HAD to make a Pokemon reach level 100. Otherwise he would owe Sans and Undyne 50 bucks.

And Flowey did NOT have 50 bucks to spare the likes of them.

Or himself.

Could sapient sociopathic flowers without a middle school education get jobs?

\[ \textit{The night fills you with} \]

\[ \textit{DETERMINATION} \]

Chapter End Notes

A Hard Day's Night - The Beatles
Be A Man - Mulan OST
Moonlight Sonata - Ludwig van Beethoven
Papa Don't Preach - Madonna

Fun Facts: Hoo boy, what to say, what to say, uh...
8:45 A.M., January 8th, 20XR

It’s a cold day outside.

Rain is falling.

A north wind is blowing.

On days like this, kids like you...

…eagerly await the morning announcements.

The first thing Ms. Toriel’s fifth grade class heard was the eardrum-piercing sound of pure feedback - the sole remnant of Mrs. Miller’s principalship.

*Gooooood morning Mountainside Elementary! I am your acting principal, Mr. McBride, here with the morning announcements!*  

To Frisk’s surprise, there was applause. Actually, on second thought, it’s really not surprising when one remembers just how boring Mrs. Miller was when doing…literally anything. Mr. McBride, however, was fun. It was…new? That clearly wasn’t the right word. They had to remember to ask Caroline after the announcements. She’d know.

*On February seventh, the quarterly bake sale is coming! Handouts will be available this afternoon and are due by Friday at three, so if anyone want to participate, get your butts in gear and let us know! We’d love to have ya!*  

Wow. Mr. McBride really IS more fun than Mrs. Miller. He’s certainly more enthusiastic, that’s for sure…
*Also, the annual Spring Concert is coming up! Four lucky fourth graders and four lucky fifth graders have a chance to get a solo part, further details will be available soon!*  

Everyone whispered and mumbled, staring at Hunter. Hunter merely stared at their desk, silently begging them to stop staring.  

*And last, but certainly not least, the graduating fifth graders have another big opportunity! Write an essay on your school experience and get a chance to read it at graduation in May! The essays are due in March, more information will be available soon!*  

Now everyone turned to stare at Caroline. Caroline didn’t even bother glancing up from her book. As usual.  

*And that is ALL, you guys have a WONDERFUL day, and I will see you around!*  

And the feedback that signaled the end of the morning announcements rang through the skulls and dust of every student and teacher.  

Toriel was stretching out her jaw to rid herself of the ringing in her ears.  

“The more things change, the more they stay the same…” she mumbled under her breath.  

---  

Elaina sat at their desk, quiet as always. They tried to pay attention to the lesson, but there was always something distracting them, it seemed.  

Maybe their uniform was terribly itchy - a red polo shirt, khaki jumper dress, white tights, and black Mary Jane shoes combined to make the wearer’s experience one of immeasurable discomfort, but at least Elaina had chewed the tags off.  

Maybe someone was whispering - Alicia, Brooke, and Chloe were in their class, so the three were very likely to whisper and titter about something or another.  

But not this time.  

This time was far different.  

This time it was Elaina’s own worried mind distracting them.  

Wait. That was actually pretty normal for Elaina. They were a born worrier.  

But the fact remains that their anxiety was killing them, and their ADHD made it even worse since now they could focus on literally nothing else.  

They stared forward blankly at absolutely nothing, hyperfocused on the contents of their own mind.  

As they had been since Friday night.  

They just couldn’t believe it.  

Were they really allowed to go on pointe? Weren’t they a little young to go on pointe? Weren’t they lacking in talent? Elaina just could not find a reason for them to go on pointe.  

But that didn’t mean they weren’t excited. Au contraire, their excitement knew no bounds. After all, getting their first pair of pointe shoes is nearly every ballet student’s dream. That’s not what made Elaina scared.
What scared them was the feeling that they wouldn’t be good enough, that they didn’t actually deserve this, that it was all some kind of fluke and that they were getting excited over nothing all over again -


Elaina forced her focus back toward the lesson.

The blackboard was full of things already known.  The class was apparently reviewing chapter eight.

Elaina nearly sighed with relief.

Irma was pissed.

Of all times for a train to be stalled on the tracks, it had to be on her way to an urgent appointment.

Of all the rotten luck…

Irma groaned and slammed her face into the steering wheel, leaving the Mercedes-Benz logo imprinted on her forehead and causing the horn to honk.

She huffed and hissed, checking her GPS for some kind of detour.

She left the line of stalled cars and drove until she reached a four-way intersection, where she made a left turn.

She was going to make this appointment, come hell or high water.

Linda was pissed.

She simply wished to explain to Mr. McBride that the Spring Concert wouldn’t be happening this year if she had any say in it - and as the president of the Mountainside Elementary School PTA, she should naturally have the final say.

But then Mr. McBride said that the turnout last year was such that the Spring Concert was practically a given - and then he had the NERVE to bring up Hunter’s solo performance.  And THEN when Linda tried to explain why fine arts programs were pointless, he threatened her with a squirt bottle full of bleach.

Linda needed a smoke, but no.  Not yet.

She had a job to do.

She went into the copy room, where some idiot had left the copies of the Bake Sale handouts in the tray.

Linda picked them up and stuffed them into her purse, then she left.

As soon as she left the school building, she took out a cigarette and lit it, breathing in the menthol-flavored fumes.

She checked her watch.  She had enough time to grab something for lunch, thankfully.
Sans was repeating the letter Z in Aster font over and over as his students watched Bill Nye the Science Guy do his thing.

Then he snapped his eyes open - the lack of light on the ceiling panels meant that his eyelights were off.

He had a bad feeling in his bones.

But he knew that it had to wait - and waiting was something Sans was almost TOO good at.

He checked the time in the lower righthand corner of the computer screen. Class was over in ten minutes, the video in five.

He decided to meet Toriel for lunch. Thai food sounded pretty good today…

After the morning announcements, it was inevitable that Hunter was going to be bombarded with questions about the Spring Concert during lunch and recess.

“Are you gonna audition for the solo again, Hunter?”

“What song are you gonna do this year, Hunter?”

“Are you okay, Hunter? You look like you’re gonna die.”

And the answers Hunter gave to the askers were “yes, I don’t know, no I am not okay, and yes I am going to die have you seen my mother”.

Hunter had finally escaped the endless stream of questions by fleeing to join Caroline and Penelope in the library with their lunch.

They plopped down onto a blue beanbag chair and opened their lunch box, taking out their ham and cheese sandwich on homemade sourdough bread and staring at it in disgust. They were sure that if it had been made by anyone else besides their mother, it would have been okay. but as it was, Linda wrought the tragedy with her own two red-polished hands, and as such it was bound to induce vomit in those with weak stomachs.

Or stomachs in general.

“You want my cupcake?” Penelope asked Hunter, apparently having noticed their terror at the sight if the sandwich.

Hunter nodded their head and smiled. “Thanks, Penelope.”

Penelope smiled back and handed Hunter her chocolate cupcake with buttercream frosting. “No problem! Your mom can’t cook, so as far as I’m concerned, you need it more than I do.”

Hunter laughed. “You’re such a mom, you know that?”

Penelope blink, her face contorting somewhat in confusion. “But I’m ten, how could I possibly have a kid?”

“Lina Medina from Peru did it at age five,” Caroline interjected.

Hunter stared at her in a mix of awe, confusion, and terror. Penelope stared at her in awe and nothing else.
“I don’t even want to know how you know that,” Hunter said.

“I read it in a book,” Caroline said, defying Hunter’s wishes.

Hunter slumped forward in resignation. “Of course. How could it possibly be otherwise.”

“Books teach us many things, Hunter Thompson,” Caroline said.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if you knew the meaning of life,” Hunter moaned.

“42,” Caroline said.

Hunter stared at her blankly. Then they sighed wearily.

“Your mind is a weird place,” they mumbled.

“Yep,” Caroline agreed, returning to her book.

Penelope scooted over to sit next to Caroline, leaning against her right arm to read her book with her.

Hunter sighed. Those two were SO going to start dating in middle school.

Irma pulled into the parking lot and exited her vehicle, walking until she reached a concrete bench and sat down to wait.

She checked her gold wristwatch. She was an hour late. Thank goodness she rescheduled on Saturday…

Irma shot her head up when she heard the sound of screeching brakes.

A Toyota Tundra pulled into the parking lot. A lanky man smoking a cigarette with greasy brown hair and patchy stubble and green eyes with bags under them came out.

Irma waved the man over.

“Do you have my stuff, Kevin?” she asked hurriedly.

“Do you have the cash?” Kevin countered.

Irma dug inside her purse, pulling out three hundred-dollar bills with a smug smile on her face.

Kevin took them and stuffed them in his pocket. He went back to his truck and reached into the truck bed for a paper bag.

He walked back over to Irma, who thanked him.

As Irma watched Kevin drive off, she walked back to her car, waiting to open the bag until she was inside.

She unfolded the carefully-closed opening.

The faint blue glow reflected from the roof of her car.

Irma close the bag once more and drove off to drop her stuff off at home before going back to work.
Toriel had just finished grading papers when she heard the knock that had been a part of her daily working life for the past year.

“Who is there?” she asked, her smile being heard through her voice.

“thai,” said the voice on the other side.

“Thai who?” Toriel asked.

Sans opened the door. “thai don’t know what i’d do without you, babe.”

Toriel giggled, covering her burning face with her hands.

“but seriously tori, i got thai food and i love you to bits,” Sans said.

Toriel nearly squealed at how cute Sans was being, and leaned over to kiss him on the forehead.

Sans blushed cyan and set down their food. “i got us both peanut chicken with noodles, hope you don’t mind.”

“I don’t mind at all!” Toriel assured. “Thank you, Sans!”

Sans simply smiled and took a bite of noodles.

The couple ate together in contented silence, letting the stress of the morning flee away in each other’s presence.

“So,” Sans started, deciding to make a little conversation, “did the bake sale handouts come in yet?”

“No, not yet,” Toriel said. “They’ll probably come in this afternoon, I suppose.”

“huh,” Sans said. “okay then.”

Sans was definitely not okay. Not with this. The handouts were supposed to be given out before lunch.

This wasn’t just not okay. This was pretty freaking suspicious.

And Sans could think of two people who wouldn’t want Toriel to be in the bake sale.

Oh, Linda was going to GET IT.

“Sans? You seem awfully quiet, are you alright? Toriel asked, voice laced with concern.

Sans gave her a smile, bright and genuine. “tori. i am currently eating thai food and with the woman of my dreams,” he said. “i think i’m a little more than just ‘alright’.”

The rest of their lunch went off without a hitch. Twenty minutes later, Sans realized that his next class started in a few minutes.

“gotta head back to work, babe,” Sans said. “see ya this evenin’?”

Toriel smiled. “I will see you at home, dear!”

Sans and Toriel kissed each other goodbye, and Sans walked out of the classroom.

Then he heard a conversation.
“Okay, HOW could a stack of 300 bake sale flyers just go missing?!” someone asked angrily.
“I don’t know!” someone else said defensively. “I just went to get the cart and they were gone!”
“Did you see anything suspicious before or after you went to grab the cart?”
“No, I just passed Mrs. Thompson on my way back!”
Sans had heard all he needed to hear.
“Okay, we can just tell Mr. McBride and hope he’ll understand.”
“He probably will. I mean, he’s already done more in two weeks than Mrs Miller has in two decades!”
The two people laughed as Sans continued listening unnoticed.
He sighed as he walked to a door.
The outside said as follows:
Mr. Guthrie’s Grade 2 Class
He knocked on the door.
“Come on in,” came a voice from the other side.
Sans opened the door. Mr. Guthrie, a portly man in his mid-thirties with dull brown hair and eyes sat at a desk grading papers.
“hey al, how goes things?” Sans asked.
Mr. Guthrie looked up. “Sans! How’ve you been? Haven’t seen you much at campaigns since you got a girlfriend!” he said. “Now what brings you here?”
“well, at first, i was here having lunch with my girlfriend, then i overheard a conversation,” Sans explained. “apparently a stack of 300 bake sale flyers disappeared. i don’t have much proof aside from personal experience and the fact that she was seen in the area at the time of the crime, but i think linda thompson jacked the flyers.”
Mr. Guthrie blinked a few times, then sighed. “It’s not the first time she’s done something like that…”
“i had a feeling.”
“Okay. I know what I’m gonna do. Thanks for letting me know, Sans.”
“no problem, al,” Sans replied, shaking Mr. Guthrie’s hand. “see ya wednesday?”
“See you then!”

The bell rang. Caroline finally looked up from her book to find that Hunter and Penelope had already left.
Caroline sighed and put away the books she had read and put on her backpack.
She walked toward the library door and exited. She looked around the hallway.

And then she bolted.

She ran - past students, past teachers, past doors, past other students.

Miranda was talking at Naomi about twelve doors away from Ms. Toriel’s classroom.

“Listen Naomi, I am your friend, and friends let friends copy each other’s’ homework, understood?” the brunette pressured.

“For the love of GOD, Miranda, the bell just rang!” Naomi said. “If we don;t get a move on, we’ll be late!”

Then they heard Caroline running toward them.

Miranda turned to Naomi with a conspiratorial smirk.

Naomi’s aqua eyes widened. “You wouldn’t.”

“Watch me,” Miranda said smugly.

She kicked her backpack into Caroline’s path and waited.

Caroline ran and tripped over the garish, sparkly pink backpack and landed facefirst.

Miranda started laughing.

Naomi wasn’t sure what to do. Helping Caroline would be the right thing to do, but then Miranda would just target her next.

Caroline simply stood up as if she hadn’t just smacked her face into linoleum tiling, shook the shock out of her head, and looked around.

Her nose and lip were bleeding.

Miranda and Naomi screamed.

Caroline just stared at them like they were crazy and continued her mad dash back to class.

Miranda and Naomi stared on after her. The winced when they heard the screams of concern from the classroom.

“I’m going back to class,” Naomi said coldly. “I’m not going to tattle, but someone could have been seriously hurt, Miranda. If you pull something like that again, I’ll HAVE to tell someone. It won’t be a teacher, but it’ll be someone.”

“And if you do tell, I’ll end you,” Miranda said, a cruel grin on her face.

“I know,” Naomi responded before walking away.

Miranda was left alone with her thoughts. What was WITH Naomi? She was supposed to be her FRIEND, and yet here she was saying that when they started middle school she wouldn’t be letting Miranda copy her homework anymore! And then she had the NERVE to tell her not to remind people of their place in life?
Miranda made a “hmph” sound, picked up her backpack, and walked toward class.

But before she was even a few steps of the way there, she saw blood spots from Caroline’s face on the ground.

She told herself not to care and just step around.

Randy sat in his cubicle, stretching out his arms and shoulders after hours of configuring line after line of code that served zero purpose aside from making it look like he was working.

Then the phone rang.

“Hi, this is Randy, may I help you?” he said automatically.

“Hello Mr. Marlow, this is Brenda Maddox, I’m the school nurse at Mountainside Elementary -”

“What did Levi do this time?” Randy sighed.

“Oh, no, sir, this is about Caroline.”

Randy nearly tipped himself backwards in shock.

“What happened?” he said, maybe more forcefully than he intended.

“She said that she was running to class when she tripped over someone’s school bag. She does have proof, since there are pink glitter flecks on her tights -”

“And why are you calling me while I’m working?” Randy asked irritably.

“Her lips and nose are bleeding,” Nurse Maddox said. “They haven’t stopped for the past half hour.”

“AND YOU’RE JUST NOW CALLING ME?!” Randy yelled, hurriedly gathering his stuff.

“Sir, district protocol states -”

“District protocol can kiss my ass Brenda, tell Caroline and Levi I’m on my way and so help me if anyone else says something about ‘district protocol’, I will NOT be happy!”

And with that Randy slammed the phone back on the receiver.

His boss was watching him from outside the cubicle.

“Lemme guess,” he said. “Lives on the line thanks to bureaucracy?”

“Could be,” Randy snapped.

“Go then, just do your work at home.”

Randy nodded his head in thanks and left the office.

He silently thanked whatever gods there were that he had such a lenient employer.

Irma threw herself on her bed, grateful for having such a lenient - and stupid - employer.
She opened the paper bag and took out one of the vials of luminescent blue liquid.

**Stardust.** The exact ingredients were a trade secret, but the effects varied from person to person and the stuff was highly addictive - and high in demand as a direct result.

Irma poured the vial’s contents into the syringe and wrapped the tourniquet around her left arm, tightening it with her teeth.

She felt around the crook of her elbow until she found her vein.

She set the needle point at the vein, squeezed her eyes shut, and pushed it in.

She pushed down on the plunger, watching intently as the entry point became stained an unnatural shade of light blue with purple flecks, like an alien bruise or a lava lamp.

As soon as the barrel was empty, Irma tried to remove the needle as carefully as possible.

**Tried being the keyword here.** Her hands were already shaking from the effects of the Stardust.

She got up and walked around a bit, waiting for the full effects to set in.

A few seconds in, her heart rate was starting to increase.

After two minutes, her legs felt like they would fall off if she didn't start running.

Five minutes after the injection, she couldn’t keep her eyes open despite the fact that the rest of her was practically screaming.

Ten minutes later, she was in her backyard, digging to make room for plants.

Never mind that it was the beginning of January, and barely 20 degrees Fahrenheit. She was digging to make room for her petunias, and damn everyone else.

Irma was on top of the world.

She was riding Stardust.

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**Elaina sat in their place at the back of the bus, as they did every day after school.**

They stared out the window, as they did every day after school.

They held out against the crumpled up pieces of paper thrown by Alicia and her lackeys, as they did every day after school.

They left the bus when it stopped in front of the dance studio, as they did every day after school.

They went to their locker and put away their things, as they did every day after school.

They went to the dressing room and put on their leotard, as they did every day after school.

They entered the studio, as they did every day after school.

They performed their barre exercises with the sound of Alicia’s posse gossipping in the backdrop, as they did every day after school.

**Miss Jo entered, signifying the beginning of class.**
They practiced their dances, as they did every day after school.

When they went to change back into their normal clothes, Miss Jo called out to them.

“Elaina Lorance? Skye Gray? Could you two follow me? I want to talk to both of you for a moment,” Miss Jo said.

Elaina and Skye glanced at each other and then followed Miss Jo.

They followed her to her office, which was decorated with posters advertising Miss Jo’s past performances from before she took up teaching ballet.

In the big soft silvery gray suede armchairs with pink throw blankets over the backs sat an irritated Irma and a blond man in a business suit. Next to Miss Jo’s desk was Miss Yvonne, a twenty or thirty-something woman with strawberry blonde hair in a spiky pixie cut and dark blue eyes and pastel pink lipstick in a pastel pink leotard with black legging and white legwarmers with pink polkadots and pastel pink pointe shoes.

Oh gosh.

Miss Jo walked over behind her desk and sat down.

“I have observed Skye and Elaina, as well as a few other select students, and I have discussed with Miss Yvonne Halliday as to who will be moving up to her class,” she explained.

“I have also had the opportunity to observe these two young ladies these past few months,” Miss Yvonne said. “From what I have seen, your daughters are very skilled and dedicated to their craft, and as such, I would like for them to be in my class.”

“And just what is your class?” Irma asked, prepared to bargain with Miss Yvonne about whatever she may have coming.

“Well Mrs. Lorence, I teach pointe technique,” Miss Yvonne answered breezily.

“And that’s different from normal ballet how, exactly?”

“Pointe technique is far more difficult and requires many factors to even consider allowing a student to move up to that level, and Skye and Elaina have both reached and surpassed that level,” Miss Yvonne explained. “They are both very strong and have very good alignment, although Elaina will have to get a physical to determine bone strength due to her age.”

Irma was about to say something when Miss Yvonne held up her hand.

“Said physical will be paid for in full by the studio, so you don’t have to worry about cost, Mrs. Lorence.”

Irma seemed slightly satisfied with the arrangement.

“Oh, Elaina blurted, causing everyone to turn toward them. “I-I’ve also been having trouble f-f-focussing m-my eyes on t-things far away, a-and I think I…m-might n-n-n-need…” Elaina’s voice started trembling and shrinking in volume.

Miss Yvonne smiled reassuringly. “No need to worry, Elaina!” she comforted. “There are many dancers who have eye problems. Many of them either take off their glasses for classes, or wear contact lenses. So it’s not much of a problem!”
Irma glared at Elaina. “And you didn’t tell me this before now WHY, exactly?” she hissed.

Elaina shrunk in on themselves. “B-b-because I-I-I thought y-you would get m-m-mad at me…” they just barely managed to squeak out.

Skye squeaked. She stepped forward to comfort Elaina. “Breathe, Elaina, slow deep breaths, okay?”

Elaina nodded quickly and breathed. Once they were calmed down enough, she simply stood in silence, trying their best to go unnoticed. This was very difficult for someone who just got done having an anxiety attack in a small room with only five other people.

“Do you need some water?” Skye asked.

Elaina nodded.

Skye smiled. “Okay then! I’ll take you there, okay?”

Elaina gave a small smile and nodded.

Skye offered her hand to Elaina, who took it cautiously.

As the two ballerinas left the room, the adults sat in silence for a moment.

“I am so, so sorry about her,” Irma said. “I don’t know WHAT her problem is, but she starts flipping out at the smallest of things -”

“Mrs. Lorence, it’s not a problem at all,” Miss Jo said. “Elaina is a very good dancer. She focuses on the steps and works at them until she masters them - and she masters them very quickly, even steps that take most students weeks to learn she manages to have down in a matter of a few days . The same goes for Skye as well. And they don’t get complacent either, they continue to practice, even when they clearly have the steps memorized. And Elaina may have moments where she starts to get overwhelmed, but she has demonstrated time and time again that she can recognize when this is happening and she calms herself down as best she can. And in competition, she has shown that she can easily put the crowds at the back of her mind and focus on her dancing.”

“Oh, well, yeah, but still -”

“Mrs. Lorence, I reviewed your daughter’s files over the break, and it mentions that she has been diagnosed with ADHD, GAD, and Asperger’s, is this correct?” Miss Yvonne asked.

“Y-yes, that’s correct,” Irma confirmed.

“I have experience working with dancers with mental illnesses,” Miss Yvonne said. “One of my past students who currently dances with the New York City Ballet has borderline personality disorder, and one of the students currently in my class has obsessive-compulsive disorder. I assure you, Mrs. Lorence, that your daughter is a very bright young lady with passion and potential - I would not have chosen her for my class otherwise.”

Irma was red in the face, but said nothing as she signed the forms for the physical and the pointe shoe fitting.

“I can at least take her to my own optometrist, I hope?” Irma asked.

“Yes, you can,” Miss Jo assured.
Irma calmed down considerably, her face looking more pink than red now.

Meanwhile, Skye and Elaina were sitting on a bench by the water fountain just around the corner from Miss Jo’s office.

“You okay, Elaina?” Skye asked.

Elaina nodded. “T-t-thank you…” they stammered.

“It’s fine!”

“Oh my GOSH, look at Elaina!”

Alicia, Brooke, and Chloe walked by with their dance bags over their shoulders.

“What the heck did you DO?” Brooke mocked.

“I bet she got kicked out for sucking so bad,” Alicia said.

Brooke and Chloe laughed.

“Actually, we’ve been put on pointe,” Skye said, a deceptively simple smile on her face.

“What?!” Alicia shrieked.

“I said, we have been put on pointe,” Skye repeated slowly.

“Don’t talk to me like I’m retarded!” Alicia spat.

“Then don’t be a brat, it’s as simple as that!” Skye said cheerfully.

Alicia growled.

“Come on girls, we have BETTER things to do than talk to LOSERS,” she said, glaring down at them from her nose. The effect was dampened by the fact that she was shorter than Skye by almost a full head.

She turned on her heel and walked off, Brooke and Chloe tailing her and imitating her actions.

Then Elaina giggled.

Skye turned to look at them in confusion.

“Y-you rhymed.” Elaina giggled.

Skye’s eyes widened. Then she began to giggle as well.

“Oh my god, I did, didn’t I?” she said.

After the two were done giggling, they went back to the office, where Irma and Mr. Gray had just finished signing the forms.

“Elaina, Skye,” Miss Jo began, “you will continue attending my classes for the rest of the week. Your first session with Miss Yvonne will be next Monday at the same time as my class. Am I understood?”

“Yes, Miss Jo,” Skye and Elaina said.
The teacher and her students stood together in silence.

Then Miss Jo rolled her eyes and held out her arms. “Oh, c’mere you two! One last hug!”

Skye and Elaina lept into Miss Jo’s arms for a hug.

“I’m gonna miss you two,” Miss Jo said.

“We’ll miss you too, Miss Jo,” Elaina whispered.

Irma and Mr. Gray looked on at the touching scene from the doorway.

“My Skye has really taken a shine to Elaina,” the man said. “Not hard to see why. Elaina’s a sweet kid.”

Irma merely hummed in response.

“I should get going,” Mr. Gray said. “My husband’s waiting for me. Come along Skye-high! We’re having chicken parmigiana tonight to celebrate!”

“Woohoo!” Skye cheered as she trotted toward her father. “Bye, Elaina! See you tomorrow!”

Elaina smiled and waved after her.

Irma stared after them.

“Come on, Elaina, let’s go,” she said.

“Yes, mother,” Elaina said, following behind Irma by a few steps, chasséing en avant in their happiness.

Absolutely nothing could get them down.

Then they got into the car.

“Elaina, I don’t you should talk to that Skye girl anymore,” Irma said casually. "I don't want you turning queer on me, is that understood?"

Elaina lowered their head. “Yes, mother,” they said quietly.

They lied. What their mother didn't know wouldn't hurt her.

After all, she didn’t know about the amazing things in Elaina’s bedroom closet. She didn’t know that Felicity and Grace left candy outside their window every month. She didn’t even know that they’d been talking to Frisk for six months without her knowing.

What their mother didn’t know wouldn’t hurt her.

Linda was on the living room couch, smoking and watching the evening news.

Hunter stood at the bottom of the stairs, bracing themself for whatever their mother’s reaction may be.

They walked up to the couch and sat down next to her.

“And now, Sara Smith-Singh with today’s Ebott Event. Sara, what went on today?”
Sara Smith-Singh, a woman with dark green eyes and coffee-brown hair showed up on the screen.

“Thank you, Gil,” Sara said. “A dealer of the drug known as Stardust was arrested today at around noon. One Rodney McCormick from the Upland area was arrested…”

“What do YOU want?” Linda said to Hunter, putting slight vitriol on the word “you”.

“The bake sale handout,” Hunter said. “If you want to sign it, go ahead.”

Linda blanched. “O-okay,” she said, snatching the paper from Hunter’s hands.

Hunter bid Linda goodnight and went up to their room.

Linda stared down at the paper. The ones she’d taken from the copy room were white. These were pink.

Then, out of the corner of her eye, she saw something on the corner of the paper.

Written in an extremely annoying font in extremely small print on the upper-left corner of the paper were the words:

get dunked on

Linda screeched in fury.

Flowey screeched in fury.

“YOU IDIOT” he screamed at the Meowth on the screen. “I raised you from a fucking EGG, and THIS is the thanks I get…”

Frisk threw a pillow at Flowey in a violent attempt to shut him up - violent for Frisk “Li’l Pacifist” Dreemurr, anyway.

Flowey growled and turned toward Frisk.

Their red eyes were wider than usual and their face was flushed.

Flowey suddenly felt uneasy.

“Stinkin’ BRAT,” he hissed.

Frisk shushed him.

Flowey grumbled as he turned off the 3DS. ‘The damn thing was almost out of charge anyway…

This wild day has filled you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes
Dancing Days - Led Zeppelin

Fun Fact (Part 1!!) - Lina Medina is a real person.

Fun Fact (Part 2!!) - Remember when we mentioned a contest in past comments? Well, the current arc is slowly coming to a close, and the kids are going off to middle school, which means we need characters! Details will be forthcoming, I will be discussing specifics with eney until then. Just know that this arc is FAR from being the last. Until next chapter~
Chapter Summary

Stitches, eyes, pizza, and revolutions. This should be entertaining...

Chapter Notes

Didja miss Hannah? How about Naomi? Well, they're both in here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

8:30 A.M., January 12th, 20XR

It’s a cold day outside.

The sun is shining

The air is still.

On days like this, kids like you…

…are staring at your friend’s stitches.

Everyone was staring at Caroline.

It was pretty hard not to stare at someone with stitches in their lip. Especially when there were more than five stitches.

And Caroline Marlow required eight stitches across her upper lip after that incident in the hallway in which she’d tripped over Miranda’s backpack and landed face-first on the linoleum tiling. That in itself was messed up enough, but then Caroline had said that it was “no big deal”, and that “it didn’t hurt”.

Eight stitches in the upper lip beg to differ.

“And you’re SURE that didn’t hurt?” Brian asked, incredulous.

“I’ve already told you guys that it didn’t,” Caroline said, beginning to get a bit testy. “I felt pressure from the needle and stuff, but no pain. Now shut up, class is starting.”

Brian grumbled a bit as Ms. Toriel asked for the bake sale handouts. Brian dug into his bag and took out his flyer, staring briefly at the signature.
He remembered the last time his mother made this, for his sixth birthday. David was at the office, so Helen and Brian decided to make something in secret, without David knowing.

The treat quickly became one of his favorites. He never did get to have it again after David came home and drunkenly ranted about how he hated sweet food or something, but the memory was a happy one up until David entered the picture.

Brian was eager for the coming bake sale, that much was certain.

“Okay Elaina, which image looks better - number one, or number two?”

Elaina held up one finger.

The test repeated a few more times until the optometrist was satisfied.

“Okay, now we move on to the chart,” the optometrist said. “Are you ready.”

Elaina nodded and followed the optometrist, a skinny bald man with aviator glasses and a white goatee, to a different room.

“Okay, Elaina, just stand behind the red tape and cover your left eye and tell me the letters you can read on each row I point at, okay?” he said. Elaina felt slightly uncomfortable, but nodded.

He pointed to the single letter on the top row.

“E,” Elaina said.

The optometrist nodded and pointed to the row below the giant E.

“F, P,” Elaina said.

The optometrist nodded and pointed to the row below that.

Elaina whimpered and squinted.

“Ah, ah, ah!” the optometrist blurted, causing Elaina to jump. “No squinting!”

Elaina nodded and apologized.

“U-uh, I think that’s an I, and uh, O, and an N?”

The man nodded and pointed to the row below.

Elaina shook their head.

“You can’t see this one?” the optometrist asked. Elaina shook their head.

“Alright then,” the optometrist said. “Now cover your other eye and we’ll repeat the test.”

Elaina shrunk in on themself and held onto the bangs covering their left eye. “B-but my mom said -”

“Elaina, your mother has given you permission, alright?” the optometrist said in what he probably thought was a calming voice but really it just sounded patronizing.

“Y-you mean she won't be m-m-mad at me?” Elaina asked.
The optometrist shook his head. “You’re perfectly safe, Elaina.”

Elaina nodded as they covered their right eye and lifted the bangs covering their left.

Elaina couldn’t read the man’s face as they repeated the test once more, with almost the exact same results.

“Okay then!” the optometrist said. “Thank you, Elaina! Now, if you could please wait in the waiting room while I speak with your mother in private?”

Elaina nodded and walked out, the doctor following behind them.

Once they made it to the waiting room, the optometrist called their mother back.

Irma followed the optometrist to his office, where she closed the door behind her and sat down in the chair across from his desk.

“Thank you SO much for arranging an appointment on such short notice, Wendell!” Irma said.

“Irma, please,” the man said. “Whenever we’re here, I’m Dr. Sawyer, alright?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Okay. So Elaina will definitely need glasses, no question there,” Dr. Sawyer said. “And when you told me that the Stardust caused her left eye to go ‘weird’, I didn’t realize you meant THAT!”

“What did you THINK I meant?” Irma asked.

“I thought you meant that her eye swelled up, or dissolved completely, not…THAT!”

“Well, it’s not that big a deal, it’s not like she’s dying!” Irma snapped.

“You’re injecting her with an addictive substance, Irma. She possibly could if you’re not careful.”

“What does it matter?! I only use five grams a week!”

“Okay, and any more than that could kill her, you heard Barry.”

Irma grumbled.

“Anyway, since it’s already paid for, I think you should go,” Dr. Sawyer said. “Elaina’s next appointment is around this time next year.”

Irma thanked Dr. Sawyer and left.

She went to the waiting room to find Elaina squinting at the TV.

“Elaina, let’s go, you’ll rot your brain if you watch that,” Irma said.

“Y-yes, mother,” Elaina said quietly as she stood up and followed her mother out to the car.

“And with that, it is time for questions! Now, who can tell me when the second World War was issued?” Toriel asked the class.

Almost everyone raised their hands.
“Let me revise the question, then. When did World War II begin before the United States joined?”

Everyone lowered their hands and mumbled except for Frisk.

“Well, since they are the only one with their hand up, Frisk will answer!” Toriel said.

<<World War II started on September 1st, 1939 and ended September 2nd, 1945!>> Frisk signed.

“That is correct, Frisk!” Toriel praised. “World War II began on September 1st in 1939 with the invasion of Poland by the Nazis.”

Levi shot up his hand eagerly, waving around.

“Yes, Levi? Do you have something to add?”

“Uh-huh!” Levi said. “My bubbie Gerda’s a Holocaust survivor!”

“Really?” Toriel said.

“Yeah! She came to America after being freed from the concentration camp she was held in!”

“Well, you’ll have to tell us about that after this unit!” Toriel said.

“Actually, she’ll be at the bake sale, so you can hear it from her if you want!”

“Thank you, Levi!”

Levi turned toward Caroline and poked her arm. Caroline turned to glare at him.


“Well, Bubbie Gerda’s coming next month for the bake sale, and also your birthday since they’re the same day!” Levi said.

“Oh, the one who’s a Holocaust survivor?”

Levi nodded.

“Well that should be interesting…” Caroline mused.

“Yeah, I can’t wait to see how everyone’ll react to the story of how she punched a guard in the face when the camp was liberated!”

“That should be hilarious…” Caroline said.

Levi watched her write.

“Is that for the graduation speech thing?” he asked.

Caroline merely shrugged.

“I don’t think anyone else is doing it, and since all the teachers know about how good you are at reading, I think that if you don’t write one, they’ll make you write one.”

Another shrug. “Maybe.”

Levi smiled and shook his head, The inevitability was amusing…
Mr. McBride was going over the signed handouts for the bake sale so he knew how many tables to set up.

_Toriel’s bringing some kind of pie, I’ve heard great things about her pie…Linda’s bringing lemon bars, god help us all…Diana’s bringing oatmeal raisin cookies, better have some antacids available…Helen’s bringing._

Mr. McBride’s thought process was interrupted by a knock at the door.

“Come in,” he said, trying not to sound angry.

The first grade teacher Mrs. Davenport entered, dragging Hannah and a little Human boy with messy brown hair and green eyes along by their arms.

“These two were fighting,” she said.

“Kyle started it!” Hannah said. “He threw a pencil at Shashi!”

“Did NOT, it was Chelsea! CHELSEA threw it, not me!”

“Okay, I can’t take this anymore, I have a class to teach!” Mrs. Davenport groaned as she left the students with Mr. McBride.

The three of them were silent.

“Okay, here’s the deal,” Kyle said. “We staged a fight so we could talk to you.”

Oh. Well, color Mr. McBride interested.

“Well, talk then!” Mr. McBride said. “What did you two need that was so important that you staged a fight?”

“We’re to tell you that Chelsea DID throw the pencil at Shashi,” Hannah explained. “She’s been bullying people the whole year, and Shashi’s been getting bullied worse for some reason. I think it’s just ‘cause she’s a Monster.”

“Yeah, I think so too!” Kyle said in agreement. “We staged a fight ‘cause it was the only way we could think of to see you!”

“Yeah, since you’re all busy an’ stuff…” Hannah said.

Mr. McBride clasped his hands together and rested his chin on them. “Hannah, Kyle, listen. I may be busy, but I am NEVER too busy for my students. Now, thank you for telling me. Now, I want you two to tell Sashi and anyone else who’s being bullied by Chelsea to see me at recess. Okay?”

Kyle and Hannah smiled widely and nodded.

“Okay! Since lunch is in ten minutes, I’ll call Mrs. Davenport and tell her I’ll be keeping you down here until lunch is over. Now, I have a question for you two: do you like pizza?”

Elaina was back at school after visiting the doctor to get their x-rays. They were eating their lunch in the courtyard when something hit them in the back of their head.

They ignored it. They were used to it. Besides, if it happened again, they could always move to
another spot.

Something else hit them. They moved to another bench.

“Hey, we’re TRYING to get your ATTENTION!” someone shouted.

Elaina looked over toward the source of the voice. Alicia, Brooke, and Chloe were glaring at her, arms crossed in front of them.

Elaina blinked and tilted her head in confusion. “W-what do you need?” she asked.

“I NEED you to get off pointe!” Alicia said. “You’re a talentless freak who no one likes!”

“T-then why am I on p-pointe and not y-you?” Elaina managed.

“Because CLEARLY your mom BRIBED Miss Jo and Miss Yvonne to get you moved up!” Alicia said.

“B-but my mom hates me, w-why would she d-do that?”

Alicia said nothing.

“That’s sad ,” Chloe said.

“Shut up, Brooke,” Alicia snapped. “Come on, we have better things to do.”

“But I’m Chloe…”

“I SAID SHUT UP!”

Elaina watched them leave before returning to her lunch.

Chloe looked back at Elaina with pity before moving on.

Caroline sat in the library like she always did at lunchtime, writing for once rather than reading.

She was trying to think of a nice way to say “almost all of you are annoying idiots”, but she was failing pretty badly at it.

She decided to ask her dad later. Randy had done a little bit of writing in the past, as had her uncle, her grandfather, and some of her cousins. It ran in the Marlow family, it seemed. She wondered if it was the same with Magic, or perhaps that came from Bethany’s side.

She really hoped it didn’t come from Bethany’s side.

Then she saw Hannah talking to another first-grader. When Hannah caught her eye, she smiled and ran over.

“Hey, Coraline!” she said cheerfully as ever. ‘Whatcha doin’?”

“I’m writing,” Caroline answered. “Fifth graders have a chance to write a speech and read it at graduation.”

“Cool! Kinda like a story, right?”

“I guess,” Caroline said with a shrug. “Maybe I could put some down. Thanks, Hannah.”
“You’re welcome~” Hannah sang.

Caroline giggled a bit, recognizing the song. “I take you finally saw Moana?” she asked.

“Oh-huh! Shiny did too!”

Caroline couldn’t help but smile a bit. So Hannah still had that thing. “But did you LIKE it?” she asked.

Hannah nodded. “I really REALLY liked it! And so did Hunter!”

“I knew he would,” Caroline remarked.

“Oh, I gotta go now!” Hannah said. “I’m on a mission!”

“Well, what’re you doing talking to me, then? Go complete your mission, Agent H!” Caroline said.

“Aye-aye, Agent C! Hope your lip feels better!” Hannah said with a salute before running off.

Caroline waved a bit before returning to her writing.

She was filled with inspiration…

Sans was eating lunch with Toriel in her classroom, as he did every day.

“So, how goes the kiddos?” he asked.

“Well, I have reason to believe that Caroline is writing a graduation speech,” Toriel said with a smile.

“Really,” Sans remarked. “Considering she reads books like she needs them to survive, she must be a pretty decent writer.”

“Her book reports seem to give that impression, yes,” Toriel said. “I also got the bake sale handouts back. Maybe half the parents of my students are participating, it seems!”

“Wow, and that’s including you,” Sans remarked. “I hope we don’t end up pulling another 201Z. That was fun ‘n all, but the cleanup afterwards, man…”

“Indeed,” Toriel said. “As much as the kids loved you, you simply were not meant to be a janitor. Even if you did look quite nice in that jumpsuit…”

Sans smirked. “Did i, now?”

“Indeed.”

“Well, there’s a thought to file away for later…”

“Sans, I can forgive tuxedo t-shirts and crocs, but janitorial jumpsuits are a step too far for datewear.”

“Who said I was gonna wear on dates?”

Toriel’s eyes widened, blush visible through her snow-white fur.

“Anyway, I better head out,” Sans said. “I got a class in three minutes, and if I don’t shortcut there now, I never will.”
“Never?” Toriel asked.

“Well, babe, you just make it too hard to leave ya,” Sans explained. “Welp. I’m goin’ to work. See ya at home, pretty mama?”

Toriel blushed and hid her face in her hands.

Sans chuckled and moved her hands from her face, leaning in to kiss her.

“See ya at home, then. Love ya tori~”

And with that Sans left for work.

Toriel was very grateful that her students had music on Fridays after lunch. It gave her time to calm herself.

She never would have taken Sans of all people for a flirt, but then again, he did enjoy teasing people. Maybe this was a special kind of teasing meant for her…

The thought made her blush even heavier and her smile even wider.

And why wouldn’t it? It had been so long since a man made her feel so special.

“Okay, kids, let’s try that again, shall we?” Miss Halsey said. “And one, two, three, four…”

She began to play the piano. The sounds of children with little to no idea of just what the heck they were supposed to be singing erupted. And covered the music room with the ashes of potential hearing damage.

“Stop, stop, STOP!” Miss Halsey managed.

The students stopped singing.

“Okay, maybe this piece is a little too difficult for you guys,” she said. “Well, O Fortuna is a little too difficult for a lot of people…”

The kids mumble apologies.

“Aww, guys! There’s no need to apologize!” Miss Halsey reassured. “Luckily for you guys, I have the perfect song. We’ll be singing it at the spring concert, too!”

The kids erupted in gasps and excited chatter.

Miss Halsey chuckled. She knew the kids loved it last year.

“Alright then! Here’s how the first line of your part goes -”

“Wait a minute!” Brian said suddenly. “Whaddaya mean ‘our part’?”

“I mean that I was given this piece special from Mr. McBride. He mentioned that he’s going to have a ‘special guest’ performing with you guys, but knowing him, it’s probably going to be himself in a weird costume of some kind…”

The kids chattered among themselves in interest. They all wondered what kind of weird costume Mr. McBride would wear to the concert.
“Okay, here we go!” Muss Halsey announced. “And one, two, three, four!”

“One, two, three of you, okay. Now, do all of you know why you’re here?”

Mr. McBride sat at his desk while five first graders including Hannah and Kyle gathered around him.

“Because Chelsea hates us,” the Eagle boy Bruno said.

“Well, it sure seems that way,” Mr. McBride said. “Now, I heard from Hannah and Kyle here that Chelsea threw a pencil at you, Shashi.”

Shashi, the Tiger girl and Hannah’s best friend, nodded. “I coulda caught it myself, but then I woulda fought back, and if I did that she’da got hurt ‘cause of my fangs,” she said as she showed off her impressive fangs.

Mr. McBride blinked. “Wow. Impressive. And good for you for not fighting back. But you really should tell someone if you’re being bullied like that.”

“But Chelsea’s scary ‘cause Mrs. Davenport likes her and also her dad’s in the HWC,” a young Slime student named Grex said.

Mr. McBride hummed. “HWC, eh? That explains so much…”

The students looked at him expectantly.

“Kids, here’s what I want you to do,” Mr. McBride said. “I want you to go back to class, and sit near each other. Stick close to each other until the day of the bake sale. Tell me if she does anything until then, okay?”

“Yes, sir!” the kids said.

“Alrighty, then! You kids head on to class, I’ll tell Mrs. Davenport absolutely nothing. But first…”

Mr. McBride left the office for a few moments, only to return with a box of pizza.

“Hope you kids like stuffed crust!”

Alphys was sure she was going to have a panic attack. How she hadn’t yet, she had no idea, but it was definitely a miracle.

Mamoru was crying. She knew that babies sometimes cried for no reason, but Mamoru did that way too often for his mothers’ comfort.

Alphys had tried almost everything, except for one thing…

She took a few deep breaths and pulled down her shirt to feed Mamoru.

He latched on.

Alphys clenched her eyes shut and tried not to cry.

Why, oh why did her son have to inherit Undyne’s teeth?

Everyone stared at Caroline as she walked to the front and handed in some papers.
“What is this?” Toriel asked, looking over the papers.

“What graduation speech,” Caroline said simply. “I decided to do it because why not.”

“But it’s not due until March!” Toriel said.

“I know, but still.”

Toriel sighed. “Well, thank you, Caroline.”

Caroline nodded and went back to her seat.

Penelope stared at her. “So you actually DID write something for the graduation thingy?” she asked.

“Yep,” Caroline replied as she began reading her book.

“Cool! I can’t wait to hear it!” Penelope said excitedly.

“We have until May, so it’ll be a while,” Caroline pointed out.

“Whaat? That’s too long!”

“Yeah, but think of it like this; after that, we’ll be middle schoolers.”

Penelope’s eyes widened. “Middle schoolers…”

“Yeah, it’s gonna be great.”

“I don’t wanna be a middle schooler…” Penelope whimpered.

“Why not?” Caroline asked.

“Because Theo’s a middle schooler and he’s stupid!” Penelope said.

“But you’re not Theo, so you won’t be stupid,” Caroline said. “And if you start showing signs of becoming stupid, I’ll tell you and stop you.”

Penelope stared at Caroline as she returned to her book.

Had Caroline’s eyelashes always been that long?

Elaina finished their work and turned it in. What to do now?

They decided to take out their Harry Potter book. They were on the fifth chapter of Chamber Of Secrets, and they planned to finish the whole book over the weekend.

After they got their glasses, of course.

Something hit them on the back of their head. Giggles erupted.

Elaina, as always, ignored it. Doing something about it would make them into an even bigger target than they already were.

Something else hit them in the back of the head.

“Alicia Berry!” the teacher gasped. “Office, now.”
“But I didn’t do anything!” Alicia said.

“Nice try, I saw that. Office, now.”

“But you can’t -”

“Can’t what? Send you to the office for physically assaulting a student? Clearly you have no idea what rules are.”

Alicia sputtered then growled. She stood up.

“Brooke, Chloe, come on,” she said.

“Brooke Lane, Chloe Phillips, stay.”

“They don’t have to stay if they don’t want to!”

The teacher sighed and stood up. She grabbed Alicia by the collar and dragged her out of the classroom.

Elaina was not sure what just happened, but they were sure of this: Alicia was going to kill them whenever she got back to class.

They continued reading their book. They liked Fred and George. They reminded them of their sisters.

Hannah, Kyle, Shashi, Bruno, and Grex returned to their class and sat at the same table.

As Mrs. Davenport taught the lesson, Hannah kept a close eye on one Chelsea Bates.

Blonde ponytail, blue eyes, pink dress with light blue cardigan.

Hannah hated pink. A lot.

But it all came down to who wore it. Some people who wear pink are great, while others are just plain not nice.

And Chelsea was just plain not nice. Unless Mrs. Davenport or another adult was around.

No wonder she had no friends. It was sad that she had no friends, and yet it was expected due to her personality.

Chelsea looked up and glared at their group. She stuck her tongue out.

Hannah and Kyle stuck their tongues out right back.

Hannah smiled at Kyle and giggled.

Justice was being served. And boy was it sweet.

Helen was at the grocery store, shopping for ingredients for the bake sale. Sure it was early, but it was always good to be prepared.

She was in aisle 3 getting flour when she heard a gasp behind her. “Helen Krieger? Is that you?!”
Helen turned around. Behind her was a woman with shiny black hair in a bob and dark blue eyes. “Do I know you?” Helen asked.

“Oh, right!” the woman said. “You probably don’t remember me! I’m Tina Bolton! We graduated high school together!”

Helen blinked a few times. “Doesn’t ring any bells, sorry.”

“Don’t worry, it’s fine!” Tina said. “I mean, you were the most popular girl in school!”

Helen busted up laughing. “That’s - That’s rich! Me! Popular!”

Tina looked at her in confusion. “But it’s true! Everyone liked you since you were so nice to everyone!”

“But - But I was friends with LINDA! Who NO ONE likes!”

“That’s a big part of why everyone thought you were nice!” Tina explained. “Not only did you help people whenever they needed it, you were patient with even the worst of people! That’s why you were so popular!”

Helen’s eyes widened. “Huh.”

“Mm-hm! And I heard you graduated from the community college! What did you major in?”

“Uh, ornithology,” Helen said.

“Oh, really?” Tina said. “I mean, I knew you liked birdwatching, so it’s not that surprising, but still!”

Helen hummed.

“Oh! Last I heard, you were married! How’s that working out for you, hm?”

Helen shrugged. “He’s working a lot, so he’s barely home. And when he is, he’s not exactly in any shape to do much for one reason or another…”

“Oh,” Tina gasped. “I’m so sorry…”

Helen chuckled. “Nah, it’s fine. At least Brian’s not around when he’s like that…”

“Brian?” Tina said, then she gasped. “Is that your kid?”

“Yep, Brian Alexander. He’s in fifth grade at Mountainside this year, and he’s got a better group of friends than I did at that age.”

Tina smiled. “Well, that’s good! My daughter Chloe’s in fifth grade at Upland, but I don’t think she has the best of friends…oh, are you going to the reunion?”

Helen shrugged. “I dunno. Sharona is, I know. She got remarried a couple of years ago. She has a son and a stepdaughter now.”

“Wow, really? Does she still have all of her piercings?”

“Nah, just the ear ones. She got rid of her nose piercings after the incident with her septum piercing in junior year…”
Tina hummed in understanding. “Well, I hope you come! Have nice day, Helen!”

“You too, Tina.”

“Wait, can I have your number?”

Helen shrugged. “Sure, why not.”

Tina smiled,

Once the two women had exchanged numbers, Tina moved on to the checkout lane and Helen continued her shopping.

Helen’s head was swimming. She was popular? Her? She wasn’t hated by association with Linda? And people still liked her after twenty years?!

That actually put her experiences since then in a whole new light…

She even felt a bit more confident.

She grabbed the strawberries and put them in the cart. She even grabbed a few more just for her and Brian. They both loved strawberries.

Sharona flopped back onto her bed with a cheer. She’d met her deadline with hours to spare.

She was excited.

Then her cell phone’s text tone went off.

*Hey sharona, remember tina bolton from high school?*

*you mean Tiny Tina? what’s she been up to?*

*I met her at the supermarket.*

*Was I really popular in high school?*

*yes. people just avoided you because Linda was near you all the time and it was hard for people to get close to you as a result.*

*So linda ruined high school for me?*

*she ruined high school for everyone, but yeah.*

*Wow.*

*yep.*

*Well, see ya around.*

*okay! tell tina i said hi!*

*Will do.*

Sharona smiled. Helen was a lot better than she thought she was. It was pretty sad how Linda made her think otherwise just so she could feel better about herself.
Then the front door opened.

“Ma! We’re home! We got Penelope with us!” Levi called.

“Hi Mrs. Marlow-Goldsby!” Penelope called.

Sharona walked down the hallway to see the kids.

“Hey, guess who finished work and is now free for the rest of next week?” Sharona said happily. Levi brightened. “Woohoo! Way to go, Ma!”

“Congratulations, Sharona,” Caroline said.

“And since I’m done with work, we’re going out to eat!”

“Woo, we’re goin’ to Tevye’s!” Levi cheered.

“What’s Tevye’s?” Penelope asked.

“A kosher deli in the Jewish district,” Caroline explained. “They have good roast beef sandwiches.”

“Yeah, you’ll like ‘em, Penelope!” Levi said. “At least, that’s what Caroline said she thought you’d like…”

“That does sound good!” Penelope said. “I’ll try that!”

“Okay,” Caroline said.

And with that, the four of them got into the car and headed out.

“Noami, remember that we are ONLY taking you here because your aunt is ill, not to eat.”

“Yes papa.”

“And you have to your homework the whole time we’re here, understand?”

“Yes, mama.”

“Good. Now, remember to keep quiet and do your homework, Noami.”

“I already said that, Myron!”

“Well, I wouldn’t have had to if you hadn’t forgotten to tell her to keep quiet, Miriam!”

Naomi said nothing as she and her parents entered the deli and sat down. She simply got out her homework and set to work.

Then the bell rang. Naomi looked up out of the corner of her eye. Levi, Caroline, Penelope, and Levi’s mom had come in.

“Hey, Naomi!” Levi said.

Naomi simply held up a hand and continued to do her work.

Levi looked over to the counter where Naomi’s parents stood and understood instantly.
Sharona looked at Naomi and winked suspiciously. Naomi was confused until the older woman walked up to the counter.

“Myron and Miriam Nivens, hiii!” Sharona said loudly. “It’s been a while, hasn’t it? I haven’t seen Naomi with you at temple in a while! How is she?”

Myron and Miriam blanched. “She’s fine!” Miriam said. “She’s just been busy with homework…”

“Well, my Levi and Caroline have the same teacher as Naomi, and I would assume that means the same workload,” Sharona said. “And besides, the shabbat is a time to rest, isn’t it? Just how much work does she have that she can’t rest on shabbat?”

Myron and Miriam were clearly nervous. “W-well, we’ll see what we can do about that,” Myron said. “We’re really only here because Malka is ill, you see…”

Sharona gasped. “Oh, that’s terrible! Tell her that Sharona said to get well soon, okay?”

Myron and Miriam nodded, and Sharona went to sit down.

Sharona gave Naomi a thumbs up and a smirk.

Naomi smiled and continued her homework.

Flowey, in his boredom, decided to sneak into Sans’ room around lunchtime, since he had his computer modded to play old Gameboy games.

Flowey was in the middle of battling Erica on Pokemon Red when the door opened.

Flowey was filled with fear.

Sans entered his bedroom and saw Flowey.

Flowey locked eyes with Sans.

“Don’t look at ME!” Flowey snapped. “YOU’RE the one with a sweet rig!”

“and you’re the one who snuck out of frisk’s room without permission,” Sans countered calmly.

“Well I wouldn’t HAVE to sneak out if you LET ME LEAVE once in awhile!” Flowey shot back. “I haven’t left that damn room for nearly two-thirds of this shitty story, and you expect me to just accept it?!”

Sans shrugged. “i dunno what you mean by two-thirds, but I guess it has been a while. i just thought you’d be happy now that you have a girlfriend.”

“Cactus Everdeen is NOT MY GIRLFRIEND!!” Flowey screamed.

“who said it was cactus everdeen?” Sans said.

Flowey was shaking with rage, his face contorted monstrously.

Sans looked at the computer screen. “i’ll tell ya what, you can play on that thing for two hours every day, and no more. capice?”

Flowey calmed down, only to stared at Sans suspiciously. “What’s the catch, Smiley Trashbag?”
“the catch is simple,” Sans said. “just don’t mess with any of my save files. if you do…”

Sans’s eyelights went out, his left eye flashing Cyan and Yellow with his Magic, Megalovania playing in the background.

“…you’re gonna have a bad time.”

Flowey cowered. “Yessir…”

Sans returned to his jovial, careless self. “good flower. now, i’ll letcha finish up this battle, then you’re outta here until monday,”

And with that Sans left.

Flowey finished his battle with Erica. He won.

Somehow, it was a hollow victory.

—

You’re not really sure what it is, but something fills you with

**DETERMINATION**

Chapter End Notes

- It's The Hard Knock Life - Annie
- You're Welcome - Moana
- O Fortuna - Carl Orff
- Megalovania - Toby Fox

Fun Fact: Levi and Caroline have VERY big extended families. Like, HUGE.
Chapter Summary

Baking. Lots and lots of baking.
That's kind of it, really.

Chapter Notes

Howdy, sinners. Prepare for baked goods.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

10:32 A.M., February 6th, 20XR

It’s a beautiful day outside.
The sky is blue.
The warmth is unseasonable.
On days like this, kids like you…

…are helping your mom bake.

Frisk was kneading the dough with Sans while Toriel mixed the pie filling.
This future pie crust filled them with DETERMINATION.

FILE: SAVE

Then the Westminster Quarters rang through the house.
Toriel turned to look at her boyfriend and child, both of whom were coated in flour and dough.
She sighed. “I’ll get it…”
She set down the mixing bowl and wiped her hands on her apron and went to the door.
Helen and Brian were on the other side, holding bags of ingredients.
“Morning,” Helen said nervously.
Toriel was confused. “Helen? What are you doing here?” she asked. “Oh, do come in. We’re working on our bake sale food.”

“Oh, sorry, should we -”

“No, you’re perfectly fine!” Toriel assured her. “This is just unexpected is all. Would you two like anything to drink?”

“Dr. Pepper if you have it,” Helen said.

“Same here,” Brian said.

“Alright, I’ll go get those for you.”

“tori, i hear someone familiar,” Sans said, walking in and wiping his hands on his apron. “brian, helen, what’re you two doin’ here?”

“Well, it’s kind of hard to explain…” Helen said nervously.

“If you’re here to borrow our oven, it’s got room enough for that if I’m not mistaken about the dimensions,” Sans said. “but that’s really up to tori.”

“I suppose it’s alright,” Toriel said. “But why can’t you use the oven at your house?”

Helen suddenly looked a bit uncomfortable. “Brian, do you wanna see if you can find Yasmin?”

Brian suddenly relaxed - no one had even realized that he’d been tense. “Okay,” he said.

“She’s in the backyard playin’ since it’s nice out,” Sans said, pointing his thumb in that direction. “Careful though, she’s taller than me now.”

Brian’s eyes widened. “Is she taller than Caroline?” he asked in awe.

“I think they’re the same height, actually.”

“Whoa,” Brian said excitedly. He ran out to the backyard.

The sounds of barking dog and laughing eleven-year-old rang out from the backyard.

Helen sighed.

“David’s at home,” she said. “He’s…got a bit of an alcohol problem. Okay, a lot of an alcohol problem. He gets a bit…rowdy, so to speak…”

“He hasn’t, has he…?” Toriel asked, voice taking on that tone it did when a child was potentially hurt. The tone that crushed Sans’ SOUL to hear.

“Well, not this time, and never at Brian, thank god,” Helen said. “I just left before he hit his limit.”

Sans’ eyelights were off completely, his smile gone.

Toriel placed a comforting hand on Helen’s shoulder. “If you two ever need a place to stay, Helen, feel free to let us know,” she said. “Papyrus has all but moved in with Mettaton, so his old room is being used as the guest room. If you are uncomfortable with that, the couch in the basement is a foldout, albeit an old one.”
Helen wasn’t sure what to say. She hadn’t even realized she was crying until Frisk gave her a box of tissues.

Linda had all the ingredients set up for her lemon squares. Lentil flour, butter, organic grated lemon peel, organic lemon juice, and eggs. She was set.

She a half cup of lentil flour, a half cup of butter, and one tablespoon of water into the yellow mixing bowl for the crust. Then she put two tablespoons of grated lemon peel, half a cup of lemon juice, four eggs, and a quarter cup of lentil flour into the blue mixing bowl for the filling.

As she stirred the mixtures, she had no idea that her children watched in horror.

No wonder her lemon squared were so bad. She didn’t even use a sugar substitute.

They had to warn someone.

But they couldn’t. Not yet.

They had to wait until tomorrow.

“…and then, I punched him in the face.”

Levi laughed. “Bubbie Gerda, who DIDN’T you punch in the face?”

Bubbie Gerda was a little old lady of 92 with a heavily lined face with a skin tag on her right cheek. Her white hair was covered by a blue scarf, and she wore a white blouse and a green cardigan with a long gray pleated skirt. She could also still punch the teeth out of a horse, in defiance of all logic.

“Well, there was ONE person -”

“Ma, that’s enough,” said another old Human lady, though she was still younger than Bubbie Gerda by some twenty-odd years or so. She was plump and had a blonde perm and wore a lilac sweater with a white collar and lilac sweatpants.

“Mona, there is no such thing as enough stories about me punching people,” Bubbie Gerda said.

Mona rolled her eyes in exasperation.

Caroline had been eagerly writing Bubbie Gerda’s words down in a notebook.

“How old are you again, Caroline?” Bubbie Gerda asked.

“I’ll be eleven tomorrow, ma’am,” Caroline said.

“Nope, still don’t believe it,” the old woman said as she shook her head.

“It’s because I’m tall, isn’t it?” Caroline asked.

“Yes.”

“Bubbie Gerda!” Sharona gasped.

“It’s okay, Sharona,” Caroline assured. “I asked, expecting honesty, and Bubbie Gerda answered.”

“Well, yeah, but still, that’s something most people lie about!”
“Why?” Caroline asked. “Shouldn’t people want honesty? Why would people want to be lied to?”

“This kid gets it,” Bubbie Gerda said. “Why couldn’t YOU have gotten it when YOU were fifteen, eh Mona?”

“I’m eleven, Bubbie Gerda,” Caroline corrected once more.

“An eleven year old can grasp the concept of honesty better than you!”

“Ma, not everyone can handle your kind of honesty,” Mona said.

“Oh yeah, I forgot some people can’t handle the truth.”

“Bubbie Gerda, no, that’s not what she meant -”

“I know, I just don’t care.”

Sharona facepalmed.

This was going to be a long weekend…

Penelope put the third batch of cupcakes in the oven, exhaling in exhaustion.

She took off her oven mitts and headband and pushed herself up onto the counter to sit for a moment.

She swung her legs back and forth, kicking the cupboard doors with her heels.

She’d already baked one batch of cherry cheesecake cupcakes, and she’d just put the second batch in the oven.

She grabbed the piping bag filled with cream cheese frosting and put the large round piping tip on the bag and set to work.

Ten minutes later, all 24 of the cupcakes were frosted.

Then she got a jar of maraschino cherries and placed one on top of each individual cupcake.

Then Penelope waited

As she set to work making a grilled cheese sandwich, the timer for the cupcakes dinged.

Penelope removed the skillet with the grilled cheese sandwich on it from the stovetop, put on her oven mitts and removed the cupcakes from the oven, set them on the cooling rack, then continued making the grilled cheese sandwich.

Well, she would have, if Theo hadn’t been there eating eating it with a smug smirk on his face.

Penelope sighed and rolled her eyes before starting to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Then she punched Theo in the eye.

Elaina sat on their bed, taking their glasses off, and putting them back on. They giggled at the sensation.

One month since they got their glasses and they still couldn’t get enough of taking the black
rectangles off and putting them back on again.

The difference with and without them was striking. It almost made them wonder how they lived without glasses for so long.

They took off their glasses and took out Harry Potter And The Goblet Of Fire, opening to the bookmark placed at the fifth chapter.

They liked Cedric Diggory. He was nice.

Toriel took the pie out of the oven and set it on the rack to cool.

“Helen, the oven’s free now!” she called.

Helen and Brian came into the kitchen, each carrying a bag of ingredients.

“Smells nice,” Helen remarked.

“Thank you!” Toriel said. “And what will you two be making?”

“Strawberry shortcake,” Helen said, setting her bags on the counter. “We made it once when David wasn’t at home, but then…”

“He came back and threw a tantrum,” Brian said.

Helen snorted. “Well, I guess that’s one way to put it…”

Toriel hummed. “Well, the mixing bowls are in the lower right cabinet below the stove, the pots and pans are directly under the stove, and the measuring cups are in the upper right cabinet near the sink,” she said. “Let me know if you need anything else.”

Helen thanked Toriel and set to work.

“This kitchen is a lot nicer than our kitchen,” Brian said.

“Yep,” Helen said. “Bri, you’re on whipped cream duty.”

“Okay.”

“Alrighty, take one and a half cups of heavy cream,” Helen instructed. “Use the big clear one and fill it to right here.” She pointed to a particular line.

Brian did as Helen had instructed as she took some strawberries and mixed them with some sugar.

“What do I do now?” Brian asked.

“Okay, now you take three tablespoons of sugar and mix them in with the cream. The tablespoon is the big spoon.”

Brian nodded and did as he was told.

“Okay, now what?”

“Okay, now you -”

Helen paused.
“Brian.”

“Yes, Mom?”

“You just used salt.”

Brian was confused. Until he put a fingertip into the mixture and licked it.

He gagged. “Sorry…”

Helen chuckled. “It’s okay, a lot of people make that mistake.”

“Even if they’re not dyslexic…?” Brian grumbled, ashamed.

“Even then,” Helen said, smiling and tousling Brian’s chestnut-colored hair. “Now, let’s see if Toriel has any whipping cream we can borrow…”

Brian smiled and nodded.

Miss Yvonne sat in her office, organizing some paperwork. Who knew teaching ballet of all things would require so much paperwork?

Then there was knock at the door - or rather, a bang that tried to be a knock and failed rather miserably.

“Come in!” Miss Yvonne called.

A woman with dark brown hair in a chignon with bronzed skin and brown eyes in a red suit dress with a pencil skirt and matching heels came in and sat down without a word.

Miss Yvonne sighed internally. Externally, she was the very image of business, as close to it as a young woman in a pink leotard and rainbow legwarmers could be.

“Ah, you must be Alicia Berry’s mother,” she said. “Amy, was it?”

“That is correct, yes,” the woman responded.

“And what did you wish to speak to me about?” Miss Yvonne asked.

“I am here to inquire as to why my daughter wasn’t selected for pointe classes when she is just as capable if not more so than her classmates,” Amy said. “Care to explain?”

Miss Yvonne screamed internally. Externally, she smiled calmly and began to explain.

“Mrs. Berry, while Alicia does have potential, she doesn’t have the ability to work well with others,” she said.

“Why would she need that to be in pointe classes?” Amy asked, starting to lose her cool.

“Because first of all, there are ten other students in that class besides her, all of whom learn not just from me, but from each other,” Miss Yvonne explained. “Second of all, once she goes pro, should she choose to do so -”

“She will,” Amy cut in.

Miss Yvonne blinked. “Anyways, should Alicia choose to go on to professional ballet, there are
many more dancers out there that will be far more talented than her or anyone she knows. And if she wants to go anywhere in that field, she will need the ability to work with others. There are also a few other things she’s missing -’’

“And what would those be, huh?” Amy snapped. “Because whatever it is, I’m sure I can get it for her -’’

“Motivation,” Miss Yvonne interrupted, more than a little done with Amy’s pushiness. “I, as well as many other instructors, have heard Alicia mention having ‘better things to do’ than dance. She has the potential, but not the motivation to unlock it or use it properly. Now, if you are quite finished Mrs. Berry, I have work to do.”

“It’s Sunday and you’re a dance teacher, what work could you POSSIBLY have to do?” Amy sneered.

“Oh, not much, I just have to see if we have enough money to rent out the Century Concert Hall for next year’s recital, order pointe shoes for five of the students, arrange for another three to be fitted, and sign off on the papers for this year’s recital and next year’s competition,” Miss Yvonne said simply. “Do you have any more questions to ask me, Mrs. Berry?”

Amy gritted her teeth and growled as she stood up and slammed the door behind her without a word.

Miss Yvonne shook her head in exasperation and took a sip of her hazelnut coffee.

And here she thought that Desperate Housewives was unrealistic for all these years…

“Well, ladies, are ya ready?”

“Yes, ma!”

“Yes, Bubbie Mona!”

“Eh, sure.”

Mona glared at Bubbie Gerda. Then she smiled widely. “Then let’s get cooking!”

The women cheered, Bubbie Gerda with slightly less enthusiasm.

“Bubbie Gerda, you could be at least a LITTLE more excited,” Sharona said.

“I am, and I would be even more excited if you people would STOP TELLING ME TO BE!” Bubbie Gerda snapped.

“Ma, it’s for the kids!” Mona said.

“Oy! Levi! Caroline!” Bubbie Gerda called.

“Yes, Bubbie Gerda?” the stepsiblings replied.

“Do you like being told how to feel?” Bubbie Gerda asked.

“Is this a trick question?” Levi asked, slightly nervous.

“I don’t think anyone likes being told how to feel,” Caroline said.
Bubbie Gerda turned to her daughter and granddaughter, a smug glint in her eye.

Mona and Sharona turned toward each other and screamed internally.

“Wait, what are we making, anyway?” Caroline asked.

“Cherry cream cheese blintzes,” Bubbie Gerda said. “Usually they’re filled with just cream cheese, but it’s a special occasion.”

Mona and Sharona oohed in awe.

“Caroline gets special treatment,” Mona said teasingly.

“Well, Bubbie Gerda’s been waiting for a great-granddaughter for two decades now, it’s no surprise,” Sharona replied.

“And so, before I leave until Caroline’s bat mitzvah -”

“I’m not Jewish, Bubbie Gerda,” Caroline said.

“- I am going to enjoy this time with my new great-granddaughter, and anyone who tries to stop me will get punched in the face!”

Sharona sighed, yet smiled nonetheless. This was going to be interesting.

Elaina was reading their book, when they heard Irma’s stomping feet. Their mom was most likely mad at them again for some reason or another. Elaina quickly hid their book and took out another book, one far too easy for them, but one that wouldn't make Irma mad. The book in question was one of the many Rainbow Magic books. God how they hated Kirsty and Rachel…

Ten minutes of stomping, and still Irma didn’t come up to scream and scold and shame. While Elaina was relieved, they were more paranoid than anything else. Maybe their mother was merely biding her time until she went up to explode in their face. Who knew for certain.

For now, Elaina chose to stay in their room, staring blankly at a pageful of pure annoying.

They wanted to talk to Frisk. They mentally made plans to talk to them that night. This would actually be easy since Irma would be out drinking with a friend that night and leaving Elaina to their own devices.

Nights like this were common, but not always so anticipated as they were now.

Elaina liked the feeling of anticipation.

As Helen put the cake in the oven, the doorbell rang.

The pattering of feet suggested that Frisk was rushing to answer the door.

“Hello, Frisk~”

“HELLO, HUMAN FRISK! AND HOW ARE YOU DOING TODAY?”

Helen set the timer and went over to the front door, where Papyrus and Mettaton were watching Frisk sign their current state of being.
Then Frisk turned toward Helen and waved.

“Ah, Helen! Good to see you!” Mettaton said with his usual winning smile.

“Good to see you too, guys!” Helen replied with a similar smile. To her surprise, it was more genuine than most of her smiles.

“Is Toriel baking something?” Mettaton asked. “It smells lovely…”

“Yeah, she made her pie for the bake sale a few hours ago, but I’m borrowing her oven right now since circumstances are currently preventing me from using mine…”

“WOWIE, REALLY? WHAT ARE YOU MAKING?” Papyrus asked, full of pure childlike enthusiasm as always.

“Strawberry shortcake,” the woman replied. “I made it once with Brian, but then stuff came up and things got busy so we never made it again until today.”

<<Brian’s out back with Yasmin!>> Frisk signed. <<Would you like to come with us?>>

“Sure!” Mettaton replied. “It’s nice enough out that we were out and about anyway!”

“SO WE DECIDED TO STOP BY AND SAY HELLO!” Papyrus continued. “WE DIDN’T EXPECT GUESTS, BUT THE MORE THE MERRIER, RIGHT?”

And so the group headed out to the backyard, where Brian was trying to get Yasmin to play fetch and failing miserably at it.

“Dangit, why won’t you catch the stick?!?” he grumbled. “Do I hafta cover it in gravy for you to do anything?!”

“say, brian, do you know how we got yasmin?” Sans asked.

“She got into your garage somehow and messed it up,” Brian said. “Frisk told the whole class about it.”

“well that takes all the fun out of it,” Sans said.

“Hey Mom, how long til the cake’s done?” Brian asked.

“About half an hour,” Helen replied as she started on Linda’s paperwork. “It’s about lunchtime, though.”

“how’s grillby’s sound?” Sans suggested.

“LIKE SOMETHING YOU ALWAYS SAY,” Papyrus replied.

Silence pervaded the backyard.

“i didn’t raise you to be this way, papyrus,” Sans said with mock seriousness

“YOUR LACK OF A DENIAL IS PROOF THAT I AM RIGHT!” Papyrus bragged.

“i never said you were wrong, i said i didn’t raise you to be this way.”

“OH MY GOD!”
“He didn’t say no~” Mettaton teased.

“METTATON, YOU ARE NOT HELPING MY CASE AT ALL!” Papyrus whined.

“I want cheese fries!” Brian declared.

“grillby’s it is then,” Sans said.

“Okay, but can we at least wait until my shortcake is out of the oven?” Helen said.

Frisk hopped in place victoriously and ran to tell Toriel.

Linda put her lemon squares in the oven and set the timer before heading upstairs to check on Hunter and Hannah.

She opened Hunter’s door to find -

“OH MY GOD, MOM! PLEASE KNOCK!”

They were changing their clothes.

“Young man, do NOT use that tone of voice!” Linda snapped.

“Sorry, but you startled me!” Hunter defended.

“I don’t care, don’t us that tone of voice with me!”

Hunter averted their eyes. “Yes, ma’am…” they mumbled.

“I am NOT a MA’AM!”

“I said yes, MOM!” Hunter squeaked.

“And don’t squeak, you’ll sound like a girl if you keep doing that.”

And with that Linda left with a slam of the door.

Hunter bit their tongue to keep from growling, from crying, from making any sound at all that could get them yelled at.

They heard Linda enter Hannah’s room and then slam it after a few seconds.

They got out their iPod to listen to music - the volume set just loud enough to hear and quiet enough to hear their mother if she called for them.

As they hummed along to the tune of Celine Dion’s That’s The Way It Is, they tried not to be happy with the thought of sounding like a girl.

They failed.

Elaina sat in their room, staring at the same page of the idiotic book that they’d been staring at for the past hour or so. Irma’s continued stomping came nowhere near their room in all that time, and yet still they stayed in place. Better safe than sorry, after all.

“Elaina!” Irma shouted. “I’m leaving! Don’t break any rules while I’m gone!”
And then the front door slammed, signalling Irma’s absence. Elaina waited for another ten minutes, just in case Irma returned for some reason or another.

Then they tossed the garbage they were reading into a random corner of their room and took The Goblet Of Fire out from under their pillow and went over to their closet and took out a faded pink flowery quilt and wrapped themself in it.

The dragons sounded way cool. Elaina decided that Cedric Diggory reminded them of Frisk.

Speaking of Frisk, they should probably text them to see how they’re doing.

“…and then I threw up on her and people were terrified,” Caroline recounted. “We spent the weekend with a friend after that and watched cartoons and ate pizza.”

“It was kosher pizza!” Levi said cheerfully.

“And you weren’t expelled?” Mona said in disbelief.

“Nobody likes Linda Thompson, Ma,” Sharona said. “Those Murphy women are hated for a good reason.”

“Don’t I know it,” Bubbie Gerda said. “Her mother’s no prize either…”

“You mean she wasn’t summoned using black magic?” Levi said in awe.

“Even the worst of us are born of men,” Bubbie Gerda said. “Bad or good, we’re stuck here til the end and we gotta make the most of it - for ourselves and our loved ones.”

Caroline applauded.

“Ma, are you trying to show off again?” Mona said.

“Depends, is it true?”

“Well, yeah, but…”

“Then no.”

Mona groaned and laid her head on the table.

“Ma?” Sharona asked cautiously. “You okay there?”

“Your stepdaughter is my mother, of COURSE I’m not okay!” Mona snapped.

“I’m not Bubbie Gerda, and Bubbie Gerda’s not me,” Caroline said. “We’re different people resulting from different circumstances and different cultures, so while we are similar, we can’t possibly be each other.”

“Unless we were identical twins,” Bubbie Gerda pointed out.

“Which, clearly, we are not,” Caroline continued. “Bubbie Gerda is very blunt and honest with what she thinks, and I respect that about her. Punching people she doesn’t agree with is a bit out there, but that’s how she deals with stuff.”

“Also it’s fun to hear her talk about all the famous people she’s punched!” Levi added. “No such
thing as too many Bubbie Blow-Out stories!”

“Very true,” Caroline said.

“Some of the happiest of my childhood memories involve Bubbie Gerda punching people,” Sharona said with a laugh.

“She saved my life with her right hook,” Mona said. “There was a riot after a cop killed a kid when I was fifteen, okay? I joined in since I knew the kid from school, he was a great kid. So I had my sign. okay? And a police officer comes up behind me with a pistol. A shot rings out behind me - couldn’t hear ANYTHING for days after. I turn around, and there’s Ma, stand over the guy with his blood on her knuckles. If I could paint a picture…”

Caroline and Levi listened intently.

Bubbie Gerda smiled in the background. She’d told many a story already. Now her daughter was telling one of her own. Her granddaughter recounted her own often enough as well. Now her great-granddaughter was telling stories too.

Stories ran in the family, it seemed. Even if they don’t share blood, they share love. Gerda learned that lesson long ago.

She only hoped that her descendants didn’t learn it the same way she did.

Frisk took a bite of their burger as they and Brian sat in silence while the grownups talked amongst themselves. Brian still wasn’t good with sign language, and Frisk wasn’t exactly feeling verbal today, so until they could reach a point where they were allowed to use their phones, they simply ate in silence.

Brian chucked a cheese fry into his mouth when he heard Frisk’s text tone go off.

Brian looked over Frisk’s shoulder at their phone.

*hey.*

*elaina! -v-.*

*how are you?*

*i have a book and a blanket and im home alone.*

*im great.*

“Are you sure that’s not Caroline?” Brian asked. Frisk giggled.

*i’m at a diner with my family and a friend! It’s great!*

*which friend?*

Frisk hooked their arm around Brian’s shoulder and pulled him close. Brian squawked in surprise as Frisk took a selfie with him.

“What the heck, Frisk?” Brian admonished.

Frisk merely shrugged and stuck out their tongue as they sent the selfie to Elaina.
*that's brian.

*is he okay? he looks like he wants to puke.

*that’s just his face, he’s fine really. ^v^

“Hey!”

Frisk giggled.

*i started reading goblet of fire.

*i really like cedric diggory.

*he reminds me of you.

Frisk had no idea how to respond to that. Especially since they knew how that ended.

“You know she’s got a point, you are weirdly like Cedric Diggory,” Brian said.

“Who’s Cedric Diggory?” Helen asked.

Mettaton, Papyrus, and Sans all winced.

“Well, he’s great guy,” Brian said. “He’s also dead - OW, what the heck Frisk?”

Frisk merely stared blankly at Brian after having discreetly punched him in the arm.

Chara flipped him off.

“let’s not even go there and keep eating like we never had this conversation, shall we?” Sans said.

Penelope had just finished wrapping Caroline’s birthday present when the cell phone on her dresser went off.

She picked it up to find a picture of Caroline with Levi and a little old lady.

*This is Bubbie Gerda. She’s a Holocaust survivor who likes blintzes and punching people in the face. She is freaking cool.

*whooooaa!! :O

*I know.

*i take it you guys had a good day then? :)

*We did. We made cherry-cheese blintzes and listened to stories about people Bubbie Gerda punched.

*Lucky! Tell me one?

Then Penelope’s phone rang. She answered.

“It goes like this,” Caroline said from the other end of the line. “Bubbie Gerda was on a plane from New York City to Paris in 1963, when some guy starts badmouthing the stewardess…”
Penelope lied down on her bed and listened as Caroline recounted the story, interrupting only to ask if Bubbie Gerda had punched anyone else that day. which she had.

Penelope wasn’t sure when she’d fallen asleep, but she didn’t wake up until almost midnight.

She simply got up, plugged in her phone and camera, and got out her outfit for the bake sale before going back to sleep.

---

Flowey sat in his place on the windowsill next to Cactus Everdeen, making small sounds of frustration in the dark as he played Tetris.

Then something next to him crashed.

He turned around to find himself face-to-face with Frisk’s cat, Isolde. He looked on the floor to find Cactus Everdeen, her pot broken, dirt surrounding her spiky green body, her bright red flower bruised and torn from the impact of the fall.

Isolde seemed to stare at him knowingly - almost as if she had knocked over the cactus on purpose.

Then footsteps resounded through the hallway and Isolde leapt back onto Frisk’s bed and settled herself around their head.

Toriel thrust the door open in worry, Sans close behind.

“Frisk!” she shouted in worry as she turned on the light, causing Frisk to finally wake up. “Is everything all ri -”

Toriel looked down at the remains of Cactus Everdeen. Frisk and Sans followed her gaze to the rug on the wooden floor, which was covered in spines, dirt, and shards of pottery.

Toriel gave Flowey a Look.

“It wasn’t me, it was the damn cat!” Flowey said. “It climbed up here, knocked over the damn plant, then -”

“so the cat killed your girlfriend?” Sans yawned, rubbing his eye sockets with his carpals.

“Yeah!” Flowey said.

Frisk and Sans smirked. Toriel glared at him and tapped her foot impatiently.

Flowey’s eyes widened. “Wait a second she is NOT MY GIRLFRIEND!”

“Well, yeah, she’s dead,” Sans said.

“So are you, but that doesn't stop YOU, does it?,” Flowey said.

“okay, say one more word and you’re joining your girlfriend on the floor there,” Sans said.

“One more word, HA!”

Sans activated his Blue Magic and sent Flowey careening toward the floor.

Frisk and Toriel watched as the Skeleton and the Flower argued with each other.

“I’ll go downstairs and make some tea since we clearly won’t be getting any sleep for a while,”
Toriel sighed. “Care to join me, Frisk?”

Frisk nodded and followed their mother downstairs. Then they turned back and dragged their father behind them to join them, leaving Flowey alone and immobile.

Flowey could safely say that in all honesty, he really hated his life.

---

The promise of baked goods in your future fills you with

**DETERMINATION**

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Chapter End Notes

Sugar, Sugar - The Archies

Fun Fact: Ironically, of Linda, Helen, and Diana, Linda has the best relationship with her husband. Probably because Richard's not home often enough to see just how shitty of a person she is, but also probably because he genuinely loves her.

Are you guys ready for Chapter 42? Because there will be a LOT of shit going down. Like, a LOT. And fifties music. Lots and LOTS of fifties music.
Chapter Summary

Chapter 42. Time to celebrate.

Wait, who's Peggy?!

Chapter Notes

Warning: This chapter contains antisemitic and racist elements and violence against children and the elderly. Also terrible lemon squares.

Viewer discretion is advised.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

10:27 P.M., February 7th, 20XR

It’s a beautiful day outside.

The sun is shining.

The warmth remains unseasonable.

On days like this, kids like you…

…are waiting patiently for the bake sale to start.

Frisk adjusted their red windbreaker jacket over their plain white t-shirt and tucked their pockets into their rolled-up jeans.

They lowered their sunglasses over their eyes.

They felt cooler than that one Halloween where they dressed like Papyrus. And that was saying something.

All they needed was a yo-yo and some bubble gum they’d be the paragon of cool.

Since Toriel was helping set up the bake sale, her students were in the classroom goofing off.

Except for Caroline and Penelope. Those two were in the library together every chance they got, and now was no exception.
Frisk shipped them so hard.

“Lemme guess,” Brian said, “Caroline and Penelope are in the library?”

“When aren’t they?” Hunter said.

“Fair point.”

“I noticed a lot of grandparents showed up,” Levi said. “And that’s not including mine.”

“Yeah, my grandma’s coming today,” Hunter said. “My mom’s mom is kinda…”

“A butt?” Brian offered.

“Satan,” Levi said.

“Satan’s butt!” Levi and Brian said in unison.

“Guys, what if my mom hears you?” Hunter said.

<<If Linda comes in, we abandon ship and kick her in the shins on our way out,>> Frisk signed.

Brian, Hunter, and Levi all stared at them.

“You terrify me sometimes, you know that?” Brian said.

<<All the more reason to say it.>>

“Do you have a death wish, Frisk?!” Hunter exclaimed.

Frisk merely shrugged. They didn’t have a death wish, per se, but Chara was more than a little reckless with their life, even in death.

Frisk could understand, somewhat.

Linda walked about the cafetorium, pale pink heels clicking loudly as she watched everyone else set things up. She pause briefly to take her compact mirror from her purse and adjusted her earrings, which matched her pale pink short-sleeved knee-length lace dress. She reapplied her lipstick, which was a shade of red so garish that even Diana questioned Linda’s taste.

Once Linda had finished with her makeup, she resumed her rounds. She spotted Toriel putting up a banner above the entryway with little effort, while the tallest Human teacher who had offered to help her put it up had to use a stepladder.

Toriel wore a sky blue short-sleeved knee-length shirt dress with a satin sash and matching heels, as well as a pearl necklace. She’d gotten a number of compliments - how her pearls were lovely, how Sans was a lucky guy to have her…it made Linda sick how people were starting to accept Monsters so easily.

“Linda, calm down, you look like you’re about to have an aneurysm.”

Linda turned slowly to find Sharona standing behind her. Sharona had on a sleeveless ultramarine blue dress with a knee-length hoop skirt and matching flats. Her curly red hair was in a ponytail held up by a blue ribbon. Her smile was as annoyingly wide and present as ever.
Linda scowled.

“Linda, your frown lines are only going to get deeper if you keep doing that!” Sharona scolded.

“Try talking to me when you can actually walk in heels, sweetie,” Linda said smugly.

“It’s my life’s dream to never talk to you again, so I’d be happy to!” Sharona said cheerfully. “I heard that your mother is coming?”

“And what does it matter if she is?” Linda asked suspiciously.

“She’s a bigot, Murphy.”

“Hey, my mother is an upstanding American citizen, Fieger!”

“Only because the stick in her ass is too painful for her to sit on.”

“How DARE you -”

“I’m just being honest, Linda. You should try it sometime.”

And with that parting shot, Sharona turned and went to greet Toriel.

“Good morning, Toriel!” she said. “And to you too, Mr. Robles!”

“Ah, Sharona, good morning!” Toriel said, finalizing the adjustments of the banner on her end. “Is Randy coming?”

“He said he wasn’t sure, but he’d try!” the redhead said. “But my mother and grandmother are definitely going to be here.”

“Ah, yes, Levi told me!” Toriel remarked. “It only just occurred to me that today is also Caroline’s birthday…”

“And today is one helluva present, I tell ya…”

“Well, she IS getting more than just cake…”

“She’s got an entire buffet.”

“Hey Sharona, you’re blocking the door, and I can’t step over you no matter how short you are.”

Helen was standing in the doorway, her arms crossed in front of her in mack impatience. She was wearing a short-sleeved dress with a black shirt-like bodice and a cream-colored pinstriped skirt and sleeve cuffs, black kitten heels clearly scuffed from years of use.

“Oh, sorry Helen!” Sharona chuckled as she stepped out of the way. “You look great today!”

“Thanks, you too,” Helen replied with a smile. “Toriel, hey.”

“Good morning Helen! I see you made it safely!”

Her phrasing was vague, but Helen understood the subtlety, considering Linda’s presence - always watching, just waiting for you to make one tiny mistake for her to catch and loudly call you out on.

“I did, thank you,” Helen assured. “You look great. Sans is one lucky bastard.”
Toriel giggled. “I have no idea why people always say that,” she remarked. “If anything, I am the one who is lucky…”

“Well, let’s keep using that good luck and hope that this bake sale is nothing like the one from April of 201Z…”

“Whoa there, Helen!” Sharona cried out. “Careful with your words, you’ll jinx something!”

“Sorry!” Helen said hurriedly.

“It’s understandable,” Sharona assured. “I had trouble removing the spiders from my hair for WEEKS!”

Helen suddenly looked a bit nauseous. “Oh good GOD…”

“I’m just glad I had them all out by the time I saw Randy again…”

“Aren’t we all,” Toriel remarked.

The women laughed.

Linda looked on in confusion and disgust. Since when was Helen so friendly with…with those?

She watched as Helen waved them goodbye and walked right past her.

Linda cleared her throat loudly.

Helen reached into her purse and took out a sheaf of papers. She passed it to Linda without so much as a glance in her general direction.

“What is this?” Linda asked angrily.

“The papers you asked me to do,” Helen replied. “I thought that since we both happened to be doing nothing at the moment, I’d give them to you to sign off on.”

“For your information, Helen, I AM doing something,” Linda claimed. “I am currently checking to see that everything is properly set up and arranged according to my specifications.”

“And if they aren’t, you’ll set them up to those specifications yourself, right?” Helen asked.

“What? No! Why would I -”

“Than you’re not really working, are you?”

Linda gasped in indignation as Helen started helping by carrying a box of plasticware over to a table. She clenched her fists and stormed off for a cigarette.

Helen wasn’t supposed to be so… confident. Linda thought she’d passive-aggressively torn down every last shred of Helen’s self-esteem back in middle school.

Something was happening. And Linda didn’t like it.

She took a final drag of her cigarette before reentering the building.

She’d feign obliviousness for now, but when it was clear that Helen was a traitor, she WOULD strike where it hurts.
Diana walked around, eliciting winces and cringes. She was wearing a gold and hot pink knee length dress with large gold hoops, a gold necklace, and large gold bangles - some even swore they heard gagging.

“Hey, Mrs. Mosley?”

“Yes, what is i-”

Diana turned around, face-to-face with Randy. He wore a western-style shirt with jeans and boots - really his usual clothing only with western-style shirts instead of old graphic tees.

“Your dress is from the wrong decade,” he said bluntly. "It's the fifties, not the sixties."

“and pink? so not your color.”

And now Sans was here, in a powder blue sport coat with a black shirt and pants and white loafers. Diana was filled with rage.

“randy, did it ever occur to you that caroline may get her bluntness from you?” Sans asked.

“It has,” Randy sighed. “Many, many, MANY times.”

“hey, weren’t you born in the fifties or something?”

“Yeah, 195W. My older sister was born in ‘5R, my older brother in ‘4X, and my younger sister in ‘6S.”

“And you’re SURE Caroline’s not your granddaughter?” Diana sneered.

“Are you sure Miranda’s not just someone you kidnapped?” Randy shot back casually.

Diana shrieked in indignation.

“Well, if you’ll excuse me, I have to check on my kids and help set things up,” Randy said, waving Diana off.

Diana was hissing in fury as she stalked off to look for Linda.

Pink was TOO her color, dammit…

Sans and Randy entered the cafetorium, laughing at their prior shenanigan.

“seriously, if i had any doubts that you were caroline’s old man, they are long gone,” Sans said, wiping a tear from the corner of his eye socket.

“What can I say? I pride myself on my Integrity , my good man,” Randy said breezily.

Sharona watched them enter and sighed. “What did you say and to whom, Randy?”

“insulted diana’s dress,” Sans said.

“Hey, I didn’t insult her dress, I insulted the anachronistic quality of her dress. There is a difference.”
“Randy, you and Caroline are the ones who always end up speaking other people's’ minds,” Sharona said as she shook her head fondly. She walked up to Randy and jumped up to peck him on his bearded cheek, coming back to earth with a smirk. “But that’s exactly what I love about you two~”

Then Sharona lifted a box of decorations and walked off while humming a jaunty tune.

Randy stood, shellshocked.

“Welcome to the world of tall love interests, Randy,” Toriel sang.

“You are a foot and a half taller than me, I’m not tall,” Randy said.

“It’s all about perspective, Randy, you know that.”

“Caroline is almost as tall as me now…”

Toriel hummed in understanding. “Frisk has barely grown a few inches since I adopted them two and a half years ago,” she said. “Perhaps they are a late bloomer…”

“could be,” Sans said, using his Magic to set up decorations. “that’s what happened with papyrus, after all. once he hit 14, he shot up like a rocket…”

“Yeah, that happens a lot of times,” Monica said. “My older brother was shorter than me until he turned 15.”

“And my older sister didn’t go through puberty until she was 17,” Randy added.

“man, just a few more years and those kids’ll be…”

The adults were silent.

“Oh my god we’re going to have teenagers,” Randy whimpered.

“WHAT’S THIS ABOUT HAVING TEENAGERS?”

Everyone turned to face two people that they really should have noticed sooner.

Papyrus wore a tuxedo with a white waistcoat and red and white striped shirt.

Mettaton wore Marilyn Monroe’s pink dress from the Diamonds Are A Girl’s Best Friend scene from Gentlemen Prefer Blondes - a sort of irony when one took his raven hair into account. He even got the jewelry and makeup down.

Papyrus led Mettaton by the arm - the image of gentlemanliness exuding from them both.

“well, look who’s here,” Sans announced. “marilyn monroe and joe dimaggio jr., how are ya?”

Mettaton giggled. “I’m doing well, Sans! And you?”

“good, good. we’re almost done setting up the decor, and after that we’ll be calling in the food and setting that up.”

“OOH, CAN I HELP?” Papyrus asked eagerly.

“Of course!” Toriel said. “We could use more tall people to set up the decorations on the ceiling! “NYEHEHEH!”
Papyrus cheerfully set to work as Sans chose to take a break and sat down on the cafetorium stage.

Mettaton sat down next to him and crossed his legs at the knees.

“I brought a playlist of 50’s music and a karaoke machine with an old Shure 55SH mic,” Mettaton said. “Plus the Dragnet theme song for when you-know-who walks in.”

“as expected of the amazing mettaton,” Sans said, clapping the Android on the shoulder. “need any help bringin’ that in?”

“Later. We’ll wait for the bake sale to actually begin for that. For now, let’s just bide our time…”

“well, that’s not the least bit ominous.”

Mettaton simply chuckled suspiciously, resting his chin on one of his pink-gloved hands for Dramatic Effect.

Sans had an odd feeling about this. He decided to wait and see how things played out.

Better than expending energy needlessly.

Caroline sat in the library reading another book - I, Robot by Isaac Asimov. She had on a black turtleneck with a purple midi skirt with a matching flower hair tie and black flats. She sat at a table today due to her skirt being full combined with a sense of modesty.

As she read about how the story of Robbie and Gloria were separated, she saw many parallels between fiction and reality - the anti-robot sentiments greatly resembled the anti-Monster sentiments now, even down to the types of people who held them. Mrs. Weston heavily resembled Linda in Caroline’s mind, from her obsession with her reputation to her clear racism. And her genuinely sweet child whose life she was inadvertently destroying.

Then Linda walked into the library and toward the checkout desk at the back.

As she passed Caroline, Caroline decided to greet her.

“Good morning, Mrs. Weston,” she greeted innocently.

Linda paused and turned toward Caroline with a sickly-sweet smile on her face. “It’s Mrs. Thompson, sweetie,” she said sweetly through clenched teeth.

“Of course, Mrs. Weston.”

Caroline watched Linda discreetly from the corner of her eye and saw her eyelid twitch. As Linda growled and stomped off. Caroline smirked and snickered silently.

Linda picked up the copies and walked past Caroline once more.

“Have a nice day, Mrs. Weston,” Caroline said.

“It’s THOMPSON!” Linda yelled.

Then she left for real, passing Penelope on her way out.

Penelope was wearing a short-sleeved jewel-green satin dress with white Keds and lacy bobby socks with a gray headband with a bow on it.
Penelope stared at Linda and sat down across from Caroline. “What’s her deal?” she asked.

Caroline shrugged, a knowing smile on her face.

Penelope crossed her arms, suddenly curious. “What did you do?” she asked.

“Oh, nothing much,” Caroline said. “Just misremembered her name is all. It happens to her a lot, you know.”

“It has something to do with the book you’re reading, doesn’t it?” Penelope asked, unfooled.

Caroline merely smiled and resumed reading.

The black-haired girls were silent.

“So what’s it about?” Penelope asked, putting her elbows on the table and resting her chin on her hands. Her green eyes were sparkling with curiosity.

“It’s a series of short stories centered around robots and set in an alternate future of Earth that achieved interstellar travel in the late 20th century,” Caroline said. “The one which I am currently reading is called Robbie, and is centered around a mute nursemaid robot of the same name. His ward’s mother is a racist socialite who I imagine as resembling Linda.”

“Whooaa,” Penelope exclaimed in awe. “Can I read it next? It sounds COOL!”

“Sure,” Caroline said. “When I’m done with it. I’ll be reading the Foundation series next. My dad has those ones.”

“Your dad has a lotta books, doesn’t he?”

“Indeed he does.”

“So has he read all of them?”

“He has,” Caroline confirmed. “And my goal is to read them all before I graduate from high school. Well, my secondary goal.”

“What’s your main goal then?” Penelope asked.

“Publish my first novel,” Caroline said, a sudden fire in her eyes and a smile on her face. She clenched a fist in excitement, Lightning Magic crackling around it.

“You are SO gonna do BOTH of those things!” Penelope said encouragingly. “You have the skills, so there’s no reason you SHOULDN’T write a novel by then!”

“I dunno,” Caroline said. “Actually getting published takes a long time, if it ever happens. My dad and uncle were both rejected by countless publishers, and their writing is actually really good.”

“Wow, really?”

“Yup,” Caroline said.

The girls were silent once more.

“Writers have it rough, huh?” Penelope said.
“Indeed they do,” Caroline said. “Indeed they do.”

Hannah adjusted her pastel yellow flower crown. She tugged at the collar of her pastel yellow sleeveless knee-length dress with little technicolor woodland animals and flowers on it.

“You guys ready to split up?” Kyle asked.

“No!” Grex sobbed.

“Me neither!” Bruno said.

“Do we HAVE to?” Shashi whined.

“How about just until after the bake sale?” Hannah suggested. “If Chelsea bullies one of us before then, someone will definitely see!”

“But what if she frames us for it?” Shashi asked. “What if someone does see and ignores it?”

“Then I’ll tell Mr. McBride,” Hannah said.

“I had fun with you guys,” Grex said sadly.

“Same, dude,” Kyle said. “Uh, you’re a dude, right Grex?”

“I’m Grex,” Grex said.

“But are you a guy or a girl?” Kyle asked.

“I’m Grex.”

Kyle was quiet. Then he shrugged.

“Okay then, whatever you say.”

Grex, though they had no mouth, seemed to smile. It was more felt than seen.

“Okay, you ready to split up?” Hannah said.

The friends nodded.

“Okay then, on three,” Kyle said. “One…”

“Two…” Hannah said.

“Two and a half…” Shashi followed.

The group remained silent. Not a word was spoken.

They hugged each other and silently dispersed, leaving Hannah, Shashi, and Kyle alone.

Then Hannah reached into her backpack and took out a pair of novelty glasses, the kind with the fake nose and mustache attached - the perfect disguise.

Kyle put on a Houston Astros baseball cap.

Shashi put a paper bag with a smiley face on it on her head.
“Ready Agent K?” Hannah asked.

“Yes, Agent H!” Kyle said.

“That’s Agent H 2 to you,” Hannah said. “My bub is Agent H.”

“Okay then.”

“How about you, Agent S?” Hannah asked.

“Yes Agent H 2,” Shashi replied, voice clear despite the paper bag over her head.

“Okay, but do we know what our mission is?” Hannah asked.

“To warn everyone about your mom’s lemon squares!” Kyle and Shashi replied in unison.

“That’s right! Now let’s go, Agents!”

The “Agents” cheered in excitement and dispersed in different directions.

They were about to save the world from bad lemon squares.

And no one was going to stop them.

Hunter wore a Phantom Of The Opera mask and stood at the entrance to the cafetorium.

They leaned against the wall and hummed a little tune.

When I was just a little girl— I asked my mother, what will I be— Will I be pretty, will I be rich— Here’s what she said to me—

“Que sera, sera—” someone familiar sang.

Hunter looked up and saw Mettaton, who had just walked through the front door of the school carrying a mic stand.

“What will be, will be—” Hunter tacked on happily. “The future’s not ours to see—”

“Que sera, sera—” Hunter and Mettaton sang in two-part harmony.

They laughed.

“So, Hunter-darling,” Mettaton said, “what’s with the mask? Not that I’m complaining, I adore Phantom Of The Opera.”

“It’s a disguise,” Hunter whispered. “Me, Hannah, and some of Hannah’s friends are scattered around in disguises to warn people…”

“Warn them about what?” Mettaton asked, curious.

Hunter tensed and looked about. Then they turned to face Mettaton once more. “She didn’t use sugar in her lemon squares,” they whispered. “Or eggs.”

“What?” Mettaton said flatly.

“Not even fake sugar,” Hunter said with a shake of their head. “And she put tofu in it…”
Mettaton gagged.

“Spread the word?” Hunter asked.

“I’m on it,” Mettaton assured. “I didn’t even know those were lemon squares, I thought it was foam rubber cement in a cake pan!”

Hunter snickered. “Sure feels like it,” they said. “But they taste like crud…”

“I’ll take your word for it,” Mettaton said with a smile.

“What’s the microphone for, though?” Hunter asked.

“Oh, I got permission from Mr. McBride and brought in a karaoke machine with 50’s music in it!” Mettaton said. “What do you think?”

They platinum blonde’s face brightened. “That sounds AWESOME!” they exclaimed. “I dunno if I’ll be able to get up there, but I’ll try!”

“I haven’t a doubt in my mind that you will, Hunter-darling!” Mettaton said with a warm smile. “I should be getting a move on, Papyrus is waiting for me!”

“Okay!” Hunter said. “Tell him I said hi!”

Mettaton gave a thumbs up. “Will do, Hunter-darling!”

Then he walked into the cafetorium.

Hunter sighed and slid into a sitting position.

He continued warning those who came in about Linda Thompson’s lemon squares.

Helen and Sharona were setting the baked goods into a red wagon, preparing to take off, when a young boy in a minor league baseball cap ran up to them.

“Hey, don’t eat Mrs. Thompson’s lemon squares, they’re made of old sweaty socks,” he said. “And they taste bad.”

Then the kid ran off back toward the building.

Helen and Sharona stared on in confusion.

“So THAT’S the secret ingredient for Linda’s yellow hell bars,” Sharona said.

“Who’da thunk it,” Helen mused.

The women paused.

Then they broke out into laughter.

“I have no idea who that kid was, but he has to have SOME taste to know Linda’s lemon squares are bad!” Sharona laughed.

“You don’t need taste to know that,” Helen said. “Even Diana hates them.”

“Wait!” the kid said, running up them. “Just call me Agent K.”
Then he ran off again, his hat flying off with a gust of wind. He started futilely chasing it.

Sharona and Helen were very confused.

“Let’s take these inside and heed this young man’s words,” Helen said.

“Right behind you.”

“And THAT is why I’m destined to be the most popular kid at North Middle School starting next year.”

Miranda walked down the hall, followed by Naomi and Olive.

Miranda was wearing a cream-colored sleeveless dress with red polkadots with a red hairbow and kitten heels.

Olive was wearing a pink poodle skirt and maryjanes.

Naomi was wearing a blue skirt with suspenders over a white blouse.

“Are you two even listening to me?” Miranda asked angrily.

“We are, we just weren’t sure if you were done talking or if you’d just paused for dramatic effect,” Naomi said.

Miranda glared at Naomi. Naomi didn’t react. Olive smiled as she stared into space.

Miranda growled and moved on and continued her useless diatribe about her inevitable popularity, lack of audience notwithstanding.

Naomi and Olive remained behind. Naomi sighed. She KNEW she’d made a mistake in befriending Miranda…

“Did something happen between you guys?”

Naomi turned toward Olive. Her usual blank airhead look was abandoned in favor of one of concern.

“Why do you ask?” Naomi asked.

“Miranda’s been angrier lately,” Olive explained. “And it’s mostly been around you. I’m worried about you…”

Naomi slumped her shoulders and lowered her head. “She wants to keep copying my homework in middle school. I think that should stop, but she said that friends let friends copy each other’s homework. If that’s what friends do, I don’t really wanna be friends.”

Olive hummed. “Well, if you leave, I will too!” she said cheerfully. “I think THAT’S what friends do!”

Naomi looked at Olive and smiled, her face heating up slightly.

Olive was a good friend…
Mettaton sat on the edge of the stage, going over the plans for the Vancouver leg of the tour that his agent sent him, when someone cleared their throat.


“Thank you, Papy-dearest!” Mettaton sang. “I’ll go over and check it out! I’ll meet up with you here in a bit, okay?”

“OF COURSE! I SHALL SEE YOU MOMENTARILY, MY LOVE!”

And with that, Papyrus kids Mettaton’s hand and went to talk with Sans. Mettaton went to get a better look at the sound system. All the cords were plugged into their rightful outlets, the wires were laid out in such a way that they were sure to go untangled, and they were marked on the floor with… was that sparkly pink duct tape? If he wasn’t so sure already that Papyrus was The One, he would have…

Wait.

Back up.

The One?

Did Mettaton really just think that? About someone?

Were he anyone else, he would have died on the spot. Luckily for him, he was a World-Famous Entertainer, who could Act. He was in full control of his emotions.

But rest assured, his diary would be full of incoherent scribbles of pure glee.

Meanwhile, Papyrus was accosting Sans.

“I TOLD YOU, SANS, NO ONE WILL UNDERSTAND THOSE PUNS!” Papyrus said, clearly exasperated. “I CAN’T EVEN UNDERSTAND THEM!”

“all the more reason to use them then, bro."

Papyrus groaned in exasperation.

Sans simply stood there and looked at his watch.

“you done there, bro? the bake sale begins in fifteen minutes, and dad’ll be here in ten.”

Papyrus brightened. “DAD’S COMING?” he asked. “ARE YOU SURE?”

“yep,” Sans replied. “asgore won’t be joining him because of work, so alphys and undyne are picking him up.”

Papyrus crossed his arms over his rib cage and hummed. “I CAN THINK OF A FEW PEOPLE WHO WILL NOT APPRECIATE THAT…”.

Sans side-eyed Linda. “you’re tellin’ me,” he said. “but our old man can hand himself, papyrus. you know that as well as i do.”

“HE WENT FOR A WHOLE WEEK WITHOUT SLEEP BECAUSE HE WANTED TO FIGURE OUT A WAY TO MEASURE THE HEAT OF HOTLAND’S LAVA, SANS.”
Sans shrugged. “and then he survived for fourteen years in an interdimensional void only to return thanks to an extradimensional being. like i said, he can take care of himself.”

“BUT SANS, IT’S ALREADY CROWDED AND NOT EVEN HALF OF THE EXPECTED PEOPLE ARE HERE!” Papyrus urged. “WHAT IF HE…”

“papyrus, if he does end up having a seizure, we know what to do,” Sans said calmly. “i know you’re worried about him - believe me, i am too. but coming here was his decision, and i am certain that he knows what he’s getting himself into. after all, tori told him all the details.”

Papyrus relaxed somewhat and nodded.

“you wanna step out for a bit?” Sans asked.

Papyrus nodded just as Mettaton returned from checking the wiring and wrapped his arms around Papyrus.

“Would you like to join me outside for a moment?” he asked. “Take a break until the bake sale starts?”

Papyrus beamed and nodded. A light dusting of Orange spread across his cheeks.

As the pair stepped out into the hallway, Sans was left standing for a few moments before walking off to who-knows-where.

Linda had been listening discreetly while redoing her lipstick in her compact. She had been sure that their father was dead, or had abandoned them, or something like that. But if that man was anything like his sons, he was sure to be a walking disaster.

But first to check her phone to look up just what the hell a “seizure” is…

Then Helen tapped on Linda’s shoulder.

Linda turned off her phone to speak. “What is it, Helen?” she asked, trying very hard not to sound as bitter as she felt. Thank GOD for that semester of drama class in freshman year…

“Sharona and I brought in the baked goods,” Helen relayed. “They’re ready to be set out, and you’re the only one with the seating chart.”

Linda smiled, trying not to snap. When in doubt, smile and nod. Her mother had taught her that one, and it hadn’t failed her yet.

As Linda walked off, Helen saw her previous smile fall into a scowl.

Helen knew that Linda was plotting something. But what, she wasn’t sure.

Helen sighed, mentally preparing herself call in reinforcements.

And by call in reinforcements we mean tell Diana that Linda wants to talk just as soon as Linda starts looking all suspicious again.

Linda was a decent enough liar, but a terrible actress.

Undyne sat in the passenger’s seat of Alphys’ green Mini Cooper, a strained look on her face.
Whoever was singing the song that was playing right now was absolutely terrible in Undyne’s opinion.

It didn’t help that Gaster was signing it aloud in the backseat, to Mamoru’s giggly pleasure.

Alphys was too busy driving to know what horrors were occurring in the backseat.

Undyne made a gun shape with her left hand and stared out the window forlornly, aiming at her head and pretending to fire. She adjusted the red bandana around her head, her red hair in a bun. Her blue shirt was tied at the front, skinny jeans tucked into her work boots. Her leather jacket was wrapped around her waist.

Alphys was in a blush-pink sleeveless dress with lace bobby socks and maryjanes. Damn adorable.

Little Mamoru was dressed like Arthur Fonzarelli from Happy Days, complete with a pair of tiny sunglasses. Sans had made a great call there. Her son was abso-fucking-lutely adorable. He got it from Alphys.

Dr. Gaster was dressed like some vampire with a nice-looking black fedora. He insisted that he was not a vampire, but Bela Lugosi’s character from Plan 9 From Outer Space. To which Undyne said “What the fuck”.

“U-Undyne, please be p-patient,” Alphys said. “We’re almost there.”

“Love and marriage~ Love and Marriage~ It’s an institute you can’t disparage~ Ask~ The local~ Gentry~ And they will say it’s elementary~”

Undyne was certain that every ounce of vocal talent that Dr. Gaster may have had was taken by his sons.

And that maybe poor Mamo-chan had poor taste in music. But then again, he was only four months old.

Undyne was pulled from her reverie when the car pulled into the parking lot.

Frisk was in the middle of a round of Old Maid when they got a text.

*I text from: Dad*

*linda’s looking for hunter

*play this when she shows up

Frisk looked at the video Sans had texted. They chose to trust him.

Then The sound of the door opening combined with the scent of lavender and menthol cigarettes alerted everyone to the arrival of Linda Thompson.

Frisk played the video.

The Dragnet theme song rang out.

Laughter erupted. Frisk quickly turned off their phone and put it away before they were noticed.

Linda looked pissed for all of five seconds before returning to Suburban Soccer Mom Mode.
“Hunter!” She called. “Grandpa Jim and Grandma Peggy are here! Come say hi!”

“Yes, Mom…” Hunter said.

“Hunter, no mumbling or else!” Linda warned.

“Yes, Mom.”

Hunter stood forlornly.

As soon as Linda left and Hunter was on his way out the door, MK took out his kazoo.

Amazing Grace played on a kazoo had never sounded so depressing.

The children with hats lowered them over their hearts. Frisk removed their sunglasses.

“Hunter James Thompson was a cool dude,” Brian eulogized. “Never have I met a kid who could hold a note for more than ten seconds. He broke twenty. Rest in peace, Hunter.”

“He is with Cactus Everdeen now…” Frisk whispered.

Then Caroline and Penelope walked in the room.

“Who died?” Caroline asked.

“Awww, I didn’t even have time to make death cupcakes…” Penelope lamented.

“No one died, Hunter just got picked up by his mom to see his grandparents,” Brian said. “But his grandma’s evil, so…”

Penelope removed her headband in a gesture of respect.

“He’s not dead yet,” Caroline said. “We can still save him.”

“But how?” MK asked.

<<Yeah, Linda’s not exactly going to let you near him after that time you puked on her,>> Frisk signed skeptically.

Caroline smirked and pushed up her glasses menacingly by the bridge.

“I have a better idea,” she said.

“Does it involve cake?” MK asked.

“Yes,” Caroline said. “Cake, secret agents, and a little old lady.”

Everyone was silent.

“I don’t even wanna know,” Brian said, shaking his head as he joined the group to discuss the plot.

Hunter and Hannah sat down at one of the cheap diner-style tables across from a scrawny, anxious-looking man in his 70s with white hair and blue eyes wearing a white shirt with khakis held up by suspenders and a plump, uptight-looking woman around the same age with dyed blonde hair and beady brown eyes wearing a garish pink flowery dress that made her resemble a sofa rather than a
“Hunter James, sit up straight,” the woman said, her voice crackly from years of chain smoking. “You look like a bum.”

“Yes Grandma Peggy,” Hunter said, voice strained slightly yet clear.

“And Hannah Grace, close your legs, it’s unladylike.”

“Yes Grandma Peggy,” Hannah said. She put her knees together tightly.

“Jim, get me a piece of chocolate cake.”

“Yes, dear,” the man said, his voice weak and resigned despite the smile on his face. “Hunter, Hannah, what would you two like?”

“Nothing,” Peggy snapped. “They’ll get fat if they eat this garbage.”

Jim smiled sadly and left to get his wife her cake.

Hunter and Hannah remained quiet and still.

They could hear the whispers of pity from the people around them.

They were filled with dread.

________________________________________________________________________

“Hold on, Bubbie Gerda, let me get that for y-”

“It’s my legs that don’t work, not my arms!”

And with that Bubbie Gerda hoisted the box of mysterious objects over her shoulders with one arm and maneuvered her wheelchair with the other, clearly used to such activity.

The people in the parking lot stared on at them in a mixture of awe, confusion, and terror.

Bubbie Gerda gave her sweetest smile to the horrified onlookers and carried on with her task, followed by a mysterious-box-carrying Randy, plus a Mona carrying a bag of birthday presents.

As soon as they entered the cafetorium, Mona and Bubbie Gerda’s faces contorted once they saw the sofa sitting across from Hunter and Hannah.

“Doesn’t that sofa look kinda familiar to you, Ma?” Mona asked as quietly as she could. Which wasn’t very quiet at all since her voice carried, but the background noise prevented the sofa from hearing her.

Bubbie Gerda hummed in affirmation. “I’d recognize that sofa anywhere,” she said, a fire underlying her voice. “But let’s wait before we move in. She hasn’t done anything TOO bad… yet.”

________________________________________________________________________

Caroline was still reading I, Robot - in fact, she had just started on the final short story, The Evitable Conflict.

The world within the stories was similar enough to the present world that it was uncanny. Humans forming factions against another sapient species, other Humans trying to understand and get along
with said sapient species…it was all so familiar.

All fiction does indeed contain an element of truth, it seems.

“Caroline! There you are!”

Levi and Sharona ran up to her.

“Bubbie Gerda and Bubbie Mona are here,” Levi said. “We’re meeting up with them in the cafetorium.”

“Can I finish this book first?” Caroline asked. “I have just a few pages left, and this is the last chapter…”

Sharona sighed and rolled her eyes. “How many is a few?” she asked.

“I dunno,” Caroline admitted. “Could be five, could be ten. But I read fast - I’ll be done real quick.”

“I think Randy has that book,” Sharona remarked.

“He does,” Caroline said. “He really likes Isaac Asimov’s works. I can see why, too. This book is great …”

Sharona and Levi glanced at each other and rolled their eyes in unison.

Like father, like daughter, it seems…

“Yo Frisk, got any fives?” MK asked.

Frisk gestured toward the deck, a way of nonverbally saying “Go Fish”.

MK put their cards facedown and drew a card and added ot to this hand, expertly retaking the facedown cards with their tail.

MK stared at the cards in their hand - err, tail.

Frisk gave the sign for 6.

“Go Fish.”

Then came a knock at the door.

“Come in!” someone shouted.

Some arguing came from the other side.

Then after a few minutes, the door opened.

Dr. Gaster had come, followed by Alphys, Undyne, and Mamoru.

“Hello, young Frisk!” he said cheerfully.

“F-for the last TIME, Undyne, you cannot kick down the door!” Alphys argued. “It would cost us money we don’t have to spend on property damage!”

“But I wanna show off for Mamo-chan…” Undyne whined, pouting and crossing her arms.
“Which you can do at any other time BUT now.”

Undyne grumbled for a bit before turning to the small crowd of awestruck fifth graders.

The silence weighed heavy.

Undyne swiftly took Mamoru in her arms and held him out a la The Lion King.

“LOOK AT MY AWESOME SON!” she shouted.

The children started chattering and crowding around the baby Dinosaur.

The coos and wows filled Undyne with pride.

“Come along, Frisk!” Dr. Gaster said, his… distinctive voice easily cutting through the atmosphere as usual. “It’s time for sugary garbage! Are you ready?”

Frisk hopped in place and nodded enthusiastically.

<<Can MK and Brian come too?>> they signed, a hopeful look in their eyes.

“Uheheh, I don’t see why not!” he chuckled. “Come along you three! Sugar waits for neither Man nor Mon!”

“Woohoo!” MK cheered. “C’mon Brian, you’re coming with us!”

MK, Brian, and Frisk ran ahead of the adults plus one baby, motivated by the promise of sugary baked goods.

The promise of sugary garbage filled Frisk with DETERMINATION.

FILE: SAVE.

Penelope stood behind her table, the half-gallon-sized jar of money was halfway full. Her cupcakes were selling very well, it seemed.

She glanced around. There were a lot of people here, but thankfully there was ample space behind the table.

Someone had taken to the stage for karaoke, singing some old jazzy-sounding tune.

Wait. This no Jazz. This was the Old Rock’N’Roll, son of Jazz and Rhythm’N’Blues.

“One, two, three o’clock~ Four o’clock rock~ Five, six, seven o’clock~ Eight o’clock rock~ Nine, ten eleven o’clock~ Twelve o’clock rock~ We’re gonna rock~ Around~ The clock tonight~”

Penelope swayed in place to the music a bit. She wondered where Hunter was. They would love this.

She spotted Mettaton and Papyrus talking to someone, but she was a bit nervous about calling them outright. She didn’t want to bother them in the middle of their conversation, nor did she want to step away from her table. She was the only one there after all since Monica was at work and Theo was at school.
Then Papyrus spotted her and waved, Mettaton following suit.

“HELLO THERE PENELOPE!” he said as soon as he and his boyfriend reached the table. “ARE YOU HAVING FUN?”

“Yeah!” Penelope said. “My jar is halfway full, so I guess I’m doing pretty good! How about you guys?”

“We’re doing quite well, thank you!” Mettaton said.

“Say, what song is this?” Penelope asked. “I wanna write it down for Hunter to give to him later since I haven’t seen him for a while.”

“Rock Around The Clock by Bill Haley and his Comets,” Mettaton answered. “The song has a pretty convoluted history, really.”

“Caroline said that everything has a convoluted history and that lots of stuff is either dumbed down or not told,” Penelope said.

Papyrus and Mettaton were silent.

“Mettaton! It’s been a few!”

The group turned to see Mr. McBride with a blond man in a business suit and a tallish girl of around fourteen with blonde hair and blue eyes in a pink dress with white lace all over with a white sash and a single white satin shoulder strap on the right shoulder with white flats, finished with white lace gloves.

“Hello, Mr. McBride!” Mettaton greeted. “You’ve heard of my boyfriend, Papyrus!”

Mr. McBride snapped his fingers. “I KNEW you had good taste,” he said. “Well, this is my husband Jeff Gray, and our daughter Skye! Skye will be in high school next year, and she takes ballet! She recently started taking pointe classes - can you believe it?!”

“Papaaa, you’re embarrassing me!” Skye whined, her hands covering her face.

Mr. McBride chuckled. “She’s reached that age - ah, rebellious youth…”

“Nathan, she’s just now leaving that stage,” Jeff said. “It was FAR worse two years ago.”

“Yeah, it’s age twelve you gotta watch out for…”

Then the song changed.

“Wait, what song is this?” Penelope asked.

Papyrus’ eye sockets widened as he slowly turned toward the stage…

…where Sans was playing trombone.

“Seventy-Six Trombones from the 1957 musical The Music Man,” Mettaton said.

“But he’s only using one trombone,” Penelope noted. “Where are the other seventy-five?”

“THE TRASH, HOPEFULLY,” Papyrus said.
The crowd was laughing and cheering at the mathematically incorrect performance.

Which was interrupted by the complaints of a sofa.

“Mother, calm down, you’re making a scene -”

“I have every RIGHT to make a scene, Linda Jane Murphy!” Peggy screamed, her face sweaty and nearly purple with rage. “That daughter of yours is going to be obese if she eats this garbage!”

“Mother, please -” Linda attempted feebly.

“YOU SHUT YOUR MOUTH YOUNG LADY, OR ELSE I WILL -”

“OH my GAUD, I’d recognize that screeching anywhere! ”

Peggy turned as quickly as her third, fourth, and fifth chins would allow her to.

Mona and Bubbie Gerda were behind her, smiling sweetly as they could.

“Peggy Smith!” Mona said with the kind of cheerfulness reserved for those with homicidal desires. “It’s been YEARS!”

Peggy growled. “Mona Epstein. Still as short as ever.”

“And you’re still as FAT as ever,” Mona said. “It’s really not surprising that your poor husband and grandchildren are starving to death…”

“How DARE YOU, YOU FILTHY, DISGUSTING -”

The last word of the sentence was followed by the gasps of offense and horror from countless people.

The silence that followed was one that went uninterrupted for what felt like hours, but could have been anywhere from seconds to centuries. In reality, it was about five minutes.

Then Bubbie Gerda rolled forth from the edge of the crowd.

And yanked Peggy down by her collar and punched her in the face.

Bubbie Gerda was angry enough to be close to tears.

“A quarter of a century has passed since I was freed from Birkenau, and still hateful things like you trouble those you deem beneath you,” she hissed.

“This FILTHY JEW JUST HIT ME!” Peggy screeched through a broken nose. “SOMEONE KILL IT!”

Bubbie Gerda punched again. And again.

“You, Peggy Ann Smith, are a terrible influence on your daughters and grandchildren,” Bubbie Gerda said, voice wavering with fury. “No surprise that Donna never calls you.”

Peggy screamed and lunged, only to fall uselessly forward.

Bubbie Gerda wheeled forward, running over the flailing sofa and toward Penelope’s cupcakes.
"Are these kosher?" she asked.

Penelope nodded dumbly. "Are you Bubbie Gerda?" she asked, a bit scared.

"Yep," the old woman said, dropping a ten dollar bill in the jar and taking a single cupcake.

"I-I'm Penelope, I'm a friend of Levi and Caroline."

Bubbie Gerda smiled. "Well, Penelope, I'm gonna tell you something. Some people just can't be reasoned with. Those who can't be reasoned with? You punch them in the face. Violence is a last resort."

"SOMEONE KILL THAT FILTHY KIKE!"

Bubbie Gerda sighed and glanced at the shocked group around her.

"Please excuse me, I have some things to clear up," she said.

She wheeled over to Peggy, who was standing with help from Linda, who looked a mix of terrified and furious.

Bubbie Gerda looked Peggy in the eye.

"Now you listen, and listen GOOD," Bubbie Gerda all but hissed. "I didn't watch my parents, my siblings, my best friends, my husband and my son - I didn't watch them DIE before my eyes, I didn't LIVE for their sakes, I didn't FIGHT for a better life in this country, just so worthless SHIT like YOU could talk down to people you hate. Plead the first all you want - just be aware that every action, every word, EVERY LITTLE THING has consequences. And if you can't take them?"

Bubbie Gerda sighed and shook her head,

"You're beyond help, Peggy. You've humiliated your daughter, you've shown your grandchildren just what they're worth to you, you've proven to all of these people what kind of person you are. I hope you're proud of the person you'll never be, and I hope that anyone who ever felt any love for you regrets having had anything to do with you. But most of all?"

Bubbie Gerda gave her sweetest, kindest smile.

"I hope your grandchildren grow up to be the kind of people you hate, because the kind of people you've always hated have been the most wonderful people I've ever had the pleasure of meeting."

Bubbie Gerda turned around, applause following her.

Then Peggy shrieked in fury and lunged, Linda trying to hold her back. This had as much effect as a worm trying to hold back a rabid hippopotamus.

An encounter was triggered.

Levi, Caroline, Penelope, Brian, Frisk, MK, Hunter, and Hannah all glared at Peggy and Linda.

The bullet board contained a Blue heart, a Purple heart with white cracks, a Green heart, an Orange heart, a Red heart, an upside-down White heart, a Cyan heart, and a Yellow heart.

"What the heck?!" Brian shouted.
“Either those two are homicidal, or just plain crazy,” Caroline said.

“My money’s on both…” Penelope muttered.

“Okay, what is this?” Levi said, turning to Frisk, Caroline, and Penelope.

“Encounter Mode,” Caroline said. “Those heart thingies are our SOULs. Mine’s the Purple one with the cracks, Penelope’s is the Green one, and Frisk’s is the Red one.”

“Frisk’s is Red?” Penelope mused. “Cool…”

“Each color is associated with a certain trait,” Caroline explained further. “My SOUL’s color represents **Perseverance**, Penelope’s is **Kindness**, Frisk’s is **DETERMINATION**, Blue is **Integrity**, Orange is **Bravery**, Cyan is **Patience**, Yellow is **Justice**, and White is a Monster SOUL. Everyone move one at a time in alphabetical order so we can see whose SOUL is whose? Except for me, Penelope, Frisk, and MK, I can tell whose they are.”

“WHAT THE HECk?” Brian screamed.

“There are two Blue ones!” Levi screamed.

“Cyan is the lighter blue,” MK said. “Some call it Aqua.”

“Brian, your move!”

Brian moved first, the Orange SOUL moving forward faster than Brian meant for it to move.

“WHAT THE HECK!” Brian screamed.

“Dude, we GET it! Shut UP already!” Levi snapped.

“Hannah, your turn,” Penelope said. “Try moving forward, okay?”

Hannah tried to move, only for the Yellow SOUL to move instead. She tried jumping, only for the SOUL to turn upside-down and shoot out a single bullet.

Hannah gasped and started giggling in excitement.

“Hunter, your move dude!” MK said.

Hunter tried to move, only for the Cyan SOUL to shudder and move forward slowly.

“Levi, are ya ready?” Caroline asked.

Levi nodded and took what he thought was a step forward, only for the Blue SOUL to jump up and fall back down.

“What are everyone’s stats?” Caroline asked.

“This is starting to look like an overhyped video game!” Brian screamed.

**Brian**

**LV:** 1

**HP:** 20/20
Acts without thinking. Not afraid to stand up for himself or others.

“Wow Bri, your defense is CRAP!” Levi said. “Wonder what my stats are?”

Levi
LV: 1
HP: 20/20
AT: 1
DF: 5
Sneaky as heck. Will do what he thinks is right.

“Dang right I will!” Levi cheered.

Hannah checked her stats.

Hannah
LV: 1
HP: 15/15
AT: 1
DF: 0
A playful young lass. Has a strong sense of right and wrong.

“Whooaaa…”

Hunter braced themself for whatever their stats may be.

Hunter
LV: 1
HP: 20/20
AT: 0.5
DF: 10
She has had enough. And it won’t be over until this young lady sings…

Hunter looked at the comment and felt just a little bit stronger.

“Okay, whose SOUL is in the rectangle-thingies on the bottom?” Penelope asked. “Cos it ain’t mine, I know that much.”
Frisk raised their hand and picked an option.

Once Linda and Peggy regained their bearings, they were furious.

None of the children could decipher their shrieks of unholy fury.

Frisk>ACT>Check>Peggy

Peggy
LV: 1
HP: 10/10
AT: 5
DF: 15
She has problems. You don’t like her much already.

Peggy screeched. The screech became an attack.

Everyone dodged easily.

“Who’s next?” Levi asked.

“I think I am,” Brian said.

Brian>FIGHT>Linda

The hit connected.

Linda
HP: 15/20

Hannah stared at the options. She chose the ones she could actually read.

Hannah>ACT>Say Hi>Linda

“Hi Mommy!” Hannah said cheerfully.

Linda shrieked in unholy fury.

Penelope>MERCY>Spare>Linda

“Hey, uh, Mrs. Thompson?” Penelope started nervously. “I don’t wanna fight, and I really hope you don’t either, so, uh…please stop?”

“SHUT UP!” Linda roared.

Hunter was close to tears.

Hunter>ACT>Reason>Linda

“Mom, if you love me or Hannah at all, then please listen to me!” they begged. “Grandma Peggy isn’t going to stop acting like this, and you and Grandpa Jim know it! Grandma Peggy’s trying to
HURT people, Mom! It’s scaring people, and I think you know that! You’re just happy it’s not you being yelled at, and that’s WRONG! Just…just STOP this, Mom! I’ll BEG if I have to!”

Linda stood stunned. Peggy was breathing heavily.

Levi\textgreater{}ACT\textgreater{}Spiel\textgreater{}Peggy

“I hope you’re happy with whatever Hell you end up in,” Levi said darkly.

Peggy growled.

Caroline\textgreater{}ACT\textgreater{}Check\textgreater{}Linda

Linda

LV: 2

HP: 20/20

AT: 5

DF: 5

Hunter’s mom. You KNEW she was homicidal…

“I don’t want this either, you know!” Linda defended. “I just don’t know what else to do!”

MK\textgreater{}ACT\textgreater{}Comfort\textgreater{}Frisk

“You okay, Frisk?” MK asked, worried.

Frisk smiled and nodded. MK sighed with relief.

Peggy\textgreater{}FIGHT\textgreater{}Hannah

Hannah squeaked and dodged.

Linda\textgreater{}MERCY\textgreater{}Hunter

“Hunter…sweetie…I don’t want this anymore…” Linda whispered.

Hunter looked at their options, then at Linda and Peggy.

Hunter\textgreater{}Decline

“Mom, Grandma just tried to hit Hannah,” they said, voice quaking with barely-restrained anger. “I’m not gonna sit back and let that happen again. Sorry, but I have to do this as a si - as a brother.”

Frisk took a deep breath.

Frisk\textgreater{}ACT\textgreater{}Call Out\textgreater{}Peggy

You tell Peggy that she’s a hypocrite.

Peggy hissed.

Brian glared at Peggy. He knew what he had to do.
Brian>FIGHT>Peggy

The hit connected.

HP: 5/10

Brian knew that another hit would cause Peggy to…faint? White out and respawn at a Pokemon Center? Whatever it was, he was pretty sure that it wouldn’t be pleasant.

Hannah>ACT>Cry

Hannah started sobbing.

Hunter grabbed onto her. They glared at Peggy.

Penelope>MERCY>Spare>Linda

“I meant it when I said that I don’t wanna fight,” Penelope said. “I wanna stop…”

Linda>Accept

Penelope phased out of the encounter. The other kids hoped she was okay.

__________________________

Penelope came to surrounded by people asking if she was alright.

She stood up, taking a moment to regain her senses.

She looked around at everyone. There was fear on their faces.

“Peggy tried to attack Hannah,” Penelope admitted, her voice thick with emotion. “Hunter’s doing his best to defend her, Brian’s fighting back, Frisk and Levi are trying to reason with Peggy and Mrs. Thompson, Caroline’s trying to find an opening, and I…”

Penelope collapsed, sobbing.

“Why can’t I DO anything?!?” she cried. “I just - I just wanna HELP them, but - but I - I - liiiii…”

She felt someone hug her.

“It’s okay Penelope,” Monica whispered. “You did your best…”

“But - but the others, they…”

“Are they safe?” Monica asked. “Is anyone hurt?”

Penelope sniffled and shook her head.

As she calmed down, her senses dulled. Exhaustion overtook her.

Penelope was worried for her friends.

__________________________

Alphys and Undyne were on their way back to the cafetorium with Mamoru when they got a text from Sans.

*sos*
Alphys and Undyne faced each other.

“I’m goin’ in,” Undyne declared. “Alphys, you look after our boy.”

Alphys nodded.

“Mamoru? You stay here and look cute.”

Mamoru gurgled in happy confusion.

As Undyne went to act as backup, Alphys held Mamoru just a little closer.

Once Undyne entered the cafetorium, she saw Penelope was leaning up against the stage with a bottle of water. The other kids were nowhere to be found.

“the others are stuck in an encounter with linda and her mother.”

Undyne would have body-thrown the speaker had it not been Sans. Sans would never attack someone from behind unless that someone deserved it.

“When Linda gets outta there I’ll KILL her…” Undyne hissed.

“Mrs. Thompson tried to stop her,” Penelope said suddenly. “It didn’t work, but she tried. She tried to spare Hunter. Her mom tried to hurt Hannah. I couldn’t do anything. I didn’t know what to do.”

Undyne knelt before Penelope and put her hands on her shoulders in an attempt to comfort her.

“You did your best,” Undyne said quietly. “You got the information out, that’s very important.”

Penelope nodded and took a swig from the bottle of water.

“Guess I gotta punch out an old lady then, huh?” Undyne said more than asked.

“Caroline’s and Levi’s grandma took care of that,” Mettaton explained. “Worked for all of five seconds…”

“Yeah, yeah, I get it, I’m getting old,” Bubbie Gerda grumbled. “Not MY fault she’s turned into a sofa in her old age…”

“Um, begging your pardon, but I would like to say a few things?”

Everyone in the group turned to see Jim. He was paler than he was a few hours ago - whether from worry, exhaustion, or some combination of the two was unknowable.

“Um, h-hi, I’m Jim Murphy, Linda’s father and Peggy’s husband?” he said. “I’d like to apologize for the behavior of my wife and daughter first and foremost, like mother like daughter they say…”

“I’M SURE IT’S NOT YOUR FAULT,” Papyrus assured.

“I appreciate the intent, but if I had put my foot down sooner perhaps none of this would have happened…”
“Sir, if you’d put your foot down sooner, you’d be dead,” Randy said. “Murphy women aren’t exactly… reasonable, to say the least…”

Sharona put her hand on Randy's forearm.

Jim sighed. “Which leads me to the second point. Peggy has been addicted to morphine for almost twenty years now. Recently, I learned that she’d chosen to quit all at once and…well, as you can see…”

“So she’s suffering withdrawal symptoms?” Helen asked. “And you brought her here anyway?!”

“I have no excuse for my actions,” Jim said. “I only stayed with her all these years because…I made a promise before God that I would stay by her, for better or for worse.”

Randy put a hand on the scrawnier man’s shoulder. “You’re a more Patient man than I am,” he said. “Whether for better or for worse, who can say. It took me far longer to take action than I wish it had…”

Sharona hugged Randy. Randy put an arm around her in kind and kissed the top of her head.

Helen pursed her lips, eyes darkened, expression otherwise unreadable.

“I’m going in,” Toriel said, her voice low and icy with rage. “It has been far too long now and I am not standing by and letting our children suffer another minute with those… those miserable creatures.”

Sans put a hand on her forearm, causing Toriel to pause and turn toward him.

Sans simply smiled.

“goat get ‘em, babe,” he said. “give ‘em hell.”

Toriel nodded tersely and straightened herself, walking forward with a regality reserved for one of her past status as a Queen. It was clear, now as much as ever, that she still had the Queenly Touch.

Sans watched as she forced her way into the encounter, well aware of the distance between them in ways he could not fathom however hard he tried.

But he wasn’t bothered. A year ago, perhaps he would have been. But now, it was a source of pride. Against all reason, she’d chosen him. She’d for all intents and purposes accepted him as hers for life - and it filled him with a joy indescribable.

He put his hands in his jacket pockets, ran his thumb over the velvet box within his left pocket and smiled vaguely at the spot where Toriel stood.

Huh. So today WAS gonna be the day.

Hell yeah.

Linda, Peggy, and the kids all stared at Toriel.

Frisk ran up to her and hugged her.

Toriel lifted Frisk up and kissed them on the cheek.
Toriel checked Frisk’s SOUL for damage.

Frisk
LV: 1
HP: 13/20
AT: 10
DF: 10

Your beloved child. Whosoever harms them shall not escape unscathed…

Toriel glared at Linda and Peggy. Peggy tensed, her sweaty face blanching and her knuckles whitening.

Linda was near tears before, now she outright started sobbing.

“Which of you miserable creatures laid your filthy hands on my child…?” Toriel said, her voice like like a blazing forest behind a wall of glacial ice.

Hannah pointed at Peggy.

“I already got her HP or whatever down to half,” Brian said. “Anymore might kill her, I think.”

“Anymore from YOU, at least,” Caroline added unnecessarily.

“Hey, it’s not MY fault she’s old and fat!”

“Brian, shush, she’ll try to kill you next!” Hunter hissed.

Peggy>FIGHT
She aimed for Toriel. Toriel dodged.

Toriel’s glare intensified.

Frisk>ACT>Cry
You sob a little. Your mother holds you close. You are fully healed.

Brian>ACT>Intimidate
You crack your knuckles. It’s not very effective, but you feel a bit calmer. Brian’s speed rose by 2.

Hannah>MERCY>Spare>Linda
“I wanna go home now…” Hannah sobbed.

Linda sobbed.

Linda>Accept

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?!” Peggy shrieked at Linda.

“Trying to save my children from you!” Linda spat.
“I AM TRYING TO PROPERLY DISCIPLINE THEM!” Peggy screeched.

“You are TRYING to MURDER THEM, YOU ANIMAL!” Toriel roared, trying her damnedest not to attack.

“YOU’RE THE ANIMAL HERE, YOU -”

**HP: 0.5/10**

Peggy screamed bloody murder.

**MP: 18/20**

Caroline glared at the spasming woman in front of her.

“What the heck, Caroline!” Brian shouted. “It wasn’t even your turn!”

“She nearly electrocuted my grandma, and you’re worried about it not being her turn?” Hunter said. “Your priorities need to change, Brian.”

Hunter>**Skip**

“I dunno what to do anymore,’’ Hunter whispered.

**Levi>MERCY>Spare>Peggy**

“As you can see Mrs. Murphy, at this stage you could be killed by a flick of a finger,’’ Levi said coldly. “And no one would be able to know how you died except for seven children, a teacher, and your daughter - none of whom are very reliable sources for varying reasons. The most any medical expert could attest to is cardiac failure due to complications of obesity, and even that will be debatable. Now you can either accept my offer of Mercy, or be a stubborn old bigot and have your blood stain a child’s hands as a result. Choose wisely; your life depends on it.”

Peggy seemed at a loss. On the one hand, she would admit that she was wrong, which is something no one wants. On the other, she would die, which is also something no one wants.

“Time is running out, Mrs. Murphy,’’ Caroline urged. “Either you admit your mistake and live another day, or die knowing you tried to kill your kin - a crime punishable by death in times past. Either way, you lose. Now make your choice.”

Peggy stood in place.

She made her choice.

Peggy>**Accept**

The children sat behind Penelope’s table, handing out cupcakes. Peggy had been taken to the police station for questioning.

Linda stood outside smoking a cigarette, having spoken with some police officers about the incident that had transpired that day, confirmed a few others, and proven that her lemon squares were not harboring anthrax.

“Uh, ma’am,” a remaining police officer said, “you do realize that smoking is prohibited on school grounds?”
“I just watched my mother get arrested, I think I deserve this!” Linda snapped.

The officer rolled his eyes and walked back to his cruiser, driving off.

Linda listened to the commotion inside.

Sounds like everyone’s having a good time…

Everyone in the cafeterium of Mountainside Elementary School as chatting, trying to make the rest of the day as close to what it should have been as possible.

Caroline opened her presents - all of them books or book-related objects.

She took time between her shifts at the cupcake stand to read one of them, Redwall. It wasn’t as big as she would have liked, but it was the first in a long-running series, so there was that.

Not to mention that the irony in the fact that the authors name was Brian was a cause for a smirk or two.

“Hey Hunter, you gonna sing?” Brian asked.

“Err, ah, well, I mean…”

“Brian, Hunter’s had a rough day today, let him be,” Penelope said.

“Hey, I WANT to, just not right now!” Hunter defended.

“then can i?”

Everyone turned to look at Sans.

“i have somethin’ i wanna sing and an announcement i wanna make,” Sans said.

“You don’t need my permission to do that, though!” Hunter said.

“i know,” Sans said. “i was just letting you guys know. frisk?”

Frisk turned toward their father.

“you’re gonna have good time, if ya catch my drift.”

Frisk brightened.

Sans walked up the stairs onto the stage.

He tapped the microphone, causing feedback to ring through the cafeterium.

Exactly the thing needed to get everyone’s attention.

Sans cleared his nonexistent throat.

“ah, hey, how’s it goin’. i’m sans. sans gaster.”

People cheered.

“no idea what you’re doin’ that for, but okay, whatever floats your boat,” Sans said with a shrug.
“so lemme start off by dedicating this one to my wonderful girlfriend, toriel dreemurr - she teaches fifth grade here, but you guys probably know this already, and if you don’t, what the heck are you doing here?”

People laughed.

“anyway, moving on. like i said, i’m dedicating this one to my goat-geous verte-bae, toriel.” Sans winked and waved the “I love you” sign. “love ya, pretty mama~”

Toriel blushed. The crowd cheered and whistled.

“this one’s from - anachronistically - 1961, but who cares since it’s elvis?” Sans said. “who doesn’t love elvis? and it was from his hit movie blue hawaii, for corn’s sake.”

People cheered.

“speaking of the sixties, i noticed that at least one person’s getup is more mid-sixties than the fifties theme requires. hint - it’s the lady who made the god-awful oatmeal raisin cookies. you know who you are. you were named after paul anka’s 1957 hit single.”

A few of the older audience members tittered.

“but i’m getting off track again. tori, this is our song. from the moment i first heard your voice, i heard this song ringing in my skull, and i knew, i knew, that…”

Sans sighed.

“ladies, gentlemen, gender-defying wonders, elvis presley’s can’t help falling in love.”

People gasped and squealed and cheered.

Sans got out his ukulele.

“JUST HOW MANY INSTRUMENTS DID HE BRING…?” Papyrus lamented.

“He can play the trombone, the guitar, and the ukulele, but his skills at the triangle leave something to be desired,” Gaster said.

“STARS ABOVE, I HOPE HE DIDN’T BRING THE TRIANGLE…”

Sans began to play.

A hush fell over the crowd.

“wise~ men~ say~ only fools~ rush~ in~ but i~ can’t~ help~ falling in love~ with~ you~”

Linda walked into the cafetorium at this point, stopping dead in her tracks at the sound of the music.

Was…was that Sans?

No, he HAD to be lip syncing, it HAD to be easy since he had no lips to speak of.

“shall~ i~ stay~ would it be~ a~ sin~ if i~ can’t~ help~ falling in love~ with~ you~”

Nope. Not lip syncing.

“ARE YOU GETTING THIS, HONEY?” Papyrus asked.
“I wouldn’t be me if I didn’t,” Mettaton said, cell phone in hand filming his boyfriend’s brother serenading his girlfriend on the ukulele.

“I’m glad I brought the camera,” Gaster said, holding a video camera. “We need to add on to the home movies…”

Levi ran up to them, managing to keep his phone’s camera focused on the stage all the while.

He looked up at them and gave a thumbs up.

“like a river flows~ surely to the sea~ darling so it goes~ some things~ are meant to be~”

Toriel was near tears, her smile threatening to tear her face in two.

“take~ my~ hand~ take my whole~ life~ too~ for i~ can’t~ help~ falling in love~ with~ you~”

Sans paused briefly. Everyone applauded.

“hey, i’m not done yet,” Sans chided.

Everyone slowly stopped clapping.

“tori, join me up here for a bit?” Sans asked.

Everybody oohed. Toriel blushed, but complied.

Once everybody quieted again, Sans looked up at Toriel.

“tori,” he began, “i honestly don’t remember the exact day we met - i think it was either a tuesday or a friday, who knows anymore. but i do remember your voice. looking back now, i think that the moment i really fell for you was when i first heard your laugh. never had i heard such a genuine reaction to a knock-knock joke until you came along.”

The audience awed and laughed.

“but really, tori. i’ve said it before, and i’ll say it again - and again, and again, and again. you’re the best audience i’ve ever had. you’ve changed me in ways even i can’t begin to fathom, and i…i can’t begin to thank you for all you’ve done for me. but, i uh…i got a question for ya…”

The crowd went silent. Even the whispering ones were silenced.

Seconds passed.

Then minutes.

“Sans?” Toriel asked, concerned. “Are…you alright? You appear to be sweating…”

“this question is a lot harder to ask than i thought,” Sans said, a nervous smile and a Cyan blush on his face.

Toriel tilted her head in confusion.

Sans scratched the back of his cervical vertebrae.

Toriel twiddled her thumbs.
Sans coughed.

Toriel glanced around.

The crowd was starting to get a bit antsy.

Sans sighed. “well, now or never i guess…”

He looked Toriel in the eyes.

“toriel,” he said. “i asked you up here for a reason, but one of the major components of the question is highly impractical…”

“Why is that?” Toriel asked, slowly starting to recognize the reasoning behind his actions.

“uh, well, considering our height difference, me getting down on one knee would just look silly…”

The crowd gasped.

Toriel put her hands over her mouth in shock, unsure of what to say.

Sans reached into his pocket and pulled out the box, opening it with a flick of his thumb.

A star sapphire, inlaid in a simple band of gold.

Toriel’s cinnamon eyes welled with tears. She nodded.

Sans’ eyelights sparkled. His smile widened, eye sockets starting to overflow.

He placed the ring on Toriel’s left finger, the applause and cheers and congratulations ignored in favor of each other.

Toriel lifted him and kissed Sans, which he eagerly returned.

Some of the younger ones in the audience expressed disgust, others cheered even louder, others chose to leave just in case things got too heated.

Sans and Toriel’s kiss was interrupted by Frisk, who had climbed on the stage and tackled them with a hug.

Toriel and Sans laughed, lifting their child and holding them close.

Eventually, the rest of their extended family joined in the group, laughing and smiling and cheering.

All was well with the world in that moment.

<<…and then they kissed! Can you BELIEVE it?!>>

“Huh,” Flowey remarked. “Didn’t know the fat memelord had it in him…”

<<Flowey, please!>> Frisk signed. <<This is a happy thing and I will not have your bitterness ruin it! At least PRETEND to be happy for them!>>

“No,” the Flower denied flatly.

<<Please?>> the Human signed. <<For me?>>
“No.”

<<For Chara…?>>

Flowey groaned and facepalmed - err, faceleafed.

<<For Narnia ?>>

“Oh my GOD, I’ll DO IT, just SHUT UP ALREADY!!”

Frisk clapped in glee.

Flowey glared at nothing and sighed.

Curse his love of Narnia and its associated inhabitants.

The future is bright and it fills you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

At The Hop - Danny And The Juniors
Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend - Gentlemen Prefer Blondes
Que Sera Sera - Doris Day
Love And Marriage - Frank Sinatra
Dragnet theme song - Ray Anthony
Amazing Grace - John Newton
Rock Around The Clock - Bill Haley And His Comets
Seventy-Six Trombones - The Music Man
Diana - Paul Anka
Can't Help Falling In Love - Elvis Presley

Fun Fact: I dunno what to put here...

This arc is almost done, and that means that these children are graduating - and THAT means that the OC contest is nigh! With chapter 44, eney and I shall provide the information on the contest. There is time yet for that, though. Have a nice day, and I hope you enjoyed this chapter!
Some Things Just Stick In Your Mind

Chapter Summary

Things come to light.
AKA the chapter you’ve all been waiting for.
AKA the chapter with Celtic music references.

Chapter Notes

Lo and behold, a chapter. Do enjoy it, for it shall quench thy thirst for many nonexplicit things.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

8:37 A.M., February 14th, 20XR

It’s a chilly day outside.
The sun is shining.
The weather is finally within seasonal norms.
On days like this, kids like you…

… are eating your Valentine’s candy while for the morning announcements.

Frisk chewed on the Tootsie Roll that was found at the center of their cherry Tootsie Pop.
They took another Pop out of the pile, only for it to be raspberry flavored. They put it in the plastic bag with Mettaton’s name on it with about 32 other raspberry Tootsie Pops.
They dug around their pile for another cherry-flavored Pop, or a chocolate or caramel or green apple one.
Then came the eardrum-piercing feedback of the school intercom system.
“Goood morning Mountainside Elementary! I’m Mr. McBride, and it is time for the morning announcements!”
The students cheered vigorously.
“Okay! First, with the results of the Spring Concert Solo auditions, Miss Halsey!”

Cheering.

“Hey everyone! First we will be announcing the fifth grade soloists.”

Cheering.

“For our fifth grade soloists, we have Hunter Thompson, Marilla Acquafredda, Eduardo Suarez, and Malis Bonnenuit!”

Loud cheers. Marilla, Hunter, Eddy, and Malis, a Shadow Elemental Monster, gathered together in a group hug.

“And for our fourth grade soloists, we have Nadetta Arcot, Ellis Christopher, Aruna Sherpa, and Jason Stuart! First day of solo practice is tomorrow at recess, I will see you all there! Remember, the concert itself is on March 22nd!”

Not-as-loud cheers.

“Thank you Miss Halsey! Continuing on with the other, not-as-fun announcements, the deadline for the fifth grade graduation speeches is March first. If you wanna give a speech about how much fun you didn’t have here, you have two more weeks to show us what you have to say about it.”

Everyone laughed a bit. But they all knew that Caroline was going to give the speech.

“Speaking of graduation, our fifth graders will be graduating alongside those of Upland Elementary at a shared ceremony. The graduation ceremony will be held at the Ebott Zoo Amphitheatre on May 23rd.”

Frisk perked up visibly.

“Thank you everyone, that’s all for now, have a great day!”

And silence followed the feedback. Everyone started chatting.

“I bet Frisk is eager to see Elaina,” Hunter said.

“I’d bet,” Caroline said. “Frisk mentioned that they keep in contact with Elaina, so meeting her in person after almost a year of long distance contact will probably be good for them.”

Hunter hummed.

“Hey, Hunter?” Caroline asked.

“Yeah? What’s up?”

“I wanna talk to you about something in private, involving the bake sale last week.”

Hunter was confused, and perhaps slightly nervous.

“Uh, okay? When and where?”

“Library, during recess.”

Hunter agreed.
They were filled with anxiety.

“Hannah, didn’t your brother get a solo part last year too?” Kyle asked.

“Yeah!” Hannah said. “He’s real good at singing!”

“Are you though?” Shashi asked.

Hannah shrugged.

“Sing us somethin’!” Bruno said.

“Yeah! Yeah!” Grex encouraged.

Hannah was a bit shy, but she knew that Hunter was even shyer than she was when not singing, so she decided to sing.

“I~  Know~  You~  I walked with you once~  Upon~  A dream~  I~  Know~  You~  That gleam in your eyes~  Is so~  Familiar a gleam~  And I know~  It’s~  True~  That visions are seldom all they seem~  But if I~  Know you~  I know what you’ll do~  You’ll love me at once~  The way you did once~  Upon~  A~  Dream~”

Many kids clapped.

“Booo!” Chelsea said.

Shashi bared her teeth.

Chelsea squeaked and turned around.

Hannah, Kyle, Bruno, and Grex high-fived Shashi.

Elaina sat on her usual bench by the blacktop of her school, reached into her purple backpack, and got out a black sketchbook and a 12-pack of colored pencils.

She opened the book to a page with a rough sketch of a globe, took the sky-blue pencil from the pack, and started to trace.

Elaina had started a project of sketching and coloring the planets of the solar system. She’d already finished Mercury and Venus, now she was on Earth. Next would be Mars, then Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. For Pluto, she would be flipping a coin on whether or not to do that one since Pluto wasn’t considered a planet anymore.

Something hit the back of her head.

She continued drawing.

Another thing hit the back of her head.

“Hey, leave her alone Alicia!” someone shouted. “This is why no one likes you!”

Alicia, Brooke, and Chloe gasped.

“Come on girls,” Alicia said. “We’re telling.”
“Snitches get stitches!” the stranger screamed.

Alicia, Brooke, and Chloe ran off.

“Hey, are uh…are you okay?” the stranger asked.

Elaina looked up at the stranger, a Human girl with curly nut brown hair and green eyes.

Elaina nodded, eyes wide and face oddly warm. The other girl was blushing as well.

“Y-y-yes, t-thank you…” Elaina said.

“Oh, it’s no problem really!” the girl said. “Alicia really needs to be knocked down a peg or two, and I just… took the opportunity, yeah!”

The silence between them was awkward.

“Oh, uh, my name’s Colleen,” the girl said. “Colleen McCann. I’m in fifth grade, Mr. Altman’s class. What’s yours?”

“Uh, E-Elaina Lorence. I-I’m in fifth grade, in Mrs. Harrod’s class. It’s n-nice to m-m-meet you…”

“Nice to meet you too!” Colleen said with a smile. “Uh, may I join you? I mean, can I sit next to you?”

Elaina nodded - maybe a bit too fast, in hindsight.

Colleen sat down. Elaina continued to color in South America while Colleen watched.

“What’re you coloring?” Colleen asked.

“U-uhh, I decided to d-draw all the p-planets in the solar system and c-color them in,” Elaina explained. “I-I already did Mercury and Venus, and now I’m on Earth.”

“Really?” Colleen said, her eyes alight with curiosity. “Can I see them?”

Elaina smiled. “S-sure!”

Randy adjusted the strap of the bass case over his shoulder and rang the doorbell of the apartment.

Gaster answered.

“Randy!” he said. “You made it!”

“Why wouldn’t I?” Randy said. “You needed a bassist, I came to deliver.”

“Well, come on in! We’re about to start with some Pat Benatar, but we have no vocalist to speak of.” Randy followed Gaster inside, where Asgore and Chas were set at a drum kit and a keyboard respectively.

“Who needs a vocalist when you have one of THESE?”

Randy dug into his bass case and got out a distinctly-non-bass guitar item.

“Dude!” Chas exclaimed in amazement. “You brought BAGPIPES to a ROCK MUSIC SESSION?!”
“Hey, Celtic rock is AMAZING,” Randy defended. “And I can PROVE it.”

“Then show us!”

Randy took out an old iPod nano, plugged it into a nearby speaker, and hit play.

The sound of oddly energetic bagpipes

*Another link in the chain getting rusty breaking~ Down in the gutter with a smile~ It’s another case of finding your place~ Another number showing what he’s made of~*

“Is this a drinking song or a protest song?” Gaster asked.

“Yes,” Randy answered.

“That wasn’t a yes or no question -” Asgore began.

“I know,” Randy interrupted. “Yes is just a fun way of saying either both or all of the above when answering a multiple choice question.”

“Really?” Asgore mused, curious at this newfangled (to him, anyway) use of the English language.

“Okay, this song is great, but just one is not enough to prove you right!” Chas asserted.

Randy sighed. “Okay. I didn’t wanna break this one out, but you asked for it…”

He fiddled with the iPod.

“Have you guys ever heard of Deep Purple?” he asked.

“A lotta people have,” Chas said. “What’s that got to do with anything?”

“The original guitarist Ritchie Blackmore founded a folk rock band with his girlfriend - now his wife - in ‘97,” Randy said. “They do medieval and Celtic too. And they kick ass with it.”

“Wait, Ritchie Blackmore’s still in the biz?” Chas asked.

“Yes, and he’s still doing great, in my opinion. I’ll show you.”

Then Randy plugged in the iPod and played the music.

He had no idea what horrors he would create that day…

Hunter entered the library and walked to where Caroline usually sat with Penelope.

Caroline was there, but not a Penelope in sight.

“Where’s Penelope?” Hunter asked.

“She’s with Frisk and Levi learning how to play Solitaire,” Caroline replied. “I did wish to speak with you alone, didn’t I?”

“I don’t like you that way,” Hunter said. “Sorry.”

Caroline was utterly confused. “The sentiment is mutual,” she said. “That wasn’t even my intent in the first place, I told you.”
Hunter was suddenly embarrassed.

“Sorry…”

“Don’t worry, it’s fine,” Caroline assured. “I’m sure Brian feels the same way…”

“What does ANY of this have to do with the bake sale?” Hunter asked, waiting for death to take them.

“Nothing whatsoever, since that’s not why I asked you here,” Caroline said.

“Why then?” Hunter asked.

Caroline took a deep breath, steeling herself.

“Remember the encounter we got into with your mom and grandma?” she asked.

“Kinda hard not to when your racist grandma was barely killed by two of your best friends,” Hunter mumbled.

“Remember when we were all checking our stats?” Caroline asked carefully.

“What about it?”

“I read everyone’s stats.”

“We all read each others’ stats, though.”

“But what about the little comment thingies underneath them?”

Hunter flinched, looking up at Caroline.

Caroline was staring at the cover of her book.

“Yours confused me a bit,” Caroline said. “It referred to you as a lady, even though you are male. And when you said that it was your duty as a brother to protect Hannah, you started to refer to yourself as something else.”

Hunter was silent. The atmosphere was cold and heavy.

“I’m not going to pry or judge,” Caroline began, “but it was something which captured my attention, and my curiosity would not be sated until I asked. You don’t have to say anything of you don’t want to.”

“It’s true…”

Caroline looked up. Hunter was shaking, almost in tears.

“What is…?” Caroline asked, so quiet her voice was barely even a whisper.

“That comment thingie, when it said I was a girl…”

“So you’re trans…?” Caroline asked.

Hunter nodded.

Silence. Heavy, heavy silence.
Caroline put her book down and hugged Hunter.

“I won’t tell anyone,” Caroline said. “I promise.”

Hunter sobbed and hugged her back.

“Um, since you trusted me with something huge like that, I…I think I’ll tell you something too,” Caroline said. “But you have to keep it secret too, okay?”

Hunter nodded. “What is it?”

Caroline hugged Hunter a bit tighter and inhaled.

“Well, I’m…not really sure if it’s entirely the case, but from what all I’ve read and Googled, the only logical conclusion is that…”

Caroline took another deep breath in.

“I think I might have a crush on Penelope…”

Hunter hugged Caroline a bit tighter.

“It’s about dang time…” she said.

A deck of cards lay on the desk before Penelope, Frisk, and Levi.

Penelope was tense.

“Y’know, if you’re so worried about Caroline and Hunter, you can just go to the library yourself and see what’s up,” Levi said.

“No,” Penelope said. “They said they needed to be alone for this, and I’m going to be Kind and respect that.”

“Okay, if ya say so,” Levi said. “So watch and learn…”

Levi shuffled and set up the cards.

Penelope stared blankly.

As soon as Levi finished dealing, he realized that Penelope had been paying zero attention to the demonstration.

He sighed. “Frisk, please tell me YOU were paying attention?”

Frisk blinked a few times and looked about in a daze.

Levi shook his head and began to play Solitaire.

Then Caroline and Hunter returned.

“Did you two enjoy yourselves?” Penelope asked coldly.

“The library really isn’t the same without you, Nell,” Caroline said with a smile.

Penelope felt her face start to burn.
Hunter snickered.

Elaina wrote her name on her paper and got up to turn it in.

As she walked back to her seat, she saw that someone’s leg was sticking out.

She stepped around it with a twirl and looked the perpetrator in the eye and stuck out her tongue before sitting in her seat.

The perpetrator flipped her off and started talking to his friends.

Elaina took out her sketchbook and continued coloring.

Something hit her in the back of her head.

Ignore.

Something else hit her in the back of her head.

Ignore some more.

Something particularly heavy and hard and pointy hit her in the back of her head.

Keep ignoring.

“Oh my god, Elaina’s bleeding!”

“What the heck is WRONG with you, Alicia?! Are you trying to KILL her?!”

“Wha - no, I-I didn’t mean to, I -”

“Alicia Berry,” Mrs. Harrod said. “Come with me.”

“No!” Alicia whined. “It was an accident!”

“Oh yes, I’m SURE throwing a pencil box at someone's head was a COMPLETE accident, and don’t even THINK about asking Brooke Lane and Chloe Phillips to go with you.”

“My daddy won’t like this one bit, you know!” Alicia screamed as she was dragged from the classroom. “He’ll sue you for everything you have!”

Elaina pretended nothing happened as people muttered words of concern.

Brooke considered getting up and following Alicia. Fear of being hated by the rest of the class won out. It always did.

Chloe considered asking Elaina if she was okay. Fear of being hated by the rest of the class won out. It always did.

Hannah, Shashi, Kyle, Bruno, and Grex were working on spelling when a strange sound was heard.

It sounded like a schlup.

“Oh, Chelsea threw something at me again,” Grex said. “Hold on.”
Grex relaxed, melting in their place.

Chelsea screeched in disgust.

“Can one of you guys get out anything that looks weird?” Grex asked.

Shashi cautiously reached forward and took out a sparkly blue hairclip, a rock the size of a walnut, half a broken pencil, a pair of sunglasses, and a pinecone.

She got up to grab a paper towel to carry the stuff over to the sink to clean them off.

Once she finished, she carried the newly cleaned stuff over to Chelsea and held them out on the paper towel.

“Is any of this stuff yours?” Shashi asked.

Chelsea turned red and punched Shashi in the arm, causing her to drop the paper towel.

Shashi just shrugged.

“All you had to say was no,” she pointed out as she crouched down to pick up the dropped items.

Chelsea kicked her in the shoulder.

“Chelsea!” Mrs. Davenport screamed.

Chelsea looked up at Mrs. Davenport, scared.

Shashi picked up the stuff, rubbed at her shoulder, and went to sit down.

“Chelsea, are you hurt?” Mrs. Davenport asked as she walked over to Chelsea. “It didn’t bite you, did it?”

“What didn’t bite Chelsea?”

Hannah and Kyle gasped, smiles on their faces. “Mr. McBride!”

Mr. McBride had his arms crossed, leaning against the doorway.

“Would you BELIEVE it, Mr. McBride?” Mrs. Davenport said. “That Tiger kid just leaned over and bit Chelsea’s ankle! I think it would be good for all of us if you just threw her out right now!”

“Shashi did nothing wrong, you…you JERKFACE!” Hannah screamed.

“You know what? We SHOULD throw her out,” Mr. McBride said.

“HA!” Chelsea spat.

“Mrs. Davenport, you’re fired.”

“WHAT?!”

“And that is how World War II ended,” Toriel said. “Tomorrow, we will be watching a movie set during World War II, The Sound Of Music! And it is COMPLETELY for the sake of the lesson and NOT because I am so very proud of my students who got solos!”
The kids laughed.

Then a Candy Monster sitting next to Malis raised their hand.

“Yes, Taffy?”

“Will this be the last movie we watch as a class before graduation?” Taffy asked.

The class became solemn.

Toriel smiled, sadly yet warmly.

“I can assure you all that this will not be the last movie we watch together,” she said. “February is only halfway through its course, and graduation is not until the end of May. We have time together yet, and lessons still to learn. So what we are going to do, my dear students, is make the most of the two and a half months we have left together. Is that understood?”

“Yes, Mrs. Toriel!” the students agreed, DETERMINED to make the best of their time left with their teacher.

Then the door was violently thrust open by Mrs. Chang. She’d clearly run there with how exhausted she looked.

“Toriel, you’re not gonna believe what happened down in the lower grades hallway!”

“What happened, Emily?” Toriel asked, concerned.

“So, one of the first grade teachers, Natalie Davenport?”

“DAVENPORT?!” Brian shouted. “That’s Hunter’s sister’s teacher!”

“You don’t think…?” Hunter whispered worriedly.

“What happened with her?” Toriel asked.

“Apparently, one of the Human students kicked one on the Monster ones, and she saw it, but she put all the blame on the Monster student - all in front of Mr. McBride!”

“Why am I not surprised?” Toriel sighed, putting a hand over her face in exhaustion.

“I know, right?” Mrs. Chang said. “So, after that, Mr. McBride actually FIRED her! And then she started throwing a fit and calling racism!”

“But Mrs. Davenport’s white,” Olive said.

“Exactly! So Mr. McBride’s called in the Superintendent and there’s gonna be a discussion between the principals of all the schools in the district about how the deal with employees in the HWC.”

Toriel went to sit down at her desk. Her head was resting in her hands.

Frisk stood and trotted up to their mother, giving her a hug.

Toriel hugged back.

Times were changing, surely. This had potential to lead to further legal protection for Monsters - but it could also lead to further opposition from certain people in certain places.
But for now, everything was being put in place. Only when all was in place could things be set into motion.

“Okay, everybody ready?!” Chas said.

Asgore, Randy, and Gaster all answered in the affirmative.

“Randy, you got the phone filming us?”

“Ee-yup.”

“Aight, here we go! One, two, three, four!”

The band struck up.

Chas began to sing.

“As I was goin’ over— The Cork and Kerry Mountains— I met with Captain Farrell and his money he was countin’— I first produced my pistol— And then produced my rapier— Sayin’ “Stand and deliver!” for he was a bold deceiver—”

Then the chorus struck, all the men save Gaster singing.

“Mush-a-ring, dabba-doo dabba-da— Whack fall, my daddy-o— Whack fall, my daddy-o— There’s whiskey in the jar—”

Randy’s solo came.

“I counted out the money— It was a pretty penny— I put it in me pocket, and I took it home to Jenny— She sighed and she swore— That she never would deceive me— But the devil take the women, for they never can be easy—”

“Mush-a-ring, dabba-doo dabba-da— Whack fall, my daddy-o— Whack fall, my daddy-o— There’s whiskey in the -”

“SHUT THE FUCK UP, CHAS!” Shelby screamed.

“YOU SHUT THE FUCK UP, SHELBY!” Chas countered. “I HAVE BAND PRACTICE!”

“WELL, YOUR BAND SUCKS!”

“YOUR FACE SUCKS!”

“YOUR MOM SUCKS!”

“I KNOW SHE SUCKS!”

“Aren’t you two siblings?” Asgore asked.

“Yeah,” Chas said. “Our mom sucks.”

“Randy, what are you doing with your phone?” Gaster asked.

“Sending the video to people,” Randy replied.

“But why?” Asgore asked.
“Well, Chas was already going to upload to his YouTube channel, why not show it to to a select few who otherwise wouldn’t see it?” Randy explained.

“Who all did you send it to?” Chas asked.

“Sharona, my kids, my siblings, my siblings’ kids, WingDings’ kids, Toriel, Mettaton, Alphys, and Undyne.”

“That’s a lot of people…” Asgore remarked with slight worry.

“Pfah!” Randy spat. “That’s not even a third of the people in my contacts! Be glad I didn’t put it on Facebook…”

“Let’s move on to the next song!” Chas said.

Then a text tone went off.

“That’s mine,” Randy said, looking at his phone. “Sharona wants me to pick up the kids, so I better head on out. See you guys Saturday.”

And the newly-formed band parted ways.

What awaited these old-timers none of them really knew for certain, but they would face it with the power of rock.

“So, anyone got anythin’ new goin’ for ‘em?” Kindred asked.

“The bae's droppin’ by again this summer,” Jessamy said.

“I’m goin’ off to see my girl again this summer, so that's brill,” Extempore said.

“I got my fall schedule set up, and Timeline’s my physics prof next semester!” Hyperion said.

Sans smiled. It had been some time since he’d last joined the Heart of Gold, and he had a lot of news.

“tori ‘n i are engaged now,” Sans announced. "we even got it on film."

The Heart of Gold screamed in excitement.

As Sans smiled at the shenanigans of his deep web justice colleagues, he got a text.

He played the video Randy sent him.

Holy shit.

“aaand i just found out that my dad’s in a band with my fiancee’s ex-husband, my co-player, and a guy i know from the pta,” Sans sighed. “who wants the vid?”

“Everyone,” Hyperion said firmly.

“okay.”

“Timeline, if you send it to me, I swear to -”

“Holy SHIT, this is BRILLO!” Extempore laughed.
“The fuck is this?” Ioniq asked.

“Who’s the bloke on the bagpipes?” Kindred asked.

“the guy on the bagpipes is randy, that’s the guy from the pta i was talkin’ about,” Sans introduced.

“Can he play hurdy-gurdy?” Kindred asked.

“i have no idea what that is,” Sans said.

“Google it.”

“okay.”

“Guys, didja see Replay’s email?” Hyperion asked.

“Yeah, kid’s doin’ good for ‘imself,” Extempore mused. “He doxxed three U.S. congressmen and shared their bank account information. Kid’s goin’ places…”

“but he’s gotta be careful,” Sans said. “especially from here on out.”

“Timeline’s right,” Kindred said. “Replay worked hard to get that info out without getting caught, and he didn’t even tell us he was doing anything.”

“Next time he’s here, we’ll let ‘im know that, then,” Extempore said.

“We’re the Heart of Gold, and we help each other to help those who can’t help themselves, right?” Hyperion said.

“for a better future for all the peoples of this world…” Sans finished.

“Right,” Kindred said. “Let’s get to work then, all.”

Caroline’s and Levi’s phones went off.

Levi’s eyes widened in confusion at the video’s thumbnail image.

He plugged in her headphones and hit play.

He tapped his fingers to the beat on his desk.

When the song finished, he looked toward Caroline, who had done the same thing he had.

“I’m showing it to Hunter,” Caroline said.

“Right behind you,” Levi said with smile. “Hey, Hunter!”

Hunter looked up at Levi.

“Our dad texted us a music video,” Caroline said. “You wanna see?”

Hunter’s eyes sparkled. She nodded.

Caroline smiled. “Hey Nell, you wanna watch it too?”

Penelope nodded so viciously Caroline was surprised her head wasn’t violently thrust off her body.
Hunter and Penelope gathered around Caroline’s desk to watch the video. Brian, Frisk, and MK followed them in curiosity.

As it played, Hunter started unconsciously humming along.

“Waitaminute, that guy on guitar is Frisk’s grandpa!” Brian said.

“Such a clever observation, Brian,” Caroline said drily.

“That was sarcasm, by the way!” Penelope tacked on cheerfully.

The final school bell rang.

Linda was scrolling through her Facebook feed on her phone, having chosen to do so after confirming that she would be attending her 20-year high school reunion.

The alumni association’s timeline was full of old photos, plus a few videos. But none of them really mattered because they weren’t her class.

Then she found a video, posted March 22nd of last year.

Ebott High School Talent Competition, 199X

Linda remembered that one. She’d lost. She didn’t even care about who’d won, either.

Not anymore, at least. At the time, she’d campaigned to have the girl, a sophomore, ostracized. She’d graduated before knowing whether or not it succeeded.

She decided to relive the moment.

She clicked play.

The murmurs of the crowd in the video reeked of 90s quality recording.

Then the show began.

The first dozen or so students came and went.

Then the next student was announced.

“At first I was afraid~ I was petrified~ Kept thinkin’ I could never live without you by my side~”

Her rendition of I Will Survive completely destroyed the chances of everyone that came after her. It was clear the moment she opened her mouth that she was destined to win.

It was why Linda first started to hate her.

“Go on now, go~ Walk out the door~ Just turn around now ’cause you’re not welcome anymore~ Weren’t you the one who tried~ To hurt me with goodbye~ Did you think I’d crumble~ Did you
The song was suddenly skipping.

Linda clicked the home button to close out of the app.

It was frozen, repeating the line.

*Did you think I’d lay down and die?*

*Did you think I’d lay down and die?*

Linda was afraid. She was certain that her heart would explode at any second.

The words repeated.

*Did you think I’d lay down and die?*

*Did you think I’d lay down and die?*

*Did you think I’d lay down and die?*

“Did you think I’d lay down and die?”

Linda shrieked and threw her phone in Estelle’s direction.

Estelle just smiled at her as the phone hit the wall, causing the screen to crack. Still the line repeated.

She walked toward her, slowly.

Linda backed away with every step Estelle came closer, pale with fear.

“G-go away,” Linda wheezed, fear making her voice quaver. She was starting to sweat.

“I did that fifteen years ago, Murphy,” Estelle sneered. “You made damn sure of that.”

“I said stay back!” Linda said, her voice getting louder and shakier the more terrified she became. She held up her cross necklace.

“I thought you said go away,” Estelle said. Her smile was still on her face, bright as it ever was.

“I DON’T CARE! GET OUT OF MY SIGHT, YOU FUCKING STUPID FAGGOT!”

“I’m not leaving until you get what you deserve, you damn hypocrite,” Estelle said coldly. “Even if it takes me the rest of your sad, pathetic life, I will make sure you get what you deserve.”

Linda cowered, curling into a ball.

“Two people already know what you've done,” Estelle said. “Who knows when they’ll tell, if ever…”

Linda whimpered.

“What was that? I couldn’t hear you over the sound of -”
“I SAID WHO ARE THEY?!” Linda shrieked.

“How would I know?” Estelle said, he smile widening. “I’m just a fucking stupid faggot, you know!”

Linda’s fists clenched. Estelle started laughing.

Then the laughter multiplied, resembling a stadium filled with Estelle Crawford, all laughing at Linda Murphy.

Linda screeched - behind was terror, was rage, was guilt, was HATRED.

Linda lunged at Estelle.

She wrapped her hands around her neck.

Estelle kept laughing, clear as day, despite Linda’s hands around her throat.

Then Linda woke up. Her bedsheets were soaked with sweat.

She looked at the clock. Quarter past six in the evening.

She checked her phone.

Not a crack in sight.

She heaved a sigh of relief.

She opened the phone. 50 missed texts and 16 missed calls, almost all from Diana as always.

She scrolled until she found the most recent text from Helen.

*Hunter and hannah are with me since you didn’t show. I don’t know what you’re doing, but it must be important if you didn’t pick them up like you usually do.

Wait. What was Linda doing when she fell asleep?

She sighed.

*Just keep them for the night. I need a break.

Linda went downstairs to grab some wine.

When she came back up, bottle in hand, Helen had texted her back.

*Okay. I don’t know what happened, but feel better.

Linda gawked at the phone. Was Helen patronizing her?!

No. That couldn’t be. Helen was too nice for that.

Linda decided to end the conversation there.

She opened the bottle and downed a third of the chardonnay.

She wasn’t going to give up. She hadn’t done anything wrong - if anything, she’d done the world a favor getting rid of that girl.
The last thing Linda saw before passing out in a drunken haze was Estelle’s smile.

Fifteen years since she’d killed that girl and that smile - that devilishly beautiful smile that tempted her toward sin - still appeared in her dreams.

This was going to be far more difficult than she thought.

Elaina knew that pointe classes were going to be hard. But who knew that pointe shoes wore out so fast? Barely a month on pointe and she’d been through two pairs! Miss Yvonne said it was par for the course to go through multiple pairs of pointe shoes in a short amount of time - it was proof of a dancer’s dedication.

She went to her locker to get her clothes.

She saw Brooke and Chloe whispering at each other.

“I don’t CARE, Chloe!” Brooke hissed, probably louder than she’d intended. “If Alicia isn’t here to keep Elaina Lorence in her place, then it’s MY duty as her beta to keep her down!”

“Fine, but I don’t want any part in that,” Chloe mumbled. “It’s just not worth it since she’s clearly miserable enough without Alicia trying to crush her head in.”

Elaina raised her hand to the back of her head where her injury was. It had scabbed over in the last few hours, thankfully.

“Elaina, you dance here too?”

Elaina turned toward the voice.

Colleen was wearing a white t-shirt and black shorts with white crew socks. She held a pair of black slippers with long laces in her hand. Her hair was in a ponytail.

Elaina swallowed and nodded. Colleen was kind of pretty with a ponytail…

“I-I take ballet,” Elaina said. “I-I’m on pointe.”

Colleen tilted her head in confusion, then shrugged.

“I’m in Irish dance,” Colleen said. “We’re practicing extra-hard because we’re part of an exhibition at the Renaissance Festival in June.”

“R-really? That sounds cool…”

Colleen smiled.

Elaina smiled back.

Then Elaina suddenly gasped in realization.

“I-I gotta go, m-m-my mother’s waiting for me,” she said. “S-s-see you tomorrow? A-at school?”

Colleen blushed and smiled. “Sure! See you then!”

Elaina nodded and went out to the lobby, where Irma was waiting.

As she went out to the car, she made a mental note to look up Irish dance.
Flowey sat on the windowsill, watching the Sims on Frisk’s tablet die in terrible accidents at his hands.

Frisk had Flowey make a separate city for his Sims since Frisk had grown weirdly attached to their little fake people - Frisk grows weirdly attached to things that just don’t matter.

But Asriel was the same, to Flowey’s chagrin.

He watched as the Sim he made look like Sans sleep through a house fire.

When did watching the Smiley Trashbag die get so…boring?

Flowey sighed and closed the app.

He stared at the night sky from Frisk’s window. Not a star in sight.

Damned light pollution.

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A lot of things are changing. The thought fills you with

DETERMINATION

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Chapter End Notes

Some Things Just Stick In Your Mind - The Rolling Stones
Once Upon A Dream - Sleeping Beauty
The Litter And The Leaves - Enter the Haggis
Whiskey In The Jar - Traditional Irish song
I Will Survive - Gloria Gaynor

Fun Fact: Linda’s not a lesbian, actually. It would be more accurate to say that she's heteroflexible, and her feelings toward Estelle have caused her much mental anguish due to her feelings not lining up with her beliefs. She has her good points and her bad points, but the worst of Linda’s bad points is her tendency to see the world in black and white and her refusal to ignore the other colors.

So, one more chapter until the OC Contest begins~ Are you ready, folks?
It’s a beautiful day outside.

The sun is shining.

Flowers are blooming.

On days like this, kids like you…

...are helping your parents plan their wedding before you go to the Annual Spring Concert.

Frisk, Sans, and Toriel sat at the round glass table on the back patio, going over ideas.

“So the dessert buffet is a no-go, but the chocolate fountain’s a-okay,” Sans clarified, writing down the information on a steno pad. “so that’s the catering, plus the bar courtesy of grillby. what’s next?”

<<Who’s in the wedding party?>> Frisk asked.

“Well, of course YOU will be there, my child!” Toriel said, pulling her giggly child into a hug.

“I already have mine down,” Sans said. “I just gotta ask their permission and I’ll be set. howzabout you, babe?”

“I do!” Toriel replied.

Sans chuckled. “Save the ‘I do’ for the ceremony, babe.”

Toriel hid her blushing face in her hands.

Frisk giggled.
They took their own steno pad and wrote down their wedding toast for their parents.

“Frisk, it’s about time to leave for the school,” Toriel said. “Let’s all get ready, shall we?”

Frisk saluted and ran upstairs to their room to get ready.

Hunter sat in the northwest corner of the music building, reading over her solo piece. Once again she’d received help choosing from Papyrus and Mettaton.

Helen had dropped her off early, since soloists had to show up early to practice their pieces. The rest of the kids would show at three.

Then she felt a tap on her shoulder.

Malis stood there.

“Ms. Halsey says we’re all getting McDonalds,” the Shadow Elemental said. “She’s buying.”

Malis had always been quiet in class - quiet enough that most kids had no idea who she even was until she was declared a soloist.

Hunter was filled with curiosity.

“So, Malis,” she began as she stood up, “do you mind telling me about yourself?”

Malis merely shrugged. “I’m a Shadow Elemental, my birthday is on October 29th, and my favorite color is orange…” she said quietly.

“That’s cool!” Hunter said. “I’m a Human - well, that’s uh, kinda obvious - my birthday is on December 13th, and my favorite color is aquamarine!”

Malis hummed in response. It seemed as though she didn’t want to talk anymore, so Hunter stopped speaking.

They joined the rest of the soloists in front of the bus Ms. Halsey had been given permission to use - or rather, that she had been owed permission to use by someone else who owed her a favor.

“Okay soloists, hop in and get ready for lunch!” Ms. Halsey announced. “I already know what I want, you just gotta tell em what it is YOU want! I’ll be passing down a notepad, write down your order on it then pass it around.”

Hunter got on the bus and sat down next to Marilla and across from Eddy and Nadetta Arcot, a Black Bear Monster. She looked toward the very back of the bus, where Malis sat alone.

She seemed content enough, so Hunter let it be.

Mettaton looked in the mirror at his reflection, putting on his black matte lipstick. He’d put on a sleeveless pink turtleneck, a black miniskirt with leggings, and pink heels.

Then Papyrus hugged him from behind and started nuzzling him.

Mettaton couldn’t help but sigh. Papyrus had been getting…clingy the past few weeks. Not that Mettaton particularly minded - in fact, it rather nice. But right now he was busy.
“Papy, I love you with every bolt of my being, but I am very busy right now,” Mettaton said as he put on his eyeliner and petted Papyrus on the head.

Papyrus pouted, ceasing his nuzzles but not even thinking about releasing his precious boyfriend from his embrace.

As soon as Mettaton was finished with his eyeliner, he returned Papyrus’ hug.

“There!” he announced. “NOW I’m free!”

Papyrus lifted him up and nuzzled him, peppering his neck with tiny kisses and nips.

“Papy, no, I just did my makeup!” Mettaton protested futilely through giggles.

But he didn’t really care. He could always just redo his makeup later.

Besides, with only three more months until his nationwide tour begins, impromptu makeout sessions with his boyfriend - or any close contact of any sort in general with his boyfriend - would be nonexistent.

Maybe Papyrus realized that and was acting on that realization. He was far more perceptive than he let on, and his unending veneer of pure good cheer allowed others to underestimate him, which gave him an advantage in the wider world.

Well, it would have, had Papyrus not been so genuinely pure of heart and SOUL and eager to help others, no matter what.

What’s more, it seemed that Papyrus was very much aware of the fact that he could be a bit naive at times. But in Mettaton’s eyes, Papyrus’ awareness of his own immature aspects are exactly what made him mature. The duality of his Skeleton lover - his happy, playful, boyyish side, and his sensual, mature, perceptive side - were all a part of the reasons why he was so desperately in love with him.

Mettaton was really blessed to have a boyfriend like Papyrus…

Caroline adjusted her vest. Well, she tried to anyway. It had become too tight for her since she’d had it resized - which was really only a month ago.

At her doctor’s appointment last week she’d reached five feet five inches tall - four more inches until she’s as tall as Randy. She was already a good five inches taller than Sharona, and three inches taller than Levi.

She didn’t even consider unbuttoning the vest - she was pretty sure it wasn’t allowed anyway. So she merely sucked in her stomach to relieve the tightness.

It failed.

She sighed as she put on her glasses and shoes and walked into the living room, where Sharona was making sandwiches for lunch.

“Hey, Sharona?” Caroline asked. “When you’re done can you help me with my hair? I want it in a braid, but I don’t know how to make one.”

“Sure thing, I’m almost done with this one and then I’ll .”
Sharona turned around.

Her eyes widened.

“Are you sure that thing isn’t too tight on you, sweetcheeks?” she asked.

Caroline shrugged. “I can still breathe and talk, so I don’t think it really matters.”

“I’m pretty sure you can unbutton it though -”

“I can handle this, Sharona, I’ve been through worse.”

“That’s a terrible argument and you know it.”

“I don’t care, I can handle this, I WILL handle this, now please braid my hair Sharona?” Caroline urged.

Sharona sighed.

This child was stubborn. Menacingly, unflinchingly stubborn and not afraid to admit it, to the exasperation of those around her.

Who knew where she got THAT from…

Randy finished tuning the last of the bagpipe drones, having already tuned his bass.

“So is Nemo the final name, or is it another placeholder?” Chas asked.

“Until we find a better name, are we not men?” Randy said. “We are Nemo.”

Gaster clapped at the reference. Chas and Asgore just stared blankly at the two.

“Anyway, let’s jam in a-one, two, three, four!”

They decided to work on instrumental numbers until they acquired a member with more talent in the vocal side of the world of music.

The sound of The Call Of Ktulu sounded throughout the apartment, though Asgore was a tad offbeat.

Shelby sat at the kitchen table, trying desperately to work on the files she was arranging for the process of the adoption of one her cases.

She didn’t know Randy very well, so he could be forgiven for not understanding, but Chas, Asgore, and Gaster all knew how important her work was - not just to her, but to the children she worked for.

She sighed, resting her head on the table.

She tried to calm down enough that when she confronted her brother’s band she would NOT end up throwing a blunt object at one of the band members.

Then a loud crashing sound was heard.

Shelby growled and stood up, stomping to the room where the band was practicing.

She let out a long shriek, more like a tone-deaf banshee than a tone-deaf Human female.
The men all flinched at the sound. Gaster fell to the ground, twitching slightly for a few minutes before blinking a bit and sitting up, grabbing a nearby water bottle.

“I am TRYING to WORK!” Shelby growled. “And if you don’t SHUT THE FUCK UP, I’ll TAKE your instruments and THROW THEM OUT THE NEAREST GODDAMN WINDOW!”

The men were silent, and slightly afraid. They needed a new place to practice…

Penelope was among the first of the ensemble to show, and the first of her non-Hunter friends to be present.

It felt strange.

As the ensemble practiced one of their numbers, more students flowed in and settled into the pace.

As soon as the piece was complete, Penelope went over by Hunter and sat down.

“So what song are you singing for your solo?” Penelope asked.

“It’s a secret,” Hunter replied, not looking up from her music sheet.

“Can I at least have a hint?” the green-eyed girl pleaded.

Hunter made a show of considering her options. Loud humming sounds, chin rubbing, the whole nine yards.

“Oh, okay, I’ll give you a hint,” Hunter acquiesced.

“And that hint would be…?”

“It was in a movie.”

Penelope narrowed her eyes.

Hunter merely shrugged and continued to read over her piece.

Penelope crossed her arms, sitting in passive-aggressive silence.

She didn’t know what it was that Hunter and Caroline had talked about together, but whatever it was had made them closer, and the fact that they were closer made Penelope feel a weird sort of frustration that wasn’t exactly frustration.

She knew it was jealousy. She knew it very well - well, not very well, considering she’d never felt it quite this strongly before. But she knew the feeling at least - she just didn’t want to admit it. She knew it was no use feeling that way since Caroline didn’t have feelings for anyone - not like that, at least - but she still felt that way anyway. It filled her with guilt.

When Ms. Halsey called everyone to practice again, Penelope was relieved.

She’d been about to cry from the feelings her introspection gave her.

Linda had just gotten dressed and was running through her messages on her phone.

She’d already gone through half of them, she only had a few more to go.
Toll-free call, clothing donation, some memorial fund…

Huh, an unknown mobile caller from St. Louis, Missouri.

Linda played the message.

*Hey, Linda, it’s your sister Donna! I heard that your son was going to be in the Spring Concert, so I’ll be dropping by with my family! My little girl is SO excited to meet her auntie and cousins, so please be nice Linda. Oh, the timer’s running out, I’ll call you later!*  

Linda hung up the phone, face pale and palms sweating.

Hunter and Hannah didn’t even know they HAD an aunt, and for good reason too!

“Oh, so just because your sister is gay, your kids can never meet her?” Estelle asked from her place a few inches above the couch, voice heavy with sarcasm. “This whole thing coulda been avoided if you’d just done to her what you’d done to me.”

“You shut up!” Linda snapped. “People actually LIKE Donna! Even if I hate her guts…”

Estelle merely shrugged. “There are times when I feel that haunting you ain’t worth it. This is one of ‘em. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have somewhere to be. My girlfriend and my mama and niece just left some flowers at my grave, and I wanna see ‘em…”

“Wait!” Linda exclaimed. “Where are you buried - I mean, where did your family put your gravestone?”

Estelle turned to Linda, slowly and suspiciously. “You’re gonna try to steal my flowers, aren’t you?” she said coldly.

Linda shook her head. Estelle smiled, bright and cold.

“I guess I can tell you…” she said. “But not now. Maybe someday.”

Then Estelle faded, a strange - almost musical - sound accompanying it.

Linda groaned. She picked up the phone to see Donna’s number to tell her off.

The message - and with it the number - had been deleted.

Frisk sat in the circle with their friends playing Uno during the break between songs.

“Yo Levi, why do you always bring cards with you?” MK asked as he laid down a blue 3.

“Well, it was something my dad did when he was alive,” Levi answered, placing a red 3 on the pile. “It was so he’d never be bored.”

“Your dad sounds like a weirdo,” Brian said, drawing a card.

Hunter laid down a red 7, followed by Penelope tossing a green 7.

“Brian, speak not ill of the dead lest ye join their endless waltz,” Caroline warned as she laid down a wild draw 4. “Uno, the color is yellow.”

The awkwardness that often followed whenever Caroline made a statement that scared people
ensued.

Frisk slowly drew another card from the deck. MK laid down a yellow reverse. Frisk laid down a yellow 3.

Caroline laid down a yellow 0, wiggling her empty fingers in the air.

Everyone stared at her like she’d just accidentally made a death threat then casually won a card game.

“You have issues,” Brian said.

“I know,” Caroline replied. “Now who wants to read my latest Flowey x Cactus Everdeen story?”

Frisk, Hunter, and Penelope raised their hands.

Brian stared at Hunter, slightly weirded out.

“Hey, the last one was really good!” Hunter defended.

Brian rolled his eyes. “Whatever dude.”

Then Brian noticed Penelope staring at him and smirking. She picked up her phone and texted him.

Brian’s phone vibrated.

*we’ll talk later. :)*

Elaina sat on a bench, wrapping the ribbons of her pointe shoes around her calves.

“Elaina~” someone familiar called.

Elaina looked up to see Colleen.

“You have Saturday classes too?” Colleen asked.

Elaina nodded. “I-I take classes e-every day but S-Sunday…”

“Wow, that sounds rough…” Colleen said sympathetically.

Elaina merely shrugged. “It’s fun, s-so I don’t really mind it! Though I have to take c-cello lessons on S-Sundays starting in the summer…”

“Seriously?” Colleen said incredulously. “Wow, your mom really DOES hate you…”

“S-she doesn’t HATE me, e-exactly,” Elaina defended meekly. “S-she just doesn’t l-like that I t-take after my d-dad…”

“Well, I think that if you take after your dad, he must be a great guy.”

Elaina smiled sadly.

They had to wonder about that…

Colleen sat down next to Elaina, taking a water bottle from her bag and taking a few sips.
The silence was oddly comfortable.

“So we’re getting measured today,” Colleen said. “The exhibition’s not for a few months, but we’re getting sized for the uniforms for the first time today! I haven’t seen them yet, but I bet they’ll look really cool!”

“What do you hope they’ll look like?” Elaina asked.

Colleen’s green eyes brightened. “I hope that they’re made of green velvet, embroidered with golden flower patterns across the chest and skirt!”

Then a bell rang. Classes were starting.

The girls bid each other goodbye and went to their respective classes.

Alphys, Undyne, and Mamoru sat in the old beige folding chairs in the cafetorium by Asgore, Gaster, Chas, and Shelby. There was an awkward silence.

Mamoru was alternating between munching on Cheerios and chewing on a rubber dog toy.

“I take it he’s teething?” Chas asked playfully, hoping to break some of the ice.

“More like he’s trying to eat every damn thing he can get his champers on!” Undyne said proudly.

“Just like a shark would,” Gaster mused.

“That’s my boy…” Undyne chuckled, tousling Mamoru’s hair as the young Dinosaur squealed with glee.

“And WHAT is THAT?” a haughty, adenoidal voice said.

Diana was there, smiling condescendingly.

“It’s called a child lady, have ya never seen one before?” Undyne snarked.

“That explains why Miranda looks nothing like you,” Sans said.

Diana shrieked.

“you keep on doing that diana,” Sans said dismissively. “that way i won’t have to keep hearing your annoying voice do that thing.”

“Dude, how long have you BEEN there?” Undyne asked in disbelief.

“about 32 years,” Sans answered.

“Not what I meant, but MAN you’re old!” Undyne said.

Then she noticed that Alphys had started glaring at her.

“What?!” she asked.

“I’m a year older than HE is,” Alphys said flatly.

Diana started laughing. Well, snorting over and over. And by snorting we mean hacking nasally.
Everyone stared at Diana.

“i think we should move before she pukes on us all,” Sans said.

“Good plan,” Chas added.

“Wait, you’re Diana Foss, right?” Shelby asked.

“Foss is my maiden name, actually,” Diana sniffed.

“Knew it,” Shelby said. “You dropped out three months before graduation and crashed frat parties at
the university until some poor schmuck asked you out on a date just so you would leave everyone
else the heck alone.”

Diana spluttered in anger.

“HELLO EVERYONE!” Papyrus announced cheerfully, as though he hadn’t noticed the furious
Diana near to exploding.

“Why is Deirdre here trying to beatbox?” Mettaton asked.

“MY NAME IS DIANA!” Doris shrieked.

“because she’s a stalker who dropped out of high school and hates babies,” Sans answered.

“I do NOT hate babies!” Diana defended.

“You know, I really appreciate how you aren’t denying that you’re a high school dropout and a
stalker,” Gaster added.

“i know, say what you will about di- anus , but at least she knows what she isn’t,” Sans said.

Diana growled and stalked off, passing Toriel on the way to the back table.

Toriel stared at her ragtag family of oddballs. Some were angry, some were smug, some were
confused, all were conspicuous. She gave everyone a look.

“She started it!” Undyne claimed. “She insulted my son and called my wife old!”

“ALSO SHE’S A HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT WHO HATES BABIES!” Papyrus piped.

Toriel sighed. Her family was… a handful, to say the least.

But she wouldn’t have it any other way, really.

The children ended the final note of the final song of practice.

“Okay, everyone, we’re on in five!” Ms. Halsey announced. “Are we ready?!”

Everyone cheered.

“Oh yeah, THAT’S what I like to hear!” Ms. Halsey praised. “Now line up from tallest to shortest,
and let’s get MOVIN’!”

The kids cheered and lined up. The height order meant that Caroline was at the back and Penelope
was at the front.
The marched through the halls of the school until they reached the backstage area.

The lights had dimmed.

“Okay everyone, this is it,” Ms. Halsey said. “We’re going in after Mr. McBride and I make our speeches, just like last year.”

“Yes, Ms. Halsey,” the students said.

“Okay, let’s go!”

The children cheered quietly and followed Ms. Halsey toward the stage.

Mr. McBride stepped onto the stage in front of the podium.

Feedback ensued.

“Hello, parents, teachers, students, and other people otherwise associated with Mountainside Elementary School!” Mr. McBride announced. “I am Nathan McBride, and I am the acting principal here at Mountainside Elementary since the last principal was arrested for accepting bribes and being very very boring.”

The audience laughed.

“Anyway, as a form of authority here, I would like to welcome you all to Mountainside Elementary School’s Annual Spring Concert!”

Cheers and applause erupted from the audience.

“And now, introducing our music teacher, Aimee Halsey! Hit it, Aimee!”

Everyone cheered as Ms. Halsey jogged onto the stage and up to the podium.

“Good evening, everyone!” Ms. Halsey greeted. “I am Aimee Halsey, and Nathan over there just said, and I am the music teacher here at Mountainside Elementary School!”

Applause.

“Please, save it for tonight’s real MVPs,” Ms. Halsey said. “These kids worked their butts off to give you all the best show they can, and I KNOW with every fiber of my being that these kids are the best I have ever worked with in my ten years of teaching. Tonight, we all hope that you will have as much fun watching and listening as we did practicing!”

Applause.

“And now, without further ado, the fourth and fifth grade classes of Mountainside Elementary!”

Everyone filed onto the risers.

“One final word before we begin, once again Frisk E. Dreemurr will be translating our music into American sign language for our audience members with hearing impairments. Let’s give them a big hand!”

Applause and cheers.

“And now, without further ado FOR REAL THIS TIME, our Annual Spring Concert!”
Cheers and applause.

As the first song was being performed, some latecomers entered the cafetorium.

Among them was a woman with dark auburn hair and blue eyes in a blue peasant blouse and skinny jeans with ankle boots leading a girl with curly strawberry blonde hair and blue eyes in a rainbow striped sundress by the hand and being tailed close behind by another woman with dyed bright red hair and blue eyes in a coral-colored sleeveless blouse with a ruffled collar and black slacks and heels.

This little group sidled up to Linda, who took a few minutes to notice them.

She did a doubletake - had she been drinking something, she would have done a spittake.

The woman with the auburn hair merely smiled suspiciously and shushed Linda.

Linda glared at the woman before turning her attention back to the stage.

The pointe class was taking a ten-minute break.

Elaina chose to spend it wandering. Skye decided to join them, to see where they would go. Also because Elaina would lose track of time and not return to class if left alone, but mostly that first thing.

Elaina and Skye wandered throughout the building to all the different departments - the tap department, the jazz department, the lyrical department, the hiphop department - until they reached near the back of the complex, where the Irish department lay.

Elaina stared at the cases filled with various awards and medals and photographs plus a few mannequins with high-collared deep forest green velvet dresses with intricate white and gold knot-like designs embroidered onto each pleat of the skirt and about the bodice.

Skye had never been back here, and it was quite clear from their enthusiasm that Elaina hadn’t either.

“Elaina, what are you doing here?”

Colleen had just gotten out of her class.

“I-I was curious about the Irish dance department, s-so I decided to use my break time to come back here and see what it’s like!” Elaina explained.

Skye observed the conversation between Colleen and Elaina, observing their reactions.

Both were smiling.

Both were blushing.

Both made eye contact briefly before turning away and blushing even more heavily and smiling even more widely.

Skye mentally smirked at the implications.

But then she remembered the look on Elaina’s mother’s face when her dad told her about his husband.

If Elaina were to tell Irma about this, who knew what she would do.
So Skye decided to Patiently bide her time and see how all this went…

Once the next-to-last song was over, Linda spoke up.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing here, Donna?” she hissed.

“I’m here to support my nephew, Linda,” the auburn-haired woman replied. “And please do not swear in front of my daughter, okay? Okay.”

“I will have you know, Donna, that I am the president of this school’s PTA,” Linda said smugly. “That means that EVERYONE in this auditorium answers to ME.”

“And I will have YOU know, Linda, that I literally could not care less about the things you pay for,” Donna countered.

Linda gasped. She looked about frantically.

“How do you know about that?” she hissed.

Donna smirked.

“I didn’t,” she replied breezily.

Linda turned red with rage.

“Don’t worry, I’ll keep it a secret,” Donna said. “Just like I have for the time you smoked pot, and the time Mom found a used condom under your bed, and the time you cheated on -”

“And now, ladies and gentlemen, our final soloist for this evening, Hunter J. Thompson!”

“AGAIN?!!” Linda shrieked.

“I have no idea what you mean by that, but shut up so I can enjoy my nephew’s performance,” Donna said sweetly.

Linda was now a particularly unattractive shade of purple with rage.

Hunter stepped up to the microphone, smiled brightly, inhaled, cleared his throat, and began to sing.

“I have often dreamed~ Of a far-off place~ Where a hero’s welcome~ Will be waiting for me~”

“Wow, he’s GOOD,” Donna’s wife remarked.

“Shut up,” Linda grumbled.

“Where the crowds would cheer~ When they see my face~ And a voice keeps saying~ This is where I’m meant to be~”

“I STILL CAN’T BELIEVE HE CHOSE MY SONG…” Papyrus sighed, pride tinting his voice. Mettaton hummed in response as he leaned into the crook of Papyrus’ neck and held his hand.

“Like a shooting star~ I will go the distance~ I will search the world~ I will face its harms~”

Frisk was trying not to cry. They were failing.
A lot of people were failing at trying not to cry. It was almost as if Hunter’s voice was magic…

“I don’t care how far~ I will go the distance~ ‘Til I find my hero’s welcome waiting in~ Your aaaaaaaarms~”

Hunter held the final note for a good fifteen or so seconds.

When she completed her song, she was gasping for breath.

But she couldn’t hear herself over the combination of the sound of her blood rushing through her ears, the pounding of her heart, and the screams and shouts of the entire cafetorium.

Hunter smiled and bowed before heading back to her place on the risers.

She scanned the audience.

Linda was almost blue with barely-restrained rage.

Papyrus and Mettaton were practically in tears as they and the rest of Frisk’s family gave a standing ovation.

She found herself wishing that they were a part of Frisk’s family.

She almost lost herself in her imaginings when Ms. Halsey took to the podium once more.

“Parents, teachers, and friends, our time together is almost at an end,” she said. “But before we go, we have a very special performance for you all, featuring our very own, Mr. McBriiiIII THE EVERLOVING HELTER SKELTER IN A SUMMER SWELTER?!”

The audience was both howling with laughter and screaming with fear at the sight of the microphone-holding gentleman with the odd sickly green mask depicting a man with wiry gray hair an evil grin, and what could either have been a monocle or a very inflamed right eye.

“Nathan, what the heck is that on your face?” Ms. Halsey sighed in exasperation.

“A mask,” Mr. McBride answered.

“I can see that Nathan, but what is it a mask of?”

“I have no idea.”

The audience laughed.

Ms. Halsey sighed.

“I honestly thought that you were going to wear a far stupider costume,” she said. “Just…just get over here, I need a drink…”

Mr. McBride stood at the podium.

“So far this school year two teachers have been fired for endangering students,” he announced. “This song is dedicated to them.”

The parents murmured in confusion.

Then Mr. McBride turned on a CD player and played it over the loudspeaker.
Much of the audience screamed in excitement.

Many of these screamers screamed even louder once they realized that the mask was featured in the music video that went with the song.

“We don’t need no~ Education~”

Mettaton gasped. “Oh my god, this is…”

“We don’t need no~ Thought control~”

“i knew mr. mcbride was a pretty cool guy, but to do this…” Sans muttered.

“No dark sarcasm~ In the classroom~”

“It actually kind of scares me just how many students provide dark sarcasm in the classroom…” Toriel mumbled.

“Teachers leave them~ Kids alone~”

Linda was readjusting herself to being furious at someone other than Hunter.

“Hey! Teachers! Leave them kids alone~”

“Linda, what are you plotting…?” Donna asked in a warning tone.

“You shut the fuck up,” Linda growled through clenched teeth.

“All in all, it’s just~ Another brick in the wall~ All in all, you’re just~ Another brick in the wall~”

Mr. McBride nodded at the students, who all put on boater hats.

The audience was now absolutely screaming.

The children began to sing.

“We don’t need no~ Education~ We don’t need no~ Thought control~ No dark sarcasm~ In the classroom~ Teachers, leave those~ Kids alone~”

Many of the kids inhaled to maximize the effectiveness of the coming line.

“HEY! TEACHERS! Leave those kids alone~”

The audience cheered.

“All in all, you’re just~ Another brick in the wall~ All in all, you’re just~ Another brick in the wall~”

As the song faded out, the parents screamed as though they were at a celebrity-filled event of some sort.

The students removed their hats as one and bowed.

The cheers grew louder against all laws of logic and acoustics.

Sans and Papyrus turned toward Gaster. He was starting to twitch a lot.
They quietly led him to a quieter space until he calmed down.
Papyrus stayed by him while Sans went to grab a water bottle.

“DAD, ARE YOU STILL WITH ME?” Papyrus asked.

Gaster nodded.

“OKAY, GOOD. SANS WENT TO GET YOU SOMETHING TO DRINK, HE SHOULD BE BACK IN FOUR, THREE, TWO…”

“one,” Sans said as he walked up to his father and brother and gave the former a cold bottle of water. “underestimate me much, papyrus?”

“NO, I JUST THOUGHT IT WOULD TAKE LONGER.”

“well, it’s not like i was trying to save a child from the vending machine, you know.”

Papyrus groaned and facepalmed.

“Savage,” Gaster mused weakly.

“c’mon dad,” Sans said, offering the opened bottle of water. “drink up, okay?”

Gaster nodded and took the bottle, easily downing half of it without stopping.

Sans and Papyrus glanced at each other, suddenly filled with worry.

“hey dadster, you been keeping hydrated?” Sans asked.

Gaster nodded.

“ARE YOU SURE?” Papyrus asked. “YOU KNOW THAT INADEQUATE HYDRATION CAN AFFECT THE SEIZURES, DAD…”

Gaster looked up at his sons and sighed.

“Work’s been kicking my ass,” he admitted.

“What work? I’m pretty sure that the band doesn’t count as work since you aren’t making money from that that I know of…”

Sans’ eyelights went out.

He put a hand on Gaster’s shoulder and sat to his left.

“personal project getting to ya?” Sans asked.

Gaster smiled exhaustedly and nodded slowly.

Papyrus sat down on Gaster’s right and crossed his legs.

The Gaster Family sat in a calm silence.

Eventually people began to file past. Some ignored the Skeletons, some waved at them, some stared at them.
Then Hunter found them.

“Hey Papyrus! Hey Dr. Sans! Hey Dr. Gaster!” she greeted happily. “You guys okay? I heard you’d ended up leaving before the encore finished…”

“That would be my fault,” Gaster apologized. “It would appear that today’s events have been rough on my epilepsy…”

Hunter hummed. “I dunno what that is, but as long as you guys’re okay that’s good!” she said. “Mettaton and Ms. Toriel are looking for you guys, should I tell them where you guys are or would you rather be alone?”

The brothers looked to their father for the answer.

Gaster shrugged. “Go ahead,” he said.

Hunter nodded. “Okay then! I’ll, uh, probably end up joining you guys since, uh, you know…my mom…”

Papyrus hummed in understanding. “ALRIGHT! WE’LL BE RIGHT HERE WAITING IF YOU DO CHOOSE TO JOIN US!”

Hunter sighed with relief. “Thanks, guys!” she said. “See ya!”

And with that the Gasters waved her off.

Hunter turned the corner and sighed. She was screwed. So very, very screwed.

“Hey, are you alright Hunter?”

Hunter looked up saw Mettaton.

“Yeah, I’m fine!” she said with a smile. “Papyrus, Dr. Sans and Dr. Gaster are just around that corner.”

“Thank you, darling,” Mettaton said. “Do feel better soon, okay?”

Hunter’s smile fell slightly.

“Thanks…” she said quietly. “I’m gonna go tell Toriel what I just told you now, okay?”

“How about I tell her myself through text?” Mettaton offered. “You look like you’re about to pass out, are you sure you’re okay…?”

Hunter stared at Mettaton briefly, then hung her head.

“Can I…tell you something? It’s…something I already told Caroline, and…I told her to keep it a secret, s-so I wanna ask -”

Mettaton put his hands on Hunter’s shoulders to calm her down.

He was smiling.

“I won’t tell a SOUL, sweetheart,” he said. “You have my word.”

Hunter nodded.
She took a deep breath.

“I’m trans,” she whispered.

Mettaton hugged her.

“It’s okay,” he comforted. “I understand why you aren’t ready to tell people.”

Hunter exhaled, only for a sob to squeak out.

Mettaton simply held her for a few minutes until she calmed down.

When he let go, Hunter’s face was still a bit pinkish.

Mettaton wiped away a few of Hunter’s stray tears.

“If you need to talk to me about anything, anything at all, just tell me, okay?” the Android said, giving Hunter a business card. “You might want to hide that from your mother…”

Hunter giggled and slid the card into her pocket.

“Thanks,” she said. “I think I’ll go and…face the music, so to speak…”

Mettaton stifled a laugh and patted Hunter’s head.

He was so stealing that one.

Linda stood outside smoking, Donna with a travel-sized bottle of air freshener.

“So,” Linda said, “who’s your friend?”

“That’s my wife Inez, and our daughter Frances,” Donna said fondly as she spritzed a bit of air freshener.

“You mean you were allowed to adopt?” Linda sneered. “With your record?”

“What record?” Donna asked. “Did you try to do something again and end up blaming it on me?”

“Wha - b-but didn’t you take the blame for the pot thing?!”

“No, I pinned it on your boyfriend at the time,” Donna clarified. “He was cheating on you with an eighth grader.”

“You mean YOU’RE the reason Curtis Lamb got arrested?!” Linda gasped.

“Well, technically it was the weed and the fact that he was screwing a minor, I just helped…”

Linda scowled in fury.

“If it’ll make you feel better, he should be out on parole in five years,” Donna said.

“Donna, there you are!”

“Stinky…”

“Frankie, hush!”
Inez had come out and walked up to the Murphy sisters, holding Frances.

“So you’re Linda,” Inez said. “I’m Inez Caballé, Donna’s wife, and this is our daughter Frances, she just turned three.”

Frances pointed at Linda.

“Stinky?” she asked.

Donna broke out into a laugh.

Inez sighed.

Linda looked furious.

“Can you please properly discipline your child?” she hissed through clenched teeth.

“Linda, she’s three, give her a break,” Donna said.

“If YOU won’t, I will,” Linda warned.

“Isn’t that what Mom tried to do that got her arrested?” Donna said coldly.

Linda’s expression became unreadable.

“DON’T tell me how to raise my daughter, Linda,” Donna hissed. “This is exactly why I left home - Dad’s a spineless dolt, Mom’s a domineering hellbeast, and you’re a hypocritical scumbag. I’m honestly afraid for your children - I mean, you said yourself many times that you didn’t want children!”

“Well, God had other plans, Donna.”

“But do you love those plans?”

“Hey Mom, when are we gonna leave?”

Linda and Donna turned to see Hunter and Hannah holding onto each other - almost as if to protect each other.

“In a bit, you two, Mommy just has to -”

“You two must be Hunter and Hannah!” Donna chimed. “I’m Donna, your mom’s older twin by seven minutes! It’s so nice to finally be able to meet you two!”

Hunter and Hannah stared briefly.

“Mommy said she was an only child,” Hannah said in confusion.

“Well, your mommy lied!” Donna said. “I was kicked out of the house after high school.”

“So…we have an aunt?” Hunter asked.

“Yep!” Donna replied. “Two, counting my wife Inez here!”

Inez smiled awkwardly. “Is your mother always like this?” she asked.

Linda’s death glare in her children’s general direction went unnoticed.
“Yes,” Hannah said.

“I plead the fifth,” Hunter said.

“You don’t even know what that MEANS!” Linda snapped.

“It means that I don’t wanna answer because if I do I’ll get in trouble,” Hunter said.

“And how do you know that, eh?” Donna asked playfully.

“Our dad’s a lawyer,” Hunter said. “He’s rarely home because his firm is in the capital.”

“And he didn’t bother taking time off to watch his son perform a Disney song in front of hundreds to standing ovation?”

Hunter blushed and fidgeted with her vest buttons, uncomfortable with being referred to as a “son” but nonetheless flattered by the praise.

“Who’s that?” Hannah said, pointing toward Frances.

“That’s my daughter Frances,” Inez answered. “That would make you her cousin.”

Hannah’s eyes widened, as did her smile.

She crept closer to Frances, as though she was trying to creep close to a cat to pet it.

Frances walked toward Hannah and pointed at her.

“Cuz’n?” she asked.

“Cousin,” Hannah answered. “I’m Hannah, and I’m six! What’s your name?”

“Fwances! I’m twee!”

“Nice to meet you, Frenchie!” Hannah said.

“Hannah, her name is -”

“Fwenchie, Fwenchie, Fwenchie!” Frances cheered excitedly.

Donna laughed as she picked her daughter up. “I guess she likes it!”

“Yeah, that’s nice, now when are you leaving?” Linda questioned.

“We head back to Phoenix tomorrow morning,” Donna said. “But first I wanna exchange contact info, so we can complain about things we both hate together for once!”

Linda sighed and acquiesced, just to get Donna off her back.

__________________________

Flowey grumbled as the ever-annoying Tingle futilely tries to destroy his Mega Man.

Flowey performed a combo and won easily.

That made 37 wins and 9 losses.

And yet, Flowey was still bored. He’d been becoming more and more bored with anything to do
with violence for a while, but only recently had it become a noticeable boredom.

So he turned off the game after putting his score down in the notebook on Sans’ computer desk and waited for the family to return.

Isolde hopped up onto the table and curled around him.

Flowey stood stiff in terror as Isolde fell asleep.

For the first time, he found himself hoping that his family would come soon.

Also for the first time, he referred to his housemates as “his” family.

He was going soft.

He found he didn’t really mind.

The wonderful music has filled you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

Don't Stop Me Now - Queen
Go The Distance - Michael Bolton
Another Brick In The Wall Pt. 2 - Pink Floyd

The contest is over! Our winners are:
Median
MapleSeaBuns
stressed, depressed, and porly dressed
Shirasaur
Bluejay25
Shawky

Congrats to our winners! We can't wait to work with your characters, and we will see you next chapter!
Friends Will Be Friends

Chapter Summary

...right 'til the end.

Or, the kids graduate, Linda's a bibbidi-bobbidi-butthole, and Caroline professes her undying hatred of people in front of a crowd of hundreds.

Chapter Notes

This chapter will introduce MapleSeaBuns' contest-winning OC! Other OCs will be introduced in a few more chapters!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

9:34 A.M., May 28th, 20XR

It’s a beautiful day outside.

Birds are singing.

Flowers are blooming.

On days like this, kids like you…

…Are graduating from elementary school.

Toriel tied the red ribbon into a bow around Frisk’s shirt collar. They wore a white Peter Pan-collared blouse with short puffed sleeves with a pair of puffy high-waisted gray pinstripe shorts with brown boots and black-and-white striped knee socks. Toriel wore a high-necked short-sleeved dress with a blue bodice and mulberry-colored knee-length skirt with black flats.

“And done!” she announced. “Oh, my child…it seems like only yesterday you had fallen into my life…and now…”

Toriel sniffled a bit.

Sans patted her lower back comfortingly.

“there there, tori, save your tears for the ceremony,” he said. “now let’s get a move on, the zoo’s an hour away and the ceremony’s at half-past noon. and we have to stop and pick up lunch since it won’t be provided…”
“We can always have a late lunch at Grillby’s with everyone…” Toriel hinted.

“okay, forget lunch, just head out anyway,” Sans said quickly, wrapping his Blue Hoodie around his waist and walking out to the van, being tailed by a very DETERMINED Frisk.

Toriel chuckled and shook her head, following after them.

Papyrus looped his Red Scarf through the belt loops of his trousers, then tied it in a figure-eight knot and clasped a brass skull brooch on the knot. He straightened his red bow tie and charcoal gray vest and walked downstairs and into the parlor, waiting for his boyfriend to finish preparing. Mettaton always took his sweet time getting dressed and putting makeup on…

Papyrus had just finished his word jumble when Mettaton came down the stairs. He leaned against the parlor entryway, crossing his arms before him. He had on a short-sleeved form-fitting fuchsia dress with a floral design on it with matching six-inch wedge sandals and and a fuchsia choker.

“I see YOU’RE ready to go,” he said playfully.

“THAT I AM!” Papyrus answered with equal playfulness. “BUT ARE YOU READY, MY SWEET?”

Mettaton smiled and nodded.

Papyrus held out his arm for his boyfriend to take. “WELL, COME ALONG THEN! THE CEREMONY STARTS IN TWO HOURS!”

Mettaton hook his arm around Papyrus’ and allowed himself to be escorted to Papyrus’ Corvette.

Alphys had just finished buttoning Mamoru’s tiny khaki waistcoat and putting on his shorts.

She took a picture and sent it to everyone in her contacts.

She put on her outfit - a lace short-sleeved blouse, a navy skirt, and black maryjanes with a navy bow headband.

She took Mamoru, grabbed the diaper bag, and went downstairs, where Undyne was waiting.

Undyne was wearing a yellow sleeveless blouse, black slacks, and black ankle boots with red lipstick and nail polish - if Undyne was wearing makeup, then clearly this was a major event in her eyes.

Undyne looked up at her wife and son.

“Everything ready?” she asked.

“Y-yep, everything’s together, Mamo-chan’s been fed, and we’re ready to go!” Alphys said.

“Alriiight!” Undyne said. “C’mon, Mamo-chan! Let’s GO!”

Mamoru giggled and clapped.

Caroline sat in the back seat of her father’s truck reading a compilation of Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tales. She had on a knee-length dress of black organza with a cream-colored lace capelet with
white tights and black Maryjanes. Her hair was in a braid, unusually for her.

Then Levi, in khaki shorts and blue suspenders, suddenly opened the car door and sat next to Caroline.

“So this is where you’ve been, Caroline!” he said. “Ma and Randy were getting worried ‘cause they hadn’t seen you since they went to wake you up.”

“But I told them I was dressed and going out to the car,” Caroline said.

“What were they doing when you told them?”

“Talking to some people on the phone, probably family members or something.”

Levi blinked,

“And you couldn’t wait like five minutes until they were done?” he asked.

“The ceremony’s in like an hour and a half, which is how long it takes to get to the zoo,” Caroline stated. “I think I’m justified in my impatience, Levi.”

“Actually it’ll take us an hour, but whatever…”

“Levi, did you find her?” Sharona called. She had on a royal blue pencil dress with a white floral design on it with a royal blue ¾-sleeved cropped jacket and a black belt around her waist with blue wedge pumps and her bushy red hair in a half-ponytail held by a velvet blue scrunchie.

“Yeah, Ma!”

“Oh, thank GOD…”

“Yeah, yeah, now stop dawdling and get in the car or we’ll be late!” Caroline urged.

Sharona blinked a few times before turning to get Randy.

“She hasn’t even graduated yet and she’s already hit the rebellious stage…” Sharona mumbled.

Elaina sat on a bench by the wolf exhibit, watching the animals. They wore a short-sleeved pastel blue shirtdress with a bow at the collar with their ponytail curled and held in place with a blue flower. They had on their gold charm bracelet and a pair of blue pearl earrings - actually their mother’s, but Irma had begrudgingly allowed them the use of one piece of her jewelry for the occasion. Elaina picked the cheapest-looking ones of the lot. They were also wearing another pair of earrings, the ones that were used to pierce their ears a second time. Felicity and Grace had taken them out a few days ago for their birthday to get their ears pierced a second time. They wondered why Irma wasn’t upset about it...

Irma had wandered off somewhere for some reason, leaving Elaina to their own devices for an undetermined amount of time.

Then someone sat next to Elaina. They turned toward the person, a very short girl with short black curls and vivid green eyes in a short-sleeved black shirt with a white collar, a pair of high-waisted green shorts, black boots, and a green seahorse chewable necklace which she was chewing on with her molars at that particular moment.

The girl took the necklace out of her mouth to speak.
“You’re Elaina, right?” she asked cheerfully.

Elaina nodded.

“I knew it!” the girl said. “I’m Penelope DeMartino, one of Frisk’s friends!” The girl giggled a bit suddenly. “Calling someone a ‘friend’ STILL makes me all giddy and stuff…”

Elaina giggled a bit. “Y-yeah, I understand.”

“You not have many friends either before meeting Frisk?” Penelope asked.

Elaina shook their head.

“Huh. Well, it’s nice to finally meet you! I hope we can be friends too!”

Elaina perked up at this.

Then Penelope started laughing.

Elaina tilted their head in confusion.

“One of the wolves just barked at someone on the other side and the person dropped their snow cone!” Penelope said.

Elaina giggled.

“So you like wolves, huh?” Penelope asked.

“Y-yeah, b-but not as much as I like h-huskies!” Elaina answered. “T-they’re like blue-eyed panda-wolves full of love.”

Penelope giggled. “That’s so true! Y’know, Frisk’s dog is a husky-chow mix!”

“Whoa, r-really?!”

“Uh-huh!”

“Penelope, who the heck is this?”

A boy with short golden brown hair and hazel eyes with gold flecks in an orange plaid shirt and khakis with black shoes stood before them.

“Hey, Brian!” Penelope said. “Brian, meet Elaina…what’s your last name again?”

“L-Lorence.”

“Elaina Lorence, right! Elaina, this is Brian Green! He’s not that smart, but he’s okay!”

“You really don’t like me, do you?” Brian asked.

“You’re one of my friends!” Penelope answered cheerfully.

“That does not answer my question at all.”

“Brian, wait up, I don’t run fast - oh Elaina, hey!”

“Lina, hiil!”
“Hey Hunter! Hey Hannah!”

Hunter was wearing a cornflower blue buttondown shirt with a yellow bow tie and black slacks held up with suspenders. Hannah had on a sleeveless yellow dress with a black gossamer hem and ruffles on the straps and a yellow headband with her hair in twin buns.

“Where’s Coraline an’ Louie an’ Fisk, Bub?” Hannah asked.

“They’re on their way,” Hunter assured.

“Who is?”

Caroline and Levi were finally here.

“ Took you guys long enough,” Brian grumbled.

“It’s not OUR fault,” Caroline said. “Dad and Sharona were busy talking to relatives on the phone and they lost track of time.”

“It’s ‘cause my cousin Caleb has no sense of direction,” Levi said.

“Just how many relatives are coming for you guys?” Penelope asked.

“My grandpa’s coming, along with my aunts and uncle and a few cousins,” Caroline said. “Same with Levi. Bubbie Gerda’s coming too, so you might wanna warn your mom, Hunter.”

“Will do,” Hunter said.

Elaina was confused as heck.

“It’s a long story, but it involves a little old lady, a sofa, and a bake sale,” Penelope said.

“A story which I am VERY willing to tell,” Caroline added.

“Well, you just like hearing yourself talk!” Brian accused.

“Yeah, no, I just like storytelling,” Caroline corrected. “Pretty big difference.”

“Hey, dudes! What’s up?”

“FINALLY, MK and Frisk are here!” Levi exulted.

*Attention zoo patrons, the Upland-Mountainside graduation ceremony will begin in exactly ten minutes. All graduates, please make your way to the amphitheater at this time. Thank you.*

The kids were silent.

“Well, looks like this is it,” Hunter said nervously. “After today, we’ll be sixth graders. Everyone ready?”

“I have my speech memorized and everything,” Caroline said.

“I have no idea what’s in store but that just makes it FUN!” Levi said.

“Let’s kick some BUTT!” Brian said, cracking his knuckles.

“I can’t WAIT to torture Theo all day again…” Penelope sighed.
“This is gonna be AWESOME!” MK cheered.

Frisk gave a thumbs-up.

“I-I’m scared out of my w-wits, but I guess if y-you guys are gonna b-be there, i-it’ll be alright!” Elaina said.

Then sniffling was heard.

Hunter felt something pull on her shirt hem.

She looked down at Hannah.

Hannah was crying.

“Don’t go bub…” she sobbed.

Hunter hugged her.

“Don’t worry, Hanners,” she comforted. “I get home earlier than you do next year, so I’ll wait for you to come home, okay?”

Hannah sniffled. “B-but it’s not gonna b-be the same…”

“Yeah…” the elder Thompson sister admitted. “But we won’t let that stop us, will we?”

Hannah shook her head.

Hunter patted her head, “Good girl.”

“Hey, let’s go everyone!” Penelope whined. “The ceremony’s in eight minutes!”

“Thank goodness the amphitheater’s just short walk away from here,” Levi said. “You picked some prime real estate, Elaina!”

Elaina giggled.

They were pretty psyched about their newfound friendships…

Somewhere in the petting zoo, near the guinea pigs and bunnies, a young Rabbit Monstress with orange fur and lilac eyes searched between every nook and cranny for… something.

“Oh come on, Dexter…where are ya, buddy?”

A black rat with a white spot over its eye crawled up the Rabbit’s leg and perched itself onto her shoulder.

She smiled at it and rubbed its head.

“There ya are, buddy!” she whispered. “I was getting kinda worried about ya, y’know! Not everyone likes rats…”

*Attention zoo patrons, the Upland-Mountainside graduation ceremony will begin in exactly ten minutes. All graduates, please make your way to the amphitheater at this time. Thank you.*

The Rabbit gasped. She had to get to amphitheater as soon as possible!
She put the rat - apparently named Dexter - into the pocket of her bolero jacket and ran toward the amphitheater.

Shelby ran swearing past the zebra exhibit, trying desperately to put on her burgundy pumps without making her matching short-sleeved shirtdress ride up, all while staring at the map. She’d lost sight of Chas long ago - knowing him he was probably hiding nearby filming her mad dash to Frisk’s graduation ceremony.

She successfully put on her shoes and began running like a normal person would if they were running very very late.

She finally reached the amphitheater, where Asgore, Chas, Gaster, Sans, Toriel, Papyrus, Mettaton, Alphys, Undyne, and Mamoru were all waiting.

“Well, what took YOU so long, missy?” Chas teased.

“Go jump in the snake pit, asshole,” Shelby growled.

“Shelby!” Chas gasped mockingly. “There’s a BABY literally five feet away from you! Watch your language!”

“I don’t even think he’s said his first words yet, Chas.”

“I still laugh whenever I remember when Mercedes was that age and said the F-word,” Chas sighed. “It was both horrifying and hilarious in equal measure…”

“Hey, guys!”

Randy had appeared alongside Sharona.

“Randy, hey!” Chas said. “Who’s this, your daughter?”

Everyone was silent. Shelby facepalmed.

Randy narrowed his eyes.

“This is my wife, Sharona,” he greeted through clenched teeth.

“OH, okay!” Chas said. “Sorry…”

“We get that a lot, actually,” Sharona admitted.

“So what’s the age difference between you two?” Chas asked.

“Chas, I think you should take this opportunity to SHUT UP,” Shelby growled.

“We’re 22 to 23 years apart in age,” Randy said.

“We became pen pals just before I started high school,” Sharona continued.

“And we met in person for the first time the summer after she graduated high school,” Randy recalled.

“He was in a relationship at the time,” Sharona reminisced. “They broke up not long after, but as with all his exes, they’re still friends.”
“We met a second time just before I met Bethany.”

“That’s the time I brought Levi’s father with me, before we married.”

“What was his name again?”

*Attention everyone, the Mountainside-Upland Graduation Ceremony is about to begin. Please find a seat.*

“We gotta go, see ya after the ceremony,” Sharona said as she dragged Randy off.

And with that everyone went to find a place to sit.

Mr. McBride stepped up to the podium. The students from Upland and mountainside were seated in alphabetical order. He cleared his throat and began to speak.

“Parents, teachers, other assorted family members. I am Nathan McBride, and as of two weeks ago, I am no longer the acting principal of Mountainside Elementary - no sirree, you can now remove the word ‘acting’ from my title!”

Applause and cheers.

“Thank you, thank you, but today is NOT about me. Today is about a transition. Today, a group of eighty-six children are about to embark on a journey - a journey toward their futures. This is the first group of kids I have had the pleasure of being a principal to, and let me tell you, we have been through some crazy stuff together. But that’s neither here nor there. Ladies and gentlemen, boths and neithers, before we present to you the graduating class of 20XR, Principal Martha Albertson of Upland Elementary and myself have chosen one representative student from among either of our schools to speak about their time in elementary school. And with that, our class speaker, from Mountainside Elementary, Caroline Violet Marlow!”

Applause. Someone in the audience screamed. Some among the students cheered particularly loud. One or two booed. One shouted something about how Caroline couldn't possibly being a fifth grader due to her height.

Caroline stepped up to the podium, kicking aside the stepstool one of the teachers had provided, expecting someone of average height.

“Um, hello everyone,” she began. “I am Caroline Marlow. I’m a fifth grader from Mountainside Elementary. But I’m not from around here. I came here from a small former mining town in western Colorado. I moved here with my dad when he remarried. There are more people in this entire audience than there were citizens in that tiny mountain town - and I really, REALLY hate people. But I knew there was no way out of here, so decided to stay back and wait until I could. But some people can’t take a hint and leave well enough alone.”

Laughter.

“Looking back, I guess it’s okay that those guys bugged me. I’m pretty sure I would’ve had less fun without them, at least. Together, we made blanket forts, had two new year’s parties, even uncovered a century-old secret. I also threw up on someone, but she kind of deserved it.”

Raucous laughter. Someone screeched some kind of obscenity, but no one could tell who.

“I also learned that…maybe some people aren’t necessarily bad,” Caroline admitted begrudgingly.
“I mean, some are pretty terrible, but with seven and a half billion of them and counting that's kind of a given. But there are a FEW okay people. I'd know, since I made friends with the okayest ones.”

Laughter and awws and cheers.

“I won't lie and say I hope to get to know everyone, but I do hope that we can all show each other basic respect, maybe have fun and make some new memories. Only time will tell if that's what'll happen, but I'm going to not be a cynic for once and hope. Consider it my thanks for trying to understand me. Thank you all for your time, and I hope you enjoy the ceremony.”

Applause and cheers. Caroline curtseyed and went back to her seat. She could feel Miranda glare at her. Not a care as always.

Mr. McBride walked up to the podium once more.

“If you will all look at your programs, which you received at the desk over there, you will find that we will be passing out awards after the ceremony, for teachers and students alike. So please stick around after the ceremony. If you don’t, we will mail your any award your child has won with a letter expressing our gratitude toward your interest in your child’s accomplishments. And now, we shall begin the Upland-Mountainside Graduation Ceremony!”

Applause rang out.

“how long do you think it'll take until people notice that was sarcastic?” Sans asked.

“I give them a month,” Toriel offered.

Then Pomp And Circumstance March No. 1 played over the loudspeakers.

“Alicia Rochelle Berry, Upland Elementary School.”

Alicia walked up, wearing a black and white striped V-neck tank top and a red satin skirt. Polite applause, some cheering from four or five people. Alicia curtseyed as she accepted her diploma.

“Sean Nicholas Cantrell, Mountainside Elementary School.”

Nicko walked up to receive his diploma, to cheers and applause.

“Penelope Michelle DeMartino, Mountainside Elementary School.”

Applause and cheers. One person jeering. Penelope waved at the audience with a smile.

“Frisk Eternal Dreemurr, Mountainside Elementary School.”

Wild applause and cheers erupted before the speaker had finished. Frisk bowed politely and winked and blew a kiss at the audience.

“Scott Jacob Foley, Upland Elementary School.”

Cheers and applause as a boy with brown hair and eyes walked up and accepted his diploma.

“Levi Denzel Goldsby, Mountainside Elementary School.”

Cheer and applause erupted.
“Brian Alexander Green, Mountainside Elementary School.”

Cheering.

“Kristina May Ketal, Upland Elementary School.”

Applause, one or two boos as the young orange Rabbit walked up to accept her diploma.

As soon as Kristina was back in her seat, inexplicable feedback erupted, causing the audience to groan.

“…Mountainside Elementary School.”

MK stood up, careful not to trip. He even hopped over someone’s stuck-out leg. He even returned without incident.

“Brooke Ivy Lane, Upland Elementary School.”

Polite applause as Brooke, in a light blue dress with a pink sash and headband walked up to get her diploma.

“Elaina Lily Lorence, Upland Elementary School.”

Polite applause and some jeering. A few audience members cheered quietly.

“Caroline Violet Marlow, Mountainside Elementary School.”

Applause and cheers, plus a few shouts of thank you for some odd reason.

“Colleen Siabhra McCann, Upland Elementary School.”

Colleen walked up, wearing a short sleeved green dress with a white collar and sleeve cuffs. Applause ensued.

“Miranda Mildred Mosley, Mountainside Elementary School.”

Applause as Miranda walked up, wearing a sparkly pink lace dress. A number of students giggled at her middle name.

“Naomi Leah Nivens, Mountainside Elementary School.”

Applause, plus a few cheers. Naomi stood from her seat wearing a short sleeve light blue shirt dress with ruffles.

“Olivia Janine Olbermann, Mountainside Elementary School.”

Olive walked up and smiled at the audience as they applauded.

“Chloe Denise Phillips, Upland Elementary School.”

Chloe stepped up to take her diploma, to applause.

“Bruce Roberts, Mountainside Elementary School.”

Applause as Bruce walked up to receive his diploma. Some students started chanting his name, stopping as he sat down.
Cheering erupted. Eddie took his diploma and finger-gunned the audience as he returned to his place.

“Hunter James Thompson, Mountainside Elementary School.”

Hunter stood and walked across the stage to great applause and cheers, and to Miranda’s ire.

“Everyone, the fifth grade class of 20XR!”

Cheers, cheers unlike any the children had ever heard before.

Each and every cheer with DETERMINATION.

The award ceremony ended a few hours later. The kids held their award packets and diplomas, posing for pictures with everyone.

Elaina and Colleen found Frisk and the rest and stopped to say hello.

“U-um, this is my f-friend, Colleen!” Elaina said. “Colleen, t-these are some of my other friends! I m-met them through Frisk.”

“Hi! I’m Levi! Nice to meetcha!”

“I’m Levi’s stepsister, Caroline. It’s a pleasure.”

“I’m Penelope! I like your dress!”

“I’m Hunter, and thi is my sister Hannah. She’ll be in second grade next year.”

“Hi, Collie!”

“I’m Brian.”

“It’s nice to meet all of you!” Colleen said.

“frisk, there you are, i’ve been lookin’ all over for ya.”

Frisk turned to Sans and smiled widely, running into his arms.

Sans chuckled as he rumpled their hair.

Sans locked eyes with Elaina.

“well, if it isn’t elaina,” he greeted. “how’ve you been?”

“I-I’ve been well, t-thanks!” they answered.

“that’s good, then.”

“Oh~”

“E~”

“Lai~”
Felicity and Grace draped their arms over their sibling’s shoulders. They both wore black halterneck swing dresses with black strappy platform sandals and black sunhats, which made their rainbow-dyed hair stand out all the more.

“So our baby sister is now in middle school...” Felicity sighed.

“My how time does fly...” Grace sighed.

“She’s growing up~” they sang in unison.

“Okay, now both of you look familiar as well for a completely different reason,” Sans said.

“You guys were at the mall last year on the 23rd of December, being chased by some guy,” Caroline announced. “You ran across the ice rink with the guy tailing you for some reason.”

“Oh, he thought we stole something,” Felicity said dismissively.

“You dye your hair, suddenly you’re a degenerate,” Grace sighed.

“I thought we became delinquents,” Felicity said.

“Hush now, you know that our Mommie Dearest can’t take a joke to save her life!” Grace hissed.

“Oh yeah, how could we forget?”

“I know, especially when she’s stomping her way over here to chew us out for no reason again!”

“No, that’s someone else’s mom who also looks like a total bi -”

Sans cleared his throat.

“- like a total bibbidi-bobbidi-butthole.”

“Five points for creativity, minus one for delivery,” Levi remarked.

“Sounds fair,” the twins said in unison.

“HUNTER JAMES AND HANNAH GRACE THOMPSON, WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?!” Linda shrieked. She was wearing a dusty pink sparkly pencil dress that was far too formal for a graduation ceremony with black high heeled sandal and gold hoop earrings with her gold cross necklace.

“You sure that’s not our mom?” Felicity asked her twin loud enough for Linda to hear.

“I don’t even know anymore, they’re both old and screechy and have bad makeup,” Grace answered.

“I don’t know who you two think you are, but I can hear you!” Linda growled.

“We know,” they said in unison.

Linda turned almost the same color as her lipstick.

The twins clearly did not care, considering the fact that they were talking about how this strange woman and their mother might be the same person in disguise.
“linda, calm down before you burst a blood vessel,” Sans said. “i thought you got helens’s text.”

“What text?” Linda spat.

“she mentioned texting you earlier, something about her taking your kids over to her place to spend the night or something.”

Linda blinked and checked her phone. Sure enough, she had indeed received a text from Helen saying that exact thing.

Then, out of the corner of her eye, she saw something black race by.

Her eyes followed it for all of two seconds before she shrieked and tried to stomp on the rat.

Then Kristina ran past.

“Dexter, wait, you could get squished by someone!” she called out.

The group stared after the Rabbit as she wove and ducked her way through the crowd.

“You nearly killed someone’s pet,” Caroline said, almost dismissively. “If it were a puppy you would have been hated even more than you are now.”

“Caroline, hush, she’ll kill you!” Levi hissed.

“How, DARE you!” Linda screamed. “I am NOT a murderer!”

Caroline merely smiled strangely at nothing in particular.

“You think that Jane, if it gives you comfort,” she dismissed coldly.

Linda stared at Caroline in a mixture of fury, terror, and befuddlement before walking away wordlessly.

Everyone stared at Caroline.

Caroline seemed not to notice.

“So what’ll we be doing?” she asked as though she hadn’t just obliquely accused Linda of being a murderer.

Irma sat on a bench arranging meetings for Mr. Hollander when someone stood over her, casting a shadow.

Wait. Make that two someones.

“Heyyyyy, Mommie Dearest~” her twins sang.

Irma groaned and rubbed her temples.

“And what the hell do YOU two want?” she asked irritably.

“Permission to spend the day with our dear baby sister, that’s what!” Felicity replied with a smile.

“Not only will we get to spend time with our dear sister again, but you, Mother, get to have a day to yourself!” Grace reasoned.
“Which we ALL know you want, since you clearly expressed your desire to be not here!” Felicity added.

“So you let us spend the rest of today and tomorrow with Elaina, you get the same amount of time to do whatever it is you do when you’re alone!” Grace concluded.

“With an hour advance notice when we’ll be returning her to your care!” Felicity added.

“So what’ll it be?” the twins asked in unison.

“I don’t care, as long as you don’t do anything that could make me look bad,” Irma answered without even considering her daughters’ words.

“‘Really, Mother?’ Grace said.

“Our very existence is a blemish upon your name, you’ve made THAT much PERFECTLY clear,” Felicity continued.

“If I didn’t know any better…” Grace started.

“I’d say she blames US for having been born in the first place,” Felicity finished.

“YOU’RE the ones who were born when I was seventeen despite all my attempts at aborting you!” Irma countered.

“Yeah, yeah, we get it, you hate us and want us dead,” Felicity dismissed. “The feeling is mutual, trust us.”

“The difference, Mother dear, is that unlike YOU, we have no desire to actually go THROUGH with murder…” Grace said. “And before you say ANYTHING, don’t think we don’t know what REALLY happened to little Cory Richmond’s fathers…”

“And Mr. Warren across the street…”

“And Mr. and Mrs. Gibson’s daughter…”

“Just fucking go already,” Irma interjected. “Tell me an hour before you bring the girl back, no less, or else…”

Felicity and Grace merely smiled at their mother coldly.

“You have our word on our honor as twins,” they said in eerie unison.

They turned and walked away in sync, not a glance back in their mother’s direction.

Once they were out of eye and earshot of the woman, they sighed.

“We really should tell someone…” Felicity said.

“But if we do, Elaina’s as good as dead,” Grace countered.

“Not to mention we have no proof,” Felicity added.

“So the best we can do is wait until Elaina’s old enough for mother to kick her out as well so we can take her in?” Grace asked skeptically.
“I know, she can’t turn sixteen soon enough,” Felicity sighed.

“Excuse me, young ladies?”

They twins turned to see a tall woman.

“I couldn’t help but overhear your conversation,” she said.

The twins’ eyes widened in fear.

“It’s fine, I won’t tell a soul,” the woman assured them. “I just want you to have something…”

She reached into her pocket and gave them a business card.

Sienna Harper
Private Investigator

The twins looked up at Sienna, who was smiling mysteriously.

“Just give me a ring if you decide you need my help,” she said. “If you just wanna chat, my personal’s on the back in the lower left-hand corner.”

Sienna walked away without a word.

She stopped in her tracks.

There was another Wizard. No, two Wizards. Both very powerful.

Sienna activated her Magic.

She walked past everyone, completely Invisible to their eyes, following the feel of the other Wizards.

Then the trail was gone, as though the Wizards just disappeared.

What most likely happened was the Wizards merely got into a car and left.

Sienna sighed.

The sensation of Electricity Magic in the aether was very distinct from that of a coming thunderstorm. And then there was a sensation that brought a single word, a single existence into Sienna’s mind.

DETERMINATION.

She had to wonder if these Wizards knew of the power they held.

After all, the descendants of the Seven Great Mages couldn’t NOT know of their power.

Their ancestry, though, was another story entirely…

Caroline and Frisk sighed as they buckled themselves in the backmost seat of Toriel’s Chevy Venture, exhausted.

“Please tell me you felt that too,” Caroline said.
Frisk nodded.

“Whatever it was was familiar somehow,” the Wizard continued. “I dunno how else to describe besides ‘kin’, if that makes sense.”

<<I felt that too,>> Frisk signed.

“But what do you think it was?” Caroline wondered more to herself than anyone in particular.

Frisk shrugged.

“We’ll go over potential options later, how’s that sound?” Caroline offered.

Frisk gave a thumbs-up of agreement, to which Caroline relied with a nod.

Then Toriel hopped into the driver’s seat, and Sans in the passenger seat, Levi and MK taking the middle row.

“first stop is a late lunch-early dinner at grillby’s, than off to pap ‘n metta’s place,” Sans announced. “your folks’ll be bringin’ your stuff up later, so no need to worry about that.”

And with that they were off to acquire food.

When they reached Grillby’s, they were surprised to see Elaina and their sisters already there.

“Hiil!” the twins said in unison.

“how goes it, fred and george?” Sans greeted.

“They ALMOST had our names right!” one twin said.

“And I don’t think we even told them, too,” the other twin said.

“How interesting~” they sang in creepy unison.

Sans was slightly uncomfortable now.

“Well then, why not introduce yourselves?” Toriel requested. “Since you HAVE mentioned being Elaina’s sisters.”

“I’m Felicity!” one said.

“And I’m Grace!” the other said.

“We’re identical twins!” they said in unison.

“Interesting,” Caroline mused, giving the twins an appraising look, as though she were reading a book jacket.

“Well, it’s nice to meet you both!” Toriel said as she shook their hands. “I’m Toriel, my child Frisk is a friend of Elaina’s, and the Skeleton is my fiancee, Sans!”

“Whoa,” Felicity said. “I haven’t seen anything quite like this, and I have a Furaffinity account…”

“Fel, there are children present!” Grace hissed as she jabbed Felicity in the side with her elbow.

“nah, it’s cool,” Sans assured. “tori ‘n i are raising frisk to be a pun-loving memelord…”
“We wish you the best in your endeavors,” Grace expressed.

“May they become a beacon of memes in a cold, dark world,” Felicity said dramatically.

“And congrats on the engagement!” The twins said in unison.

“Thank you for your well-wishes,” Toriel said.

“we’ll do our best,” Sans said.

Irma lie facedown on her bed, crashing back down from the high of the Stardust in her system.

They high had distracted her from the truth - the truth she’d spent years denying.

They knew. Felicity and Grace knew she had killed those people - they acted as if she’d committed a crime in ridding the world of a few faggots.

At least they knew to keep quiet - but to blackmail her? Where did they learn such a thing? They were STUPID - that was the ONLY explanation.

But the fact remained - they knew she’d killed people, and that meant Irma had to be a LOT more careful from now on.

She made plans to call Kevin in the morning.

There was work to be done…

The knowledge the you are growing up fills you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

Friends Will Be Friends - Queen
Pomp And Circumstance March No. 1 - Sir Edward Elger

Fun Fact - I am so tired I woke up at 3 in the afternoon and now it's half-past midnight and I'm uploading a chapter of a fanfiction and listening to Mr. Blue Sky by Electric Light Orchestra and reading Mass Effect fanfiction while high on Scooby-Doo fruit snacks. Please don't save me, I am actually quite happy with this.
She Moved Through The Fair

Chapter Summary

Step back in time and see...

Sans and Toriel go Shakespearean, Caroline is your new queen, Penelope and Elaina are hella gay, and Levi gets lost again.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Large amounts of old-timey speak and description porn.
Also introducing Median's OC, Fiona Johnson!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

9:30 A.M., June 20th, 20XR

It’s a beautiful day outside.

Birds are singing.

Flowers are blooming.

On days like this, kids like you…

...are chilling in the Void with your headmate.

<<…and that’s why Caroline fell down a flight of stairs!>> Frisk signed.

“So she’s afraid of wasps?” Chara asked. “Enough to run down a flight of stairs and completely wreck her knees?”

<<Not completely!>> Frisk signed frantically. <<They were just skinned very badly! I still don’t know why she didn’t cry or complain!>>

“I think it’s because she has no nerve endings for whatever reason,” Chara reasoned. “Might be the whole Wizard thing.”

<<Could be.>>

“Hey, mom’s about to wake you up, you guys’re going to the Renaissance Fair or whatever.”
Frisk smiled widely.

<<See you tonight, Chara!>> they signed as they woke up.

Chara rolled their eyes.

Then they realized that Frisk was giving them a chance to co-pilot.

This was going to be fun.

Caroline stood still - well, she tried to anyway. It was difficult to do when there were places to be, things to do and fun to be had, but as it was necessary, she stood still.

“Are you almost done, Sharona?” she whined.

“Not yet,” Sharona said, teeth clenched and holding pins. “The skirt’s almost done, then we gotta lengthen these sleeves to the floor.”

Caroline groaned in agony.

“Hey, you’re the one that wanted your ‘blee-ott’ or whatever to be as ‘historically accurate as possible’, missy,” Sharona said, pausing to make patronizing air quotes. “You got yourself into this…”

“It’s ‘bliaut’,” Caroline grumbled. “It’s French, so the T at the end of bliaut is silent, and the O sound is long…”

“I heard that!” Sharona said. “It’ll be done in a couple more hours, so don’t worry.”

“I’ve been standing here since six, and now you’re saying I’ll be here another two hours, I think that doesn’t just make me worry…”

“Then what does it make you, eh?”

“It makes me wanna hurl myself off a cliff.”

“If it helps, you can sit down while I work on the sleeves, how’s that sound?” Sharona offered.

“Like there’s a catch…” Caroline said suspiciously.

“The catch is no more complaining or no Ren-Fair for you.”

“Yes ma’am.”

Sharona’s heart twinged ever so slightly at Caroline’s dejected tone. She was very much aware of how time-consuming this was, being the one adjusting the dress.

“Howzabout I have Monica and Penelope join us?” Sharona offered. “Maybe Monica can work on your hair while I…”

“They can join us, but YOU do my hair,” Caroline said. “I don’t trust anyone else with my hair.”

Sharona felt her heart warm a bit. She smiled gratefully.

“I’ll see what I can do…”
Elaina sat in the back seat of Felicity’s and Grace’s shared Chevy Malibu, stopped in traffic on Olsen Bridge.

Grace checked her phone from the front passenger’s seat.

“Some jackasses got in a wreck a few blocks from the end of the bridge,” she said. “Apparently one of them got cut off and t-boned the other guy. No injuries, but there will be if we DON’T FUCKING MOVE!”

“Grace, Elaina is literally in the backseat,” Felicity warned.

<<It’s fine!>> Elaina assured them. <<I’m just worried we won’t make it to the fair in time…>>

Felicity and Grace saw Elaina’s sad smile from the rearview mirror. Then Grace spotted an opening in the traffic on her side.

“Traffic opening, one o’clock!” she called.

“FINALLY!” Felicity exulted at the sun roof.

Then they got moving, finding a detour while Grace flipped off the wreckage of the vehicles.

They were on their way…

Frisk stared in their bedroom mirror at the outfit Chara had chosen, a red tunic with blue tights and black boots.

They had to admit, Chara had taste.

They ran to the stairs, slid down the banister, and ran to the living room where Sans was in his usual get up, but with a donkey mask. Toriel was wearing a lovely, flowing teal dress embroidered with green and gold with snowy white fairy wings and gold rings around her horns connected by a bejewelled gold chain.

Frisk’s eyes widened as they hopped in place, giggling and applauding their costumes.

Toriel curtseyed, Sans bowed.

Then Frisk pounded their fist into their hand in realization, then ran back up to their room.

They returned with Flowey, who wore a Jester hat and a frown.

“welp, let’s head out,” Sans said. “titania, young page, audrey ii.”

“Audrey II was from THE 70’S, YOU IDIOT!” Flowey screamed.

“Clearly someone hasn’t read As You Like It,” Toriel mused as she turned to walk out to the car, a swish in her hips.

Sans chuckled as he followed her, thankful for the fact that his donkey mask hid his wandering eyes.

Levi jumped down from the truck bed, his long brown mantle with a yellow patch on the breast swishing up dirt as it moved.
Randy stood waiting for him, wearing a birdlike white leather mask, a black mantle, and a black wide-brimmed hat, while carrying a wooden cane.

Randy lifted Caroline, spun her a bit, then put her down.

A gold circlet circled her head, which was covered by a wimple. Her burgundy dress was floor-length, the sleeves draping from the elbow, accented with a gold rope about her waist.

Penelope followed, wearing a green tunic and black tights with brown boots. Her camera hung around her neck.

She stared enthralled at Caroline.

“Take a picture, it’ll last longer,” Caroline said teasingly.

Penelope squeaked. She was caught. But she recovered quickly enough.

“Strike a pose for me, then,” she countered.

Caroline obliged, straightening her posture and stiffening her upper lip, gazing down at the camera.

Penelope snapped the image as she fought back a blush.

Now, Penelope was very much enraptured by Caroline, but not so much so that the uncostumed Theo would ever escape her sights.

“Halt, Brother Theodore!” she called. “Thou shalt not escape our clutches this day, foul rogue!”

“Stop talking like that!” Theo snapped, his voice starting to crack with the annoying squeakiness that tends to come with puberty.

“You may command Lady Penelope to cease speaking as she does when YOU have reached manhood, Sir Theodore,” Caroline chided, affecting the air of a queen.

“Methinks thou hast been burned,” Levi said.

Theo growled and stomped off.

“So, Father,” Caroline started. “What raiments wearest thou?”

“I am a plague doctor, my dear,” Randy said, his voice muffled somewhat by the mask. “I travel to distant villages, warning the people of the coming plague. This mask I wear has herbs, which protect me from the illness… causing… miasma…”

Randy doubled over in laughter.

“I-I’m sorry, I can’t keep in character!” he managed. “Not with such…BAHAHAHAHAH!”

Caroline merely stared at her maniacally laughing father.

“You don’t have to wear that,” she said, her normal voice returning. “Plague doctors originated in the 17th century, whereas my bliaut is of the eleventh century.”

Randy slowly stopped laughing. Once he came back down, he stood up and dusted off his cloak.

“Can I claim to be a time traveller?” he asked.
“NO,” Caroline shot.

“Well, what do you want me to do?” Randy asked.

“It matters not, good sir,” Caroline assured. “Come now, everyone! Midsummer has but a few hours left!”

She turned and walked, assurance in her steps.

Penelope followed directly behind her.

If she had a basket of flower petals, she would be tossing them about with reckless abandon.

Elaina stepped out of the back of her sisters’ car, their eyes widening.

They were certain that they had stepped back in time.

Well, they would have been, had they not seen the people in modern clothing spread about.

Elaina turned to their sisters, eyes glittering with excitement.

Felicity and Grace turned to each other and smiled.

“Ready…” Grace started.

“Set…” Felicity continued.

“GO!” Elaina shouted, running off into the crowd, being chased by their sisters, all of them laughing.

Elaina ducked and wove their way through the thick crowd, her anxiety dulled considerably by her excitement at the new surroundings.

They looked back to see if her sisters were there.

Her way was blocked by a Human girl with long pin-straight black hair parted in the middle with a widows peak and dark eyes. She had on a knee-length black dress with white sleeve cuffs and a white lace collar, green and white Celtic knot designs embroidered onto it, paired with white crew socks and black lace-up slippers.

They slammed into her, falling back on their rear.

Elaina stared up at her, suddenly slightly frightened.

“Hey, you okay?” the girl asked.

Elaina shrunk in on herself.

“Hey, stay here, okay?” the girl said comfortingly. “I’ll go get you something to eat, okay?”

She was gone to a stall nearby before Elaina could react. A few moments later, the girl returned with a cup of lemonade and some fried cheese.

“As an apology,” she said, passing the treats to Elaina before she could turn them down. “I gotta get going, someone’s outfit needs hemming!”

The girl started to walk away before turning back to say something.
“Hope you came see the Irish Dance exhibition!” she called before turning to leave for real.

Elaina’s eyes widened. They stood up, looking around them for their sisters.

Once they saw them, they ran to join them, offering them some of the fried cheese.

“C-come on, the exhibition should be s-starting soon!” Elaina urged.

The Lorence siblings went onward through the crowd.

But first they stopped at a stall selling outfits.

They looked about the stall.

Then Elaina's eyes landed on a particular outfit.

It was a white peasant blouse with puffy sleep with a long green patchy skirt.

They fell in love.

Felicity and Grace watched as their sibling's eyes sparkled at the sight on the outfit.

Then Elaina sighed and moved on.

Felicity and Grace stopped them by grabbing their shoulders.

Elaina turned around.

Their sisters were smiling.

"You want it?" Felicity asked.

Elaina looked from the outfit to their sisters and nodded.

"It's yours my friend," Grace said.

"As long as you have enough rupees!" the twins said in unison, the smuggest smirks on their faces.

Elaina was confused, but smiled anyway, taking out their purse.

"Ah, ah, ah!" Grace said. "We're buying!"

"Anything for our darling…" Felicity began. "Gender?"

<<Not today,>> Elaina signed.

"Okay then. Anything for our darling sibling!"

Elaina giggled. They watched as their sisters purchased the outfit and returned with it bagged.

"You wanna go change into it?" Grace asked.

Elaina smiled and nodded, following their sisters to a place where they could change into their new outfit.

Not much later, they had changed into their awesomeness.
They felt like running through a field and fighting a dragon.

Sans and Toriel watched as Frisk held a ribbon and ran around a maypole with it.

Then a camera snapped.

The couple blinked to readjust their eyes before turning toward the source.

Penelope stared at them from behind it, eyes wide with pure glee, Caroline smiling serenely next to her.

“Good morrow to ye!” she greeted.

“Lady Penelope, speak not so disrespectfully to the Fair Folk,” Caroline warned. “They do not take kindly to disrespect. The donkey-headed lad is but one example of a _light_ sentence…”

“wee-snaw,” Sans said, not even trying to sound like a donkey.

“Good God, tis worse than I thought…”

Then Plague Doctor Randy walked briskly up to the group.

“Caroline Violet Marlow, what did I tell you about - okay, why are Titania and Bottom eating a pizza and watching a maypole dance?”

“Perhaps, dear Father, this is all a Midsummer Night's Dream,” Caroline said with a smirk.

Sans and Toriel laughed. Randy started chuckling a bit before stopping himself short.

“That doesn’t mean you can run ahead without supervision,” he snapped.

“But what else am I supposed to do in a pretty dress if not run and twirl about?” Caroline asked.

“Stand around and look pretty.”

“Father, this may be a Renaissance Faire, but it's still the 21st century, and as such I have freedom to traipse about with reckless abandon.”

“I never said you didn’t, just prance like a unicorn where I can see you.”

“But only virgins can see unicorns.”

Randy was starting to get very annoyed.

“Sometimes I wonder if raising you to question that with which you disagree is such a good idea,” he mused.

“Would I be quite as entertaining a conversationalist had you not?” Caroline asked.

Randy stood silent.

“do you two want us to let you work it out, or are you done?” Sans asked.

“I wish for this argument to end,” Caroline said.

“Then it is ended,” Randy said.
“okay then,” Sans said definitively.

“Wait, is Levi not with you?” Toriel asked.

The group was quiet.

“Dammit,” Randy muttered.

Levi looked around, unfamiliar with his surroundings.

He was lost.

Unfortunately, he was quite certain that there were no pianos in medieval Europe.

So he chose to wander.

He wove his way in and out of the crowd, some in costume, others not.

His stomach growled.

He still had thirty bucks.

He wondered if there were any kosher options here…

Levi walked up to a man in armor - a security guard.

“Begging your pardon, good sir knight,” he said, “but do any of these vendors sell kosher food?”

The security guard thought for a moment.

“Methinks ye may find one such stall over yonder past the fount,” he said, pointing in that direction.

“My dearest thanks, sire!” Levi said, bowing and walking in the direction he was sent in.

Levi walked toward the fountain until he found the stand, surprisingly without a soul in line.

He walked up to the vendor, a round, ruddy brown-haired woman in wench garb with her hair in a messy bun - and not the attractive messy, either. The *messy* messy.

“Good morrow, madame,” he greeted. “Are your wares kosher?”

The woman smiled.

“Aye,” she said. “What’ll ye have, lad?”

Levi scanned the menu.

“I’ll take a turkey leg and a medium lemonade please,” he decided.

“Coming right up then!” the woman said.

The food was ready in no time. Levi thanked her and paid the woman for the meal and went on his merry way, humming the tune playing over the loudspeakers. Something about herbs and a shirt.

*Hear ye, hear ye! The Irish Dance Exhibition is drawing near! When the clock strikes midday, the dancing shall commence! All who wish to observe make haste toward the northern stage!*
Levi paused. An Irish dance exhibition, huh? Sounds like something Randy and Caroline would enjoy watching.

Maybe THAT was where they would be!

Levi took a bite of turkey leg and gulped down some lemonade and made followed the moving crowd.

“Fiona, come ON! The show’s about to start!”

“Hold on, Colleen, I’m almost done…”

Colleen wiggled her toes as she stood in place while her dress was being hemmed.

“And there! All done!”

The dark-eyed girl who had run into Elaina not much earlier stood from her kneeling position and returned her pincushion to her fabric sewing box. Only now she was also wearing a wig of ringlets.

“Thanks, Fia!” Colleen said. “You’re a lifesaver!”

“Cherry or peppermint?” Fiona asked teasingly.

Colleen laughed.

“Come on, we’re on in five!” Fiona said.

“Aye!” Colleen said with a salute as she and Fiona joined the other dancers on the stage.

“Wait, Colleen, your wig!”

“Ack!”

Elaina stood at the front of the crowd in front of the stage, her sisters flanking her on either side.

Then someone came on the stage and started announcing. Too bad Elaina was busy watching for Colleen and that other girl from earlier.

Then the announcer person stopped talking and a bunch of people wearing the same dress as the girl from earlier walked onto the stage. All of them had insanely curly wigs and strangely tanned legs considering their upper bodies were quite pale. And how their socks were staying up Elaina had NO idea. And they smiled despite the fact that their outfits looked like heat stroke incarnate.

But something told her that these girls were not to be trifled with. Maybe because their legs looked like they could bring a linebacker to his knees.

Then they started dancing. Their arms didn’t move, nor did their smiles or socks, but every other part of them did. It was almost frightening how similar it was to ballet with less arm movement and more highkicks.

The Irish were not ones to be trifled with.

Then the song ended. Elaina found themself applauding without having realized they were doing so.
After a few more numbers and a shoe change - to some tap-like shoes - the dancers left the stage to nigh-thunderous applause.

Felicity and Grace put their hands one Elaina’s shoulders.

“That…” Felicity started.

“Was…” Grace continued.

“AWESOME!” they both finished in unison.

“Why didn’t you TELL us you knew people who could kick like that?!” Felicity asked.

“You could have saved us a night in jail!” Grace said.

“Grace, that was a secret!” Felicity hissed.

Elaina simply giggled.

<<I only just met Colleen a few months ago, and I learned that she dances a month after that,>> they signed.

“Well, then let’s ask her to kick people in the face!” the twins said in unison.

Elaina sighed internally. Their sisters were kicked out of dance school for a reason…

“Ah, Lady Elaina! What pleasure to see you here!”

Elaina paused before realizing that someone was talking to them and not a different Elaina.

Frisk stood, with Penelope, Levi, their mother, some guy in a hoodie and a donkey mask, a princess-queen-person, and the Grim Reaper.

“I see you were enjoying the dance!” the princess-queen said.

Elaina said nothing, wondering how this stranger knew their name.

“Caroline, I don’t think she recognizes you…” Levi said.

Elaina’s eyes widened, practically sparkling.

“Whoa,” the twins said in unison.

“I thought you were someone else!” Felicity said.

“Yeah, someone older!” Grace said.

“Grace shush!” Felicity said ans she swatted her twin.

Caroline said nothing, her face serene and superior.

Everyone was quiet.

“Do I really appear that much older?” Caroline asked, more curious than creeped.

Everyone mumbled nervous affirmations.
“Is it my height?” she asked.

“Ssssort of?” Felicity admitted.

“It’s also because of your face,” Levi said. “Your face is kind of…sharp-ish?”

“All the better to cut verbally cut you apart, dear brother,” Caroline said.

“Also you act WAY too mature to be eleven,” he continued.

“Am I too mature, or is everyone else simply too immature?”

“perspective is everything,” the donkey-headed man said.

The Grim Reaper hung his head and sighed.

“Sans, please don’t encourage her,” he moaned.

“sorry randy, but she raised a great point,” Sans defended.

“I taught her everything she knows, exasperating it might be at times,” Randy sighed.

“Wait, Frisk, didn’t you bring Flowey?” Penelope said.

Frisk simply stood in place, expression indifferent. They shrugged.

“should we check ye olde lost and found?” Sans asked.

“The security guards are dressed as knights!” Levi said. “Let’s ask them if they’ve seen an angry potted plant in a jester hat!”

“Okay, but can I have a few drinks first? Maybe I’ll look more sane if I say that after I’ve had a few,” Grace said.

“Grace, no,” Felicity said.

Flowey thought he hated everything. He thought he’d seen and experienced all there was to hate.

He was wrong. So very very wrong.

Being Gaster Blasted to nothingness had nothing on being tied to a maypole in the village square.

Did Frisk even know he was there?

And if they did, did it even matter?

Flowey knew of only one thing he could do in this situation.

He screamed.

The intermingling of past and present fills you with

DETERMINATION
She Moved Through The Fair - Traditional Irish folk song

Fun Fact: I have never done Irish dance - or any kind of dance for more than a year - but by god it looks hard and I will never have the motivation to even consider trying. Here's a sample link of one of the types of Irish dance: https://youtu.be/e58jAqXq8PY
Chapter Summary

Undyne hates Canada and Sienna just wants to make it to her manicure appointment on time.

Chapter Notes

In this chapter, we will be introducing Bluejay25's OC contest winner, Jayme Silver! Here's hoping we did her justice!

Also, after this chapter, it'll be a while before Mettaton makes an appearance in-story again.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

11:37 A.M., July 4th, 20XR

It’s a beautiful day outside.

Meats are grilling.

Crackers are popping.

On days like this, kids like you…

… are celebrating your uncle’s boyfriend’s going-away party that also happens to double as their second anniversary party.

Frisk sat on the porch swing, chocolate milk in hand. Everyone was happy and laughing, but the mood was somber.

Such things happened when a good friend and family member was about to leave for a nationwide tour.

The celebrity life was one Frisk looked on with envy and relief - envy toward all the material trappings and dates with pretty people, relief that they didn’t have to put up a front for the world in order to keep their job.

But that is not the point. The point is that Mettaton would be leaving tomorrow for Los Angeles and the first stop on his tour. And for this reason he was hosting his own going-away-for-the-rest-of-the-year party - with not inconsiderable help from Papyrus.
In fact they stood next to each other right now, chatting with Alphys and Undyne about something or another.

They wondered what it was.

Frisk was filled with curiosity.

They stood up and walked over to their aunts and uncles, sipping their artificially flavored dairy product.

“So you’re going to CANADA?” Undyne asked.

“No, Undyne, I’m going to Vancouver, which is IN Canada,” Mettaton corrected. “I also happen to be stopping in Edmonton and Montreal.”

“But NONE OF THOSE ARE IN AMERICA!” Undyne screamed in exasperation.

“But WE’RE NOT IN AMERICA EITHER?” Papyrus asked.

“A-actually Papyrus, we are,” Alphys said. “We live in the state of -”

“Oh, HELLO FRISK!” Papyrus interrupted.

Frisk smiled and waved. They couldn’t sign with a handful of chocolate milk, so they chugged it down and went to set the empty glass down and join the conversation.

<<I don’t see why Canada’s so bad,>> Frisk signed. <<They’re very polite!>>

“Exactly!” Undyne said. “It’s suspicious…”

Everyone just stared at Undyne.

“Hey hey, everyone!”

They turned to see Chas, Shelby, and Asgore.

“Hey, glad you all could make it!” Mettaton greeted.

“So, um,” Asgore began, “what exactly is it that Undyne finds suspicious?”

“CANADA!” Papyrus piped.

“Okay, if ANY country is suspicious, it’s CLEARLY Sweden,” Chas claimed. “I mean, Minecraft is WAY too popular for how shitty it is. Besides, Canada has Tim Horton’s and a shortcut to Alaska.”

“Hey, Minecraft is okay!” Undyne countered.

“Exactly!” Chas said. “It’s okay, but people are OBSESSED with it like it’s the best game ever, Like what the fu -”

Chas then noticed Frisk.

“- fudge. I was TOTALLY gonna say fudge.”

<<No you weren’t,>> Frisk signed.
“Yes I was,” Chas said.
<<Was not.>>
“Was too.”
<<Was not.>>
“Was too!”
<<Was too.>>
“I was NOT and you KNOW it!”
<<Okay, if you say so.>>
Everyone stared at Chas.
“I just got Bugs Bunnied by a ten-year-old, didn’t I?” he asked.
<<I’m eleven,>> Frisk corrected.
“okay, what’s going on over here?” Sans said, holding a plate of cheesecake.
<<Undyne hates Canada and Chas is bad at lying and I’m not eleven,>> Frisk signed.
Sans’ usual blithe smile didn’t shift.
“anyway, if you guys’re looking for my dad he’s trying to reverse-engineer the cheese fountain,” he said.
“Wait, where’s Randy and Sharona and their children?” Asgore asked.
“oh, you didn’t hear?” Sans said. “they’re on vacation in new mexico. and before you ask, helen’s bringing brian and the double h’s up, traffic on 4th is being stupid as always.”
“You guys have NO idea.”
“aaaand here they are.”
Helen, Brian, Hunter, and Hannah finally showed up.
“Well, look who finally decided to show!” Undyne said as she crossed her arms.
“Said as though I can control the traffic on 4th,” Helen snarked. “If highway patrol can’t do it, I really doubt I can.”
“That bad, huh?” Chas asked sympathetically.
“Again, you guys have NO idea.”
“Well, you’re here now, so LET’S PARTY!” Mettaton cheered.

Sienna sighed as she set up her manicure appointment and parked her car outside of the Northtown Apartments.
The current investigation was one into a possible missing child case - one Sienna really thought better suited to take to the police, but the child’s parents insisted that she was the only one who could help.

Sienna didn’t believe them one bit, of course. That’s why she was here now - the child, a 13-year-old girl named Audrey Lourdes, resided here with her parents Kent and Jill Lourdes. Kent sounded relatively disinterested when they asked Sienna to find their daughter, Jill as anxious as any parent who lost their child should sound. When asked when she was last seen by anyone, they couldn’t answer.

Sienna got out of the car and activated her Magic. She made herself invisible and waited by the apartment door for someone to enter so she could follow them - having Magic that covered your every trace was a mixed blessing, after all.

At least she’d already been paid in full…

“So chas, you find ‘em yet?” Sans asked as they set up the karaoke stuff outdoors with Alphys and Papyrus.

“Depends on what ‘them’ is,” Chas said.

“the mass effect games we need for the next let’s play fridays,” Sans said.

“Hell yeah!” Chas said. “I even went out and bought Andromeda a couple weeks ago, round out the series so far!”

“okay then,” Sans said. “your shepard end up with anyone last you played?”

“So far all of my Sheps have been males who banged Liara.”

“then we’re gonna need a new save file for our femshep, aren’t we?”

“Probably.”

“you got any dlcs?”

“Try all of them, Sans.”

“i plan on it.”

“WHATEVER YOU TWO NERDS ARE TALKING ABOUT, AT LEAST MAKE SURE YOU ARE WORKING WHILE YOU DO IT!” Papyrus warned.

“mine’s been done,” Sans said, gesturing over to his part of the setup.

“Same here,” Chas added, gesturing to his part.

Papyrus sighed and finished his own part as Alphys did.

At the same time, Hunter was showing Mettaton a song Caroline had sent him.

“So she’s been sending you one every week since you came out to her?” Mettaton asked.

“Pretty much,” Hunter said with a smile. “I’d be surprised at how few of these I know, but then I remember why I don’t know them.”
“I didn’t even know two of the ones you showed me even existed,” Mettaton admitted.

“If you told Caroline that she would never let you live it down!” Hunter giggled.

“Which is why I’m not telling her,” Mettaton said, “and neither are you.”

“Never said I was gonna, though.”

“KARAOKE’S SET UP AND READY!” Papyrus called out.

“Woohoo!” Hunter cheered.

“I got a randomizer set up, and I am certain that Brian is gonna complain,” Helen said.

“You didn’t add my sister’s name in there, did you?” Chas asked, genuinely concerned.

“Chas, I had choir with Shelby back in junior year,” Helen assured. “I know exactly what she’s incapable of.”

“I am right here!” Shelby snapped.

“So it seems,” Chas said.

Shelby growled.

“I added my name to the pile,” Helen said with a smirk.

“Take it out!” Brian pleaded.

“I’ll think about it.”

Brian groaned.

Sienna waited for two hours before a person finally came.

A girl of about thirteen with dirty blonde hair in a half ponytail and blue eyes walked up to the door before pausing and running into the bushes by the door.

Sienna sighed, knowing she had to wait again for another passerby to come through the door.

Then from inside, a girl with layered shoulder-length red hair with bangs and brown eyes with plentiful freckles came out and looked about.

Audrey Lourdes. So she’d been at home the whole time?

Were Mr. and Mrs. Lourdes stupid, or just bad parents?

“Did you find it, Jayme?” Audrey asked, apparently afraid of something - of what, Sienna didn’t know.

“Yeah,” the other girl - apparently named Jayme - replied with a nod. “It’s been five hours, and at five bucks an hour…”

“Of course, I’ll have it for you by tomorrow, promise,” Audrey said.

“Okay then, follow me.”
As the two girls left, Audrey tailing Jayme, Sienna followed them undetected. Whatever had been going on, apparently Audrey and this other girl had a hand in it. But then again, it was also possible that it was something else entirely.

Sienna followed the girls behind the building, toward the dumpster, where a trash bag lay at the foot.

Audrey gasped, hands covering her mouth in shock.

Jayme put a comforting hand on her shoulder as Audrey sobbed.

“Wha - why would they - what did I ever - “

“I dunno, Audrey,” Jayme sighed. “Your parents are assholes.”

Audrey merely sobbed harder, the truth apparently too much for her to bear.

Jayme patted her shoulder.

“C’mon,” she said. “Wanna play some games at my place? My brother got Mass Effect: Andromeda last week and he’s letting me play it now.”

Audrey sniffled. “C-can we romance Vetra?”

Jayme smiled. “Heck yeah!”

As the girls walked right past Sienna without any idea of her existence, Sienna took the opportunity to see just what was inside the garbage bag Audrey’s parents had tossed out.

DVDs. Further digging revealed a laptop computer with many stickers on the cover. And even further digging revealed a cell phone - Audrey’s cell phone, judging by the Pusheen phone case (did anyone even play that game anymore?). The one her father had said she’d misplaced shortly before she’d left.

All the pieces were finally coming together…

“Aaaand it’s Hunter’s turn!” Toriel announced.

The cheers erupted as Hunter walked up to the microphone.

“Uh, hey,” she said nervously. “So I’ll be singing a song Carolien showed me, called Turn The Page, because it fits and there’s an awesome saxophone solo. Also, uh, if it’s not too much to ask, does anyone know how to play the saxophone?”

Sans stood up and took a saxophone out of his inventory. He walked up beside Hunter and put on a pair of sunglasses dramatically.

Hunter blinked. “Okay, here we go. One, two, three, and…”

Sans proved himself. Very much so. In fact, his saxophone solo kicked quite a lot of ass.

Sans smirked inwardly. First chair sax in sophomore year was bound to pay off eventually.

Hunter braced herself.

“On a long and lonesome highway~ East of Omaha~ You can listen to the engine burnin’ out its
one-note song~ You can think about the woman~ Or the girl you knew the night before~”

Frisk knew what they had to do - and that would be because they were already doing it. After all, such awesomeness DESERVED to be recorded and sent to everyone in their contacts.

“Most times you can’t hear ‘em talk~ Other times you can~ All the same old cliches~ Is that a woman or a man~ And you always seem outnumbered~ You don’t dare make a stand~”

Hunter scrunched her face at the “is that a woman or a man” part. Sometimes she wondered, but deep down she knew which she was. She KNEW, and screw anyone who tried to tell her otherwise.

“Oh, here I am~ On the road again~ There I am~ Up on the stage~ Here I go~ Playing the star again~ There I go~ Turn the page~”

Sans observed the audience - he was in a perfect position to do so, and it was something he’d always revelled in, people-watching.

All were impressed - unsurprising considering Hunter’s vocal talents. Kid’s definitely going places.

But somehow, Papyrus and Mettaton seemed more than impressed - which wasn’t to say they weren’t, it was pretty obvious that they were. But there was something else.

Sans mentally took note of their very clear - almost parental - pride as Hunter went all out on the last words of the song.

“Yeah, here I am~ On the road again~ There I am~ Up on the stage~ Here I go~ Playing the star again~”

Mettaton leaned into Papyrus’ clavicle as the song reached a crescendo. Every last word gave him pause to think.

He knew what he had to do.

“There I go~ There IIIIIII goooooo~”

Applause came before Hunter was even finished singing. She wondered if that always happened.

She found she wouldn’t much mind even if it did.

Sienna slammed the garbage bag full of Audrey’s DVDs, laptop, and cell phone in front of Kent - a muscular man with dark hair and eyes - and Jill - a wiry, high strung redhaired woman with brown eyes. It was clear where Audrey got her looks from, it seemed.

Jill’s eyes widened. Kent clenched his hands, knuckles turning white.

“What the hell is this?” Kent gritted through his teeth.

“Mr. Lourdes, in this bag is the reason your daughter disappeared,” Siena said, voice betraying no emotion. “Your reaction tells me that you are aware of this.”

“It was for her own good,” Kent growled.

“That’s what they ALL say, Mr. Lourdes,” Sienna said dismissively. “Just thank your lucky stars you merely threw out her belongings and communication methods.”
“You’re not a fucking parent, you wouldn’t understand!” Kent screamed.

“Does Audrey know why you did it?” Sienna asked. “And don’t tell me it was for her own good, because if it were you wouldn’t have thrown out her cell phone.”

“You threw out her stuff?” Jill gasped. Her face turned white. “Kent, did you - why did you -”

“Shut up, Jill,” Kent gritted.

“Mr. Lourdes, I think I know why you called me instead of the police,” Sienna said, leaning back and crossing her legs in the dining room chair in the Lourdes family apartment. “You knew that you’d thrown away Audrey’s cell phone - maybe on accident, maybe not, who knows. And once you realized that your daughter was missing, you knew that the police would be able to trace her cell phone in an attempt to look for her. You knew that when they realized it was in a dumpster, they would assume the worst and quite possibly arrest you on possible murder charges. As a private investigator, I cannot trace phones or other devices due to the illegality of such an act - a fact of which you are aware.”

Kent was turning red. Jill was speechless.

“Sir, as a private investigator I am not legally allowed to arrest you,” Sienna explained. “But if the evidence points to what I think it does, the law allows me to make a citizen’s arrest. Now tell me the truth, Mr. Lourdes - did you or did you not intentionally throw away your daughter’s cell phone?”

Kent gripped the table ledge, knuckles white.

“I did…” he hissed.

Jill gasped.

“Why?” Sienna interrogated. “And if you say it was for her own good, may I state that some parents have killed their children citing that exact reason?”

“Because she was on it after I told her not to be,” Kent explained. “I was just punishing her like a good parent should.”

Sienna and Jill both stared at the unapologetic man.

“Kent,” Jill said, “bullshit like this is EXACTLY why we’re filing for divorce.”

“I’m sure you’re making the right choice in divorcing this man Mrs. Lourdes, but why do you still live with him?” Sienna asked.

“I don’t, he threw me out and is trying to claim custody of Audrey despite his criminal record.”

“Shut UP, Jill!”

“No, Kent. The divorce will be finalized next month, and I feel that this is a VERY good reason why you should not have custody of my daughter.”

“EXCUSE ME?!”

“Goodbye, Kent. I’m going to look for Audrey myself and apologize - something YOU don’t have the decency to do.”

Jill took her purse and left the apartment.
Sienna and Kent sat in silence.

“I should go,” Sienna said casually. “The investigation is officially over, and I have an appointment with my manicurist in an hour.”

Kent attempted to grab Sienna. Sienna dodged - far too easily - and left the apartment.

She managed to catch up to Jill easily.

“What is it, Ms. Harper?” she asked.

“I think I have an idea of where your daughter might be,” Sienna said. “I saw her with a young girl around her age named Jayme?”

Jill gasped. “Jayme Silver! She’s one of Audrey’s schoolmates. She lives on the third floor with her older brother. Why do you…”

Jill’s eyes widened in recognition. “Oh my god…”

“Shall I join you?” Sienna asked. “I have a manicure appointment in an hour, you and Audrey are free to join me. I also know a social worker if you need one.”

Jill was near tears. She nodded as she wiped at her eyes.

Sienna smiled and followed her, letting her manicurist know of the two - maybe three if persuaded - extra guests.

Once again, **Justice** wins…

Papyrus and Mettaton climbed the stairs of Ebott Tower, giggling like schoolchildren committing a misdemeanor.

Well, technically they weren't schoolchildren, being in their early twenties, but trespassing is definitely a misdemeanor.

Papyrus lifted Mettaton bridal style as they jumped across the gap where the stairwell had collapsed thirty-something years earlier between the 86th and 87th floors.

When they reached the observation deck, the sun was finally starting to set.

The couple sat down and snuggled into each other.

“I STILL REMEMBER THE LAST TIME WE WERE UP HERE…” Papyrus sighed.

“You mean out first date?” Mettaton asked, a smiled on his face.

“YEP!” Papyrus answered happily.

“Has it REALLY been two years already?” Mettaton remarked.

“I KNOW! TIME PASSES FAST, DOESN’T IT?”

“It really does…”

They remained silent, content with the sensation of each other.
Well, mostly.

Mettaton was…nervous. Very much so.

But this was something he wanted - nay, NEEDED to ask. One of those “now or never” type events.

He took a deep breath.

Here goes nothing.

“Papy…?” he asked, voice quiet with nerves.

Papyrus sensed this.

“YES, HONEY?” he asked. “IS SOMETHING THE MATTER?”

Mettaton looked Papyrus in the eyes. He calmed down instantly. This question was one he wouldn’t dare ask anyone else - he would never even CONSIDER it. Hell, before Papyrus he believed that he could live without such a thing.

Mettaton cradled Papyrus’ cranium in one hand and held his lover’s hand in the other.

“I…would you be willing to…”

Oh stars above he was going to die of embarrassment before he asked this question he was sure beyond a shadow of a doubt.

Then Papyrus’ blushed in realization.

“METTATON, ARE YOU SUGGESTING WE DO THAT HERE OF ALL PLACES?”

Silence - awkward.

Mood - surprisingly not ruined.

Mettaton chuckled. “No, that wasn’t what I was - I mean, if you REALLY want to, but that wasn’t what I was trying to ask, darling!”

“OH. WELL THAT’S EMBARRASSING.”

“I won’t lie to you, I’ve seriously considered that, but that is not what I am trying to ask you.”

“THEN…WHAT IS IT?”

Aaand anxiety returns. Shit.

“Well, Papyrus, I…I’ve been thinking very hard about it since…since I first heard about the tour, and recently I have come to a decision on the matter…”

Deep breaths. Now or never.

“I…want to try…SOUL contact. With you.”

Silence.

Papyrus embraced Mettaton. Mettaton could feel him nod.
“And no, we will not be doing that here,” Mettaton explained, knowing exactly what Papyrus was going to ask. “We’re going back home for that one.”

Papyrus huffed out a laugh in response.

He released the embrace to look Mettaton in the eye.

Mettaton KNEW what SOUL contact meant to Skeletons - ever since that first night in Chicago.

They smiled at each other.

They kissed just as the fireworks started.

Flowey hardened his glare.

Isolde didn’t budge.

Flowey made his creepy face.

Isolde remained unmoved.

Flowey made the creepiest face he could.

Isolde was now tired of Flowey’s aimless shenanigans.

She scratched at his leaf and hopped down from the windowsill.

Flowey hissed as Isolde left Frisk’s bedroom, rubbing the leaf the cat had scratched.

Next time he started a staring contest, he was challenging the dog.

_The feeling that something wonderful has happened fills you with_  

_DET E R M I N A T I O N_

Chapter End Notes

Turn The Page - Bob Seger

Chapter Summary

Gaming, prank phone calls, and nothing else. Just crapping this out here.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is the shortest one so far at a whopping 9 pages.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2:18 P.M., July 17th, 20XR

It’s a stormy day outside.

Rain is falling.

Thunder is crashing.

On days like this, kids like you…

...are watching your father and his friend play video games.

Sans and Chas plugged in the appropriate wires for playing the Xbox 360 on the old television in the basement as Frisk and Yasmin watched eagerly.

“and we’re done,” Sans announced, grunting as he stood up from the concrete floor. “now all we gotta do is set up the recording system and we’re ready.”

<<How long will that take?>> Frisk asked.

“Shouldn’t be more than a few minutes with the setup we use,” Chas said with a reassuring smile. “But it’ll probably go faster if you help!”

Frisk took a moment to consider the option when the doorbell rang.

Frisk ran up the basement stairs to answer it, as was their instinct.

They answered the front door just as thunder crashed, causing the house to shake.

Caroline and Penelope were on the other side.

“Hey Frisk!” Penelope said. “Can we come inside? Rain’s great and all, but…”
“I can just reroute the lightning, you know,” Caroline pointed out. “My Magic could probably do that.”

“I still don’t wanna take any chances,” Penelope said. “What if you get hurt?”

“Penelope, I seriously doubt lightning can hurt me,” Caroline said. “If it hadn’t been for lightning I wouldn’t have found the library that day Ms. Roth threw me out of the classroom.”

“Yeah, but still…”

“Frisk, who is at the -”

Toriel entered the foyer and her eyes widened in shock.

“Frisk, get those two inside while I get some towels,” she said.

Frisk saluted and dragged them inside. Toriel quickly came back with a pair of towels.

The girls dried off and followed Frisk into the basement.

“Hey, what happened up there?” Chas asked. “Toriel sounded kinda upset.”

Caroline’s eyes widened as she grabbed at her left shoulder.

<<She wasn’t upset!>> Frisk reassured. <<She was just surprised is all! We had no idea you guys were coming over!>>

Caroline remained with hand at her left shoulder.

“What’re you guys doing?” Penelope asked.

“we’re setting up our gaming system so we can play it over here,” Sans explained. “we’re gonna record ourselves playing mass effect.”

“Cool, can we watch?” Penelope asked.

“Sure thing!” Chas said. “You’ll be on YouTube though, hope you don’t mind being seen by hundreds of thousands of people across the internet!”

“I write fanfiction that gets read by a few dozen people a week, and I made a speech in front of a few hundred of them a month and a half ago,” Caroline said with a shrug, still grasping at her shoulder. “I can take this.”

“You write fanfiction?” Chas asked.

“Mostly Sailor Moon stuff, but yeah…”

“Oh come ON, how much longer is it gonna be til you’re set up?!” Penelope whined.

“We’re almost set up,” Chas reassured. “Just a few more wires to plug in and -”

Then darkness engulfed the basement.

“God dammit,” Chas muttered.

“Hey, no fuckwords,” Caroline scolded. “There are eleven-year-olds present.”
“You just said a worse swear than I did, but okay…”

“well, looks like we can’t do much until the power’s back on,” Sans said.

Then the lights flicked back on.

The basement door opened.

“Is everybody alright?” Toriel asked. “The power just went out all over the neighborhood - why is there power down here?”

Frisk, Penelope, Sans, and Toriel all looked at Caroline.

Caroline gripped her shoulder tightly, her face betraying her shame.

“Caroline, it’s okay!” Penelope said. “Right guys?”

“sure it is,” Sans reassured. “you’re doin’ what you can to help out. that’s a good thing.”

“That it is,” Toriel said, “but you should be careful that you do not overexert yourself from using your Magic too much, Caroline.”

Caroline calmed down, if the slackened grip on her shoulder was any indication.

“I have NO idea what’s going on here,” Chas admitted.

“funny story,” Sans said. “caroline here’s a wizard. she can control electricity.”

“Speaking of control,” Toriel said slowly walking down the steps, “have you been practicing fine control of your Magic, Caroline?”

Caroline said nothing, responding by forming a butterfly the size of a fist on her outstretched palm and letting it flutter about before it fizzled out by the window.

Penelope’s eyes sparkled in excitement.

“Hey, it’s working now!” Chas cheered.

“Alright, let’s get this show on the road,” Sans announced.

A few minutes later, all was set.

Everyone sat down on the ratty old foldout couch.

Chas pressed the record button.

“hey, how’s it goin’ youtube, i’m sans,” Sans greeted.

“And I’m Chas, and today, at LONG last, we are playing the first game of the Mass Effect trilogy!” Chas announced eagerly.

“i’m pretty pumped,” Sans said as if he really did not care. “i really love sci-fi stuff, so this is gonna be great…”

“And what’s more, we have a few guests for you all!” Chas said.

“yep. we have my fiancee, tori…”
“Sans, who are you talking to?”

“the camera,” Sans said. “we are currently recording the beginning of our first video in which we film ourselves playing mass effect.”

“I am confused and intrigued,” Toriel said as she took a seat next to Sans.

“we also have with us our kid frisk,” Sans introduced.

Frisk waved,

“And two people I have never met before!” Chas said.

“I’m Penelope, I make cupcakes!”

“I’m Caroline, I hate people.”

“And with that we have our audience, now let’s begin!”

Two hours passed.

“Batarian at your two,” Caroline said.

Sans shot it.

“thanks.”

“Of course.”

Caroline was busy writing something in her notebook.

“Whatcha doin’?” Penelope asked her.

“Writing the fanfiction for this,” Caroline replied.

“oh my stars, what the hell is that?”

“Sans, I would chide you for your language if I did not agree with your sentiment,” Toriel said.

The dialogue continued.

“ewww, it looks like it belongs on one of alphys’ doujinshis…” Sans said, cringing in disgust.

“That, my friends, is a hanar,” Chas said.

“Poor Hannah, to be named after such a thing…” Caroline lamented.

Sans snickered.

More time passed.

Caroline had already written five chapters of the Mass Effect fanfiction - the idiosyncratic titling she used was themed around science fiction and war movies.

All she really needed was a title - hopefully keeping in theme with the chapter title names.
Sans and Chas had stopped playing hours ago. Toriel was making dinner - chicken and dumplings, if the smell was what she thought. A tad wintry in Caroline’s opinion, but she wasn’t complaining - even if it wasn’t the Regal Toriel’s absolutely amazing cooking, it is impolite to turn down free food when offered by your host.

She wondered briefly if chicken and dumplings was kosher. Maybe there was a recipe online for it…

“Dinner’s ready!” Toriel called.

Everyone ran upstairs - Toriel’s food had that effect on people.

Chicken and dumplings.

As she expected.

Frisk, Caroline, and Sans sat around the phone as Penelope listened to the tone.

“Hello?” Theo’s voice said from the other end.

Penelope simply shrieked as loudly as she could.

For as long as she could.

As close to the receiver as she could.

As soon as she felt it suitable to stop shrieking, she stopped abruptly.

“Thank you sir, have a nice day,” Penelope intoned using her best telemarketer impression as she hung up.

She looked about at Frisk, Caroline, and Sans. Frisk had their fingers in their ears. Sans’ eyelights were off, his head seemingly snapped backwards as though he had suffered whiplash. Caroline stared at Penelope, eyes wide.

“So,” Caroline started, “I found a song online that I’m about to send to Hunter. Anybody wanna listen in?”

“Me!” Penelope said.

Frisk nodded fiercely.

Sans shrugged as he brought his skull back into position. “sure, why not.”

Caroline smirked and pressed play.

*From Omega to Mars~  From the council to the seediest bars~  From the reaches of space~  To the pillars of asari grace~  There are battleworn batarians lacking in humility~  Turians a-braggin’ ‘bout their reach and flexibility~  The clutter of the cities spreads to the loneliest stars~*

Frisk found themself headbanging to the tune. Penelope tapped her foot. Sans snapped his fingers.

*But no matter what scars you bear~  Whatever uniform you wear~  You can fight like a krogan, run like a leopard but you’ll never be better than Commander Shepard~*
Then the song ended.

“Was that a cool song or what?” Caroline said.

“i like it,” Sans admitted. “i should join chas’ band, since they mentioned need for a vocalist still.”

<<Needs more hot alien babes,>> Frisk critiqued. <<Otherwise it was great! I give it a solid 8 out of a possible 10.>>

“I like it!” Penelope said with a smile, doing her best to not let her jealousy show. “But are you sure Hunter would like it, though? He doesn’t SEEM to have any particular preference, but still…”

Caroline touched her shoulder. “I won’t know until I send it, right?”

Caroline sent the video.

Frisk knowing smirk in Penelope’s direction went unnoticed by all save its intended target.

Penelope pouted.

Frisk snickered.

Hunter stared at the makeup on her tablet screen - all in colors that Mettaton had assured her were suitable for her. None of them ever capable of belonging to her until she left home.

She sighed. Six and a half more years of living under her mother’s tyranny, then she could be free, if the Murphy Family Tradition of removing the least favorite child as soon as legally possible was real and not just a one-off thing.

Then she got a text.

Hunter picked up her phone, having received another song.

She plugged in her headphones, the volume set just loud enough to hear but quiet enough that Linda’s movements would not go unheard.

She hummed along. Catchy…

Them Linda’s footsteps sounded, apparently angry at something or another. Hunter swiftly and silently slid her tablet into the drawer of her bedside table, laid her phone on top of the table, and took out a comic book - a carefully practiced routine learned through years of trial and error.

Linda opened Hunter’s door - failing to knock as she always did.

“Lights out, Hunter,” she said, slamming the door behind her.

Hunter sighed as she closed the Wonder Woman comic hidden inside of a Fantastic Four comic and turned off all the lights in her room.

She pictured herself walking into middle school with a skirt and makeup on.

It was a nice thought.

Maybe she could use some white or clear nail polish too…
Flowey narrowed his eyes at Frisk and whichever friends they were having a sleepover with this time - the girl ones this time. He always, ALWAYS made it a point to do so.

He glared particularly nastily at Isolde, who sat in Caroline’s lap as though it were the seat of her royal feline ancestors for thousands of years. Isolde stared back, as though she couldn't care less what he thought of the situation.

Caroline noticed and countered with a glare of her own.

Was it a glare? Her eyes were too wide. Too unblinking. Too…unseeing? Too unfeeling? What is WRONG with her?

Flowey became more uncomfortable as Caroline and Isolde glared (Is that what they’re trying to do?) at him.

Flowey growled at the cat and the Human and turned away. Seriously, he told himself he’d stop this.

He wondered if the universe had it out for him.

Asriel chuckled and shook his head at Flowey’s foolishness.

Asriel knew Karmic Retribution when he saw it.

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*Your friends and family fill you with*

**DETERM INA T I O N**

Chapter End Notes

Silly Games - Janet Kay  
COMMANDER SHEPARD - Miracle of Sound
Going Camping

Chapter Summary

Theo is an asshole, Hanna wants an RV, Caroline scares people, Hunter and Elaina are fabulous, Brian is a good friend, and Randy likes CB radios.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Incoming plot, ableist language, and elements of horror. Viewer discretion is advised.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

7:14 A.M., August 17th, 20XR

It's a beautiful day outside.

Birds are singing.

Flowers are blooming.

On days like this, kids like you…

… are getting ready to go camping with your friends.

Frisk awoke to a knock at their door.

Toriel opened the door, a still-sleeping Sans in her arms.

“It is time to wake up my child,” she said. “You remember what today is, right?”

Frisk slowly sat up, eyes bleary with exhaustion.

Toriel knew to leave instead of turning on their light - they preferred to so that themself.

Frisk slowly got up and went to turn on the light.

The brightness was hard to adjust to.

They blinked a few times, regaining their bearings from having been woken up so early on a weekend in summer.

Then it hit them the moment they saw the red hiking backpack and hiking boots.
Today was the day they were going camping with their friends and family for a week.

They put on a pair of jean shorts, some sandals, and a red tank top with two purple stripes on it.

They flung the surprisingly heavy backpack over their shoulders, picked up the boots, ran down the stairs to the living room.

They set their stuff down next to their parents’ and went to the kitchen, where Toriel was making waffles - Sans was still stuck to her like a bony sloth.

Shortly after Frisk sat at the kitchen table, the doorbell rang.

They hopped up and went to answer it.

A very sleepy-looking Helen was there, with Brian, Hunter, and Hannah in tow. Hannah was asleep in Hunter’s arms. Brian looked like he really didn’t want to be here.

Brian was wearing a Syracuse University basketball jersey and black athletic shorts with flip-flops. Hunter had on a Justice League t-shirt and jean shorts with black hi-tops. Hannah had on a pair of white jean shorts and a yellow gingham tank top with ruffled sleeves.

Frisk gestured them all inside.

<<Hey guys, we’re making waffles!>> they signed in greeting.

“Alright, that sounds cool!” Hunter said. “What do you usually put on waffles and stuff here?”

<<Butter and syrup, but I sometimes put nutella on mine! How about you guys?>>

“My mom says waffles make you fat,” Hunter said sadly. “I think she’s full of it, but I’ll just try to tell myself that she doesn’t want me to be like grandma…”

“Well, I should get back to the house,” Helen said. “Brian, remember to call me whenever you guys stop to eat if you have cell service, okay?”

“Moom!” Brian whined. “Stop treating me like a child!”

“Then don’t whine like one,” Helen said, tousling his hair.

“Oh, Helen, hello!” Toriel said, peeking out from the kitchen. “Are you really leaving so soon?”

Helen sighed. “I suppose I could stick around until Randy and Sharona get here…” she relented.

“Good!” Toriel said. “The waffles should be ready in a few minutes. Papyrus will be here in about ten or fifteen minutes, and Randy and Sharona will be here with Levi and Caroline at around nine.”

“Okay, but will Caroline be okay without Penelope?” Brian asked mockingly.

“Oh, Penelope will be joining us, along with Monica and Theo!” Toriel said, pretending not to notice Brian’s mockery.

Brian’s face fell into a frown. “Oh, joy…”

“Also, Sans’ father will be along for the ride.”

“Okay, now I’m worried that Caroline will snap and destroy us all because she’ll be too scared of the
crowd,” Brian said.

“Brian, she’s autistic, not homicidal,” Hunter said.

“And we’ll be taking two RVs,” Toriel said. “Papyrus is picking up the rental right now.”

It suddenly hit Frisk that they hadn’t talked to Elaina in a while. They decided to text her after they ate their waffles. Or maybe now, since they couldn’t wait.

Elaina was still asleep on the bed in their sisters’ motel room when their phone went off.

The sound caused Felicity to sit up with a scream of fright and Grace to literally fall off the bed.

Elaina felt around for their glasses while they turned their phone on.

Once they had their glasses on, they read the text from Frisk.

*hey elaina! ^v^

*what’s up?

*not much. hanging with my sisters.

*you?

Frisk sent a photo of a pile of backpacks and hiking boots.

*i’m going camping! ^U^*

“Ask them where to!” Felicity said suddenly. Elaina flinched, dropping their phone temporarily. When Felicity had started reading their conversation, they had NO idea.

*that sounds fun! where at?

*fallen oak state park!*

“What?!” Felicity griped. “That’s like three days away! AND there’s no cell service the deeper in you go!”

Grace said nothing, still asleep. As similar as the twins were, they had their dissimilarities. One was the fact that Grace was not a morning person.

Felicity suddenly had an idea.

She leaned toward Grace’s ear.

She licked her ear.

Grace shot up, headbutting Felicity.

The twins moaned in pain.

“Dammit, Fel, what the fuck was that?!” Grace snapped.

“I got a plan, stupid!” Felicity snapped.
“Did it have anything to do with why you LICKED MY EAR?!”

“How else was I gonna wake you up?!”

“I dunno, tell me to wake up?!”

“I literally dragged you to Elaina’s bed from our bed, and now I know what dragging around a corpse feels like!”

Elaina cleared their throat.

The twins turned toward them.

<<What are you plotting?>> they signed.

Felicity whispered something in Grace’s ear.

Grace’s eyes widened.

The twins smirked in Elaina’s direction.

“Get in the car, sibby-poo!” Felicity announced. “We’re goin’ camping!”

Caroline sat on the couch in the rented RV, reading her book of Grimm’s fairytales. It really never ceased to amaze her just how many of these stories were adapted by Disney and dumbed down to force a happy ending - well, a happier ending.

Seriously, the original version of Rapunzel was brutal. Sending a pregnant lady out into the desert and blinding her boyfriend? Who DOES that? How petty can you GET?

Caroline wore a purple halterneck top with black stripes and a black skort. She decided to wear her hiking boots the whole trip through.

Eventually, the RV started moving. Caroline glanced at the driver’s seat, where Randy sat. Sharona was in the shotgun seat next to him, and Levi had sat down next to her. Randy had on a souvenir t-shirt from Dead Horse Point State Park and khaki cargo shorts. Sharona had on a matching t-shirt in her size and jean shorts. Levi had on a blue t-shirt and jean shorts.

It took them the usual five minutes to reach Toriel’s house.

When they stopped, Caroline stayed inside the RV to read her book. She didn’t even look up when Hunter and Hannah made their way into the RV. She simply put some music on, putting in her headphones. No one’s cruel enough to try to remove someone’s headphones. Stupid, maybe, but not cruel.

Caroline deeply hoped Brian wasn’t that level of stupid.

The RV stopped once more, Caroline assuming that they had reached a stop sign or a red light or something.

They continued moving. Caroline was not sure how much time passed, but she read through all of Grimm’s fairy tales and she was now halfway through one of H.P. Lovecraft’s works - the Dunwich Horror, it seemed. She felt a tap on her shoulder. She looked up. It was Penelope.

“Hey, Care!” She greeted as she sat down. Caroline didn’t hear her, being absorbed in her book, but
she nodded in greeting nonetheless.

Randy did a double take from his place in the driver’s seat.

Never had he seen Caroline acknowledge someone while reading a book. It went against her very nature.

Randy’s eyes widened.

He had a feeling he knew what was up, but for now he had to focus on other things.

Like navigating an 8-person RV through urban highway traffic.

He took a deep breath to calm himself.

Just one more hour of this bullshit and they’d be on the rural highway - and ACTUALLY FUCKING MOVING.

<<So what excuse did you give your mom to let you come here?>> Frisk asked Hunter.

“She thinks we’ll be at summer camp the whole week,” Hunter answered. “By the way, do you, uh, have any feminine clothes I could borrow…?”

Frisk smiled and nodded. <<Caroline said she brought some old stuff of hers that would probably fit you.>>

Hunter smiled gratefully.

“Okay, everyone!” Toriel called. “We will be stopping for lunch at McDonald’s here shortly before we leave the city limits! Just a heads up!”

“I think you should wake up Hannah,” Brian said.

Hunter nodded and shook Hannah’s shoulder.

“Hannah, wake up, it’s almost noon and we’re getting lunch at McDonald’s.”

Hannah sat up and yawned. Once she regained awareness, she glanced around her.

“What kinda bus is this?” she asked.

Hunter snickered. “This is an RV, Hannah. People use them to avoid paying money to stay in hotels.”

“Indeed, recreational vehicles can be an advantage from an economic standpoint,” Gaster said. “So long as one disregards the long-term cost of fuel and possible repairs, of course.”

Hannah scrunched her face in confusion. “I dunno what any of that means, but I want an RV when I grow up.”

Gaster simply nodded. “I cannot blame you, young Hannah. RVs are very versatile and you can travel quite far in them!”

“BUT IT WAS EXPENSIVE ENOUGH JUST TO RENT ONE!” Papyrus said. “SO BUYING ONE MUST BE FINANCIAL TORTURE!”
“I don’t have a job though, I’m seven,” Hannah explained.

“Your job is to look cute,” Hunter said, tousling her sister’s hair.

“And I am GREAT at it!” Hannah said proudly.

“Will all of you SHUT UP?!” Theo shouted. “I’m TRYING to TEXT PEOPLE!”

Everyone stared at him - Papyrus through the rearview mirror since he was driving.

“Theo, if you wanted silence you shoulda gotten in the other RV,” Hunter said.

“And bunk with my sister? You’re an idiot.”

“THEO, IF YOU ARE AS DISTRACTED AS YOU CLAIM, TRY LISTENING TO MUSIC AND NOT INSULTING PEOPLE!” Papyrus scolded cheerfully.

The vehicle's occupants stared at Papyrus now. But alas, he was busy driving.

“AND NOW WE HAVE REACHED THE EXIT LEADING TO THE MCDONALD’S!”

Papyrus announced. “THEY ALSO HAVE A GAS STATION!”

“sweeet, we can stock up on some non-trail mix snacks,” Sans said.

“AND SANS, IF YOU ATTEMPT TO STEAL KETCHUP PACKETS AGAIN YOU WILL HAVE A BAD TIME!”

“bro,” Sans said, “i can’t believe you’re threatening me with my own catch phrase.”

“I WOULDN’T HAVE TO IF YOU DIDN’T STEAL KETCHUP PACKETS!”

“Both of you settle down,” Gaster warned, “or do you want to sleep in the cupboard?”

“dad, i’m pretty sure i can fit okay, and pap would probably enjoy it since he got stuck in the lab vending machine eleven times,” Sans said.

“ Without ketchup.”

Sans was silent.

“shutting up now.”

The RV was silent once more as they pulled into the parking lot.

“I have no idea what just happened,” Brian sighed.

“From what I saw, Theo was being a butt, Dr. Sans is a ketchup stealer, and Mr. Papyrus really likes vending machines,” Hunter said.

“I can’t believe I’m stuck with you losers for a whole week,” Theo grumbled as he and everyone else got out of the RV.

“And how do you think we feel being stuck with a stupid buttface?” Hannah said.

“You think we can stop by the gas station?” Levi asked. “I think they might have something for Theo’s horrible burn.”
Caroline and Penelope high fived him and each other.

Theo begged whatever god was listening that Penelope would die in a hit and run.

“Okay, we are getting some McNuggets!” Felicity announced as she turned the Malibu onto the exit ramp to the McDonald’s.

Grace gave a victorious hiss and a fist pump. Elaina smiled, eagerly awaiting some McNuggets and a chocolate milkshake.

They pulled into the lot and walked inside.

The first sight they saw made Felicity and Grace smirk at each other.

“Well, look who it is!” Felicity called out.

“What a coincidence!” Grace followed.

“How YOU doin’?” They asked together.

The ragtag crew of ever-familiar Monsters and Humans stared at the twins and Elaina in silent shock and confusion.

Sans silently held out a single ketchup packet in offering. Papyrus swatted it out of his hand without taking his confused eye sockets off the twins.

“What the heck?” Brian said.

Frisk waved happily once their own shock and confusion wore off. Elaina waved back.

“So, where you guys headed off to?” Felicity asked as though she knew exactly what was going on and was relishing the fact that she was making everyone uncomfortable.

“Certain doom,” Theo griped.

“Theodore Francis…” Monica hissed.

“Well, everything in existence is headed toward certain doom when you stop to think about it,” Caroline said dismissively. “Some are simply closer to it than others.”

Now everyone stared at Caroline.

“Oh come ON, it’s TRUE,” she defended.

Randy ran his hands down his face and sighed. “That…that doesn’t mean you can just tell people, Caroline, it scares them…”

“So?” Caroline asked, not really grasping why that was a bad thing.

“So SHUT UP!” Theo snapped.

“Theodore Francis DeMartino, just because you didn’t want to come here does NOT give you the right to RUIN everyone else’s trip!” Monica scolded. “Now you can suck it up and TRY to enjoy yourself, or I can find a way to TURN this convoy around and we WILL go home - and you WILL be GROUNDED for THE REST OF THE SUMMER.”
Theo clicked his tongue dismissively.

“Theo, quit being a jerkface and have fun,” Penelope said. “I dunno what’s gotten into you since last year, but you’ve changed. And NOT in a good way.”

“Shut up, you don’t know anything,” Theo grumbled.

“I know you’re ruining everyone’s fun for no reason,” Penelope shot back. “Now please stop it.”

Theo seemed to be weighing his options.

“Soо…” Grace started after a few minutes of tense silence. “Can we join your little camping trip?”

“we never said we were camping,” Sans said.

Felicity facepalmed. “Dagnabbit, Grace! We were supposed to ask when they ACTUALLY TOLD US!”

“Well, it’s not MY fault that the one kid started complaining!” Grace defended.

“I’m not a kid!” Theo snapped.

“Then stop acting like one!” the twins snapped in unison.

Theo crossed his arms and pouted.

More awkward silence.

“Anyway, can we tag along?” Felicity asked.

“We got snacks!” Grace added.

Everyone glanced at each other.

Elaina sat in the booth between Hunter and Caroline. They were excited. They’d never been inside an RV before - heck, they’d never even been allowed to sit in a booth seat at restaurants because Irma said so.

So this was an experience they were going to take advantage of, and damn the consequences.

Then a static sound came from the dashboard.

“HEY RANDY!” Papyrus’ staticy voice said. “THESE RECREATIONAL VEHICLES HAVE WALKIE-TALKIES IN THEM!”

Randy sighed and picked up the receiver. “The correct term is CB radio, Papyrus. They’re in case something happens to one of the vehicles and we get stranded so we can call for help.”

“Randy, you’re being a bit paranoid there, ain’tcha?” Sharona asked nervously.

“Sharona, I lived well over half my life in the Rockies, I’ve seen and experienced almost everything nature has to offer,” Randy said. “Also, CB radios are fun.” He picked up the receiver. “Okay, everyone, this is Mountain Man, asking everybody in the vehicles for their call signs, over.”

“What’s a call sign?” Papyrus asked.
“A call sign is a name you use to refer to yourself on CB radio in place of your real name,” Randy said.

“OH!” Papyrus realized. “CAN I BE COOL DUDE?”

“Sure thing,” Randy said. “Get everyone else to say their call signs into the radio.”

The sound of static, garbled and warped beyond reasonable translation, came through the radio.

Randy blinked in shock, “Sorry, I uh, didn’t catch that, over.”

More garbled and warped static.

“It’s Dread Cthulhu, awakened from his slumber in R’lyeh and come to feast on our flesh,” Caroline said. “I TOLD you guys that all existence is inevitably doomed.”

“THAT WAS DAD!” Papyrus said. “HE SAID HE WANTS TO BE KNOWN AS THE DOCTOR!”

“Well that’s certainly not a reference to anything in particular,” Randy mumbled.

Sharona picked up the receiver and spoke into it. “Lil Red here, all clear in the left lane, over!”

“Hello, everyone, this is Mama Bear and I have no idea how this works, over!” Toriel said, giggling in a sort of excitement.

“hey-o, this is skelepun, ready to have a good time, over,” Sans said.

“This is Nightingale, ready for action, over!” Monica said.

“Okay, kids, line up!” Sharona called.

The kids looked up and walked toward the CB radio.

“Howdy folks, this is Blazing Saddles ready to pee all over nature, over!” Levi announced proudly.

“Levi!” Sharona scolded.

Levi stuck out his tongue playfully.

“Violet Moon here, keep those lanterns burning bright, over,” Caroline said.

“This is Cupcake, ready to have some fun, over!” Penelope said.

“This is Starsong, and I am already having more fun than I have in a long time, over!” Hunter said.

“This is, uh…Agent H2, ready to, uh…do camping stuff, over!” Hannah said, giggling.

“This is, uh…B-Boy, over?” Brian said.

“T-this is Echo, and uh…hi?” Elaina said nervously but giddily. “O-over?”

Frisk took the receiver, having Chara choose their call sign.

“This is Angel, coming in hot, over,” they said.

“Thanks kids, and I’m guessing that’s the last of ‘em in over with you guys? Over?” Monica asked.
“right on the money, nightingale, over,” Sans said.

Theo walked up to the radio and picked up the receiver.

“This is Theo, and I hate all of you,” he said, turning around to sit back down

Then he stopped in his tracks and was forcibly pulled back to the radio.

“stop being a killjoy and pick a call sign before i pick one for you,” Sans said, left eye and hand glowing Cyan. “and believe papyrus when i say that you do not want that. capice?”

Theo struggled uselessly for a few minutes before growling at Sans. He had no choice.

He sighed into the radio.

“This is…T-bird, I guess. Can I sit down now?”

“Hey-o, T-bird, this is Cupcake, over! You gotta say over when you finish talking to the radio, over!”

“Get lost, over,” Theo snapped into the radio. “And over and over and over!”

“And over and over and what, over?”

Theo just dropped the receiver and sat down.

He REALLY wanted to go home.

What if he met someone from school while with his sister? What about his reputation? His sister was an embarrassment, even WITHOUT his friends around!

He had to think of something, fast…

Felicity and Grace sat in their Malibu, grateful that once it ran out of gas, it would be towed by one of the two RVs.

But that gratefulness was far overshadowed by the ever-present fear of Irma finding out that they had taken Elaina out to have fun. Luckily they left her a text message telling her of the benefits of such an act - all of them involving freedom to do whatever. She would be notified the day before their return.

They had taken speech and debate in high school after all, and they were DAMN good at it - at least, that’s what their three state champion awards told them.

They checked the gas levels. Still about half a tank.

Their phone rang. Someone was calling them.

Grace, being the non-driver, checked the caller ID.

A sigh of relief at the lack of the name “Irma” was the best she could muster.

She answered.

“Yeah, Toriel?”
“Hello, Grace!” Toriel greeted. “It is getting rather late, so we shall be stopping to switch drivers here shortly. I just thought you should know!”

“Okay, thanks for the heads-up! See ya in a bit!”

“Of course!”

Then Grace hung up.

She stared blankly at nothing for a moment.

“How could she tell it was me and not you?” she asked.

“Wait, she could tell it was you?” Felicity asked. “By your VOICE?”

“Yep.”

“That’s kinda hot.”

“That is kind of hot, but she’s engaged, Fel.”

“Don’t rub salt in my gay, gay wounds Gracie.”

“Then don’t get crushes on women in relationships again.”

“It was ONE TIME and she wasn’t wearing a ring!”

“They’re pulling over now.”

“Fuck.”

8:19 A.M., August 18th, 20XR

Day 2 of the Camping Trip

On the road

Frisk woke up with a squeak. The RV had hit a pothole.

Apparently Levi, Hunter, and Elaina woke up from it too.

The four children stared at each other.

“Good morning!” Levi said, gap toothed smile far too bright for so early in the morning.

Elaina looked about and laid back down, covering their head with the blanket.

Hunter sat up, stretched and yawned, and leaned back against the wall, putting in her headphones to listen to music that would help her wake up.

Frisk looked about the vehicle. A peek outside the window showed that it was raining.

Currently, Monica was driving.

Frisk was bored. Luckily, Levi always had a deck of cards with him.
They got up and tapped his shoulder.
Levi looked at them.
<<Can we play Crazy 8s?>> Frisk signed.
Levi smiled and nodded.
A few minutes later, Hunter sat with them and joined the game.
An hour after that, Elaina decided to join. At this point, Brian woke up and decided to join.
At around 11, Penelope and Caroline woke up.
By this point everyone was deciding on a movie to watch.
“Well look who finally decided to join the land of the living!” Levi teased.
“Technically I shouldn’t be alive right now, but whatever,” Caroline said with a shrug.
Everyone stared at Caroline.
“Caroline, it's too early in your life for an existential crisis,” Randy said.
“And yet I am having one.”
More silence.
“What the heck,” Brian said.
“Dude, I swear your last words will be ‘what the heck’,” Hunter teased.
“My last words will be ‘I left the money in the - AGH!’,” Levi said.
“My last words will be ‘Finally’,” Caroline said.
“Why?” Brian asked, a bit terrified.
“Why NOT?” Caroline reasoned. “Everyone on my dad’s side lives to be over 80 on average. The lone exceptions were some cousins who died in a freak accident when their car broke down on some train tracks on a foggy day and they didn’t see the train coming.”
Everyone was silent yet again, only this time from fear.
“Caroline, please don’t talk about such things while we’re driving,” Randy said.
“Yeah, wait until we’re around the campfire telling stories and stuff!” Sharona added.
Caroline’s eyes sparkled with excitement at the prospect of being able to tell stories and terrify people at the same time.
Everyone else was suddenly even more terrified than before.

In the other RV, meanwhile, Toriel was the driver, a Chevy Malibu being towed behind her.
She looked in the rearview mirror. Felicity and Grace were playing I Spy with Gaster - Grace was
It, and it was obvious that she had seen a cloud shaped like a duck. Again.

Sans was still asleep. At noon.

The next town was half an hour away. It was there where they would be stopping to eat. Four hours after that, they would find the exit they needed to turn on for the campground.

She decided that despite sans not going to bed until 11:30, he had had enough sleep.

“Can one of you try to wake Sans up?” she asked. “He has had enough sleep, I think”

Gaster got up and did so, much to Sans annoyance.

Well, it would have been, had Sans actually registered the act of someone waking him up through his sleepiness.

“Well, I’ve done all I can do,” Gaster said with a shrug before returning to his and the twins’ game of I Spy. “Okay, I spy something dead.”

“That raccoon we just passed looked squished!” Felicity said.

“Correct.”

Toriel sighed. Looks like she was going to have to carry him around. Again.

Not that she minded. It was fun. And it made her feel powerful.

Besides, she knew Sans tired easily. Maybe letting him be until they stopped for lunch wouldn’t hurt anything.

Six in the evening. The brown highway attraction sign for the exit leading to Fallen Oak State Park was within sight.

The RVs turned onto the exit ramp and drove until they reached the park entrance.

Randy’s RV was the first to reach the booth, which was being manned by a female ranger.

“Evenin’, sir,” she said. “You wanna map of the park?”

“Sure, we’ll take five,” Randy replied. “Also, we’re paying for the RV behind us. They’re with us, you see.”

“Okay then, thank you sir, have a wonderful rest of your day,” the ranger said.

“You too, ma’am.”

Randy rolled up the window and took to the radio.

“Attention everyone, this is Mountain Man, saying no need to worry about payment, I gotcha covered, over,” he said.

“COOL DUDE TO MOUNTAIN MAN, I READ YOU LOUD AND CLEAR, OVER!” Papyrus responded.

“10-4, Cool Dude, over and out.”
Randy hung up the receiver and smiled to himself.

“MAN, paying that extra 100 bucks for the CB radios was SO worth it…”

It took yet another half an hour for the vehicles to reach their campsite.

Which looked nothing like a campsite and more like an old parking lot.

Because it was an old parking lot.

Next to a trailhead.

Which led to the campground.

Which was three miles from the lot.

The vehicles parked.

Randy got out first, followed immediately by Caroline, then Levi, then Sharona, then Monica, then Penelope.

Randy cleared his throat a bit before blowing a whistle on a lanyard around his neck.

“Everybody line up!” he announced, authority and experience with this sort of thing present in his voice.

Everyone else in his RV, all of the children, exited the vehicle and entered the line.

Then the other RV pulled in.

Everyone inside it got out and entered the line.

“About time,” Randy said. “Now here’s how this is going to go down, folks. Three miles up that trail head over there is the campsite we’ll be using. There are restroom facilities attached. If you need a shower, the ones in the RV will have to do. For food, we have ways. Ways meaning we have some stuff in the fridge in the RV. Which also has a freezer. We will have two lucky volunteers stay behind to make sure no one steals the RVs. That is why we came up with call signs - so we could call for help if needed. Are there any questions? Any questions at all? Remember, there are no stupid questions, only stupid people who ignore the answers.”

Theo raised a hand.

“Yes, T-bird?”

“Can I watch the RVs?” he asked.

“I think Nightingale can answer that one for you.”

Monica took the cue to speak and cleared her throat.

“No,” she said, as if it were the final word.

“And there you have it,” Randy said. “Any other questions?”

Felicity and Grace raised their hands at the same time.
“Yes, the twin terrors?” Randy asked.

“So if there are two guys on the moon…” Felicity began.

“…and one of them killed the other with a rock…” Grace continued.

“…how screwed up would that be?” they finished in unison.

Randy blinked. Sans slow clapped.

“Yyyyeah, save the memes for the campfire,” Randy said.

“Wait, there was one more!” Grace said.

“And the would be…?”

“I have to pee.”

Randy facepalmed and pointed to the RVs.

“There are also facilities inside the RVs. Just make sure you flush. Anyone else need to go, please go now or forever hold your pee.”

Grace gave a sigh of relief and ran to the RV, followed by Brian and Hannah.

A few minutes later, all were congregated outside the RV once more.

“Okay, do we have the tents and firewood?” Randy asked.

“SIRE YES SIR!” Papyrus said, holding up three cylindrical drawstring bags.

“Okay, everyone have their backpacks? And if you do not, get them now.”

Frisk, Hunter, Hannah, and Brian went to grab their backpacks.

“Okay, that is everything,” Randy said. “Now let’s head on out, any stragglers will be left to the mountain lions.”

“Hannah, that means DON’T straggle,” Hunter chided.

“But I wanna see a mountain lion…” Hannah pouted.

“None of those here, sorry,” Sharona said. “There’s a lot of ground squirrels and chipmunks though!”

Hannah gasped and squealed in delight at the thought of feeding small mammals.

“But don’t feed them,” Randy said. “In national and state parks that's illegal.”

Hannah started pouting again, this time with an added crossing of her arms.

“Hannah, it’s illegal because feeding the animals keeps them from being able to survive in their natural habitat,” Caroline explained. “They need to be able to hunt for their own food, and they won’t learn to do that if we feed them. Do you want the animals to live and be happy?”

Hannah nodded.
“Good, now don’t feed the animals, okay?”

Hannah nodded again.

“Okay, now let’s head to the campsite, set up our tents, and relax for the rest of the day!” Sharona cheered.

Twenty minutes later, exactly four children and two adults were out of breath.

“I regret so much…” Grace wheezed.

“My back hurts…” Felicity moaned.

“Why did I agree to this?” Brian whined.

“Because you thought you could do it and you were wrong,” Hunter sighed. “We were all wrong…”

“My legs hurt…” Hannah whined.

“I hate all of you, I hope you know that!” Theo growled.

Caroline, Elaina, and Penelope stared at the straggling ones.

“Pathetic,” Caroline sneered villainously. “You call yourselves heroes? You can barely walk three miles up a gentle incline without gasping for air like dying fish!”

Frisk winced at the metaphor.

“Shut up, ya backwoods hick!” Brian snapped.

“This backwoods hick can actually walk three miles without collapsing from exhaustion,” Caroline countered. “Just take a break like the sad pansies you are and us women - who can actually do stuff - will do the heavy lifting.”

“Hey, I’m on the school soccer team, I’LL do it!” Theo bragged. “You ladies probably can’t even lift ten pounds.”

“Sorry bro, can’t hear you over the awesomeness of Ms. Toriel carrying both Sans and four packs of firewood!” Penelope said.

“What!”

Toriel was in fact carrying Sans and four packs of firewood.

<<Is Theo always this mean?>> Elaina signed to Frisk.

<<He didn’t used to be,>> Frisk signed. <<It got worse once he went to middle school.>>

<<I hope none of us gets mean in middle school…>> Elaina signed nervously.

<<Same.>>

Then they watched as Theo tried to carry a pack of firewood. The key word here being “tried”. Because he was failing.
“How much does this thing WEIGH?!” Theo griped.

“Eighteen pounds,” Toriel said, Sans still attached to her like a koala and arms loaded with more firewood.

Theo stared at Toriel like she was either crazy, hot, or both.

“back off kid, she’s mine,” Sans said, pride lacing his voice.

“You could do something too, ya know!” Theo snapped.

“okay.”

Sans used his Magic to move the wood into the fire pit.

“there.  done.  you’re welcome.”

Theo looked like he wanted to punch something.

He settled for a nearby tree.

His knuckles bled.

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11:24 A.M., August 19th, 20XR

Day 3 of the Camping Trip

Hiking

The first full day of camping would be spent hiking. Randy took pity on the ones who couldn't make the three miles and chose a simple five mile hike with a lunch stop halfway.

“Just remember that I only chose this one out of pity,” Randy said. “The rest of the hikes will be longer.”

“I hate you,” Theo growled.

“A lot of people hate me, Theo, you’re not special,” Randy dismissed.

Theo growled again.

“Wait, where are Caroline and Penelope?” Monica asked.

“They ran ahead,” Sharona said. “Those girls were really looking forward to this trip…”

Monica hummed in agreement, a contented smile on her face as she looked up at the blue sky through the trees.

Penelope and Caroline looked out at the lake from their place on the dirt trail. Penelope had her camera on a tripod - a present for her birthday this year - and was taking pictures of it. Caroline simply stared out at the water, lost in thought.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” Penelope spoke up, trying to make conversation.
Caroline nodded and hummed in agreement. “Never thought I’d see mountains like the Rockies again…”

“Yes, but I still miss Colorado,” Penelope said as she pressed the shutter. “Even if I have some bad memories there…”

“Indeed,” Caroline said. “Despite everything, it’s still home.”

“Yes.”

They were quiet once more.

“Okay, I think that should do it for here,” Penelope said. “Will you please help me put away the tripod?”

“Sure.”

And with that the girls went on their way.

Hunter was starting to feel a bit anxious. Whenever she felt anxious and had the opportunity, she put in her headphones and turned on some music.

She did just that.

She listened to the music, relaxing as she hiked along the trail.

Feeling the breeze between her skirted legs felt better that she thought it would.

She sang aloud accidentally.

“Have you got color in your cheeks~ Do you ever get that feein’ that you can’t shift the tide that sticks around like summat’s in your teeth~ Ah there’s some aces up your sleeves~ Have you no idea that you’re in deep~ I dreamt about you nearly every night this week~ How many secrets can you keep~ ‘Cause there’s this tune I’ve found that makes me think of you somehow when I play it on repeat~ Until I fall asleep~ Spilling drinks on my settee~”

Brian rolled his eyes. Who needed an iPod when your best friend filled the position just fine?

And so what if your best friend wore skirts and expressed a desire to try wearing makeup? Your best friend is your best friend, and what they like changes nothing about who they are, right?

Then Brian heard giggling.

He looked and saw Levi smiling smugly at him.

Brian stared strangely at him.

“You lllliike him~” he sang.

“Dude, he’s my best friend,” Brian said. “Of COURSE I like him.”

Levi snickered.

“What?” Brian warned.

“Nothing~” Levi sang.
Brian shook his head in confusion.

Levi was a weird one…

Gaster gazed out on the scenery before him. It was all so familiar. The only difference was the clearly defined trail.

And the season. It was winter last time he’d been through here.

Or was the snow he remembered actually dust? It was all hazy. Five hundred years plus a brief stint at nonexistence did not serve a memory well, after all.

“So little has changed, has it not?”

Gaster turned to face Toriel. He nodded.

“The more things change, the more they stay the same,” Gaster said.

“Indeed,” Toriel agreed.

The two were silent.

“Well!” Gaster piped. “Let’s carry on now, shall we?”

Toriel smiled and nodded.

Elaina turned on their music and put in their headphones.

The song that came on was catchy…

They looked around, making sure they had enough room to do as they planned.

They started to dance a bit as they walked.

A corner came up. They twirled as they turned.

They leapt over a fallen log, landing in another twirl.

Then a completely different song from the one they were dancing to registered.

Elaina nearly tripped in their confusion.

They paused and removed their headphones.

Hunter was singing.

“Video killed the radio star~  Video killed the radio star~  Pictures came and broke your heart~  Ohh-wah-oh~”

Elaina ran to catch up to Hunter.

They started dancing along to Hunter’s singing.

If Hunter was surprised, she didn’t let it show. In fact, she just increased the strength of her singing.
As soon as the song was over, Hunter and Elaina giggled from the fun they’d had.

“Wanna go again?” Hunter asked.

Elaina nodded.

“Me too, bub!” Hannah said.

Hunter giggled, “Sure, Hanners!”

Hannah cheered.

The dancing and singing went on for an unknown amount of time.

Everyone reached the site where they would eat lunch. Caroline and Penelope were the first to reach the spot, followed by Randy, Sharona, and Monica, then Hunter, Hannah, and Elaina, then Brian and Levi, then Sans, Papyrus, Gaster, and Toriel, then the twins, and lastly Theo.

“How do you guys DO that?” Grace grunted.

“Do what?” Sans asked blithely.

“WALK FOR HOWEVER LONG THAT WAS WITHOUT DYING!” Felicity yelled.

“Well, i have a girlfriend willing to carry me since i get tired easily due my health,” Sans explained. “Tori, papyrus, levi, and caroline are both freakishly tall, randy and monica have experience with this sort of thing, sharona is in kinda the same situation as i am, frisk saved an entire civilisation, i’ve heard that elaina does dance and that that sort of thing trains you to kill gracefully with nothing but your legs, and i think theo just wants to leave as soon as possible.”

The twins just blinked.

“Anyway, we got sandwiches,” Sans said. “You get your pick from between either peanut butter, nutella, roast beef, cheese, or bologna.”

The twins blinked again.

“Or you could just eat some trail mix, whatever.”

“Gimme the roast beef,” Grace demanded.

“I want the cheese,” Felicity said.

Sans rolled his eyelights and passed the twins their respective sandwiches.

The twins looked from the sandwiches to Sans then to each other.

“Did he just get our sandwiches right?” Grace asked.

“He DID, didn’t he?” Felicity asked.

“Is there a problem with that?” Sans asked.

The twins looked at him and smiled.

“Nope!” they said in unison.
Felicity and Grace felt odd. No one had ever been able to tell them apart before - of those that potentially could, their mother just didn’t care, their father disappeared years ago, and even Elaina got confused sometimes (though to their benefit, they felt guilty about it every time they did mess up).

This was going to take some getting used to…

Night fell.

After some debate about how to start the fire - and who would start it - it was decided that it would be good practice for Caroline to start it.

“Okay, young Caroline!” Gaster said. “Fire away!”

Sans and Toriel laughed. Papyrus groaned.

Caroline stared at the pile of wood.

A lightning bolt struck the pile, setting it alight instantly.

The group applauded.

Caroline bowed.

“She coulda hurt someone with that!” Theo snapped.

“Theodore, I assure you that I have been doing rigorous exercises so such things do not happen,” Caroline said. “But I’m sure that if you keep… distracting me with your complaints, that I just might slip up…”

“Caroline, just because Theo’s being a brat does not give you the right to threaten him with electrocution,” Randy sighed.

“Yes, sir,” Caroline said.

“NOTHING gives her the right to threaten me with ANYTHING!” Theo yelled.

“WHO WANTS TO TELL SOME SCARY STORIES?!” Papyrus said in a thinly-veiled attempt to prevent violence amongst the youth.

Caroline raised her hand, eager to scare people.

“OKAY, LET’S ALL GATHER AROUND THE OPEN FLAME AND BE TERRIFIED!” Papyrus cheered.

Everyone settled around the fire.

“Caroline’s first,” Levi said. “She called dibs fifteen times today.”

Caroline nodded and cleared her throat.

“The story I am about to tell you all is true. It happened near my hometown of Silverton over a hundred years ago, by the banks of the Animas River. This is a story of the fine line between fear and madness, and one woman who crossed it,” she began.
“A woman sits in her decrepit log cabin on the mountainside, marking the wall with yet another line as the day drew to an end. She no longer knew how long it had been since her husband had left - was it fifteen days? Twenty? And that was just this time. Countless times now she would hear the sound of the train whistling along the tracks below, vowing to herself that she would ride that thundering mechanical beast to a better place…”

Theo was starting to get impatient. “Are you done ye -”

“The wind howled through the cracks in the walls,” Caroline said sharply in order to silence the interruption.

A moment of silence. A gust of wind whistled through the trees.

Gasps were heard.

“It was cold,” Caroline hissed, starting to get into the mood of the story. “It was so, so cold. Winter was coming again, and the woman remembered how awful the last winter had been. She couldn’t face another. She was sure she’d never be warm again.”

Whimpers of fear. If they were this scared already, Caroline wondered how they would handle the end.

“And her husband?” Caroline continued. “He’s gone. Prospecting for quartz. Lovely, clear, crystalline quartz. ‘That’s where I’ll find the gold and silver!’ he’d told her. Alas, there was no gold, or silver. Only quartz, quartz as far as the husband’s axe could strike. And oh, how the woman HATED that rock!”

Caroline’s voice rose in volume suddenly, causing some of the group to jump.

“Every day, the woman watched for her husband, hoping that he hadn’t forgotten her. He wouldn’t. He’d promised her a life, a fine house in a city - perhaps in Denver, overlooking the plains, or San Francisco, with a view of the ocean, or even Durango, where families and children grew up happy and healthy into adulthood! He’d PROMISED her!”

Her voice had adopted a confident, hopeful tone. But something about that hope was…wrong.

“As days passed, the woman’s hope of ever seeing her husband again dwindled. Her fear of surviving without him grew, crushing her heart so that she could hear each beat pound frantically in her ears. Thump, thump, thump, thump…”

“You can stop now…” someone, who Caroline could not tell, whimpered.

“The woman tried to find her way down to the river, along whose banks the train tracks wound. But toward one direction was a steep-walled gorge, and toward the other a series of treacherous waterfalls. She could slip on the rock. Or she could be attacked by a bear…or a mountain lion … each time she tried to reach the tracks, she gave in to fear and returned to her cold, lonely cabin. She was too scared. She thought she would never leave.”

Caroline smiled, cruel and cold, as she listed the ways the woman could possibly die in the mountains.

No one was sure which was scarier - the story, or the girl telling it.

“And what of her husband? Where, oh where could he be? He should have returned to her by now. How could he just leave her here alone on this godforsaken mountain, huh?!”
The woman’s fury seemed to be flowing through Caroline as she told her story.

“He’d called this place beautiful. Beautiful. And it had been. It truly had been beautiful, with colorful wildflowers, caps of snow on the mountain peaks, the sky so beautifully blue it hurt. ‘I’ll make us rich,’ he’d said to her. ‘You’ll see.’”

The silence was as cold as the mountains she spoke of.

“That promise brought her nothing but pain now. Rich, he said. HAH! Those words were poison on her tongue, bitter and sickening.”

“P-please stop…” someone whimpered.

“The wildflowers were gone now. The snow was piling up fast, the ground about the cabin covered in the stuff. The sky was gray, heralding ever more snow to come.”

“this story is very depressing,” Sans mumbled.

“And it really is all true,” Randy added.

“Oh dear…” someone squeaked.

“The woman knew, now, that she would never have a house, where she could hang wallpaper and welcome guests and maybe even raise a family. There was nothing. Nothing but misery and isolation and broken promises. And that train whistle, mocking her from far below.”

“Please tell me you’re done now…” someone’s shaky voice begged.

“She could hear the clatter of boulders falling down the mountainside, the crack of a falling tree, the roar of a mountain lion, the cry of a young deer as it was overcome by a predator…the sounds would drive her mad. She had to go, and soon, or else she feared that she would live out the rest of her days in that godforsaken cabin, in a dark and shadowy forest of evergreens where sunlight never shone.”

The silence was broken by someone’s sobs.

“Far below her, the train passed by, carrying women and children.”

Caroline smiled, something cold inside of her coming through.

“That’s what the whistle told her…”

“Oh god…” someone whimpered.

“Come to me, it cried! I am your way out, your only hope of escape!”

Caroline’s voice became louder, more…unhinged, almost. But it would only get worse…

“The whistle’s call reawakened the hope that promise brought to her, the fear this place instilled in her. Alas, she was trapped high above in her isolated cabin, seeing no person, hearing no sound, her only company the bitter cold of the wind and sleet pelting the leather windows.”

Over the simpering and whimpering if the frightened group, the whistling of wind could be heard.

A branch creaked. Someone yelped.
“It wouldn’t be long now. Soon the creek would freeze over, then the woman would lose her only chance. She had to leave now, or else she never would. She would die if she remained here.”

The wind blew harder, whistled louder.

“In the distance, she heard the whistle…”

Then, against all reason, the sound of a train whistle was heard in the distance, causing the group to shout.

Caroline didn’t react. It was almost as if she was reliving the story, the real world nonexistent.

“Just down the creek, she told herself. It’s the only way out. I won’t get lost this time. I won’t fall into the rapids. I am NOT going to drown. I CAN get to the train! I WILL!”

Caroline was starting to…laugh. Her words became disjointed, as if she were trying to convince herself that she would survive the horrid journey she was going through inside her mind.

Her laughter became more like shrieks trying to be laughter.

And her face.

Her pupils were constricted, her silver eyes wide and mad. Her fingers ran through her long black hair, almost as though she was trying to rip it all out.

Then she let out a final shriek of agony, causing everyone else to scream in terror.

Then all was silent.

Caroline’s face returned to relative normality - except for a smile. A cold, serene smile of someone finally freed from some lifelong horror.

“The woman never did find her escape,” Caroline said, her voice breathy and tired. “But she still lives on. To this day, kayakers find her in the waterfalls and rapids of Crazy Woman Creek in La Plata County, Colorado. They say that if she’s happy, the boats on the creek will just glide right through the water like a hot knife through butter. And if she’s not, you get caught on each and every boulder as she reaches from beneath and tries to pull you down, down, DOWN into the icy waters below. When the Crazy Woman’s upset, they say, ain’t no doubt she wants you dead.”

Caroline closed her eyes, her icy smile remaining frozen to her face, her arms crossed at her chest.

The simpering sobs and other assorted sounds of fear were the only sounds.

Then came a train whistle.

Caroline shrieked in agony once more.

Everyone else screamed in utter terror.

Then Caroline laughed. Not the psychotic, shrieky laughter of the Crazy Woman. It was the laughter of someone who had just pulled the ultimate prank, or someone who just saw a troupe of dancing corgis.

Everyone just stared on in terror at the seemingly normal girl laughing before them.

Once she’d calmed down. She looked around at everyone.
She was confused.

“What’s up with you guys?” she asked.

Everyone stared at her like she was crazy.

“Oh come on, it wasn’t THAT scary!” Caroline claimed.

“I am never getting on a train,” Brian quavered.

“Are you fucking POSSESSED or something?!” Theo shouted.

“Perhaps,” Caroline said with a shrug. “They DID tell me that they found my body by Crazy Woman Creek.”

Everyone stared at her.

“You do know how someone becomes a Wizard, right?” Caroline asked.

“Aren’t they BORN Wizards?” Brian asked.

“No,” Caroline said. “They can be born with the potential, but not the actual power. To change the potential into power requires a heavy price.”

“Caroline Violet Marlow, I am begging you now, please stop,” Randy sobbed.

Caroline looked at her father. He was sobbing, face white with fear.

She looked around at everyone’s faces.

Hannah and Elaina were crying in the arms of their respective sisters. Frisk was sobbing and rocking back and forth, biting their nails. Papyrus was curled up into a ball, his bones rattling in fear. Sans and Toriel held each other close. Gaster stared at Caroline, Skeletal features laced with concern. Theo looked as though he was ready to summon an angry mob should Caroline make a wrong move.

Penelope just stared, green eyes wide and wet with tears.

Caroline’s face fell. She scrunched her face and grabbed at her left shoulder.

She started to back away.

She ran to a tent.

She didn’t come out until morning.

8:30 A.M., August 20th, 20XR

Day 4 of the Camping Trip

More hiking

Frisk woke up the next morning, remembering the night before. They looked around, seeing their friends and family, some only just waking up, some still sleeping. Frisk somehow convinced Elaina to join them in their tent, and Elaina had happily complied.
Frisk stood up and changed into a red tank top with two white stripes and a pair of jean shorts, plus their hiking boots.

They sat outside, taking in the fresh air of the mountain morning.

The sun had risen, and was peeking through the trees.

The beautiful sunrise filled them with **DETERMINATION**.

FILE: SAVE.

They stared at the sun as it continued to rise, stopping once it started to hurt a bit to look at.

They blinked a bit and looked about.

While they had been busy staring at the sunrise, everyone else had awakened.

Except for Caroline.

Frisk was worried now.

They went over to where Penelope was sitting on a log while eating a granola bar.

“What’s up Frisk?” she greeted.

<<The sun,>> Frisk replied.

Penelope looked toward the sun, squinting and using her right hand as a visor while holding the granola bar in her other hand.

“Well I’ll be darned,” Penelope said. “It really IS up.”

Frisk nodded.

“Okay, but really though, is something wrong?” Penelope asked. “You seem worried about something.”

<<Caroline’s the only one not awake, and considering what happened last night…>>

Penelope hummed sadly.

“I’m worried too,” she said. “I heard Hannah wake up crying from a nightmare, and I don’t know if it was because of the story or what, but I’m scared that everyone will avoid Caroline after last night, ya know?”

<<Do you think we should check on her?>> Frisk asked. <<You know her moods better than anyone.>>

Penelope took her seahorse chewable pendant and nibbled on it a bit. She shrugged.

After a good five or so minutes of silence and seahorse-chewing, Penelope seemed calmer than she had been.

“Let’s go check on her,” Penelope said.

Caroline lied awake in her sleeping bag, arms splayed, face sticky from crying, staring at the roof of
her tent. She hadn’t slept at all. Too much going on in her head.

The looks on everyone’s faces were unmistakeable.

Familiar.

She’d hoped she’d never see fear like that on anyone’s face ever again. Not like that.

Caroline sat up.

Her left shoulder stung.

She looked down at it and pulled down her sleeve.

She’d made it bleed again.

Caroline sighed.

At least it had clotted.

She got up to get dressed.

She felt kind of hollow.

But she knew how to handle it.

Papyrus felt quite concerned for Caroline. She looked like she had come…unhinged last night. But then she had come to rather quickly.

He had seen Frisk and Penelope get up to go check on her. That was good.

Hunter was hugging Hannah. That was also good.

Felicity and Grace were still in the RVs, having been selected to sleep in them and make sure no one stole them.

Elaina was sitting alone, listening to music. They didn't look like they were very happy.

Papyrus decided to sit next to Elaina to make them feel better. He got up and walked over to where Elaina was sitting. Elaina looked up and gave Papyrus a weak smile.

“How ARE YOU FEELING, ELAINA?” he asked.

Elaina shrugged.

“I-is C-Caroline a-always l-like that?” they asked.

“SHE IS NOT!” Papyrus answered. “BUT SHE SEEMED TO BE AWARE OF WHAT HAD COME OVER HER, SO SHE MAY VERY WELL BE BACK TO WHATEVER CONSTITUTES NORMAL FOR HER TODAY!”

“I am.”

Caroline was in fact awake. She hadn’t slept well if the shadows under her eyes were any indication, but otherwise it was possibly safe to assume that she was back to her - rather odd - definition of normal.
But she seemed…off, somehow. She wasn’t “unhinged” anymore, but something was still wrong.

A very familiar kind of wrong.

“Is everyone else ready?” Caroline asked, voice lacking inflection.

“Not yet,” Randy said, exhaustion lacing his voice (Papyrus just then realized that Randy hadn’t spoken all morning). “Just a few more minutes and we’ll get going.”

Caroline nodded and went to sit down on a log by the fire pit and read.

Penelope and Frisk sat beside Caroline in silence.

Caroline didn’t seem to notice.

As the day passed, the mood seemed to settle back into relative normalcy. Caroline was still “off”, but otherwise all was well.

But that just made Theo even more suspicious.

After what happened last night, for everyone to have settled back into a routine so quickly is just not right.

In hindsight, he should have fought harder for permission to stay home.

Penelope was a bit sad.

She had gone on ahead to take pictures, but Caroline wasn’t with her. She said she would catch up in a bit, but…

Penelope sighed and shook her head as she came to an outcropping overlooking a field of wildflowers in endless colors, mountains in the background. Would that there were snowcaps on those peaks, that would make this scene even better…

But this would do.

Penelope set up the tripod and camera, arranging the settings as best she could.

She began taking the photographs.

Sepia and other monochromatic film tones were best for taking photos of people in Penelope’s opinion, but color film was best for scenery.

Penelope saw someone unfamiliar watching her out of the corner of her eye, but they could wait.

Just a few more photos.

There.

NOW they could see who was watching them.

They turned to see a Human girl around Theo’s age, maybe a bit older, with curly brown hair and eyes. She apparently spent a bit of time outdoors if her freckles and light tan revealed anything.

“Oh, hi?” Penelope greeted cautiously.
The girl blinked.

“Oh, hi!” she said. “Sorry, I was just watching. You were really into it!”

“Heh, really?” Penelope asked. “My brother says I have a problem, but I say better a photog addiction than a drug addiction!”

The girl laughed. She was kind of pretty.

“True. But aren’t you a little young to be taking photographs with equipment like that?”

Penelope crossed her arms and glared.

“I’ll have you know that I’ll be starting middle school in a few weeks,” she said. “North Middle, same as my brother and my best friends.”

The girl brightened a bit. “No way! I’m at North Middle too! I’ll be in seventh grade.”

“So will my brother,” Penelope said.

“Really?” the girl remarked. “Maybe I know him?”

“Maybe,” Penelope said with a shrug. “His name’s Theo.”

“Theo?” the girl said. “As in, Theo DeMartino?”

“The very same.”

“He’s one my boyfriend Elliot’s friends. He said he was an only child, though…”

“Yeah, well Theo hates me for some reason,” Penelope said with a disinterested shrug.

“So what’s your name?” the girl asked. “I’m Julia. Julia McFadden. And you are?”

“Penelope. Penelope DeMartino.”

“And who’s your friend over there? Your aunt or something?”

Penelope was confused. She looked around until she saw Caroline sitting on a rock and reading a book.

Caroline looked up.

“Oh, I’m Caroline,” she said. “Caroline Marlow. Despite appearances, Penelope and I are in fact both eleven years old and entering middle school.”

“Okay, that’s crazy,” Julia admitted.

“So I’ve been told,” Caroline sighed. “And judging by the fact that he claims that Penelope doesn’t exist, I take it he’s a jerkface both in and out of school?”

“Eh, not so much a…jerkface, as someone trying to climb the social ladder,” Julia extrapolated.

“So he’s pretending to be an only child so he can become popular?”

“That’s what it looks like to me…”
“What the hell is going on here?”

The girls turned to see a very pissed off Theo.

“Speak of the devil and he shall come,” Caroline sighed.

“Heya, Theo!” Penelope said. “I was talking to Julia here! Is it true that you said you’re an only child just so you can get popular?”

Theo clenched his teeth and fists.

“Theo, your sister won’t make you unpopular, but lying about having one will,” Julia said angrily.

“I didn’t lie about that for popularity!” Theo bit. “I can get popular WITHOUT lying!”

“Then why?” Caroline asked, voice cold. “What reason would you have to lie about Penelope’s existence? Because none of the reasons I can think of are good in any way.”

“You still blame me for Dad leaving, don’t you?” Penelope asked quietly.

“You shut up,” Theo hissed.

“Theo, that’s not an answer, do you blame me for Dad leaving or not? If you can get popular without lying, then BE HONEST.”

“I SAID SHUT UP AND GO AWAY, YOU’RE EMBARRASSING ME!”

The shouting caused birds to fly out of some nearby trees.

Penelope sighed. “I’ll take that as a yes.”

Penelope put away her tripod and camera and continued hiking on.

Caroline turned to glare at Theo. How she could glare without even changing her expression, Theo didn’t know - nor did he want to, when he really thought about it.

Then she turned around and walked off after Penelope.

Theo and Julia watched silently for a moment as Caroline tried to talk to Penelope.

“Penelope’s real nice,” Julia said suddenly. “Can’t see why anyone wouldn’t like her.”

“Yeah, well you don’t live with her,” Theo dismissed.

“You know, I say the same thing about my brother, but I don’t lie and tell people he doesn’t exist.”

“You’re not going to let that go, are you?” Theo sighed.

“No,” Julia deadpanned. “Theo, you’re petty. I don’t know what you think your sister did that caused your dad to leave, or why you think it’s her fault, but you need to get over yourself.”

“He left because she’s autistic!” Theo snapped.

Julia blinked a bit before her face turned furious. “That’s IT? You think he left because she’s AUTISTIC? Are you an IDIOT?”

“I’m NOT! It’s TRUE!”
“Says who?!"

“Says EVERYONE!”

“Everyone, huh?”

“Yeah!”

“Would you say it’s the fault of everyone who’s autistic that your dad left?”

“Maybe!”

“Well then congrats, Theo. Elliot made your dad leave.”

Theo blinked. “Elliot’s not autistic. He has people skills.”

“You’d be amazed what we don’t tell you, Theo,” Julia said. “When he’s done talking to people, Elliot has to ask me if he said anything wrong because he’s afraid he may have upset someone. He gets nervous talking to people in the lunch line so I make him a lunch at my place for us to eat together. For a whole month he was nervous about you and the others eating with us because he’s not used to being popular. And you know what? Blaming people with autism for your dad’s mistakes is…” Julia shook her head. “It’s BEYOND stupid. You can’t control autism, and neither can Penelope or Elliot or anyone else with autism.”

“Are you saying it’s MY fault, then?!” Theo roared.

Julia looked at him like he was stupid. “Really, Theo? I defend your sister, and you take it as an attack against you? What is WRONG with you?”

“What’s wrong with ME?! YOU’RE the one calling me a LIAR!”

“I’m not calling you a liar, I’m just saying that you may want to consider other things besides your sister as the reason your dad left.”

Theo could say nothing to that. That only made him angrier.

“Well I can’t think of another reason, so I’m sticking with that one,” he said.

Julia just shook her head and turned to walk away.

“Whatever, Theo. Getting you to see reason is clearly not working, so I’ll just take my leave now.”

She walked a few yards, only to turn around.

“By the way, I hope you realize that I HAVE to tell Elliot what you said. Also, your crush on me? Never gonna happen. You were already doomed from the start, now you ruined any chance of even being friends anymore. Hope you’re happy. And if you blame your sister for THAT, that’s your problem. Your ignorance isn’t her fault.”

Then she turned and walked off without a goodbye.

Theo was stunned silent.

“so.”

Theo turned around and saw Sans.
“seems my bro, my kid, and my old man all made your dad leave,” the Skeleton said, as if it was a basic fact of life.

“That’s NOT what I MEANT!” Theo said.

“but it’s what you said,” Sans countered. “actions are great ‘n all, but words can destroy everything if you’re not careful.”

Sans walked on ahead. Then he turned his head back.

“so watch what you say, kid, or you’re gonna have a bad time.”

Theo blinked a few times. “Are you threatening me?” he asked.

“nah, that wasn’t a threat. it was a warning.”

Sans walked off.

Theo shook his head and decided to continue on.

No use trying to convince people of the truth…

Everyone made it back to the campground. Toriel lit the fire when sunset came.

Then Gaster took out a guitar.

“Campfire music, who’s with me?” he said.

Cheers.

“Okay then. We all go in a counterclockwise direction, singing a song. Let’s just hope some of us besides Hunter can carry a tune.”

Laughter.

Theo ignored everything, doodling in the dirt with a stick.

“So, Randy’s first then!” Gaster announced, pointing at Randy.

Randy rolled his eyes.

“Can you play me a little Rocky Mountain High, G-man?” he asked.

Gaster gave a thumbs up and began to play.

“He was born in the summer of his 27th year~ Comin’ home~ To a place he’d never been before~ He left yesterday behind him~ You might say he was born again~ You might say he found a key for every door~”

Then Monica, Penelope, Caroline, Levi, and Sans joined in for the chorus.

“And the Colorado Rocky Mountain High~ I’ve seen it rainin’ fire in the sky~ Friends around the campfire, and everybody’s high~ Rocky Mountain High~”

Theo really should have tried harder to stay home if everyone was singing the Colorado state song.
“Okay, since Sharona is physically incapable of making musical sounds with her vocal cords, Felicity is next!” Gaster announced.

Felicity nodded.

“Gaster? Play the Campfire Song Song.”

Gaster blinked and shrugged.

“Ready Grace?”

“Always, Felicity.”

“Okay! Together on four! 1, 2, 3, 4.”

“Let’s gather ’round the campfire, and sing a campfire song~ Our C-A-M-P-F-I-R-E S-O-N-G song~ And if you don’t think that we can sing it faster, then you’re wrong~ But it’ll help if~ You just sing along~”

“bum~ bum~ bum~”

Sans had interrupted, to the joy of many.

Then they did, in fact sing it faster. Hannah was having trouble keeping up, adorably.

“HANNAH!” the twins said, pointing to her for her to solo, to everyone’s laughter.

“THEO!” they said, pointing at him. He flipped them off.

“It’ll heeeelp~ It’ll heeeeeeereelp~ if you just song alooooo00000ong~ OH YEEAAAH!”

And to finish, Grace took Theo’s stick and snapped it on her knee dramatically.

Theo steamed.

“And I do believe that Miss Elaina is next?” Gaster enquired.

“M-Mister, actually,” Elaina said. “I-I’m genderfluid, and t-this is the first time I’ve ever felt m-masculine…”

Silence.

“Oh. Okay then! Fire away, lad!”

Elaina perked up. He thought of what song he could possibly want to sing. So many to choose from…

“B-Be A Man from M-Mulan?”

Applause and cheers, with a hint of laughter.

Gaster chuckled. “I can do that.”

Elaina cleared his throat.

“Let’s get down to business~ To defeat~ The huns~ Did they send me daughters~ When I asked~ For sons~”
Theo didn’t understand any of these people. Were none of these people normal?!

He sighed. This was why he lied about having a sister…

“Time is racing toward us~ Til the huns~”

“Aarrive~”

Aaand now Penelope and Caroline were joining in.

Looks like Caroline went from unhinged to just plain weird again.

“Heed my every order~ And you MIGHT~ Survive~”

Then Hunter walked up to him and sang at him.

“You’re unsuited for~ The rage of war~ So pack up~ Go home~ You’re through~ How could I~ Make a man~ Out of yoooooouu~”

And when the song ended, Caroline clapped her hands - making an insanely loud banging sound since she had surrounded them with Lightning.

Applause.

Caroline seemed nervous, but happy.

“Okay, who’s next?”

That night, the kids had all decided to stay in the tent by themselves.

Since it was the last night, they decided to discuss their favorite parts of the trip.

“My favorite part of the trip had to be the Mirror Lake hike,” Penelope said. “The pictures were AMAZING, the view was AMAZING, *everything about it* was AMAZING!”

“Uh, honestly, I kinda liked the scary story Caroline told,” Hunter admitted nervously.

“But she went crazy!” Brian claimed.

“That’s what made it fun, though!” Hunter claimed.

Brian sighed and shook his head. “You’re CRAZY, dude.”

“Um, actually,” Hunter said nervously, “I’m…not actually a…dude.”

“If you’re not a dude then what are you?” Brian asked.

“A girl,” Hunter said. “I did some studying, and the term for it is transgender. Caroline already knows, she kinda figured it out herself.”

Everyone looked at Caroline.

“Remember the bake sale, when her grandma tried to kill us?” she asked. “When everyone checked their SOULs, there were little comments below them. Hunter’s called her a ‘lady’, and I was a bit curious, so I read some stuff on it, and when I had all the info I thought I’d need, I asked her about it, and she said it was true.”
“So that’s why you started hanging around each other more,” Penelope remarked. “Because he - she trusted you with something big.”

Caroline nodded.

“And why didn’t you tell ME, huh?” Brian asked. “You’re my BEST FRIEND, so what made you think you couldn’t come out to me, or whatever the word is?”

Hunter buried her head in her pillow.

“I was scared of how you’d react…” she said, her voice muffled. “I was scared you wouldn’t wanna be friends anymore…”

Brian sighed. “Listen, dude - or dudette, or whatever you wanna be called - we’ve been friends for way too long for that to mess anything up. Your best friend is your best friend, and nothing they like can really change that. All that changes here is…okay, I dunno what’s supposed to change, but I’m pretty sure that something’s changed.”

Hunter laughed a bit then lifted faced from her pillow to smile up at Brian.

“Thanks, Bri.”

Brian turned away, blushing. “It’s nothing.”

Caroline, Penelope, Levi, Frisk, and Hannah all looked at each other and smirked.

They were SO gonna start dating in middle school.

There was just one problem.

“Would Mommy be okay with that, bub?” Hannah asked.

“I guess it’d be sis now, Hannah, but I think she’d kill me if I told her,” Hunter said.

“Do you HAVE to be sis?” Hannah asked. “I mean, bub doesn’t have to stand for bubba, it can stand for…uh…bubble gum?”

Hunter blinked, then giggled. “Well, if that’s the case, I guess I can accept it.”

“But when I talk to my friends about you, you’ll be my sister from now on, okay?”

Hunter giggled. “O-okay, just not around Mom…”

“Okay, this is starting to give me cavities,” Brian sighed.

“Hey, Elaina’s signing something!” Penelope said.

Elaina nodded in thanks.

<<So I’m genderfluid, Frisk is agender, Hunter is trans, and everyone else is cis?>> he signed.

“Seems like it,” Caroline said. “I dunno what cis means, and we’re nowhere near good cell service, so I can’t look it up on my phone.”

<<Cis means you identify with the gender you were born as, like you were born a girl and you know you’re a girl,>> Frisk explained.
“Well, not COMPLETELY,” Caroline said. “I’m a girl, but not entirely, I guess? The rest is just… there, I guess. Is there a word for that?”

<<I think the word for it is demigender, but I dunno,>> Elaina said.

“Huh, okay.”

“Wait, guys?” Levi said. “Since we’ve suddenly started a mass coming-out thing here, I think I have something to say…”

“Oh no, if you’re a girl too, Elaina and I’ll be outnumbered like crazy…”

“PFAH! Nah, I’m pretty sure I’m as manly as they come,” Levi said. “Actually, I’m gay.”

Caroline hugged Levi.

“I have a gay brother,” she whispered in reverence.

“Yep.”

“I’m gay too, actually!” Penelope said. “But for me I guess it’d be lesbian or something.”

<<I’m pansexual!>> Frisk said. <<I love everyone. Everyone is pretty and I would totally smooch everyone.>>

<<Same here!>> Elaina said.

“Um, if I like guys and I’m trans, what does that make me?” Hunter asked.

“Since you’re a girl, you’re straight,” Caroline said. “My hatred of people extends to dating as well. I will only date someone I’ve spent time with and have come to trust.”

<<So you’re demisexual!>> Elaina signed.

“I’m demi lots of stuff, it seems,” Caroline said with a shrug,

“If I’m cool with both guys and girls, but mostly girls, what does that make me?” Brian asked.

“Bi,” Levi said,

“What?”

“It means bisexual,” Levi explained. “You don’t have to like guys and girls equally, but there has to be something there for both.”

“Huh.”


“For me, I like blonds,” Brian said. “The blonder the better, I guess.”

“Does that go for girls, too?” Caroline asked with a smirk.

“Yes,” Brian said. “But the things I like in a girl are different from what I like in a guy.”

“Um, I like guys with pretty eyes, I guess,” she admitted. “Muscles are nice too. Loyalty and understanding are great too.”

“Okay, how about you, Frisk? What’s your type on the dude spectrum?”

<<DETERMINED,>> Frisk signed.

“Anything else?”

Frisk paused.

<<I’d wanna date a Monster more than a Human,>> Frisk admitted. <<Humans are physically appealing, but I wouldn’t marry one.>>

“So MK is up there with your ideal dude?” Brian asked.

<<MK is nonbinary, but yes,>> Frisk admitted with a blush.

“So you DO have a crush on MK!” Penelope realized.

Frisk hid their face in their pillow.

“It’s okay, Frisk,” Caroline reassured. “It was obvious, anyways.”

Frisk made a whining sound.

<<My ideal person has nice legs,>> Elaina signed. <<Green eyes are a must, too.>>

“I only fit ONE of those,” Penelope said. “My legs are stumpy…”

“So how about chicks?” Caroline said. “What’s your ideal girl, Brian and Penelope?”

“Blonde with a cute smile and a pretty voice,” Brian admitted.

“Convenient,” Penelope said. “I like the ladies tall.”

Everyone stared at the 4-foot-2 Penelope.

“You are a vague little midget,” Brian said.

“Okay, more specific - like way, WAY tall. And she has to be able to kick my butt. And other people’s’ butts. And she’s gotta be super-smart.”

Everyone kept staring.

“Well, THAT doesn’t describe anyone WE know at ALL,” Hunter snarked.

“Kids, lights out!” Sharona called.

Caroline smirked.

“Well, this was certainly…”

The light flicked off.

“Enlightening.”

12:30 P.M., August 21st, 20XR

Day 5 of the Camping Trip.

Homeward bound

The bags were packed. The walk between the RV and the campground was easier than it had been the first day.

A lot had happened, and Frisk had been audience to some. Not all, but some.

Ever since the scary story, Caroline seemed a bit colder. Penelope was clinging to her now more than ever, especially since yesterday’s hike.

Theo seemed even angrier leaving than he had on the way up - and that’s saying something. Frisk wasn't sure if the fact that he was ignoring Penelope was a good thing or a bad thing.

But one thing was certain.

This trip had changed everyone. For better or for worse, Frisk wasn't sure yet. But something had changed.

And that change had brought everyone closer.

Huh.

Maybe this WAS a good change.

9:21 P.M., August 22nd, 20XR

Day 6 of the Camping Trip

Home at last

Flowey lay on the floor of Frisk’s room, surrounded by candy wrappers.

He was starting to regret sneaking into the kitchen.

Then he heard the garage door open.

Now he regretted everything.

Flowey was filled with dread.

All the fun you had, all the things you’ve learned, all of it fills you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes
Going Camping - The Muppets
Do I Wanna Know - Arctic Monkeys
Video Killed The Radio Star - The Buggles
Rocky Mountain High - John Denver
The Campfire Song Song - Spongebob Squarepants
Be A Man - Mulan


Aaand that's all for the filler. Soon, these brats will be in middle school. And we ALL remember middle school...
These poor children.
School

Chapter Summary

Welcome to middle school, bitches.

We got us a dead president, band class shenanigans, Theo ignoring karma, Bruce getting a girlfriend, Levi being gay as hell, a Soriel sushi lunch date, Penelope accidentally starting shit again, alliances being formed, Frisk drawing a homicidal plant, Undyne being a good sensei, PTA shit, Caroline plotting, and the remaining OCs being introduced.

Enjoy, you wads.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter contains swear words, homophobic language, teen makeouts, and Irma.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

8:13 A.M., August 28th, 20XR

It’s a beautiful day outside.

Bells are ringing.

Children are gloomy.

On days like this, kids like you…

…are comparing schedules with your friends.

Frisk, MK, Brian, Hunter, Levi, Caroline, Penelope, Elaina, and Colleen all sat in the library waiting on the bell to ring.

Frisk wore a short-sleeved red hoodie with jean shorts and their favorite boots. They had black wristbands and the Heart Locket, and their backpack was dark blue with stars and moons on it and with charms attached - a teal skull, a purple Delta Rune, a yellow flower, and a red heart.

Brian had an orange Syracuse University t-shirt and jeans with basketball shoes.

Hunter had on a Bohemian Rhapsody t-shirt and skinny jeans with aqua high-tops. She had
“borrowed” some of Linda’s mascara today, it seemed.

Levi had a blue t-shirt over a white long-sleeved shirt with cargo shorts and blue tennis shoes.

Caroline had on a purple short-sleeved top with a black midi-skirt and brown western boots. Her hair was put into a ponytail held up by a purple scrunchie.

Penelope had on a Colorado Avalanche jersey with the number 33 on it and black jean shorts with lime green moon boots with a green and black ski cap with a Nordic design on it - one Caroline had gotten her one year for Christmas.

Elaina - feeling masculine today - wore a blue and black striped v neck t-shirt with black shorts and black converse hi-tops. He also had 4 lokai bracelets of varying styles and colors, his charm bracelet, a long necklace with a few charms on it, and some emerald and sapphire studs in. He had a gray marble beanie on too. It appeared that most of his hair has been tucked up into that beanie.

Colleen wore a green short-sleeved shirt and a gray tweed skirt with black Maryjane shoes.

Frisk pointed to the first class on their schedule - Math.

“I got that first period too,” Brian said.

“Same,” MK said.

“I got math third period,” Hunter said.

“Third for me too,” Penelope said.

Elaina held up four fingers.

“I’m with Elaina,” Levi said.

“Same here,” Caroline said.

“And here too,” Colleen said.

Then Frisk pointed to the second class on their list, English.

“I got second period English,” Penelope said.

<<Me too!>> Elaina signed.

“Same!” Levi said.

“My English is sixth period,” Caroline said.

“Mine too,” Colleen said,

“And mine!” MK said.

“I got fourth period English,” Hunter said.

“Fifth for me,” Brian said.

Frisk pointed to the third class on their list, Spanish.

Everyone stared.
“Any of us have Spanish?” Caroline asked. “I don’t.”
“I have French fifth period,” Hunter said.
“I got French second period!” MK said.
“Fifth for me too,” Colleen said.
“I have Spanish third period,” Brian said.
<<I have art instead!>> Elaina signed.
“My third period class is life science,” Caroline said.
“I got that fourth period,” Brian said.
Frisk held up six fingers, as did Elaina.
Then the bell rang.
“Well guys, this is it,” Hunter sighed. “Middle school awaits us. See you guys at lunch?”
“That’s NEVER gonna change,” Brian said with a smile.
“Yeah, let’s all meet back here for lunch!” Penelope said. “That okay with you, Caroline?”
And then the friends bid each other farewell.
They were all filled with DETERMINATION.

Linda filed her nails as she waited in the office of North Middle School.
She had PLANS.

“Mrs. Thompson, Principal Kierkegaard will see you now.”
Linda stood up and walked to the principal’s office and sat in one of the armchairs in front of the mahogany desk. The nameplate on the desk said:

Principal Opal Kierkegaard

The portly woman of slightly-above-average in her late 20s with bespectacled brown eyes and brown hair in a pixie cut in a purple dress with a black cardigan and a pearl necklace was typing away at her computer.

“Mrs. Linda Thompson,” she said. “I’ve heard a thing or two about you from Mr. McBride.”
Linda’s confidence rose.

“Have you now?” she asked.

“Mm-hmm, and from what I’ve heard, I thought I should tell you now - we already have a PTA president for this year,” Principal Muller said.
Aaand confidence down.

“What?”

“The email went out last week, Mrs. Thompson,” Principal Kierkegaard sighed. “Her name is Jill Lourdes, and her work with the PTA has proven her more than capable of filling the position until such time as her child graduates.”

“And when will that be?” Linda asked, far too quickly to be inconspicuous.

“Confidential.”

Linda’s left eye twitched.

Then the phone rang. Principal Kierkegaard answered it.

“Hello? Okay, thanks Kendra.”

The phone was hung up.

“Okay, if that’s all Mrs. Thompson, I have another parent waiting out in the lobby,” Principal Kierkegaard said.

“Wha - now wait just a minute!” Linda snapped.

Principal Kierkegaard crossed her arms and narrowed her eyes at Linda.

The women stared at each other.

Linda growled. “I don’t have time for this.”

“Neither do I,” Principal Kierkegaard sighed wearily.

Linda growled and slammed the door behind her.

Principal Kierkegaard sighed and rubbed her temples.

This was going to be a LONG year…

Hannah, Kyle, Shashi, Bruno, and Grex were in the same class again for second grade.

And even better?

They were in Mr. Guthrie’s class.

Unfortunately, Chelsea Bates was in their class.

And now she had a friend - or lackey. None of them could tell which.

“Okay everyone!” Mr. Guthrie said as he clapped his hands. “Let’s introduce each other by groups! There are five groups of five kids each, your number in on the corner of your desk! Who’s in Group 1?”

Hannah looked at the corner of her desk.

She was in Group 3.
Chelsea and her new “friend” seemed disappointed as the kids in Group 1 told their names. Then Group 2 was called. Then Group 3’s turn. Shashi stood up first. “I’m Shashi Khan, and my favorite colors are orange and gold!” she said with a smile that showed off her fangs. Then Bruno stood. “I’m Bruno Ra, and my favorite colors are red and blue!” he said before sitting down. Hannah stood, feeling confident. “I’m Hannah Thompson, and my favorite colors are yellow and blue!” Hannah sat down, somewhat proud of herself. Then Grex stood up. “Hi, I’m Grex Fuligo, and my favorite colors are fuchsia and camouflage.” “Camouflage is not a color!” Chelsea shouted. “Chelsea, move your stick to the blue can.” Chelsea scoffed then growled as she stood up to put her popsicle stick in the blue can. In Mr. Guthrie’s class, each student got a popsicle stick with their name on it. There were four cans - a green one, a blue one, a yellow one, and a red one. If your popsicle stick got put in the red can, you had to have your parents called. Then Chelsea sat back down, her new friend comforting her as they both glared at Grex. Kyle shrugged and stood up. “I’m Kyle Cooney, and my favorite colors are green and yellow!” Then Group 4 was called. And then, Group 5 - Chelsea’s group. Chelsea stood up, confident. “I’m Chelsea Bates, and my favorite colors are pink and white!” She sat down, smug as can be. Then her friend, a girl with wavy blonde hair in pigtails and brown eyes in a pink shirt and a white skirt, stood to give her name. “I’m Holly Anderson, and my favorite colors are purple and pink!” The rest of their group stated their names. They clearly didn’t want to be in the same group as
“Okay, everyone! Since it’s the first day of school how about you all get to know each other a bit more?” Mr. Guthrie said.

Hannah and her friends really didn’t want to get to know Holly - especially if she’s anything like Chelsea.

So they talked amongst themselves and chose to wait for other kids to talk to them.
“Here,” Brian said, disinterested.

A few girls stared at him.

Mrs. Bell opened her mouth to speak when police sirens passed outside the classroom window.

“Present!” MK said excitedly. “And, just call me MK! It’s easier!”

Mrs. Bell blinked a few times. How this kid had heard her, she had NO idea.

“Ookay, then, Ridley Levintson?”

“Here,” said a girl behind Frisk with thick, wavy hair with the bangs held back, length down to her shoulderblades and dyed dark green with gray eyes. She had on an oversized rainbow tie dye sweater that covered her hands completely, and she was listening to some music through a pair of headphones.

“Miranda Mosley?”

Silence.

“Miranda Mosley?”

Nothing.

Mrs. Bell sighed. “And we have our first absence of the year.”

Then Miranda walked in, revealing exactly why she was late.

Mrs. Bell stared at her in horror.

Miranda wore a pink t-shirt and a black skirt with pink kitten heels. And she had on lip gloss. Frisk marvelled at how, after all this time, Miranda Mosley STILL used too much lip gloss. She was also wearing shimmery eyeshadow and too much mascara. And oh god, the smell...

Everyone stared.

Miranda smiled smugly.

All part of her plan apparently.

“Well, I really hope you’re not Miranda Mosley, because she’s been marked absent,” Mrs. Bell said.

“What?” Miranda hissed.

“I’ll take that as a yes.”

And the roll continued.

Miranda was clearly upset as she walked over to sit by Brian.

Brian put his shirt over his face.

Frisk could now see the reason Brian preferred blondes.

Caroline and Hunter entered Mr. Nielsen’s Social Studies class.
Mr. Nielsen was a man in a brown tweed suit with a red tie, almost past his prime, with fierce blue eyes, a full head of brown hair and a very nicely groomed mustache. His oval wire-rimmed glasses only accentuated his apparent worldliness.

Caroline’s eyes widened.

“Begging your pardon, sir,” she said, “but the schedule refers to this class as belonging to Mr. Nielsen. I was not aware that Theodore Roosevelt would be teaching instead.”

Mr. Nielsen stared at Caroline.

He held out a hand.

“I think I’m gonna like you, kid.”

Caroline cautiously took the man’s hand.

“Likewise, Mr. Roosevelt.”

Caroline went to sit down, followed by Hunter.

Then the bell rang.

A few minutes passed.

Then Mr. Nielsen stood. He was surprisingly short - technically he was of average height at 5’10, but some thought he would be far taller. His presence was just that powerful.

“Hello everyone,” he greeted. “I am Mr. Nielsen, and I am the social studies teacher, as well as the student counselor for the seventh and eighth graders. I am about to call roll here shortly, so if you’re not in here by the time your name is called, absent, no excuses can save you unless signed by a parent or guardian. Now, roll call.”

Mr. Nielsen cleared his throat.

Caroline and Hunter started signing to each other.

<<Doesn't he look like Theodore Roosevelt?>> Caroline signed.

<<A little.>> Hunter admitted with a small smile.

“Kristina Ketal?” Mr. Nielsen called.

“Here!” the orange Rabbit girl called. She was sitting in front of Caroline, one of her jacket pockets wriggling.

Caroline was confused. Hunter didn’t seem to notice.

“Brooke Lane?”

“Here.”

“Caroline Marlow?”

“Present,” Caroline said.

Then Mr. Nielsen paused before sighing in exhaustion.
“Travis Martin?”

A grunt from a boy with a dark blond crew cut and dull blue eyes.

“Mr. Martin, I do believe that this is your second year in my class,” Mr. Nielsen said. “And in the sixth grade over all.”

“What can I say, old man?” Travis said. “Your class kicked my ass. And my name’s not Mr. Martin, it’s Trav.”

A few kids laughed.

Mr. Nielsen hummed.

“Well here’s to another year of it, Mr. Martin. Naomi Nivens?”

“Present.”

And the names continued.

“Hunter Thompson?”

“Here,” Hunter said.

“And that’s everyone. Now let’s line up and head to the library for our textbooks.”

Caroline brightened a bit at the mention of the word “library”.

But then again, she always did.

Elaina sat in the second chair cello seat in the orchestra classroom. Mrs. Vanderstappen stood on the conductor’s block.

He looked around. Levi and Colleen appeared to be in orchestra as well. Mrs. Vanderstappen raised her hands. All talking ceased.

“All right, since this is the first day of school, we are simply going to do roll and find our instruments if you are renting one from the school.”

“Also you may call me Mrs. V, as Mrs.Vanderstappen can be quite difficult to say early in the morning…”

That elicited some laughter.

“Now, let’s do roll!”

A litany of unrecognized named and students passed.

“Scott Foley, grade 6, trumpet.”

Elaina faintly recognized the name. He recalled this “Scott” being called up to the office quite frequently. And Colleen seemed to glare at him as he went to grab his instrument.

“Elliot Gilmore, grade 7, bass drum.”

A boy with dirty blond hair and bluish-green eyes stood and went to grab his instrument. As he
returned, he tapped his right hand to a particular beat on the case.

“Levi Goldsby, grade 6, French horn.”

Levi went to grab his instrument and returned.

A few more names, unrecognized.

“Jenson Lewis, grade 8, cello.”

The tanned boy with buzzcut black hair with sideburns down to his double-pierced earlobe held up his case.

“Elaina Lorence, grade 6. cello.”

Elaina got up and went to grab his instrument. He was almost tripped up by Scott’s outstretched leg.

Almost.

He hit Scott’s leg and briefly stumbled, but righted himself quickly and gracefully.

Scott hissed in pain and held his leg.

“What the fuck, bitch!” he hissed so Mrs. V couldn’t hear. “You a fuckin’ soccer player or some shit?!”

Elaina merely smiled as he went to grab his instrument.

“I do ballet,” he said proudly.

Scott blinked in disbelief as Elaina walked away, humming the Moonlight Sonata. A few kids who had seen applauded, included the kids in the first and second chair trumpet seats.

As Elaina sat down, Jenson, Chloe, and the fourth chair cellist high-fived him.

Wait, Chloe?

Chloe Phillips is third chair cello?

“Colleen McCann, grade 6, flute.”

Colleen smiled and went to pick up her instrument. Scott held out his other leg - the one Elaina hadn’t exacted accidental justice upon - as Colleen passed.

Colleen also nearly tripped over Scott’s outstretched leg. The only difference between her and Elaina was that Colleen went from a supposed stumble into a graceful leap.

Scott’s face was red with held back tears of pain.

“Don’t tell you do ballet too?!” he hissed.

“Irish dance,” Colleen responded as she passed by with her instrument. “Bitch.”

More applause, interspersed with laughter.

“Mrs. V, did you SEE -” Scott began angrily.
“You trying to trip other students?” Mrs. V snarked. “Yes, I did. I hope you’ve learned to not trip people in case they dance.”

The entire orchestra applauded.

“Chloe Phillips, grade 6, cello.”

Chloe stood from her place to get her instrument. It was obvious now that her hair had grown much longer - from her shoulders to her mid-back now.

“Reuben Walker, grade 8, trumpet.”

A kid with curly dark brown hair and blue eyes in the first chair trumpet seat lifted his instrument to show Mrs. V.

“Sarah Ward, grade 8, cello.”

The relaxed Human girl in the fourth chair cello seat with a black pixie cut and dark brown eyes lifted her cello case high above her head with little effort.

She set it back down and relaxed in her seat once more, resting her eyes as if to fall asleep.

“Aaand you’re free for the day,” Mrs. V said. “Spread your wings, chill, maybe take cue from Sarah Ward over here and sleep, I don’t care today. I need rest as much as you all.”

And then Mrs. V went to her desk, laid her head on it, and fell asleep.

“Is she gone?” Sarah asked suddenly.

“Out cold,” Jenson said.

“Oh thank GOD, I’ve been waiting for this moment.”

Sarah opened her case, removed the cello, and stepped inside the case, curling into a cozy little ball and falling asleep.

“Wake me up when my corpse starts to rot,” she yawned.

“You got it, boo,” Jenson said as he took a photo.

“Yo, Elaina was it?”

Elaina nodded.

“Can I have your number?” he asked. “I like to chat with all the cellists and shit. I’ll put Sarah’s number in it, too.”

Elaina nodded and passed Jenson her phone.

He had put himself in Elaina’s contacts as “nyoom”, and Sarah as “butts”. He passed his phone on and Elaina put his contact name as “dead”. When Sarah’s phone was passed, Elaina noticed that her phone was an old Tracfone.

Jenson looked at the contact name and nodded.

“Accurate,” he said. “Hey Sarah, I’m putting Elaina’s number in your phone. She’ll be ‘dead’.”
“H-he’ll, a-actually. A-at least f-for now…” Elaina said.

“Really? That’s cool,” Jenson said. “A bit weird, but cool.”

Sarah contorted her squished body to give a thumbs up. How she would get out was a mystery, but considering the ease with which she had stuffed herself inside, she would probably not have much difficulty extracting herself.

He put Chloe’s number in his and Sarah’s phones, and his and Sarah’s in Chloe’s. Chloe seemed a bit scared - considering how Alicia would almost certainly react to the sight of a boy’s number in Chloe’s phone, it was understandable.

“I can add my number,” Elaina offered her. “-s-so if it’ll help at all -”

“Yeah, Elaina’s already dead,” Jenson snarked.

“Okay,” Chloe said.

Elaina’s eyes widened. He handed Chloe his phone, and Chloe passed hers on.

When he saw Chloe’s contact name, he snickered a bit.

Somehow, Chloe being “lost” was kind of expected.

And so the cellists - Nyoom, Butts, Dead, and Lost - acquired a strange friendship.

Penelope sat sadly in a green chair at a table in Ms. Clark’s drama class.

She was the only one of her friends in first period drama.

She sighed and put her head on the desk.

She was all alone…

“Oh my gosh, Penelope!”

“Yo, Penelope!”

Penelope looked up.

She felt better already.

Marilla, Bruce, and Nicko took the seats near her. She smiled.

“Hey guys!” she said. “How was your summer?”

“It was fun!” Marilla said. “My family went to Danger Zone a few weeks ago!”

“No way!” Bruce said in amazement. “Didn’t that place just open in July?”

“Yeah! It was even more fun than advertised! What about you, Brucey?”

“HOLD up!” Penelope interrupted. “Brucey? Explain the nicknames, please?”
Bruce blushed. Marilla gave a watery giggle.

“We started dating a few days ago!” Marilla said excitedly.

Penelope gasped happily and squealed.

“I’m so HAPPY for you two!” she said.

“So what did you do this summer?” Bruce said, somewhat eager to change the subject.

“Okay, so me and Caroline went to the Renaissance Faire with Levi, and we met Frisk there unexpectedly,” Penelope began. “Then we went camping with Frisk’s family and Brian and Hunter and Hunter’s sister. We got back from camping a few days ago.”

“Really?” Marilla said. “Where did you guys go camping?”

“Fallen Oak State Park.”

“What all did you guys do?” Bruce asked.

“Well, we hiked a lot,” Penelope recounted. “We sang songs around a campfire. And Caroline told a REALLY scary story!”

“Well, since it’s Caroline, she MUST be good at it!” Marilla said.

“Psh, DUH!” Penelope said. “Caroline’s good at EVERYTHING!”

“Sounds like bias, but okay~” Marilla sang teasingly.

“Guys, teacher incoming!”

Then everyone quieted down as the teacher entered.

Theo slumped into the aisle seat in the back row of Mrs. Keiner’s seventh grade math class and crossed his arms.

He watched as students came in one by one, hoping that none of them was Julia or Elliot.

Well, that none of them was Julia. Elliot was almost definitely in pre-algebra with the smart kids.

He saw a lean girl with a mass of curly black hair and dark brown eyes with narrow black glasses in a sweater and leggings walk in with a green-eyed gray tabby Cat Monster in a blouse and sweater vest and a green skirt walk in the door.

Theo groaned inwardly. Why, WHY were Sofie Gutierrez and Moira Kittredge in his very first class of the day.

He had to look away quickly before they made eye contact.

Aaaand it was too late.

The shame ate at his gut as his former friends glared at him.

He turned away and clicked his tongue. Show them just how little he cared.

Then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw her.
Julia McFadden.

Dammit, WHY did his heart still turn somersaults whenever he saw her?! Not only was she taken, she actually HATED him now!

Julia saw him.

She made a point to sit as far away from him as possible while glaring angrily at him.

Theo groaned and banged his head on the desk.

This was going to be a long year.

“Hey, DeMartino, heard you finally ditched Girly Gilmore!”

Theo looked up at the source of the voice.

A boy with a blond crew cut and clear blue eyes in a blue football jersey was sitting in front of him.

Theo’s eyes widened.

Matt Gorman, the most popular boy in seventh grade, was actually talking to him.

AND he knew his name.


Theo smirked and sat up, putting his hands behind his head.

“Eh, yeah,” he said, intentionally loud enough for Julia to hear and glancing askance in her direction. “Hanging with that wuss and his fake girlfriend wasn’t getting me anywhere, yanno? Decided it was time for a change.”

Matt smirked. “I get that. Hey, what class you got after this?”

Theo clicked his tongue in disappointment. “French class.”

Matt shook his head in pity. “Physical science for me. Wanna compare schedules?”

“Sure.”

Theo made SURE that Julia, Sofie, and Moira were watching him.

He was going to SHOW them. He would PROVE that they weren’t worth his time. He had BETTER things to do, BETTER people to hang with.

“Heyyy, Matt! Who’s this?”

Matt and Theo looked up at the green-eyed champagne blonde in the skinny jeans and barely-within-dress-code t-shirt.

“Hey, Courtney! This is Theo, he’s on the soccer team. We’re comparing schedules.”

Theo stared at the girl.

Courtney Day, the most popular girl in seventh grade. Too bad Theo’s not into blondes, or she’d win out over Julia.
Ow. His heart stung a little at the thought of Julia.

He wondered why Julia wasn’t more popular than Courtney.

Then he remembered that Courtney made out with maybe half the football team and a third of the soccer team. Rumor had it she even slept with a member of the basketball team.

But those were just rumors. She seemed too sweet.

Then Mrs. Keiner cleared her throat.

Class had started.

Sans was VERY grateful. Like, INSANELY grateful.

Afternoon classes? He could nap on the big soft suede couch on the second floor of the university library until then.

Especially since his office was open from 9:30 to 5 most days.

And today was not one of those days.

Sometimes, PTA meetings could be a GOOD thing.

Who knew.

And it got even BETTER.

Linda Thompson wasn’t the PTA president.

The knowledge that Linda was no longer in a position of power filled Sans with DETERMI…

Wait, nope. Nevermind.

Just a burp.

Well, even without DETERMINATION, life was actually pretty okay for Comic Sans Gaster in this one moment.

Which clearly meant that something terrible was going to happen soon.

Because Sans can never go too long without something fucked up happening.

But you know what?

Sans has learned something.

Instead of dreading the future, just be content with the present.

Sounds simple enough.

But the thing about simple-sounding things?

They always end up being difficult.
Mrs. Walker’s sixth grade English classroom had tables arranged in rows on either side of the classroom with an aisle down the middle. Each table sat four students.

Frisk, Penelope, Elaina, and Bruce all sat together at the table across the aisle from Levi’s. Levi sat in the aisle seat to better communicate with them.

“Excuse me, is this seat taken?”

Levi looked up at the source of the voice. His blue eyes widened.

A boy, a bit on the chubby side, with curly dark brown hair and dark blue eyes smiled nervously back at him.

Levi nodded dumbly.

Oh dear god, was he blushing? He hoped the hell not.

The kid sat down. Next to him, Kristina and the Ridley girl from math class sat down.

Kristina’s jacket pocket wriggled and…squeaked? What the heck?

A tiny head peeked out of the pocket. A tiny black rat head with a white spot over its eye.

Ridley stared at the rat.

Kristina stared at Ridley.

“Please don’t tell anyone?” Kristina asked nervously.

Ridley replied with a thumbs up and a smile.

Kristina responded with a grateful smile of her own.

Frisk silently observed all the events at the table across the aisle from their own spot.

Penelope, Elaina, and Bruce had also watched.

Then they glanced at each other, knowing somehow that they had just witnessed…something.

That something filled them all with DETERMINATION.

FILE: SAVE.

Then Miranda walked in and sat down at the table directly behind Frisk and started doing her makeup.

Frisk gagged.

Why, oh WHY was SHE here?

They made a sound that combined a sigh and a gag.

Oh well.

At least they could watch their new OTPs interact. That’s always fun.

If only they could hear what they were saying over the boys talking enthusiastically to Miranda in
hopes of getting a date.

Brian and Colleen sat together in awkward silence in Mr. Nielsen’s class.

They had only met each other twice through mutual friends, and neither of those times did they speak to each other.

Then Colleen made a face like she had stepped in something weird.

Brian turned and saw Scott.

Scott went and sat down at a separate set of desks, moving when someone sat down at them.

It went on until he had no choice but to sit with someone.

These someones being Brian and Colleen.

Scott and Colleen glared at each other.

Scott turned to Brian.

“You her boyfriend or somethin’?” he asked, jerking her head toward Colleen at the word “her”.

“Nah, we just know each other through mutual friends,” Brian answered with an easy shrug.

“Besides, I prefer blondes.”

Colleen rolled her eyes and sighed in annoyance at the very concept of males.

“Blondes, eh?” Scott said with a smirk. “So you like Brooke Lane?”

“Who?”

“Aw, come on, you GOTTA know who THAT is!” Scott said in disbelief. “She was the second hottest girl at Upland Elementary after Alicia Berry!”

Brian narrowed his eyes.

“I went to Mountainside, and the hottest girl there was Olive Olbermann,” he said. “Second was Miranda Mosley. She woulda been higher up, but she’s annoying.”

“How so?”

“Okay, class, enough talking, let’s get to work,” Mr. Nielsen announced.

Theo sat down at a desk in Mr. Klein’s class, grateful that no one he knew had French I this period.

Then he knocked on the desk, really hoping that he hadn’t already jinxed himself.

Then he saw a familiar yellow Wyvern Monster faceplant next to him. An arm lifted the Monster by their shirt collar and set them down upright.

MK shook their head to rid themself of the shock.

“Thanks, Nicko,” they said.
Nicko merely shrugged. Theo wondered if Nicko even knew how to talk, or if they were like Frisk and just chose not to for some reason.

They sat down.

Then someone caught Theo’s eye.

She had golden blonde hair in a ponytail with ringlet curls, and brown eyes. She twirled a ringlet in her finger and sat down between Theo and MK.

The girl turned to them both and smiled.

Theo could not believe his eyes.

Scarlett Hebert, the most popular girl in school, the hottest girl in the eighth grade, had French with him.

And sat next to him.

Theo stared off into space with a blank smile on his face.

Maybe this year wouldn’t be so bad after all.

Then he heard Scarlett talk.

“Is he… okay?” she asked MK.

“ Heck if I know,” MK answered. “Last I heard of Theo he destroyed his friendships for the sake of popularity.”

“Hey, you shut up!” Theo snapped.

“Hey, man, I’m just repeating what your sister told me,” MK said.

“To the most popular girl in school, dumbass!”

“Hey, you be nice!” Scarlett scolded. “You’re really not helping your case here…Chino, was it?”

“ I-it’s Theo, actually,” Theo corrected.

“Whatever, you’re only proving his point!”

“Actually, I’m a ‘they’, ” MK corrected.

“Oh, sorry!” Scarlett apologized. “I’ll try to remember! My older sibling’s the same way, they’re a junior in high school.”

“Really? That’s cool! So’s my older sister!”

“Oh, it’s Reuben! Hey, Reuben, over here!”

Theo hit his head on his desk a few times.

He really WAS doomed.

He’d gotten on the bad side of the most popular girl in school.
Meanwhile, Chloe watched the exchange with confusion.

She shook her head, choosing to ignore them

Class was starting, anyway.

Hunter and Caroline sat next to each other in the choir room.

“So do you know what kind of voice you have?” Caroline asked. “Like are you a soprano, a mezzo soprano?”

“I… I dunno, honestly,” Hunter answered nervously. “I know that the choir teacher’ll probably be the judge of that.”

Caroline hummed.

Then the teacher, a woman in her fifties with glasses and a perm, entered the class and sat at the piano.

“Good morning everyone,” she greeted. “I’m Mrs. Caton, I’m the choir teacher here at North Middle School, and I have been for over thirty years, so chances are I’ve taught some of your parents. If some of these last named are anything to go by, I did, and I hated every minute of it, so if I compare you to one of your parents, it’d better be a good comparison. Now, first, we will be arranging you by voice type - soprano, mezzo soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, and bass. Some of the boys will end up changing their voice mid-year, so if I take you aside gentlemen, don’t be alarmed.”

Nervous laughter.

“Okay, ladies, come up here so I can judge you.”

Caroline turned to Hunter sadly.

“Sorry, they still think you’re a guy…” she said.

Hunter smiled sadly. “It’s fine, I’m still gonna do my best. Show the boys what girls are made of and stuff, you know?”

Caroline smiled proudly. “I am SO texting that one to Frisk to pass on to Mettaton, that was inspirational.”

Hunter blushed a bit.

“I’ll be right back,” Caroline said, and she stood up to endure vocal judgement.

After a few moments of warm ups and general singing, Mrs. Caton said something to each girl and sent them all back.

Caroline sat down next to Hunter.

Hunter turned to face her eagerly.

“Well?” she asked. “What’d you get?”

“I’m an alto,” Caroline answered. “But my limits are surprisingly wide, she said. My comfort zone is in the alto section.”
“Seriously?” Hunter said. “Wow. I wonder section I’ll be in…”

“Your section’ll be here in a bit.”

“Gentlemen, your turns!”

“Go show ‘em what you’re made of, princess,” Caroline said with a smile.

Hunter smiled back and nodded.

Moments of song later, Hunter returned.

“Well?” Caroline asked.

Hunter smiled. “I’m a mezzo soprano until my voice starts changing!”

“Cool,” Caroline said, high-fiving Hunter. “I’m sure there are ways of preventing that, though.”

The rest of the choir class was spent chatting, since it was the first day.

In Mr. Ochoa’s third period Advanced Earth Science classroom, a deep bluish-gray Smoke Elemental Monster in a sweater vest sat uncomfortably hunched over at a table far too small for his 6’8” stature. His three solid white eyes - two placed normally, one vertical on his forehead - were all focused on the copy of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein in his hands.

“Hey, I don’t think I’ve met you before, what’s your name?”

The Smoke Elemental glanced up at the girl with layered red hair and brown eyes and the boy with the buzz cut and piercings.

“His name’s Almsal Gakrou,” the boy with the buzz cut and piercings said. “He’s a science geek, doesn’t talk much.”

“Jenson, this is the advanced class,” the girl said as she rolled her eyes. “Everyone in here is either a science geek, or just really smart.”

“Naw, Audrey, this guy’s on a COMPLETELY different level,” Jenson assured. “Like if we’re Bulbasuars, he’s a Charizard, you know?”

Audrey blinked in confusion. “I…have NO idea what you’re talking about.”

Jenson stared blankly at Audrey. “I-I’m sorry, I have just lost ALL respect for you until you play Pokemon.”

“Are you two going to sit down or not?” Almsal asked impatiently.

Jenson and Audrey took the opportunity given them.

“So what’re you reading?” Audrey asked.

Almsal simply pointed at the spine of the book.

“Frankenstein, huh?” Jenson mused. “Is it any good?”

Almsal shrugged. “I guess. Now be quiet, class is starting.”
Audrey and Jenson opened their mouths to speak when the bell rang, signalling the start of class.

Hunter, Penelope, Bruce, Eddie, and Nicko all sat near each other in Mrs. Bell’s third period class.

“So Bruce is really dating Marilla?” Hunter asked.

“Yep!” Penelope said. Bruce blushed.

“Yeah, he’s had the BIGGEST crush on her since the Spring Concert back in fourth grade!” Eddie said with a smirk.

“Well, I’m happy for you guys!” Hunter said with a smile.

Bruce’s blush was even heavier. “Thanks…”

 “…so I tried to trip them, but their legs were like fucking concrete or some shit!”

“Dude, that’s GOTTA suck.”

Scott and Trav walked in, talking to each other like they’d known each other their whole lives.

“And then one of ‘em called me a bitch when I asked if she did ballet!” Scott complained.

“Seriously?” Trav said. “What the fuck, man.”

“Trav Martin?” Penelope asked her group. “I thought he was in seventh grade!”

“He flunked,” Hunter answered. “Caroline and I have social studies with him.”

“I’m so sorry for you, man,” Eddie said.

“So am I,” Hunter sighed. “Caroline is gonna have a LOT of fun with him. You know how much she likes making fun of people she thinks are stupid.”

“Isn’t that everyone though?” Bruce asked. “I mean, her graduation speech was just her saying how much she hates everyone.”

Penelope giggled. “I know, isn’t she great?”

“Um, excuse me, is this seat here taken?”

The group looked up at Kristina. Then at the rat peeking out of her jacket pocket.

“Sure!” Penelope said cheerfully. “You’re Kristina, right? We have English together, and so does Bruce here! I’m Penelope DeMartino!”

Bruce gave a tiny wave.

“Hey, you’re in social studies with me!” Hunter said. “I’m Hunter! It’s nice to meet you!”

“Name’s Eddie Suarez,” Eddie greeted. “And this here’s Nicko. He don’t talk much, but he makes up for it by being the action dude.”

“Bruce is an artsy guy, Eddie’s a music lover, Nicko’s sports!” Penelope explained. “Kinda like that!”
Kristina seemed slightly confused by the explanation, but shrugged in acceptance anyway.

“So, uh… who’s your friend there?” Penelope asked, pointing at Kristina’s pocket.

Kristina looked down at her pocket, the rat within looking back up at her.

“Oh, this is Dexter,” Kristina said. “If anyone asks, he doesn’t exist.”

“What doesn’t exist, huh?” Scott said with a cold smirk. “This?”

He grabbed Dexter by his tail, to Kristina’s shock. Dexter flailed around squeaking.

“Seriously, you’re STILL bringing this thing to school with you?” Scott mocked. “You’re such a loser!”

“Give him back, you…” Kristina growled.

“You BITCH!” Penelope snapped.

Scott glared at the girls. “The fuck did you just call me - OW!”

Scott held his thumb, dropping Dexter.

Nicko caught the rat with ease.

“What the fuck, the fucker just fucking BIT me!” Scott growled.

“Well, yeah, you held him by his tail!” Kristina said matter-of-factly. “Didja think he’d give you candy or something?”

Other kids laughed. Penelope high-fived Kristina.

“Dude, just let it go,” Trav said. “It’s a Monster, that was probably its plan the whole time, ya know?”

Kristina’s eyes widened.

Bruce, Eddie, and Nicko stood up. They were all easily taller than both Trav and Scott.

“You wanna run that by us again?” Eddie said.

“Yeah, that sounded a lot like racism,” Bruce said.

Scott and Trav glared as they sat down, knowing they’d lost this round.

The three boys turned to check on Kristina.

“You okay there?” Eddie asked.

Kristina nodded.

“Thanks,” she said. “Especially you, Nicko! You saved Dexter’s life!”

“Wait, I KNEW I recognized you!” Hunter said. “At the graduation ceremony! You lost Dexter, and -”

“Hunter’s mom nearly squished him!” Penelope gasped.
“Oh no, I’m so sorry!” Hunter whimpered. “My mom, she - she’s not exactly, uh -”

“Nice?”

“Decent?”

“Right in the head?”

“Yeah, that,” Hunter said.

Kristina shrugged. “You get used to it. Monsters are a very small minority at Upland Elementary, and a lot of Upland kids’ parents are in the HWC. Scott’s dad is vice president of the Ebott chapter, so he carries a lot of influence that’s not really his.”

“Well, we’re friends with Frisk freakin’ Dreemurr, Ambassador for Monster-Human Relations, so you’re in good hands with us, Kristina!” Penelope reassured with a bright smile.

Kristina smiled back.

“Oh, and that comment about candy?” she said conspiratorially.

Kristina dug into her backpack and got out some Monster Candy.

“And it’s non-licorice flavored!” she said excitedly.

The kids each grabbed a candy.

“Okay, you’re cool,” Eddie said.

Nicko just stared at the candy and put it in his pocket for later.

He had a feeling he was actually going to like math for once.

Miranda and Alicia glared at each other from across Mrs. Handel’s life science classroom, room C06.

Marilla, Colleen, Caroline and Levi observed their glare-off.

“I honestly thought that those two would end up forming an alliance against the unpopular kids,” Caroline admitted. “But now that I think about it, those two are far too stubborn and selfish to even consider such a thing.”

“Lucky for everyone else’s sanity…” Levi snarked.

Caroline hummed in agreement.

The three were silent.

“So who do you think’ll win the glare-off?” Levi asked.

“I think they’ll both lose because a third party will make an inappropriate but very hilarious joke targeting their sexual orientations,” Caroline said.

Ridley walked into the classroom and stared at the scene before her.

Then she smirked.
“So, Alicia, Miranda,” she drawled. “When can we expect your wedding invitations?”

Laughter erupted.

Alicia threw a nail file at Ridley.

It landed a foot short of its intended target.

Ridley stared at the bright pink object.

Then she picked it up and threw it in the trash while Alicia shrieked with indignation.

She went to find a seat, choosing one next to Caroline.

Ridley turned on her music and tuned out the world.

Caroline turned to her stepbrother and their friend with a smug “I told you so” smile.

Levi rolled his eyes.

“What book do you want?” he sighed, knowing exactly what she would say.

“I’ve been quite curious about Neil Gaiman’s American Gods,” Caroline said. “Think you can handle that, brother?”

“I’ll certainly try, sister,” Levi retorted.

Colleen stared between the Marlow-Goldsby stepsiblings.

“Are you two SURE you’re not twins? Because you two are pretty synced,” she said.

“Our birthdays are two months and twenty-seven days apart, and no one in the Marlow family has red hair,” Caroline explained. “But Levi is still my brother, lack of blood relation notwithstanding. I don’t even know if we share the same blood type.”

“What’s a blood type?” Marilla asked. “Is it a Human thing?”

“If it is, I’ve never heard of it until now,” Colleen admitted.

“Well, we’re in life science, so the syllabus should say when we’ll be talking about that sort of thing,” Caroline said with a shrug.

“Ewww, WHY are you FREAKS talking about BLOOD?!” Miranda said loudly while pointing at the group.

“Remember the time you made me trip over your backpack and I had to get stitches in my lip?” Caroline said. “I got curious.”

“So you ate your own BLOOD?!” Miranda said in disgust.

“Kinda had no choice since I had a huge gash in my face because of your ugly backpack, but yeah,” Caroline admitted. “It actually tasted good. My blood type is O negative, by the way.”

“What’s that about Type O Negative?” Ridley interjected.

“Oh my GOD, we have a VAMPIRE in our class!” Miranda said in mock fear. “It’s gonna suck out our blood!”
Some of the kids giggled cautiously.

“If I were to suck someone’s blood, it wouldn't be yours. I wouldn't want it to taste like fake bitch,” Caroline countered.

Laughter and shouts of amazement at the savagery.

All interrupted by the entry of the teacher with the syllabi.

Theo had already accepted that he would have enemies in every single one of his classes this year. He had also accepted that as long as he had the most popular kids in seventh grade at his side that it wouldn't matter.

So despite the fact that Julia - gorgeous, friendly, fun-loving Julia - was in his U.S. History class, he was given a confidence boost from Matt’s presence in the same class.

“Oh, so I went for the touchdown, right?” Matt says. “So the South Middle QB, some kid named Isaac or some shit, tried to stop me, so I -”

Then Matt pauses and points at the girl in the ruffly blue and white short-sleeved shirt with white shorts and blue flats with ribbons drawing something in a (rather professional-looking) sketchbook.

He holds a finger to his lips and sneaks up behind the girl, swiping her notebook from her hands.

Theo and the other kids laugh as Matt flips through the sketchbook, the laughter dying as Matt’s confusion increases.

“The fuck, there’s nothing in here,” Matt said.

“It has that in common with your head then,” the girl said. “Now please give me back my sketchbook. If you don’t, whatever. I’d just rather have it back than have you ruin it - or worse, not use it at all.”


“We know, Matt,” Fiona said, taking her sketchbook back. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I’d rather not fight anyone. I don't wanna get in trouble on the first day of school.”

“What, afraid it’ll make you more unpopular than you already are?” Matt mocked.

“Oh no, I don’t really care about that. I just really hate fighting.”

Matt stares at her for a moment before scoffing and turning away.

He sits back down in his seat.

“See that, Theo?” he asks, pointing at Fiona. “Fiona Johnson’s her name. She doesn’t even react when you mess with her. She’s like some kinda brick wall.”

“You think SHE’S no fun to mess with, I know a coupla kids in sixth grade this year who don’t react to anything. At all. You could probably STAB them and they’d just shrug it off with a snarky comment.”

Matt got a weird look on his face. “Really…even if you stab them…”
“I’m pretty damn sure,” Theo responded. He felt his gut clench. He didn’t swear much.

“But what if you shot ‘em up, huh?” Matt asked.

Theo shrugged. “Probably the same thing. I don’t even think one of ‘em can die.”

“What makes you say that?”

Theo shrugged.

Matt was silent for a moment.

Something was going through his head…

Sans left the sushi place, got on his motorcycle, and zoomed off back to work.

Then he took a shortcut off Warwick Avenue to Mountainside Elementary instead to partake in his little Tradition he shared with his fiancee, Toriel.

He hopped off his motorcycle and waltzed through the front doors, where Mr. McBride was about to leave for lunch.

“Sans!” he greeted. “You’re still dropping by here?”

“Well, just because Frisk graduated doesn’t mean Tori’s gonna leave to follow ‘em,” Sans said with a shrug.

“Oh, right, I forgot you did that!” Mr. McBride admitted. “I see you got sushi.”


“Well, don’t keep her waiting on my account!” Mr. McBride said. “I’ll see you around, Sans.”

“Later, Nathan.”

Sans walked to Toriel’s classroom door and knocked twice.

*knock knock*

“Who is there?” came the familiar voice from the other side of the door.

“Fish.”

“Fish who?”

“I fish you’d let me in, babe.”

Toriel’s laughter was clear and bright, as ever.

She answered the door with a bright, beautiful smile followed by a kiss as always and led Sans inside.

“So, sushi this time?” Toriel asked.

“Yep,” Sans replied. “I gotcha some cali rolls, and i got me some unagi.”
“Aah, you remembered I liked them…”

Sans took her left hand and kissed her engagement ring.

“only the best for my girl…” he said huskily.

Sans chuckled a bit at her blush. To know that he could do that (and more) to such a dignified woman filled him with pride.

That such a woman even glanced his way filled him with pride.

Really, everything about Toriel filled him with indescribable pride and joy.

The couple settled into their daily routine with ease.

“so you got some good kids this year?” Sans asked.

“Sans, I have good kids every year, you know this,” Toriel said with a smile.

“yeah, but last year’s group was pretty unforgettable,” Sans claimed.

Toriel sighed with a smile. “Well, when you consider all that those children accomplished…”

“see?” Sans said. “they got two evil old ladies arrested - three if you count mrs. miller.”

“Mrs. Schultz wasn’t so innocent either,” Toriel recalled.

“yanno tori, you could probably be a good principal.”

Toriel blinked in incredulity. “Me? Really?”

“yeah. i mean, you're already the best teacher ever, but that’s just for half a group of fifth graders. if you’re a principal you can teach everyone.”

“Sans, that is really not how it works.”

“i know, babe, but i can dream.”

“Speaking of dreams, dearest, we have yet to do anything with that janitor outfit of yours…” Toriel said seductively.

“but i already bought paint,” Sans said.

Toriel bit her lip and smiled, eyes hooded.

Sans’ eyelights widened and cyan exploded across his face. “oh. okay then. that-that’s nice. that’s real nice.”

Toriel giggled. That she could make someone so eloquent turn into a stuttering mass (and more) filled her with pride.

“Ah, the students should be returning soon,” Toriel said.

“you kicking me out then?” Sans asked. “okay then. at least we’ve made some plans for this weekend, right toots?”

“Wait, have we - OH!”
Sans chuckled deeply as Toriel blushed madly and sputtered a bit.

“might wanna turn that off before the kids get here, babe,” he said. “love ya.”

He blew her a kiss with a wink and left.

Toriel whined a bit and hid her head in her arms.

“That man is going to be the death of me and I can’t bring myself to not be okay with that…”

“Hey, isn’t that -?”

“Yeah, Irma Lorence.”

“You gotta wonder what she’s doing here.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, she WAS a state legislator’s secretary, but now she’s working for the governor!”

“Yeah, it IS kind of suspicious.”

“Shut up, she’ll hear you!”

“No she won’t, look at her! She’s just doing her makeup!”

“Makeup? I thought it was face paint.”

Irma reapplied her lipstick as the two women laughed. She knew what people thought, she just couldn’t bring herself to feel anything about it.

But she was pretty offended by the jab at her makeup. She was NOTHING without it.

“But how DID Irma get promoted? I don’t think I’ve ever seen her work.”

“She does a lot behind the scenes, if you know what I mean…”

“I really don’t.”

“Really? Fine, I’ll say it - she sleeps her way up.”

“Oh, right! Everyone knows that, though.”

Of course they did. It’s the only reason Irma hadn’t killed someone here yet.

Besides the fact that it could possibly raise suspicion.

Irma was starting to get a bit bored.

Maybe she’d stop by the PTA meeting. Those are always good to watch, scout for possible ways up.

One of the things Caroline loved most about middle school besides the more difficult courses was, of course, the library. Namely, that it was far bigger than the one at the elementary school.

By that logic, the one at the high school should be even bigger - an obvious assumption when she
thought about it. And the college library must be *massive* when one applies that logic. Then what type of facility would have the largest library?

Caroline thought on this as she read the first book in the theme for this year - she decided to read all of her books by date of publication in chronological order, and she and her father found that The Epic of Gilgamesh was the oldest in both of their collections.

But the library of North Middle School was a good bit larger than that of Mountainside Elementary. And in place of six colorful beanbag chairs were three couches with pillows and a plush version of the school’s mascot, the badger, the size of an adult Human male.

Caroline sat curled up in a couch reading her book, Penelope leaning into the opposite arm of the couch with a book of her own - her being a cupcake cookbook where she was marking recipes.

Then a Smoke Elemental Monster sat in one of the other couches and opened their book.

Caroline glanced up briefly from her book.

The Monster did as well.

The bookworms nodded in acknowledgement.

“Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein,” Caroline said. “I’m not sure when I’ll read that one, but I do have it.”

“And you have the Epic of Gilgamesh,” the Smoke Monster said. “I have that one, but I’m not sure where it could be.”

“Understandable,” Caroline sighed. “My father and I moved here two years ago, and I’m still finding some books in boxes in the attic.”

“Hmm.”

The group was silent.

“If you wanna ask her out then just say so!” Penelope said.

“I have not expressed desire for emotional attachment to others, nor do I have any desire to,” the Smoke Monster said.

“Agreed,” Caroline said. “Maybe with someone I really really trust, but otherwise people are people, and I hate people.”

“People are quite foolish,” the Monster said. “Anyone so easily swayed by emotions is quite tiresome to be around, even dangerous in the wrong situation.”

“I agree, but in the right ones they can be entertaining,” Caroline stipulated.

“To each their own, Human,” the Smoke Monster said with a shrug.

“I have a name,” Caroline said. “And it’s Caroline Marlow. I detest being referred to as a Human.”

“Okay then,” the Monster said with a shrug. “Almsal Gakrou. Who might your friend be?”

Penelope perked up a bit. “I’m Penelope DeMartino. I don’t think we have any classes with you…”
“It might be because I’m in eighth grade,” Almsal said.

“That makes sense,” Penelope said.

“I’m guessing you’re used to people seeming older than they are due to their height?”

“Caroline was mistaken for a high schooler once,” Penelope giggled.

“More than once, but I don’t care enough to count,” Caroline said as she rolled her eyes.

“Unsurprising.”

“Caroline, Penelope, there you guys are!”

Hunter and Brian sat down on the free couch.

“I hate math,” Brian said.

“You only hate it because you’re no good at it,” Caroline said.

“Isn’t it natural to hate what you’re bad at?” Brian asked. “Hey, waitaminute!”

“Caroline, stop teasing Brian just because he’s not smart,” Penelope chided. “Brian, don’t react, it only encourages her to keep teasing you.”

Hunter smiled and shook her head. “You are SUCH a mom, Penelope.”

“You already said that once,” Caroline said.

“So who’s the smokey guy?” Brian asked.

“Brian, that’s rude!” Hunter said.

“Not really,” Almsal said. “I’m Almsal.”

“Ansel?” Brian asked.

“It’s pronounced AM-sal,” Almsal corrected. “With an M, not an N.”

“Hey, we’re done eating now! Colleen’s a slow eater!”

“Well, so-rry!”

MK, Frisk, Elaina, and Colleen came up. Elaina and Colleen sat with Brian, while Frisk and MK took to the giant plush badger.

“You guys coulda gone ahead of me, you know,” Colleen grumbled.

“Hey, we’re fine with waiting,” Hunter said. “Brian’s the same way with schoolwork.”

“Hey, shut up!” Brian snapped.

“Hmm, nah~”

“Grrrr…”

“Hey, Almsal, who’re these guys?”
“Oh, Dead, ‘sup.”

“Oh, h-hey Nyoom!” Elaina greeted.

Jenson waved, Audrey smiling in greeting.

“You know that guy, Elaina?” Hunter asked.

“T-that’s Jenson. W-we have orchestra together,” Elaina said. “H-he’s first chair cello.”

“When I leave, he’s my replacement,” Jenson said.

“You know about the genderfluid thing?” Colleen asked him suspiciously.

“Yeah?” Jenson said, scratching his head. “I don’t get it, but I can respect it at least.”

“A nice way of doing it,” Penelope said. “So how do you know Almsal?”

“Advanced earth science,” Audrey said. “This guy’s a science genius! A bit prickly, but a genius!”

“So this a book club or something?” Jenson asked.

“Nah, we’re just a buncha sixth graders chatting with you three eighth graders about nothing in particular!” Penelope said cheerfully.

“But a book club’s not a bad idea, though…” Caroline mused.

“Caroline, you’re smiling like you did before you went all crazy during your scary story,” Brian said.

“Oh, that’s just her plotting smile!” Penelope said. “Whenever she gets a plot, she smirks.”

“You really notice weird things about her, don’t you?” Hunter said knowingly.

“Isn’t it normal to notice everything about your best friend?” Penelope asked.

“Penelope, nothing about you and Caroline is normal,” Brian said.

“Dude, we’re made up of a flirtatious messianic figure, an armless jitterbug, an anxious singer, a gambling filmmaker, a Wizard Vampire who does nothing but read, a cupcake photographer, a pile of dancing anxiety, a pile of Irish legs, and you,” Caroline said. “If anything, you’re the abnormal one by virtue of being the only normal one.”

“Perspective is everything, my dude,” MK said.

“I’m not your dude, man!” Brian said.

“I’m not your man, bro.”

“I’m not your bro, buddy!”

“I’m not your buddy, guy!” Jenson interjected.

“I’m not your guy, friend!” Audrey added.

“I’m not your friend, buddy!” Jenson replied.

“I have no idea what the heck this is,” Brian sighed.
“So what classes do all of you have after lunch?” Penelope asked.

Frisk dug into their backpack for their schedule and pointed to the fourth slot, where the words “Social Studies” were typed.

“So social studies, huh?” Hunter said, “Mr. Nielsen looks like Teddy Roosevelt!”

“Seriously?” Penelope giggled.

“Yeah, Caroline was the one who noticed!”

“That mustache gave it away,” Caroline said. “I have math fourth period.”

“Life science here,” MK said.

“Me too!” Penelope cheered.

“I got math,” Levi said.

“Same,” Colleen said.

“Computer science,” Almsal said.

“Same here,” Audrey said.

“I got Spanish II,” Jenson said.

The bell rang.

“Well, I guess we’ll see you guys around!” MK said cheerfully.

“Yeah, it was nice meeting you guys,” Jenson said.

Audrey nodded. “It was! Come on, Almsal, let’s walk to class together?”

Almsal shrugged, disinterested.

Everyone went on to their classes.

Caroline decided to stop by the office after school, though. Her book club plot was the best thing she’d thought of yet in her own opinion…

Miranda giggled as Scott dragged her to the restrooms in the fine arts wing.

He pulled her out of the view of the hallway and started necking her.

Miranda moaned, then Scott kissed her on the mouth.

His hand crawled up her shirt as Miranda slipped her tongue into his mouth.

Scott had completely removed her shirt when there was a sound.

They ignored it and continued their makeout session.

Jenson stared at the image as he took a drag of his blunt.
He wondered if he should tell Scott’s girlfriend about this.

Maybe later. He was busy.

Brian, MK, Penelope, and Bruce sat in the life science class.

“So Trav’s in this class too, huh?” Penelope grumbled. “What a jerkface…”

“Yeah,” Bruce said.

“What did he do?” MK asked.

“Well, we have math together third period, okay?” Penelope said. “Eddie and Nicko are there too. There’s a girl, a Rabbit named Kristina, she’s REAL cute, I mean really, her eyes are SO pretty -”

“Penelope, your gay is showing,” Brian warned.

“Oh, right, sorry!” she said. “Anyway, Kristina has a pet rat named Dexter, right? So she brought him to school with her, and some kid named Scott grabbed Dexter by the tail and dangled him. And apparently Scott and Trav are dating, because when Dexter bit Scott Trav started being a racist jerkface.”

“Hey, I’m not a fag!” Trav defended.

“But you’re a racist jerkface?” Penelope said as she rolled her eyes.

“You’re so lucky you’re a girl, or else I’d punch you so fucking hard -”

“Why, you scared?” Penelope asked, her usual chipper smile gracing her face in spite of her threat.

Trav’s face turned a shade of red that implied that he might get an aneurysm if he didn’t kill Penelope.

But Trav, for all his stupidity, knew that he couldn’t do anything about that here.

“You, me, after school, in the courtyard,” Trav hissed. “Hope you’re ready to die.”

“Well, I can think of a few people who want me dead, so whatever!” Penelope said.

Trav stared at her like she was crazy.

“No cheating though, that’s how I made friends with Bruce here!” Penelope said.

“It’s true, she liked my tattoos,” Bruce said.

“Oh yeah, did your sister give you anymore?” Penelope asked.

“Yeah, actually! Check this one out!”

Bruce lifted his right sleeve to show the skull with flowers blooming around it on his bicep.

Penelope took a picture with her phone.

“Dude, that’s AWESOME!” MK praised.

“Yeah, how much is your sister accepting for tattoos?” Brian asked.
“Dunno, I’ll ask,” Bruce asked.

“Is it permanent?” someone asked.

A group had congregated to admire Bruce’s tattoo.

“Nah, it’s temporary,” Bruce said. “But my sis does want to be a tattoo artist, and I’m kind of her personal canvas.”

“Dude, tell her I want one,” Brian said.

“I’ll see what I can do,” Bruce said with a smile.

Elaina sat in math class, when he felt more…feminine? But not completely? So, she guessed, she felt like a demigirl, like Caroline. Speaking of Caroline, she was reading a book. As always. Not surprising…

Elaina took her hair from her beanie, letting it fall down to her lower back, and put the beanie back on on top.

Then Caroline’s phone went off.

Caroline took her phone out and checked it.

She stared at the photo.

“Hey, Bruce got a new tattoo,” she said. “Wanna see?”

“Heck yeah!” Levi said, leaning toward his stepsister’s phone.

The floral skull staring back at him was badass.

“Cooool.”

“I know, right? You wanna see, Elaina?”

Elaina nodded as Caroline turned the phone screen toward her.

“I-I want one, b-but my mother would kill me,” she said.

“Apparently they’re temporary,” Caroline said.

“Hey, Levi!”

Levi perked up when he saw the boy from English class.

“Jordan, hey!” he greeted.

Caroline smirked knowingly and crossed her arms.

“And who might this be, brother?” she asked teasingly.

“I’m Jordan, Jordan Burton!” the boy said. “You must be Caroline! Levi told me so much about you!”

Caroline looked at Levi and smirked.
Levi was suddenly a little scared.

Little did he know that Caroline had already planned her dear brother’s wedding to this boy.

She wondered if Neil Diamond did weddings.

Kristina and Ridley sat next to each other in Ms. Marker’s computer science class.

“You seem kinda happy,” Ridley said with a smirk. “Something good happen?”

Kristina blushed, “Mayybee?” she said nervously.

Ridley’s eyes widened. “Crap, d-did I upset you? Sorry!”

Kristina smiled and shook her head. “You didn’t upset me! It’s just - wow, uh… “

“Okay, you’re starting to scare me a bit here, Tina,” Ridley said.

“Okay, okay, FINE!” Kristina said. She took a few deep breaths before speaking. “I have a crush on someone…”

Ridley blinked. “Okay.”

“Okay?” Kristina repeated. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Sorry! I just don’t… get crushes? I’m sorry, that sounds weird!”

“No, it’s okay! It’s not weird! And if anyone says it is, they don’t matter!”

Ridley smiled. “So who’s the lucky person?”

“Oh, uh, his name’s Nicko. He saved Dexter from Scott.”

“What’s that about Nicko?”

Kristina squeaked and jumped about three feet in the air.

“Hey, Eddie,” Ridley said. “Kristina here was just telling me about when Nicko saved her friend.”

“Oh, I already know about Dexter, I was there!” Eddie said. “I’d never seen Nicko so happy before.”

“He can smile?” Ridley asked.

“Eh, it’s not so much a smile as a spring in his step, you know?” Eddie said with a shrug.

“Oh, I see!” Kristina said, making mental notes.

Eddie smirked.

“Please don’t tell him,” Ridley sighed.

“And ruin my chance to watch everyone embarrass themselves? You think me a better man than I am, Miss Levintson.”

“No, I think you a jackass.”
Kristina grimaced as the classroom door opened and Scott and Miranda came in. Miranda was smoothing out her shirt suspiciously.

Miranda went to sit close to Alicia, but not too close. They glared at each other from their places.

Scott sat in a random spot, smirking to himself in a way that alerted everyone as to what really happened.

Naomi walked in and chose to sit with Eddie, Kristina, and Ridley.

Chloe walked in and looked around, unsure of where to sit since Alicia was focused intently on glaring at Miranda until one of them exploded.

She sighed and sat by Naomi.

“Why was I friends with her again?” she sighed.

“I wonder the same thing,” Naomi said.

“I’m Alicia Berry’s ex-friend,” Chloe said. “Chloe Phillips.”


“Alicia’s still dragging her friend Brooke Lane around,” Chloe sighed. “I almost feel bad for her…”

“I’m honestly surprised that Miranda hasn’t noticed that Brian hates her guts,” Naomi said.

“Why be surprised?” Eddie asked. “Miranda’s an idiot.”

“Of course, how could I forget?” Naomi said.

“Because she’s so dumb it’s contagious,” Ridley offered.

Eddie and Kristina high-fived her.

“Lemme in on that,” Naomi said, holding her hand up.

That high-five sealed an alliance in the computer classroom that day.

Frisk sat in Mr. Cranach’s fifth period Art I class, having been given the assignment of designing their portfolio folder.

“Frisk, hiii!”

Frisk turned to see Olive and Naomi.

“It’s been a while, hasn’t it?” Olive said. “Can we sit with you?”

Frisk nodded.

“Oh, and since I don’t understand that hand language thing you do, you can just write whatever you wanna say since you forgot that flower thing!” Olive continued with blithe insensitivity.

Naomi facepalmed.
Frisk took out their phone and typed in it before showing it to Olive and Naomi.

* okay!

Olive smiled.

Naomi looked between Olive and Frisk and sighed as they all sat down to start designing their portfolios.

Frisk considered whether to draw Omega Flowey or if that would make people concerned.

They decided that it probably wouldn’t unless they actually explained it to them. Luckily art needs no explanation.

Frisk took the green, red, yellow-green, pink, gray, silver and black colored pencils from their pack of 50.

They pondered which part to sketch first. The vines? The… face… part? The TV screen? The tube-thingies connected to the TV screen? They were at a loss.

But they began at random.

No use dawdling. They had work to do, and they were DETERMINED to complete it.

They’d started by sketching the face - the one not on the TV screen. Then they sketched the TV, then the tube thingies, then the vines.

They finished the sketch. It was the best they could do, and class wasn’t even fifteen minutes in.

They picked up the silver pencil.

“Eww, what IS that?!” someone asked.

Frisk turned to face the source of the voice.

“That, Courtney, is your mom,” came a different voice.

Courtney scoffed. “How DARE you -”

Courtney’s eyes widened at the smirking blue-eyed blond boy behind her.

She smiled as sweetly as she could.

“A-Ashton, why are YOU -”

“I’m in this class too, Courtney,” Ashton sighed. “And no, for the last time, I will NOT go out with you. Not only are you dating Matt Gorman, I don’t date blondes.”

“But-but YOU’RE a blonde!” Courtney defended.

Ashton rolled his eyes. “Yeah, and I prefer redheads. The fact that the first thing you focus on is the blonde thing says a lot about you as a person, none of it good.”

Courtney growled and stomped back to her seat.

Ashton watched with a blank smile on his face.
“Sorry, that’s Courtney Day,” Ashton said. “She’s… unpleasant.”

“So we noticed,” Naomi deadpanned.

“She reminds me of Miranda…” Olive remarked.

“Anyway, I’m Ashton Doyle. I’m in eighth grade. And you guys are?”

“I’m Naomi Nivens, this is my best friend Olive Olbermann, and the kid who drew the… thing, is Frisk Dreemurr. We’re in sixth grade.”

Frisk took a piece of lined paper and wrote on it.

* It’s Omega Flowey.

“Flowey?” Olive asked. “Like that flower thing that translates your sign language?”

Frisk nodded.

“But Flowey’s small and yellow.”

Frisk nodded.

“Hey, I think it looks pretty cool!” Austin said.

“What does?”

The group looked up.

“Oh, hey Fiona!” Ashton greeted. “Check out this kid’s portfolio!”

Fiona looked at Frisk’s portfolio cover and flinched.

“Rude much?” Naomi asked.

“Oh, sorry!” Fiona said. “I’m just… scared of robots…”

“But you have three of Mettaton’s albums, don’t you?” Ashton asked.

“Mettaton’s not a robot, he’s an Android,” Fiona claimed. “Kind of a big difference.”

“Where, though?” Naomi asked.

Frisk patted the table to get everyone’s attention.

* Mettaton can think for himself.

“Yeah, she gets it!” Fiona said.

Frisk cringed and wrote on the paper.

* I’m a they. Not a she, not a he. A they.

Fiona and Ashton blinked.

“Oh, I get it!” Ashton said. “Scarlett’s older sibling is like that too. So are a lot of Monsters from what I’ve heard…”
Frisk nodded.

“Huh,” Fiona remarked. “Humans and Monsters really do have a lot more in common than we think, don’t we?”

“I know, it’s cool!” Olive said. “But Monsters are way cooler than Humans because they have more different kinds than us!”

Everyone blinked.

“She means Monsters are more diverse than Humans,” Naomi explained.

“Ohhh.”

“So what’s that on your portfolio, Olive?” Ashton asked.

“A field of flowers!”

“Huh, and Naomi’s?”

“A whirlpool in the sunset in nothing but colored pencil.”

“Ooh, it looks pretty!” Fiona said.

“What’s on yours?” Olive asked.

“Oh, just one of my outfit designs!” Fiona said bashfully.

“You make outfits?!” Olive gasped, her eyes sparkling. “Woooow!”

Fiona blushed.

“T-thank you…” Fiona stuttered.

Frisk tapped her on the shoulder and wrote something on a torn corner of lined paper.

* Naomi likes Olive.

Fiona’s eyes widened.

She nodded at Frisk in understanding.

Frisk retained their neutral expression and gave a silent thumbs-up.

Their foreseeable future as a matchmaker filled them with DETERMINATION.

FILE: SAVE

Caroline and Levi sat near Moira and Kristina in fifth period Drama.

“Hey Moira, I heard what happened with Theo from Penelope,” Caroline said. “If you need anything let me know.”

Moira blinked. Levi facepalmed.

“Thanks? I guess?” Moira said in confusion.
“No need,” Caroline dismissed. “Oh, Almsal, hello.”

Levi, Moira, and Kristina turned to see the Smoke Monster as he walked over to sit with his underclassmen.

They sat in relative silence until Miranda walked in and toward a student in the corner by the window.

The student, a girl with dark brown hair cropped to her ears with windswept bangs with grey eyes stared up at Miranda.

“Move, I wanna sit here,” Miranda snapped.

“No,” the girl said bluntly.

Miranda blinked. “Ex-ca-USE me?!”

“No,” the girl repeated. “I don’t have to move because there’s literally no real reason why I should, now please go away.”

Miranda spluttered a bit before letting out a growl and stomping away.

Caroline, Levi, Kristina, Moira, and Almsal looked on as Miranda grumbled.

“I like this kid,” Caroline said. “Anyone who can make Miranda shriek in fury like that is okay by me.”

“You mean you’re gonna cheat on Penelope?” Levi teased.

“Levi, Penelope and I aren’t even dating,” Caroline said.


“Exactly. I want to, I just haven’t found the incentive to do so, nor do I believe that my feelings could possibly be mutual.”

Levi would have laughed had Caroline not said it so…sadly.

Levi merely placed a hand on Caroline’s shoulder.

“Aww, look at the happy couple!” someone mocked.

Moira cringed.

“Ew,” Levi cringed.

“This guy’s my brother, asshat,” Caroline cringed.

“Matt, please don’t encourage incest,” the girl in the corner with close-cropped hair cringed.

“You shut the fuck up, Astrid!” Matt snapped.

“I don’t think you can really shut those, if what I’ve heard about your girlfriend is any indication,” Astrid countered.

The students gasped at the savagery.
“You bitch! Courtney would NEVER cheat on me!” Matt roared.

“She kind of is,” Moira said cautiously.

A few kids murmured in agreement.

Matt scoffed.

“Whatever, I’ll believe it when I see it,” he dismissed.

“Okay, but don’t say we didn’t warn you,” Caroline sighed.

Miranda simply listened to the conversation as she reapplied her lip gloss for the third time since lunch.

She briefly wondered who this “Courtney” was.

Sixth period, last class of the day.

Frisk, Hunter, Elaina, Eddie, and Nicko all sat near each other in life science.

“So why’s your hair down, Elaina?” Hunter asked.

“I-I s-started feeling slightly feminine earlier during math class,” Elaina answered.

“Oh, okay then!” Hunter said with a shrug.

Eddie and Nicko seemed confused.

“I-I’m genderfluid,” Elaina explained. “I felt m-masculine this morning, but I feel m-more or less f-feminine now.”

“So you can change genders at will?” Eddie asked, kind of awed.

“N-not really, I-I have no real c-control over it, but I-I have n-noticed that it changes every w-week or so…”

“Ohhh, cool, so you kind of have a pattern?” Eddie asked.

Elaina shrunk in on herself. “K-kind of?” she squeaked.

“Oh, she’s getting scared,” Hunter said.

Nicko tapped Eddie’s shoulder and pointed somewhere.

Eddie followed the finger then glared where it was pointing along with Nicko.

Scott looked at Nicko and shuddered, slinking away.

Nicko turned back toward the group, slightly irritated.

Eddie gaped at him.

Nicko tilted his head in confusion.

Eddie shook his head and smirked.
Frisk and Elaina were baffled.

“I’ll tell ya tomorrow,” Eddie said.

Brian and Bruce awkwardly changed next to each other in the locker rooms.

“So…you and Marilla, huh?” Brian asked, trying to make conversation so as to make this entire situation less awkward.

“Uh, yeah,” Bruce said.

“Huh.”

“Yeah.”

“Well, congrats.”

“Uh, thanks.”

Even more awkward silence.

They changed into the blue and gold gym outfits. Brian admitted that these were comfortable - no different from what he wore to bed, in fact.

Brian and Bruce walked out and stood with the other sixth graders from Mrs. Undyne’s sixth period gym class.

“How’s it goin’, punks?” Undyne called.

Many kids, almost all of them Monsters, cheered enthusiastically.

This happened to be less than half of the group.

Brian and Bruce glance at each other, knowing what the Human students would probably do.

Brian looked around until he saw Theo

He nudged Bruce and pointed at Theo.

“Remember that guy?” he asked.

Bruce squinted a bit then nodded.

“Isn’t that Penelope’s brother?” he asked.

Brian nodded. “Yep. He turned into a jerk last year.”

“I heard, Penelope told me and Marilla in first period.”

“You guys have class together?” Brian remarked. “What class is that?”

“Drama.”

Brian blinked.

Then Trav went to stand next to him.
Bruce glowered at him.

Trav looked up at the taller boy and flinched.

Then Sofie, Moira, and Julia walked in, laughing together.

Until they saw Theo. At which point they glared at him like he was something that got stuck to the bottom of their shoes.

“I remember Theo being friends with Moira and Sofie,” Bruce said.

“He ditched them for popularity’s what I heard,” Brian said.

“YOU SHUT UP!” Theo snapped.

“DeMartino!” Undyne called out. “Now is not the time to scream at people doing nothing to harm you! SAVE IT FOR YOUR ENEMIES!”

“But Mrs. Undyne, WE’RE his enemies!” Julia declared, standing with her arms of the shoulders of Sofie and Moira.

Undyne looked to be rather impressed as she put her hands on her hips.

“Really?” Undyne stated more than asked. “What’d he do to YOU three?”

“Ditched us for a chance at Popularity, Captain Undyne,” Moira said.

Some of the Human students whispered in confusion.

Undyne chose to take the opportunity.

“Okay, so before Monsters came to the surface, I was in the Royal Guard back in the Underground,” Undyne said. “The Royal Guard was kind of like the Human military, y’see, and I was a Captain.”

Julia raised her hand.

“Yes, McFadden enemy of DeMartino?”

“My granddad was in the navy!” she said. “He was a lieutenant commander!”

“Dang, kid, that’s pretty cool!” Undyne remarked. “But enough about my military days, today we’ll just be running laps around the track field!”

Some of the kids moaned.

“Hey, if it were up to me we’d be playin’ dodgeball all year long! Be a little more grateful! Now come on!”

Undyne led the group to the track.

“Oh, okay punks, go wild!” Undyne said cheerfully. “But not too wild, I don’t wanna get sued!”

Laughter.

“Okay, now START RUNNING YA PUNKS!”

And they were off.
Theo watched as Julia ran, weaving between anyone who got in her way. Then someone slammed into him and he fell over. He grunted as he stood to see who’d pushed him. Sofie stared back at him, surprised. Theo growled as he stood up. He ran, aiming for Sofie. Sofie dodged just as he moved to push her over. Theo had run into Audrey. Undyne blew her whistle. “DeMartino! Principal’s office!” “I wasn’t even aiming for her!” Theo claimed. “So you were trying to knock someone over,” Undyne said. “This ain’t Mario Kart, DeMartino. There are penalties for pushing people over. Now go!” Theo grumbled as he stormed off. Sofie kneeled to help Audrey. “I’m so sorry, are you okay?” Sofie asked anxiously. “Yeah, I’m okay, thanks,” Audrey claimed. “What’s his deal, anyway?” “I honestly don’t know,” Sofie admitted. “Everything was fine until Theo started getting popular. Then he just ditched us! Now he ditched the people he ditched us for? What’s his DEAL?” “You don’t deserve him,” Audrey said, placing a comforting hand on Sofie’s shoulder. “I know that now…” Sofie sighed. Brian and Bruce made it to them. “You two alright?” Brian asked. “Yeah, thanks Brian,” Sofie reassured. “Thanks,” Audrey said. “So you’ve met me already,” Sofie began. “My named Sofie Gutierrez, and I’m in seventh grade. These are Brian Green and Bruce Roberts. They’re friends of Theo’s sister Penelope, and they’re in sixth grade.” “And trust us when we say that Penelope is far better than Theo,” Brian said. Audrey laughed. “I’ll take your word for it. I’m Audrey, Audrey Lourdes. I’m in eighth grade!” “Nice to meet you,” Bruce said politely.
“Thanks, I got the text with the picture of your tattoo!” Audrey said. “That was COOL!”

“Thanks…”

“Keep running, you four!” Undyne called. “I’m glad you made friends, but save the stalling for when the bell rings!”

“Ma’am yes ma’am!” the group said.

They laughed a bit as they started running.

Undyne sighed, a smile on her face. This was definitely going to be an eventful year…

Linda fumed silently as she sat in a seat in the chair in the library waiting for the PTA meeting to start.

Whoever this “Jill Lourdes” was, she already hated her guts.

“good afternoon, linda.”

Linda growled as an obviously cheerful Sans took the seat opposite her.

“you’re not sitting at the head of the table this year?” he asked. “whyever not?”

“Shut up, you know why,” Linda snapped.

“i actually don’t,” Sans said.

Linda blinked.

“go on. tell me.”

Linda thought she was going to throw up.

Sans KNEW why she wasn’t at the head of the table. It was OBVIOUS.

He just wanted to watch her suffer.

Or hear it from her outright. Same thing.

“Hey Sans!”

Aaand the audience to Linda’s suffering grows ever larger with the addition of Sharona.

“hey, sharona,” Sans greeted. “do you know why linda’s not at the head of the table?”

“I’m honestly wondering why she’s not outside smoking,” Sharona admitted.

“yet another good question…”

Linda’s left eye twitched.

She stood up to go outside and smoke.

Linda Jane Thompson was pissed. The PTA was hers. She was nothing without it.
When had her life become so hollow?

“When do you think?”

Estelle appeared in Linda’s peripheral vision.

“Now is not the time, Crawford,” Linda hissed.

“Why not?” Estelle asked, standing next to Linda as she smoked.

“You know DAMN well why not!” Linda snapped.

“Puh-lease, Murphy! It ain’t like you got work to do - not that you ever did it in the first place -”

“SHUT UP!”

Linda turned to where Estelle was.

Estelle wasn’t there.

Helen, however, was.

Helen blinked a few times, then shrugged dismissively as she walked past Linda.

“Come on, Linda, the meeting’s in five minutes,” she said.

Linda growled and stomped ahead of Helen.

She turned back and smiled smugly.

Helen just kept walking.

Meanwhile, Sans and Sharona discussed a few things.

“So you’ll talk with her about it?” Sans asked.

“Yep!” Sharona answered. “I’m sure she’d be more than willing to do it.”

“thanks, sharona. tori and frisk were both pretty adamant about this, and you know how they are when they’ve made a decision…”

“Caroline’s the same way, I get it.”

“hey, i think it’s starting, linda finally came back from her smoke break.”

Sharona pulled her face mask up and gave Sans an “okay” gesture, which was promptly reciprocated.

“Excuse me, ma’am, but why are you wearing that?”

A woman with brown hair and eyes in a berry-colored velour tracksuit was before them, looking down on them despite her 5-foot even height.

“Because I’m allergic to bullshit,” Sharona replied.

The woman crossed her arms. “Well I can assure you that you will find none of that here.”
“this is a pta meeting, ma’am, these meetings are nothing but bullshit,” Sans said, “but if it’ll really help our kids, then i can suffer through a couple hours of it.”

The woman sneered at him.

“lemme guess, hwc?” Sans said without changing his ever-neutral inflection yet still somehow managing to sound sickened by the tracksuited woman’s very existence.

“So what if I am?” the woman said cautiously.

“just making an observation based on your reaction to my very existence.”

you xenophobic bitch.

“Well, if we had things our way, you wouldn’t even be here!” the tracksuited woman said.

“i wasn’t here until half an hour ago, and i don’t plan on leaving until i know what i’m up against in the bullshit department,” Sans countered. “and i’ll just keep comin’ back, just because my presence offends you.”

The tracksuited woman fumed as she sat down.

Irma walked in and sat down, texting someone and pointedly ignoring everything else.

The meeting was about to begin.

Caroline sat in Principal Kierkegaard’s office in the armchair.

Principal Kierkegaard typed something into the computer.

Caroline fidgeted in the seat.

“Okay, it seems that there’s a spare classroom you can use for club activities in D hall that’s available on Tuesdays,” Principal Kierkegaard said. “You’ll have to design your own club advertisements and come up with the schedule yourself, you think you can handle that?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Caroline assured.

“Okay, here’s the paperwork, you just have to look for a club advisor among the teachers and get at least nine other students to sign up by the nineteenth.”

“Thank you so much, ma’am!” Caroline said with a smile. “I really do hope this turns out well! If you wish to do so, you can drop by as well!”

“I just might, actually!” Principal Kierkegaard said. “Thank you, see you around!”

Caroline left the office and met up with Levi, Hunter, Brian, Frisk, and Elaina.

She held up the paperwork.

“So?” Brian said with a shrug.

“This is the stuff we need signed by next month to have the book club up and running,” Caroline said. “You just have to sign here if you wanna join. We’ll meet after school on Tuesdays.”

Levi, Frisk, and Elaina signed.
Hunter looked nervous.

“I’ll have to ask my mom if I can…” she said.

“We won’t know if we can even meet until next month,” Caroline said. “So you can sign and tell Mrs. Thompson if we end up doing this.”

Hunter thought for a moment before nodding and signing her name.

Brian watched the proceedings and grumbled as he signed his name.

Caroline blinked a bit before smiling gratefully.

“Thanks, guys!” she said. “I’ll go ask around and see if anyone else wants to join!”

And she was off.

“I can’t believe she’s actually going through with this,” Brian remarked.

“You underestimate our Caroline, Brian,” Levi said.

“That sounds terrifying.”

A wiry, high-strung woman with red hair and brown eyes stood at the head of the table at the first North Middle School PTA meeting of 20XR-20XS.

Flanking the red-haired woman’s right was a woman with dyed white-blonde hair with visible roots and green eyes.

Flanking the red-haired woman’s left was a woman with brown hair and blue eyes.

“Good afternoon, everyone!” the red-haired woman announced. “I’m Jill Lourdes, and I’m the president of the PTA here at North Middle School. My daughter Audrey is in the eighth grade. Why don’t we all introduce ourselves starting with Janice?”

The woman with brown hair to Jill’s left spoke up.

“Hi, my name is Janice Gilmore, I’m the PTA vice president, and my son Elliot is in the seventh grade.”

A few more parents introduced themselves. Until Diana was reached.

“Hi, I’m Diana Mosley, I was the PTA secretary at Mountainside Elementary, and my daughter Miranda is in the sixth grade!”

A few more people. Then Helen’s turn came.

“I’m Helen Green, my son Brian is in sixth grade.”

Linda’s turn.

“Hi, I’m Linda Thompson, I was the PTA president of Mountainside Elementary, and my son Hunter is in the sixth grade, and I have a daughter Hannah in elementary school.”

More people until Irma.
Irma continued texting.

Jill cleared her throat.

Irma looked up and rolled her eyes.

“I’m Irma Lorence, I have a daughter in the sixth grade.”

Then she returned to her texting.

After a brief silence, the line continues until a surprisingly youthful-looking woman with black hair in a bob cut with bangs and dark eyes.

“Amanda Johnson, my daughter Fiona is in seventh grade.”

Sharona had been sitting next to Amanda, so it was her turn.

“I’m Sharona Goldsby, my son Levi and my stepdaughter Caroline are in sixth grade. And I’m wearing a face mask because I’m allergic to BS and most perfumes.”

And now it was Sans’ turn.

“hey, how’s it goin’, i’m sans gaster. my kid frisk is in sixth grade.”

A few people down from Sans was the woman in the tracksuit.

“I’m Amber Foley, I was the PTA president at Upland Elementary, my son Scott is in sixth grade.”

And last, the woman to Jill’s right was to introduce herself.

“Hi, I’m Karen Day, my daughter Courtney is in seventh grade! And by the way, Jill, I heard you got a divorce some weeks ago, how did that go?”

It was obvious what Karen’s angle was. The smug-ass smirk gave that much away.

“I can honestly say that freedom feels great, and knowing that my daughter is safe from that bastard is one of the best feelings I’ve ever felt,” Jill said, taking the attempt on her reputation in stride with a smile.

Karen was not prepared for the surprisingly happy response.

Sans applauded, as did Sharona and a number of other parents.

Karen glared at them.

Sans winked his right eye.

“Okay, now let’s start figuring things out, shall we?” Jill announced. “The first coming event is Spirit Week. Anybody not know what that is?”

A few parents raised their hands.

“Okay then, for those of you that don’t know, Spirit Week is a week where we arrange days for students to dress up according to a theme for a whole week,” Jill explained. “The cost is a dollar, and the funds we raise will go toward future school events, such as field trips.”

“And why are you telling us this?” Amber asked.
“So we can come up with a theme for each day,” Jill answered. “Any ideas?”

Sans raised his hand.

“Yes, Sans?”

“how about pajama day?” he suggested. “everyone loves those.”

Most of the parents murmured in agreement.

“Okay, all in favor of a pajama day?” Jill asked.

The required majority raised their hands.

“Okay, Monday September 28th is Pajama Day!” Jil announced. “Any other ideas, guys?”

Helen raised her hand. Linda glared at her with bloodlust in her eyes.

“Yes, Helen?”

“Country-Western day, everyone dresses like cowboys,” Helen said.

“Not bad,” Sharona admitted.

A few other parents murmured in agreement.

“Okay, all in favor of Country-Western Day?” Jill asked.

The required majority once again raised their hands.

“Okay, Country-Western Day on Tuesday the 29th!” Jill announced.

The meeting continued like this for another five or ten minutes.

Caroline looked down at their papers. Counting Levi, Frisk, Elaina, and Brian, they had five signatures.

They saw a girl in a frilly blue and white top with white shorts and blue flats with ribbons sketching something.

Caroline walked up to her.

“Um, excuse me,” she said. “I’m Caroline Marlow, I was wondering if you’d like to sign up to join my book club. If we get enough signatures by the nineteenth, we’ll be meeting Tuesdays from 2:45 to 4:30 in room D-105.”

The girl in the frilly top paused.

“Sure, hand it here!” she said.

Caroline handed the girl in the frilly top the paper.

The girl in the frilly top signed her name and cell phone number and gave back the papers.

Caroline looked at the name and nodded.
“Okay, thank you Fiona. I will text you if I get enough signatures by the nineteenth.”

“Oh, you’ll get enough signatures!” Fiona assured. “Especially if Frisk Dreemurr’s name is on there!”

“I hope so!” Caroline said. “Thanks again!”

“No problem, I’ll see you around!” Fiona said. “Is there any way I can get in touch with you during school hours since we don’t have any classes together?”

“I’m in the library during lunch every day unless something happened, like I died or something,” Caroline said.

“Okay, thank you!” Fiona said.

“You too, have a nice day.”

Caroline walked off, finding a crowd outside in the courtyard.

She shook her head and moved on.

“Okay, we have ten minutes left, but we have everything covered for now, so everyone’s free to go!” Jill announced. “If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to ask!”

Linda decided. Now was the time.

She walked up to Jill.

“Excuse me, Mrs. Lourdes,” she said. “I’m Linda Thompson, former Mountainside Elementary PTA president, I have a few questions to ask you?”

Jill blinked. “Okay, go ahead?”

Linda smirked inwardly.

“Yes, my first question - you do realize that by divorcing your husband, God hates you now, right?” Linda asked condescendingly.

“And you realize that you’re not the first person to tell me that, right?” Jill countered. “Any other questions - preferably ones that won’t get you kicked out?”

Linda scowled. “Are you going to have everyone leave early every time we meet?” she hissed.

“Only if we’ve covered everything within the time provided,” Jill answered. “Any other questions?”

Linda’s left eye twitched. “That’s all for now…” she gritted.

“Okay then, have a nice evening Mrs. Thompson.”

“DON’T TELL ME WHAT TO DO!”

Linda stormed off grumbling.

Irma watched her blankly and shrugged.

Irma walked up behind Elaina.
“Elaina, time to go,” she snapped.

“Y-yes mother,” Elaina said.

“What did I say about stuttering?” Irma warned.

“Yes mother,” Elaina said, quietly.

Elaina waved her friends goodbye as she followed her mother out of the school building.

Sans watched as Irma and Elaina left. Something about Irma had always seemed… off. And considering he’d seen Elaina with her sisters more often than he’d seen her with Irma, there must be a reason.

But there wasn’t much he could do about it for now. He turned to face Frisk.

“ready to pick up your mom, kiddo?” he asked with a smile.

Frisk nodded and grabbed Sans’ hand.

They took a shortcut.

Flowey sat on the windowsill playing Pokemon Ranger while Frisk did their homework.

He drew circles around the Pinsir.

1…

2…

3…

4…

5…

And the Capture Styler broke.

Flowey growled.

Frisk shushed him.

Flowey glared out the window before getting an idea.

“Hey, Frisk!” he said.

Frisk turned to face him.

“I wonder if your teachers would believe you if you told them that a flower ate your homework?” he asked, making a scary face.

“You eat their homework and I give you a bad time, grasshole,” Chara snapped.

Flowey squeaked in fear, his face returning to normal.

Asriel snickered.
Flowey told him to shut his face.

Frisk mentally high-fived Chara.

Your eventful first day of school has filled you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

School - Nirvana

Fun Fact: This chapter is the longest one yet - 67 pages of augh.
You're Going Down

Chapter Summary

Featuring the results of Penelope's fight with Trav, Caroline describing her own death while hawking her book club at people, Frisk is a Spanish genius, Astrid is NOT a lesbian, Levi dies while selling life insurance, and Alphyne family fluff.

Chapter Notes

So after the next chapter there will be a week-long hiatus since I[Spazzin] am going on a camping trip in Colorado, as per family tradition. Writing the camping chapter was mental preparation for that, only I won't be taking RVs, because they really are expensive as hell to rent.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

10:30 A.M., August 29th, 20XR

It’s a beautiful day outside.

Stuff is happening.

Other stuff is happening.

On days like this, kids like you…

…están escribiendo en español.

Frisk and Brian sat in Spanish class, working on worksheets.

Frisk wasn’t exactly sure why, but Spanish was pretty easy to them. They could understand some spoken Spanish, as well. Well, technically, it was like a memory, if their hunch was correct.

Chara wasn’t sure why this was. They had only been with Frisk since their fall into the Underground, and any memories of Frisk’s from before then were effectively blocked to them.

Brian was having as much trouble with reading Spanish as he was with reading English, unsurprisingly.

Luckily, Frisk brought Flowey with them today since they had express permission from Principal Kierkegaard.
They tapped Brian’s desk to get his attention.

<<Do you need help?>> Frisk asked.

Brian was clearly weighing his options.

While he did this, Frisk completed their worksheet and turned it in.

They returned to their desk and waited for Brian’s answer.

“Fine, I need to know what this means,” Brian said, pointing toward the third question.

Frisk stared at the question.

It was asking the Spanish word for yellow.

Frisk spelled amarillo.

Brian nodded and wrote it down.

Frisk continued to help Brian with his Spanish.

Eventually someone noticed.

“Hey, Frisk, when you’re done helping him, can you help me out?” someone asked.

Frisk turned to find Jordan standing there.

They nodded at him.

“Who’re you again?” Brian asked.

<<This is Jordan!>> Frisk signed. <<We have English together, as well as life science!>>

“Huh, that’s nice,” Brian said. “Nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you too!” Jordan replied.

The rest of the Spanish class was spent with Frisk helping Brian and Jordan with their Spanish.

Penelope turned in her work and sat down, taking out a book of photographs - one that Caroline had gotten her for her birthday this past year.

She hadn’t looked at more than a few pictures when a pair of hands slammed on her desk.

She looked up, slightly irritated, and saw a very pissed off Trav.

“Where were you?” he growled.

Penelope blinked. “Uh, wha?”

“Yesterday, we were s’posed to fight after school in the courtyard!” Trav yelled. “Remember?!”

Penelope blinked. “No? What the heck are you talking about?”

“ARE YOU SERIOUS?!”
“Travis, quiet!” Mrs. Bell snapped. “You’re disrupting the class.”

Trav glared at Mrs. Bell, then at Penelope.

He growled and sat down.

“We’re not finished,” he hissed. “Football field at lunch. You and me.”

Penelope blinked. “But I still don’t know what you’re talking about!”

She shook her head.

Whatever he was talking was probably unimportant anyway.

And she didn’t really want to fight - not this early in the year.

Hunter was just as confused as Penelope was.

“What was THAT about?” she asked.

“No idea,” Penelope said with a shrug.

“Should we get ‘im for ya?” Bruce said, cracking his knuckles.

Penelope shook her head. “Thanks but no thanks. He’s not worth it.”

“Okay, but you tell us if he tries to mess with you again.”

“I will, thank you!”

“But what do we do about lunch if he’s gonna try to fight you?” Kristina asked.

“I’m just gonna ignore him,” Penelope dismissed. “I don’t even know where the football field IS.”

Then the bell rang.

“Come on guys, I got cupcakes!” Penelope said with a smile. “With rainbow sprinkles~”

Caroline stared at the sheet of names of students that would be in her book club,

She had the required nine student signatures and then some, but she needed an advisor from among the teachers - and since it was lunchtime, why not ask the librarians?

She went up to the librarian with curly dark blonde hair and dark green eyes manning the front desk, whose name placard gave her name as Marian Hill.

“Um, begging your pardon Mrs. Hill?” Caroline said.

Mrs. Hill looked up.

“May I help you, ma’am?” she asked.

“Yes, I was wondering if you would be interested in being the advisor for a club I’m starting,” Caroline said. “I plan to have everyone meet on Tuesdays after school, and so far there are twelve members. You don’t have to if you don’t want to or if you don’t have the time to spare, but any help I can get would be appreciated.”
Mrs. Hill blinked.

“You mean you’re not a new teacher?” she asked, somewhat incredulous.

“Strange though it may seem, I am in fact a sixth grader,” Caroline sighed.

“Well, lucky for your future book club, I am in fact free on Tuesdays after school!” Mrs. Hill said with a smile.

Caroline smiled back and handed Mrs. Hill the paper to sign.

Once she had finished, Caroline took it back and prepared to leave.

“Oh, and by the way?” Mrs. Hill began. “My husband might join us once in awhile, I hope you don’t mind guests.”

Caroline smiled. “As much as I hate people, anyone with an appropriate appreciation for books and the reading thereof is welcome!”

Mrs. Hill chuckled. “Well, miss, I hope that all goes well!”

“Thank you, have a nice day ma’am!”

“You too!”

Caroline went off to the corner with the couches and the giant stuffed badger and sat on the same couch as last time, in the same spot at last time, in the same position as last time.

Having completed The Epic of Gilgamesh yesterday just before she went to ask about forming the book club, she was currently reading Beowulf.

Penelope sat down next to her.

“Man, whatever they made in the cafeteria today smells WEIRD!” Penelope said.

“I know,” Caroline said. “I thought I was gonna die again.”

“What IS dying like, Care?” Penelope asked.

Caroline blinked. “What brought this on?” she asked. “Not that it really matters; I’m very willing to tell you about my experience with death.”

“Just wondering,” Penelope said with a shrug.

“What are you two even talking about?”

Caroline and Penelope looked up.

“Oh, hey Almsal!” Penelope greeted. “Caroline was just about to tell me what being dead is like!”

Almsal’s three eyes blinked.

“Interesting,” he said. “Do tell.”

“Tell what?”

Brian, Hunter, Frisk, Elaina, Levi, Colleen, Jenson, Sarah, and Audrey joined the party.
Caroline was starting to be a bit overwhelmed, but she would not be deterred.

She would **Persevere**.

“I’m pretty sure there’s more of you people coming…” she sighed.

“Hey, what’s with the group?”

And now Ridley, Kristina, Marilla, Bruce, Eddie, and Nicko are here.

It was then that Caroline realized that she had started clawing at her left shoulder in fear of the crowd around her.

Penelope put a comforting hand on her right shoulder.

“You need some space?” she asked Caroline quietly.

Caroline paused before shaking her head.

“I’ll be fine,” she said, her voice rough.

“Oh crap, we forgot she’s afraid of crowds,” Brian said.

“I said I’ll be fine,” Caroline declared, voice steadier as she stared into space and grabbed at her left shoulder.

“But what were you guys talking about?” Jenson asked.

“I was going to talk about the time I died,” Caroline said casually.

Everyone was silent.

“What the heck?” Brian asked.

“She did mention once that she’d died,” Hunter said quietly.

“What IS being dead like?” Sarah asked with reverence.

Caroline was silent for a moment before speaking.

“It’s like…you’re asleep, but you aren’t dreaming,” she explained. “You can’t perceive anything through any of your senses. Sensation, emotion, everything is rendered irrelevant - even time is irrelevant. There is nothing, not even awareness. I only know that I died because I heard some nurses saying that I shouldn’t even be alive, much less relatively unaffected by the events that led to my brief demise.”

Everyone was silent.

“What the heck.”

“There is no heck,” Caroline said darkly. “There is no heaven, no hell, no afterlife of any sort. There is only a strange, comforting nothingness.”

More silence.

“Curious indeed,” Almsal mused, taking notes. “And how, exactly, did you die?”

“Dude, did you seriously just ask someone how they died?” Jenson asked.
“Yes.”

“I died of hypothermia,” Caroline replied. “I’m actually missing a couple of fingers - the index finger of my left hand, and the middle finger of my right. I’m also missing most of my toes and nearly lost my left earlobe.”

“Okay, please stop, you’re scaring me…” Kristina squeaked, hiding behind Ridley and Nicko, levitating slightly.

“Yeah, this is starting to get gross,” Audrey admitted.

“But you asked, and she answered honestly,” Almsal said, slightly confused.

“Yeah, but we asked about how she died, not how many limbs she lost!” Brian snapped.

Elaina had strange look on their face.

“Don’t worry Elaina, I haven’t lost any limbs, just extremities,” Caroline reassured wiggling her eight fingers.

“Can I touch one of the stumps?” Penelope asked.

Caroline blinked then shrugged. “Ok, whatever.”

She held out her left hand.

Penelope touched where Caroline’s index finger should have been with the tip of her own index finger.

“Whoa…” Penelope whispered.

“What do you mean ‘whoa’?” Caroline asked.

“Just…just whoa, you know?”

“If I knew I wouldn’t have asked!”

“Wait, did you ask them if they wanted to join your book club?!”

Everyone blinked.

Caroline moved to grab the papers.

She held them up.

“Sign here for book club?” she asked.

Almsal took the papers and signed his name with surprising eagerness, despite his features not shifting in the slightest.

Everyone stared at him.

“It’d get my mom off my back about a LOT of things,” he explained.

A the rest of the group decided that they had nothing to lose by signing the paper except for maybe a couple of hours after school on Tuesdays.
*knock knock*
Toriel brightened.

“Who is there?” she asked.

“loaf.”

“Loaf who?”

“i loaf you, now please let me in.”
Toriel giggled and opened the door.

“I loaf you too, Sans dear~” Toriel sang.

“but do you loaf me a latte?” Sans asked, holding up an latte.


They laughed as they kissed each other again.

“Thank you so much for taking the time to do this with me, Sans,” Toriel said. “It gives me something to look forward to…”

Sans smiled warmly. “same here, tori. thanks to you and frisk and everyone else, i’ve been finding myself looking forward to things. i’d, uh…forgotten what it’s like to do that, if i’m honest.”

Both were silent.

“well, enough of that heavy stuff,” Sans said. “i got sandwiches.”

Trav and Scott waited on the football field, surrounded by kids eager to watch someone beat the everloving crap out of someone else - some particularly eager ones skipped lunch to watch.

Impatience was setting in.

“Oh my GOD, just FiIGHT already!” someone yelled.

“Who are they fighting anyway?” someone else asked.

“Some girl from their math class.”

“They’re tag teaming a girl?”

“That sounds kinda douchey…”

“Hey, she started it!” Trav defended. “She called me a racist!”

“But you are.”

“YOU WANNA GO?!” Trav roared.

“Hey, the bell rang!”

“Dude, I missed lunch for this…”
“This is bullshit.”

“Hey, she might be coming!” Scott attempted. “She might wanna skip science class! No one likes science!”

A few kids mumbled.

Some stayed.

Some left.

Scott and Trav waited.

Brian, MK, Bruce, and Penelope sat in Mrs. Handel’s class.

Mrs. Handel, a petite woman with dirty blonde curls and blue eyes with glasses, looked out at the class.

“Okay everyone, take out your notebooks,” she announced. “Today we will start our first lesson!”

Almost everyone groaned.

“Hey now, don’t be like that!” Mrs. Handel chided. “It’s not like we’ll be dissecting frogs!”

Some of the kids giggled nervously, while others gagged.

“Yeah, that’s gonna happen in April!”

Then full-on laughter. Someone ran out of the room, looking rather nauseous.

“Okay, enough horsing around, today we’ll be covering the scientific method. Who here knows what that is?”

Penelope raised her hand eagerly. Mrs. Handel gestured to her.

“It’s when you notice something and try to test it out to see if what you think is happening is happening!” Penelope said.

“Very good, Penelope!” Mrs. Handel praised. “The scientific method has six steps. These six steps are…”

She drew the first step on the blackboard in red chalk.

“…make an observation…”

Second step in orange chalk.

“…form a question…”

Third step in yellow chalk.

“…form a hypothesis…”

Fourth step in green chalk.

“…conduct an experiment…”
Fifth step in blue chalk.

“…analyze the data…”

Last step in purple chalk.

“…and draw a conclusion. What I want you guys to do is design your own version of this chart. We will be putting this on the bulletin board over there. Your parents will see this during open house next week, just so you all know.”

Penelope wasn’t a note taker. She just watched and memorized. She watched everyone else take notes out of her peripheral vision.

“Okay, now you can start making your charts,” Mrs. Handel said. “And make ‘em pretty!”

Penelope took her colored pencils from her backpack, and picked a bright red colored pencil to start out with.

She drew a six-layered cupcake tower, with a step of the scientific method on each layer. Each layer also had a different kind of cupcake on it.

Then she doodled cookies on every corner plus an atom shape on top of the cupcake tower.

“What the heck, how did you DO that?” Brian asked.

“Do what?” Penelope asked.

“Draw those cupcakes that good!”

Penelope blinked. “Cupcakes are literally the only thing I can draw. I’ll prove it.”

Penelope then proceeded to sketch a stick insect. Then she drew a pair of black holes in it. Then she scribbled a bunch of wires on top of it.

“What the heck?” Brian said.

“It’s supposed to be Caroline, but the eyes are too dark,” Penelope explained.

Silence.

“Yeah, that’s the problem with this horror show,” Brian mumbled.

“I told you I can’t draw anything but cupcakes!” Penelope defended. “I’m a photographer, not a sketchy-drawy-painty person…”

“I can see that.”

“Shut up.”

Astrid was sitting in her usual seat next to Fiona in Mrs. Weaver’s physical science. It and English were their only classes together, so they took those two classes as opportunities to talk about their days up to that point.

“So after Jayme ran to get water to clean up the spilled paint, Mel ran up and slipped on it!” Astrid chuckled.
Fiona giggled. “Seriously? That must have made cleaning up difficult!”

“You have NO idea!”

The girls giggled.

Someone gagged audibly.

The girls turned around slowly.

Theo stared at them and gagged audibly in mockery.

The girls blinked.

“Is he okay?” Astrid asked.

“He’s friends with Matt Gorman, of course he’s not okay,” Fiona sighed. “Not to mention the rumors…”

“What rumors?”

“Don’t you fucking dare,” Theo hissed.

“Apparently he ditches people at the first sign of better people,” Fiona explained. “Who knows if that’s what really happened, though. You know how the rumor mill is…”

“Yeah,” Astrid sighed. “I mean, I’m bi, not a lesbian. I like girls, but I’m not a lesbian, dammit!”

“Tell ‘em, Ash!” Fiona cheered. Some other students voiced their agreement.

“It’s probably because I told Courtney she wasn’t my type when she told me not to hit on her!”

“Preach it!”

“Tell ‘em!”

“Give it to ‘er!”

“I prefer brunettes!” Astrid cried triumphantly as she stood on her desk.

“WOO!”

“Same!”

“Go out with me, then!” Theo said.

“Correction: I prefer brunettes who won’t ditch their friends at the drop of a hat,” Astrid said with a cringe.

The sounds of applause and laughter rang.

Then the door opened. Mrs. Weaver sighed.

“I leave the classroom for five minutes and they riot…” she grumbled. “This is why I wanted to teach high school…”
Elliot sat next to Julia in computer science, trying to type without being distracted by a certain set of sixth grade girls.

“Who CARES if you’re in choir?” Miranda scoffed. “I take dance lessons after school!”

“So do I!” Alicia countered. “You’re not special.”

“Well, I have a horse!”

“Ooo, you have a pony, how wonderful,” Alicia mocked.

“Alicia! Miranda! Settle down!” Ms. Marker announced.

Alicia and Miranda glared at each other, growling, before turning back to their computers with a huff.

Julia held Elliot’s hand and rubbed his knuckles with her thumb.

“You okay now?” she asked with a smile.

Elliot chuckled. “Well now I’m distracted by something better…”

Julia giggled.

She was glad to see that her boyfriend was doing okay after Theo’s betrayal. Elliot was never one to let the big things get to him. The small things could stress him out majorly, but the big things could never quite register. Julia wasn’t sure if Elliot’s priorities were skewed or if he just let the stress accumulate until something sent it flying.

But that was part of why they worked - Julia looked at the big picture, Elliot had an eye for details. It was really helpful last year during the science fair - second place was actually pretty good when competing against Almsal Gakrou.

Speaking of, he was in this class.

“Hey, Ell, remember the science fair last year?” Julia asked.

“Can it wait? I’m in the middle of some calibrations,” Elliot said.

“Is that nerd speak for ‘sorry, Julia, I have no idea what you’re talking about’?” Julia snarked.

“Yes,” Elliot replied seriously.

Julia sighed. “Well, we won second. The guy who won first is in this class.”

Then Elliot’s eyes widened. “Oh, okay, I remember now. Smokestack guy, won first place by building a Tesla coil, ended up almost winning nationals with it.”

“I still call racism on that one,” Julia mumbled.

“So did Principal Kierkegaard,” Elliot said.

“Yeah, that’s why she’s better than ol’ Mrs. Albertson back at Upland…”

Elliot growled lowly.

He never did like it when she talked about her years at Upland.
“But why’s he talking to those sixth graders…?” Julia asked herself.

“I have orchestra with the chick with the braid,” Elliot said. “Apparently there’s some book club gaining ground among the sixth and eighth graders. A few seventh graders have signed on, but the rest are too intimidated by the presence of exactly three Monsters and paranoid of the wrath of Gorman.”

“But Matt’s -”

“An idiot, I know, but for some reason idiots rule the world…”

Julia snickered. Another thing she liked about Elliot - he knew how to make her laugh.

“So you wanna try it?” Elliot asked.

“Try what?” Julia asked.


“Oh!” Julia said. “I guess. Do you want to?”

“Hey, it can’t be all bad,” Elliot said with a shrug. “As long as there’s not too many people, I’m good.”

“Then if you go, I go too,” Julia assured with a smile.

Elliot returned her smile with an awkward half-smile of his own.

Trav and Scott sat in Principal Kierkegaard’s office, waiting for their parents to pick them up.

Principal Kirkegaard rested her chin on her right hand.

“So, Travis Martin,” she said. “Back in my office already.”

Trav scowled at Principal Kierkegaard.

“Why were you ditching class on the football field of all places?”

“It’s not MY fault!” Trav claimed. “That midget started it!”

Principal Kierkegaard blinked. “A midget.”

“Yeah!” Scott added. “Some midget with a weird hat who was chewing on a seahorse!”

Principal Kierkegaard stared at the boys like they were crazy.

“I don’t know what you two think I asked, but wrong answer,” she sighed wearily. “I’m asking you two why you were brought here - and if you say ANYTHING about whatever the heck that was, you’re suspended.”

It was but an idle threat, but the boys didn’t know that.

“W-well, yesterday some Rabbit brought its pet rat to class -” Scott began nervously.

“Okay, first of all, just because someone is a Monster does not make them an ‘it’, ”Principal Kierkegaard interjected.
Scott groaned. “Fine, she brought her pet rat to school, and I tried to show it to the teacher and it bit me!”

Principal Kirkegaard blinked. “Go on…”

“He was about to punch the Monster, right?” Trav continued. “So these three MASSIVE kids from… I think they’re Mountainside kids, but they’re like MASSIVE, like REALLY massive -”

“Get to the point, Travis.”

“So they stood up to defend the Monster, and I told Scott to let it go since it would be doing what it wants -”

“So you used offensive language?” Principal Kierkegaard asked, starting to lose her patience.

“No, that’s not even the POINT here!” Trav groaned. “So one of those massive kids and that seahorse-eating midget are in my science class. They were telling some other kid about what happened, then the midget called me a racist faggot -”

Trav stopped speaking abruptly.

“Keep going, Travis,” Principal Kierkegaard warned.

“So I…challenged her to a…fight in the courtyard after school,” Trav continued weakly.

“But she wimped out and didn't show!” Scott snapped.

“Yeah!” Trav concurred, clearly gaining some confidence. “So when I confronted her about it today, she said she had no idea what I was talking about!”

“So we decided to show some mercy and have a do-over fight on the football field during lunch!” Scott added.

“And she didn’t show again!”

Principal Kierkegaard sighed, rubbing her temples. “So someone calls you out on an actual flaw, and you fight them!”

“I’m not GAY!” Trav screamed.

“I never said you were,” Principal Kierkegaard sighed. “I’ll be calling your parents, and you’ll be sent home for the rest of the week.”

“What!” the boys screamed.

“Hey, be glad it’s Thursday,” Principal Kierkegaard deadpanned as she picked up the phone to call the front desk. “Hey Kendra, can you call the parents of Travis Martin and Scott Foley? Okay, thank you. You’re free to head home after you do that.”

Then Principal Kierkegaard hung up the phone. “You two wait in the front. I have some work to do.”

Trav and Scott stood up and left, glaring at the principal over their shoulders.

As soon as they left, Principal Kirkegaard sighed and rubbed her temples.
She took some aspirin out of a desk drawer and took one.

Then she chuckled a bit.

“…seahorse-eating midgets? What the hell?”

Sans gazed upon his kingdom.

And by gazed upon his kingdom we mean took a nap while his students scrambled to solve the formula written on the board.

This, in Sans’ humble opinion, was the best part of teaching elementary physics - seeing who can do what while watching them fail to not panic.

“Holy shit I got it!” someone cried out.

The groans and complaints of how it wasn’t fair rang out as Tom walked up and slammed the paper with the completed formula on Sans’ desk as he panted heavily in exhaustion.

Sans looked over the formula through his right eye, keeping the left eye closed.

“good job, tom,” he said. “you’re free to go.”

Tom cheered and ran out of the classroom as envious and incredulous students watched.

Then they turned to stare agog at their Skeletal professor.

“you wanna leave too, then stop staring at me and finish your work,” Sans said with a shrug. “he finished first, he gets to leave first, simple as that.”

Some of the students grumbled as they continued their work.

Sans went back to sleep.

Everyone in Ms. Clark’s fifth period drama class had moved their desks around to make a decently-sized area of empty space in the middle of the room.

Ms. Clark, a kaftan-wearing Human woman of above-average height and full build with freckles and a kinky-curly French roll hairstyle, stood toward the front of the room with her hands on her hips.

“Okay everyone, since this is the first day we’ll actually be doing something, we’re going to start with improv,” Ms. Clark announced. “Does anyone know what improv is?”

Caroline and Almsal both raised their hands. They were the only ones out of the class to do so.

“Yes, the tall one?” Ms. Clark said.

Almsal and Caroline blinked in confusion. Both were far too used to being referred to as “the tall one” in these types of situations.

Ms. Clark recognized this. “Okay then, the taller one,” she corrected.

“That would be you,” Caroline said, gesturing toward Almsal.

The Smoke Elemental nodded.
“Improv is unscripted theater, which one acts out based on what the performer before them has done,” he explained.

“That’s correct!” Ms. Clark announced. “And with that, today we will be doing just that. I will assign you all a number from one to five, and you will join a group with others with your same number. Everyone ready?”

Everyone agreed.

Caroline, Astrid, Miranda, and Almsal in group one; Levi, Kristina, Matt, and Moira were in group two.

Caroline took the opportunity to further her cause when it was group one’s turn to improv before the class.

“Hey, you there!” she announced in her best infomercial voice while pointing at Astrid.

“Who, me?” Astrid asked, pointing at herself in confusion.

“Yes, you! Do you like reading books?”

“Uh-huh!” Astrid replied.

“Do you enjoy talking about books with other people who enjoy reading books?”

“Uh-huh!”

“Then you’ll love Book Club™!” Caroline announced, placing emphasis on the ™. “Every Tuesday starting on September 19th, from 2:45 to 4:30, we will be meeting in room D-105!”

“Hey, I heard about that!” Astrid said. “But isn’t that only for sixth graders?”

“Oh, no! Book Club™ is for bookworms of ALL ages!” Caroline assured. “As long as you are a student at North Middle School, you can be a member of Book Club™!”

“Wow!” Astrid said. “Where do I sign?”

Caroline produced the papers. “Sign right here with your name and contact information! We’ll get back to you when it’s all official!”

“Oh my GAWSH, stop being NERDS!” Miranda groaned.

“Well, Miss Miranda,” Almsal said in an affected British accent, “considering we are in a lesson on the dramatic arts, I do believe that all of us are, as you say, ‘nerds’.”

The other students giggled.

“I bet you freaks are just jealous of my perfection,” Miranda said primly.

“You think that, Jane, if it gives you comfort,” Caroline said with an equally-falsified British accent and an inhumanly serene smile.

“MY NAME IS MIRANDA!” Regina shrieked in fury.

Everyone applauded.
Caroline and Astrid bowed dramatically. Almsal did absolutely nothing.

Levi sent the video of the performance to everyone in his contacts, then went up with the rest of group two.

“Show these primitives what the Marlow-Goldsby siblings are made of, brother,” Caroline said, an eerie smile upon her face.

Levi responded with a nod and an eerie smile of his own.

Levi, Kristina, Matt, and Moira went up to perform.

Levi cleared his throat.

“Hello, sisterly duo!” he said to Moira and Kristina, his voice lilting like that of an insurance salesman. “Would you two be interested in buying life insurance?”

“What?” Moira asked flatly.

“Life insurance! Should one of you ladies be left alone without your sister, you’ll need monetary compensation to get by, right? What if some maniac comes in here and shoots us all to death?”

Everyone became silent. All were filled with discomfort.

“Matt, that’s your cue,” Levi said. “You’re the maniac who shoots us all to death.”

Matt said nothing, merely making a gun out of his fingers and aiming, making three shooting sounds.

“Ohhh, I’m hit, I’m hit!” Levi said as he fell to the linoleum flooring, flailing about dramatically while clutching an imaginary bullet wound in his chest.

“Gasp!” Krisitna said dramatically while turning to face Matt with a look of mock surprise on her face. “Jennifer, how could you shoot your own father in cold blood like that?!”

“My name’s not Jennifer, you furry freak,” Matt sneered, clearly not acting anymore as he held up the finger gun. “You’re next…”

“Okay, team two is disqualified for hateful content!” Ms. Clark interjected.

“Dammit, Jennifer!” Levi griped. “You made us lose!”

“You shut up too!” Matt snapped.

Kristina was a bit anxious now. Moira and Levi walked her back over with their friends.

“If it’s any consolation, I think it was going great before the big shootout,” Caroline said. “Edge Lords really don’t belong in life insurance commercials.”

Silence.

“Yyyeah, adding that to the growing list of Things Caroline Has Said That No Sane Creature Would Say,” Levi said.

“Brother, of all people, surely you should be accustomed to my wondrous wit and wisdom,” Caroline said, placing a dramatic hand over her heart.
“And yet that does not stop me from being impressed by some of your quirkier moments, sister.”

“My quirkier moments impress even myself at times.”

“Your ego shines at the strangest moments.”

“Indeed it does.”

“Both of you are very odd,” Astrid said bluntly.

“Thank you,” the Marlow-Goldsby Siblings said in unison with mocking smiles on their faces.

A few hours later, after school had ended, Undyne and Alphys were playing with Mamoru in their bedroom.

The eleven-month-old’s shaggy bright red hair had grown out, being long enough that his three little horns were but nubs peeking from the fiery puff. The rest of him had grown as well, and quickly too.

Undyne was playing that the mattress was a trampoline and bouncing Mamoru up and down on it, one of Mamoru’s favorite games - clearly he was going to be an active one, to Undyne’s joy.

She even made silly sound effects, to Mamoru’s joy.

Alphys looked on, addid some of her own playfulness to the exchange.

She’d always felt special whenever she would be reminded by her friends - technically an extended family with hiw close hey all were - of how much calmer Undyne was around her. But it wasn’t hust her anymore - now their son, this little existence, this entirely new lifeform that they’d created together could see that side of her too.

Alphys deeply hoped that Mamoru could see just how special that made him, to be someone that Undyne - a woman widely considered a hero among her people, someone hotblooded and forceful by nature, Undyne - considered close enough to bring out her gentler side around without fear of being considered weak. Stars knew Alphys still had trouble believing that this was her life, she didn’t need that added pain of her own child going through that same self-loathing. She was going to do everything in her power to make sure that little Mamoru Akira knew he was loved.

Alphys’ reveries was interrupted when Undyne abruptly stopped making silly sound effects at her son and started talking to her beloved wife.

“You alright there, Alphy?” she asked, holding out Mamoru for her to take.

Alphys smiled warmly and took her son into her arms.

“Y-yeah, I’m fine,” Alphys assured. “I was just thinking about stuff…”

“What kind of stuff…?” Undyne asked, a shit-eating grin on her face.

Alphys was unamused.

“N-not the kind of s-stuff you’re thinking of, unfortunately,” she deadpanned.

“Awww…” Undyne moaned as her face fell in disappointment before bouncing right back again.

“But I just had the best idea EVER!”
“No Undyne, we are not adding rockets to Mamoru’s stroller for his birthday.”

“No what I was gonna ask, but still a total bummer!” Undyne said. “I was going to ask if you and Mamo-chan wanted to come with me to work on his birthday! See where Mama works before he sees where his Ka-chan works!”

Alphys thought for a moment.

“N-not a bad idea,” Alphys admitted after a bit. “B-but what if he wants to see where I work first instead?”

Undyne smirked. A challenge hath been issued - by her own wife, no less.

“Well then, Ka-chan, let’s see who Mamoru wants to join at work first!” she said. “Put ‘im on the bed, whoever he crawls to first gets to take him to work!”

Alphys hummed.

“I-I don’t see why it w-wouldn’t work,” she said. “Let’s do it!”

“Awriight! Let’s get it started!”

Alphys giggled and set Mamoru down on the center of the bed. Alphys moved to the right side of the bed, while Undyne went to the left.

“O-okay Mamo-chan,” she cooed. “Come to Ka-chan!”

“Naw, li'l man, come to Mama!” Undyne said, opening her arms wide in welcome anticipation of a hug.

Mamoru stared back and forth between his mama and ka-chan, his light green brow furrowed with indecision, the fins on the sides of his face twitching.

Then he moved into crawling position.

Alphys and Undyne held their breaths in anticipation.

He crawled a few paces forward before flopping facefirst into the soft duvet cover.

Just as his mothers moved to help him, he righted himself once more, a look on his face that told the world that Mamoru Akira Styracor-Buemako would NEVER give up.

Then he crawled toward his parent of choice.

He stood, using Alphys’ crest as support.

He opened his mouth, his four sharp, fang-like teeth visible as he moved his mouth and babbled.

“O-oh my gosh, I’ve been chosen!” Alphys squeaked. “AND he’s about to say his first words!”

Undyne filmed the moment, ready for anything.

“Kuh-muh…”

“C-come on, Mamo-chan, y-you can do it!” Alphys encouraged.

“Kuh-muh-muh-kuh-kuh-”
“COME ON, SON!” Undyne screamed. “YOU! CAN! DOOO IIIIT!”

Mamoru strained a bit.

“Mmmuh…mmmuh…”

Undyne gasped. “Oh my gosh, he’s gonna say Mama, I just KNOW it -”

“Ka-cha…”

Stunned silence filled the room.

Mamoru squished Alphys’ face between his tiny green hands, headbutting her.

“Ka-cha!” he repeated, louder and happier this time.

Alphys gasped.

Her eyes filled with tears of joy as she hugged her son.

“Y-y-y-y-yeah, s-sweetie…” she whimpered. “I-it’s Ka-chan…”

Undyne started crying too now.

She joined the cuddle pile.

Never had Undyne Bluemako been so happy to lose a challenge.

Frisk, Toriel, and Sans all sat in the basement, watching Blue Hawaii.

Toriel and Sans snuggled with each other, Sans on Toriel’s lap, her arms wrapped around him lovingly.

Frisk held Flowey close in a similar manner.

Flowey had long ceased to care.

Not even when Sans and Toriel started humming along with Can’t Help Falling In Love.

Not even when Frisk left with Flowey in tow to give them some privacy, leaving nothing but a note saying so in their previous spot.

He didn’t care. He didn’t WANT to.

Asriel didn’t believe any if that.

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*Your growing circle of friends fills you with*

**DETERMINATION**

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Chapter End Notes
You're Going Down - Sick Puppies

Fun Fact: Undyne wants her kids to call her Mama or Ma or Mom. Alphys wants her kids to call her Ka-chan, a sort of shorthand for Oka-chan, the Japanese word for mother, because she's a fucking weeb. Asgore will be Bara, because he is one.
Chapter Summary

Frisk applies fandoms to politics, Sans and Papyrus have a broment (bro moment), Miranda makes Brian VERY uncomfortable, Asgore is to innocent to be real, a band name is finalized, Kristina accidentally seduces Nicko using the power of long division and a meddling Eddie, the book club becomes a force to be reckoned with in the span of half an hour, and shit. Goes. DOWN.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter contains non-con elements and ableist language. Viewer discretion is advised.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

8:11 A.M., September 19th, 20XR

It’s a stormy day outside.

Rain is falling.

Thunder is crashing.

On days like this, kids like you…

…are in the library waiting for school to start.

Frisk sat in the lap of the giant stuffed badger in the school library, chatting with MK and Hunter.

“So, you stopped watching Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles because April started dating Casey instead of Donatello?” MK asked, an edge of amusement in their voice.

<<Donnie loves her, MK,>> MK signed, their face miffed at their best friend’s dismissal of their plight. <<Casey is a jerk.>>

“But April’s been the one for Casey since the comics came out in 1984!” Hunter claimed. “While I prefer April enter a relationship with Donnie, most long-time fans prefer her with Casey because that’s what they’re used to.”

<<I think that Donatello and April becoming a thing would break a lot of barriers,>> Frisk signed. <<Not just for fans of the series, but for the rest of the world as well!>>
“Frisk, your Political’s showing,” MK said.

Frisk signed a quick apology. MK made sure that Frisk kept their Political Life and their Ethical Life separate. They still had a tendency to bleed together, but MK helped them return to Ethical Life when they went Political.

“Hey guys!” Levi greeted, far too cheerful for so early in the morning.

Then they saw why, as Jordan walked in with him.

<<Hi Levi! Hi Jordan!>> Frisk signed.

“Hey Frisk!” Jordan said. “Oh, hey MK! You too Hunter!”

“Hey!” MK greeted.

“Hey guys!” Hunter said. “Where’s Caroline?”

“She’s turning in the book club forms,” Levi explained. “If she gets the okay, we’re meeting after school for the first book club on the 29th!”

“Sweet!” MK said. “Here’s wishing her luck!”

Principal Kierkegaard signed the forms.

All was set.

“Alright, Caroline, your book club is a go!” she said. “24’s a lot of members, though…”

“I can suffer through it silently enough,” Caroline said with a shrug. “Tis a leader’s duty, after all.”

“Don’t I know it,” Principal Kierkegaard muttered.

Caroline snickered in response.

“Anyway, thank you SO much!” Caroline said. “I’ll let you know how the first meeting goes!”

“I’ll be looking forward to it!” Principal Kierkegaard said. “See you around!”

Caroline bid the principal farewell and went on her way.

She fought back squeals of happiness.

Penelope was waiting for her in the front.

“Well?” Penelope asked.

Caroline’s smile gave it all away.

Penelope squealed and jumped up and down in happiness.

Caroline joined her.

“I am going to make cupcakes for EVERY meeting, just you WAIT!” Penelope vowed.

“I wouldn’t have anyone else’s but those of my VICE PRESIDENT!” Caroline said.
Penelope squealed again.

The front desk lady hushed them.

Penelope stopped.

“Let’s go squeal girlishly in the cafeteria,” Caroline said.

“Let’s DO this!”

---

Sans had been hearing a lot of talk lately.

Talk about a state fair.

Sans looked it up on the computer in his office at the university.

Looked like something Papyrus would really enjoy. Frisk too.

The fair went through the last week of September and the first few days of October. He made plans to cancel classes the 28th and 29th. Give his own students a chance at some fun. They deserved it.

He had a feeling Frisk would end up inviting their ever-growing circle of friends - not that he necessarily minded, Frisk’s friends were all great kids. But was a little time with just his family too much to ask for once in awhile?

Knowing Sans’ luck, the answer was a resounding yes.

Luckily Mamoru’s first birthday was a family-only event.

Sans considered whether to call or text Papyrus before settling on the former.

An immediate answer as always.

“HELLO?” Papyrus answered.

“sup bro,” Sans said. “I heard from some of my students that there’s a state fair coming up.”

WHAT IS A STATE FAIR?” Papyrus asked.

“An event where people from around the state congregate to eat greasy food, play games, and judge livestock,” Sans explained.

“OH, THAT SOUNDS LIKE FUN!” Papyrus chimed. “EXCEPT FOR THE PART ABOUT THE GREASY FOOD. THAT SOUNDS GROSS.”

“So how’s the 29th sound?” Sans asked.

“SOUNDS GREAT!” Papyrus chirped.

“okay then.”

The brothers were silent.

“So where is he right now?” Sans asked.

“HE’S IN MINNEAPOLIS,” Papyrus sighed. “WE SKYPE EACH OTHER EVERY NIGHT.”
HE SINGS ME TO SLEEP.”

More silence.

“I REALLY MISS METTATON, SANS.”

“yeah,” Sans sighed. “just a couple more months until he’s back, pap. and you know he will be. you two are officially mated now, after all.”

Papyrus spluttered into the receiver, flustered as all get-out.

“bro, you could tell when tori and i mated. it’s kind of a thing with skeletons. like knowing someone’s gender identity as soon as we meet ‘em, or blue magic.”

“OR SCIENCE AND MATH?”

“nah, that’s more of a gaster family thing,” Sans said.

“WELL THEN THAT JUST MAKES US UNIQUE, DOESN’T IT?” Papyrus pointed out.

Sans smiled. “yeah. it does.”

“WELL, SANS, I DO BELIEVE THAT YOU SHOULD GET BACK TO PRETENDING TO WORK,” Papyrus said. “I WILL SEE YOU THIS EVENING!”

“okay bro, see ya when i get home,” Sans said. “bye.”

“BYE, I LOVE YOU!”

“love ya too, bye.”

“BYE!”

Then Papyrus hung up.

Sans decided to do some actual work.

He paused.

Had he just decided to do work? Like, no prompting, just…deciding?

Stars above, he’d changed.

He needed a nap. Sleep off that brief about of out-of-character-ness.

Miranda sat next to Brian. She’d prepared herself for this moment. She’d been practicing making out with Scott for when she succeeded in making Brian hers. She’s even put on extra lip gloss, make her lips EXTRA shiny and sparkly. So what if it was a bit sticky?

Brian gagged a bit. Probably because he was sitting next to that Dreemurr freak.

Miranda giggled.

“Okay everyone,” Mrs. Bell announced. “Take out your workbooks and turn to page 26, and work through problems 1 through 21 until class is over. Come to me if you have any questions, you may begin.”
Miranda stared at the division problem before her and sneered in disgust.

When the heck would ANYONE need to know 2,395 divided by 479?!

Then it hit her.

She smirked inwardly at her plot.

“Hey, Brian?” Miranda asked, putting a hand on his thigh. “Can you… help me with the first problem?”

“No,” Brian deadpanned. “Get your hand off my leg.”

Miranda removed her hand - while slowly dragging her fingernails up Brian’s thigh.

“Your entire hand,” Brian reiterated.

Miranda squeezed his thigh before removing it.

Brian jumped.

Brian looked very uncomfortable for some reason. Probably because he preferred doing things like this in private.

After all, there’s no way Brian WOULDN’T like Miranda, RIGHT?

Gaster twitched, causing his guitar to fall, and thus band practice to be interrupted.

“Goodness, are you alright, Doctor?” Asgore asked.

“Yes, just a myoclonic,” Gaster reassured. “If it happens again, I’ll have to stop since that means it probably won’t for a while.”

“That’d mean it went clonic, right?” Randy asked.

“Correct,” Gaster answered.

“Hey, maybe someone, somewhere, said something so unbelievably stupid that the universe facepalmed - and you felt it!” Chas joked.

Gaster chuckled. “Perhaps so.”

Then Gaster’s phone rang.

Gaster went to answer it.

“This is Dr. Gaster, may I help you? Oh, Papyrus, hello!” Gaster said, an excitement in his staticy voice that only his boys and grandchildren could induce. “Is there something you need? Did you break something?”

“Does he always get happy like that when he asks if someone broke something?” Chas asked.

“He’s always enjoyed tinkering,” Asgore said. “Once upon a time, back in…I think it was the late 17th century, early 18th? He was having a slow work day, so Tori - sorry, Toriel and I decided to pay him a visit, and we found him destroying things about his lab - just so he would have something to fix!”
“Alright then, goodbye Papyrus, I love you!”

Gaster hung up.

“Apparently Papyrus, Sans, Frisk, and Toriel are going to some event known as a ‘state fair’ and have invited me to join them,” Gaster said. “They have also invited Randy and Sharona and their children.”

“When is it?” Asgore asked.

“The 29th,” Gaster said.

“We can make that,” Randy said. “Crap, that reminds me - Sharona and I haven’t talked to Caroline about the request…”

“What request and why are you reminded?” Chas asked.

“Sharona told me that Sans had asked her to see if Caroline would want to write a speech for the wedding,” Randy explained. “I think she’d want to, but I think I’m going to end up telling her not to write about how much she hates people this time…”

“Best graduation speech ever,” Chad said. “You raised a smart girl…”

“Thanks,” Randy said with a smile. “I’m sure that Mercedes woulda been a smart cookie herself.”

Chas smiled sadly. “Yeah, she would have…”

Silence overcame the fathers.

“So I guess Nemo’s our official band name then?” Chas asked.

“Seems like it,” Randy said. “Though I’m still kinda partial to The CRAWDads.”

“Okay, that’s our new name,” Gaster announced.

“Is it because we are all fathers, or have been at some point in the last?” Asgore asked.

“Yes, but also the word CRAW is an acronym for our names,” Randy explained. “C for Chas, R for Randy, A for Asgore, W for Wingdings, you know?”

“Oh, I see!” Asgore said.

“I still like Dadster and the Daddy-O’s,” Gaster said as he picked up his guitar, only to jerk his hands and drop it again.

He sighed in exhaustion, twitching.

“Aaaand we’re clonic.”

“It’s cool man!” Chas assured. “We got three songs in - that’s good!”

“We can just hang around and brag about our families,” Randy said.

“My elder son has three Ph.D.s and my younger son broke a world record for fastest time to solve a Rubik’s cube while blindfolded,” Gaster said.

“My children were royalty,” Asgore said.
“My daughter won three beautiful baby contests,” Chas said.

“My daughter’s a Wizard and my son is probably going to direct a remake of a Mel Brooks film using money he won in Vegas,” Randy said.

The men were silent for a while

“I think we should have some breakfast,” Asgore said. “We can yiff later.”

Randy choked.

Gaster facepalmed.

Chas laughed.

Asgore had no idea why his friends were reacting this way about breakfast.

Mr. Cranach’s third period art II class had just begun.

Everyone had grabbed their portfolios and was sitting down.

Except for Astrid.

She looked all over the classroom for her portfolio - even in her backpack, where it almost certainly would NOT be. And it wasn’t.

She blew her bangs up in exasperation and went to sit down with a paper.

She checked her wallet. $8.75. She had a week to come up with more, but for now she would be able to pay for an hour.

She sighed and sat next to Jayme.

“Hey, Jayme, can you help me find something?” she asked. “It’s extremely important.”

“How much you got?” Jayme asked, sketching the still life of a plaster bust of a Roman god with a charcoal pencil.

“$8.75,” Astrid answered as she started sketching the bust. “I’ll have the rest ready when you find it.”

“Of course,” Jayme said. “And what is it you need me to find, exactly?”

Astrid hesitated.

“My art portfolio,” she sighed. “I looked all over the classroom, i even checked my backpack!”

“Don’t worry, I’ll find it,” Jayme reassured.

“I know,” Astrid said with a smile.

“Astrid Woods, Jayme Silver, quiet when sketching!” Mr. Cranach said.

“Yessir,” Astrid and Jayme said in unison.
Hunter, Penelope, Bruce, Eddie, Nicko, and Kristina all wracked their brains on the solution to 421,255 divided by 865.

“Okay, so do we carry this?” Eddie asked.

“No, Eddie, that’s multiplication, in division we drop,” Hunter said.

“But what are we even supposed to be dropping, man?!” Eddie whined.

“You guys are still on number five?” Kristina asked.

“Yeah, what’s WITH that?” Penelope added.

The boys and Hunter looked up at the two girls, who were smiling innocently.

“Please help us, you are our only hopes!” Eddie whined.

“Dude, are you seriously asking for help from a couple of girls?” Trav mocked.

“Better than fail, girl-hater,” Hunter said.

“You callin’ me a fag?” Trav gritted.

“How does girl-hater even translate to that?” Eddie asked.

Nicko shrugged.

“Maaan, I wish Caroline were here!” Penelope moaned. “She’d know how to solve number twenty!”

“I’ll show you!” Kristina said.

Penelope watched and listened intently as Kristina showed the group how to divide 143982 by 421 to get 342.

“Whoa,” Eddie remarked. “Didja SEE that, Nicko?”

Kristina blushed and pulled down her ears to hide her blushing face.

Nicko seemed concerned for Kristina. He glared at Eddie. Eddie shrugged in falsified innocence.

Penelope and Hunter turned to smirk knowingly at each other.

Lunch time. Caroline sat on the couch in the library and had her phone out.

She hit the contacts of the book club members to tell them all the good news.

*Greetings, North Middle School Book Club. I am delighted to inform you all that we have received permission to meet every Tuesday after school in room D-105 from 2:45 to 4:30 starting on the 29th. Please meet me in the library by the giant badger so we can discuss club officer positions and answer any questions you may have.

*Also, I sincerely hope that you all have this number recorded in your contacts. If not, do so now under the name Caroline Marlow. Club President is also accepted, as are The Book Queen and The Wizard.*
Caroline took out Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy - currently she was on the eighth Canto of Purgatorio.

*Here, Reader, fix thine eyes well on the truth,*

*For now indeed so subtle is the veil,*

*Surely to penetrate within is easy.*

*I saw that army of the gentle-born -*

“Caroline I got your text and came as soon as I could!”

Caroline was about to snap at whoever it was before she saw Penelope.

“Glad you could make it, Vice Presidentlash-Snack Provider,” Caroline said with a nod, placing her book pages down for to keep her place.

“I’m vice president AND snack provider?!” Penelope gasped. “This is the best day of my life…”

“You know what would make it better?” Caroline asked softly.

“What?” Penelope asked, eager.

A pause came between them.

“If we were in Colorado,” Caroline said.

“Well, I mean, yeah,” Penelope said with a shrug.

Neither girl could tell the other was disappointed.

“Hey, guys!”

Elaina, Colleen, Hunter, and Brian had shown up.

“I got the text,” Hunter said. “I changed Caroline’s contact name to The Book Queen. I can’t believe I never thought of that…”

“Don’t feel too bad about it,” Caroline said in what she probably assumed was an attempt at reassurance,

“Wooo, book club!”

Bruce, Eddie, Nicko, Marilla, Kristina, and Ridley were present now.

Then Almsal, Audrey, Jenson, and Sarah walked up, followed by Elliot, Julia, Sofie, Moira, Fiona, and Astrid.

“Well!” Caroline said with cheerful tenseness. “This looks a LOT like my next death!”

“Wait, we’re missing some people,” Almsal realized.

“Oh joy,” Caroline deadpanned.

“Holy crap, there’s a lot of people here!”
Levi and Jordan, the last of the book club members, appeared.

Caroline’s eyes widened. Any more and she was sure we would have a meltdown, then a heart attack, then she would die again. Then her body would be disposed of by being trampled by these people -

“…and then they’re gonna throw me out the window and the last bits of me are gonna be eaten by crows!” Caroline continued, as she had been speaking aloud without realizing it.

At least she hadn’t realized it until someone cleared their throat and she looked up at the concerned army of people (dreadful, dreadful people).

She knew how to recover quickly well enough, at least. She inhaled deeply through her nose and out through her mouth.

“Hey guys!” she said. “Let’s start by announcing officers?”

Everyone continued staring at her like she was mental.

“Sorry about that, it, uh…takes me a bit to adjust to sudden onslaups of people,” Caroline explained. “I hate people, if you didn’t know that about me.”

“Caroline, your graduation speech was pretty much you saying you hate people in the nicest way you could,” Levi said.

“But not everyone here was there,” Caroline said. “Anyway, club officers. As founder, is it not reasonable then that I be president?”

“You mean you considered someone else?” Brian asked. “As president of YOUR idea?”

“Absolutely NOT!” Caroline scoffed. “Someone else would just mess it up!”

“Okay, but what about Vice President?” Kristina asked.

“It’s Penelope, isn’t it?” Hunter said, crossing her arms and smirking.

“Yes,” Caroline said. “I can’t think of anyone else I’d rather have in the position, plus she makes the best cupcakes ever.”

“She really does make good cupcakes, like for real!” Eddie said. “You shoulda been at the bake sale back in February!”

“Yeah, you REALLY shoulda been there,” Hunter said weakly. “My grandma got arrested and Frisk’s mom got engaged.”

“I’m surprised that no one threw any food,” MK remarked.

“They didn’t wanna waste Penelope’s glorious cupcakes, and Mrs. Thompson’s lemon squares could kill a person in two or more different ways,” Caroline said.

“What does any of that have to do with club officers?” Astrid asked.

“Sorry about that,” Caroline said. “Anyway, any volunteers for secretaryship?”

No one raised their hands.
Caroline waited. She stared off into space.

Astrid raised her hand.

“Okay then Astrid Woods for secretary, going once, going twice…”

No objections.

“Astrid, there you are, I was looking for you!”

A girl with dirty blonde hair and blue eyes pushed her way through the army toward Astrid.

“Jayme, what’s up?” Astrid asked. “Did you find my portfolio yet?”

“Not yet, but I picked up a few promising leads!” Jayme said. “What’s going on here?”

“Book club,” Caroline said. “We are currently assigning officer positions, and Astrid is now our secretary. If you wish, you can join the book club. We meet on Tuesdays after school and leave at 4:30.”

“I’ll consider it, thanks!” Jayme said.

“What was that about a portal-whatsit?” Brian asked.

“Oh, I lost my art portfolio today, and Jayme Silver -”

“That’s me,” Jayme said.

“- is helping me look for it. She’s like the school detective.”

“She has her own agency!” Audrey said. “She helped me find my laptop and cell phone over the summer.”

“She does her work and does it well,” Sarah said.

“Interesting,” Caroline mused. “Well, if you choose to join, I’m in the library for lunch every day.”

“Okay, thank you!” Jayme said. “See you guys around!”

And with that Jayme left.

The silence was by no means tense or awkward, but its presence was just enough to cause slight discomfort.

“Okay, Levi is the historian since he has a camcorder,” Caroline said. “And if I remember properly from last year, Ridley does too, so you two are co-historians, how’s that sound?”

“Awesome!” Levi said.

“And who wants to be treasurer?” Caroline asked.

“Elaina’s a rich kid, I vote her!” Levi called.

“But her mom’s almost as strict as mine,” Hunter said.

“I-I honestly don’t think she r-really cares what I do a-as long as I stay out of her w-way,” Elaina said.
“But what about money?” Carolien asked. “Just your mom has it, doesn’t mean she’ll let you have it, right?”

“T-true, b-but I’ve s-started noticing a p-pattern in her b-behavior,” Elaina said. “I-I think I could w-work around it if I’m c-careful.”

“Okay then, let us know if you succeed!” Hunter said.

“Okay, and Frisk is the diplomatic representative of the book club due to their experience in the world of politics,” Caroline said. “As long as their minder is okay with it, of course.”

Everyone was silent as they looked toward MK.

MK stared back.

“Hey, if Frisk wants to, thay can!” MK said.

Then everyone looked to Frisk.

Frisk gave a thumbs up gesture.

“I think that’s everything,” Caroline said. “But rest assured that Almsal would be the science officer if book clubs required such a position.”

“I can still be a researcher,” Almsal said.

“Then Almsal is club researcher.”

“I could totally be a bouncer!” Brian said.

“Same here!” Eddie said. “Bruce ‘n Nicko ‘n me could go for that too!”

“Okay, the Three Amigos are the bouncers, and Brian is the undercover security dude,” Penelope said. “If someone suspicious sneaks into the club, he tackles them!”

“I can do that, I like tackling evil to the floor and pummelling it!” Brian said excitedly.

“Brian just got character development, whaddaya know,” Caroline remarked. “Anyway, MK is in charge of marketing and advertising. Drawing up club adverts and the like, come up with a logo. Hunter is in charge of music. If anyone else comes up with more officer positions, please let me know before the afternoon of the 29th.”

“What’s going on back here?”

Mrs. Hill walked up, curious as to the reason for the presence of the small army of middle schoolers congregating around the giant stuffed badger.

“Ah, Madame Librarian, just in time!” Caroline greeted. “Everyone, the club advisor, Mrs. Hill. Mrs. Hill, these are all the club members.”

“Wow, this is - this is a lot of members,” Mrs. Hill said.

“Indeed, but I shall do my best to handle it, despite their presence,” Caroline assured.

Everyone was silent.
“Caroline, you are a stone-cold bitch,” Jenson said.

“Thank you.”

Then the bell rang.

“Okay then. Thank you for meeting up with me everyone, I apologize if I interrupted anything you were doing.”

“Its fine, we got some stuff covered!” Penelope said. “We should get to class now!”

Miranda stood by the life science classroom, waiting patiently for Brian.

She was finally, FINALLY going to ask him out. She felt all giddy inside.

She crossed her legs to fight the urge to jump up and down like a weirdo.

“Miranda?” Mrs. Handel said, peeking her head from the doorway. “You’re not in my class this period what are you doing?”

“Oh, just waiting for someone~” Miranda sang.

Mrs. Handel seemed suspicious. “O-kay, whatever, as long as you aren’t tardy for whatever class you have this period.”

“I’ll be fine,” Miranda snapped.

Mrs. Handel looked slightly offended. “Okay, geez. Sorry I want you to graduate…”

Mrs. Handel went back inside the classroom as students began to show up.

Miranda watched for Brian out of the corner of her eye.

Then she saw him. Walking with Penelope, MK, and Bruce.

She perked up immediately.

“Brian, hiiii!” she called, waving.

Brian immediately widened his eyes in fear.

Penelope, Bruce, and MK looked at him with concern in their eyes.

“Dude, you gotta tell her the truth,” MK said.

“Yeah, if you don’t she’ll just keep trying!” Penelope said. “You want her to leave you alone, you gotta tell her to leave you alone!”

“I don’t like recommending this, but sometimes you have to be a dick if you want to get your point across,” Bruce said cautiously.

Brian knew they were right, but he was terrified. Who knew what Miranda would do to him if he turned her down?

But if he didn’t lay down the law, she would keep stalking him.
Brian Alexander Green summoned all his strength and walked up to confront Miranda.

He felt **Bravery** surge through him.

He stopped in front of Miranda, jaw and other muscles tense.

“What do you want, Miranda?” he asked, the coldness in his voice surprising him.

Miranda’s previous manic grin fell briefly before returning with a vengeance.

“Well, I have a *reeeeally* important question to ask you…” she said, averting her eyes from his face.

“If it’s so important, then just look me in the eye and tell me honestly,” Brian snapped. “If you even know how to be honest, that is.”

“Wha - why would you assume that I’d lie to you, Brian?” Miranda said, looking almost surprised at his accusation.

“Because you lie, Miranda,” Brian said. “It’s what you do, it’s who you are. Now look me in the eye, and say what you wanna say. And make sure it’s the truth.”

Miranda blinked.

“Well, I really really like you - like, like-like you - and I’m pretty sure you like-like me too, because I mean, who wouldn’t like-like me? I’m perfect!”

“I don’t like-like you,” Brian deadpanned.

Miranda gaped at him in disbelief before laughing weakly.

“Haha, good one!” she said.

“I’m not kidding, Miranda,” Brian said, his voice getting tenser with each passing second. “I don’t. Like you. No one with half a brain likes you.”

Miranda’s eyes widened. “Brian, i-it’s not funny anymore.”

“Oh my GOD, Miranda, take a fucking HINT!” Brian screamed. “You’ve been STALKING me for YEARS, you tried to FONDLE me in math class, you MAKE FUN OF my friends, and you actually expect me to LIKE you? You’re INSANE!”

A few kids applauded. Miranda didn’t pay any attention to them. She felt cold.

“B-but - but you’re a BOY, boys LIKE being touched by girls!” Miranda defended.

“Only if it’s a girl who isn’t a stalkery psycho like you,” Brian hissed. “Now if you’ll excuse me, class starts in a bit. I don’t wanna be tardy.”

Brian stormed inside the classroom, leaving a stunned Miranda standing in the hallway.

Miranda walked off to reapply her makeup.

Which actually meant that she hid herself inside a stall and began to cry.

She had a lot to think about.

And none of it was pleasant.
Elaina, Levi, Caroline, and Colleen sat in Math class chatting, since they had already finished their work - and easily, too. Math came easily to these four.

“I can’t believe I’m actually being challenged,” Colleen said. “It’s like…it’s a great feeling!”

“I’m bored,” Caroline said, as she thumbed through Dante’s Paradiso, Canto II. “But at least I have Dante here with me. He actually died almost exactly five centuries and five days ago. September 13th or 14th, 1521. Pretty cool, right?”

The other three blinked at her.

“Sure,” Colleen said unconvincingly.

Then Caroline’s phone vibrated. She raised her hand.

“Yes, Caroline?” Mrs. Bell asked.

“Can I use my phone since I’m done with my work?” Caroline asked. “It’s on silent with the volume completely off.”

“Sure, as long as you’re not ordering Chinese food,” Mrs. Bell said. “It happened last year. Kid’s lucky she bought enough for everyone…”

Caroline blinked. “Plans for April Fool’s, then,” she said. “Maybe buy a pizza for Pi Day?”

“You do that, you automatically make yourself my favorite student,” Mrs. Bell said. “But ONLY on Pi Day.”

“Got it,” Caroline said. “Thank you, Mrs. Bell.”

Caroline stared at the text she’d received from Penelope.

*1 text from: Little Nell*

*watch this!*

*(1 video attachment)*

*Sorrry, I’m in the middle of math class! I’ll have to wait until the bell rings to watch it.*

*okay!*

*See you after school? Sharona’s making pot roast.*

*heck yeah! see you then!*

Caroline smiled as she closed out of the texting app and opened the notes app, writing down an idea for a fluffy romantic scene before returning to her book.

Caroline wondered if this is what being in love feels like. Then again, she is young. It may simply be an overestimation of the real emotion due to unfamiliarity with it. It may simply be hormones - she has reached or is preparing to reach puberty, judging from what books she’s read.

But whatever this feeling she got whenever she thought of Penelope was, it was nice. It felt like she did whenever she used her Magic - like sparks running through her veins and across her skin and
through her brain.

She would need to take it up with an expert of such feelings.

She wondered what Alphys would say about it…

It was the passing period between fourth and fifth periods when Hunter received the video.

For the fifth time.

In three minutes.

*I text from: The Book Queen*

*I’m certain that you’ve seen this already, but social protocol seems to dictate that I send this to you anyway just in case you haven’t.

*(1 video attachment)*

*As you can see, your chances with Brian have increased significantly. I still recommend caution around him, just less than your usual anxiety-level caution if you can. Whatever makes you comfortable.*

Hunter smiled. Caroline claimed to hate people, but you wouldn’t know it by the way she supported her friends.

Hunter sat down in Mr. Klein’s class with Penelope and Colleen.

“So didja get the video?” Penelope asked.

“Yes, five times,” Hunter sighed.

“I see.”

The girls were silent.

“So what’s it like knowing you have a chance with your crush?” Penelope asked, cheerful as ever.

Hunter blushed and hid her face in her arms on the table.

“I don’t understand, are you happy, are you angry? You’re confusing me here, Hunter.”

Hunter whined and banged her head three times on the desk.

“So you’re angry?”

“Well, at you, yeah!” Hunter hissed. “I’m - this is - UGH!”

Penelope paused. She did not expect this. She was confused.

“I-I don’t understand,” Penelope said. “I-I’m sorry, I don’t know what I did wrong, I’m really sorry, I -”

“Please stop apologizing, Penelope, please,” Hunter sighed.

Penelope shrunk in on herself, gnawing on her seahorse chewable.
She was confused and guilty - a combination of feelings she’d always hated.

Monica sat on her bed, medical manual in hand. Most laypeople had no idea just how much had to be done to even be considered to qualify for med school - and how you never really leave med school. You have to keep studying, keep learning, keep reviewing. A single mistake could be the difference between life and death for a patient, especially when that patient is a child. Monica managed to review her medical texts once a month - it kept a sense of stability.

She checked the time on her phone. 11:42 P.M. Late.

Monica opened the email app.

She sighed wearily as she scrolled through a sea of spam, deleting them as she went. Maybe letting the kids use her email for game websites was a bad idea. She made a mental note to herself to help them make their own emails…

Monica froze. Her body went numb.

She thought she scrolled past a familiar name.

And that familiarity was not good.

She opened the email, chest pounding, blood running cold through her veins.

Monica,

It’s been a while. Your sister says you took on your maiden name and moved to Ebott after I left - she said it was because the neighbors and their kids were bullying the girl. You always were a weak-hearted, thin-skinned sap when it came to that one. I’ve told you a thousand times that her condition is not your fault, but then again you never were one to listen when you should. I hope you’ve been working on that.

I’m coming to Ebott with my new wife Melanie to talk about taking custody of Theo. My son deserves a normal family, and I just don’t think you’re capable of that while you’re trying to raise that girl.

We’ll be there around Christmas. You’d better not run away again, or else.

Sincerely,
Tony Garcia

Monica felt the bile rise in her throat.

Tony. Bastard hadn’t changed a bit. Still didn’t think Penelope was his just because of her autism. Still blatantly favored Theo because of his “normalness”.

Monica was furious. She was furious, she was sad, she was mortified -

She had never been more scared of anything in her life.

But for now, she would power through.

Tony,
Six years of no contact, and you haven’t changed one bit.

Her name’s Penelope, jerkface. She’s your daughter. Her favorite things to do are make cupcakes, take photographs, watch old hockey games on YouTube, and hang out with her friends.

If you lay a finger on my children while you’re here, or if this “Melanie” is anything short of an angel to BOTH of my children and NOT just Theo, there WILL be hell to pay. For BOTH of you.

Regards,

Monica DeMartino, PNP

P.S. - She has your smile. You’d know that if you actually bothered to look at her when you weren’t hitting her.

Monica sent the email.

A few moments later, she ran to the bathroom and threw up.

Remembering what Tony did to Penelope had that effect.

The future is so mysterious. This mysteriousness fills you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

I Can't Explain - The Who

Fun Fact: This chapter marks the beginning of a week-long hiatus for me[Spazzin] to go camping. Here's hoping this tides you all over! Stay DETERMINED, okay?
Isn't It Kinda Fun?

Chapter Summary

The first book club meeting, and Trav is jealous of cupcakes.

Also the state fair happens. Monica is a crack shot, Theo is blind to the obvious, Courtney is a ho, and Randy is a Great Husband.

Chapter Notes

Well, I[Spazzin] am publishing this chapter from a Red Robin restaurant in Colorado Springs. It's loud and my autistic ass is low-key dying and this is all I can do to keep from running away screaming.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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2:30 P.M., September 28th, 20XR

It’s a beautiful day outside.

Birds are singing,

Flowers are blooming.

On days like this, kids like you…

…are preparing for Book Club™.

Frisk, Hunter, Eddie, Nicko, Elaina, and Jordan left Mrs. Handel’s classroom and headed to find their friends before heading to room D-105.

It was pretty easy when all the main classes were in the same hallway.

“So Levi’s in social studies, right?” Jordan asked.

“Yeah,” Hunter said.

“Hey guys!”

“Speak of the devil.”

Levi, Penelope, and Kristina left Mr. Nielsen’s classroom at about the same time MK, Caroline, and
Colleen left English class.

“Now we gotta wait for the math kids and pick up the P.E. kids,” Eddie said.

<<Marilla’s the only one in math class this period,>> Frisk signed.

“You called?”

Marilla jogged up to the group.

“Sorry, I had some questions about the homework,” she said.
“Hey, it’s fine!” Hunter encouraged.

“Yeah, integers are hard!” Eddie concurred.

“No they’re not,” Caroline said, slightly offended.

“Yeah, they’re easy!” Levi said.

“And fun!” Kristina added.

“Fun,” Eddie deadpanned. “You three think math - the bane of every kid’s existence - is fun.”

“Well, without some kind of mathematical order everything would not exist in the state that it does,” Caroline said.

“And without math, we wouldn’t have technology!” Kristina said. “Without it, we wouldn’t have cars or cellphones or airplanes or any of that stuff!”

“Yeah, and without math there would be no science,” Levi said.

“Guys, we should get going,” Caroline said. “Book club starts in ten.”

Bruce, Brian, Ridley, Julia, Sofie, Moira, and Audrey walked down the hall from P.E. to meet up with Jenson, Sarah, Jayme, and Almsal to head to the book club.

“So what’ll we be doing for the meeting?” Brian asked.

“We’re just going over the schedule for this semester this time and introducing ourselves as far as I know,” Ridley said. “I’m honestly wondering what kind of cupcakes Penelope made…”

“Chocolate with cream cheese frosting…” Julia sighed hopefully.

“They’re actually chocolate chip,” Brian said.

“She made some of those ones for your birthday last year, right Brian?” Bruce asked.

“Yeah, they were awesome,” Brian reminisced with a grin.

“What’re you freaks talking about, huh?” Trav was blocking their way, arms crossed smugly.

“Cupcakes,” Ridley said. “You can’t have any.”

“And why not, huh?” Trav snapped.
Because you’re not in the club,” Sofie said.

“What club?” Trav asked skeptically, narrowing his eyes at the group.

“The one with the cupcakes,” Moira said.

“JUST TELL ME WHAT CLUB YOU FREAKS ARE IN OR ELSE I’M GONNA -”

“Martin, no challenging enemies on school grounds!” Undyne shouted.

Trav flinched before glaring at the group.

“This isn’t over,” he hissed as he stomped off.

The group was silent.

“Take a detour by the fine arts hall to avoid him?”

“Good plan.”

Sans sat on the ratty old foldout couch in the basement, answering emails and doing work for the Heart of Gold.

He’d gotten a look at the data of the president of the Brooklyn chapter of the Human Welfare Coalition. She apparently had a LOT of racketeering going on.

He recorded the information, encrypted it in a lovely picture of a butterfly with Nigel Thornberry’s face, and sent it to the rest of the Heart of Gold.

He decided that the next few hours could be spent answering emails.

He saw some from students asking for help on the lesson, one asking for doctor’s leave in mid-November, and one from the professors.

That last one seems interesting.

He opened the message.

Dear Dr. Gaster;

I am Dr. Paul Carlson, professor of statistics at Ebott University. I am contacting you to express my concerns about your teaching methods, as in my experience sleeping and leaving a lesson on the board is not considered teaching.

I have also heard from some of my other students who are in your classes that you have granted everyone two days off for the state fair. In my experience such practice is considered unprofessional.

I have been teaching at Ebott University for twenty-three years, and never have I seen such displays of blatant unprofessionalism as you have shown. If you do not cease this instant, I will have to report you to Dr. Albertson.

Sincerely;
Dr. Carlson
Sans stared at the message.

He replied after reading it over again a few more times.

dr. carlson,

I assure you that I am teaching these students to the best of my ability. This is only my second year of teaching, so I admit that I have a lot to learn, but I am doing my best for my students.

I often fall asleep while teaching because I have a health condition that causes fatigue, which Dr. Albertson is aware of. I have granted my students the free days because they did very well on their last tests. Besides, many of my students, and yours, are monsters, and the concept of a state fair is one that monsters are unfamiliar with. Plus, it gives me the opportunity to spend some much-needed time with my family.

I do appreciate your concerns.

Thank you.

Dr. Sans

P.S. - Dr. Gaster is my father. Please refer to me as Dr. Sans to differentiate between us. Thank you.

And send.

Sans answered the rest of the emails.
Then he set a timer for 4:15 and took a nap.

Penelope set all the chocolate chip cupcakes on a paper towel in a zigzag pattern and took out her camera to take a picture of them.

Then she took a picture of Caroline as she stood at the podium and filed the agenda for the day’s meeting.

Caroline met Penelope’s eyes and smiled for the camera.

Penelope’s blush went unnoticed as she snapped the photo.

Then the first club members entered, along with Mrs. Hill and a tallish man with dark brown hair and bright blue eyes in a navy suit jacket with khaki trousers with a red necktie.

Almsal, Jayme, Jenson, and Sarah all walked in the room.

“Hey, guys,” Caroline said. “Glad you could make it. Please take a seat wherever you wish that is not the podium.”

“Where did you get a podium?” Jayme asked.

“It was already here!” Penelope said.

“So who’s this?” Caroline asked.

“This is my husband, Harold!” Mrs. Hill said. “He’s the band teacher at Ebott High!”
“Welcome to our club, Mr. Hill!” Penelope greeted.

“Glad to be here!” Harold said. “Marian, are those cupcakes?”

“Yes, Harold, those are in fact cupcakes,” Marian said with a fond smile as she rolled her eyes.

“Jackpot.”

“I hope everyone likes chocolate chip!” Penelope said.

“Aaand the rest of the book club has arrived!” Levi announced as he kicked the already-open door. The sixth and seventh grade members of the book club entered the classroom.

“Okay, let’s see…” Caroline mumbled, scanning the crowd. After a few seconds, she wrote something down in a notebook.

“That’s all 25 of you,” Caroline announced. “Welcome one and all to the first-ever meeting of the North Middle School Book Club!”

Everyone applauded, to Caroline’s apparent surprise.

After a few moments of letting the applause settle in, Caroline spoke up again.

“For our first book club meeting, I shall pose a question for all of you: do any of you know what a book club does?”

Miranda was always grateful whenever she had the horse track to herself, no matter the reason.

Even if that reason was that she, as a middle schooler, was not considered old enough to participate in the equestrian exhibition at the state fair, she was grateful.

Being alone on the trail, with nothing but the sound of the trees rustling in the wind and Diamonds’ hoofbeats pounding on the ground and her own thoughts running around in her head, provided Miranda Mosley with the ideal environment to think.

Brian had told her that she was “annoying” - she’d heard that often enough. But when he called her a liar, she felt…smaller, all of a sudden. Then he told her he hated her, and even told her why.

Miranda had never felt so humiliated in her life.

No.

Wait.

It wasn’t humiliation. Humiliation made her feel anger.

This was something new.

And whatever it was made Miranda feel like crying.

Then it hit her.

She felt guilty.
This was not something she was used to at all.

Her ruminations were interrupted by the sound of another set of hoofbeats coming up behind her.

She sighed as Emma and Rootbeer trotted up beside her.

“Hey, Miranda!” Emma greeted, cheerful as always to Miranda’s unending annoyance.

“What?” Miranda asked flatly.

Emma’s face fell slightly. “Are…you okay, Miranda?” she asked, voice lined with concern.

“Honesty? No, I’m not,” Miranda snipped. “I got rejected by my crush because I…”

Miranda swallowed. Honesty was too hard - especially when people could judge you and hate you for it.

But Brian liked honest girls, so she was going to be more honest from now on.

Start living with more Integrity.

“…because I don’t like his friends.”

Well, baby steps.

“That’s not all, is it?” Emma asked knowingly.

Miranda tightened her grip on the reins.

“He said I’ve been stalking him,” Miranda continued weakly. “I-I didn’t know that I was doing that! I just followed him around so I could talk to him or look at him or just be near him, that’s what my mom said she did with my dad! And - and that he didn’t like it when I touched him, because he doesn’t like me -”

“Where did you touch him?” Emma asked quietly.

Miranda bit her lip.

“His thigh…”

Emma sighed.

“Miranda, you can’t just touch people without permission, no matter who they are or how much you like each other,” she said. “Not everyone likes being touched like that. Some people would have attacked you for something like that -”

“Brian wouldn’t hurt someone without a good reason!” Miranda snapped without thinking.

“Then you’re lucky,” Emma said. “I know you did that because you didn’t know better, but I hope you understand now that not everyone is going to like that.”

Miranda felt like she was going to cry.

“B-but guys like being touched by girls…” she whimpered. “M-my mom said so -”

“Your mom is wrong, Miranda!” Emma snapped. “She won’t always solve your problems for you!”
Miranda flinched, squeezing her eyes shut.

Emma sighed. “You didn’t tell your mom that you got rejected, did you?” she asked warily.

“N-no! If I did something like that, who KNOWS what she would do?!”

“That’s good,” Emma said. “I’m sorry I was a bit short with you, but you need honesty as much as you need to be honest. If you’re honest with others, they’re honest with you.”

Silence.

Miranda sniffled.

“Y-you know, Emma?” she started. “I may not always be honest with other people, but…something about you is different.”

Emma perked up and smiled.

Miranda couldn’t help but smile back.

The doorbell of the Thompson residence rang.

“I’ll get it! I’ll get it!” Hannah chanted, running up to the front door.

She opened it, a man with slicked-back black hair and bright blue eyes in a navy business suit.

“Hey there, Hannah Banana!” Richard Thompson said affectionately.

Hannah smiled brightly.

“Mommy, Daddy’s home!” Hannah called.

“I’ll be down shortly!” Linda responded.

Hannah and Richard looked at each other.

“Wanna play Sorry?” Richard asked.

“Okay,” Hannah said.

Richard went over to a closet and took out the board game, setting it down on the coffee table in the living room.

“You take the yellow pieces, I take the green?” Richard asked.

“Yep!” Hannah confirmed, taking the four yellow pieces from the box.

The two played a full game and were about to start on a new one when Linda cleared her throat.

Richard and Hannah froze and slowly turned toward Linda.

Tense silence.

“So where’s Hunter?” Richard asked.

“Some school club,” Linda said. “We’ll pick him up at half-past four.”
“And the time right now is…?”

“Quarter after!”

“Quarter after what?”

Silence.

“Four…”

Awkward silence.

“I’m gonna go get my shoes on!” Hannah said quickly as she ran up the stairs.

“Hannah Grace Thompson, no running in the house!” Linda snapped.

But Hannah was already in her room.

Linda hissed out a sigh.

“She seems scared of you,” Richard noted.

“Ooh, he’s smart!” Estelle said. “Wonder why he ended with someone like you?”

“You shut up!” Linda snapped.

Richard’s eyes widened.

Linda paled and sputtered. “I - I’m sorry sweetie, I-I wasn’t - I didn’t mean -”

“It’s fine, Lindy,” Richard assured with a shaky smile. “I understand. Your temper flares up, then it comes back down again. I wouldn’t have married you if I couldn’t handle it. For better or for worse, right?”

Linda sighed with relief and hugged Richard. He returned the embrace and kissed the shell of his wife’s ear.

“Your kids, however…” Estelle began.

“Don’t you dare ruin this moment,” Linda hissed under her breath.


Toriel had finally graded the last of her papers - all A’s, to her delight. This year’s class was shaping up to be very intelligent indeed…

*knock knock*

She perked up at the ever-familiar sound of knocking.

“Who is there~?” she sang out.

“fair.”

“Fair who~?”

Sans opened the door of her classroom, a smiling and hopping Frisk in tow.
“we can fairly wait anymore,” Sans said. “you ready to head on out, babe? pap’s gonna meet us there, and randy and sharona and their kids are gonna wait for us at the midway with monica and her kids so we can all get some dinner.”

“That sounds like a lovely plan!” Toriel said. “But what of your father? Did you not say that he was to be joining us?”

“he is,” Sans said. “he said that chas managed to sign the band up for a spot at the amphitheater. they even have a name now - the crawdads.”

“Well, that certainly sounds like fun!” Toriel said. “Did you bring the van?”

Sans smiled wider than he already had been and held out his hand toward his fiancee.

“Sans, are you really going to have us take a shortcut?” Toriel sighed, taking Sans’ hand nonetheless.

“yep,” Sans answered as he took Toriel and Frisk through the shortcut to the motorcycle in the Mountainside Elementary School parking lot.

Toriel blinked and looked around. She put her hands on her hips and have Sans A Look.

Sans simply shrugged.

Frisk cleared their throat. They were already seated in the sidecar with their helmet on.

Toriel glanced from the bike to Sans and back again.

Sans took a seat on the bike and put on his helmet. He took the other helmet Frisk had offered and held it out to Toriel.

“hop on,” he said, gesturing at the empty bit of brown leather seat space behind him.

Toriel was clearly very nervous. She’d never even ridden in Papyrus’ convertible, and here was her fiancee, asking her to ride behind him on a motorcycle?!

“tori,” Sans began calmly, “if you’re nervous, i can always use a bit of blue magic to keep you on the seat. i won’t do any crazy stunts or anything to hurt you or frisk.”

Toriel smiled, having calmed down significantly.

“I know,” she said. “I shall do my best to keep calm.”

She sat behind Sans on the motorcycle, putting on the helmet and wrapping her arms around him while making sure he could still maneuver the bike.

She could feel him tense slightly before relaxing, the heat flowing through the contact.

“And we ready?” she asked.

Sans said nothing, simply revving the motorcycle.

Frisk gave a thumbs up. Toriel swears she saw a glint where their eyes were behind the helmet.

“Then let’s go!” Toriel announced.

And with that they were on their way.
The knowledge that they were on their way to have some fun filled Frisk with **DETERMINATION**.

**FILE: SAVE**

Elaina sat in Irma’s silver Audi TT, trying to take up as little space as possible. Irma was pissed about something as always.

They stopped at a red light, and a familiar Chevy Malibu pulled up beside them. Irma saw them and rolled her eyes. She rolled down the window.

Felicity and Grace were simply smiling innocently. The light turned green, and they took off with Irma close in tow. They pulled into the Whole Foods parking lot, and exited their respective vehicles.

Felicity and Grace simply stood by their car as Irma slammed the car door behind her.

“What the **hell** are you two doing here?!” Irma snapped.

“Nothing~” the twins said innocently.

“Psh, yeah RIGHT!” Irma spat. “You two are ALWAYS up to something that could make me look bad!”

“Oh, Mother,” Felicity cooed condescendingly, “you do **that** all by yourself!”

Irma growled.

“Careful, Mother,” Grace warned condescendingly, “we don’t want a **murder** on our hands, do we?”

Irma’s eyes widened. She looked from the twins back to Elaina, who was paying absolutely no attention to anything around her while she attempted to make herself invisible to the world.

Irma snapped her head back toward the twins.

“You two are **so** lucky we are in public right now, or there would be **two** murders and **no** regrets,” she hissed. “Now if I catch you two **anywhere** in Ebott in **any** season except summer, I will make sure the **no one** sees you two ever again, do you understand me?!”

Felicity and Grace’s eyes widened briefly before returning to normal.

“Yes, Mother dear,” they said innocently.

Irma turned up her nose with a smug smirk and left to go into the grocery store.

Felicity and Grace weighed their options before sighing and getting back in their car to leave.

“She was serious,” Grace stated.

“Yep,” Felicity concurred. “If she weren’t so likely to get caught, she’d’ve already killed us off decades ago…”

“Why she didn’t go for adoption, I’ll never understand,” Grace sighed.

“I think she just kept us around so she’d have someone to beat up whenever she was pissed,” Felicity
“Okay then, I guess that’s the story we use when she gets arrested for murder.”

“You mean if she gets arrested.”

“Oh. Right.”

The twins were silent for a while.

“I think we should head back to Minnesota,” Felicity said weakly.

“What?” Grace gasped. “And not see Elaina before we go?”

“Grace, what if Mother found out and did something to them in retaliation?” Felicity questioned. “If that happened, I wouldn’t be able to live with myself, and you know what happened last time Mother did something to someone we care about!”

“I know, Felicity!” Grace snapped. “I was there too! You think I didn’t feel a part of me die when Dad left?! You think I don’t blame myself?!”

“I never said that, Grace!” Felicity sobbed.

“I know, Fel! I just…”

Grace whimpered.

“Sometimes…I wonder if she killed Dad too…” she whispered, as though Irma could possibly hear them from wherever she was.

Felicity was silent, save for some sniffling.

“Youh…” Felicity said. “Me too…”

The twins returned to silence. Chatty as they were, even they needed the comfort of silence sometimes.

Frisk, Toriel, Sans, Papyrus, Sharona, Randy, Levi, Caroline, Penelope, Theo, and Monica all sat in the shade of a tent by the midway while they ate their assorted meals.

Papyrus stared with unabashed disgust at the golden-brown rectangular prism on a wooden skewer held in his hand.

“papyrus,” Sans said as he tried to hold back laughter, “you accepted the dare, now you have to eat that whole thing kf deep-fried butter on a stick without throwing up so you can win fifty bucks.”

“IT’S NOT WORTH IT, SANS!” Papyrus whimpered. “NOT EVEN YOU COULD EAT THIS, AND YOU ARE THE SINGLE GREASIEST PERSON I KNOW!”

“bro, i literally have fried pizza on a stick, i can probably handle fried butter on a stick no problem.”

Randy, Sharona and Monica all groaned.

“Okay Sans,” Randy began, “I can forgive your statement because you have never been to a state before, but for future reference, eating solid butter, fried or unfried, is never a good idea.”
“but randy,” Sans defended. “fifty bucks.”

“Whether or not it’s worth it is up to the poor guy actually eating the butter,” Randy said.

Everyone turned to face Papyrus.

He stared at the people, then the fried brick of solid fat on a stick.

“NOPE, NOT WORTH IT,” he deadpanned. “WHO WANTS THIS HEALTH CODE VIOLATION ON A STICK?”

“Give it here,” Theo snapped, holding out his hand.

“BUT YOU HAVE A FULL LIFE AHEAD OF YOU!” Papyrus said dramatically. “DO YOU REALLY WANT ALL THAT TO BE SQUANDERED BY A DEEP-FRIED STICK OF LARD ON ANOTHER STICK?”

“Oh come on, I’m not gonna die,” Theo sneered.

“you’re not getting the fifty bucks if you do eat it,” Sans said.

“Toss it then,” Theo said.

Papyrus didn’t even hesitate.

“I’m gonna go do stuff,” Theo said. “Mom, gimme some cash.”

Monica didn’t hear him. She’d been staring into space the entire time she’d been at the fair.

“Momma, Theo just asked for your wallet so he can buy some liquor!” Penelope said.

“I did not, you little bi-!”

“Wha?” Monica said, clearly extremely out of it. “Someone say Theo wants booze?”

“Penelope’s lying, Mom!” Theo attempted.

“No booze until you move out of the house,” Monica said lamely. “Or New Years, whichever’s first.”

Everyone stared.

“What?”

Monica reached into her purse for some money and gave it to Theo.

“Here, go nuts,” she said.

Theo stared at the five dollar bill in his hand. He clicked his tongue and stuffed it into his pocket.

“Cheapskate…” he muttered under his breath as he walked off.

Monica stared at nothing once again.

“Momma?” Penelope asked, clearly very worried. “You’re acting kind of…zombie-ish. Are you okay?”
Monica didn’t respond.

Then she jumped, looking around and blinking.

“Wha - oh, sorry,” she said. “It’s been a rough couple of weeks. What were we talking ab -”

She looked around.

“Where the hell is Theo?” she sighed.

“You sent him away with five bucks and disappointment after he tried to steal Mr. Papyrus’ fried butter on a stick,” Caroline said.

“Why would…” Monica sighed and shook her head. “Whatever, we’ll find him. I have a plan.”

“I NO LONGER HAVE ANY CLUE WHATSOEVER AS TO WHAT IS GOING ON, BUT I AM NONETHELESS QUITE EXCITED!” Papyrus said.

“Okay then,” Monica said. “Are there any shooting games on the midway?”

Linda watched the people stroll along the midway from the picnic table under his tent as she sipped her beer.

She never did like the state fair. It was too dirty and cheap for her tastes.

At least she could see the amphitheater from here.

She was no country music fan, but it was certainly better than sitting around doing nothing.

“But isn’t that what you usually do?” Estella asked.

“Oh my God, Estelle,” Linda groaned as she put her head in her hands and rubbed her temples. “I’m already suffering enough without some voice in my damn head mocking my every decision!”

“I’m not mocking your every decision,” Estelle said. “Just the ones that could end up hurting people in the long run.”

“I’d like to see you make the decisions I have to make on a daily basis!” Linda snapped.

“Oh boy, I’d love to make the choice between which of my children to demean today!”

“You actually think that I demean my children?” Linda hissed darkly.

“I am literally haunting you until you admit you killed me, I think I know the intent behind your actions.”

“I would never -!”

“I also see the effects of your actions of other people. You don’t intend to hurt people, because you don’t even care what your words do to them. You think that as long as you’re not physically hurting them, it won’t matter.”

“But it won’t matter!” Linda defened. “It’s just words! They’ll live!”

“Sticks and stones will break your bones, but words leave wounds that never heal,” Estelle said calmly.
“That’s just *retarded!*” Linda sneered as she chugged down the rest of her beer. “Shit, I need another…”

“The more you drink, the more I’ll mock you,” Estelle deadpanned.

“You won’t be mocking me when I’m blacked out!” Linda bit.

“Yeah, but I’ll go into doubletime when you wake up.”

Linda groaned.

Theo shook the change in his hand. He’d managed to con a few people out of some spare change, and now he had twelve dollars and thirty-four cents - almost all of it in spare change.

“Hey, Theo!”

Theo turned around and saw Matt.

“Hey, Matt, what’s up?” he said.

“Eh, nothing,” Matt said dismissively. “I’m just here on a date with Courtney, but she went off to buy some stuff. You know women.”

Theo shrugged.

“So how ‘bout you?” Matt asked. “What are you doin’ here?”

“Some of my mom’s friends dragged her along,” Theo explained. “She thinks I’m too young to stay home alone, so here I am.”

“Dude, your mom sucks,” Matt said, patting Theo’s shoulder in pity.

“I know,” Theo sighed.

“C’mon, let’s go play some games,” Matt offered. “The rides are shit anyways.”

Theo followed Matt.

How he got noticed by such an understanding guy, he had no idea.

But he wasn’t complaining.

Frisk, Levi, Caroline, and Penelope walked down the midway, searching for something to see or do.

Penelope held the prize she’d won at skeeball - a comically-giant stuffed gorilla with a bow tie. It was actually the same height as Sans.

Frisk stopped suddenly. They’d spotted someone…familiar.

The champagne blonde in a crop top and leggings with an unknown brown-haired boy who seemed to be a high schooler, if the Ebott High letterman jacket was any indication.

“What’s up, Frisk?” Levi asked. “Why’dja stop all of a sudden?”

Frisk pointed at the pair before rumeturning their hands to sign something.
“That blonde girl is Courtney Day,” they signed. “She’s in my art class.”

“What’s she doing with a high schooler?” Levi asked. “And he’s kind of a hottie, too…”

“Oh my god,” Caroline said. “That’s Matt Gorman’s girlfriend Courtney, isn’t it?”

The group turned to see Courtney stand on her toes and kiss the guy.

Penelope thrust her gorilla into Levi’s face and took a picture of the illicit moment with her cellphone.

“I guess the guy’s not Matt?” she asked.

“Not even close,” Levi said.

“You’re a blond,” Caroline said. “And apparently pretty stupid if Courtney’s being this open about her cheating…”

“Theo’s been hanging around a Matt Gorman lately,” Penelope said. “He’s also been a lot angrier recently. I dunno if the two facts are related, but for now I’m gonna give Matt the benefit of the doubt.”

“Same here,” Frisk said. “Just because the people you associate with are bad, doesn’t mean you’re bad!”

“Yeah, well I’m not gonna pretend to like him!” Levi snapped. “He’s a racist jerk who likes incest! And he shot a life insurance salesman and his own daughter!”

Penelope and Frisk were utterly baffled.

“Improv day in drama class,” Caroline said, as if that would explain everything.

“Ooohh,” Penelope said. “I get it.”

“What are we gonna do about the cheating blonde?” Frisk signed.

“We could get Jayme on it, but I don’t think she’d investigate the obvious,” Caroline said.

“We could investigate her ourselves!” Penelope said.

“Hey, that’s a GREAT idea!” Levi said. “I say we get as many drama kids as we can to team up and expose Courtney Day’s two-timing nature to Matt once and for all!”

“I like it,” Caroline said.

“I’ll see if I can get the art kids in on it too!” Frisk offered.

“I’m texting Hunter right now to see if she’d like to get the choir kids to help out,” Caroline said.

As soon as she sent the text, someone’s phone went off.

Caroline looked around and found Hunter looking at her cellphone, flanked by Hannah and a man she could only guess was their father.

Hunter looked around and spotted the group and waved. She said something to her father and he nodded.
Hunter and Hannah ran up to them.

“Hey guys!” Hunter said. “Guess whose dad’s in town for a week and got to decide where we go with him today?”

“No Mrs. Thompson?” Penelope suggested.

“Correct!”

“Okay then,” Caroline said. “So what do you say? Are you in?”

“ Heck yeah I’m in!” Hunter said excitedly. “I’m pretty sure Brian would wanna take part in this too!”

“Well, it’s not punching evil in the face, but it’s something,” Caroline said.

“I have pics,” Penelope said, a manic grin on her face. “You wanna see?”

Everyone looked at the image of Courtney sucking the highschooler’s face.

“Well if this doesn’t convince Matt Gorman that Courtney’s a two-timing wad, he’s definitely a lost cause,” Hunter noted.

“I think he already is one, but okay…”

Courtney pulled up her underwear and leggings and stepped out of the restroom with the highschooler.

“Thanks, Josh!” She said with a smile. “I really needed that!”

“No problem, Megan!” the older boy said.

“Well, I guess I’ll see you around!” Courtney said.

“Gimme your number and you sure will,” Josh teased.

Courtney and Josh exchanged numbers.

Courtney winked and blew Josh a kiss goodbye as he looked back while walking away.

Courtney left to stand outside the building when she got a text.

*I text from: ❤ Matt❤ *

*wher r u i found the wannabe*

Courtney swore. She had to buy something, and fast.

She went into a stall and bought a zebra-print scarf.

She would rather have had a cheetah-print one, but she was in a hurry. But as the most popular seventh grade girl at North Middle, anything she wore automatically got worn by everyone else.

She’d have to lie about where she got it though.

Or better yet, never wear it at all and just sneak it into Megan’s room. She was already using her
name to hook up with older guys, so why not pay her back?

Linda took the black teacup yorkie-poo and handed over the money to the disinterested bald man reading the newspaper.

“Thanks again, Arnie!” she said with relief.

“Just leave already Diana,” Arnie said gruffly.

Diana left and got out to the car.

She had just turned out of the puppy mill parking lot when she got a text.

*I text from: Miranda*

*cn i spend teh nite at a frends hows

*of cors! c u 2moro!

Diana slammed on the brakes as she put away her phone.

She’d nearly run a red light again.

Monica said as she stepped up to the shooting game stall and laid down some money.

The man at the stall stared from the wad of cash to the 5-foot-even woman in Betty Boop nursing scrubs with a condescending smirk.

“Okay, sweetcheeks, how about you go over to that booth over there?”

He gestured toward the teacup ride.

“Gimme a damn gun you sexist prick,” Monica snapped.

The man laughed and gave her one.

Monica looked at it.

“A real gun,” she deadpanned.

“Shoot with this first, then we’ll see if you can handle the real -”

*BANG*

Monica shot down the most difficult target, not even taking her vivid green eyes off of the man.

The man stared at her.

“That was obviously a fluke,” he claimed. “Try agai -”

*BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG*

Monica shot the second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth hardest targets.

“You owe me the seven best prizes,” Monjca said evenly. “And don’t even think about skimping.”
The man was sweating nervously. He gave her the prizes.

“Would you like a bag for these, ma’am?” he asked, fear making his voice shake.

“Sure, why not?” Monica said with a shrug.

The man put all the prizes in the bag, trying to sneak one off the table.

“Don’t even think about it, mister,” Monica snapped.

“Yes ma’am,” the man squeaked.

Monica took her prizes and walked off to another, more difficult shooting game.

Linda drunkenly hummed along with the song the band on the amphitheater stage was playing. She was already off-key when sober, but when drunk, she was absolutely terrible.

She hadn’t even noticed that Estelle had stopped talking long ago.

Then everyone applauded. Linda stood up and tried to bow, only to stumble drunkenly and knock her head on the picnic table.

“Ladies and gentlemen, up next performing a set of classic rock covers, The CRAWDads!”

Everyone applauded politely, Linda included.

Linda stopped and contorted her face in unabashed disgust when she realized who was on the stage.

“Good evening, everybody!” Randy greeted. “I’m Randy Marlow, bassist and lead vocalist of the CRAWDads! The long, dead, and handsome guitarist to my right is WingDings Gaster, who can play the guitar like a genius but cannot sing if his life depended on it! The guy on keyboards is Chas Wong, he’s backing vocals but he has no idea what he’s doing here otherwise! The giant buff dude on the drums behind me is Asgore Dreemurr, he is way too innocent for someone who’s been married with kids!”

The audience applauded and laughed. Linda fumed while she texted Richard telling him to pick her up now dammit or so help her -

“Okay, so this first number is a cover of Warren Zevon’s Werewolves Of London!”

The audience cheered in excitement as the band began to play- and they played very well for a classic rock cover band full of dads.

Linda got another beer downed half of it.

Listening to a dead lesbian sing disco music was better than this.

“You look like you’re having fun.”

“Fuck off, Crawford,” Linda slurred.

“Yeah, actually it’s Goldsby,” Sharona said. “The only Crawford either of us know has been dead for over fifteen years.”

“How do you know that?” Linda snapped.
Sharona stared at her. “For a second there I thought you’d gone nuts, but nope, you’re just drunk.”

“Fuck off!” Linda repeated.

“Why would I fuck off when I could fuck my husband?” Sharona countered.

Linda growled, using every bit of her power to keep from splashing the rest of her beer all over Sharona.

“Anyway, I was just popping by to say hey,” Sharona said. “See you at the PTA meeting tomorrow?”

Linda screeched as Sharona walked away.

Matt grinned smugly as he walked along the midway, Courtney holding his right hand, some cotton candy held in his left, and Theo behind him carrying his and Courtney’s stuff.

Man, Theo really was desperate.

Maybe he would be easier to manipulate than he thought…

Then Matt spotted a shooting game.

He smirked.

“Sheo, hold the cotton candy,” he said, but even giving Theo a chance to speak as he shoved the cotton candy somewhere in the pile of stuff Theo was holding.

He walked up to the booth and laid down some cash.

Then a woman in scrubs with black hair in a low ponytail and green eyes laid down some money.

Matt snorted derisively.

“Sure you can do this, ma’am?” he asked condescendingly.

The woman said nothing as she scanned him – for weaknesses, maybe?

She looked over the rest of his group before hazarding into his eyes once more.

Her eyes were even greener than Courtney’s.

The woman in scrubs merely shrugged as the booth attendant gave her and Matt their guns.

Matt stroked the barrel as if it were the most precious thing he’d ever touched.

The whistle sounded. The game began.

Matt shot down seven of the ten targets with ease.

“Beat that, old lady,” he said smugly. Courtney giggled in response. Matt loved it when she was mean. She was so sweet to him, and everyone else, but she could be a real bitch when she was in the right mood.

“Okay,” the woman said dully.

She lined up her shot, not even flinching as she shot down all ten targets.
Matt’s eyes widened.

The whistle sounded for round two.

Matt shot down eleven of the fifteen targets, turning the lady in the scrubs.

The woman paid him no attention as she shot down all fifteen targets in quick succession.

The woman wasn’t even trying. This just pissed Matt off even more.

The whistle signaled the last round.

“How polite,” the woman deadpanned, aware of his insincerity.

She shot at the twenty-five targets, hitting every last one without wasting a single shot.

Matt growled. He wasn’t going to lose to…whoever this lady was.

He shot wildly, screaming in fury.

Once the bell rang for the end of the game, he lowered his gun, breathing heavily.

He gave a shot into the air above him.

Screams of shock rang.

He threw the gun on the ground and stormed off.

Courtney ran to follow him.

Theo and Monica remained in place in front of the booth.

“We’re going home, Theo,” Monica said coldly.

“Uh, ma’am, what about your prize -” the game operator began.

“Keep your cheap prizes,” Monica snapped. “Come on Theo.”

“But Mom, I’m holding Matt’s stuff -”

“Theodore Francis, we are leaving now.”

Theo growled. “At least lemme explain to Matt…”

“I don’t think he’d listen,” Monica sighed. “Let’s go.”

Theo growled as he set Matt’s stuff down. He sent a text to Matt explaining the situation with a half-truth - that his mom had found him and that she was taking him home against his will.

Theo had a lot of questions to ask Monica. Starting with…

“Why didn’t you tell me you could shoot?” Theo asked coldly.

“Because your father thought it wasn’t fitting for a woman to shoot,” Monica explained. “Well, better than him anyway.”
“Dad wouldn’t say something like that,” Theo said.

“Not to you,” Monica said. “You’re a boy.”

“What difference does that make?!” Theo asked.

Monica turned to Theo and smiled sadly - the first time she’d so much as looked his way the past week.

“I guess to you it doesn’t make a difference how your father treated women,” she sighed.

“Mom, what are you even talking about?!”

“Your father’s coming here for Christmas.”

Monica’s voice as she said ot was full of fear, rage, and sadness despite the fact that it was barely above a whisper.

“Really?” Theo asked, clearly excited by the prospect despite his mother's obvious dread.

That made Monica’s heart fall even further.

“He’s coming with his new wife to fight for custody of you,” Monica quavered. “Only you. Not Penelope. He always hated her.”

“He never hated her!” Theo defended. “He just…got frustrated with her!”

“And that gave him the right to hit her until she went to the hospital?!” Monica nearly screamed.

Theo could say nothing to defend that.

The two were silent the rest if the way to the amphitheater.

“Okay everybody, we got one more song for you all before we leave, but before that I have an announcement!”

Sounds of disappointment intermingled with cheers.

“Randy, what are you doing?!” Chas hissed.

“Just hold on a sec!” Randy hissed back.

“Everyone, twenty years ago today, I got a letter in the mail from a high schooler. I was in college at the time, and at that time I had no idea just what that would lead to.”

Murmurs.

“Now, we’re married with a son and daughter in sixth grade and I can assure you all that I have never been happier! For my lovely wife Sharona - she's the petite redhead over where I'm pointing - Let It Be Me by The Everly Brothers!”

Sharona gasped, hands covering her mouth. She was in tears.

Levi and Caroline turned to each other and smiled. They gave each other a thumbs-up.
“I bless the day I found you~ I want to stay around you~ Now and forever~ Let it be me~”

Caroline turned to Penelope.

Penelope looked up at her.

They smiled.

It took them a while to notice that they had started holding hands at some point.

Papyrus sent the video of the CRAWDads’ performances to Mettaton.

*HELLO MY SHINING STAR! DAD’S BAND PERFORMED AT THE STATE FAIR THIS EVENING, AND AS YOU CAN SEE THEY HAVE DONE EXCEPTIONALLY WELL! NOT NEARLY AS WELL AS YOU, OF COURSE, BUT NOT EVERYONE IS AS ABSOLUTELY AMAZING AS YOU!*  

*I LOVE YOU AND MISS YOU SO, SO MUCH, AND I CAN’T WAIT FOR YOU TO COME HOME, MY SHINING STAR.*

Papyrus pocketed his cell phone and walked back to his car with the giant pink stuffed bear he’d won for Mettaton.

He just knew he’d love it.

Irma sat on the couch watching reruns of Say Yes To The Dress.

These women were cheapskates, ALL of them. What woman in her right mind spent only $10,000 on her wedding dress?

The her phone went off.

She groaned as she paused the episode and checked the phone.

*I text from: Leland*

*I got the wife away from Christmas to New Year’s. Can you make it?*

Irma stared at the message. Her heart soared.

*Sure! I don’t have any plans!*

Irma was so excited she could scream. Usually the only thing that could make her feel like this was Stardust, but Leland Schwartz - her sweet, sweet Leland - was the exception.

Besides, Elaina could take care of herself. She’d done it before, and for a month at that, so what was two weeks?

It wasn’t like she’d run off or anything, right?

Matt walked into his house with a sigh as the usual sounds travelled through it.

“George, get your damn feet off the coffee table! No one wants to see that!”
“You know what, Veronica? Fuck you!”

“George, get your damn feet off the coffee table or so help me GOD -”

“Shut UP already bitch, I’m tryin’ to watch the game!”

“How can you even SEE that damn game past your UGLY-ASS FEET ON MY COFFEE TABLE?!”

Matt went to the bathroom to get ready for bed. His parents didn't even realize he was gone. Again.

He stared at the orange medicine bottle with his name on it. That doctor said it was to stop the bad thoughts. All it did was make him feel weak.

Matt dumped half of the bottle’s contents into the toilet and flushed. The other half he put into a brown paper bag and labelled it “fish food”.

He wondered what would happen to Veronica’s fish if he fed them his pills.

Flowey stared at the latest interloper on Frisk’s windowsill - a stuffed frog.

He hated everything.

He played Pokemon SoulSilver and pushed the stuffed frog off the windowsill.

He felt nothing.

Except maybe a bit silly.

*The fun day has you filled with*

*DETERMINATION*

Chapter End Notes

Isn't It Kinda Fun? - Rodgers & Hammerstein
Werewolves Of London - Warren Zevon
Let It Be Me - The Everly Brothers

Fun Fact: Felicity and Grace are majoring in psychology and forensics respectively at Minnesota University.
Chapter Summary

Someone new joins Chara in the Void. Sans and Toriel plan their wedding. Miranda’s starting to live by her own damn rules. Courtney has issues. Book Club talks interspecies yaoi and sad poetry. Cactus Everdeen is reincarnated.

Chapter Notes

Question: Will we ever stop making new characters?
Answer: Never.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

10:33 A.M., October 6th, 20XR

It’s a dreary day outside.

Rain is falling.

Thunder is rolling.

On days like this, kids like you…

…are pretty sure you already studied this.

Frisk didn’t exactly have a great attention span, but they were absolutely certain that they already learned about Spanish pronouns. They weren’t really sure when, but they were certain that they had at some point. How else would they automatically know that the closest thing Spanish had to an official gender-neutral pronoun was ello?

They didn’t know how to admit that they knew this, so they kept it to themself.

And Chara, of course. Chara was literally and figuratively a part of them by virtue of being the only Humans to bear the Red SOULs, since all Red SOUL Humans are reincarnated from one another and descended from the same Monstrous ancestor - almost certainly a Boss Monster according to Gaster.

Frisk had already completed their worksheet and turned it in, so they decided to visit the Void and speak with Chara.
They laid their head on their desk and closed their eyes.

They immediately saw Chara playing Gin Rummy with…

A Human?

In their Void?

Frisk watched the game until it completed.

Chara looked up, their ruby-red eyes widening.

“Frisk, how long have you been in here?!” they asked.

<<No idea,>> Frisk signed. <<Who is this?>>

Chara turned to the Human, a tall, lean one with freckled skin and rust-colored hair covering their eyes, styled similarly to Frisk’s and Chara’s. They wore a poncho and trousers with leather ties wrapped around the calves. They were barefoot, the soles of their feet filthy as though they had been walking through mud for a while.

The poncho Human stared at Frisk, as if this would somehow give Frisk the ability to read their mind.

Frisk stared back in confusion.

Chara groaned in exasperation.

“Frisk,” they began. “This is Rowan. They were the Red SOUL Human at the time the Barrier formed trapping the Monsters under Mt. Ebott.”

“It was called Mount Gehenna in those days,” Rowan said suddenly. “It was used for Human sacrifice by settlers before it was ordered by Pope Leo X that Monsterkind be imprisoned there. Also, I am a male.”

Frisk’s eyes widened.

<<So you personally helped to seal the Monsters in the Underground,>> Frisk signed.

“I didn’t want to,” Rowan said. “None of the Seven Great Mages wanted that.”

“Then why did you do it anyway?” Chara asked, putting their hands on their hips and leaning down so that their face was close enough to Rowan’s that their noses were touching.

Rowan didn’t even react. It was as though he didn’t even notice Chara.

“We knew that erecting the Barrier would kill us,” he said. “So did the Church. It served both of their purposes - getting rid of the Monsters once and for all, and killing the strongest of the Wizards.”

“But aren’t Wizards Human too?” Chara asked. Their eyes sparkled - they loved history, especially the history of warfare.

“No,” Rowan said. “But at the time, the Church believed that Wizards were Humans who had sold their SOULs to the Monsters in exchange for Magical power.”

“So they didn’t know how Wizards were made?” Chara asked. “Or did they just not care?”
“I don’t know,” Rowan admitted. “The Great Mage of Integrity, Gregor, would have known the answer to that.”

“But Gregor is dead, so we can’t ask, right?”

Rowan hung his head.

“I truly wish I could help you,” he whispered. “But I want to do what I can now.”

Rowan stood tall. He had to be about as tall as Papyrus, if not taller.

Then he suddenly kneeled before the two younger Humans, gazing up at them.

His eyes were the same ruby red as Frisk’s and Chara’s - the outward mark of the Red SOUL Human.

“Please let me know how I can be of service to you, Determined Ones. I wish to help you in ways that I couldn’t help Prince Asgore and Grand Duchess Toriel.”

Chara eyed him with suspicion.

“Asgore was King when I fell, and Toriel was the Queen,” Chara said. “They had a son together, Asriel.”

Rowan gasped.

“They had a child,” he muttered. “So that must mean that they have passed…”

Chara clenched their fists and lowered their eyes, their lip trembling.

Frisk spoke up.

“Chara sacrificed their life to free the Monsters,” they said. “Asriel helped them by absorbing their SOUL. Together they crossed the Barrier, and were killed by Humans. The Humans forgot that Monsters ever existed - they thought Monsters were just myths, stories to scare children into obedience.”

Rowan was in tears.

“Stars above…” he sobbed. “I had no idea…”

“You could have helped us,” Chara sobbed. “Why didn’t you?”

“The Void,” Rowan whispered. “I don’t even know why I’m here now. I just know that I’m here, and now that I am, I want to do what I can for you both.”

Chara said nothing, too angry to speak. Frisk spoke, since Chara was in no state of mind to do so themself.

“I’m the living Red-SOUL Human,” Frisk admitted. “Chara is able to assume control if I allow them to and they want to. Prove yourself, and I’ll give do the same for you Rowan.”

Rowan smiled and bowed.

“Thank you, Frisk,” he said. “May I ask your full name?”
“My name is Frisk Dreemurr,” they said. “With the help of Chara and Asriel, I destroyed the Barrier keeping Monsters imprisoned. It helped that time had weakened it.”

“Time…” Rowan gasped. “What year is it?”

“20XR,” Frisk said. “What year were the Monsters sealed away?”

“151X,” Rowan replied. “Stars above and beyond, five centuries have passed…and what of Asgore and Toriel? How do they fare?”

“They divorced after Asgore declared war on Humanity in the wake of Asriel’s and Chara’s deaths, a choice Mo - Toriel disagreed with.”

Rowan hummed. “Asgore was always one to let his feelings do the talking,” he said. “Toriel was the more levelheaded of the pair.”

“She is also the one who adopted me,” Frisk said. “She is currently engaged to Sans Gaster.”

“Gaster?” Rowan gasped. “As in the Lord Doctor WingDings Gaster?!”

“His son,” Frisk said.

Rowan sat down once more, stunned by this series of revelations.

Then the school bell rang.

“I should go,” Frisk said. “I’ll check back later.”

Then they woke up.

Caroline sat in the library on the couch in the back by the giant badger, reading Miguel de Cervantes’ Don Quixote. Her father had told her that it was a fun read, and he had been right. This was definitely entertaining for a book about a senile old man’s brain having rotted from having read too many books.

Maybe this would be one of the first books that the book club discussed.

Caroline bit back a laugh as Don Quixote created the idiom “tilting at windmills”.

“Is that book really that funny?” Penelope asked from her usual spot next to Caroline.

Caroline smiled enigmatically at her and marked the place in her book.

“Miss Penelope,” she began, affecting a posh accent, “imagine, if you will, a man of advanced age. He is riding a horse of advanced age, and is flanked by a squat man on a donkey. He wears armor, and bears a lance. He sees a field of windmills. Only in his mind, they are no windmills, but fearsome giants. And so he sallies forth to attack the so-called ‘giants’, only for his lance to be caught in the blade of a windmill, causing him to be dragged along with it.”

Penelope was quiet as she imagined the scenario. She soon bit back a laugh.

“And now you understand,” Caroline said, opening her book once more.

“Can I read it when you’re done?” Penelope asked.
“I don’t know, *can* you?” Caroline retorted playfully.

Penelope rolled her eyes. “*Fine, may* I read it when you’re done?”

“Read *what* when I’m done?”

Penelope groaned in mock exasperation. “May I read *Don Quixote* when you’re done?”

“Why, yes you may, dear Nell!” Caroline said.

Penelope swatted at her in jest.

They laughed.

They didn’t know just how happy the banter made the other.

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Sans whistled a tune as he walked out to his motorcycle, helmet under his arm and keys twirling around his finger.

He hopped onto his motorcycle and was about to put an earbud in when he took note of the weaselly, bug-eyed Human man in a powder blue pinstriped buttondown and khakis with thick bifocal glasses standing next to a beige station wagon.

“Well well well!” Sans greeted. “*Dr. Carlson!* how have things been since you sent me that email, huh?”

Dr. Carlson merely glared at him, thin lips pulling back into a scowl.

“Well, just thought i’d stop and say hello before i meet my fiancee for lunch,” Sans said cordially. “see ya ‘round, paul.”

Sans put in one of the earbuds - motorcycle driving laws and car driving laws are quite different, after all - put on his helmet, and rode off toward Olsen Bridge.

He hadn’t the slightest clue why Dr. Carlson had it out for him, but in the long run it didn’t really matter unless there was proof that he wasn’t doing it in the best interest of the students.

As soon as Sans had crossed the Olsen bridge, he pulled onto the next exit ramp and took a shortcut to Mountainside Elementary.

He pulled into the lot and walked in the front door.

Toriel had a few more minutes of class left, so Sans decided to stop by the office and say hello to Mr. McBride.

He entered the front office, pretending not to be paying any attention to the screeching blonde speaking with the bespectacled, afroed secretary and sat down, skimming through a Highlights magazine.

“Now you *listen* and listen *good,*” the woman hissed, “if you do not let me in to see Principal McBride, I *will* mention it to the school board and you will *all* be sorry!”

“Mrs. Anderson, I’m already sorry,” the secretary said. “Sorry you *walked in that door and started screaming your butt off.* Now sit down and wait your turn like a decent person.”
“How dare you!” the woman screeched.

“Yes, how dare I suggest you be civil, now sit the heck down before I call security.”

The woman growled and went to sit in a chair.

“Next,” the secretary deadpanned.

Sans stood up.

“Hey Gloria,” Sans greeted casually. “I see Linda was cloned.”

“Sans!” Gloria said, demeanor brightening somewhat. “So sorry you had to see that.”

“Please, I’m used to it,” Sans assured. “I take it Nathan’s out at the moment?”

“He’s picking up his daughter from school,” Gloria said. “She had an asthma attack, poor thing.”

“Man, that’s rough,” Sans said. “Tell I dropped by, okay?”

“Sure thing,” Gloria said. “You want me to leave a message?”

“Yeah, actually.”

Sans reaching into his Inventory and took out four envelopes sealed with gold wax.

“One’s for you,” Sans explained. “Invitations to Tori’s and my wedding.”

“Thank you, Sans!” Gloria said. “See you around!”

“Later, Gloria.”

Sans opened the office door, then turned around and nodded at the fuming blonde woman.

Then he left and walked to Toriel’s classroom.

*knock knock*

“Who is there?” Toriel asked.

Sans smiled. Hearing her say that never gets old.

“You,” Sans said.

“You who?”

Sans opened the door and made Jazz Hands.

“You called, baby?” he asked, affecting an Elvis-like voice.

Toriel laughed. Judging by the way she hit her fist on her desk, he’d made a good one.

“Thank you, thank you very much,” Sans said, giving finger guns.

Toriel’s laughter became bleating guffaws.

“Note to self,” Sans said, “No roleplaying as Elvis in the bedroom.”
Toriel’s laughter was now desperate gasping for breath interspersed with bleating giggles.

Sans took his usual seat by her desk and waited Patiently for his Mate to stop laughing her ass off.

Which he was more than willing to do.

After a moment, she had calmed down.

“That - that was brilliant!” Toriel said. “I think I have found your Halloween costume for this year!”

“Okay then,” Sans said. “Oh, and I gave Gloria her invitation. Nathan was out, so Gloria’s gonna hand him his invites.”

“Thank you, Sans!” Toriel said. “Do you know why Mr. McBride was out?”

“Skye had an asthma attack, so he went to pick her up from school and take her to the hospital to get her checked out,” Sans explained.

“Oh, that’s terrible,” Toriel gasped. “I do hope she’s alright.”

“Yeah,” Sans sighed. “I’ll text him later tonight.”

Toriel hummed.

They were silent as Sans took out the sandwiches they’d made that morning and Toriel opened some of the bookmarks on her laptop.

“So we’ve got a venue set for sure?” Sans asked.

“The one I considered was booked by someone else, and the one you told me about is currently debating integration with agreement set to be reached by December,” Toriel said.

Sans laid his head on the desk and groaned. “What year?” he asked.

“20XS.”

“Shit.”

“There’s still Mt. Ebott Convention Center by the wildlife refuge,” Toriel said.

Sans gasped.

“Of course,” he said. “The wildlife refuge!”

He looked up at Toriel, eyes sparkling with excitement.

Toriel matched his expression with a grin of her own.

“Oh my goodness, why did we not think of it sooner?” she gasped. “That is absolutely perfect!”

“I know!” Sans exclaimed. “Now we just gotta book it for a certain date and time and get the catering -”

“And the flowers, and the band - oh wait, we have Mettaton…”

“And the crawdads, and Hunter if Helen can get the Thompson kids away from Linda.”
“The wedding party!” Toriel gasped.
“i got pap, alphys, and chas for mine.”
“Then Mettaton, Undyne, and Shelby are in mine.”
“well, that’s the stuff that doesn’t cost money,” Sans said. “i know the warden of the refuge, so it might be slightly easier.”
Toriel sighed. “Sans, your many social connections are going to save someone’s life someday, I swear it,” she said.
“perhaps,” Sans said with a shrug.
The school bell rang.
“man, time really does fly,” Sans sighed. “i’ll try to get in touch with the warden and see around about some other stuff, okay t?”
“of course,” he said.
Sans and Toriel gave each other a kiss goodbye before Sans left.
Things were moving forward.
Miranda sat at the computer, using the best of her fine motor skills to type as quickly as she could. It wasn’t the quickest, but it was still only the first semester. There would be time enough yet to make it there.
“Hey Miranda!”
Miranda glanced at Scott from the corner of her eye.
She continued working silently.
“Sooo,” Scott began. “You got rejected pretty bad, huh?”
Great, another guy trying to get a date. That’s the fifth one today. And the third overall who already has a girlfriend.
“And you tend to state the obvious,” Miranda countered. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m a little thing called busy - which is what you should be if you want to even try to pass.”
“Aw, c’mon!” Scott dismissed. “Who needs work when you got me?”
Apparently not Summer Monte, Anna Reid-Jones, Caitlin Burns, and Mia Dunbar,” Miranda said coolly. “I’d feel more sorry for them, but their ugly AND stupid. They’re dating you, after all.”
Scott blanched.
“Lucky they’re not in this class, huh?” Miranda said with a smirk. “Now please, leave me alone or I’ll scream.”
“You wouldn’t dare,” Scott hissed.
“Try me, Scotty-boy.”

Scott glared at Miranda.

Miranda smirked and returned to her typing.

Halfway done, and only five minutes before the bell.

Mr. Cranach’s fifth period drama class. Courtney was nowhere in sight.

Thus began the plotting.

“So what do we have this week?” Ashton asked everyone.

A few students raised their hands.

“Yes, Gavril,” Ashton said, pointing to a brown male Bat student with wide orange eyes covered by steampunk goggles.

“I thaw her with a thtudent from Thouth Middle Thchool at the boyth thoccer game lath night,” Gavril said. “It wath obviouth what she wath up to with him, I could thmell it.”

“But did you get visual evidence?” Fiona asked.

“I honethly wish I hadn’t,” Gavril said with a shudder. “Tho many regretth…”

Many students winced, gagged, or otherwise made expressions of disgust. Frisk patted Gavril on the shoulder sympathetically.

“I’m sorry you had to see that, Gavril,” Ashton said. “Your sacrifice will be rewarded.”

“With cake?” Gavril asked, hope absolutely radiating from his form.

“Eh, sure,” Ashton said with a shrug.

<<I have a friend who makes great cupcakes!>> Frisk signed. <<You can specify a kind you want and she can make it!>>

“Thweet!” Gavril said. “Hope she can make apple cupcaketh!”

“Guys, Courtney incoming!” announced the student guarding the door.

“Crap, everyone sit down and act natural!”

Courtney entered the room and grabbed her portfolio just after the last of the plotters sat down and acted natural.

Everyone slowly began to ignore Courtney in favor of their work.

Courtney was very aware of the lack of attention being paid her, and the awareness was increasing.

So she tapped on her table with her pencil.

One or two people turned around briefly before returning to the work they were supposed to be doing.
Courtney was affronted.

She tapped the desk even louder.

If anything people were paying even less attention to her than before.

That wouldn’t do at all.

So Courtney got up and went to the art supply closet.

She grabbed some neon tempera paints and a brush and started painting herself.

She’d painted neon pink spirals on her arms when Mr. Cranach walked in and didn’t even spare her a second glance as he went to sit at his desk.

But he’d noticed.

“Courtney Day, office,” he sighed. “Just because you’re not being ogled in my class doesn’t mean you should try to make them ogle.”

Courtney looked like she was about to cry as Mr. Cranach picked up the phone and called the front office.

“But…but I saw that the cabinet was open and-and I just wanted to have some fun, and -”

“Courtney Day, your temper tantrums will not be tolerated,” Mr. Cranach sighed. “I explained the situation to Ms. Rush, and -”

Courtney wailed loudly and scratched her blistering arms.

Everyone tried really hard not to pay her any attention.

Courtney noticed them not looking at her and shrieked.

Many of the more sensitive students plugged their ears. Gavril nearly vomited. Frisk tuned Courtney’s shrieks out by retreating into the Void.

Chara and Rowan saw Frisk fade into the void then crumple themself into a ball. and start hyperventilating

“Frisk!” Chara gasped, running over to Frisk.

Rowan slowly made his way over to the youngsters - though his long strides made the trip rather quicker than it would have for one of lesser height than he.

He observed the pair’s interactions.

“Frisk, is there something going on outside?” Chara asked.

Frisk nodded while they held their head with one hand while biting the nails on the other and rocking on their haunches.

“Are you able to explain it right now?” Chara asked.

Frisk paused and took deep breaths. Then they looked up at Chara and began to sign.
"Painting herself," Chara repeated in disbelief.

Frisk nodded. "She’s like Mettaton with no self-control or fashion sense."

Chara bit back a laugh.

"Seriously, who even wears zebra print anymore?"

Chara could no longer contain their laughter.

Rowan watched on as the two continued to insult a seventh-grader's lack of fashion sense.

Though he had known them for less than a few hours, Rowan could clearly see that these two were as different as night and day in terms of personality.

Chara was a cold child, yet sharp like a knife. But despite the cruel and cutting words they had thrown at Rowan upon discovering him, it was clear that they were merely trying to protect their world the best way they knew how in the moment. And to learn of their sacrifice, their attempt to SAVE their newfound family and free them from their centuries-long imprisonment - he knew that Chara has a strong sense of Justice.

Frisk was a warm, friendly child. Unlike Chara, they didn’t move to attack Rowan first thing, instead asking who he was and why he was there. His perusal of Frisk’s viewable memories revealed things - things that would have traumatized any other child beyond repair. But Frisk was not only alive and well, but they were happy with their lot - they had even made peace with the entity that caused all of their suffering, and turned them into an ally. This child’s Kindness truly knows no bounds.

But both of them, despite their differences, were friends. They found in each other a pillar of support, a friend to be there when there was no one else. And yet, Rowan felt that even though they clung to each other for support and protection, were they somehow separated, they would be able to soldier on despite the potentially horrendous pain.

That was what many believed DETERMINATION to be - the strength to move forward, to keep growing and changing no matter what the world throws your way. This desire for change, this desire to advance the world beyond its comfort zones for its own good was the very reason why those with pure Red SOULs never lived beyond the age of fifty - they became martyrs of their causes, or had their voices suppressed by those who feared that any change, no matter how small, would destroy everything and leave civilization in ruins.

Rowan knew then what he could do.

“Frisk Dreemurr, Chara Dreemurr, I know what I can do to atone for all I have done to your family,” he said.

Chara, who was already in a crouching position, sat down and crossed their legs, leaning back on their hands. They stared at Rowan in such a way that he felt as though he were being interrogated by a judge before a jury that had ready declared him guilty.

1492 was a terrible year for him.

“And what would that be, Poncho?” Chara asked skeptically. Frisk watched from the sodelines,
clearly ready to compromise should all go south.

“As you may have guess, I was present for the War If Monsters and Humans,” Rowan began. “As one of the Seven Great Mages, I fought on the side of Humans as a spy for the Monsters on orders from Prince Asgore’s mother, Queen Gormlaith. None but the closest aides of the Dreemurr’s knew this, and only Dr. Gaster, Queen Gormlaith and I knew how futile it was to continue the charade. Still we continued.”

“Listen Poncho, as nifty-keen as this history lesson is, I think you should get to the point,” Chara pushed.

“Of course, Chara Dreemurr, my sincerest apologies,” Rowan said. “My intent is as follows: I have skills in swordsmanship and marksmanship, as well as hand-to-hand combat. With these skills, I feel that I could be of use in situations where Frisk Dreemurr needs to FIGHT. I hope that no such situation arises, but if the world is still as hostile toward Monsters as it was in my time, I fear it may be necessary.”

Chara studied the man before them and Frisk with utmost scrutiny.

Frisk stood up suddenly.

Chara’s eyes widened.

“Frisk, what are you -”

Frisk turned back to look at Chara with a smile.

They knew what they were doing.

Frisk walked up to the older Human and looked up at him.

“Kneel,” they said.

Rowan blinked, then kneeled, lowering his head as a knight to his lord.

“Your full name,” Frisk said.

“Rowan Lithgow.”

“Oh,” Frisk said. “Do you, Rowan Lithgow, promise to FIGHT for the protection of Monsters and their allies?”

“By my faith and the stars above,” Rowan vowed.

“Do you promise to FIGHT only when there are no other options present?”

“By my faith and the stars above.”

“Do you promise to never let anyone know of your existence unless I allow it?”

Rowan paused.

“By my faith and the stars above,” he said.

Frisk smiled and place their hands on Rowan’s shoulders.
“Rowan Lithgow, by the power vested in me by my SOUL and the names of my father and mother, I grant you the chance to experience life once more through my eyes.”

Rowan flinched, then realized that nothing happened.

Chara blinked.

“All that pomp and ceremony, and we get nothing.” Chara sighed.

Frisk giggled. <<I just did that because I thought it would be fun!>> they signed.

Rowan blinked a few times before chuckling.

A chance to experience life once more, huh?

This should be very, very interesting.

He wondered what the rest of the Great Mages would think of this…

Megan Day could tell by the whispers and giggles that her sister had done something - or someone - using her name again.

No use telling their mother. Never was. It was always “She’s too young!” or “She’s not smart enough to do that!” or “Not now, Megan, I have a root touch-up appointment.”

She was done.

“Megan, do you know who you did this time?”

Megan turned to her friend Sawyer Hebert, a brown-eyed blond in a Misfits tee shirt and black jeans.

“No clue,” Megan sighed, closing her locker and turning around with a swish of her ash blonde hair.

“Josh Landry,” Sawyer said, their voice lowering. “Kim Drayden’s boyfriend.”

Megan’s eyes widened.

“My sister wants me dead, I swear,” she groaned.

“Do you have a plan this time, or do you gonna eat in the emergency stairwell again to avoid angry girlfriend?” Sawyer asked.

“Oh, I have a plan alright,” Megan said with a smirk, digging into her backpack and producing a phone with a flashy, glittery case that clearly wasn’t hers.

“You stole your sister’s phone,” Sawyer deadpanned.

Megan smirked.

“My sister said that there’s a schoolwide plot at North Middle to reveal Courtney’s whoring,” Sawyer said. “A few South Middle students and some freshmen have found out and are joining. You want in?”

Megan’s eyes widened.

“I’m in,” she said. “But first to dispel rumors by ruining some boys’ lives.”
The last bell of the day rang, its sound breaking the chains on the hearts of all who roamed the halls of North Middle School.

The book club of D-105 had gathered, cupcakes being enjoyed.

“So, fellow readers,” Caroline announced from her place on the podium as she peeled the wrapper from a pumpkin cupcake with cream cheese frosting, “I do hope all of you finished this week’s book.”

Everyone stared at her.

“You expected us to actually finish The Hobbit in a week?!” Brian asked. “What the heck?!”

“Brian, I understand that your dyslexia makes reading difficult, which is why I have extended the deadline to next week for everyone,” Caroline said. “But The Hobbit is only one book, while its sequel, The Lord of the Rings, is a set of three. Plus, the type is bigger and there are pictures.”

Everyone stared at her.

“Um, Caroline?” Marian said. “Not everyone is at the same reading level you are, so maybe we could try something else?”

Caroline looked away, slightly ashamed.

“As long as we don’t watch the movies,” she grumbled.

“What was wrong with the movies?” Sofie asked.

“Oh no, you got her started…” Levi groaned.

“Oh, sweetie, do I have a long explanation for you,” Caroline said. “Now I will say this, the cast was wonderful. Ian McKellen is Gandalf the Grey as always, Orlando Bloom is Legolas, and they even managed to bring Christopher Lee in to reprise his role as Saruman the White despite the character having not been in the book at all - which I am willing to forgive due to Mr. Lee’s glorious portrayal of the character and his tragic passing. The one thing I cannot forgive about Peter Jackson’s version of The Hobbit is that they forced in an unnecessary romance between one of the dwarves and what is basically an Elven OC. And it made me very uncomfortable since The Hobbit is by NO means a romance.”

Silence.

“Do I really need to go on?” Caroline sighed wearily. “I wanna talk headcanons already…”

Sarah raised her hand cautiously.

“What is it, Sarah Ward?” Caroline asked.

“I read a shortened version of the books last year, and I started shipping Legolas and Gimli from the first book on,” she admitted.

Caroline gasped. “You ship them too?”

“I see their banter as subtle flirting, and it makes the book even better than it already is,” Sarah said with a smile.
“May the Dwarf and the Elf be happy!” Levi said, raising his cupcake as if asking for a toast.

“Hear hear!” Ridley agreed.

“I honestly never thought of it like that,” Marian admitted. “But now looking back, I should reread the books to check and see…”

“We love you, Marian,” Jenson said. “And the reason is that you’re cool with fictional representations of same-sex cross-species liaisons.”

More confusion.

“Is this a book club or a yaoi fan club?” Jayme asked. “Because either way I’m staying for life.”

“The answer to your question, Jayme, is yes,” Caroline said.

“Two in one,” Audrey mused. “Even better…”

“Yo Almsal, your thoughts on dwarves and elves banging?” Sarah asked.

“As long as they are content, I’m in no place to judge,” Almsal said, reading through the last pages of The Hobbit. “Though I’ll admit that the speed with which the conversation went from Caroline’s frustration at everyone’s average reading level to discussions about interspecies sexual relations between dwarves and elves is slightly entertaining.”

“Thank you for not calling us all stupid, I guess,” Sarah said with a shrug.

“No one here is stupid,” Almsal said. “They are simply not quite as intelligent in the areas I find worthwhile.”

Sarah blinked. “Whatever floats your boat, dude.”

There was a knock at the door.

“A person,” Caroline hissed. “Bouncers, Assemble!”

Bruce, Eddie, and Nicko all walked up to the door and answered.

Undyne answered, Alphys and Mamoru with her.

“How’s it goin’!” Undyne greeted.

The Book Club Bouncers turned to Caroline for further instruction.

“Mrs. Undyne, Dr. Alphys, Spawn Mamoru,” Caroline greeted. “Welcome to Book Club™. We are currently discussing homosexual interspecies relations from Tolkien’s works.”

“B-but there weren’t any,” Alphys said.

“But all the subtext tells us that Legolas and Gimli totally hooked up at some point before the books ended,” Sarah claimed. “That flirtatious banter cannot be ignored!”

“I swear it all started when the Fellowship met with Galadriel in Lothlórien,” Caroline said. “From there I believe Legolas came to respect Gimli as Gimli had shown as much respect as he could despite the icy welcome he was shown by the elves.”
“Okay, I’m no nerd, but if your book club is gonna talk about gay fictional characters, count me in!” Undyne said.

“W-wait!” Alphys began. “D-do any of you know any stories for M-Mamoru’s age group?”

Everyone was silent.

“I think I recall a few from when I was little,” Caroline said. “I’ll have to look them up online, I hope that’s okay…”

“Sure it is!” Undyne assured. “Show us whatcha got!”

Everyone turned to Caroline.

Caroline turned paler than she already was - a real accomplishment when one is as pallid as Caroline.

Caroline breathed in through her nose and out through her mouth to keep herself from shutting down.

She took out her phone and looked through some stories.

Then she found one of her favorites.

It had taught her much about Humanity, but it took another few years for her to truly understand.

“I found one,” she announced. “Here goes?”

Polite encouragement from the group.

She saw Levi and Ridley with their phones out filming her.

Caroline sighed. She’d dug her grave. Now it’s time to roll in it.

She began to read aloud.

“Once there was a tree,” she began. “And she loved a little boy. And every day, the boy would come, and he would gather her leaves and make them into crowns and play king of the forest. He would climb up her trunk, and swing from her branches, and eat apples. And they would play hide-and-go-seek. And when he was tired, he would sleep in her shade.”

Everyone listened as Caroline recited Shel Silverstein’s The Giving Tree.

It soon became apparent that this story was sad.

“And after a long time the boy came back again. ‘I am sorry, Boy,’ said the tree, ‘but I have nothing left to give you - My apples are gone.’ ‘My teeth are too weak for apples,’ said the boy. ‘My branches are gone,” said the tree. ”You cannot swing on them - ” “I am too old to swing on branches,’ said the boy. ‘My trunk is gone,’ said the tree. ‘You cannot climb - ‘ ‘I am too tired to climb,” said the boy. ‘I am sorry,’ sighed the tree. ‘I wish that I could give you something… but I have nothing left. I am just an old stump. I am sorry…” ‘I don’t need very much now,’ said the boy, ‘just a quiet place to sit and rest. I am very tired.’ ‘Well,’ said the tree, straightening herself up as much as she could, ‘well, an old stump is good for sitting and resting. Come, Boy, sit down. Sit down and rest.’ And the boy did. And the tree was happy.”

Silence, interspersed with a few sniffles.
“Shel Silverstein, The Giving Tree, the end.”

Applause.

Caroline flinched once it began - it seemed that he had entered a trance as she recited the story.

Caroline hid her face in her hands, embarrassed.

But behind her hands, she was smiling.

Karen Day sat at the kitchen table, preparing to rearrange her schedule while the phone rang in her hand.

The person on the other end picked up.

“Upland Psychiatry, how may we assist you?”

“Hi, I’d like to set up a family appointment with Dr. Bradley,” Karen said.

“Okay, and who is the appointment for?”

“The Day family, members are Orville, Karen, Megan, and Courtney.”

“We have an opening on the 25th at four in the afternoon, how does that sound?”

Karen flipped through her agenda.

“Sounds perfect,” she said. “Thank you very much.”

“Of course, you have a wonderful d-”

Karen hung up the phone and sighed. Courtney had locked herself in her room, unwilling to believe that painting on herself was anything but the logical choice to make to get attention - she KNEW she was allergic to tempera paint. Courtney had always believed that she had to be the center of attention - good or bad. But puberty had actually made these tendencies worse - whether it was hormones or something else Karen wasn’t sure. And Megan had gotten it into her head that Courtney was using her name to hook up with boys and leaving stuff in her room - but lately she’d given up. She’d told Karen, “You won’t believe me anyway since Courtney is your and Dad’s favorite. She always has been, and you know it.”

Had Karen been favoring Courtney? She wasn’t sure. Helping a child who struggles with schoolwork rather than one who consistently gets above-average grades was only natural, right?

Karen really wasn’t sure. And she sure as hell wasn’t going to get the answers alone.

She texted her husband to tell him about the family therapy session. He’d been suggesting therapy for Courtney for a long time, but Karen wanted to hold off.

Karen was kind of regretting that now.

But this would help. She really, really hoped this would help.

Flowey sat in his usual spot on the windowsill in Frisk’s bedroom, playing Pokemon White.
He moved his character through the Desert Resort, so eager was he to reach the Ruin Castle.

Then an encounter was triggered.

Flowey groaned, but he stopped and gasped once he realized he had run into a Maractus.

He needed it to complete the Pokedex for this version.

He brought its HP down to about a quarter before tossing an Ultra Ball.

The seconds were long and tense.

But they were fruitful.

Flowey decided to nickname it - he always nicknamed his Mons.

But why he named a male Maractus Everdeen he had no clue.

Your friends new and old fill you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

Too Much Time On My Hands - Styx

Fun Fact: We both started crying while we were writing the part with the Giving Tree. I swear that everyone who has ever read The Giving Tree has cried while reading it at least once. Even Flowey - he's SOULless, not a dick.
Chapter Summary

Mass Dysphoria, Skelefam bonding, and Courtney's issues run very very deep.

Chapter Notes

Warning: This chapter contains mentions of suicide, underage sexual content, ageism, extremely minor gore, the hellspawn of chemistry and history puns, and an edgy psychiatrist. Viewer discretion is advised.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

3:28 P.M., October 25, 20XR

It's a pleasant day outside.

Wind is blowing.

Leaves are falling.

On days like this, kids like you...

... are ready to pounce.

Frisk climbed up the maple tree in their backyard and sat in a branch directly above the ever-growing pile of brown and red and gold.

They watched as Papyrus raked all the leaves into a pile.

The warm colors of fallen autumn leaves filled them with DETERMINATION.

FILE: SAVE

Papyrus hummed a little tune and danced about as he raked the leaves.

Frisk leaned forward, clinging to the tree like a sloth, only their body was on top of the branch rather than hanging from it.

They closed their eyes just as Papyrus went over to grab something from the shed.

They reawakened in the Void.
<<Are you ready?>> Frisk signed eagerly, their smile big and bright.

“It’s been nearly a century, but playing in leaves never gets old,” Chara said, hands clenched in excitement and smile wide and eager.

“Children do such things?” Rowan asked, clearly curious as to the nature of this endeavor.

Chara and Frisk stared at Rowan in confusion.

“Yeah?” said Chara. “Did kids in the old-timey days of yore not do things like have fun?”

“I wouldn’t know,” Rowan answered. “I never was one.”

Chara and Frisk were silent.

“Anyhow,” Chara said, “now’s not the time for a sad backstory. It’s time to try for Triple Control!”

Frisk hopped up and down excitedly.

They hopped over to stand between Chara and Rowan.

As they continued to hop in place, they grabbed the hands of their headmates.

“Ready?” Frisk asked.

“ Heck yeah!” Chara asked.

“I shall follow your lead if things become confusing,” Rowan said.

“Okay!” Frisk said, still hopping in place from excitement. “On three!”

Rowan gulped. “O-one…”

“Two…” Chara added in excitement.

Frisk woke up.

They stared into space as Chara and Rowan took in the sights of the 21st-century autumn.

“Three,” Frisk whispered.

They jumped from the tree and into the crisp pile of brown and red and gold with a squeal of excitement.

They moved their arms as though they were making a snow angel out of leaves rather than snow.

Then Toriel come into the backyard. The breeze kindly wafted the scent of a warm apple pie toward the Human.

Chara sat up, resting their weight on the palms of their hands behind them.

“Frisk!” Toriel called out. “MK is here!”

Frisk hopped up from their position and Rowan dusted the bits of leaf off of their hoodie and jeans, running inside.

Toriel looked on, smiling as Frisk signed animatedly to MK about their day so far and their plans for
the rest of the weekend.

She was reminded of her own first forays into the world of love. But there was always a chance that this wasn’t quite the same, so Toriel wouldn’t tease her child just yet.

But should Frisk choose to bring home a date, she would break out the embarrassing stories.

Twas a mother’s duty, after all.

Then she felt a familiar bony hand on her forearm.

She looked down at Sans and smiled warmly.

She received a similar smile in return.

“you ready to go?” he asked.

Toriel was confused briefly before widening her eyes in realization.

“Oh!” she gasped. She sighed. “Just give a moment to change into something at least somewhat nicer…”

She looked down at her yellow gingham midi-dress, currently covered by a red apron.

“tori, just put on some shoes and a cardigan and you’re golden,” Sans assured. “it’s just asgore, not mr. hollander.”

Toriel smiled, kissing Sans on the crown of his skull.

“NYOHH, COME ON!” came a familiar exasperated shout. “IT TOOK ME THREE HOURS TO ARRANGE THIS LEAF PILE!”

Frisk giggled.

Then they signed something to MK, to which the young Wyvern replied with a cheer and followed Frisk out the back door.

Toriel and Sans glanced at each other and smiled fondly at their family’s antics.

Their fond reverie was interrupted by Papyrus’ screams of exasperation and Frisk’s and MK’s laughter.

They chuckled.

“get your shoes and sweater and we head out?” Sans asked.

“Sounds like a plan,” Toriel said.

Karen got in the front passenger seat of the navy blue Lincoln Continental, her husband Orville sitting in the driver's seat.

She looked at her daughters in the rearview mirror - Courtney texting her boyfriend, Megan plugging in her headphones and turning on some music.

Then she looked at Orville, his sea-blue eyes looking back at her pale green ones.
They nodded in silent agreement as the car backed out of the driveway.

“Okay girls,” Orville said. “We’re heading out. You two behave for Dr. Bradley during your individual sessions - and that means you too, Courtney.”

“But I never did anything!” Courtney whined. “Everyone in this family hates me!”

“Not everyone,” Megan said reassuringly. “Just me.”

“Megan, don’t provoke your sister,” Karen sighed.

“It’s hard not to provoke someone who’s out to ruin your life,” Megan bit. “Now let me listen to my music in peace, please.”

Then she plugged in her headphones and turned up the volume loud enough that she could hear no one.

Too bad the rest of the people in the car could hear every note of her music.

“Moooommmyyy,” Courtney whined, “tell Megan to turn off her emo garbage!”

“Listen to your music if it’s bothering you so much,” Megan sighed.

Courtney growled and put on her own music, turning the volume up to the max.

Karen and Orville looked at each other and turned on the radio.

This therapy session had better be worth it.

Elaina sat on the brown leather sofa in the waiting room Dr. Bradley’s office. They had their hood up to hide their face from the other patrons.

They always ended up crying after a panic attack. They were just grateful that Irma had dropped them off so she couldn’t chastise them for being an embarrassment.

Oh no. More tears.

Elaina rubbed at the eye not covered by their hair with the sleeves of their Panic! At The Disco hoodie, making their face even more raw and blotchy.

Maybe some music would help calm them down.

Then, just as they unlocked their phone, the door opened.

Elaina nearly gasped when they saw Courtney walk in.

They pretended to be doing something on their phone - well, technically they were doing something on their phone, but they were pretending to be doing something slightly less shifty than what they were doing. Which happened to be taking photos of Courtney next to a group of people who would be assumed to be her family.

Then Elaina’s phone vibrated - they’d gotten a text.

*I text from: mother*

*Irma: I’ll be late. Walk to dance. I’ll pick you up.*
Elaina sighed. So *that* was why Irma had picked a therapist so close to the dance school.

They should have known.

They typed out the only response their mother ever accepted from them without question.

*Elaina: ok*

Elaina put their phone in their hoodie pocket - but not before taking a picture of Courtney texting someone.

They discreetly looked at the contact name on the picture of the phone as they left.

Their eyes widened at the name.

Once they were out of the building, they took out their phone and texted all the information they had to their fellow plotters.

This was going to be *major.* Elaina could feel it in their gut.

Wait, no.

*His* gut.

Elaina groaned.

Motherfucking *dysphoria.*

Maybe he could ask Felicity and Grace for a chest binder for Christmas…

Hunter gnawed on her tongue as she sat in the back of the Cadillac heading home from the grocery store.

Motherfucking *dysphoria.*

She felt that feeling that could only be described as *wrong* pretty much constantly, but sometimes it was stronger than usual.

Like this exact moment.

Maybe some music would distract her.

Hunter steeled herself for Linda’s anger.

“Uh, Mom?” she asked.

“What?” Linda said.

“What?” Linda said.

“Can we…listen to some music?”

She could feel Linda glare at her.

Linda groaned as she turned on the radio and tuned it to the 90s pop hits channel.

“Only if we can listen to *my* music,” she said.
Hunter smiled - Linda wasn’t one to acquiesce to her children’s wishes, however small. She must be in a good mood today…

“Thanks Mom!” she said happily.

Linda seemed… surprised for some reason.

“Whatever…” she mumbled.

Hunter chewed on her tongue some more and pulled her sweater hem.

The dysphoria hadn’t changed at all.

But she still felt better, if only just a little.

Toriel and Sans stood in front of the door of Asgore’s apartment.

Toriel was clearly very anxious, what with her chewing on her lips and rhythmically tapping the bottom of the pie tin with her claws.

Sans sighed. It was understandable, considering the nature of their visit.

He grabbed onto Toriel’s arm and looked into her cinnamon eyes.

“it’s okay, t,” he assured her. “i’m right here, okay? if you need me to get it across for ya, i will, okay? just lemme know.”

Toriel breathed a sigh of relief and smiled at him.

“Thank you, Sans,” she said. “But I shall do this on my own, come hell or high water.”

Sans sighed. Toriel was a very stubborn woman when she made a decision - it was exasperating as much as it was attractive.

“well, here goes,” he said.

He nearly knocked on the door.

Toriel stopped him and rang the doorbell.

Sans got the feeling that she saw that as an act of cruel pettiness on her part.

The door was answered by Gaster.

“Sans!” he said happily. “How have you been?”

“hey dad,” Sans said, hugging his father. “i’ve been good. you?”

“Well, to be quite honest, my joints have been feeling a tad stiff the past few months,” Gaster admitted. “I’ve been thinking about buying a walking cane…”

“huh,” Sans said. “is that so…”

“Doctor, is someone at the…”

Asgore came in from the kitchen and saw Toriel and Sans.
His expression became unreadable.

“Hello, Toriel,” he greeted. “Sans…”

“Asgore,” Toriel greeted tersely. “Sans and I are here to discuss something with you.”

Asgore sighed. “Do have a seat on the couch,” he said. “I have some tea on boil. Would you like any?”

“No, thank you,” Toriel answered as she sat down and adjusted her cardigan.

“we brought pie,” Sans said, hoping to warm the atmosphere at least somewhat. “hope you like apple.”

The silence was somewhat heavy.

“I’ll go put the pie in the refrigerator!” Gaster said. “Is it just me, or is it oddly humid in here?”

“What is it that you wish to discuss with me?” Asgore asked.

Toriel stared blankly at her hands for a moment then sighed.

“Asgore,” she began. “We… I have a request to ask of you, pertaining to the wedding.”

“And that would be…?”

Toriel was tense, her breathing becoming ragged. She scratched her palms and tugged on her cardigan sleeves.

Sans laid a hand on her thigh.

“need me to explain?” he asked.

Toriel relaxed a bit at the contact and sighed quietly at the words.

“That will not be necessary, Sans,” Toriel assured. “I thank you, though. Perhaps you and your father can spend some time out and about while Asgore and I discuss the matter?”

Sans smiled. “sure, tori. just call me when you have everything covered, okay?”

“Of course,” she said, placing a kiss to his zygomatic. “I shall see you in a moment.”

“okay then,” Sans said, apparently relieved. “c’mon, dad, we’re takin’ a shortcut to my place.”

Gaster nodded happily and stood up with some effort.

Sans watched in case he needed help. It seems like a cane will be necessary for him to be able to get around before too long…

Gaster made his way over to Sans and they walked out the door.

Sans looked around to make sure that there were no people.

He saw someone leave an apartment next door.

The Human woman had golden brown hair all shorn save for a waist-length wavy lock at the front left and sharp deep-green eyes.
“Ah, good afternoon Miss Harper!” Gaster greeted. “I take you have an appointment scheduled?”

Sienna laughed. “Well, these nails won’t exactly manicure themselves, Doctor! If only my Magic could do that…”

Sans quirked a brow ridge.

“Ah, yes!” Gaster gasped in realization. “Sans, this is Sienna Harper, our neighbor. She’s a Wizard.”

Sans stared at Sienna skeptically.

Sienna, as of sensing his unsureness, made herself Invisible for a moment before turning back. Sans’ eye sockets widened and he crossed his arms.

“huh,” he said. “well whaddya know.”

“I take it you’re Sans, then,” Sienna said. “Your father has told me much about you.”

“has he now.”

Sienna chuckled. “Well, I must be off now. I have a meeting with a client right after my manicure appointment, and I’ll be damned if I’m late for either of them.”

“Of course,” Gaster said. “It was good to see you, Miss Harper.”

“You too Doctor. It was a pleasure meeting you, Sans.”

Sans nodded curtly as Sienna turned to make her way to the elevator.

Sans saw no others about, and stepped into the shortcut.

Megan sat in the squishy oversized leather armchair across from the lean, bony man with bushy facial hair and eyebrows sitting at the mahogany desk.

She chewed on the drawstrings of her hoodie and picked at her black-painted nails as her forest-green eyes met Dr. Bradley’s chocolate brown ones.

“So whaddya wanna know?” she asked. “And don’t be vague. I can’t stand vagueness. I also know about confidentiality laws, so I am aware that whatever happens in this room stays here unless the patient grants permission to do so or does or mentions something really messed up.”

Dr. Bradley quirked one bushy brow and recorded the statement.

“Well then Megan, let’s start with the basics,” he said. “I already know your name and date of birth -”

“Then what are they?” Megan asked.


Megan said nothing.

“So, Megan,” Dr. Bradley said, “tell me about your interests, your likes and dislikes.”
Megan shifted in the chair slightly.

“I like listening to music,” she said. “My favorite genre is punk. My favorite groups are The Ramones and Misfits. I don’t any particular favorite song.”

Dr. Bradley recorded the information. “I remember the first concert I ever went to. It was in San Francisco on January 14th, 1978.”

Megan gasped. “You saw the Sex Pistols’ last American performance? In concert?!”

Dr. Bradley sighed. “Part of the reason I went was to spite my parents. I have no regrets and I punched someone throwing empty bottles at leaving concertgoers.”

Megan smirked. “I think I’m gonna like you, old man.”

“Likewise,” Dr. Bradley said. “Moving on, do you have any other interests?”

“I like playing chess,” Megan said. “I’m pretty good at it, I guess.”

“Do you like chess because you’re good at it, or is there another reason?” Dr. Bradley asked.

“Aaand now we’re at the part where you pick at my brain,” Megan sighed. “I wasn’t always good at chess. It took me a few years, but now I can beat my dad at chess when he’s actually trying his best.”

“Would you say you’re looking for a challenge?”

“Yeah, I guess,” Megan said. “I’m in the chess club at my school, and there’s a few good players, but they don’t exactly challenge me, you know?”

Dr. Bradley hummed and wrote down the information. “Any other significant interests you care to tell me about.”

“I like hedgehogs,” Megan said. “I wanna have a pet hedgehog, but I’d have to leave the state since it’s illegal to own them as pets here. I’d really like to move to Florida.”

Dr. Bradley wrote that down.

“And as a psychiatrist, I know you’re here to see if I have anything wrong and how you can help either fix it or deal with it, so here’s what’s ‘wrong’ with me,” Megan said, using air quotes as she said the word “wrong”. “I have thoughts of suicide. I’ve been thinking about it since I was thirteen, and I came with a specific plan last year.”

Dr. Bradley’s eyes widened.

“I know it’s screwed up,” Megan said. “I don’t want to have those thoughts and desires. But if it’s any help, I decided not to kill myself while I still live at home because if I did, I think my sister would use it as a ploy to get attention. It would make her happy if I died, so I’m staying alive to spite her.”

Dr. Bradley recorded the information.

“I know that you’ll tell my parents that,” Megan said. “If confidentiality prevents it, I give you full permission - hell, I want you to tell them. During the group session.”

Dr. Bradley wrote down the information.
"Well, your half-hour is almost up, and then it’ll be your sister’s turn and then your whole family together after that," Dr. Bradley said. “Do you have anymore to say?”

“Yeah, actually,” Megan said. “I looked around online for stuff for a school project a few weeks ago, and I found a disorder whose symptoms match a description of my sister pretty well - some personality disorder of some kind.”

“Diagnosing others without professional input is dangerous,” Dr. Bradley warned.

“I know,” Megan said. “That’s why I’m telling you - because you’re a professional.”

Then she stood up and stretched.

“Man, that is one comfy chair,” she remarked. “Well, I guess I’ll see you around.”

Dr. Bradley nodded as Megan walked out of his office.

Megan seemed rather intelligent. She’d apparently done a bit of research on psychiatric procedure.

He wondered what personality disorder she meant.

But her sister would be in in a moment. He would probably understand better then.

Alphys, Undyne, and Mamoru were strolling through the park, admiring the autumn scenery about them.

Alphys and Undyne held hands, while Mamoru was being carried on Undyne’s shoulders.

Mamoru’s hair apparently grew out pretty fast - definitely inherited from Undyne. His crest wouldn’t start to grow in completely until he reached puberty, so the three little nubs would remain so for another ten years or so.

Alphys glanced up. Mamoru definitely had his Mama’s hair and smile, but his tail and crest were Ka-chan’s all the way.

Speaking of his smile, he was teething.

And he was currently chewing on Undyne’s ponytail.

“U-um, Undyne?” Alphys stuttered. “M-Mamoru’s chewing on your hair again.”

Undyne made a confused noise as she felt her ponytail for saliva.

Mamoru nipped her finger.

Undyne pulled her finger back and held it as she hissed in pain. Mamoru held on to the flailing Fishwoman, giggling gleefully at the motions.

“N-now imagine that pain, but on your b-boobs,” Alphys said.

Undyne squawked at the thought.

“Y-yeah, I thought so,” Alphys said.

“Now that’s just petty, Alphy!” Undyne said. “And kind of hot, but mostly petty!”
“L-let’s hope that the next one w-won’t have your teeth,” Alphys said.

“Maybe I should cut my hair,” Undyne said. “Don’t want Mamo-chan to choke on it, do we?”

Alphys giggled. “N-no, we would n-not.”

Then their eyes caught sight of a woman with wavy shoulder-length sandy blonde hair in a ponytail pulling a girl with wavy blonde pigtails of about seven close to her protectively while glaring at the Fishwoman and her Reptilian wife as they walked with their child.

“Come on, Holly,” the woman said. “Don’t stare at them, or they’ll eat you.”

“I don’t eat kids, lady,” Undyne snapped.

“But you still eat Humans?” the woman sneered in disgust.

Undyne smiled widely, threateningly baring her sharp, pointed teeth and flaring her facial fins - an expression Mamoru imitated brilliantly.

“Not ones as ugly as you,” Undyne said.

The woman screeched indignantly and stormed off furiously, dragging little Holly with her.

Undyne sighed.

“Welp, I probably started another incident,” she said.

“W-well, at least you d-didn’t try to s-stab anyone this time?” Alphys assured weakly.

Undyne shrugged noncommittally.

Then she looked around.

Something was missing.


Alphys paused.

They looked at each other.

Then they heard Mamoru’s giggling.

They turned to find him clinging to a tree by his claws like a cicada or something.

Undyne took a picture with her cellphone.

“He’s got your claws,” she said, looking at Alphys with a proud smile.

Alphys smiled and blushed.

Then the mothers moved to remove little Mamoru from the tree he’d gotten himself stuck to.

Frisk and MK had moved on from making leaf angels, and now they were searching for the prettiest leaves.
“Whoa, I found a really yellow one!” MK said, deftly picking up the leaf with their tail and showing it to Frisk.

Frisk gasped and smiled.

<<It’s the same color as you are!>> they signed excitedly.

MK chuckled, blushing slightly.

Frisk looked around their feet and gasped happily and clapped when they found a leaf.

They picked up the leaf, one of an extremely brilliant shade of red.

MK’s blush grew heavier as they watched Frisk analyze the leaf by holding it up to the sunlight.

It was a very beautiful sight…

“U-um,” MK stuttered, “t-that leaf is the same as y-your eyes.”

Frisk quirked an eyebrow in confusion at the statement.

Then Sans and Gaster suddenly appeared before them, their sudden presence causing the scattered leaves to be blown about dramatically.

Frisk applauded their autumnally dynamic entry.

Gaster put a hand on his sternum and bowed. Sans simply stood there.

“So,” Sans began. “you two wanna go out shopping for a bit? we can hit grillby’s.”

Frisk squealed in excitement and clapped and hopped in place.

“Well, that’s one yes,” Sans said. “what say you, mk? wanna come along?”

MK smiled excitedly. “Sure!” they said.

“And there’s two,” Sans said.

“SANS!” Papyrus called from the shed. “WHAT ARE YOU DOING BACK SO SOON? AND WHERE IS TORIEL?”

“She’s discussing stuff with asgore,” Sans explained. “i decided to spend the day with dad, and we’re taking frisk with us. wanna come with?”

Papyrus brightened. “WHY, CERTAINLY, BROTHER!”

“And that makes three,” Gaster said. “How many people fit in your car, Papyrus?”

“FIVE,” Papyrus said. “TWO IN FRONT, THREE IN BACK. BUT I AM CERTAIN THAT WE COULD FIT AT MOST FIVE IN THE TRUNK, DEPENDING ON THE SIZE OF THE PEOPLE WILLING TO DO SO!”

Everyone stared at Papyrus.

“I call trunk,” Sans said.

Frisk pouted. <<No fair!>> they signed. <<I wanted to try riding in the trunk!>>
“NO RIDING IN THE TRUNK UNLESS THERE ARE NO OTHER OPTIONS!” Papyrus declared.

The kids and Sans made sounds of disappointment.

“I call shotgun!” Gaster announced.

Even louder disappointment.

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Toriel and Asgore sat alone in the apartment, enveloped in icy silence.

Toriel stared at the palms of her hands, eyes lidded.

Asgore twiddled his thumbs nervously.

“So,” he said suddenly. “You wished to discuss something with about the wedding?”

Toriel blinked, returning from her apparent introspection. “Oh. Yes, I did.”

“And what is it that you wished to discuss, exactly?” Asgore asked.

Toriel felt her gut clench.

But she forced herself forward.

“Asgore,” she began, voice quaking with anxiety, “I have been thinking, lately, that…perhaps, it is time that we…put some of our animosity behind us. I have come to feel that…much of my coldness toward you is rather…unfair - not only to you, but…to our friends, our family, and…the memories of…Asriel and Chara. Frankly, I would like to…try to…let some of it go…difficult though it may be.”

“Toriel…” Asgore said, incapable of saying more in the moment.

“And so, I have come here with…a request a one that I hope will help both of us in moving forward with our lives,” Toriel continued.

The former lovers were silent.

“Asgore,” Toriel said, voice thick with anxiety yet lined with DETERMINATION, “I have come here today to ask you…if you would be willing, as my eldest surviving next-of-kin, to…to…”

Toriel inhaled, bracing herself for what she had to say.

“…to give me away at the altar at Sans’ and my wedding.”

Asgore gasped, cornflower-blue eyes widening and watering.

Toriel continued to stare at her palms.

Asgore smiled and wiped away a few tears.

“Yes,” he whispered. “I would appreciate that, Toriel. Thank you.”

Toriel looked up at Asgore, mouth slightly agape.

She granted him a small smile.
Something inside of her heart had dislodged itself, lightening a bit of the burden there.

She was finally moving forward.

In her SOUL she felt a small spark of DETERMINATION.

Courtney sat in the squishy oversized leather across from Dr. Bradley.

“So, Courtney, do you have any hobbies?” Dr. Bradley asked.

Courtney crossed one of her legs over the other and put a finger up to her face somewhat coyly.

“Well,” she said, affecting a clearly fake innocence, “I like shopping…talking to my friends - my best friend is Demi Holmquist, by the way - and oh my god I have so many boyfriends, you have no idea .”

“Pardon my interruption, Courtney,” Dr. Bradley interjected, “but you say boyfriends, as in more than one.”

“Uh-huh!” Courtney said proudly.

“Just how many do you have, exactly?”

“Thirteen,” Courtney said. “I plan on going for my fourteenth at my thirteenth birthday party.”

“Thirteen…” Dr. Bradley remarked with exaggerated interest. “Quite a lot of them for a girl of twelve, don’t you think?”

Courtney was genuinely confused. “I mean, I am developed for my age, but thirteen isn’t that many in my opinion. I’m going easy on them.”

“And do these boys know about each other?”

“Of course not!” Courtney said, clearly offended by the notion. “That would take away all the fun and they’d stop paying attention to me!”

“Paying attention to you you say?” Dr. Bradley asked. “Is that why you have thirteen boyfriends? So someone will pay attention to you?”

“No?” Courtney said, as if Dr. Bradley was a fucking idiot for even suggesting such a thing. “I have thirteen boyfriends because I like sex.”

Dr. Bradley would have spat out his coffee had he been a coffee drinker. Alas, he was more of a tea person, and he had no tea, so he settled for raising one bushy eyebrow in surprise.

“You’re sexually active?” Dr. Bradley asked.

“What part of ‘I have thirteen boyfriends because I like sex’ did you not understand?”

Dr. Bradley recorded Courtney’s statements.

“And do your parents know you are sexually active, Courtney?” he asked.

“Not yet,” Courtney said with a smug smile. “I plan on telling them at my thirteenth birthday party, though~”
“I see…do you practice safe sex?”

Courtney seemed confused. “What’s that mean?”

“Do you use condoms when you have sex?” Dr. Bradley asked. “Do you take measures to ensure you don’t contract any sexually-transmitted diseases or infections or accidentally become pregnant?”

“I used a condom once,” Courtney said. “It felt weird, so I never used any ever again! Why would I ever go back?”

Dr. Bradley had formulated a pretty good idea as to what personality disorder Megan meant by this point, but now he was beginning to get the feeling that this girl might just be stupid.

“So, Courtney,” he said, “how would you describe your boyfriends?”

“Oh, they’re obsessed with me,” Courtney said as if it were completely obvious. “Isn’t it normal for people to want pay attention to me all the time? Aren’t they retarded if they don’t?”

Dr. Bradley recorded the statements. “Well, Courtney, your half-hour is up. Next I’ll speak with all of your family members together. Please let them know, and be honest about it?”

Courtney blinked.

“Can’t we talk about me some more?” she asked. “I deserve it more than they do, right? I mean, come on now, really.”

Dr. Bradley simply looked at Courtney with a look that clearly said “Go now, please.”

Courtney glared at him then went to get her family without a goodbye.

Dr. Bradley sighed and smoother his eyebrows.

Megan hadn’t merely been expressing concerns or stating beliefs.

Perhaps she was trying to warn him.

He went over his conversation with Courtney. What the signs pointed to were…not good.

Twelve was rather young for a diagnosis of a personality disorder of any kind, but what he saw all pointed to it.

He knew he had to express his concerns, for the good of Courtney herself and those around her.

“okay dad, you sure you don’t need me or papyrus to go in with you?” Sans asked.

“YEAH!” Papyrus said. “EITHER ONE OF US WOULD BE WILLING TO GO IN WITH YOU!”

“I’ll be fine, boys!” Gaster chuckled. “I think one anthropomorphic omen of death is more than enough.”

Papyrus seemed confused. Sans looked slightly concerned.

“okay, if you’re sure…” Sans sighed in surrender.

Gaster nodded and entered the store.
He looked about.

Many of the patrons were indeed older Humans, plus a few similarly-aged Monsters here and there.

He sighed.

He knew he was getting older - his sons were fully grown, for Typhon’s sake - but he’d never truly felt the weight of 662 years until this moment.

It frightened him.

He sighed.

Doctor WingDings Gaster summoned as much of his Perseverance as he could find within his SOUL, and looked about for a cane to suit his tastes.

He was utterly disappointed with these tasteless wares.

“May I help you, sir?”

He turned toward the condescending woman with an inhumanly-large smile standing next to him.

“Do you have any canes that aren’t excessively flowery or…you know, boring?” he asked.

The woman’s smile never faltered. “I’m sorry sir, but that’s all we carry!” she said, not once ceasing in her condescension. “Maybe we could find something close to what it is you want?”

Gaster looked at the woman with mild disappointment.

“Madam, please stop speaking to me like I’m a helpless burden to society,” he said. “If you are so unwilling to help me, I have the materials to make my own cane - one to my own specifications. I suppose that hoping I would find something a little more creative was a tad foolish of me. Humans have apparently lost all originality in the last 500 years…pity.”

The woman’s eyes twitched, her smile present as though surgically attached to her face.

“Sorry, was I too honest?” Gaster snarked. “I know some Humans take issue with honesty, so I apologize if you wanted me to lie to you…”

“Okay, I get it!” the woman snapped, her fake smile finally faltering.

“There, now doesn’t that feel better, being able to honestly express your frustration?” Gaster asked, genuine. “Your patrons may be older, but they know condescension when they hear it, I’m sure.”

The woman took a walkie talkie from a holster.

“Security!” she shrieked.

“Dammit lady, he didn't do anything but say what some of us have already told you!” a male Human patron with a tweed driving cap complained.

“We’re like ten timeth older than how you’re treating uth!” another patron, a female Bat Monster with cat-eye glasses, said.

The woman stormed off to personally meet with the manager to complain.
Gaster sighed and rolled his eyelights as he turned to leave what he dubbed the House of Shitty Walking Aids.

Then the man with the tweed driving cap and the Bat with cat-eye glasses called out to him

“Hey, thankth for that,” the Bat said, holding out a wing.

Gaster shook it. “Five hundred years and Humanity still hates honesty.”

“Well, I can’t with ya argue there, pal,” the Human said, shaking Gaster’s hand as well. “The name’s Roger, Roger Levintson.”

“Elthpeth Tepeth,” the Bat said. “Dr. WingDingth Gathter, I prethume?”

“That is…correct, yes,” Gaster said, pausing to translate the Bat’s lisp.

“Oh, crap,” Roger sighed, checking his watch. “I gotta go find my son and granddaughter. Those two are so absentminded I’m honestly worried they’ve made their way to Beijing without even knowing…”

“And my grandthon ith pothibly going batty from thenthory overthtimulation,” Elspeth said.

“My own boys are possibly worried that I may be scaring someone to death,” Gaster chuckled. “Perhaps we could exchange numbers?”

The other old-timers agreed, and exchanged contact information before each headed on their merry way.

Gaster met up with his sons moments later.

Sans and Papyrus looked up.

“DAD, YOU ARE TWITCHING,” Papyrus said. “HAVE YOU GONE CLONIC?”

Gaster looked down at his hands - which were, in fact, twitching.

“Fuck,” he said.

“c’mon, have a seat,” Sans offered. “frisk ‘n mk are off doing whatever and’ll meet up with us when tori calls me.”

Gaster sighed and sat down with a grunt.

“So they didn’t have what you were looking for?” Sans stated rather than asked.

“Not even close,” Gaster said. “I’ll probably end up making one on my own. I have so many plans for it…”

“You’re gonna put a model of a carbon atom on top of it, aren’t you?” Sans asked knowingly.

“OF COURSE HE IS, SANS!” Papyrus said, almost sounding offended. “HE’S DAD, THERE’S NO WAY HE WON’T PUT A MODEL OF A CARBON ATOM ATOP HIS WALKING CANE!”

Gaster chuckled. “My boys know me all too well, it seems…” he teased.
“WELL, IT REALLY IS EASY SINCE YOUR FAVORITE NUMBERS ARE ALL MUL\[58\]IPLES OF SIX!” Papyrus said.

“and carbon is your favorite non-radioactive element,” Sans said. “favorite element overall is polonium. you had a sample you’d found in the dump and named it marconium, which is also how you found out that monsters are.”

“I THINK I REMEMBER THAT!” Papyrus laughed. “HE HAD IT IN A GLASS CASE THAT WOULD SAY ‘POLONIUM’ WHENEVER SOMEONE SAID ‘MARCONIUM’ AND I HATED IT SO MUCH!”

“I still think it’s my third greatest achievement,” Gaster sighed.

“I’M AFRAID TO ASK WHAT THE OTHER ONES ARE,” Papyrus muttered.

“but that won’t stop you, will it?” Sans asked knowingly.

Papyrus snickered.

“SO WHAT ARE YOUR GREATEST ACHIEVEMENTS, DAD?” he asked.

Gaster chuckled. “Well, the Core is merely my second greatest achievement, despite what some would assume,” he said.

“THEN WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT?” Papyrus asked, clearly eager to know despite already knowing.

Gaster smiled lovingly and looked up at his sons, then at the two holes in his hands, his fingers twitching.

“You two,” he said. “I have made many mistakes in my lifetime, and nearly all of my inventions came with some cost - stars, lads, fifteen good Monsters died while the Core was being built!”

Gaster sighed.

“But you boys?” he began again after a moment. “I will admit that I never planned to become a father. But I don’t regret it one iota.”

Papyrus suddenly lunged at Gaster for a hug, tears streaming down his face, his body shuddering from barely-restrained sobs. Sans joined in immediately after.

Gaster wrapped his arms around his sons, a tear or two leaking from his good eye socket.

“Thank you,” he whispered. “Thank you for being my sons…”

“and thank you for bein’ our dad,” Sans said.

Gaster tightened his embrace somewhat.

He was getting older, that much was true.

But even as his body breaks down from the wear and tear of the passage of time, his family will always be there in some way.

It gave him the strength to Persevere.
Elaina let out a whoosh of breath as he sat down on the bench by his locker.

He took off his pointe shoes and stared at his bleeding toes.

When they say dance is all about blood, sweat, and tears, they meant it very literally.

He took the bandage box out of his dance bag and took out some bandages and antibiotic ointment and began applying them to his wounds.

“Elaina, hey!”

Elaina looked up and saw Colleen.

He smiled at her.

“H-hey Colleen!” he greeted. “I d-didn’t know you had c-classes today!”

“Hehe, surprise!” Colleen said.

“FAGS!” Alicia called out loudly while pointing at Elaina and Colleen.

“Takes one to know one,” Colleen countered with equal volume.

Alicia shrieked in indignation.

“You can’t talk to me like that!” Alicia hissed. “I’m better than you!”

“T-then why am I on pointe and you’re still in b-beginner classes?” Elaina asked.

Some of the girls giggled.

Alicia growled.

Elaina took out his regular shoes, checking them for tacks or other unsavory items of pettiness.

Finding none, he put them on and walked out the door, Colleen following him along the hallway to the lobby.

“You’re feeling masculine right now, aren’t you?” she asked.

Elaina turned to Colleen and gasped. He hugged his chest, putting his hands in his hoodie sleeves as he blushed.

Colleen patted his shoulder. “Don’t worry, it’s only obvious if people know what to look for!” she assured. “I notice that when you’re feeling masculine you’re a lot more tense than usual, and you look even more uncomfortable with the universe. It’s your usual self, but a bit heavier and warier, in a way?”

“It feels wrong,” Elaina whispered. “It’s like…I-I know it’s me, but it’s not… me, I-I guess? I-if that m-makes any s-sense?”

Colleen hummed thoughtfully. “I guess? I mean, I don’t really understand what you mean, but I know what you mean, you know what I mean?”

“I-I think so,” Elaina giggled.

Colleen smiled.
Elaina blushed and smiled back.

Colleen had a pretty cute smile…

Hunter laid back on her bed in her room, limbs splayed out comfortably.

Well, as comfortably as a dysphoric five-foot-tall tweenage girl’s limbs *could* be comfortably splayed out while lying on a twin-sized bed with Captain America bedding.

The music she listened to helped. It wasn’t much for the dysphoria itself, but for the accompanying anxiety it was a great boon.

Then she received a text.

*I text from: Elaina*

*Elaina: hey what’s up
*Hunter: dysphoria
*H: hbu
*E: same
*E: felt masc after leaving therapy
*H: bruh
*E: i thought the same thing
*E: also
*E: since you’re here
*E: (4 photo attachments)
*E: the last one nearly blew my cover

Hunter opened the photos and gasped.

Courtney was in therapy? Wait, that didn’t surprise her at all.

Courtney was dating *Scott Foley*?!  

It was surprising how much that shouldn’t have surprised Hunter but still surprised her anyway.

*H: i hate how shocked i am
*E: same
*H: y am i shocked
*H: did a part of me expect better of 1 of them
*H: to quote brian
Hunter giggled.

Knowing that someone understood her gave her the **Patience** to wait for a better day ahead.

---

The Day family sat in Dr. Bradley’s office in various emotional states.

Orville was pissed.

Karen was done.

Megan was bored.

Courtney was smug.

“I **told** you guys Courtney would try something,” Megan sighed. “This is why I walked back here instead of following you out to the car.”

“We get it, Megan,” Karen groaned. “You were right, we were wrong, yadda yadda yadda.”

“If you get it, stop playing favorites and **start disciplining Courtney**, for chrissakes!”

“Megan, I’ve told you a thousand times that it’s **not worth it!**” Orville hissed. “It’s like she **can’t learn from punishment!**”

“**O-kay, calm down!**” Dr. Bradley announced. “Now, all of you are here right now so we can discuss what I have gleaned about your daughters from meeting with them today.”

“What’s ‘gleaned’ mean?” Courtney asked.

“To glean means to learn,” Dr. Bradley said patiently. “Now, what I have learned about Megan —”

“Can we talk about **me** first?” Courtney asked. “I’m pretty sure I’m more important here.”

“Megan has expressed suicidal thoughts and desires,” Dr. Bradley said.

“What?!” Orville gasped.

“Megan, is-is this **true**?” Karen sputtered.

“I have a plan and everything,” Megan said, as if it were a normal thing. “I’m not actually gonna go **through** with it while I’m still living here because if I did Courtney would be happy I died. She is using my name to get sex, after all.”

“Megan, I’ve **told you**, Courtney doesn’t even know what that **is!**” Karen groaned as she rubbed her temples.

“And that, Karen, is where you are **wrong**,” Dr. Bradley said.

The Day family was silent.

“What.”
“Courtney is indeed sexually active,” Dr. Bradley said. “That is but one of many concerns my discussion with Courtney has brought up. But until I know for certain that my concerns are not unfounded, I will have to meet with her again for a few more sessions. I am available at this same time on Mondays if you are able to make it.”

“Concerns about what?” Karen asked, slightly fearful.

Dr. Bradley paused before sighing.

“You see,” he began, “the reason I feel that we need to have more sessions is because…for what I fear Courtney may have, a diagnosis is more appropriately given upon reaching adulthood, you see.”

“What is it, am I gonna die?” Courtney asked. “I’m gonna die, aren’t I?”

“No,” Dr. Bradley said. “But it will greatly affect your quality of life in the long term.”

“And just what is ‘it’, exactly?” Orville asked cautiously.

Dr. Bradley typed something into the computer and waited a few seconds before clicking on a link. He turned the monitor to the Day family.

Orville and Karen were shocked at what they read.

Courtney was confused.

Megan saw it as old news.

“As you can see, to diagnose someone of Courtney’s age with histrionic personality disorder - HPD for short - takes a lot of consideration if it’s ever done at all,” Dr. Bradley said. “Compared to this, diagnosing Megan with depression is a walk in the park.”

Orville put his head in his hands.

“Where…” he whispered. “Where did we go wrong?”

“Orville, the thing about mental illness is that there is no one thing that went ‘wrong’,” Dr. Bradley said. “Sometimes it’s everything, sometimes it’s nothing. It can be something you’re born with, or something you won’t have to deal with well into adulthood.”

“It says there’s no cure,” Karen monotoned.

“There hardly ever is a cure for mental illness, especially for personality or mood disorders,” Dr. Bradley explained. “There are, however, near-countless coping methods for mental illnesses.”

“So if Courtney has…this,” Orville started, “what options are there?”

Dr. Bradley smiled reassuringly. “Orville, you just asked a question many have asked, but not in that exact way,” he said. “You just said ‘if’. You are as aware that there is a chance that your daughter might not have it as you are the chance that she might. And to answer your question, yes. There are indeed options.”

“And for Megan?” Karen asked. “Is there any way we can help her?”

“Actually, Karen, due to the sheer amount of resources on depression treatment as well as the sheer number of different varieties thereof, Megan’s quality of life pretty much guaranteed to be mostly
positive,” Dr. Bradley explained. “For Courtney, the process is far more difficult due to the stigma surrounding personality disorders - however, difficult does not mean impossible.”

The Day family considered their options.

“And what options are there?” Orville asked.

Megan watched as her parents listened to the doctor, offering some of their own suggestions based on what they knew Megan and Courtney liked.

Megan smiled.

She looked at Courtney out of the corner of her eye.

Courtney was merely staring into space.

Megan wondered if she was upset because she didn’t have everyone’s attention.

But maybe she was just in shock at her possible diagnosis. Megan wanted to give her little sister the benefit of the doubt, she really did.

But it was hard for Megan to genuinely find any feeling in herself at all.

She wanted to cry. She couldn’t.

Frisk and MK sat on the bench with their cups of warm tea.

Frisk blew on theirs and then took a sip.

The warm cinnamony spice of their tea filled them with DETERMINATION.

FILE: SAVE

Frisk turned to look at MK.

They were holding their sketchbook in their feet, using their tail to sketch…

What was MK sketching anyway?

Frisk tried to peek over their nest friend’s shoulder at their drawing, but MK moved too fast for them.

Frisk’s eyes widened.

Then they smirked.

Now they were really curious.

They attempted to subtly sneak peeks at MK’s sketchbook while pretending to stare into space.

“Frisk, I see you glancing at my sketchbook,” MK said. “You’re not subtle.”

Frisk pouted and took another sip of their tea.

MK smiled to themself.

Frisk was cute when they pouted.
But they weren’t sketching that.

The sight from earlier that day, the one of Frisk staring at the leaf as red as their eyes - or maybe it was their eyes that were as red as the leaf - with sunlight making their eyes sparkle, their mouth slightly agape in wonder. That was a sight MK would never forget.

They were sketching it from memory just in case they did forget someday.

Then Frisk’s phone went off. They set down their tea and checked it.

Then they texted back and put it away once more.

<<Mom just texted Sans,>> they signed. <<Sans is going to pick her up, and we’re spending the night with Granddadster!>>

“Really?!” MK gasped. “That sounds AWESOME!”

Frisk’s smile spoke their agreement for them.

__________________________

Sans and Toriel made their way from the apartment building and out to the parking lot.

They stood on the median in front of the car in contented silence.

A breeze blew, causing leaves to be blown from the trees and Toriel’s ears to move with the wind.

Toriel moved her ear from her face with her left hand.

A clicking sound was heard.

Toriel looked about for the source before setting her eyes on Sans, who appeared to be texting someone, but almost certainly wasn’t.

“Sans, did you just take a picture of something?” Toriel asked, her arms crossed at her chest.

“nope,” Sans said.

Toriel gave him A Look. He was a good liar, she’d give him that.

She sighed and moved to get in the driver’s seat. Sans sat in the passenger’s seat next to her.

Once he was sure that Toriel had most of her attention on the road, he opened his cell phone and looked at the photo he’d taken.

He wasn’t sure how, but he’d gotten the exact moment he’d wanted to capture.

The breeze was blowing, red and gold maple leaves fluttering about, Toriel gazing at something off in the distance. She had just brushed her ear out of her face, and her left hand was still touching her ear, the star sapphire engagement ring clearly visible.

He saved it as his lock screen - because she’d unlocked a new chapter in his life.

Sans had been in this relationship for over a year and a half, and still no clue how or why she’d chosen him. Him, the paragon of dismotivation, professional fuck-up, local sadsack.

But she had, and Sans knew deep in the marrow of his bones that he was all the better a man for it. Where he would be today without her, he didn’t want to imagine. But he knew it would not be
pleasant.

He was so, so grateful that Toriel was his, that he was hers, that they belonged to each other, belonged with each other.

He was absolutely certain that he was blushing and grinning like a maniac.

He didn’t care.

Let the whole world know he loved this woman.

That was something to be proud of.

Flowey stared at the brown and red and gold world of autumn.

Asriel liked autumn. He liked the colors and the food and the sweaters his mother knitted for him and Chara every year on the first day of the season.

Flowey liked spring. So much new life to disregard entirely. Also stealing Frisk’s Easter candy had become another blessing.

Flowey couldn’t understand it. He and Asriel were so different, and yet they were intertwined so thoroughly.

Something deep within Flowey’s DETERMINATION told him that he and Asriel would never part.

There was a part of Flowey that felt kinda bad for poor Asriel. The rest of Flowey just didn’t care.

But the fact there was a part that did care caused Flowey no end of mental anguish.

His newfound feelings scared him. They were too… there, despite how fleeting their presence was.

But Flowey could adapt. He’d done it through countless RESETS before, so this wasn’t that much different! Only real difference was that now he only had one chance!

Then Flowey felt an emotion he was at least slightly familiar with.

Fear.

Because what is one supposed to do with mortality if they’d never had it before?

This golden world you live in fills you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

Fields Of Gold - Sting

Fun Fact: I have no idea what to put here. Sorry.
4:21 P.M., October 31st, 20XR

It's a spooky evening outside.

Lawns are decorated.

The wind is rustling through the trees.

On evenings like this, kids like you...

...are hosting a Halloween party.

Frisk set out the bowl of popcorn, setting the tubs of caramel, chocolate, cheese, butter, and salt next to it.

They checked the packaging of the tubs once more to make sure everything was kosher - they’d done so many times in the last half hour, but still they felt it better to check again just in case.

They knew they would be checking again in the next few minutes. But this party was making them so anxious, and it wouldn’t even start for another hour!

Frisk put out some bowls of candy as well - with kosher candies and candies with nuts clearly marked as such for the sake of the allergic guests.

They even had two bowls with nothing in them but gumdrops and dark chocolates - Chara’s favorite candies. Frisk had asked Penelope to look online for a recipe for chocolate-coated gumdrops - after all, if you like two things, did it not make sense to combine them?
Frisk immediately regretted the decision upon recalling the Amalgamates and their situation, but by then it was too late for Frisk to turn back. They’d opened their can of worms, now they had to lie in it.

But the one thing that made this party a source of anxiety was the events that occurred on the otherwise-uneventful prior Monday…

=/= 11:53 A.M.

North Middle School Library, Ebott, United States

<<So I asked my mom and dad if I could have a Halloween party and invite my friends!>> Frisk signed. <<And since you guys are my friends, I’m inviting you!>>

“Aw, sweet!” Levi said. “The food will be kosher, right?”

<<Yes.>>

“Sweet!”

“But will we have to wear costumes?” Penelope asked. “Not that I’m complaining, I just wanna know, you know?”

<<If you want!>> Frisk answered.

“What’re you retards talking about, huh?”

The group looked up at Trav and Scott and groaned in disgust.

“We’re talking about ways to make you end up together,” Levi said. “Plan A is to assault your ears with Kiss The Girl!”

“Say that to my face ya fag!” Scott said, lifting Levi by his shirt collar.

The he let go, with a gasp of pain as he held his wrist.

“Did you hide something in your shirt?!” Trav said, lunging toward Levi before he grabbed his own hand and yelped in pain.

“Ahem.”

The boys looked at Caroline.

“Please leave our presence,” she said calmly.

Then she held up two fingers, Electricity Magic surging through them visibly like a taser.

“Or else.”

“We’re not leaving til you tell us what you’re talking about!” Trav snapped.

“We’re planning a Halloween party at one of our homes,” Caroline said. “We haven’t decided whose home shall host it at the moment.”
The boys stared strangely at the group.

“You’re thinking of crashing the party, aren’t you?” Hunter sighed.

“No man, what the hell,” Scott said with disgust. “You guys are freaks! There’re BETTER parties to crash than YOURS!”

“Well, forgive our assumptions which are based on your less-than-decent behavior toward us,” Caroline said unapologetically, her fingers still alight. “Perhaps you would LIKE being electrocuted…”

“We are SO telling on you!” Scott said.

“And who would believe you?” Caroline asked.

Scott’s face contorted in fury.

Caroline held back laughter at the sight.

Then the bell rang for the end of lunch.

“This isn’t over!” Trav said, stomping off with Scott tailing him and flipping them off.

The kids sat in silence.

“They’re gonna try to break into all of our houses until they find the party aren’t they?” Levi said.

“Yes,” Hunter sighed.

Frisk sighed.

They were filled with anxiety.

=/=

Caroline stared at her reflection in the bathroom mirror as Sharona painted her hands green. Her high-necked black dress had long leg-o-mutton sleeves and went down to her ankles. It was paired with black lace-up boots. Her hair was held up in a bun.

“Are you done yet?” Caroline whined. “The party’s in an hour, and I wanna make it to my FIRST DAY OF COLLEGE!”

“Perfection takes time, Caroline,” Sharona sighed.

“But nobody’s perfect, therefore all of this is utterly pointless,” Caroline claimed.

“Just because you’re right doesn’t mean I’m gonna stop,” Sharona said. “Now hold still so I can paint your face.”

Caroline groaned.

Elaina felt butterflies in her stomach.

She’d actually sneaked out of her house for the party - she’d chosen to wear a costume from a dance recital earlier in the year, a sparkly blue one with white tights and matching slippers and a little tiara.
Thank goodness Irma’s a sleepy drunk.

She walked a mile or two until she reached a particular tree by a rocky cliff face across from a row of houses - they were nice houses, but smaller than the ones in Upland.

Kristina, Fiona, Jenson, Sarah, Brian, Hunter, and Hannah were sitting on the cast iron bench underneath it.

“Lina!” Hannah greeted her, waving her arms ecstatically and hopping up and down on the bench. She was wearing a pair of white rabbit ears and a red velvet dress.

“Hannah, sit down, you’ll break the bench!” Hunter warned.

Hannah stopped jumping and sat down.

Hunter looked around.

“Do you… do you have the thing?” she asked. “Fiona has the dress already, so…”

“Finn’s REALLY good at making dresses!” Hannah added.

Elaina nodded.

She reached into her bag and took out the black and white striped tights.

Hunter smiled in excitement.

“All right then,” Brian said. He was wearing old torn clothes and his hair was messed up. His neck had red paint on it - probably supposed to be blood. “Frisk’s house is just a few blocks north of here on Cedarwood.”

“Oh, that’s the road I live on!” Fiona said. She wore a frilly dress with a hoop skirt that went down to her knees, and painted lines on herself that resembled joints to make herself resemble a doll. “I live of the western side of Main though…”

“I live over by Sullivan Street,” Kristina said. She was dressed up as an angel, an effect tempered somewhat by her own little bat wings between the fake angel ones.

“I live in the Sunset apartment complex Main and Sunset,” Sarah said. She was dressed in Lydia Deetz’s wedding dress from the Beetlejuice movie. “Same with Jenson.”

“Yup,” Jenson confirmed. He wore his usual clothing but with a large button that said “VOTE FOR PEDRO” on his chest.

“Come on!” Hunter whined. “I wanna get to Frisk’s so I can put my costume on!”

“Well then princess, if you wanna get there so badly, lead the way,” Brian teased.

Hunter turned to him with a smile and a wink.

“Maybe I will~” she sang.

Then she ran ahead a few blocks, laughing excitedly.

Brian shook his head and ran after her.
Kristina, Fiona, Jenson, Sarah, Elaina, and Hannah followed.

This was going to be fun.

Theo walked down the hallway to Monica’s room. The door was open.

“Hey, Mom?” he said. “I’m going to Matt’s place. I’ll be back later.”

Monica looked up from her medical books and her laptop. The shadows under her eyes gave away her lack of sleep. Her hair was all over the place. Her eyes were wide open, blinking like crazy.

Theo gasped and stepped backwards.

“Geez, sorry I asked,” he mumbled.

“Just go,” Monica said coldly. “Be back by one. Any later, I call you, and if there’s no answer…”

“Yeah, yeah, be back by one or else, whatever,” Theo dismissed as he left.

Monica heard the front door open and slam shut.

She sighed, but it came out more like a sob.

Which fell into outright crying.

She had less than two months to find a lawyer to help with the custody case, and she was no closer to finding one anywhere near her price range that had even a shred of credibility.

She needed help.

She took a deep, shuddering breath.

She dialed the Marlow-Goldsby’s home phone number.

Frisk walked down the stairs, the tail of their black cat costume swishing a bit with each step they took.

The costume was simply a black tail and a cat ears headband with a pair of black fingerless gloves paired with a plain tee shirt and jeans.

They walked to Papyrus, whom Sans had convinced to dress up as Skeletor. How, Frisk didn’t know, but he was going to find a LOT of ketchup packets from the school cafeteria under his pillow on Monday night as an offering of gratitude.

They clapped to get his attention.

Papyrus turned to face them.

“HELLO, CAT FRISK!” he greeted. “ARE YOU READY FOR YOUR FACE PAINT?”

Frisk hopped up and down, nodding furiously.

“OKAY THEN! LET’S GO INTO THE KITCHEN! THE PAINTS ARE ON THE TABLE!”

When they got into the kitchen, so was Sans.
Sans was asleep on the table.

And not even wearing a costume.

Papyrus glared at him.

“SANS, WHAT HAS TORIEL TOLD YOU ABOUT SLEEPING ON THE TABLE?” he sighed.

“that it’s very uncomfortable,” Sans said. “she gave it a four outta ten.”

“I DO NOT EVEN WANT TO KNOW WHAT THOSE NUMBERS ARE FOR, BUT PLEASE GET OFF THE TABLE AND PUT ON A COSTUME!”

“this is my costume,” Sans claimed.

“SANS, YOU ARE WEARING THE SAME OUTFIT YOU ALWAYS WEAR.”

“yep.”

“THAT’S NOT A HALLOWEEN COSTUME!”

“sure it is.”

“What could you possibly be dressed up as besides you?!”

“a skeleton.”

Papyrus screamed in exasperation. Frisk laughed.

“If you want me to move, all ya gotta do is ask you know,” Sans said simply.

Frisk tapped Sans. San opened his right eye.

<<Get off the table please, Dad,>> they signed.

Sans chuckled and rumpled their hair as he got off the table.

“I just can’t say no to you,” he sighed fondly.

Then a timer dinged.

“Oh, hey, the things’re done,” Sans remarked, walking over to the oven,

“WHAT THINGS?” Papyrus asked.

Sans rolled up the sleeves of his Blue Hoodie, put on some flowery pink oven mitts, and removed a dish of pastries.

The scent of apples and cinnamon filled the air.

“apple dumplings,” Sans said. “tori ‘n i made ‘em for the party.”

<<They look delicious, Dad!>> Frisk signed with a smile.

“Well, your mom did do most of the work,” Sans said with a shrug.
“Most, Sans?”

Toriel was in the entryway to the kitchen. She wore the lovely flowing teal dress with green and gold embroidery with fairy wings she had worn at the Renaissance Faire in July, complete with the chained gold rings around her horns.

“okay, all,” Sans acquiesced.

“Sans, you actually did more work on these than I did,” Toriel said.

Sans blinked.

“i did?”

“Yes, you did,” Toriel assured. “There is a reason I let you be when I saw you asleep on the table.”

“oh.”

The couple was silent.

“OKAY, FRISK’S FACE HAS BEEN PAINTED!” Papyrus announced dramatically. “BEHOLD!”

Frisk revealed their face, painted with a pink cat nose and black whiskers.

“Oh, my child, you look so adorable!” Toriel squealed, hugging Frisk as Sans took a picture.

“hold up a sec,” Sans said, changing the camera to record video. “hey frisk, say ‘nya’.”

Frisk held up their hands like cat paws and smiled.

Sans said nothing.

“okay, this is adorable and going on the internet,” Sans said. “also sending it to mettaton.”

The doorbell rang.

“I’LL GET IT!” Papyrus said, walking to the door.

He opened it to find Penelope dressed like Link from Legend of Zelda holding boxes of jack-o-lantern and skull cupcakes, MK dressed like a lion, and Ridley dressed like Sailor Pluto with a pair of bike shorts under the skirt.

“Hey, Mr. Papyrus!” Penelope greeted. “We’re here for the party!”

“We met up on our way here!” MK said. “This Ridley! We know her from school, and she’s in the book club with us!”

“WELL, DO COME IN YOU THREE!” Papyrus said, moving out of the way of the children. “IT IS VERY NICE TO MEET YOU, RIDLEY!”

“Thanks,” Ridley said, toying anxiously with her gloves. “Nice to meet you too.”

They entered and took a deep breath in.

“Oh my gosh, it smells AMAZING in here!” Penelope sighed.
“Yeah…” MK concurred.

Frisk ran from the kitchen to greet them.

MK’s eyes widened. Their pupils were dilated and their cheeks were flushed and their heart was pounding and -

“Hey, you okay there MK?” Penelope asked. “You look kinda sweaty…”

“I’m fine!” MK squeaked.

“And your voice is squeaky? MK, you’re not fine. I think you might be dying.”

MK stared at Penelope in confusion.

“What are you feeling, Patient MK? Describe to me your feelings.”

MK blinked.

“Uncomfortable…” they admitted.

“A sure sign of imminent death,” Ridley muttered gravely.

“Oh, hello Penelope and MK!” Toriel greeted. “And hello to you as well, Ridley! It’s been a while since I last saw you!”

“Good to see you again, Mrs. Toriel!” Ridley greeted.

“There are some snacks on some card tables in the den! Please help yourselves!”

“Sweet! Thanks, Ms. Toriel!” MK said.

“Candy!” Penelope cheered, running into the den, Ridley and Frisk and MK at her tail.

Toriel chuckled warmly at the sight.

“hey t, i have an idea what we can do with the paint left over,” Sans said from next to her.

His shortcuts rarely startled Toriel anymore

She turned to look at him quizzically.

“Oh? And what do you suggest, dear?” she asked.

“we have other paint as well, plus after tonight the pumpkins on the front porch will be used for pies, so how about we paint us some pumpkins?”

Toriel smiled.

“That sounds like a lovely idea!” she said. “And the children are going to love it - Sans, you truly are a genius!”

Sans was blushing heavily under the praise, his attempts at hiding it by pulling his hoodie over his head and pulling the drawstrings taut barely doing anything to help.

Toriel giggled and kissed his covered head.
Sans got flustered so easily - but only when it came to Toriel, much to her own bashfulness and pride.

She still wondered what she’d done to deserve such a sweet man.

But Toriel was not complaining - rather, she was giving thanks.

She was truly happy for the first time in so long, she had no clue what to do with herself much of the time.

But Sans was often just as confused as she was, so they could help each other when one of them stumbles, or fall together if they both do.

Sans finally calmed down enough to slacken the drawstrings of his hood.

He peered up at her, a small smile on his face.

Toriel snapped a picture with her cell phone camera.

Sans hid himself in his clothing once more as Toriel giggled.

Papyrus groaned.

Those two were hopeless.

He sighed, thoughts of Mettaton running through his mind.

He was just as hopeless as they were.

Mettaton should be in Boston today.

Papyrus hoped he had fun there.

Another month and he’d be home…

Caroline and Levi walked down Cedarwood Road to Frisk’s house for the Halloween party.

Caroline was a witch, her outfit now complete with green body paint and a pointed black hat.

Levi was Darth Vader, but his helmet was far too large, even comically oversized. Because he was not Darth Vader. He was Dark Helmet from Mel Brooks’ Spaceballs.

They walked down the street, pausing at the corner of Cedarwood and Vine to look both ways before crossing the street.

They saw many families with children out trick-or-treating - not at all unexpected, as it was Halloween.

But what was unexpected was the sight of Courtney dressed as Suicide Squad Harley Quinn arm-in-arm with another high school boy.

They watched as Courtney giggled at something the boy said.

Caroline sighed.

“She’s not going to stop whoring even if we successfully out her, is she?” she asked.
“Not a chance,” Levi replied, voice muffled by the comically oversized helmet. “Wanna spy on them and get some dirt? The party’s not for another half-hour, and Frisk’s place is five minutes from here.”

Caroline thought about it.

“Nah,” she said. “Just snap some photos and be done with it.”

“On it.”

Levi took the first photo.

The siblings crossed the street, watching Courtney discreetly out of the corners of their eyes and took pictures as she sneaked into some bushes with the highschooler.

They looked at the photos once they’d successfully crossed the street.

Seven of the ten photos were blurry. Of the three that weren’t, only one was any good, and it was the one with Courtney very obviously rubbing the guy’s inner thigh.

“It’s like looking for Bigfoot,” Caroline mused.

“I can’t believe Courtney’s Bigfoot,” Levi chuckled.

“I can’t believe Bigfoot’s a whore,” Caroline added.

The siblings continued their walk.

“Caroline, you say a lot of things normal people wouldn’t think of,” Levi noted.

“Well, Levi, I’m not exactly a normal person,” Caroline said.

“True,” Levi said. “Most normal people can’t control lightning.”

“My point exactly,” Caroline said.

Then she saw someone in a hockey mask and an orange flannel shirt.

She grabbed Levi by the shoulder to stop him.

She sent out a text.

The person in the hockey mask took out their phone and looked around until they saw Caroline and Levi, lifting up their mask to reveal Astrid.

Astrid jogged over to them.

“Hey,” she said. “You guys on your way to Frisk’s party?”

“Yep,” Levi said. “Wanna walk the rest of the way with us?”

“We can look at the pictures of Bigfoot being a slut,” Caroline offered.

Astrid blinked.

“That sounds weird,” she said. “I’m in.”
Kristina, Fiona, Jenson, Sarah, Elaina, Hunter, Hannah, and Brian stood outside of Frisk’s house. Waiting.

“So…” Fiona began calmly.

“Okay, is one of you guys gonna press the button or not?” Brian groaned.

“Brian, none of us are guys here but you and Jenson,” Hunter said. “I think. Elaina, how’s your gender?”

“I-I feel feminine right now,” Elaina said. “O-otherwise this o-outfit w-would be awkward…”

“And there you have it,” Hunter said.

“Wait, you’re not a dude?” Jenson asked.

“Sorry, I’m trans,” Hunter said nervously.

“Okay, that’s cool.”

“Will one of you idiots just get the door already?” Hannah deadpanned.

Everyone stared at Hannah.

“You’ve been hanging around Flowey too much,” Hunter sighed.

Brian groaned as he rang the doorbell.

Footsteps came running.

Penelope opened the door, a bowl of candies in her arms, her smile wide.

Then her face fell in disappointment.

“Oh,” she said. “Hey.”

“Such a warm welcome,” Sarah deadpanned.

“Come in,” Penelope said, regaining some cheer.

The group entered.

“There’s snacks in the den, and they’re marked so you can tell which ones you can and can’t eat,” Penelope said. “Lucky for Brian, I can’t think of any Halloween candy with pecans in it.”

“Do you have Reeses Pieces?” Hannah asked.

“Yeah, in the bowl marked ‘peanuts’,,” Penelope said.

Hannah cheered and ran to grab some.

“I-I wonder what they taste like,” Elaina mused. “T-too bad I’m a-allergic…”

“Same here,” Sarah sighed.

“That’s rough, buddies,” Penelope sighed.
Then Frisk and MK ran out into the living room and struck a pose before the remainder of the group.

Elaina, Hannah, Kristina, Jenson, and Sarah applauded, while Penelope, Fiona, and Hunter snapped pictures.

“You guys even stuck the landing this time!” Penelope said.

Frisk bowed.

<<Where’s your costume, Hunter?>> Frisk signed.

“Oh, I-I still have to put it on,” she replied. “Can I…use your bathroom?”

<<Sure!>>

“Thanks…”

Hunter walked down the hallway to the bathroom, her dress in hand.

She took a deep breath.

This was a lot more difficult than she thought it’d be…

Courtney had just managed to remove her top when her phone went off.

She groaned.

“Ugh, can’t it WAIT, Megan?” the boy whined desperately.

“If by it you mean you, it’d better,” Courtney snapped.

*I text from: <3Matt<3*

Matt: me n the wannabe r at the sematary where r u

Courtney groaned and went to put her top back on.

“What - hey, where are you going?” the guy asked.

“We’re gonna have to reschedule, okay Ethan?” Courtney said.

“My name’s Dane!” the guy said.

“Whatever, buh-bye.”

Courtney put on her top and left the bushes.

Why was she even dating Matt? All he ever did was cling to her and interrupt her at the worst possible times. He ALWAYS did that.

She would NEVER do that to HIM.

Randy sat at his computer and sighed.

Lagging again.
How, oh HOW was he supposed to get ANY work done at ALL?

Then his phone rang.

The caller ID named the DeMartinos.

He decided work could wait.

He picked up the phone.

“How?”

“Hey, Randy…”

Randy leaned away from the phone, startled. Monica sounded like she was dying.

“Hey Monica,” he greeted nervously. “You uh…you need something?”

“I need…”

He heard Monica swallow.

“I’ll just start from the beginning…”

Randy was both confused and concerned.

“Okay. Go on.”

He heard Monica sigh into the receiver - it morphed into a sob partway through.

“Late last month… I got an email from Theo’s and Penelope’s father…he remarried, and he and his new wife want full custody of Theo…”

Randy gasped, and ran his fingers through his beard.

“Wow, geez, that’s…why only Theo, though?” he asked.

“He never loved her,” Monica sobbed. “She looks so much like me and not enough like him even though her smile is…and the Asperger’s…he said that no child of his could ever be a - a - oh god, I can’t say it -”

“Monica, just breathe,” Randy urged gently.

He listened to Monica take three deep breaths.

“You a bit better now?”

Silence.

“I can’t see you through the phone, Monica.”

“Oh, sorry,” Monica said quickly. “I-I’m better now, yeah.”

“Okay,” Randy said. “Sharona and I are headed over there. The kids are at Frisk’s for the night. Is Theo there?”

“He’s…with a friend,” Monica said.
“When’ll he be home?”

“Probably not until way past the curfew I gave him. He’s been acting out more since school started back up, and I can’t help but feel that it has something to do with that Matt kid he’s been hanging around…”

“Well, either way, we’re headed over. You want me to tell Sharona, or wait till we get over there for you to tell her yourself?”

“Don’t you have work though…?”

“My computers being an ass, I think not doing work would be a good thing at this rate.”

“Thank you so much, Randy…”

“It’s no trouble at all, I’ve been there. See ya in a bit.”

Randy hung up the phone.

He sighed heavily.

“Sharona!” he called. “We’re goin’ to Monica’s!”

“Can I at least get some pants on first?”

Penelope sat on the suede couch in the den when the doorbell rang.

She sighed. More stupid trick-or-treaters.

She got up, carrying a random bowl of candy.

She opened the door to find herself staring at torsos decked in black.

She looked up.

Her entire existence brightened.

“Caroline, you’re here!” she cheered.

“Nice to see you too, Penelope,” Levi snarked.

“Come on in, Mrs. Toriel made apple dumplings!”

“Are they kosher?” Levi asked.

“Yep!” Penelope confirmed. “Mrs. Toriel and Dr. Sans confirmed it, since it was made with Monster ingredients.”

“Huh. Okay then.”

“I brought Halloween MadLibs,” Caroline said.

“You look like a witch but have the heart of an angel,” Penelope sighed.

“I, uh, may be a Wizard, but I'm pretty sure that my Wizard SOUL is still trapped within a Human-y flesh casing, much to my own chagrin,” Caroline explained.
Penelope, Astrid, and Levi stared at her.

Levi snickered.

“Flesh casing…” he said.

Penelope, Astrid, and Caroline stared at him.

“Levi, now is not the time to be thinking about sausage!” Penelope chided.

“Or gay stuff,” Caroline added. “Now IS, however the time to party.”

“If Jordan hadn’t been taking a weekend trip to visit his grandparents, you wouldn’t be saying that!” Levi snapped, his freckled face flushed.

“True,” Caroline and Penelope said in unison.

“Now come on, they got karaoke!” Penelope said. “And we have Hunter, which means the music will be twice as good since it’ll be coming out of her mouth!”

“That sounded gay, but that’s okay,” Caroline said. “Because Hunter is pretty, and she is talented, therefore she is pretty talented.”

“You two are literally fangirling over your best friend while she is literally in the other room,” Levi said.

“But she’s in the bathroom putting on her costume,” Penelope said. “I don’t think it should take twenty minutes to do that, but maybe she’s sick or something.”

“I think we should get someone to check on her, then,” Caroline said.

“OH, HELLO HUMANS CAROLINE AND LEVI AND UNKNOWN GUEST!”

Levi and Caroline looked up.

“Oh, hey there Skeletor,” Caroline said with surprising casualness. “This is Astrid. We go to school together. Would you be willing to check on Hunter for us? She - he’s been in here a while from what I’ve heard, and we’re a bit worried…”

“NO NEED TO WORRY!” Papyrus assured the children with a salute. “I WILL CHECK ON HER FOR YOU!”

“Oh, okay then,” Caroline said. “But…”

“HMM?”

“She’s not out to a lot of people yet,” Levi said. “Just us kids and Mettaton. You’ve caught on, but…”

“I ALREADY KNEW!” Papyrus said.

The three were silent.


“SKELETONS INSTINCTIVELY KNOW WHAT GENDER SOMEONE IS, EVEN IF THEIR
BIOLOGY TRIES TO FOOL EVERYONE ELSE!” Papyrus explained. “THIS ALSO APPLIES TO UNBORN CHILDREN FROM A CERTAIN POINT ONWARD!”

Caroline’s eyes shone as she gleaned this new knowledge.

“But you are still going to check on her, right?” she asked.

“OF COURSE!” Papyrus said, nearly offended.

“Okay then,” Caroline said. “We’ll be in the den with the others, then.”

“OKAY THEN! LET ME KNOW IF YOU FIND SANS, THOUGH! HIS ABSENCE IS BEGINNING TO CONCERN ME…”

“If you are looking for Sans, he is currently in the basement with your father doing work!” Toriel called from the kitchen.

“Well, there’s the answer to that question at least,” Levi said.

“We’ll check in on Sans before we join the others,” Caroline said. “You, Skeletor, are to check in on Hunter. Are we clear?”

“CRYSTAL, MISS WITCH!” Papyrus responded with a hearty salute.

“Good, now let’s moooove out!” Levi announced.

And with that they split up.

Matt, Theo, and Courtney wandered through the cemetery.

Cemeteries at night are actually very boring.

So Theo decided to do something to make it less so.

“Wanna try to guess how some of these people died?” he asked. “That could be fun, I guess.”

“Eh, nah,” Matt said dismissively. “I brought spray paint for a reason, you know.”

Theo was slightly conflicted.

Matt smirked.

“Whassamatter, Theo?” he asked. “You afraid of ghosts or some shit?”

“Ghosts, no, the police, yes,” Theo admitted. “Dying in prison is not how I wanna go out.”

“Oh puh- lease!” Matt mocked. “We can’t go to prison, we’re minors!”

“And yet there have been minors tried as adults in the past,” Theo said. “Sorry I don't want anybody here in jail or whatever.”

“Dude, are you doubting me?” Matt asked, slightly angry.

“Not doubting you, just wondering if we should do this,” Theo said nervously. “I saw a lot of cops around when we entered, and we’re more likely to get caught the more there are.”
Matt paused. Theo was right about that, at least.

Huh.

This wannabe could be useful after all.

“Well then, Courtney and I’ll do the dirty work, and you can keep watch!” Matt said. “Agreed?”

“Okay,” Theo said, hoping he didn’t sound as unsure as he felt.

“Good. Now just follow us, and keep an eye out.”

Theo followed Matt.

He had bad, squirming feeling in his gut.

But he couldn’t leave now. These were his only friends.

*And just whose fault is that, jerkface…*

Elaina stood just outside the bathroom where Hunter was supposedly changing.

She was worried about her, but…

….would it be rude to ask if she was okay? Was she not feeling well? Was she lying dead on the bathroom floor??!!

“ELAINA, ARE YOU ALRIGHT?”

Elaina jumped at the sudden appearance of Papyrus, causing some of the glitter to fly from her costume.

“IS THAT A YES OR A NO?” Papyrus asked.

Elaina shivered, arms covering her head.

“HEY, IT’S ALRIGHT, YOU ARE SAFE,” Papyrus assured her. “JUST BREATHE, OKAY, DEEP BREATHS IN AND OUT, FIVE SECONDS EACH, OKAY?”

Elaina nodded, doing as she was told.

Papyrus rubbed Elaina’s back, using Cyan Magic to calm her as best he could, the tension slowly leaving the girl’s body as he did so.

“Hey, Mr. Pap, is bub okay?”

Hannah had appeared, and was tugging on Papyrus’ costume.

“THAT IS WHY I AM HERE, TO CHECK ON HER!” Papyrus said.

“S-s-same,” Elaina managed.

“OKAY THEN! HOW ABOUT WE ALL CHECK TOGETHER?” Papyrus suggested.

“Yeah!” Hannah cheered, hopping.
“O-okay,” Elaina squeaked. “I-I’m just worried that s-she might be d-d-d-d—”

“ANOTHER GOOD REASON TO CHECK!” Papyrus interrupted with seemingly undue optimism.

He walked up to the bathroom door and knocked, the door opening a crack.

“HUNTER?” Papyrus said. “ARE YOU ALRIGHT IN THERE?”

Hunter stepped up and opened the door a bit more.

She seemed frightened.

Papyrus crouched down to her level.

“ARE YOU ALRIGHT?” he asked.

Hunter nodded hesitantly.

Papyrus crossed his arms and gave a look that said “Yeah right”.

Hunter recognized this and opened the door, ushering the others in.

They entered.

Hannah gasped, her hazel eyes sparkling.

Elaina’s eyes widened, face flushed.

Papyrus didn’t react, simply analyzing.

Hunter wore a pastel blue scoopneck dress with three bows on the bodice, the bow at the neckline bigger and lacier than the others. The neck and hem were edged with white lace, and the sleeves were small puffs lined with the same. She wore black-and-white striped tights and brown lace-up boots. The outfit was topped off with a matching headband with a lacy bow and a pair of white satin gloves

She was absolutely adorable.

And she was absolutely terrified.

“I-I think it might b-be t-too much a-at once to h-her,” Elaina suggested. “I-is that it?”

Hunter nodded, near to tears.

“I-I love it,” she said. “I r-really really do, like a lot, but…it feels so right, bu-but something’s screaming at me telling me it’s wrong, but the part saying it’s wrong doesn’t sound like me, and - and -”

Hunter couldn’t speak for sobbing.

Papyrus, unsure of what to do at this point, just held Hunter close until she could calm down enough to think clearly.

Hannah joined in shortly, Papyrus wrapping an arm around her.

Elaina felt awkward, unsure of what to do. She almost felt like she was interrupting something…
“YOU WANNA JOIN THE GROUP HUG?” Papyrus asked. “YOU CAN IF YOU WANT TO.”

Elaina didn’t even hesitate as she accepted the hug, feeling an oddly warm yet skeletal arm wrap around her shoulders as hers wrapped around her friend.

It hadn’t occurred to her until that moment that the last time she’d hugged or been hugged was when her sisters were in town for the camping trip.

She’d missed it.

A lot.

Sans and Gaster sat on the ratty old foldout couch in the basement, typing away on their laptops as the television streamed reruns of Corazón Espinado.

Sans still shed a tear when he watched as Guillermo was reunited with Placido and Sol, as Feliz and Castel became friends, as the characters evolved and grew…

It almost reminded him of his own life in a way.

But this was no such episode. It was one of the ones where Feliz was still wandering through the Compound and finding citizens to befriend - before the citizens knew their name.

So Sans was bored. *Stars* was he ever.

“How’s the stuff goin’ over there, dad?” he asked with a yawn.

“It isn’t, sadly,” Gaster sighed, resting his chin in his hand. “It’s as though we can see The Hub, but something we can’t see is blocking our access.”

“Like a firewall of some kind, izzat it?” Sans asked

“In a way,” Gaster replied. “It’s more like a proxy - and an extremely complex one, at that. Getting through it could take *days*, if we end up choosing not to take breaks -”

“Out of the question,” Sans interrupted.

“Really, Sans?” Gaster sighed. “We’re nowhere *near* the Core, and -”

“It doesn’t *matter*, dad,” Sans pressed. “If we do this, we are taking breaks for at *least* two meals a day and five to six hours of sleep. I *don’t* want to see you glitch out or…”

Silence.

“…or melt…”

More silence.

Gaster sighed.

“I understand,” he said. “I know that I am impatient when it comes to my work, and that it can affect my personal wellbeing.”

More silence.

“Dad?” Sans asked.
“Yes, Sans?”

“you said…that the project was sabotaged,” Sans said quietly. “that the core was too. did you…did you ever find out who -”

“Yes,” Gaster said.

Sans’ eyelights went out.

“then who?”

“Sans, the Monster who did those things is not worth our time,” Gaster warned. “We have better things to do with our time than chase after fools blinded by their own ambition. Just as Justice cannot reach every Human, it cannot reach every Monster, however lower our numbers be than those of Humans.”

“so the bastard’s still alive,” Sans growled. “i was hopin’ they’d joined ya, honestly, like those other so-called ‘followers’ of yours…”

“He escaped,” Gaster said. “I do not know where he could be right now, but I do know that he is still alive.”

“then why, dad?!?” Sans asked, voice raising. “why won’t you do anything about him after what he did to you - what he did to our family?! does that mean nothing to you?!!”

“I can never forgive him for causing me to leave my boys,” Gaster hissed, his words shrouded heavily in static. “Sans, you know nothing of how I wished it had been him instead of me in that damned Void. You know nothing of what I’d seen in that machine that forced me to accept that fate, how I never wanted to -”

“dad, what are you talking about?” Sans asked, clearly worried.

All was still.

“Sans,” Gaster said evenly. “There is so, so much about our universe that we don’t understand - that we will never understand, no matter how hard we try.”

“dad, the point?”

“You know our universe is just one of many, Sans.”

“yeah…?!”

“Our universe is connected to countless others,” Gaster said. “Our universe came to be when a timeline was made to continue after Frisk freed you all. The universe the timeline was split off from is connected very directly to The Hub, which could be considered the ‘main universe’, in a way. But although we are not the main universe, we are real, Sans. We are very, very real.”

“dad, how does this have anything to do with -”

“This means that there are countless other Sanses that are just as real as you,” Gaster said. “Countless other Papyruses, Toriels, Frisks, Charas, Floweys -”

“dad -”

“- countless other mes, Sans.”
Silence.

“…dad, please -”

“Everyone in our universe is changeable, fate-wise,” Gaster explained. “They can make their own choices to an extent. These choices create new timelines, new universes. All Sanses, Frisks, Charas, and Floweys are connected as they are in this universe. Your roles are static, but not your destinies. The same goes for everyone else.”

Silence.

“But not I.”

Sans was silent, eyes dark and smile gone.

“All Gasters share the same fate,” Gaster continued. “No matter how we are connected to a Sans, be it as a father or creator or what-have-you, we all share the same fate in the end, and nothing can stop that fate. Sans, all Gasters must fall into the Core and be erased from existence.”

Sans sobbed.

“But there have been Gasters who were freed,” Gaster assured. “Sans, I was freed. And because of that, the universe was rewritten. While this family may recall my absence, no one else does. To them, I have always been here.”

“but what about -”

“I do not know if the saboteur remembers me or not,” Gaster said. “Beyond the knowledge that he is alive, I know nothing. I am sorry Sans.”

Sans shivered, bones rattling.

Gaster wrapped an arm around him to calm him down.

“Sans,” Gaster said softly. “You do know that…even if we do successfully pass the proxy into The Hub, the chances of bringing Chara back to reality are next to nil, correct?”

“yeah…” Sans whispered.

“So you still want to do this despite the fact failure is almost?” Gaster asked.

Sans shrugged.

“it’s been a while since we did something like this together, and almost certain means there’s a chance we’ll succeed even if it ain’t much,” Sans said. “and you know how day of the dead is tomorrow and sunday, right?”

Gaster tilted his head, his good eye sparkling with curiosity.

“Yeeees…?”

“we’re goin’,” Sans said. “the whole family. show these humans that día de los muertos is really about.”

“You mean laying out offerings to the goddess Mictecacihuatl and dancing in the nude?” Gaster asked.
“well, yeah, but i meant celebrating life and honoring the dead while painting faces and throwing flowers and stuff everywhere,” Sans said.

“You’re going to throw Flowey at some point, aren’t you, Sans?” Gaster sighed.

“damn right i am,” Sans said.

Then came a knock at the door.

Sans shortcut to the top of the stairs and opened the door.

A witch, Link, Jason Voorhees, and some Mel Brooks movie character stood on the other side.

“okay, i saw penelope, but who’re you three?” Sans asked.

The witch said nothing, merely summoning Lightning that wrapped around her hand, causing Jason to gasp in surprise.

“oh, hey caroline,” Sans greeted. “think you can charge my laptop? i got about eight percent left on it.”

“Sure, why not?” Caroline said with a shrug as she walked down the stairs.

“you next, vader,” Sans said.

The Vader coughed, the size of his helmet muffling the sound.

“Lone Starr,” he began, affecting a deep voice. “I am your father’s brother’s nephew’s cousin’s former roommate.”

Sans smirked.

“So what does that make us?” he asked playfully.

“Absolutely nothing.”

“nice one, levi,” Sans praised. “randy must be very proud of you.”

“He is,” Levi said, smugness radiating from his comically oversized helmet as he walked down the stairs.

“okay, i know you’re jason, but who are you?” Sans asked Jason.

Astrid took off her mask.


“So what’re you two up to down here?” Penelope asked.

“Approximately a meter and a half below sea level,” Gaster said.

Sans laughed.

“Call me when you’ve lived 3,000 meters above sea level,” Caroline bragged.

“Is that Silverton’s altitude?” Penelope asked.
“Well, I rounded up to the nearest thousand, but yes,” Caroline said. “That leaves Trinidad at about 2,000 meters above.”

“Whoa,” Penelope awed.

“Yeah,” Caroline soghed. “Colorado certainly is… high, isn’t it?”

Sans broke down laughing, followed shortly by Astrid, Penelope, and Gaster.


“So I have…”

It took a bit for everyone to calm down.

Once they had settled, it was question time.

“so, caroline,” Sans said, “you been doing the magic exercises?”

“Magic?” Astrid questioned. “Humans can do that?”

“Not without meeting certain… requirements, no,” Caroline said. “Frisk and I are the only living Wizards that I know of, but there may be at least one more in the area.”

“Caroline, the Magic!” Penelope urged.

Caroline simply straightened her posture and held out a hand, palm upward.

She focused all her attentions on the center of her palm.

She created a raven out of lightning.

“Holy shit…” Astrid gasped.

“Do either of you guys know morse code?” Caroline asked. “I wanna show off.”

“both of us know it,” Sans said. “show us what you got, kid.”

The lightning raven flew to Caroline’s right shoulder and nuzzled her cheek affectionately.

“I would rather show off before everyone, if it’s not too much to ask,” Caroline requested shily.

“sure, dad ‘n i weren’t doing too much anyway,” Sans said. “i’ll even shortcut you all up there, howzzat sound?”

“That sounds AWESOME!” Penelope gasped in excitement.

“Sounds good to me,” Caroline said, the raven on her shoulder seeming to nod in agreement.

“I’m nervous, but excited,” Astrid said.

“Beam me up, Sansy!” Levi said.

“okay, no,” Sans said. “just no. you can’t falsely quote star trek while wearing a costume from a movie parodying star wars, you just can’t.”

“I know that now,” Levi said.
“good, now don’t you forget it,” Sans said. “hold on tight everyone.”

Theo, Matt, and Courtney had grown bored of blatantly disrespecting the dead, and had moved on to blatantly disrespecting the living in Upland.

Matt was throwing eggs at empty houses, to Theo’s relief.

Theo was keeping an eye out, as promised.

“Hey, I gotta take a leak,” Matt said. “I’ll be right back, okay?”

“Oh okay!” Courtney chimed innocently.

“I’ll keep an eye out,” Theo sighed.

Matt turned a corner around the house he was egging. Theo thought he heard a gate open.

A few moments later, Matt returned with a shopping bag full of assorted knickknacks and some toilet paper and eggs.

“Rat and you die,” Matt warned.

Theo nodded in understanding.

Matt smirked.

“Come on, let’s hit some other houses,” he said. “Maybe they’ll have better shit…”

Theo felt all kinds of wrong.

But he couldn’t say so. He didn’t want to lose his only friends.

*But I already did, didn’t I? That’s why I’m with these guys in the first place…*

Hunter splashed a bit of cold water on her face to snap herself out of her remaining anxiety.

“Y-you feeling b-better now?” Elaina asked.

Hunter nodded.

“GREAT!” Papyrus said. “DO YOU STILL WISH TO WEAR THE OUTFIT? YOU DO NOT HAVE TO IF YOU ARE UNCOMFORTABLE DOING SO, YOU KNOW!”

Hunter exhaled.

“I’ll wear it,” she said. “I…I really do like this outfit. I’m not too big on frills though, even *if* they look good on me…”

“NYEH HEH!” Papyrus laughed. “METTATON IS THE SAME WAY WITH MANY STYLES AND FABRICS, ACTUALLY! HE SAYS THEY GET CAUGHT IN HIS JOINTS A LOT, SO HE NEEDS TO BE CAREFUL!”

Hunter giggled a bit. “I can kind of see how that would be problematic for him…”

“Come ON!” Hannah whined. “I wanna show you off!”
Hunter laughed.

“Okay, okay!” she acquiesced. “Let’s go knock some socks off, shall we?”

“Who even says that anymore?” Hannah grumbled.

Elaina merely shrugged in response as she followed the group to the den.

The sudden appearance of Sans, Gaster, Levi, Caroline, Penelope, and Astrid in the den shocked pretty much everyone present.

Sarah had clung onto Jenson, who had squeezed apple dumpling filling all over his face.

Kristina was hanging from the ceiling fan, little bat wings flapping frantically as she shivered, causing the fan to rattle.

Fiona had half a Milky Way bar hanging from her mouth.

Brian was clutching his head, having hit it against the wall in shock.

MK had jumped into Frisk’s arms, and was being held like a princess.

Penelope took a photo of all of them.

“For the club scrapbook!” she said with a grin.

“Wait, the hell is that thing on the witch’s shoulder?” Sarah asked, voice high and shaking.

Caroline’s Electric Raven opened its mouth, a series of electronic beeps emanating from it.

“OHMYSTARSWHATTHEJIMJAMISTHATTTHING?!” Kristina shrieked.

“What the hell, I didn’t even smoke anything, man,” Jenson groaned.

“I am so confused and ever-so-slightly terrified,” Fiona said, her expression unchanging.

“What THE HECK!” Brian screamed.

“Meep…” MK squeaked.

Frisk’s expression remained neutral. Inside of their head, Chara was torn between laughing at the terror of the others and being terrified themself, while Rowan watched in awe.

“HEY, EVERYONE, INTRODUCING THE NEW AND IMPROVED - OH MY GOSH, WHAT IS THAT THING ON CAROLINE’S SHOULDER??!!”

Elaina fainted.

Hannah tried to run to pet it, but Hunter stopped her by grabbing her collar.

While all were horrified, the doorbell rang.

Toriel sighed and answered it.

Bruce, Eddie, and Nicko were all dressed as rock stars.
“Hey Mrs. Toriel!” Eddie greeted. “They watchin’ a horror movie back there or somethin’?”

“Or something,” Toriel sighed. “Caroline certainly has a knack for scaring people…”

“What’s she doing?” Bruce asked cautiously.

“Come in and see for yourselves,” Toriel deadpanned. “There’s candy and treats, all marked by potential allergens. I know Nicko’s allergic to mint and Bruce to tree nuts.”

“Alriiight, thanks Mrs. T!” Eddie said.

“Only my fiancee may refer to me as ‘T’, Eddie,” Toriel said with a smile.

“Gotcha,” Eddie said with a wink as he and his friends entered the house.

Then the unholy screeches of the damned intensified.

Toriel was genuinely curious as to what Caroline was scaring them all with, so she decided to check.

An army of screaming teens, at least three of them fainted, were scattered about.

Sans and Gaster watched the chaos casually.

Caroline simply stood with a raven made of lightning on her shoulder, which was making odd sounds.

Toriel’s eyes widened - not from fear, however.

She was certain that Caroline had no idea what she had created.

She would have to wait for everything to calm down first.

This could take a while…

“Okay, so it seems that this guy is the closest we can get to your requirements,” Randy explained. “He’s done great work and won about 68 percent of his cases. The problem is that he’s…”

“Linda’s husband,” Sharona grumbled.

“That much can wait,” Monica wavered. “He could be Satan himself asking for my very SOUL for all I care, I just want my children safe!”

Randy patted Monica’s hand.

“I know,” he said. “That’s why we’re doing everything we can.

“So now we have a lawyer at least,” Sharona sighed. “We just gotta come up with the cash…”

“I’ve been saving up for a trip for me and the kids to Disneyland for a couple of years now,” Monica admitted. “I may end up having to use that…”

“Monica, Randy and I make more than enough money to help you out,” Sharona assured. “You can use some of your Disneyland money, but not all of it. You and those kids deserve that trip, and then some.”

Tears welled up in Monica’s eyes.
Then her cell phone rang.

She checked the phone, finding it to be from Theo.

She didn’t expect him to contact her at all.

Something bad must have happened.

She answered.

“Hello?”

“Hey, is this Monica DeMartino?” an unfamiliar voice asked.

“Who is this?” Monica asked.

“Cress Haventhy from the Ebott Police Department,” the voice said. “Your son Theodore and two of his friends were caught vandalizing some homes over in Upland.”

Monica thought she was going to explode.

“Theodore wasn’t doing anything but keeping watch, but his friends were directly taking part. I’m so sorry to bother you, but we’ll need you to pick up your son,” Cress said.

“Of course officer,” Monica said, voice so shaky and quiet she could barely hear it. “I will be there shortly.”

Monica hung up the phone.

She ran to the bathroom and threw up.

Randy and Sharona ran after her.

Sharone tied her hair back while Randy grabbed some water for her.

Once Monica was done, her nose was bleeding from the strain.

Monica grabbed some tissues.

“Monica, who was it?” Randy asked. “What happened? Can you tell us?”

Monica sniffed.

“Theo’s in jail…” she sobbed. “He was with some friends and the friends were in Upland vandalizing some shit and -”

Monica leaned over the toilet again and threw up.

“We’ll take to the station,” Randy said. “Sharona probably knows where it is, and since she’s the same height as you we’ll take your car and she’ll drive, okay? We’ll bring something for you to puke in.”

Monica sobbed.

One could make out words of gratitude and apology from among the sobs.
It took about ten more minutes, but everyone eventually calmed down.

Kristina, Sarah, Bruce, and Elaina were back from having fainted - it seems that Kristina and Elaina are easily frightened, while Bruce and Sarah are afraid of birds.

“Caroline,” Toriel began, “Please try to unsummon that bird.”

“I tried to as soon as everyone started shrieking like lunatics,” Caroline deadpanned.

Toriel sighed. “I was worried you’d say that…”

“Why?” Caroline said. “Is it gonna explode or something?”

Kristina squeaked and hid herself underneath a pillow.

“No, no, nothing like that!” Toriel assured her. “Caroline, I’m sure that you are aware of the concept of Familiars?”

“A familiar is something akin to a spiritual conduit for a mage or wizard, often taking the form of animals, in order to assist in magical pursuits,” Caroline explained automatically.

A pause.

“So this dude is a familiar?” Caroline asked “More specifically my Familiar?”

“That is correct, yes,” Gaster said. “For Wizards who control Elements, a Familiar can be created accidentally while using your Magic for other purposes, and almost always in the shape of an animal with which the Wizard spiritually resonates.”

“Like an ancestor of sorts?” Caroline asked. “You mentioned when I first found out about my powers that Wizards are descended from Monsters, so would this my ancestor a Raven specifically, or some other avian Monster?”

“Could be either one,” Gaster said with a shrug.

“So do Familiars get named, or what?” Caroline asked.

“I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT’S GOING ON ANYMORE!” Eddie screamed.

“We’re not screaming anymore, dude,” MK said.

“So I’m not high?” Jenson asked. “Everyone else is seein’ this too right?”

“Unfortunately,” Sarah squeaked.

Jenson sighed and kissed Sarah’s temple. “It’s cool, boo. I gotcha.”

Caroline rubbed under her Familiar’s chin. It made a sort of staticy purring sound.

Caroline giggled. “He’s kinda cute…”

“How do you know it’s a guy?” Levi asked.

“He told me,” Caroline said.

“And his name?” Astrid asked.
Caroline looked at the Raven.

The Raven opened his mouth and made more beeping sounds.

“He doesn’t have one,” Caroline said. “So, what, do I give you one or what?”

The Raven opened his mouth and made more beeping sounds.

Caroline hummed thoughtfully in response.

“You can understand that thing?!” Brian asked.

“Then I shall call you Pallas,” Caroline announced. “Although Pallas is feminine in origin, it is a name adopted by Athena, the goddess of wisdom and warcraft in the Hellenic pantheon. As such I believe it matters not the words so long as the meaning comes across as intended!”

“I am still very confused, but congratulations on your pet!” Fiona said.

“Familiar,” Caroline corrected.

“Of course, sorry.”

“Can I pet ‘im?” Hannah asked.

“No,” Hunter deadpanned.

“I’m sorry Hannah, but Hunter is correct,” Caroline said. “Pallas is made from electricity, you see, and I don’t know if touching him will hurt you or not, so it is better to be safe than sorry in cases like this, alright?”

“Fiine,” Hannah grumbled, crossing her arms and pouting.

“Good,” Caroline said. “You look lovely by the way, Hunter!”

Hunter flushed under the praise, plating with one of the ribbons on her bodice. “Really…?”

“As though a white rabbit could take you off to Wonderland at any moment!”

“One pill makes you larger~ And one pill makes you small~” Jenson sang.

“And the ones that mother gives you~ Don’t do anything at all~” Sarah continued.

“Go ask Alice~” Caroline sang, pointing at Hunter. “When she was just small~”

Everyone suddenly got an idea.

“Karaoke?” Caroline asked.

“Karaoke,” Hunter confirmed with a smile.

Cress Haventy was filing some paperwork - boring, boring paperwork - when a very, very stressed-looking Human woman entered.

“I’m Monica DeMartino,” she said. “I heard my son might be being held here?”

Cress looked at the woman and sighed with pity.
“Of course, ma’am,” they said. “Follow me.”

Monica followed Cress into the holding unit, where Theo sat on a bench opposite Matt and Courtney.

“DeMartino, your mom’s here,” Cress announced.

Theo stood up to leave, as did Matt and Courtney.

“Not those two,” Monica said. “Their parents should be picking them up soon, I assume.”

“Miss Day’s parents are on their way up, Mr. Gorman’s parents didn’t answer the phone,” Cress sighed.

Monica sighed.

“Maybe her parents can take him if his don’t show,” Monica said. “I’m sorry I can’t take you two along, but you did get my son arrested.”

Monica turned to Cress.

“Thank you so much, officer,” she said. “I’m so sorry about all of this…”

“Hey, compared to some of the stuff I’ve seen, a few kids breaking into houses is nothing new!” Cress assured with a smile.

Monica’s eyes widened.

“Breaking…?”

“Oh, your son didn’t do anything, even if these two said he did!” Cress said. “We got some surveillance footage that proves it. He was just keeping watch while they did the dirty work. Theodore here just got caught up with some bad stuff.”

“I noticed,” Monica sighed. “Thanks again, Officer.”

“Of course, ma’am,” Cress said.

And Monica and Theo left.

Cress leaned against the wall next to the holding cell.

They saw a hand reach out from between the bars toward their pocket.

“No,” they said, swatting the hand.

The owner yelped and withdrew the hand.

“Well, there’s a first for me,” Cress said. “Someone dumb enough to try to pick an officer’s pocket while behind bars. Who’d a thunk it.”

“Shove it, bitch,” Matt grumbled.

“Then don’t be an idiot, kid,” Cress sighed.

They left the holding cell area and went to the front desk to wait for Courtney’s parents.
They had a feeling that Matt’s parents wouldn’t show tonight.

“Okay, uh, any other requests?” Hunter asked.

“Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds,” Jenson said.

“Ooh, The Beatles,” Sarah said. “Good choice, bae.”

“Thanks, boo.”

“theshe two have great tashte in mushic,” Sans said through a mouthful of apple dumpling.

“SANS, DO NOT TALK WITH YOUR MOUTH FULL!” Papyrus scolded. “THAT IS VERY DISGUSTING!”

“Shush, Bub’s boutta sing!” Hannah said.

Hunter stood, microphone in hand.

She sang.

“Picture yourself in a boat on a river~ With tangerine trees~ And marmalade skies~”

Papyrus, Levi, and Ridley started filming.

“Somebody calls you, you answer quite slowly~ A girl with kaleidoscope eyes~”

Elaina had seen videos of Hunter singing, but it’s really not the same as seeing it live.

She touched the bangs covering her left eye.

“Cellophane flowers of yellow and green~ Towering over your head~ Look for the girl with the sun in her eyes and shes gone~”


“Lucy in the sky with diamonds~ Lucy in the sky with diamonds~ Lucy in the sky with diamonds~ Aaaaahhhhh~”

Papyrus smiled as he filmed Hunter’s performance. He wasn’t sure why he was proud - he had no reason to be.

But he wasn’t complaining. This was fun.

Mettaton was going to love this, he was sure of it.

Monica and Theo entered their house.

Monica slammed the door hard enough to leave a visible crack.

Theo knew he’d messed up.

He waited for his mother to scream in anger.

“I know you're waiting for me to yell at you,” Monica said, voice weak. “But I won’t. I’m not
angry, Theodore.”

She used his full name. She was nowhere near done.

“I give up,” Monica sighed. “No matter what I do, I know I’ll never live up to your father in your eyes. I’m not like him - I don’t play video games with you or take you hunting or hit your sister just for existing -”

“Mom, I get it -”

“But do you care, Theodore?” Monica asked, practically pleading. “You may know what your father did to Penelope, but do you care? Does the fact that he put her in the hospital mean nothing to you?!”

“I never said that!” Theo shouted.

“But you act like it,” Monica sobbed. “You have proven that you want to live with a man who only loves you because he thinks you can grow up to be like him. If that’s what you want - to be like your father instead of you - then just say so.”

Silence.

“Please, just say something…”

“I…I need to think about it,” Theo whispered, running to his room.

Monica flopped down on the couch and started bawling.

Flowey was in hell.

He thought being tied to a maypole in the village square was the worst thing that ever happened to him.

He was wrong. So very, very wrong.

The worst that ever happened to him was being snuggled by a sleeping Hannah Thompson.

Also existing.

Flowey really hated existing.

This Halloween fills you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

This Is Halloween - Danny Elfman
White Rabbit - Jefferson Airplane
Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds - The Beatles
Fun Fact: Starting August 1st, Spazzin will be attending job training, so updates will come less often. We MIGHT have one more chapter up before then though, who knows. We apologize for the inconvenience.
Put Your Lights On

Chapter Summary

Día de los Muertos, day one. Everyone is getting used to Pallas, Matt visits a pawn shop, Caroline prepares herself for the next step in her Magic training, Asgore wakes up to an awkward situation, Shelby has regrets, Chas and the Gasters want you to respect the dead, Chara says hello and goodbye to an old friend, Penelope tells her story, Sienna gets some character development, and flashbacks. So, so many flashbacks.

Chapter Notes

Warning: This chapter contains prescription drugs, alcohol, bullying, child abuse, underage sexual themes, noncon themes, and flashbacks. Viewer discretion is advised.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

9:54 a.m., November 1st, 20XR

It's a chilly day outside.

Leaves are falling.

Candy wrappers are fluttering in the breeze.

On days like this, kids like you…

…are about to wake up from a deep, deep slumber.

“So Miss Caroline is an Electricity Wizard,” Rowan mused. “And already with a Familiar, at that…”

“What do you mean by that, Poncho?” Chara asked.

“It takes most Wizards years before their Familiar is revealed,” Rowan explained. “Either Caroline is naturally strong, or she went through two Wizardings…”

“The fuck is a Wizarding?” Chara asked flatly.

“You know how Wizards are made, Princet Chara?” Rowan stated rather than asked.

“A Human child descended from Monsters dies at the hands of someone close to them, then their SOUL reassembles itself with the Magic of their Monstrous ancestors,” Chara explained, as if they had been told this many times over. “This Magic becomes a part of the Human, who is now a
“Correct,” Rowan said. “The process by which one becomes a Wizard is known as a Wizarding. So either Caroline is naturally strong…”

“…or she was killed twice by whoever…Wizarded her or whatever,” Chara finished. “Does it have to be the same person?”

“Not always, but that seems to be the case most of the time,” Rowan sighed.

“That’s just fucked up,” Chara groaned.

“I wish it wasn’t so, but it is what it is,” Rowan said. “There was a Red SOUL Human many centuries before me who tried to appeal to as many Humans, Monsters, and Wizards as she could to find a way, but to no avail.”

<<Who was she?>> Frisk asked.

Rowan smiled sadly.

“I don’t recall her name,” Rowan admitted. “No one does. But she had the red eyes of a Determined One, just as we do.”

<<So maybe we’ll meet her someday?>> Frisk asked.

“Perhaps,” Rowan sighed. “Void permitting…”

Some muffled voices were heard.

“Frisk, you’re about to wake up,” Chara said. “See you later?”

Frisk nodded and waved to Chara and Rowan.

As Frisk faded into reality, Chara and Rowan stood in silence.

“Those stupid Skeletons are trying to bring me back, huh?” Chara sighed.

Rowan said nothing.

Chara sighed and leaned back on their hands.

“Welp,” they said, “I dunno if it’ll actually work, but if it does…”

“Their chances of success are even lower than they realize,” Rowan said. “My existence is not yet known to them, but I am almost certain that I am not being factored into any of this.”

Chara laid back, splaying their limbs out like a starfish.

Rowan sat next to them, crossing his legs.

They sat in silence.

Matt walked into his unlocked house, released from holding.

He looked around, checked every room.

No one home.
Not even a note.

Matt sighed and rifled through his parents’ room.

He gathered some of his mom’s rings and necklaces and his dad’s baseball card collection and put it all in an old shoebox.

He left the house and walked down the block to the pawn shop.

The man at the counter was smoking a cigar - it smelled unpleasant, and Matt usually liked the smell of cigars.

He slammed the old shoebox imon the counter to get the man’s attention.

The man stared at him.

“How much will all of this get me?” Matt asked.

The man tapped his cigar over a novelty guitar-shaped ashtray before appraising the contents of the box.

It took the man ten to twenty minutes to come up with a price.

“This’ll net ya $837.72,” the man said. “I can round up to the nearest ten if you’re desperate, kid.”

“I’ll take it,” Matt said, a little too eagerly.

“Cash or check?” the man asked.


“Yeah, yeah,” the man said. digging out the money from a safe.

Matt put the money in the now-empty old shoebox and dropped it into his mom’s checking account before he went back home.

He went on the computer and checked the auction site he’d bookmarked.

Still up for another ten minutes. Not many bidders.

He took out his mom’s credit card and typed in the number and the amount.

He waited.

He fed the fish in the tank his mother’s valium.

They rushed around, ramming into each other.

He went back to check on the website.

He’d won the bid.

He checked one item off the list.

When Matt checked the tank, five fish were dead.

He adjusted the list.
Caroline stood in an alleyway on Notorious Blair Street, sitting and reading The Neverending Story. Then she realized where she was. She was back in Silverton. And this had happened before.

“Hey, there she is!”

Caroline couldn’t even bring herself to react when the group of kids swatted the book out of her hands.

She heard nonsense. The kids were shouting at her. They’d learned already that she wouldn’t react no matter what they did, so she’d become their target.

The babbles of hateful nonsense continued until…

“Why don’t you just kill yourself already, you useless piece of crap?” their leader mocked.

Caroline reacted.

She didn’t have any Magic in dreams of the past, no matter how much she wanted to. So she simply looked up at the kids and smiled.

It was the smile of The Crazy Woman.

Caroline opened her eyes.

She wasn’t in her bedroom.

She was on the floor of the Gaster-Dreemurr family den, Pallas resting on her abdomen. Her body framed with masking tape like a murder victim at a crime scene.

How original.

She sat up, still half-asleep.

“Morning, Care!”

Caroline slowly turned toward a smiling Penelope.

She blinked.

Caroline mumbled and layed back down to sleep some more. Surely she had to be dreaming…

“She’s about to go back to sleep, guys!” Penelope announced.

Caroline didn’t react as she heard sounds of shock and disbelief.
Her hair was definitely sticking out all over the place.

Her Magic always acted up whenever she had nightmares.

She felt herself be lifted and carried by…nothing?

She opened her eyes.

Cyan surrounded her.

“relax, kid,” Sans said. “just takin’ ya down to the basement.”

“I am relaxed,” Caroline claimed. “I just woke up.”

“From a nightmare?” she heard Gaster’s distinctive voice ask.

“Yes, but nonetheless,” Caroline sighed. “So what am I to do from here in regards to Magical Training?”

“You will be continuing your training,” Toriel said. “But know that this is where your real Magical Training truly begins.”

“Finally I can get to the good stuff,” Caroline groaned as she rubbed her eyes.

“but first,” Sans said. “your nightmare.”

“What about it?” Caroline asked.

“exactly.”

Caroline was confused briefly before realization dawned on her face.

“My nightmare…was about this time when…I think I was six?” Caroline queried. “Maybe seven? It happened somewhere in that limit, I know. It was a Silverton Dream after all.”

“Do you get them often?” Toriel asked, motherly concern lining her voice.

“Not really,” Caroline said. “Just every once in awhile. It used to be every night.”

“How often would you say they happen now?” Gaster asked.

“There doesn’t seem to be much of a pattern, really,” Caroline admitted. “They come and they go.”

Gaster wrote this down.

“Well then,” he said. “Be aware that from here on out your nightmares will only increase in frequency until you find a Talisman.”

Caroline tilted her head curiously.

“A Talisman,” she repeated, making sure to enunciate the Capital Letter. “I believe I understand what it’s for, but please explain it to me just in case?”

Gaster nodded.

“A Talisman is a small object kept on or near the body of a Purple SOUL Wizard to help them focus their Magical Power,” Gaster explained. “Frequently this object is something special to the Wizard, but it need not be. The element of preciousness merely amplifies the Power.”
“So can Pallas -”

“No, Pallas cannot be your Talisman, as he is your Familiar.”

“Well that sucks.”

“Indeed,” Gaster said. “But you can make it through this until you find your Talisman. You have the Purple SOUL, after all. And the Purple SOUL’s Trait is…?”

Caroline hardened her resolve before answering.

“Perseverance,” she declared.

Gaster smiled.

“Correct, Miss Marlow,” Gaster said. Caroline gave a small smile.

“May I go now?” she asked. “I have to iron my hair, you see.”

Gaster chuckled.

“Go ahead, Miss Marlow - you need it.”

Asgore woke up in only his underwear on a couch.

The Wongs’ living room couch, to be exact. He could tell because it was suede and his horns were stuck in the wall (again).

He felt something a light on his lap.

He looked down and saw Shelby, fast asleep and wrapped in a blanket.

Ah. Now he remembered.

=/=

Just after midnight, this morning

Birchtree Apartments, Ebott

Asgore woke up to the door bell being rung.

He groaned as he got out of the bed to answer.

The person on the opposite side of the door kept ringing the doorbell to no end, giggling like a lunatic all the while. Their giggling seemed familiar yet...unfamiliar.

It seemed off somehow.

He opened the door.

Shelby was there, all dressed for work, high heels in her right hand and a bottle of cheap beer in her left.

“Yo yo, Asgorororooooahahahahahaha...”
“Oh golly.

“M-Miss Wong, you are drunk,” Asgore managed.

“How can I be both Miss Wong AND drunk at the same time, Ass Gore?” Shelby slurred.

Asgore sighed.

He did what he had to do.

He lifted Shelby in his arms and carried her over to her own apartment, still carrying her as he made her some coffee and sat on the couch with her.

“Dayum, Assbowl, you is BUFF as SHEEYAT!” Shelby said, far too loudly for so late at night - or early in the morning.

Asgore whined. “Miss Wong, it is after midnight -”

“We gonna let it all hang out~”

“Miss Wong, please -”

“Mister please, don’t play B-17~ It was our song, it was his song~ But it’s ooooooovaaaaahhhhh~”

Shelby started laughing.

“Shelby!” Asgore snapped.

Shelby gasped, but it came out as something like a mix between a choke or a hiccup.

“Forgive me, Miss Wong, but please calm down,” Asgore said, far calmer now. “It is nearly one o’clock in the morning, and here you are in your work clothing, drunk out of your mind. I must ask you to consider that there are children in this apartment complex!”

“Whaddaya think our kids would look like, Ashgore?” Shelby asked, voice becoming more and more slurred - and thankfully more quiet.

Asgore choked on air.

“Naw, naw, hear me out, Azure…” Shelby whined. “I love ya…I mean, I luv yoo, I mean, I -”

“Miss Wong, you are clearly too drunk to think clearly right now -”

“Why else would I be telling you my real feelings?” Shelby sobbed. “I KNOW you’re still all hung up on Ms. Toriel, even though she’s moved on and is giving you the chance to do the same!”

“Miss Wong -”

“Don’t you DARE ‘Miss Wong’ ME, Mr. Dreemurr!” Shelby snapped. “You KNOW I’m right! And you ALSO know that you gotta get over shit that happened a century ago!”

Asgore sat shocked as Shelby sobbed into his bare chest.

“It doesn’t even have to be with me,” she whimpered. “I just…” She sniffled. “I just want you to move on with your life and be HAPPY, Asgore!”

“I don’t deserve happiness, Miss Wong,” Asgore said darkly.
“And that - that right there? That’s proof that you DO deserve happiness, you stupid jackass! You REGRET your choices!”

“Miss Wong, you do not understand -”

“Understand what?” Shelby hissed. “That you’ve killed? That you still love Ms. Toriel? That you can’t fucking DIE?! I DON’T FUCKING CARE, ASGORE! I STILL LOVE YOU!”

Asgore was silent as Shelby continued to bawl as she pounded against his chest.

Once she’d stopped crying, she started straddling his lap.

She kissed him on the snout, between his nose and his mouth.

She smiled and collapsed into a drunken sleep.

Asgore was completely and utterly lost now.

=/=

And now, nearly twelve hours later, he was still lost.

And Shelby was still unconscious.

And where was Chas…?

Chas walked through the cemetery, a bouquet of marigolds in one hand and a canister of wet wipes in the other, the vandalization around him making him sick to his stomach.

He glared at the nonsense graffiti painted all over the headstones, sickened wondering who would do such a thing.

He was very glad he’d chosen to bring some wipes to clean off the grave with.

He walked on, knowing exactly where he was going.

He stopped before a plot with a pair of headstones with angel statues on each.

Chas sobbed with relief, knowing that his wife and daughter had been spared.

He laid the bouquet of marigolds down and cleaned the carved-in names before the rest of the stones.

Once he was done, he returned to his car and grabbed a cooler, taking it back to the plot.

He set it down, opening it, and taking out a bottle of cherry juice - Mercedes’ favorite.

He opened it.

“Hey Esperanza, Mercedes,” Chas greeted the headstones. “I’m real glad you’re safe…”

He was greeted with silence.

He chuckled wetly.
“I’d ask what the hell I’m doing but I think I already know…”

He clasped his hands, closed his eyes, and bowed his head.

“I don’t know who’s up there,” Chas began, “but I hope my girls are happy with you.”

Then he looked back up and took a sip of juice, puckering his face a bit at the tartness.

He laughed a bit as he recalled the face Mercedes would make when she drank cherry juice before
smiling widely and giggling like she was having the time of her life.

It’s the little things he missed most.

Courtney sat in her room, going through her text messages.

Maybe two thirds of them were from Matt.

That clingy piece of shit.

She sighed as the messages got sappier and sappier.

She had a few from her other boyfriends as well as some of her hookups asking when she would be
available next.

No.

When Megan would be available next.

Megan had everything in Courtney’s eyes - the perfect body, the perfect looks, the perfect grades -
everything.

She got the best of everything just for being the older of the two Day sisters.

She kept saying and trying to prove that Courtney was the more preferred of the two.

Courtney knew that wasn’t true. There was a reason she used Megan’s name when hooking up with
guys - because Megan gets all the attention that Courtney rightfully deserves.

Courtney shot upright with a gasp.

The memories came flooding back.

==

11:56 P.M., the previous night

Mountainside Police Department, Holding Block 4, Ebott

“Miss Day, your parents are here,” the officer on duty said. “I’ll be bringing them back here.”

“Die,” Courtney bit as the officer turned the corner.

Matt chuckled.
Courtney glared at him.

“You too,” she snapped. “Everything tonight was all YOUR fault, you know!”

“Aw, c’mon baby, don’t be like that~” Matt cooed, slipping his hand under Courtney’s shirt.

“Don’t TOUCH me, you SICKO!” Courtney shrieked as she smacked Matt in the face.

Matt stared blankly at her for a moment before forcefully kissing her and slipping a hand into her shorts.

She gave in.

“COURTNEY ANGELICA DAY!!!!”

Just as her parents came in.

After that everything was a blur of irrational anger and screeches of nonsense from Courtney.

=/=

Courtney was not only completely humiliated, but grounded for months as well as put on birth control.

Courtney wondered if, just maybe, there really was something wrong with her.

But maybe not.

Caroline walked Penelope home in silence.

Then Penelope spoke up.

“Caroline, what was your nightmare about?” she asked.

Caroline stopped walking.

Penelope looked back at her.

She was pale. More so than usual.

“Do you…not wanna talk about it?” Penelope asked cautiously.

Caroline took a deep breath and shook her head.

“Oh okay then,” Penelope said. “If you ever want to, I’m here okay?”

Caroline smiled.

“Thanks, Penelope,” she said.

Penelope smiled back.

“Oh, we’re at my house!” Penelope said. “Talk to you soon!”
Caroline waved as Penelope entered her house.

Penelope walked in and found her mother and Theo on the couch.

“Penelope,” Monica said. “Have a seat. I have something…to tell you.”

Penelope sat down.

The DeMartinos were silent.

Penelope opened her mouth to speak when Monica finally spoke up.

“Your father is coming,” she managed. “He…he remarried, and he’s coming here with his new wife to take Theo to live with them.”

Penelope was silent.

“Oh my god, just say something you MORON!” Theo snapped.

“What is there to say, Theo?” Penelope asked coldly. “You’ll be happier if you go, won’t you? Since you blame me for him leaving and all - not to mention you blame every autistic person for it.”

Monica turned toward Theo.

“I…I was angry, because she was talking to a friend of mine from school -” Theo attempted.

“You pretended I didn’t exist,” Penelope said.

“I didn’t know what else to do!” Theo snapped. “I’m not like you Penelope! I actually care about my reputation!”

“You’re also normal, right?” Penelope asked. “I know you were going to follow with that, don’t even try to deny it!”

“Don’t assume shit about me!” Theo screamed.

“Then stop giving me reasons to assume and actually try being Theo instead of Dad for once!”

Penelope got up and went to her room.

She slammed the door, tossed herself into the beanbag chair in the corner, and began to cry.

She lowered her sleeves and snapped her coil bracelets.

It didn’t help.

Papyrus dipped the brush in the red paint, coloring in the heart-shaped outlines on Frisk’s face around their eyes and on their forehead.

“pap, i’m doing yours when you’re done with frisk,” Sans said as he colored the borders of the cracks in Gaster’s face with tiny blue, yellow, and silver stars. “since dad’s clonic right now he can’t really do much without -”

Gaster’s arm seized and sent Sans’ paintbrush flying.
“yyyyeah.”

“WORRY NOT, BROTHER, I AM ALMOST DONE PAINTING THE FACE OF MY FAVORITE NIBLING!”

“frisk’s your only nibling, papyrus,” Sans said.

<<So far,>> Frisk signed.

Sans’ eyelights darkened and he accidentally made a yellow line across the bridge of his father’s nose.

Then he handed him a hand mirror to look at his reflection in.

“Sans,” Gaster began, “you painted police tape on my face.”

Sans wheezed like air running out of a balloon and nearly fell backwards.

Luckily Yasmin broke his fall and trotted him toward Toriel.

Toriel looked from the fainted Sans, to the painted Gaster, to the giggly Frisk, to the focussed Papyrus.

She sighed.

“What did you imply this time, Frisk?” she asked.

<<You and Dad’s future babies!>> Frisk signed innocently.

Toriel blinked.

Then her eyes widened and her face flushed.

She stood frozen.

“MRS. TORIEL, YOU AND MY BROTHER ARE BOTH HOPELESS IDIOTS,” Papyrus said.

<<Then you and Uncle Metta can adopt Hunter and Hannah and Elaina so you don’t feel left out!>> Frisk signed.

“Frisk, you make a wonderfully valid point!” Gaster laughed. “Also, would you mind painting words onto the yellow line Sans painted on my face?”

Frisk giggled as they painted the word “CUIDADO: SUAVE ABUELO” in big black letters inside the yellow lines on their grandfather’s face.

Papyrus stood still for a moment before returning to his work.

Something to file away for later…

Last night had taught Elaina many things.

She learned that her mother didn’t care what she did or where she was as long as she didn’t hear about it.
She learned that Skeletons give surprisingly great hugs.

She learned that Caroline was far more terrifying than she thought and that she should probably not get on her bad side.

And most importantly, she learned that sleeping in tutus can cause serious chafing.

She rubbed her thighs where they had been chafed by the tutu.

Maybe something with less glitter next year.

The thought gave Elaina pause.

*Next year…*

No.

It wasn’t here yet.

*But it will be…*

Hunter sat in her room listening to music - specifically, the song Caroline had sent her.

Apparently the group that made Hannah’s favorite song was huge in the 70s, 80s, and 90s, and was still going strong.

Suddenly she got a text.

*I text from: Brian*

*Brian: yo*

*Hunter: hi*

*Br: dad drunk again*

*Br: distract me pls*

Hunter wasn’t sure what to do.

Then she heard the TV.

Linda couldn’t hear with the TV on.

Hunter called Brian.

He picked up instantly.

“What?”

Hunter began to sing.

“We’ll do it all~ Everything~ On our own~”
Silence.

“We don’t need~ Anything~ Or anyone~”

“Hunter, what~”

“If I lay here~ If I just lay here~ Would you lie with me and just forget the world~”

Hunter wasn’t quite sure how, but somehow, singing to Brian like this, she felt oddly…connected to him, in a way.

It made her feel giddy.

Shelby awoke, head pounding.

Every time she even tried to drink, she ended up awake the next day without doing what she’d gotten drunk to do in the first place - and she got a hangover.

She wanted everything to die. Mostly herself, but everything would be fine too.

She’d stupidly, drunkenly poured her heart out to the one she’d fallen in love with, and she didn’t even have the decency to forget.

Shelby covered her eyes with her arms, unable to face the world while nauseous and depressed.

She didn’t dare imagine how Asgore would react next time they saw each other.

She chose then and there to act like it never happened.

She decided to risk looking around.

She found a flowery mug of coffee on the coffee table - on top of a coaster, too.

She sat up slowly and reached for the mug.

Still warm.

She took a sip.

It was just as she liked it, too - two sugars and an ounce of cream.

Shelby smiled through tears she didn’t know had formed.

She really was hopeless, wasn’t she…?

Chas was lost in memories when he saw someone out of the corner of his eye.

Rather, five someones.

Gaster, Sans, Papyrus, Frisk, and Toriel were walking toward him. Gaster had his face painted with galaxy designs and a strip of police tape with a custom phrase written on it, as did his sons. Sans had
crescent moons painted on the outer edges of his eye sockets connected at the corners by a trail of stars making a figure 8, while Papyrus had suns painted around his. Sans’ caution tape paint said “CUIDADO: SUAVE PADRE” and Papyrus’ said “CUIDADO: SUAVE TÍO”. Toriel had a black sugar skull half-mask over her eyes with flowers along the top edge. Frisk had their face painted with red hearts over the eyes.

“Hey, guys,” Chas greeted.

“Hey chas,” Sans said.

“I see you guys are getting in the spirit of things,” Chas joked.

Everyone but Papyrus laughed.

Then all become somber.

“So this is them,” Toriel said.

“Yes,” Chas sighed. “This is my wife Esperanza María Sanchez, and my daughter Mercedes Paz Wong-Sanchez. Have a seat if you want. They’d’ve been happy to meet you guys.”

Frisk looked at the gravestones.

They had the same dates on the right hand side.

But the dates on the left hand side of one gravestone stood out to them.

<<Mercedes and I have the same birthday,>> Frisk signed in awe.

Sans leaned down to check.

“huh, so you did,” Sans remarked.

“And she’d’ve been the same age too,” Chas said. “Funny how the world works, huh?”

“Indeed,” Toriel said. “The world is connected at almost every turn,”

“Such is the way of things,” Gaster said. “In some way, all is connected. To what extent cannot possibly be known for certain, but the knowledge is enough.”

“Whoa,” Chas gasped. “That was deep, man.”

“Was it? I don’t see it. It is what it is, after all.”

“You’re doing it again!”

“Doing what?”

Chas groaned.

“Whatever. Just take a seat.”

Everyone took their place.

<<Do you have any pictures of them?>> Frisk signed to Chas.

“Not right now, no,” Chas said. “They’re all at home. I uh…don’t know where they could be
anyway…”

“You will find them,” Toriel assured him. “Until that day, your memories will suffice, will they not?”

Chas was silent.

I wonder about that…

Caroline entered her house and looked about.

“Dad? Sharona?” she called out. “I’m home. I have a Familiar.”

“Is that some new nickname for Penelope?” Randy called from his study.

“Nooo, it means I have a Familiar,” Caroline replied. “I’m a Wizard, remember?”

“You didn’t bring home a stray cat, did you?” Randy warned.

“No, I made a raven out of lightning and he literally can’t leave anymore, so I named him Pallas and he’s going to be helping me with my Wizardry from now on,” Caroline answered.

There was silence.

Randy walked into the front of the house and stared at Pallas, who sat on Caroline’s shoulder. He looked very tired.

Caroline did not notice.

“Dad, this is Pallas,” Caroline introduced as she patted the raven’s head. “He is my Familiar.”

Randy blinked.

“Say hello, Pallas,” Caroline requested.

Pallas opened his beak.

Randy covered his ears.

Sharona ran into the living room in a panic.

“What happened? Who set off the car alarm?” she asked.

“No, Sharona, it’s just Pallas,” Caroline said. “Who, by the way, can shut up now.”

Pallas closed his beak.

Randy cautiously uncovered his ears.

He sighed with relief at the lack of noise.

Sharona blinked.

She sighed.
“He doesn’t make any mess since he’s made of lightning and Magic,” Caroline said. “He also doesn’t need to eat.”

“And I’m guessing he’s hypoallergenic since I’m able to breathe,” Sharona added.

“That he is.”

“He’s not gonna do that…that thing he did just now in the middle of the night is he?” Randy asked.

“Nope.”

“Oh thank god.”

Shelby showered and changed her clothes into a tee shirt and jeans, still putting on her favorite black kitten heels.

She left her apartment at the same time Asgore left his.

Aaand there was the embarrassment.

“Howdy, Miss Wong!” Asgore greeted far too casually for Shelby’s comfort. “I see you’re feeling better!”

“Uh, y-yeah,” Shelby said nervously. She really hoped that Asgore couldn’t tell how panicky she was.

“Well, I was just about to head down to my office to check on things,” he said.

“Oh, I see.”

They were silent.

“Well, I suppose I will…” Asgore began.

“See you around?” Shelby finished.

“Ah, yes, of course.”

“Okay then.”

Shelby walked toward the stairs as Asgore walked in the opposite direction toward the elevator.

She ran from the apartment to her car and hit her head against the steering wheel thrice.

The car horn honked loudly each time, only adding to her already-mounting frustration.

She let out a sob.

Shelby wished to whatever gods existed that she could talk to Esperanza again. She would have had some good advice.

But that could never happen. Not anymore.

She sat up straight and buckled her seatbelt before starting the car with renewed purpose.
She had a meeting with Sienna at 3:30.

Maybe **Justice** could finally be served.

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Toriel adjusted her sugar skull mask as a gust of wind blew by, carrying leaves and discarded candy wrappers with it.

“Ugh, thank the stars that this section was spared from any vandalism,” she sighed.

“Respect for the dead means nothing to those who have not experienced it,” Gaster said sagely.

“or maybe they have and just have nothing better to do with their lives,” Sans added.

“SERIOUSLY!” Papyrus griped. “**SOME PEOPLE NEED TO GET A LIFE!**”

Gaster, Sans, and Toriel laughed at Papyrus’ accidental pun.

Papyrus groaned and facepalmed.

Suddenly the opening synth for Take On Me rang out.

Papyrus picked up immediately.

“**HI, HONEY!**” he greeted cheerfully.

“**Hey, Sugar Skull~**” Mettaton replied. “**I had a moment during rehearsals so I thought I’d call you!**”

“**WOWIE, THANKS HONEY!**” Papyrus gasped. “**SO YOU’RE IN ATLANTIC CITY FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW?**”

“**And I NEVER want to come back here AGAIN,**” Mettaton sighed. “**Thank the STARS that after this it’s NYC...**”

“**OH YEAH, YOU’D BEEN WANTING TO GO THERE!**” Papyrus said. “**MAYBE ONE DAY WE COULD GO TOGETHER! JUST LIKE IN CHICAGO, BUT WITHOUT THE MAGAZINE INTERVIEW!**”

“**Oh my GOSH, that sounds FABULOUS, Darling!**” Mettaton practically squealed. “**Once we have free time, that is the FIRST thing we’re doing, mark my words!**”

Sans chuckled at the sight of his younger brother, all hyper over a phone call from his Mate.

He knew he would have been no different in his position. He probably wouldn’t be quite as obvious about it, but even if he were he wouldn’t care.

“few more weeks and mtt’ll be back,” Sans noted.

“It will certainly make for an...*eventful* Thanksgiving,” Toriel giggled.

“unless he joins the macy’s thanksgiving parade before he comes back,” Sans added.

“Really, Sans?” Toriel sighed.
“okay, maybe mettaton having a float at the macy’s parade *would* be eventful,” Sans relented.

Toriel rolled her eyes and swatted him playfully.

They giggled.

Gaster watched his sons interact with their Mates.

He sighed and looked up toward the sky.

Not every Skeleton found their SOUL-Chosen Mate - he was one such Skeleton. And among the Skeletons who did find theirs, very rarely were the feelings reciprocated. His sons were among the lucky few whose Mates had reciprocated their feelings - they had even Mated officially.

Gaster was filled with love and pride.

“Hey, where’s Frisk?” Chas asked.

Chara wandered among the headstones, reading the names and dates on each one.

It was both funny and oddly sad how many Smiths there were. There were even different plots for different families of Smiths. Whatever higher power came up with the names of everything ever must be very uncreative if there are this many Smiths in one cemetery, much less the world. Seriously, Asgore was more creative. They hoped.

Then Chara came across a headstone of black polished granite. This person died very young compared to the others they’d seen so far.

**Estelle Monet Crawford**

**August 9, 198S - December 13, 200Q**

They’d died on Hunter’s birthday. Not the same year, but the month and day are both the same.

They took a picture of the headstone with Frisk’s cell phone.

Chara decided to play a little game.

Whenever they came across a headstone belonging to someone who died between the ages of 5 and 55, they would take a picture and later look them up online to find out how they’d died. And take pictures of every cool-looking headstone they found. And take pictures of the ones from their own time.

Then they got a text.

*I text from: Dad*

*Dad: u ok kid*

Chara sighed. They were very glad that they had come up with a system so Sans could tell whether Chara or Frisk was out when he texted them.

*Frisk: I'm fine, thanks! =)*
*Dad: o hey chara
*Dad: y u out
*Fk: Taking pictures of headstones. Someone died on Hunter’s birthday. Cool huh? =)
*Dad: if u say so
*Dad: were leaving in 10
*Dad: theres a fiesta downtown tomorro
*Dad: ill be crowded
*Dad: but well be nearby so u 2 wont get overwhelmed
*Fk: Thank you, Sans. =)
*Dad: np

Chara closed out of the app with a sigh.

They knew that either they or Frisk had to tell Sans about Rowan. If they didn’t, who knows what will happen.

Chara walked onward.

They walked up a hill and found a simple white headstone with a familiar name.

William Hiram Breedlove

Month Day, 1902 - Moth Day, 1915

They sat down before it and crossed their legs.

“So,” they said quietly. “This is where they put you…”

They chuckled bitterly.

“Hey, at least you’re not anywhere near him anymore, huh William?”

The stone said nothing.

Chara sighed.

They looked directly at the stone.

“You know, if you’d lived I’d’ve taken you with me,” they admitted. “You and Asriel would’ve gotten on like a house on fire…then cried so much that the fire burned out. You’re both such crybabies…”

Chara leaned back on their hands and faced the sky. The sun and sky were obscured by silver clouds, but it was still infinitely brighter than the Void.

“But nope! No dice, Will. You died. Asriel did too eventually. So did I…I’m only here right now because this kid named Frisk is letting me borrow their body. They’re another soppy sentimental baby. I dunno why, but I seem to be a magnet for crybabies. It’s weird. But then again, I’ve always
been weird myself, so I suppose it makes sense enough.”

Chara sighed before being silent.

They leaned forward and hugged their Human brother's gravestone.

“I’m sorry, William,” Chara whispered. “And thank you. I love you, big brother…”

Chara stayed for a moment before standing up to return to Frisk’s family.

No.

They supposed this was their family as well. It had changed a lot, but it was still their family.

Everything changes in time, whether in a second or a century. But the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Chara pushed Frisk to the front, content to observe from the Void for now.

Who knew death could be so bittersweet.

“Okay Pallas, repeat after me: The rain in Spain falls mainly in the Pyrenees Mountains.”

Pallas opened his beak, an unholy sound like a car alarm combined with a storm siren trying to speak Danish emanating from it.

Caroline pressed Pallas’ beak shut to stop the sounds. She experimentally opened it again, the sound continuing. Then she closed it, stopping it. Then she opened it, starting it. Close. Open. Close. Open.

She laughed. It was just so cartoonish…

“Caroline Violet Marlow, stop teaching Pallas to talk!” Randy scolded.

“Sorry Dad!” Caroline responded.

She sighed wearily. She didn’t have the Patience for this. Teaching a magical lightning bird to speak something other than Morse code and screeches of the damned was time-consuming and migraine-inducing.

But Caroline wasn’t just going to give up because of that.

She’d suffered worse.

Yeah.

Persevere.

“Okay, Pallas, let’s try that again,” Caroline said. “But maybe a bit quieter this time if you can?”

Penelope sat on the beanbag chair in the corner of her room, her wrists raw from the snapping of her coil bracelets.
She still felt the same. Nothing was helping.

She smelled lasagna.

But she would not give in, no matter how hungry she was, no matter how good it smelled.

Penelope whined a little, still “lost in her coils”, as Monica always said.

Then she spotted her phone from the corner of her eye.

She grabbed it and decided to tell Caroline everything.

Caroline had trusted Penelope with her own past, now it was time to return the favor.

Yeah. Trust…

Penelope sighed. The memories hurt. But they were what they were, and the best you can do sometimes is move forward.

This was moving forward, right?

Shelby parked her car in front of the cafe and walked inside.

Sienna was waiting at a booth and waved her over once she noticed her.

Shelby sat down across from her.

Sienna sipped on her iced latte and reached into her purse for some files.

“So,” she began, “you need me for something?”

“I want you to investigate someone,” Shelby said. “It’s a very personal thing, not just for me but for Chas too.”

Sienna tilted her head in curiosity.

“Oh? Do tell, then.”

Shelby paused before sighing heavily and giving Sienna a business card.

Sienna picked it up and read it, eyes widening somewhat at the name.

“Nine years ago, this person was involved in a DUI,” Shelby explained. “The vehicle he was driving collided with the car Chas was driving. His wife was killed instantly, his daughter thrown from the vehicle. Chas and this person are the only known survivors. This person was acquitted despite considerable evidence against him. The statute of limitations in this state is unlimited for crimes of this nature, but unless we can prove that he’s done something else since then we can’t do anything.”

“So you want me to see if this guy is doing anything unsavory?” Sienna asked. “Well, besides what the business card says he does anyway.”

“I also want you to look into the jurors of the case against him, interview them if possible,” Shelby added. “This person is very wealthy, and I’m seriously worried that he may have bought off the jury for an acquittal.”
Sienna hummed thoughtfully.

Then she smiled eerily.

This could prove to be an interesting case indeed…

“\textquote“I'll take it,\textquote” Siena declared. “\textquoteBut you mentioned that the daughter was thrown from the vehicle?\textquote”

“Yes, and is currently missing and presumed dead,” Shelby said quietly.

“What are the odds that she’s still alive, do you know?”

“I became a social worker for a reason, you know,” Shelby said. “\textquoteIf there’s even a small chance that Mercedes is still alive, I can find it more easily from this position. It’s likely that she’s in foster care or a group home somewhere. Best case scenario is that she’s been adopted by a loving family somewhere, and worst case scenario…”

Sienna patted Shelby’s hand.

“I’ll help you with that in any way I can during my free time,” Sienna assured her.

“You mean during your free time that \textquoteisn’t\textquote being spent getting your nails done?” Shelby deadpanned with a smirk.

“You say that like I have a problem,” Sienna snarked with a smile.

The girls laughed.

“We can discuss payment at a later date,” Sienna said. “\textquoteFor now, I’m buying dessert. This place has the \textit{best} lemon cream cake you could ever hope for.\textquote”

Courtney sat in Dr. Bradley’s office in the squishy oversized leather armchair, her parents and Megan on the squishy oversized leather couch on the other side of the room.

Dr. Bradley stared at her.

“So, Courtney,” he began. “\textquoteYou went to jail.\textquote”

“And now I’m grounded and on birth control,” Courtney griped.

“She wouldn’t have been grounded for as long as she is if we hadn’t caught her making out with her boyfriend,” Orville sighed wearily.

“And who is this boyfriend?” Dr. Bradley asked.

“His name is Matt Gorman,” Megan said, the first she’d spoken all day. “\textquoteHe’s in the same grade at the same school as her. I only met him twice, and he’s annoying. I asked him his name and he threatened to shoot me.\textquote”

The room got silent.

“Moving on,” Dr. Bradley said. “\textquoteOur time is almost up. Anything else to discuss?\textquote”

“Um, yeah,” Courtney said. “\textquoteI’d like to speak with you. Alone.\textquote”
“Okay then,” Dr. Bradley said. “I have another ten minutes before my next appointment, so I can spare you some time.”

Orville, Karen, and Megan left.

Courtney and Dr. Bradley were alone.

“I think you were right,” Courtney said. “Last week, when you mentioned that I may have a problem.”

Dr. Bradley quirked one bushy eyebrow.

“Now, Courtney,” he began evenly. “We don’t even know if you have HPD yet. But the fact that you recognize something wrong is a very good thing.”

“How is realizing that I’m messed up in the head a good thing, exactly?” Courtney asked angrily.

“Because by recognizing it, you can start working to become better, or at least prevent it from getting worse,” Dr. Bradley explained calmly. “That is my job - to work with people to help them move forward and cope with their issues, whatever they may be.”

Courtney was quiet.

She was angry at herself - she’d actually admitted that she was at fault for something.

But with that anger came relief as well.

Catharsis was a strange thing.

Caroline picked up her cell phone when she heard the text tone go off.

*I text from: Nell*

*Nell: hey care?

*Caroline: Oh no, you left out the emoticon. What happened?

*Nl: where to begin with that.

*Cr: You don’t have to talk about it if you’re not ready yet, just know that I’ll be ready to listen when you are.

*Nl: i am. ready to talk, i mean.

*Cr: I’m listening.

*Nl: my dad’s coming. to take theo with him and his new wife.

*Cr: That sounds like exactly what Theo wants, but that’s not all there is to it I’m sure.

*Nl: it’s not.

*Cr: Go on, then.
Exact time and date unknown, six or seven years ago

Trinidad, Colorado

Penelope Garcia, first grader, was an odd little girl. It was obvious.

There were those who found her oddities adorable, even fun and interesting. Alas, they were outnumbered by those who found them unnatural.

Our story begins with those who found Penelope unnatural.

She stood on the corner of Pierce and Adams with her older brother in the second grade Theo in front of Eckhart Elementary, waiting anxiously for her father Tony to pick her up, since her mother Monica was the sole breadwinner.

Penelope suddenly felt something hit the back of her head.

She was used to it.

She was also used to many things hitting her at once as soon as her assailants knew that she was ignoring them, the sounds of ableist insults being thrown with them.

She was used to all of it.

But she wasn’t used to Theo no longer defending her.

Tony had told him that Penelope was getting what she deserved for being a freak. Exact words, too.

Penelope took it. Even as she felt blood drip down the back of her head.

She knew they wouldn’t go too far. They’d get bored and stop eventually. They always do.

Tony drove up.

The kids kept attacking, knowing full well that Penelope’s father wouldn’t do anything to stop them.

Penelope got in the back of the car from the side toward the street.

She sat silently in her spot next to Theo.

Tony, a man with deep olive skin and black hair with a goatee, sat in the drivers seat.

Then a kid threw a rock at the rear window.

There was a crack in it.

Penelope watched in horror as Tony’s face morphed in absolute anger.

He started speeding.

When they got home he ran over the mailbox in anger.

Then everyone got out of the car.

Penelope glanced at Theo from the corner of her eye.
He wasn’t reacting at all. He didn't even seem to care.

Penelope followed her father and brother, dread coursing through her veins.

She prepared herself for what was to come.

“Theo,” Tony said suddenly, voice low with barely-restrained fury. “Go to your room. I have to talk with the girl.”

Theo did as he was told. He didn’t even spare Penelope a glance.

Penelope stared at the floor.

Whenever Tony told Theo to go to his room so he could “talk” with Penelope, there was no talking involved.

Just fists.

Tony stood silently, taking out a cigarette.

He lit it and took a puff.

Penelope stood, eyes clenched shut in fear as the smell of cigarettes wafted through the air.

Then she squeaked as Tony yanked her by the arm.

She tried not to scream as he put out the cigarette on her left wrist.

When he was done, he went to his usual route of fists.

Penelope was used to it, so she didn’t cry.

Until he started kicking.

He kicked and kicked and kicked until she threw up.

There was blood.

The last thing Penelope saw was her father smiling as he prepared to kick her again.

=/=

Caroline was shaking as she read the last message. It was filled with typos and grammatical errors galore.

She was lost. She had no idea what to do from here. Should she text her something encouraging? Should she call her and tell her a story of some kind? Should she run over there and risk losing her temper at Theo?

She decided that, in this situation, calling was more appropriate.

She tapped the contact and waited.

Penelope answered sniffles heard through the receiver.

“Y-yeah?” Penelope sniffed
“rednearoC darnoC lraC: skooB dlO.”

“What?”

“This inscription could be seen on the glass door of a small shop, but naturally this was only the way it looked if you were inside the dimly-lit shop, looking out at the street through the plate-glass door.”

“Caroline, what are you talking about?” Penelope asked in confusion.

“I’m telling you a story,” Caroline replied simply.

“What story?” Penelope asked.

“The Neverending Story, by Michael Ende,” Caroline said. “I was holding it when I died. It got washed away, but I know every bit of it by heart.”

Penelope gasped in wonder.

“You memorized an entire book?” she asked.

Caroline giggled. “Yep. All 448 pages, all 138,880 words.”

“Okay, forget Electricity, your element is books,” Penelope deadpanned.

Caroline huffed out a laugh. “I wish,” she said.

“Okay, but keep going!” Penelope urged. “You stopped at the words ‘plate-glass door’.”

“Okay, okay, hold your horses,” Caroline sighed. “Alright, here we go…”

Caroline recited the story, doing all she could to do the tale of Bastian Balthazar Bux’s journey through the land of Fantastica the justice she felt it deserved.

If it could help the one she cared about most, she had to do it right or else not do it at all.

She hoped she was doing it right.

Gaster walked into the elevator of the apartment complex when a familiar woman phased into being beside him.

“Good evening, Miss Harper,” he greeted. “On a case, I take it?”

“Just returned from meeting a client, actually,” she said. “Can’t spill details, but this should be a very fun case indeed…”

“Well, I wish you luck!” Gaster said. “Should you need my help, feel free to drop by anytime!”

“Of course, Doctor,” Sienna said. “I’ll even tell you beforehand so Asgore can put on some tea.”

“A lovely idea,” Gaster noted.

The two were silent as the elevator door opened and they left the shaft.

“Miss Harper,” Gaster said suddenly.
“Doctor,” Sienna replied.

“Wizards can tell when they are in the presence of other Wizards, do you know this?”

“I do,” Sienna replied. “I’ve felt such a presence before.”

Gater looked at her strangely. “And where and when would this have taken place?”

“It was back in May,” Sienna said. “I was at the zoo with some friends from high school when I felt it.”

Gaster paused.

“I see,” he said.

“You know something,” Sienna stated.

“I know many things, Miss Harper, do be more specific.”

“You know other Wizards,” she said. “Aside from me.”

“I know of many,” Gaster said. “Most all of them have been dead for five hundred years of more, but—”

“Dammit Doctor, are there any other living Wizards?!” Sienna snapped. “I have to know that I’m not the only one who had this happen to them, Doctor! I have to know that I’m not alone in this!”

Gaster paused.

“I do,” he said quietly.

Sienna’s green eyes widened.

“What…” she breathed.

“There are more Wizards aside from you,” Gaster said. “Two of them, as far as I know.”

Sienna felt tears prickle at the corners of her eyes.

“Have you met them?” she asked. “What are they like, what kind of Magic do they have, what SOUL Traits do they have?!”

“Calm down, Miss Harper,” Gaster chuckled warmly. “I know this is very big for you, but if you don’t calm down you won’t be able to listen properly, now will you?”

Sienna nodded frantically and took a few calming breaths.

“Sorry,” she said. “Go on.”

“Well, one of them is Frisk Dreemurr,” Gaster said. “They bear the only Red SOUL on earth at present, and they hold Time Magic as a result, allowing them to turn back time to any point they can recall.”

Sienna’s eyes sparkled as she took notes.

“And the other one? You said there were two of them.”

“Ah, yes. The other Wizard is named Caroline. She has a Purple SOUL, and holds Electricity
Sienna put away her notebook and smiled gratefully.

“Thank you so much, Doctor,” she said. “This helps so much…”

“How old are they, though?” Sienna asked.

“Both are eleven years old in sixth grade,” Gaster said. “Any other questions?”

“That’s it for now,” Sienna said. “Thank you Doctor.”

Sienna watched as Gaster entered his and Asgore’s shared apartment before entering her own.

She entered her room and took her hormone pills before lying back in her bed and squealing with excitement.

She wasn’t alone. She wasn’t the only Wizard after all.

She rubbed her eyes free of tears.

It felt good to not be alone, even if your company was far away.

Flowey sat in his place on the windowsill as always, Pokemon Sapphire his game of choice today.

He went in a pattern with the Gen III games: Ruby version starter was Torchic, Sapphire version starter was Mudkip, and Emerald version starter was Treecko.

He’d named his female Mudkip Undyne. He’d only started the game some days ago, so it was only a Marshtomp now.

He wondered why he named it Undyne. It wasn’t like he cared or anything. It just reminded him of Undyne, and that’s really all there is to it.

Undyne’s Mudshot K.O.ed Wattson’s Magneton.

Flowey won the Dynamo Badge.

The knowledge that all is connected fills you with
Put Your Lights On - Santana
After Midnight - J.J. Cale
Please Mr. Please - Olivia Newton-John
Chasing Cars - Snow Patrol
Take On Me - a-ha

Fun Fact: Character heights as of this arc are as follows -
Alexis - 6'1
Alicia - 5'
Almsal - 6'8
Alphys - 5'4
Amber - 5'6
Asgore - 9'
Ashton - 5'5
Astrid - 5'3
Audrey - 5'7
Brian - 5'4
Brooke - 4'11
Bruce - 5'8
Caroline - 5'6
Chara - 4'
Chas - 5'11
Chelsea - 3'7
Chloe - 5'2
Colleen - 4'7
Courtney - 5'4
David - 5'10
Diana - 5'2
Eddie - 5'3
Elaina - 5'4
Elliot - 5'4
Estelle - 5'7
Felicity - 6'
Fiona - 5'
Frisk - 4'7
Gaster - 5'10
Gavril - 4'8
Grace - 6'
Hannah - 4'
Helen - 5'1
Holly - 3'11
Hunter - 5'2
Ioniq - 5'3
Irma - 5'8
Janice - 5'3
Jayme - 5'2
Jenson - 5'8
Jill - 5'6
Jordan - 4'6
Julia - 5'4
Karen - 5'5
Kristina - 4'3
Kyle - 3'11
Levi - 5'5
Liam - 6'3
Linda - 5'
Mamoru - 2'6
Matt - 5'2
Megan - 5'6
Mettaton - 6'
Miranda - 4'8
MK - 6'10 (from head to tip of tail, 4'8 discounting tail)
Monica - 4'8
Naomi - 4'6
Nicko - 5'
Olive - 5'3
Orville - 5'8
Papyrus - 6'7
Penelope - 4'2
Randy - 5'10
Richard - 5'11
Ridley - 5'
Rowan - 6'6
Sans - 5'2
Sarah - 5'2
Scott - 4'9
Sharona - 4'11
Shashi - 4'4
Shelby - 5'6
Sienna - 6'2
Sofie - 5'4
Theo - 5'3
Tom - 5'5
Toriel - 7'
Trav - 5'3
Undyne - 5'7
Yuu - 5'3
Into The Night

Chapter Summary

Día de los Muertos, part 2. Romance, anxiety, and Skeletal awesomeness ensue.

Chapter Notes

Holy fucking SHIT, a whole month and a half since the last update…I am so sorry…

Anyway, eney and I have gotten jobs - unpaid jobs, but still jobs. They've been eating up much of our time and motivation.

But here it is at last~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

3:02 P.M., November 2nd, 20XR

It’s a chilly day outside.

Music is playing.

Bonfires are burning.

On days like this, kids like you…

…are enjoying a fiesta.

Frisk sat on a bench with Gaster, sipping on some root beer.

Frisk had on a short-sleeved red hoodie over a long-sleeved white shirt with jeans and red hi-tops. Their face was painted the same way as yesterday, with red hearts over their eyes. Today, they had a golden flower painted on the center of their forehead, on each cheek, and the tip of their chin, all connected by green vines. Over the red hearts, hearts in orange, yellow, green, cyan, blue, and purple were painted in eyebrow-like arcs.

Gaster sat next to them, white turtleneck and black slacks with shiny black shoes, topped with a hooded floor-length robe of black with a purple border, held in place with a pewter Gaster Blaster brooch with garnet eyes. His face was painted with stars and atoms.

Frisk found out that Rowan liked root beer a few hours ago, so they were drinking the root beer for him.
Then they found the song “Do It For Her/Him” from Steven Universe trapped in their head.

They opened their phone and sent the video to Hunter.

Who then texted back.

*Hunter: frisk i cant tell if ur tryin 2 tell me smth or sending me songs

*Frisk: sending songs~ ^u^

*Hn: ok thx

*Hn: this is so catchy

*Hn: but if i hum my mom will kill me

*Fk: but she’d kill you if you didn’t hum.

*Hn: still

Frisk sighed.

Hunter had come a long way since they’d met. She was a lot more anxious before - she still is, really. But she’s coming out of her shell a lot more - and it’s really making her happy. There’s a long way still to go, but she has people in her corner.

Then Frisk came up with an idea.

They would have to get everyone else in on it first.

Levi was lost.

Again.

With no piano or police officer in sight.

He was silently grateful that he wasn’t Caroline, or else he’d be freaking out spectacularly, possibly electrocuting people in the process.

Levi had heard that Caroline’s Magic came to her at a price, but what that price was was a mystery to him, and Caroline didn’t seem to enjoy talking about it.

But Penelope seemed to know how she got it.

And Levi wanted to know too. But he couldn’t push. That would just make Caroline shut down.

Levi decided to wander around.

He had on an orange long-sleeved shirt, a blue puffy vest, and jeans with basketball shoes.

The vivid colors, the funky decorations, the bright lights…

Levi was glad he’d chosen to take Frisk up on their offer to join their family at the Día de los Muertos fiesta.
“Oh my gosh, hi Levi~!”

Levi turned his head and found Jordan. Jordan had on a blue-green short-sleeved buttondown open over a black tee shirt with jeans and sandals.

Levi just knew he was blushing.

“Hey Jordan!” he said. “H-how ya doing?”

“I’m literally only here because I’m writing a report for Spanish class, but I’m actually having fun!” Jordan said. “You?”


Levi was now absolutely certain that he was on fire from embarrassment.

“You want me to help you find Caroline?” Jordan offered.

Levi’s deep blue eyes met Jordan’s.

They held their gazes for some time.

“You’d do that?” Levi asked.

Jordan swallowed and nodded.

Levi smiled his gap-toothed smile.

Jordan returned the smile.

“Lead the way?” Levi asked.

“Sure!” Jordan said, grabbing Levi by the hand.

Levi held back a yelp as Jordan dragged him along on the search for Caroline.

Oh gosh.

Levi Denzel Goldsby was so screwed.

---------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Brian really hated his dad.

But there were times when the very things he hated the guy for could be used to his advantage.

Like today. Today, David was knock-out drunk.

So his mom had taken him to the Día de los Muertos fiesta downtown.

She’d even managed to grab Hunter and Hannah to take with them.

And so Brian was walking along with his fingers laced behind his head, Hunter beside him with her hands in the pockets of her bomber jacket. Hannah trotted along with them, rainbow snowcone in hand, eyes wide and glimmering with what could only be described as childlike wonder.
“So many Dr. Sands and Mr. Paps…” she breathed.

“What’s with your outfit?” Brian asked.

Papyrus was wearing a white poet-style shirt with brown slacks tucked into boots. Over he wore a hooded floor-length orange robe with a blue border with the front clasped over his collarbone with a pewter Gaster Blaster brooch with pearl eyes. He had his Red Scarf tied around his waist, and his face was painted with suns and stars.

“Are you a pirate?” Hannah gasped.

“NYEH HEH HEH, NOPE!” Papyrus replied. “AS YOU CAN SEE, I AM A SKELETON!”

“But what is that you’re wearing?” Hunter asked.


“I’ve been well, thank you Helen!” Papyrus answered. “Mettaton will be coming home on the 25th, so that is definitely something to look forward to!”

“I’m sure it is,” Helen said with a slight smile. “I’m gonna look around for a while. Can you watch the kids for me?”

“Mom, I’m twelve, I don’t need this!” Brian groaned.
“If you don’t need this, then you clearly don’t need ice cream later,” Helen reasoned.

“DO IT FOR THE ICE CREAM, BRIAN,” Papyrus urged.

Brian sighed.

“Good boy,” Helen said. “Remember to call me every two hours with your location and what you’re doing, okay?”

“Mom, I get it,” Brian whined.

“I know, I just need some reassurance that you get it, you know?”

Brian sighed.

“Fine, just go, okay?” Brian said. “If dad calls, let me know, okay?”

Helen gave a thumbs up in response and went on her way.

Brian, Hunter, Hannah, and Papyrus stood awkwardly.

“WHO WANTS TO HELP ME LOOK FOR FRISK AND MY DAD?” Papyrus asked.

Sans and Toriel had more in common than just a sense of humor.

They also liked learning, and telling people what they’ve learned. In short, they liked teaching.

Which is what we find Sans doing - walking hand-in-hand with Toriel, explaining the history of Día de los Muertos and why it is culturally important to Skeletons.

He had on a pale blue tunic shirt and black slacks with sandals, over which was a hooded floor-length robe of teal with a purple border with a pewter Gaster Blaster brooch with emerald eyes. His Blue Hoodie was tied around his waist. His face was painted with moons and stars.

Toriel wore a black off-shoulder knee-length dress edged with lace.

“So that’s how marigolds became special,” Sans ended. “Anything else you wanna know?”

Toriel was quiet as she thought of a question.

“Well,” she began, “there is one thing I’m curious about.”

“And that is?”

Toriel twiddled with her ear, unsure of how to appropriately phrase her question.

“Are you and your family...the only Skeleton Monsters remaining?” she asked weakly.

“Yeah,” Sans replied casually. “Skeletons were particularly despised by humans way back when because...well, I think it’s obvious. When the war order was given, skeletons became a particular target. Humans actually resorted to tearing us apart to get our bones as prizes, and we ended up being even more hated when it became clear that, as monsters, we turn to dust when we die.”

Toriel’s cinnamon eyes widened.
“I…recall hearing such reports in those days,” she said. “By the time I was in any position to do anything about it, the Skeleton population had already dwindled to less than a few dozen.”

“yeah,” Sans sighed. “dad said that by that point in the war it was too late for monsterkind as a whole to do much of anything besides try to protect the refugee camps and the few castle strongholds left.”

“Do you know what all your father did during the war?” Toriel asked.

“he started as a frontline soldier, reaching the rank of colonel before he was injured,” Sans said. “it was the same injury that gave him the cracks in his skull.”

“So he told you.”

“he never was one to hold back when he had something to say. even still, it surprised me when he said that it was the best thing that ever happened to him.”

“What,” Toriel said flatly in disbelief.

“i know,” Sans chuckled. “he said he’d always preferred the work behind the scenes. he felt he did his best work building weaponry and such.”

“I’m not surprised,” Toriel said fondly. “It was his work during the war that led to him being selected as the Royal Scientist, after all.”

“hm.”

The two were silent as they walked through the crowd, watching as marigold petals fluttered about, as colorful lights twinkled and shone, as the Humans who had once hated Skeletons came together to celebrate their accomplishments unknowingly.

It filled Sans with a strange feeling. He knew very well that Humans as a whole weren’t necessarily bad - some were even pretty damn cool. But many of these Humans were likely descended from someone who hated enough to kill. He didn’t know.

But that wasn’t all.

“hey, tori,” Sans said. “i got a question for you now.”

“And that would be?” Toriel asked.

Sans took a deep breath - Skeletons don’t need to breathe, but the action of rhythmically expanding and contracting the rib cage is calming in its own way.

“were there any monsters that hated skeletons?” he asked. “like, it doesn’t even have to be skeletons as a whole, you know?”

“You wish to know if your father had any enemies,” Toriel said, as if asking for confirmation.

Sans merely sighed in response.

“Is there a particular reason why?” Toriel asked.

Sans was silent. He glanced about the area as if looking for someone in particular.

“We’ll carry on that line of convo later, babe,” he sighed. “it’s a long story, y’know?”
“Does it have anything to with -”

Sans silenced her by turning her SOUL Blue and leaning her in for a kiss.

After a moment of surprise, she reciprocated.

Once they let each other go, Sans put a phalange to her muzzle and winked his left eye.

“i said later, capice?” he said huskily.

Toriel nodded.

“good. now c’mon. they got chocolate churros at the stall on 5th.”

---

Elaina, Colleen, Caroline, and Penelope walked side-by-side, taking in the atmosphere.

“Needs more darkness,” Caroline said. “I like the decor, but the lights should really wait until sunset to turn on.” Caroline had on a deep purple maxi dress with ¾ sleeves and black sandals with black, white, and purple calavera face paint. Her hair was in a braid woven with a deep purple ribbon and placed over her left shoulder.

Elaina whimpered. “C-Caroline, y-you’re not going to -”

“No, don’t worry Elaina, I’m not shutting off the lights here.”

Elaina breathed a sigh of relief. Elaina was feeling masculine and had his hair pulled up under a sombrero and black, teal, and green calavera face paint with skinny jeans and a Guns & Roses tee shirt and sandals.

“Citywide, however…” Caroline started.

“Caroline,” Penelope warned. She had on a neon green cold-shoulder top, jean shorts with black tights, neon green moon boots, her green and black ski cap, and her sea horse chewable necklace. Caroline sighed and rolled her eyes. “I was just teasing. Sorry, Elaina.”

Elaina nodded and smiled.

“I-it’s fine,” he said. “I-I know you were just t-teasing, hehe…”

“Hey, it’s Hunter!” Colleen said, pointing to where Hunter, Hannah, Brian, and Papyrus were sitting at a picnic table.

“Should we go join them?” Penelope asked nervously. “I mean, look at the crowd we have to walk through to reach them…”

Colleen stood straight. She was nearly a foot shorter than Caroline when she did so. Colleen had on an olive green off-shoulder peasant dress with brown strappy sandals and a crown of marigolds with a calavera-printed orange neckerchief.

“I’ll guard you guys,” she announced Bravely. “Just huddle together and I’ll lead you through the crowd!”

“What are we, sheep?” Caroline deadpanned.
"Is it such a baaaah-d thing if we are?" Penelope asked playfully.

Caroline blinked. "Yes," she responded seriously. "Sheep are mindless animals who live in herds and require Human assistance to not accidentally die."

"Well yeah, but just because we’re not mindless doesn’t mean we won’t accidentally die without protection!" Penelope claimed.

"I know Penelope, I’ve died before," Caroline sighed.

"Okay, everyone huddle!" Colleen ordered.

Caroline sighed as she, Penelope, and Elaina huddled up to Colleen in preparation for the coming terror of crowds.

"Ready?" Colleen asked.

"No," Elaina squeaked.

"It’s okay," Colleen said. "We got you, we got each other, we can and will make it through this alive, okay?"

Elaina took a deep breath and nodded.

"Okay! Ready?"

"I guess?"

"Okay…"

"Help me…"

"And…GO!"

The group of socially-awkward tweens pushed their way through the crowd with screams of apologetic terror and anxiety.

Once they reached the place they meant to reach, they sat down heavily and gasped for breath.

"That was terrifying," Penelope wheezed.

"I am never doing that again," Caroline growled.

Elaina merely wheezed and slammed his head on the picnic table, causing the sombrero to fall off his head and onto the ground.

Papyrus, Brian, Hunter, and Hannah all stared at them.

"Are you…okay?" Hunter asked.

"Do you not see that crowd?" Penelope gasped.

"Hunter, we nearly suffocated to death on Human and anxiety," Caroline said. "I really doubt that we’re okay."

"WELL, YOU ARE SAFE NOW!" Papyrus declared. "AND BECAUSE YOU ARE SAFE, WE SHALL ALL SEARCH FOR FRISK AND MY DAD TOGETHER!"
“Okay,” Caroline said with a shrug. “It’s not like they’d be in a worse crowd than this.”


Everyone was quiet.

“You just now noticed?” Caroline asked.

Frisk stared at their cell phone.

It had died.

They sighed.

They really should have listened to their mom when she told them to charge their phone earlier.

“Welp,” Gaster said. “I don’t even have a cell phone.”

Frisk blew their bangs out of their face.

“Well, what do you suggest we do then?”

<<Look for them,>> Frisk signed.

“Well, that’s -” Gaster started before realization dawned on his face. “…actually the best idea.”

<<What was your idea?>> Frisk signed.

“Busking,” Gaster said.

Frisk just stared at Gaster.

“I told you yours was the better idea,” Gaster said. “Ockham’s razor and all that.”

Levi and Jordan, had they been asked what they were currently doing, would have answered “Searching for a friend”. And that was exactly what they were doing.

Sort of.

Levi didn’t really want to admit that he wouldn’t exactly mind it if it took them a little longer to find Caroline. He was having fun.

However, he was also nervous. Extremely so. He wondered if every sane person felt like this when they were alone with their crush. He both wanted to stay in this moment forever and run screaming for the hills at the same time.

Then he spotted salvation for his poor nerves.

“Hey, Jordan, it’s MK!” he said. “Yo MK, over here!”

Levi waved his arms to get MK’s attention.
MK noticed and ran over, falling on their face twice as they did so.

“Hey Levi, hey Jordan!” they greeted cheerfully - almost too cheerfully, as if they were teasing them. “What’re you guys doing?”

Levi glared at MK, very much aware of what they were doing.

“We’re trying to find Levi’s sister,” Jordan explained.

“Oh, okay!” MK said.

“You can totally join us!” Levi said suddenly. “You know, if you want. Three heads are better than two, six eyes better than four, stuff like that.”

“Sure!” MK replied with a smile. “I was actually looking around for Frisk anyway, since I knew they’d be here and my sister ditched me for her girlfriend…”

“Okay!” Jordan said. “The more the merrier!”

And so the three went on their merry way, Levi’s nerves abated and his excitement dwindled.

Papyrus led the kids through the crowd, all in order by height - Caroline, Brian, Elaina, Hunter, Colleen, Penelope, and Hannah, in that order.

Penelope felt really self-conscious about her height at that moment.

“Why must everything be so stupidly tall?!” Penelope whined.

“Because everything is stupid,” Colleen sighed in response.

“I’m so glad I’m taller than my mom,” Hunter sighed.

“I-I’m probably gonna be t-taller than my m-mother,” Elaina said. “B-both of my s-sisters are.”

“Being taller than your mom’s not an accomplishment,” Brian claimed.

“I’m almost as tall as my dad,” Caroline said. “I’ll probably end up even taller than that.”

“I’M THE TALLEST IN MY FAMILY,” Papyrus said. “I ACTUALLY USED TO BE SHORTER THAN SANS WAS AT THE SAME AGE UNTIL MIDDLE SCHOOL!”

“So we’re gonna get taller?” Brian asked.

“UNTIL YOU TURN ABOUT TWENTY, YES!” Papyrus encouraged.

“So C-Caroline is still g-growing?” Elaina squeaked.

“So are you,” Caroline assured.

“SANS ACTUALLY STOPPED GROWING ALTOGETHER IN MIDDLE SCHOOL!” Papyrus added unnecessarily.

“I’m betting that Penelope’s gonna stop growing,” Brian said.
“If I do, I’m gonna blame you,” Penelope hissed.

“I hate all of you,” Hannah sighed.

“I know how you feel, Hannah, but you should not actually say it unless you have a very good reason to do so,” Caroline said.

“Oh, okay,” Hannah said.

After that everyone was silent.

“Have you tried calling Frisk?” Caroline asked.

Papyrus stopped short. He was sweating nervously.

He proceeded to take out his cellphone and contact Frisk.

He sent them a text.

“THEY ALWAYS RESPOND WITHIN FIVE MINUTES AND FORTY-THREE AND ONE-HALF SECONDS, SO WE SHALL WANDER UNTIL THEN!” Papyrus declared.

“Okay, but what if Frisk’s phone died?” Brian asked. “They’re so out of it half the time that that’s probably exactly what happened.”

“He’s actually got a point,” Caroline said. “Frisk has a tendency to be easily distracted, so it is very likely that they were distracted and let their phone die.”

“I DO NOT WISH TO ADMIT IT, BUT THAT MAY VERY WELL HAVE HAPPENED!” Papyrus said nervously.

“Hey, we’ll find them!” Hunter assured. “Knowing Frisk, they probably went off looking for us on their own after letting their phone die!”

“T-they d-don’t like crowds a-any more than w-we do, s-so they p-probably won’t be in the c-crowds unless they’re r-r-really d-desperate,” Elaina reasoned.

“Maybe they found Dr. Sand and Ms. Toral and now they’re looking for you!” Hannah said.

Papyrus paused, an odd expression on his face.

Then he smiled.

“THANK YOU,” he said, voice oddly calm. Then he straightened his posture, assuming a dramatically heroic pose, his confidence regained and his nerves abated.

“NOW LET’S GO FIND THAT HUMAN!”

Sans and Toriel continued to walk hand-in-hand.

The sole difference being the oddly tense atmosphere surrounding them despite their close proximity.

“Sans,” Toriel said suddenly, “your performance is in a few hours.”
“yep,” Sans said simply.

“Shall I carry you so you do not tire before then?”

“eh, if it’ll make you happy.”

Toriel sighed as she lifted Sans and placed him on her back. He clung to her almost instinctively.

They kept walking until…

“Hey, it’s Mrs. Toriel and Dr. Sans!”

Levi, Jordan, and MK ran up to them.

“Hey Mrs. Toriel!” MK greeted. “We’re looking for Caroline. Have you seen her?”

“We have not, no,” Toriel said. “We have been looking for Frisk and Dr. Gaster ourselves. Have any of you seen them?”

“No, sorry,” Levi said. “We could look for them and Caroline at the same time!”

“What a wonderful idea!” Toriel said. “Sans, how does that sound to -”

Sans said the letter Z in Aster font.

Toriel rolled her eyes with exasperation and smiled with affection.

“I do believe that is a yes.”

Frisk and Gaster walked around, trying to avoid any big crowds while still attempting to find the rest of their group.

This was quite a task, considering the size of the crowd.

There were Monsters and Humans galore, almost in equal measure. Humans were still the majority, with five of them for every three Monsters in Ebott, but Frisk was certain that they were almost equal in number here tonight.

Frisk could see that things were improving.

It filled them with **DETERMINATION.**

FILE: SAVE

Frisk held onto their grandfather’s bony hand, their fingers in the hole that once held the piece of bone that would become Sans.

They were worried about their family. But it had only been a few hours. They still had time.

They would keep searching.

“Frisk? Is that you?!”
Frisk perked up, seeing Eddie rushing toward them.

Eddie had his face painted with pinks, oranges, blues, and greens. More traditional than Frisk and their friends, but it was still very suitable for him. Frisk waved at him, uncertain as to whether they should sign or stay quiet since they were unsure if Eddie knew sign language.

“Who’s this guy?” Eddie asked, pointing to Gaster.

“I am Dr. WingDings Gaster,” Gaster said. “I am Frisk’s grandfather.”

“Oh, that’s cool!” Eddie said. “Nice to meet you! I’m Eddie Suarez!”

“Likewise, Mr. Suarez!” Gaster said. “You wouldn’t happen to understand American sign language, would you?”

“A little, but not enough to speak with Frisk one-on-one,” Eddie admitted.

“Then I shall be Frisk’s translator,” Gaster decided. “Is that alright with you?”

“Yeah!” Eddie said. “I got separated from Bruce and Nicko, so can you guys help me find ‘em?”
<<We’re looking for our group too!>> Frisk signed. <<We can search together!>>

“Sounds good to me!” Eddie said.

Gaster chuckled. “Alright then. Let us be off!”

Sans, Toriel, Levi, Jordan, and MK walked along their way, relaying stories.

“…and that’s how I found Papyrus inside of a vending machine for the seventh time,” Sans completed.

“I’m suddenly kinda concerned for Mr. Papyrus,” Levi admitted. “He’s dating a robot, and he’s gotten stuck inside of vending machines at least seven times!”

“he’s found himself stuck in a vending machine eleven times,” Sans said. “all of them have been caught on film.”

“I’ve never gotten stuck in a vending machine, but I did crawl into a claw machine,” Jordan admitted. “You know, those claw crane thingies that get you prizes almost never?”

“I know ‘em!” Levi admitted. “How did you get in one of those?!”

“I was two at the time…” Jordan mumbled, scratching behind his head shily.

“Um, excuse me?”

The group looked in the direction the voice was coming from.

A girl of around six feet in height with dyed hot pink hair in a undercut tied back into a ponytail with black lipstick and multiple tattoos and piercings wearing a white tank top with a black leather jacket and torn skinny jeans with combat boots appeared before them. With her was a girl with waist-length
light ash blonde hair and green eyes in a worn Misfits hoodie and cargo pants with flip flops.

The pink-haired girl seemed very worried.

“Have you seen my little brother?” she asked. “He’s about up to my shoulder in height, his face paint is a green skull, he’s got short brown hair and blue eyes? You seen him?”

“We have not, sorry,” Toriel said. “We shall keep an eye out. Should we tell him you asked for him?”

“Yeah, thanks,” the girl said. “Tell him I’ll be over by the pavilion, okay?”

“can do.”

“Okay, thanks. He answers to Bruce, tell him that his sister Leslie is looking for him.”

“gotcha.”

“Oh, thank god…”

“Bruce?” MK piped. “As in Bruce Roberts?”

“Yeah,” Leslie said. “You know ‘im?”

“We go to school with him!” Levi said. “We’ll be able to recognize him no problem!”

“Okay, thank you!” Leslie said.

“Les, c’mon, Sawyer’s waiting,” the blonde girl said.

“Right,” Leslie said. “I’ll see you guys around, then.”

The two groups bid each other goodbye.

“well, now we’re looking for three possible groups of people,” Sans sighed.

Toriel rolled her eyes in exasperation.

Sans instinctively clung to his Mate’s clothing.

Levi, Jordan, and MK smirked at each other as Levi took a picture with his phone and sent it to all in his contacts.

“I say we just meet up with everyone at the pavilion,” Penelope sighed. “It’ll be easier on everyone…”

“I REALLY DO THINK THAT THE ONES WE ARE SEARCHING FOR ARE NEARBY!” Papyrus announced.

“I-I really h-hope so…” Elaina squeaked.
Leslie anxiously gnawed on her thumbnail as Megan texted Sawyer.

“Did you try texting him?” Megan asked.

“Three times,” Leslie said from around her thumb. “No answer yet.”

“Hm.”

Leslie stared at Megan as she put away her phone and took out a different phone that clearly wasn’t hers.

Megan hummed a little tune as she texted someone on the phone that clearly wasn’t hers.

“Still getting back at your sister, huh?” Leslie asked.

“Maybe~” Megan sang.

Leslie sighed.

“Oh come on, Les,” Megan said. “What’s with the sigh?”

“I’m just concerned about what’ll happen to you if it goes too far,” Leslie admitted. “You know how Kim is. Who knows what she’ll do to you?”

“What’s it matter?” Megan shrugged. “Whatever Kim does, it’s all according to plan. I have a different plan for each potential event so that it all gets turned in my favor.”

Leslie sighed.

“I shoulda guessed…”

“You underestimated me,” Megan stated.

“A little, yeah,” Leslie admitted.

“It happens a lot,” Megan assured. “I’m used to it.”

“That’s not a good thing, Megan.”

“But isn’t getting used to it better than letting it define you?”

“Not by much, no.”

“Whatever Les, you do you and I do me, okay?” Megan said evenly. “I’m gonna go through with this no matter what, since the only way my reputation could get any more ruined than it already is is if Courtney used my name and ended up getting knocked up.”

Leslie’s eyes widened in slight horror.

“You really hate your sister, don’t you?” she asked worriedly.

Megan looked offended.

“No, Leslie, what the hell,” she said. “I don’t hate Courtney. I’m doing all this because I can’t think of another way to make her see how fucked up in the head she is! I don’t want her to be an empty shell of a person before she turns sixteen, I want her to be normal! Because she’s the most normal of either of us! She deserves that!”
Leslie simply looked at Megan, dumbfounded.

A sound was heard. Megan took out the phone that actually was hers.

“That’s Sawyer,” Megan said. “They’re waiting by the pavilion entrance closest to Ingram Hall. We should get going.”

Leslie complied blankly.

The drama surrounding her never ceased to amaze her.

A girl with wavy dark brown hair with sideswept bangs and dark blue eyes wearing black leggings, tan suede ankle booties, and a pink cropped off-shoulder sweater sat at a bar texting someone on her phone.

Next to her was a boy with brown hair and eyes in a letterman jacket and jeans with tennis shoes, apparently disinterested in his surroundings.

Then his phone went off.

*I text from: Megan*

*Megan: hey~ where r u? i’m @ dotd festival! hbu?*

*Josh: same! we should meet up!*

*Mg: ok! meet u @ todd hall?*

*Jh: ok. see you then!*

Josh glanced at the brunette out of the corner of his eye.

She was too absorbed in her cell phone.

Perfect.

He stood up and left the bar.

Just as soon as he stood up, the brunette heard his stool squeak and looked up to see him leave.

She sent out a text as she stood up to follow Josh.

Frisk, Gaster, and Eddie walked on the sidewalk as the streets began to be closed off for the parade.

<<So what time’s the parade?>> Frisk signed.

“The parade’s at 9,” Eddie said. “The fun one, anyway. There’s one at 7 for the kids, but it’s dinky and stupid.”

<<They think we’re children, don’t they?>> Frisk signed with a sigh.

“So it would seem, young Frisk,” Gaster sighed. “They underestimate us due to our ages, opposite in extremes though they are. They view us as weak and unintelligent - me in spite of my multiple
“accomplishments, you in spite of your vast potential.’

“Do I have vast potential?” Eddie asked.

“Yes,” Gaster said. “Everyone at every age does. It all comes down to turning that potential energy into kinetic energy.”

Silence.

“That’s deep, man.”

Sans, Toriel, Levi, Jordan, and MK made their way to the pavilion.

“Sans, we’re here,” Toriel said.

Sans hummed and climbed down from her back.

They all looked around for a place to sit, choosing a spot next to a decently-sized bonfire.

“not even the fifth and they already got some bonfires out,” Sans noted. “i’m gonna text Pap and let ‘im know where we’re at.”

“Okay then, I’ll try to call Frisk again,” Toriel said. “If they didn’t forget to charge it before we left, of course…”

“If they find Caroline, she could charge it for them!” Levi said. “Knowing a Wizard with Electricity Magic has its perks…”

“but she still has trouble charging laptops without overheating them, and i don’t think the warranty covers wizards,” Sans stated.

“Extended warranties help absolutely no one except the lawyers involved,” Toriel sighed.

Sans patted her thigh comfortably.

The surface world had really changed in five centuries…

Papyrus led the group of youths among the field of bonfires, trying to find the best one.

“OKAY, THIS ONE IS TOO LARGE…THIS ONE IS TOO SMALL…THERE ARE PEOPLE AT THIS ONE…”

Caroline pointed to the right of where everyone was. “I see London, I see France -”

“Caroline, don’t point -”

“I see Toriel and Sans,” Caroline finished.

Everyone turned.

“FOUND THE PERFECT SPOT!” Papyrus announced, causing many in the vicinity to jump in
surprise.

He led the youths in his charge toward the bonfire where his brother and future sister-in-law were seated, along with Levi, MK, and Jordan.

“I see you’ve found some extras,” Caroline remarked drily. “What did I tell you about running off, Levi?”


“Then let me say something about it now - please don’t or else.”

Silence.

“I LIKE HOW SHE ADDED THE PLEASE!” Papyrus said as he sat down, taking care not to get any dirt or bits of grass on his robe.

The rest of the group sat down as well.

“So what now?” Brian asked.

“NOW WE JUST HAVE TO WAIT FOR DAD AND FRISK!” Papyrus announced.

“Did they answer your texts, Papyrus?” Toriel asked, concerned.

“NO RESPONSE,” Papyrus sighed. He turned to the kids and asked, “DID ANY OF YOU TEXT FRISK?”

“I did, but no response,” Penelope said.

“S-s-same here,” Elaina stammered. “I r-really hope they’re ok-okay…”

“Come on guys, let’s wait a moment,” Hunter assured them all. “It’s barely seven, so let’s wait until around nine or so to go looking for them, okay? Nothing comes out of panicking but mental and physical exhaustion. So I say we calm down and think - maybe they’ll have found us by nine, who knows?”

“she’s got a point,” Sans said. “we’re gonna need to be calm if we’re gonna find frisk. so let’s just chill here until nine, then we get our search on. sound like a plan?”

Sounds of agreement both enthusiastic and reluctant resounded.

“okay then. let’s try and text them again, see if they pick up this time…”

Frisk, Dr. Gaster, and Eddie wandered around the pavilion, seeking their groups.

A tall girl with hot pink hair in an undercut with a ponytail and multiple piercings and tattoos ran up to them.

“Eddie, it’s you!” she gasped, clearly out of breath from running around. “Is Bruce nearby?”

“We got separated,” Eddie sighed. “Frisk, Dr. Gaster, this is Bruce’s sister Leslie.”

“Pleased to meet you, miss!” Gaster said.
“Likewise. Where did you guys get separated?”

“Around 6th and Ammonia,” Eddie admitted.

Leslie whined.

“Anyway, thanks for your help guys,” she said. “C’mon Megan.”

“Megan’s not here,” Eddie said. “It’s just you, Les.”

Leslie turned around.

Her eyes widened.

“She wouldn’t.”

“Wouldn’t what?” Eddie asked.

Leslie shook her head and ran her fingers through her hair.

“Thanks for the help guys, I got an idea of where they could be,” she said, turning to leave. “See ya, Eddie.”

“Later Leslie!” Eddie called back while waving.

After Leslie was out of sight, Eddie stopped waving.

“Come on, let’s keep looking for everyone by the bonfires!” Eddie said. “That’s where all the performers do their thing!”

“Then they must be by the bonfires!” Gaster reasoned. “Thank you, Mr. Suarez!”

“It’s Eddie.”

Megan leaned against a pillar and stuffed her hands into her hoodie pockets.

She spotted Josh leaning on the pillar across from her.

She smirked inwardly as she strolled up to him, affecting an air of sugary sweetness the likes of which made her want to vomit.

“Heyyy, Josh~” she sang.

Josh turned to look at Megan, his face utterly confused.

“Who the hell are you?” he asked.

“Oh puh-lease, don’t pretend like you don’t know me!”

“I’m not pretending, I really don’t know you!” Josh said, seeming perturbed.

“But aren’t you looking for me?” Megan asked sweetly. “You know, Megan? Megan Day?”

“You’re not Megan!” Josh spat accusingly. “Megan is shorter and hotter!”
“Joooooosh!”

Josh suddenly looked terrified.

He and Megan turned to see the source of the furious shrieks, the brunette in the pink crop top.

Megan was horribly tempted to take the charade beyond what was planned, but she stuck to the original plan.

“You seriously ditched me on a date to screw some fugly emo chick?!” Kim gritted. “I can’t believe you!”

Megan cleared her throat and held up the phone that wasn’t hers. On the screen was a picture of Josh making out with Courtney.

“Is this who you were waiting for?” Megan asked.

Josh was caught, and he knew it. He nodded.

“Josh Landry, you had sex with my twelve-year-old sister Courtney,” Megan explained. “In other words, you had sexual relations with a minor. You can claim you didn’t know all you want, but the fact remains. You fucked my kid sister. Hope you’re proud of yourself.”

Kim just stared at Josh, wide-eyes and mouth agape.

Josh was trembling, almost in tears. “B-bu-b-but, she-she didn’t look like -”

“Save it, Landry,” Megan sighed. “I’m deleting your contact from my sister’s phone. I’ll be reciting a few names, and I want you to answer me honestly if you know them. If you lie, I’ll be calling the police on you here and now.”

Kim just stood there, unsure what to say or do.

“The first name on the list is Finley Baker,” Megan read. “Know him?”

“No,” Josh said.

“How about Duncan Bennett?”

“No.”

“Malachi Duke?”

A pause.

“N-no…”

“Malachi Duke is on the football team with him.”

Megan and Josh looked at Kim.

Kim’s arms were crossed, her eyes narrowed. She chewed on her lower lip.

“Finley Baker is in my geometry class, too,” Kim continued.

Josh was stunned.
Megan continued listing names.

“Zak Fisher?”

“Baseball team, in my English class,” Kim said.

“Shaun Gould?”

“Football team.”

“Nathan Horn?”

Megan listed off seven more names before she was finished.

“Alright then,” she sighed. “I already know the other ones. Sawyer’s sister’s in on this too - all of North Middle is.”

“I’ll help in any way I can,” Kim said. “I have a younger sister myself at West Middle, and if she ended up in the same situation as yours, god knows what I’d do…”

“Glad to have more help!” Megan said with a smile. “You don’t even know the other half of the story though.”

Kim tilted her head and put a hand on her hip.

“Do tell,” she said.

Megan smiled mysteriously.

“I hope you don’t have a curfew, because this could take a bit.”

Papyrus and his family and friends sat around the bonfire.

“So what do humans do around bonfires?” he asked.

“Make ’em bigger,” Brian said.

“That can be arranged,” Caroline said, Electricity Magic crackling around her hands.

“Caroline, no,” Toriel chastised. “There are too many people nearby, most of them Human.”

“Oh, okay,” Caroline whined. “Stupid people…”

“For once I agree,” Brian said. “I wanted to see the fire explode into bigerness!”

“That’s not even a word,” Hannah said.

“Okay, when did you get sassy?” Brian asked, his eyes narrowing at the second grader.

“I wasn’t being sassy, was I?” Hannah asked.

“I didn’t think so,” Caroline said. “But then again, I’m not the best person to turn to when it comes to people skills.”
“You were being a little sassy, Hanners,” Hunter admitted.

“Oh, okay,” Hannah said. “Sorry…”

“Should we not have Flowey around when she’s over?” Toriel asked.

“No!” Hannah said. “I like Flowey! He’s nice!”

Everyone stared at Hannah.

“you sure she ain’t yours, papyrus?” Sans asked.

Papyrus blinked and shook his head.

“SORRY, I WASN’T PAYING ATTENTION!” Papyrus admitted sheepishly. “I THOUGHT I SAW FRISK AND DAD JUST OVER THERE!”

Papyrus pointed in a direction.

Everyone looked in said direction.

“huh,” Sans remarked. “so you did.”

“FRISK ETERNAL DREEMURR!” Toriel called. “GET YOUR BUTT OVER HERE NOW!”

Frisk turned toward their mother, red eyes wide.

“Oh mierde,” Eddie chuckled nervously. “Tengo que ir…”

He ran before being stopped by a hand on the scruff of his neck.

“Oh no lo hagas,” Gaster said. “You’re waiting with us, Mr. Suarez.”

“Es Eddie…” the boy pouted as the Skeleton dragged him along.

Frisk ran up to Toriel and hugged her tightly, then letting go and hugging Sans in turn.

They released their father and started signing.

<<My phone lost power because I forgot to charge it before we left,>> they said. <<I’m sorry…>>

“Oh, my child,” Toriel cooed as she cradled Frisk in her arms, “we can deal with that later. Right now, I’m just happy you’re safe…”

“maybe getting dad a cell phone’s a good idea,” Sans said. “what say you, papyrus?”

“I THINK THAT IS A GREAT IDEA!” Papyrus said excitedly. “THAT WAY WE CAN CALL HIM WHENEVER WE WANT TO!”

“Okay, what do we do now?” Brian asked impatiently.

“wait ‘til we’re on to perform,” Sans said.

Leslie sat on a bench in front of a wall, atop which sat Sawyer, who chewed on their thumbnail
impatiently.

“You don’t think she fucked up and Josh or Kim or both of ‘em snapped and killed her, do ya?” Leslie asked.

“Josh probably would, Kim would scream for a bit and then give her a chance to explain herself,” Sawyer said. “It all really comes down to whether or not Kim believes her.”

“And do you think she will?”

“With Josh’s dating history she’d be a complete idiot not to.”

“Any idea why they were dating in the first place?” Leslie asked.

“Kim’s dad is the coach of the Ebott U football team,” Sawyer explained. “Need I say more?”

“Nope.”

“Alrighty then.”

Sawyer sighed. They squinted and looked around for Megan’s ash blonde hair and worn-out hoodie once more.

They spotted them.

They took out their phone.

*Sawyer: u ok meg?

*Megan: Yep! All good - even better than expected, actually!

*Sw: explain.

*Mg: I’ll be over in 10, don’t worry your cute bubbly butt ;p

Sawyer slipped and nearly fell from the wall in shock - thankfully they stopped themselves by clinging to the top by an arm and a leg.

They were even more grateful for the fact that their face was toward the wall. Their face was red as sin.

Sawyer hoisted themselves back up on the walltop with a grunt.

“Wha-pah,” Leslie said with a smirk.

“Shove it, Pinkie Pie…”

“Okay, how much longer until the big performance thingie you two are doing?” Brian asked.

“half an hour,” Sans replied breezily.

“Oh yeah, my brother Luis and his girlfriend Yvette are on after you guys!” Eddie said.

“Cool, what’ll they be doing?” Hunter asked.
“Music,” Eddie answered. “It runs in my family.”

“Ah, one of those ‘in the blood’ traits that one could just as easily consider a product of one’s environment,” Caroline noted. “Like reading and writing in my family or scientific endeavors in the Gaster family.”

“You notice weird stuff,” Brian said.

“And you state the obvious,” Caroline retorted.

“So should we go get ready?” Papyrus asked. “Half an hour is not a very long time, after all!”

“Eh, gimme fifteen minutes and a churro and I’ll think about it,” Sans yawned.

Papyrus narrowed his eye sockets before grabbing Sans by his hood and carrying him.

“I shall return him to you in one hour, Toriel,” Papyrus deadpanned.

Toriel giggled. “I know you will, Papyrus!”

Papyrus nodded and walked away.

Everyone sat in silence.

Hunter fidgeted a little.

Brian noticed.

“You okay there?” he asked.

Hunter looked up at him and smiled.

“Yeah, just getting a bit antsy. I’m sure that my mom would kill me if she knew I was here…”

“Hey, you know what we always say about that,” Brian chided.

“That she’d kill me even if I didn’t?” Hunter deadpanned.

“Dang right,” Brian said with a smile. “Now chin up and enjoy the fiesta, okay señorita?”

Hunter blushed and sputtered a bit before nodding.

Brian snickered a bit.

Kim’s eyes were wide, her hands covering her mouth as she trembled.

Josh’s arms crossed over his chest, his face angry.

Megan’s face was blank, almost dead, her lips pursed and eyes lidded.

“Oh my god…” Kim whispered.

“Our parents don’t even know,” Megan monotoned. “And if they do they don’t care. It’s not like
they can do jack shit about it anyway since it’s not in our state’s jurisdiction…”

“Oh come on!” Josh snapped. “It’s obvious she’s lying to get attention!”

Kim slapped Josh.

“Stop trying to act like you’re any better, you bastard!” she growled. “I trusted you - hell, I was considering going to college with you, but I guess you’re just another asskisser trying to get in with my dad, huh?!”

Josh lunged at her, only to be easily restrained by Sawyer and Leslie.

“This just one of many reasons why I’m gay,” Leslie sighed.

“Fucking let go of me you fucking psychos!” Josh screamed.

“No,” Sawyer deadpanned as they punched some numbers into their phone then held it up to their ear.

“The fuck are you doing?!” Josh screamed.

“Yeah, I got a belligerent here,” Sawyer said into the phone. “I also got proof that he sexually assaulted a minor.”

“I DIDN’T FUCKING KNOW SHE WAS TWELVE! SHE LOOKED FIFTEEN!”

“Yeah, we’re at the pavilion by Ingram Hall, I’m restraining the guy,” Sawyer continued calmly. “Yeah, I got help. Okay, thanks. Bye.”

Sawyer pocketed their phone once more. “Popo’s on the way, Mr. Pedobear sir,” they said. “Maybe that’ll teach ya to keep it in your pants.”

“You SHUT THE FUCK UP FAGGOT!” Josh screamed. “HANGING AROUND GIRLS ALL THE TIME AND NOT TRYING TO BANG ‘EM AND SHIT!”

“How can I be gay if I don’t even have a gender?” Sawyer countered.

Someone cleared their throat.

A police officer, a man with dark kinky-curly hair and eyes who clearly did not want to be here, showed up.

He took out his badge.

“Trayvon Martin, Ebott PD, what seems to be the problem here?”

“The guy being restrained just tried to assault me because I broke up with him,” Kim said.

The officer sighed. “I also heard someone sexually assaulted a minor?”

“Yep,” Megan said, brandishing Courtney’s cell phone with the picture of Courtney and Josh making out. “This is my twelve-year-old sister.”

The officer squinted at the image and sighed.

“Well then, hand him over,” he sighed. “Good luck graduating high school with that on your
resume.”

Trayvon cuffed Josh and led him away.

Josh glared at Sawyer and Megan before he and the officer rounded the corner.

“He’s gonna try to get revenge isn’t he?” Sawyer sighed.

“Yep,” Megan replied easily. “That’s road block number one on Operation: SCAR taken down. A few more steps until we reach the next one…”

“And when’s that gonna be, d’ya think?” Leslie asked.

“Sometime between late April or mid May at the current rate, give or take a week or two,” Megan calculated.

“What about the boys involved?” Leslie asked. “Your sister’s not the only one caught up in this, you know.”

“That depends on how they take it,” Megan explained. “If they react anything like Josh did just now, there’s gonna be a lot more situations like this in the future.”

“You think he’s gonna sell out the other guys you mentioned?” Kim asked, her voice low.

“I’d say there’s about a one-in-seven chance of that happening,” Megan said. “I’m sorry you had to get involved like this, Kim - I really wish it had gone better…”

“No, i-it’s not your fault he snapped like he did!” Kim reassured. “It’s probably my fault anyway. I didn’t want to sleep with him when he asked since I’m saving myself, and I thought he was okay with that since he never brought it up after that…”

“Hey, you didn’t know what was going on,” Leslie insisted. “And good for you for keeping your Integrity.”

Kim gave a wobbly smile as a few tears escaped her eyes.

“I-I’m gonna text everyone to tell them what happened,” she said as she wiped her eyes with her sleeve and used the other hand to take her phone out of her pocket. “I’m not gonna name anyone, but you’ll be exonerated, Megan.”

“WOO!” Sawyer cheered, pumping a fist in the air.

“What did you even do to get hated, anyway?” Kim asked.

“Back in sixth grade, Kayla Walkins had a crush on a guy who had a crush on me,” Megan said with a shrug. “Girl’s petty as shit.”

“Huh,” Kim remarked. “Interesting. Thanks for letting me know.”

“No problem,” Megan dismissed. “See ya around?”

“See you tomorrow!” Kim said with a smile as she turned around and walked off.

Megan sighed and stared up at the night sky, smoke and marigold perals billowing in the breeze.

She grabbed onto Sawyer’s hand.
It had been a long day.

The group of Monsters and Humans minus three Skeletons sat together around the bonfire, waiting for the performance to begin.

“So does anyone know what they’ll be doing?” Colleen asked.

“I haven’t the slightest idea,” Toriel admitted. “I have never seen them practicing, and the few Day of the Dead performances I have watched in the past were all drastically different…”

“How were they similar?” Caroline asked.

“Magic was involved and they all wore the robes,” Toriel replied.

“And the differences?” Carolien asked again, having taken out a notebook.

“Where did you even get that?” Brian asked.

“Unimportant, now how were all the performances different?” Caroline urged eagerly.

“In every other way possible,” Toriel said.

Caroline scrawled something into the notebook. “I’m gonna need specifics here.”

“Hey, they’re on!” Hunter announced.

The three Skeletons stood on the stage, the eyes of countless Monsters and Humans upon them.

Their eyes began to glow in the colors of their Magic.

Glowing Bones flying everywhere.

Gaster Blasters shooting colorful fireworks.

All while the Skeletons starting the scene stood stock still, their arms out before them with palms outward, glowing and sparking with their Magic.

The Blasters blasted fireworks of Cyan, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, White, and Purple.

Then a Black firework appeared.

Not black, Black.

It joined the other Magics with astonishing ease, swirling while the others sparked, like a rainbow in the dark.

The audience, both Monster and Human, were awed. Somehow, they instinctively knew that what they were watching was something centuries in the making.

It was history.
It was a new future.

Then the Skeletons raised their arms high above their heads. Their robes billowed behind them as though a gust of wind was blowing.

The Blasters and Bones spun around and rose into the air, the Magics swirling with them.

The Skeletons clapped once.

The Blasters and Bones exploded as one like a firework, the Magic rumbling and sparking and crackling and whistling and booming in the air above.

Then all was silent and dark.

All were stunned.

The Skeletons, despite lacking the parts that required them to do so to survive, gasped for air.

The audience broke into applause.

The Skeletons joined hands and bowed before leaving the stage.

“Who wants to bet that the HWC is gonna twist that performance into propaganda?” Caroline asked.

“Come on, Caroline, don’t be so negative!” Levi chided. “Save it for tomorrow when everyone else will be negative because of Monday!”

Caroline grabbed at her left shoulder with her right hand and exhaled sharply. She bounced her leg and worried her lip anxiously.

“Caroline, it will be alright,” Toriel reassured her calmly. “Should such an event come to pass, we have methods of clearing up any misunderstandings that may arise.”

“I don’t doubt that,” Caroline said. “What I’m worried about is that…”

Caroline inhaled sharply and shakily.

“I dunno, I’m just worried. It was an amazing display of Magic, but there are those who will deconstruct that wondrousness and twist it into something it’s not. I’m worried about what might come of that, I suppose.”

Toriel hummed. “You raise a valid point,” she admitted. “There are those who will search for flaws where there are none in order to further their own agendas - but Levi is correct when he says not to worry about it for now.”

Caroline hummed.

All were quiet.

“Caroline, couldja turn the lights back on?” Colleen asked.

The lights returned.

“Thanks.”
“hey hey everyone, guess who’s back?” Sans announced.

“How did we do?” Papyrus asked excitedly.

“That was AWESOME!” Levi cheered. “I even got it on video!”

“Explosions make everything better,” Brian said with a satisfied smile as he crossed his arms.

“That’s because you’re a…” Hunter began. “Caroline, what’s the word I’m looking for, someone who has a fire addiction?”

“Pyromaniac?” Caroline offered.

“Yeah, that.”

“The term usually applies to people who have a compulsion to set fires for some reason though,” Caroline explained.

“You know weird stuff,” MK noted.

“I know, isn’t it awesome?” Penelope sighed.

“Hey, Luis is on!” Eddie announced.

On the platform was an older teen male with chin-length black hair and brown eyes with a black calavera tee and cargo shorts with an electric blue Fender Stratocaster guitar next to a stocky girl nearly half his height with waist-length brown hair and eyes in an aqua dress with a crown of aqua-colored roses.

“So that’s Yvette,” Eddie mumbled.

“She’s shorter than Sans…”

“She’s the same height as Kristina, looks like,” Caroline notes. “That’d be about a full foot shorter than Sans…”

“Shorter than me?” Sans repeated. “That’s a real accomplishment…”

Then the music started.

Luis fingered the strings and frets, the music from the instrument in his hands filling the air with a sort of buzzing energy.

Then he began to sing.

“Like a gift from the heavens it was easy to tell~ It was love from above that could save me from hell~ She had fire in her soul it was easy to see~ How the devil himself could be pulled outta me~”

Sans suddenly stood, holding his hand out to Toriel in offering.

“Care to dance, mamasita?” he asked sultrily.

“There were drums in the air as she started to dance~ Every soul in the room keeping time with their hands~”

Toriel smirked and bit her lip, taking his hand and allowing herself to be pulled up.
“And we sang ay oh ay oh ay oh ay~ And the voices rang like the angels sing~ We’re singing ay oh ay oh ay oh ay~ And we danced on into the night~”

The pair danced, moving as though they were water in a stream, or a silken banner in the breeze, or some other simile describing their gracefulness.

And indeed, as the song stated, everyone around them was clapping in time with the music. They ones who weren’t were filming the experience or were themselves dancing to the music.

Elaina tapped his foot to the music, watching with amazement as Sans and Toriel danced to the music with ease, focused on nothing but each other.

He wondered if he would find someone like that someday, then he disregarded it. Why would anyone in their right mind love him, anyway? Irma often had to remind him that he was lucky to even be alive.

He sighed and stared up at the sky.

The smoke from the bonfires obscured the stars.

Sawyer sat atop the wall, their legs crossed and their eyes on the dancing audience. They weren’t much for dancing - they weren’t much for athletics in particular. Chess club existed for a reason, and that reason was to weed out the people who would succeed in life and separate them from the jocks.

They looked to their right, where Megan sat texting the boys in Courtney’s contacts.

Sawyer sighed. Megan’s work was never done, it seemed…

Then Megan leaned against them, hugging their bicep.

“Thanks for everything,” she said. “You’ve stuck by me all this time even when I was being bullied and when Courtney started acting out and all…”

“Why wouldn’t I?” Sawyer asked. “We’re besties, aren’t we?”

Megan looked up at them and smiled.

She kissed them on the cheek.

Sawyer blushed heavier than they ever had before, they were certain.

Megan snickered a bit and leaned into Sawyer’s shoulder.

The group was walking back to their vehicles, tired from the wild night they’d had.

Jordan and Levi hung back silently, taking in the last of the sights and sounds.

They were filled with tension.

Levi had always been the type to think for maybe five seconds before making a decision of any kind,
ten if the decision was serious.

So ten seconds of thought led him to make the decision that he would tell Jordan how he really felt about him.

But the question lie in the timing - when was the right time, if any?

It turned out he didn’t have to think hard on that one.

“Levi,” Jordan said quietly, “can I tell you something?”

“Sure?” Levi said, slightly unsure.

After a brief silence, Jordan took a deep breath and spoke.

“I’m gay,” Jordan whispered.

Levi suddenly felt a huge weight he didn’t know was there leave his shoulders.

But something felt off.

“There’s more,” Levi stated.

Jordan stopped short, Levi pausing alongside him.

“I…like you…” Jordan whispered.

Levi paused, unsure if he heard right.

He ran Jordan’s statement through his head a few more times to make sure he heard right.

He had.

Levi smiled widely and hugged Jordan.

Jordan let out a sob and returned the hug.

?

It was late - almost midnight, in fact.

Sans and Toriel sat in the basement, making certain that the door and windows were locked.

Toriel was somewhat anxious due to all the preventive measure, especially since she trusted Sans’ judgement.

They sat on the ratty old foldout couch, silent.

“So,” Toriel began cautiously, “why do you wish to know if the doctor had any enemies?”

“because the incident at the core all these years ago was no accident,” Sans said darkly. “dad knew, from the moment we walked in, that someone had gotten in and changed everything around in such a way that switching on the machine overloaded the magic powering the core, causing it to rapidly overheat and shut down. not just anyone can do that, so it had to be someone at the lab.”

Toriel sighed.
“Of your father’s enemies that are known to me, I know of three still living, and only one of them worked at the labs with him,” she explained.

“and that would be?”

“A Stone Elemental, Diaspro Nil,” Toriel said. “He’d always attempted to undermine your father’s work for reasons unknown to me. The only ones who could possibly know of a reason, granted there are any, are your father and perhaps Asgore.”

Sans was silent.

He had to make some room in his schedule to drop by Asgore’s at some point.

The festivities have filled you with

**DETERMINATION**

Chapter End Notes

Into The Night - Santana ft. Chad Kroeger

Fun Fact: As of this past week, Irma’s name has increased in accuracy. Please keep the victims of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma in your thoughts, and we sincerely hope that our readers in the affected areas are safe.
A Horse With No Name

Chapter Summary

Dr. Carlson creeps, Linda offends, Sans skulks, and Theo self-loathes.

Also, we finally get a look in on the HWC.

Chapter Notes

*sees the date*

*realizes that two months have passed*

Kill us.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

8:45 A.M., November 4, 20XR

It’s a cold day outside.

Wind is blowing.

Leaves are crunching underfoot.

On days like this, kids like you…

…are in math class.

Frisk was almost finished with their worksheet - Caroline helping them with their homework was a great help in more ways than one.

Which is not to say that they actually like math now. They still hate math with a burning passion. They were simply better able to get it over with as soon as possible so as to move on to better things, like their next class or something.

Or watching other people interact. People watching was great fun as well, so long as there weren’t too many people around.

Frisk finished the final problem - correctly or not was of little consequence to them in that moment - and turned it in to Mrs. Bell before sitting down once more.

They looked around.
Ridley was listening to her music, laying her head on her desk. Frisk made a mental note to themself to wake her when class ended.

Miranda was not next to Brian - she hadn’t sat near him since he publicly rejected her. Frisk wondered if this was a good thing or not. At least she wasn’t sitting by Alicia - that would have been a very bad sign for everyone.

Brian was still working - Frisk could tell that he was farther along than usual. Why Caroline didn’t want to be a teacher was beyond them.

But that was of no matter in this moment. Frisk was bored.

Then MK returned from turning in their work and sat down next to Frisk.

Frisk smiled at them.

Suddenly they were a lot less bored.

Elaina cringed as the final note of the piece was completely ruined by one of the trumpeters.

Ms. V glared at the source of the sour note.

“Foley, why,” she said flatly.

Scott shrugged.

Ms. V sighed. “Anymore of that and you’re on fourth chair, understand?”

“Whatever,” Scott sighed dismissively.

Ms. V glanced at the clock on the wall. “Okay, ten more minutes left until the bell, feel free to do whatever as long as you’re quiet.”

And with that Ms. V went to her desk and fell asleep.

Sarah laid down her cello case and contorted her body so that she fit comfortably inside. Jenson took a picture of the sight and sent it to the Cello Squad before sitting down next to his girlfriend.

Then one of the saxophonists, a Raccoon Monster named Cooper Stallone, walked up to them and began playing Careless Whisper.

Jenson, Elaina, and Chloe stared at Cooper until he finished.

They applauded.

Cooper held out a paw.

“That’ll be twenty-five cents,” he said.

“I’m poor,” Jenson said.

“I-I only have five dollars,” Elaina admitted.

“I have some glitter pens,” Chloe said.

“Any of those glitter pens orange?” Cooper asked.
Chloe dug around in her backpack and got out her pencil case. She rummaged through it and got out an orange pen and a yellow pen, placing them in Cooper’s outstretched hand.

“Keep it, I’m not a fan of yellow anyway,” Chloe said. “Consider it extra.”

Cooper smiled and saluted, walking away with his saxophone around his neck while staring at his new pens.

He turned around and flashed Chloe a brief smile.

Chloe smiled a bit.

Jenson snickered at the sight.

Chloe blew a raspberry at him.

Sarah continued to sleep in her cello case.

Elaina plucked a tune on the strings of their cello, lost in thought.

Kristina, Caroline, and Hunter sat next to each other, working on their worksheets.

“The ancient Egyptians made paper out of what?” Hunter read aloud.

“Papyrus,” Caroline answered. “Papyrus is the name of the paper, the reed-like plant whose pith the paper is made out of, and the boyfriend of Mettaton. The plural form of the word is papyri, and the word paper is actually based on the word papyrus.”

Hunter, Kristina, and most of the other students who had heard were stunned into silence.

“I-I don’t think the space is big enough to write all that in it,” Kristina said. “I’ll just write down papyrus and be done.”

“Okay then,” Caroline said with a shrug.

“Put it in all capitals,” Hunter requested.

Kristina blinked and shrugged, complying.

She passed the paper to Hunter.

“Okay,” Caroline said. “Who was the Egyptian god of death, Kristina?”

Kristina wracked her brain for an answer as Hunter tapped the table with her pencil and Caroline chewed her lip impatiently.

“Osiris?” Kristina asked.

“Correct,” Caroline said. “Osiris is also the god of the afterlife, and rebirth and transitions.”

Hunter wrote down as much as she could fit in the space, though she had to condense it significantly.

“That was the final question,” she said. “Let’s turn this baby in!”

Kristina pumped a fist. Caroline gave a thumbs up.
Hunter went up to the basket to turn in the paper when she noticed Trav eyeing her. She felt uncomfortable. She put the paper in the basket facedown and walked back to the table slowly, keeping her eyes on Trav all the while to make sure he didn’t try anything. She sat down in her seat. “I think Trav is gonna try to steal our paper,” she told her groupmates. “No dip,” Caroline said. “That’s why I put a little note on the very bottom before we started.” Hunter’s eyes widened. “Oh no, what does it say?” she whimpered. “Nothing bad if that’s what you’re getting at,” Caroline said. “Just a warning to Mr. Roosevelt, y’know?” Hunter crossed her arms and glared skeptically at Caroline. Caroline copied the glare. The bell rang. “Alright,” Caroline announced. “You ready to sing, princess?” Hunter smiled. “Dang right I am!” she said confidently. “See ya in math, Kristina!” “And I shall see you in drama,” Caroline said. Kristina waved at them before running off to her next class.

Sans sat at the desk in his classroom, awaiting the students of his Physics II class. Today was going to end up extending to lab since they would be discussing the upcoming final exam on Thursday. He turned on the overhead projector to test it out. It was a bit off-center. Sans used his Blue Magic to adjust the projector until it was as correct as the thing could be. Once he’d gotten it, he opened up the lecture powerpoint slides and checked his email. He scanned the thing and found nothing of note. He deleted the ones that he was certain were unimportant and closed out of his email just as the first student walked in. Ten minutes early. “tom, hey,” Sans greeted. “need me for anythin’?”
“I saw the performance you did Sunday night at the Day of the Dead festival,” Tom replied. “People loved it!”

“So I’ve heard,” Sans said easily. “But we can’t get complacent. One of Frisk’s friends mentioned being worried about how the HWC is gonna react, if they react at all.”

“Alexis was thinking the same thing,” Tom said as he sat down in his usual spot. “They thought the performance was incredible, but dangerous to the cause…”

“I see where they’re coming from,” Sans sighed. “This could potentially help and hurt the cause by showing what monsters - at least skeleton monsters - are capable of.”

“Yeah…” Tom muttered. “Maybe we could use it to our advantage…”

“We could,” Sans noted. “We’ll just have to figure out how.”

“Good point.”

“Heyyy, Dr. Sans~”

Tom’s Cat Monster girlfriend Rose entered the classroom, along with a few other students.

“Good morning, Rose,” Sans greeted. “You ready for some circuitry?”

“I’m never ready,” Rose admitted. “But I ran into Dr. Carlson from stats on my way in, and I think he was headed this way!”

Sans groaned.

“Thanks Rose,” he grumbled. “I dunno what the guy’s got against me, but it’s huge.”

“You mentioned your dad had an enemy back in the day,” Tom said. “Maybe the torch of gaining enemies who would kill you has been passed down?”

“I sure as hell hope that’s not hereditary,” Sans said. “Two people willing to kill me is enough, and if I’m gonna die it’s gonna be on my terms.”

“Who’s the other one?” Rose asked.

“Frisk’s pet flower, long story there.”

“I thought you were gonna say Linda Thompson,” Tom said.

“Nah, if she wants to kill me I need proof,” Sans said. “And at this point in time I got nothin’.”

There was a knock at the door.

“I’ll get it,” Sans sighed. “It can only be two people, and since my fiancee’s at work…”

Sans got up and walked to the door.

He opened it to find Dr. Carlson.

“Dr. Gaster,” Dr. Carlson said tersely. “I hope you don’t mind if I sit in on your class for the first half hour?”

“Not at all,” Sans said breezily. “Class starts in about five minutes, so have a seat wherever until then.”
and please, call me dr. sans. dr. gaster’s my father.”

Dr. Carlson twitched one of the corners of his mouth in barely-concealed disdain as he stood in the back of the class, like a bird of prey waiting for the kill.

“So you got a PTA meeting this afternoon, don’tcha?” Rose asked.

“nah, those’re at the end of the month now that frisk’s moved up.” Sans said. “and let me tell you, middle school kids are bad enough, but their parents are terrifying.”

“I’ll have you know, Dr. Gaster, that I have a son at West Middle School,” Dr. Carlson sneered. “Are you insinuating that my son is bad?”

“well, first off, i didn’t know you had a family,” Sans said. “but that’s not what i said at all. i was talking about middle schoolers in general, not any one in particular.”

Dr. Carlson narrowed his eyes and said nothing.

“okay then, it’s 9:15, let’s begin,” Sans said. “thursday’s class will be a half hour since we’ll be covering the exam, so lab has been moved to today just in case you didn’t get my email.”

Some students wrote down the information.

“and if you’ll turn to the back of the classroom, you’ll see we have a guest skull-king on our lesson,” Sans said, to the titters and groans of most of his students. “say hello to dr. carlson, the stats professor.”

The students mumbled greetings uncomfortably.

“i know this is unexpected, but i didn’t get any more advance notice than you all did,” Sans said. “anyway, today we’re covering current and ohm’s law…”

Linda put the tuna noodle casserole in the oven and set the timer for one hour. Sure, the recipe said to cook it for 45 minutes, but Linda had time to spare, and she wasn’t going to risk undercooked food.

She reached for the phone and called Helen.

Helen picked up after the phone rang four times.

“Yes, Linda, I am going to the meeting and David isn't feeling up to it so he’s staying home,” Helen shot out.

Linda blinked in surprise. “Okay, no need to yell!” she said. “I was just calling to check in on you, but I guess you don’t really care…”

Helen sighed loudly on the other end. “I get it Linda, I’m just trying to clean the kitchen over here so I can cook.”


“Because I felt like it?” Helen said. “It’s not as if you’re the only one allowed to cook for functions, right?”

“Well, no, but -”
“Then relax, Linda. You don’t have to do everything. Just take a backseat for a bit and do something you want to do for once.”

Linda paused.

“Well, I gotta hang up,” Helen said. “David should be up in a bit and he’ll yell at me if he sees me on the phone.”

Linda was confused. “Why would he do that?”


“Wait, Helen -”

Busy signal.

Linda was utterly confused. But whatever. She had better things to do.

Theo walked into French class and sat down. Today was off to a bad start and it was barely second period since Matt was absent again and Courtney wasn’t speaking to him.

Worst. Year. Ever.

He took his seat and waited patiently for class to begin.

The bell didn’t even have to ring before Theo heard the students whispering.

He already knew what the whispering was about. Everyone knew he’d managed to get himself arrested over the weekend.

He deserved their scorn.

But now wasn’t the time for self-pity.

He had some French future tense to learn.

Hannah scrawled the last of the answers to the math problems on her paper, hopeful that the answers were as correct as she thought they were.

She stood up to turn her paper in and looked around.

Kyle and Grex had already completed their papers, and Shashi and Bruno were still working.

Hannah turned in her paper and managed to catch something out of the corner of her eye.

Holly and Chelsea were looking at the papers of their groupmates.

Hannah glanced at Mr. Guthrie, then back to Chelsea and Holly before turning to speak to her teacher.

“Yes, Hannah?” he asked.

“Um, I don’t want to snitch, but I think Holly and Chelsea are cheating,” Hannah said as quietly as she could.
Mr. Guthrie sighed. “Have a seat, I’ll handle it.”

Hannah did as she was told.

“Holly, Chelsea?” Mr. Guthrie announced from directly behind them. “What you’re doing looks a lot like a little thing called cheating. Did you know that that could send your sticks directly into the yellow can?”

Holly and Chelsea looked guilty.

“And that goes for everyone,” Mr. Guthrie continued. “Cheating is an automatic yellow, understood?”

“Yes Mr. Guthrie,” the students said in unison.

“Good. Chelsea, Holly, I’ll do you both a solid and put your sticks in the blue can for you since this is the first time I’ve ever caught someone cheating in my class. I hope you two don’t mind staying in for recess to redo the worksheet on your own, do you?”

“No, sir,” the girls said in unison.

“Okay then. Continue on with your work everyone. And if you’re having trouble, ask me and don’t cheat off your groupmates, mmkay?”

Mr. Guthrie returned to his desk and sat down with a sigh, rubbing his temples.

Hannah felt a bit proud.

Justice, in small ways, shall prevail.

“Okay, students!” Mrs. Caton announced just after the bell rang for class to start. “Starting today, we will be practicing for the Christmas Concert!”

Most of the students cheered.

A Human girl with wavy flaxen blonde hair down to her waist held back by a sparkly blue headband and light blue eyes raised her hand.

“Yes, Rachel?” Mrs. Caton sighed.

“Will there be a solo part?” Rachel asked. “Because if there is, I want it.”

“No, Rachel, there are no solos in the Christmas Concert,” Mrs. Caton sighed. “I’ve told you and your mother and your grandmother many times already that the only solo parts are in the Spring Concert.”

“Well I thought maybe you’d changed your mind since last time I asked!” Rachel defended.

“You asked me twice already this morning,” Mrs. Caton deadpanned. “Now I’ll be passing around the packets with the songs you will be performing, we’ll be going over the chorus parts first.”

As the packets were passed around, Rachel made a show of grumbling loudly and gripping the stack of packets so hard they crumpled somewhat.

“Rachel, keep that up and you won’t be in the concert at all,” Mrs. Caton warned.
Rachel decided to spend the rest of the class glaring at Mrs. Caton, who was clearly very skilled at ignoring her after decades of teaching other prima donnas-in-training.

Caroline and Hunter glanced at each other and shared a cringe.

“Okay, the first song we will be learning is the soprano-mezzo-alto piece, Sleigh Ride,” Mrs. Caton announced. “Remember that this is in three-part harmony, so read carefully. Ready? One, two, one two three.”

The group began to sing.

The sound of a mezzo attempting the soprano part rang out and cracked slightly.

“RACHEL!” Mrs. Caton screamed. “You are a mezzo, not a soprano.”

“But I was a soprano last year, so -”


“But I don’t wanna!” Rachel whined.

“If you won’t sing in mezzo, you won’t sing at all,” Mrs. Caton warned. “I will not tolerate grandstanding during ensemble pieces, do you understand?”

Rachel said nothing, opting instead to glare at Mrs. Caton once more.

Mrs. Caton once again skillfully ignored Rachel as she led the choir.

She had better things to do.

Megan walked into her third period AP Biology class and sat in her usual seat next to where Sawyer would always sit.

She picked at a hangnail as she waited for them to arrive.

Then a pair of manicured hands and a blast of perfume appeared before her. Megan looked up to find a very angry Human girl with pin-straight dark auburn hair and brown eyes in black skater skirt, a purple long-sleeved v-neck shirt revealing some cleavage, and black thigh-high boots, as well as lip gloss in a shade of fuchsia that clashed with her outfit but went well with her skintone.

Megan returned to her hangnail.

“Hi, Kayla,” she said dully. “Don’t you have geometry this period?”

“Don’t play dumb with me, Day!” Kayla snapped. “You know exactly why I’m here!”

“Mr. Cottingham’s not here yet, and he’s dating Ms. Barnett,” Megan deadpanned. “But if that’s not it, then stop beating around the bush and say it.”

Kayla dug her nails in the table’s surface and gritted her teeth.

“You told Kim Drayden about Andy,” she hissed. “Do you have any idea what you’ve done to my rep?!”

“Can you really say it was me who ruined your rep when I wasn’t actually the one who told the
school?” Megan sighed. “Why do you focus your frustrations at other people onto me, anyway? All I ever did was get the attentions of a guy you like, and he’s not even my type in the first place. So there has to be something more that I did without knowing, because only a complete idiot would so completely petty over dick.”

Kayla was silent. Her jaw was tense, her lips pursed.

“You are so lucky we’re in class right now or you would be so dead, you fugly emo bitch,” she hissed.

Megan looked around. Students were staring and whispering.

“Then kill me,” Megan said dismissively. “Unless you’re a dirty coward waiting until no one’s around like you did last time…”

Megan smiled and lifted her head, showing a small scar on her collarbone.

“The one on my stomach’s still there too,” she said.

Kayla was pale.

The tardy bell rang.

“This is not over, Day,” she hissed, standing up straight and glaring down haughtily at Megan. “We’ll finish this later.”

“Can’t wait!” Megan said with a smile. “Maybe this time you’ll actually hit a vital organ!”

Kayla growled and turned to walk away.

As she did so, Sawyer finally entered.

They stared in confusion at the angry teen stomping away before walking over and sitting beside Megan.

“What was that about?” they asked.

“Eh, beats me,” Megan sighed with a shrug. “All I got from her was a death threat, but that’s -”

“She threatened to kill you?” Sawyer hissed, clenching their fists.

“Yes, but -”

“But nothing, Megan!” Sawyer snapped. “Last time she threatened you, she made good on her threat and got away with it! She’ll definitely do it again, and you know it! Are you crazy?!”

Megan blinked.

Sawyer sighed.

“Whatever, class is starting…” they grumbled.

Megan was utterly baffled. She shook her head as she took out her textbook.

Hunter, Penelope, and Kristina finished their worksheets, turning them in together.
They warily watched Trav and Scott from the corners of their eyes to make sure they didn’t steal their papers.

Then they sat back in their seats.

“What was all that dramatic side-glaring at the douche brigade about?” Eddie asked.

“Trav tried to steal Caroline’s, Kristina’s, and my worksheet in social studies, so we’re making sure he doesn’t try it again,” Hunter explained.

“Scott’s in Nicko’s French class!” Eddie gasped. “Nicko, did Scott try to steal anyone’s worksheets?”

Nicko shrugged.

“Well, keep an eye out tomorrow though, okay?” Kristina said quietly. “I don’t want those two taking anyone else’s work…”

Nicko saluted her in response.

Eddie gasped dramatically. “What’s this?! Did Kristina - timid, fragile Kristina Mae Ketal - just initiate conversation with our Nicko?!”

“By Jove, I do believe she did!” Penelope remarked. “Quick, check to see that the sky isn’t falling!”

Kristina whimpered bashfully, hiding her face in her ears and floating a few inches above her chair. Nicko glared.

Hunter rolled her eyes. “Stop teasing them, you two, they’re sensitive.”

“Wrong!” Eddie exclaimed. “Kristina’s sensitive, Nicko’s the strong silent type!”

“Point still stands, Kristina looks like she’s about to cry,” Hunter sighed.

Kristina let out a tiny sob.

“Aaaand now she actually is crying.”

Penelope suddenly looked a bit terrified.

“O-oh god, I’m so sorry Kristina, I was just teasing!” she attempted. “I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry, please forgive me -”

And then Penelope started crying.

Scott and Trav were pointing and laughing.

Nicko glared at them.

They took one look at the taller boy’s glaring muted green eyes and slowly stopped.

Nicko kept glaring. Trav and Scott shrunk in on themselves.

Nicko breathed out a sigh.

His intimidating demeanor was very much a double-edged sword.
Frisk and Brian sat at their desks in Spanish class, trying not to make it obvious that they were zoning out as Jordan bragged about his boyfriend.

Again.

“…and I swear he’s a piano god, you know?” Jordan gushed.

“So you’ve said,” Brian deadpanned. “Twice. In the last five minutes.”

“Oh, you’re just jealous that you don’t have a super-cute boyfriend like I do,” Jordan dismissed with a smirk.

“I’d only be jealous if said boyfriend was a blonde,” Brian retorted.

Jordan oohed. Frisk snickered.

<<Or if said boyfriend was no boy, but Hunter?>> Frisk signed, trying desperately to hold back their snickers.

“Dangit Frisk, that’s not even close to what I said!” Brian snapped.

Brian gritted his teeth and fought an extremely hard battle with himself in order to not punch the snot out of his friends.

Then the Spanish teacher cleared her throat.

Brian sighed and hit his head against his desk, giving whatever deity or deities existed a silent prayer of thanks.

Frisk and Jordan were now laughing outright.

Brian hummed a little tune as he twirled his keys around his finger and sauntered through the parking lot to the motor cycle to which the keys belonged.

Sans hopped on the seat, put the helmet in his inventory on his head, inserted the key into the ignition, revved up, and rolled out.

He briefly pondered what to grab for lunch before deciding on McDonald’s.

He rode off and took a shortcut to his destination, acquiring the desired goods.

He rode off toward the school from there, taking no shortcuts as he had time enough to take in the world around him.

Sans had yet to call Gene about scheduling the wedding ceremony - Sans had been tasked with arranging the exact date, and ever since he knew what the venue was to be, he knew of a specific time frame that he wanted the wedding to be held in.

He knew it had to be on a night in November.
Before Sans realized it, he had pulled into the parking lot of Mountainside Elementary School. He parked, chained his bike, and walked into the building.

Out of the corner of his eye sockets, he spotted the familiar sight that was Mrs. Anderson screeching at Gloria.

Sans rolled his eyelights and sighed before checking the time on the clock on the wall.

Five more minutes until lunch.

Sans walked into the office and took a seat, picking up an Oriental Trading catalog and began to skim as Mrs. Anderson continued her screeching tirade.

“- and if you think I’m going to stand for that woman being anywhere near my PTA, much less vice president, you’re as dumb as you look!”

Gloria glared at Mrs. Anderson over her glasses.

“Melissa Bates has done the work required for the position, otherwise she would not be in the position in the first place,” she pointed out. “Every PTA officer worked for their position Claire, not just you. If it weren’t for the fact that you do your job well, your horrible personality would’ve gotten you kicked out by now.”

Sans stifled a laugh as Mrs. Anderson - apparently her first name was Claire - screeched indignantly.

“How dare you! This school is lucky to have me!”

“Sure thing sweetie, now if all you’re here to do is complain about your colleagues, I suggest doing so some other time since I have work to do,” Gloria dismissed as she rolled her eyes.

Claire glared at Gloria before stomping out of the office in a huff and slamming the door behind her.

The office was silent.

“huh,” Sans spoke up. “guess you didn’t need me here after all.”

“Sans, hey!” Gloria greeted brightly. “How y’all doing?”

“eh, you know how it is,” Sans said with a dismissive wave of his hand. “stats professor sat in on my class, got mcdonald’s for me ‘n tori, got to watch linda 2.0.1 get shut down.”

“You’re telling me,” Gloria sighed. “Claire actually does her job, unlike Linda, but the personality is pretty much the same.”

“the worst kind of asshole is the one who can back up their logic,” Sans said, crossing his arms.

“Don’t I know it…”

Sans hummed. “well, i should probably go get tori. lunch is only an hour, and as cool as you are, i’d much rather spend time with my future wife.”

“Of course, Sans, you go on ahead!” Gloria said with a smile. “I’ll see you around!”

“see ya gloria.”

And with that Sans left the office and took a shortcut to Toriel’s classroom.
Linda walked into the church fellowship hall, ten minutes early as always.

Linda always showed up early.

“Linda Thompson, early as always I see!”

Linda looked up at the speaker, a Human male with brown hair and blue eyes and a sparkling smile.

Linda smiled cordially. “Craig, it’s so good to see you again! How are things?”

“They’ve been great!” Craig said. “My boy Scott’s planning to try out for the basketball team this year! How about Hunter?”

“Oh, you know my boy!” Linda said. “He’s probably going to do either baseball or soccer…”

She hoped. She really, really hoped for Hunter’s sake or else…

“Oh, Helen Green!” Craig said, suddenly looking upwards. “David at work?”

Linda looked up at Helen, who was carrying a baking dish covered in tin foil.

“Nah, he just didn’t want to come,” Helen said with a shrug.

“Helen!” Linda gasped. “You don’t know anything! David’s probably not feeling well!”

“Linda, David says whatever’s on his mind,” Helen deadpanned. “If he’s sick, he’s sick, if he’s mad, he’s mad. And besides, you called me earlier and I told you that was the case, remember?”

Linda clenched her jaw.

Helen was very lucky that Craig had moved on to the next person.

But Helen had mentioned something during the phone call earlier. It probably wasn’t important, but the way Helen had said that Linda never cared sounded less like she was upset over something and more like she was stating a basic fact of life.

And somehow that made Linda feel bad. It wasn’t even true - she just didn’t care about Helen as long as whatever she did didn’t affect Linda negatively.

Wait, that made her sound terrible.

She decided to take her mind off of it for the three minutes before the meeting started.

She looked around for something, anything that seemed like a conversation starter.

Then she spotted something.

“Helen, look over at that table!” Linda whispered as she pointed.

Helen turned to look, seeing nothing of importance.

“I don’t know who or what you’re pointing at, but please stop before they see you,” Helen sighed.

“There’s Asians here, Helen!” Linda hissed.

Helen looked up at Linda and cringed. “Is that bad or something?” she deadpanned.
“No, it’s just - you know the HWC doesn’t get a lot of minorities!” Linda said.

“Wonder why,” Helen mumbled drily.

Meanwhile, just two minutes before the meeting began, Irma strutted into the room - amazingly on time for once.

It was an important day for Leland Schwartz, after all, and she wanted to be there for every moment of it.

She sat down confidently in a folding chair, opening up her purse and digging through it to find her phone. She unlocked it, and opened up the messaging app to text her boss that she’d be home the rest of the day. Stupid idiot would fall for it like he did every time. She smirked, knowing that she was free to support her darling Leland without her boss nagging her.

Then a microphone screeched with feedback.

“All rise for Branch Vice President Craig Foley.”

Everyone stood up as Craig walked up to the front of the room.

“Afternoon, everyone!” he said confidently. “As you all should know, today we are supposed to watch the first-ever Human Welfare Coalition commercial!”

Cheers erupted.

“However, that has been rescheduled for the December sixteenth meeting as a special Christmas present from our great founder!”

A brief murmur of disappointment before murmurs of acceptance.

Irma sighed as she tuned out the rest of the meeting. The urge to take out her phone was strong, but she had to stay strong.

She had to **Persevere.**

---

Penelope walked into the school library just in time to catch Caroline discussing Book Club-related things with Mrs. Hill. She decided to creep closer, aware that Caroline could possibly hear her coming anyway but deciding to have a little fun nonetheless.

“So I was thinking that once a month or so starting next semester, we could hold the book club off-campus,” Caroline suggested. “Like at a restaurant, a park, someone’s house if they volunteer…”

Mrs. Hill hummed thoughtfully. “That’s a very nice idea, but we would have to somehow pay for transportation…”

“At least four book club members have parents who would be more than willing to volunteer their time and resources, and maybe more if we explain the plan,” Caroline explained. “It is only a suggestion, but I do think that this could bring in more recruits for the club next year since the eighth graders will be graduating and all…ah, Penelope! You’ve made it just in time!”

Penelope flinched, then she slumped her shoulders in a pout.

Caroline chuckled. “You’re no good at sneaking, Penelope! Shame on you!”
“Well, sorry I was having a little fun!” Penelope sniffed. “Would it kill ya to play along?”

“No, but it’s just so much fun to tease you when you’ve been caught in the act~”

Penelope groaned as Mrs. Hill fought back some giggles.

“Yeah, yeah, now c’mon, let’s get to the back before our spots are stolen!”

Penelope urged, hopping in place impatiently.

“Of course, of course,” Caroline sighed, turning to make her way toward their place at the back of the library. Penelope quickly followed suit.

Mrs. Hill watched them with a smile on her face before returning to work.

Sans sat in his office as he bid the final student of his work day goodbye. He yawned and checked the clock - Frisk had been out of school for a good hour and a half now, so maybe closing up shop half an hour early wouldn't hurt anyone.

Except maybe Dr. Carlson’s milquetoast sensibilities. Those seemed pretty delicate.

Sans wondered how the stats professor would react if he left early - chances are that the answer was “not well”.

Sans checked the clock - quarter til four.

He sighed. Maybe those last fifteen minutes could be spent getting in touch with Gene about scheduling the wedding.

He wondered if he should use his work or personal email and decided that maybe his personal email would be better and he opened it up and started to compose the email.

When he was done and the email sent, he logged out and checked the time once more.

Five til.

Sans shut down his computer and packed up the quiz papers that needed grading, heading out the door as he did so.

As expected, he came face to face with the weaselly countenance of Dr. Carlson.

“you know, if you wanted to speak to me, you coulda come in at any time,” Sans said evenly.

“Your syllabus says that your office is due to close in exactly two minutes, Dr. Gaster,” Dr. Carlson sneered pettily. “Are you shirking your duties?”

Sans just stared at him, eye sockets unblinking, semi-permanent smile unmoving.

“wow, two minutes,” he deadpanned. “that’s a lot.”

“Are you talking back to me, Dr. Gaster?” Dr. Carlson hissed.

“Are you trying to sabotage me, dr. carlson?” Sans asked casually.

Dr. Carlson pursed his lips and blanched.

All the response Sans needed, really.
“welp, see ya,” Sans dismissed breezily and he turned on his heel to leave.

Dr. Carlson floundered briefly as Sans turned the corner before his resolve returned.

He went to follow him around the corner.

Sans was nowhere in sight.

Dr. Carlson growled to himself as he walked out to his car.

That damned Skeleton did not deserve the professorship, and Dr. Carlson was going to prove it.

Somehow.

Flowey photosynthesized impatiently on the sill of the open window as Frisk finished their life science homework.

He wanted to do something - anything.

But boredom was, as always, his one companion in a world that continued to torment him.

But the thing that made this particular boredom even worse than usual?

The fact that it was paired with another emotion.

Loneliness.

Flowey was always bored, but never until now had he been lonely on top of that.

As soon as he recognized this, another emotion filled him - one he was becoming more and more familiar with as he gained more and more emotions.

Flowey was filled with anxiety.

An icy breeze flowed through the open window, scattering some loose papers about.

A yellow oak leaf flew in, landing on the desk in front of Frisk.

The picked it up and held it by the stem between their fingers, twirling around a few times, a vacant look in their eyes.

A change was coming, and fast.

The changing leaves and autumn breeze fill you with

**DETERMINATION**

Chapter End Notes

A Horse With No Name - America

Starting this coming Monday (Nov. 13), I (Spazzin) will be volunteering at my local
library! I’ll be archiving obituaries from newspapers from the 40s, 50s, and 60s - one such newspaper has been out of print since the mid-60s! This is essentially my dream job - recording information that could be lost to time, and keeping it preserved for centuries to come…

Anyway, please forgive this super-late update! We are so very grateful for your continued patience - over 3k comments, nearly 60 chapters, almost 700 kudos, 65 bookmarks, and 350K words worth! It’s been a year and a day since I first summoned the courage to publish this story, and now look where it is. I never even though this fic would go beyond a few chapters, but your overwhelming response has ensured that not only will this fic continue for the foreseeable future, but that maybe I have a chance to make my ultimate dream of becoming a published author come true!

Thank you all so, so much for all your kind words and your continued loyalty. And, as we in the UnderTale fandom always say…

STAY DETERMINED!
One old friend returns, and another makes a cameo. Sawyer knows what they have to do. Theo has a long way to go. Caroline is troubled. Elaina is afraid.

And Frisk has a newfound respect for a certain armless jitterbug thanks to pancakes and toothbrushes.

Trust me, that last thing will make sense when you read the chapter.

So, Spazzin has THREE WEEKS of winter break (started Wednesday, ending on January 4th). That means maybe ANOTHER update in the next few weeks or so. Lucky bastards.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

7:29 A.M., November 25th, 20XR

It’s a chilly day outside.

Leaves are falling.

An early snow blankets the earth.

On days like this, kids like you…

… are awaiting the return of your uncle’s boyfriend.

Frisk lied awake in bed, staring at the ceiling.

Not a wink of sleep was had last night, for numerous reasons. But for simplicity’s sake, only three of these reasons shall be given:

The first of these reasons is that Chara was yelling at Rowan for assuming that white chocolate was even chocolate in the first place - Chara was really touchy about that, and man could they scream.

The second is that Papyrus was up at three in the morning cleaning every corner of the house until it was, in his own all-caps words, “SPICK-AND-SPAN”.

The third, final, and most important reason is the one which also explains why Papyrus was cleaning
the house at three in the morning.

Mettaton was coming home.

Frisk Eternal Dreemurr was filled with **DETERMINATION.**

And exhaustion.

But mostly **DETERMINATION.**

FILE: SAVE

---

Papyrus Gaster could easily say that he had never been more excited in his life.

Easily because his emotions were running rampant, not because it was necessarily true.

Which is not to say that he wasn’t excited - au contraire, he was so excited he was vibrating in place. He’s just had more exciting times.

Like when he first met Mettaton in person.

Or when he first became friends with Mettaton.

Or when Mettaton first asked him out on a date.

Or his first date with Mettaton.

Or when Mettaton took him to Chicago and introduced him to the world as his boyfriend.

Or when he introduced Mettaton to his father.

Or when Mettaton first consented to SOUL contact.

Really, many of his most exciting moments in life involved his beloved boyfriend Mettaton in some way.

This was no different, so really the point is moot if there even was a point to begin with.

It is with this in mind that Papyrus knelt at the baseboards of the upstairs hallway outside of the guest bedroom-slash-his old room, toothbrush in hand, bucket of soapy water at his side.

Cleaning baseboards is tough work indeed, especially with his housemates waking up at all hours to tell him to wait to do this in the morning (albeit with more swear words and exhausted slurring).

But time was of the essence.

Mettaton would be home at noon, and all must be of the utmost perfection, for no less would do when it came to his precious boyfriend.

Not even a familiar pair of novelty turkey slippers would distract him from his mission.

“really pap? it’s seven in the morning, you’ve been up for three days in a row, and you’re cleaning walls with a toothbrush. i know you love the guy, and the guy loves ya back, but you need to do a little thing called rest .”

Papyrus’ eye sockets widened in fury, the effect causing it to look like he had violently angry googly
eyes in his eye sockets.

“FOR YOUR INFORMATION, SANS, I HAVE ONLY BEEN UP FOR THREE DAYS, ONE HOUR, TEN MINUTES, AND THIRTEEN SECONDS!” Papyrus snapped. “AND I AM NOT CLEANING THE WALLS, I AM CLEANING THE BASEBOARDS! THERE IS A CLEAR AND DISTINCT DIFFERENCE!”

Sans crossed his arms and met it with a Look - clearly adopted from his own Mate.

“pap, when was the last time you ate something?” he asked.

“NOT NOW SANS, I HAVE SOME VERY IMPORTANT CLEANING TO DO!”

Sans sighed wearily.

“welp,” he said. “looks like someone doesn't want chocolate chip pancakes.”

Papyrus paused at the potential promise of pancakes.

Then he went back to his baseboard-brushing at full force.

Sans sighed, even more wearily than he had previously.

“fine, i’m splitting your share with frisk,” he said. “don’t say i didn’t warn you.”

And with that Sans went back to his and Toriel’s shared room.

Papyrus continued brushing the baseboards.

*BING BONG*

*ATTENTION PASSENGERS. UNITED FLIGHT 433 TO EBOTT HAS BEEN DELAYED FOR THREE HOURS DUE TO INCLEMENT WEATHER.*

A collective groan rang out through Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.

As this occurs, we find set up next to a smartphone charging station a man with voluminous, glossy raven hair to the nape of his neck. He wore a long pink duster coat with black faux fur lining and trim, black leggings, pink high-heeled boots with black fur trim, and sunglasses that hid his unique magenta-colored eyes. Despite his heavily layered outfit, it was nonetheless obvious that he was very beautiful - so beautiful in fact that he was practically inhuman. Many people stared at him, too intimidated to do anything further.

The man plugged in his cell phone - a rose gold one with glittery pink case with iridescent white and glittery orange heart stickers all over it - and opened it up to send out a text message.

Not five seconds after he had successfully sent out the text, he got a reply.

The man smiled at the phone and sighed with a wistful, longing smile on his face. Had he not been so deeply into his phone, he would have heard someone scream girlishly.

But, as it was, Mettaton was so deeply in love with his amazing boyfriend Papyrus that other people weren’t even close to the radar.

But anymore delays of his flight and he would reactivate his Human Eradication functions, and he
would have NO regrets.

Caroline stood on the doorstep of Penelope’s house - a bowl full of chocolate pudding in one hand, that week’s book club book in the other, her Familiar Pallas on her left shoulder - and took a deep breath.

Having a crush and being very much aware that you have a crush are two very different things, as she had recently come to learn.

Luckily, Caroline was adept at keeping her emotions inside.

She turned to Pallas, nodded in a half-false display of confidence, and rang the doorbell.

She drummed her fingers against the book impatiently as she waited for someone to answer the door.

Sixty-five seconds passed.

“I can’t do this, Pallas,” Caroline whined under her breath, her usual stony expression fell. “I don’t even know how I did this when I didn’t have these weird emotions around her! I don’t even…”

Caroline inhaled deeply through her nose before continuing on.

“What did I even do to get the time of day from her?” she waver quietly.

Pallas crackled - his own little version of a purr - and nuzzled his Summoner’s cheek in a display of affection and support. Caroline returned the gesture with a nuzzle of her own.

“Thanks Pallas,” she said gratefully.

Then she rang the doorbell again - thrice in a row for good measure.

The door opened to reveal an angrily huffing and puffing Theo.

Caroline just stared at him.

Theo stared back.

“The hell is that thing on your shoulder?” he asked.

“This is my Familiar, Pallas,” Caroline explained. “Is Penelope about?”

“She’s in her room,” Theo said, gesturing in the direction of his sister’s bedroom with a flick of his head.

“Thank you,” Caroline said as she walked past Theo.

“Wait.”

Caroline paused, turning back to Theo.

“What?” she asked, somewhat impatient.

Theo opened his mouth to speak before closing it again. Then he shook his head.

“Nevermind,” he said.
Caroline was confused, but also absolutely certain that Theo had something to say and/or ask.

She turned to go to Penelope’s room.

Theo’s request could wait.

“Strike! Woohoo!”

“Yeah, yeah, I get it, you’re the god of Wii bowling.”

Sawyer smirked smugly at their sister and patted her head condescendingly as they tossed themself onto the beige suede loveseat that resided in their bedroom.

“It’s okay, Scarlett,” they teased. “You’ll just have to settle for Wii golf queen~”

“I shall bear that title with pride,” Scarlett deadpanned as she rolled her eyes.

Sawyer chuckled and tousled their younger sister’s hair.

They were quiet.

“So you said you had something to talk about?” Scarlett asked. “What is it?”

Sawyer clenched their jaw. They’d hoped - futilely, it seemed - that Scarlett has forgotten that.

They sighed, bracing themself for the inevitable teasing that was sure to come.

“Scar,” they said, “I’ve got a crush on Megan.”

Scarlett blinked.

“Okay, but what was it you wanted to talk about?” Scarlett asked, as though she hadn’t just received mind-blowing information.

Sawyer gaped at her, opening and closing their mouth.

Scarlet snorted. “You look like a dying lamprey…”

Sawyer narrowed their eyes at their sister.

“How specific,” they deadpanned. “But I am very serious when I say that I have a crush on Megan and I need your advice because you have a boyfriend and Mom and Dad’ll just misgender me and say shit like they ‘thought I was queer’ or something!”

Scarlett just looked confused. “But I thought that your crush on Megan was obvious,” she said.

Sawyer seemed taken aback. “Is it really that obvious?”

“The only way it could ever be more obvious is if you had an I-Heart-Megan-Day t-shirt,” Scarlett teased.

Sawyer whined and curled up into a ball, hiding their face in the arm of the loveseat.

“So what about your crush do you need to talk about?” Scarlett asked.

Tense silence.
“Do you…think I have a chance with her?” Sawyer asked.

Scarlett laughed.

“I’m serious, Scar!” Sawyer whined. “She hasn’t shown if she’s interested, and she hasn’t shown interest in other people either -”

“She digs you, Saw,” Scarlett said, a sure smile on her face. “I have heard her sister in the halls complaining about how Megan’s going on and on in her diary about your ‘bubbly butt’, and I have seen her eyes wander in that direction more times than most eyes should.”

Sawyer squeaked, their face turning red.

“Sawyer, I’ve seen her when she’s around you,” Scarlett continued. “When she’s with you, she’s more genuine, she’s happier overall, and I’m 98% sure that it’s because of you. The remaining 2% is that she’s happy to be away from Courtney.”

Sawyer huffed out a laugh and hugged their sister.

“Thanks Scar,” they whispered.

“No prob, Saw,” Scarlett said.

They were quiet.

“I’m gonna tell her,” Sawyer said suddenly, their voice full of conviction.

“Wait, you mean now?” Scarlett asked incredulously.

“Damn right,” Sawyer said. “You’ll back me up, right?”

“Of course I will!” Scarlett assured.

“Good, ‘cause I’m gonna sneak out tonight to do it.”

“Are you crazy?!”

“Yes.”

Scarlett sighed and rolled her eyes.

“The things you do for that girl…” she sighed.

“Whaddya expect, Scar? She’s my best friend in the world, and I think that…maybe I’m…in love with her, maybe, I guess?”

“Oh my god, Sawyer, stop gushing and start plotting!”

“Yes ma’am.”

Frisk walked down the upstairs hall, a tray in hand with plate of chocolate chip pancakes with maple syrup and a glass of milk with a crazy straw in it.

They listened for the distinctive sound of Papyrus doing something, Chara and Rowan having paused their little tiff to help out by listening themselves. They crept about until they could hear enough sound to follow.
Needless to say, they didn’t have to creep around for very long at all.

They stopped outside the upstairs bathroom and knocked on the door.

“COME IN!” Papyrus called.

Frisk was kind of in a rut there since they couldn’t exactly use their hands, and using their feet to open a door seemed a bit suspect, so they decided to go out on a limb and use their mouth.

They turned on their side, leaned into the door, and put their teeth around the doorknob. They tilted their head with the knob in their mouth, their teeth and tongue trying to manipulate the knob so it would turn.

It took them maybe three minutes to open the door with their mouth and successfully entered the bathroom, where Papyrus was cleaning the shower head with a toothbrush that they were pretty sure was theirs.

Frisk suddenly had a newfound respect for MK.

They stared at Papyrus, waiting Patiently for him to notice them and the breakfast they’d brought for him.

They decided to retreat into their headspace to play some cards with Chara and Rowan while they waited.

Elaina sat on her - err, their bed, knees pulled up to their chest, rocking back and forth, trying not to cry. They had just finished the Goblet of Fire.

They went into their closet, took the giant quilt to wrap themself in, sat on the cedarwood chest, covered themself up, and cried silently.

They’d been warned - they just didn’t listen.

Elaina was filled with regret.

And sadness.

They pulled out their phone, but hesitated to unlock it. Who would they text, if anyone at all?

They wondered if Frisk was available…

Then they remembered that Mettaton was coming back to Ebott and that Frisk was waiting for him with their family.

Caroline? No, she was probably with Penelope, and Elaina was sure that they would wish to be left alone, since that was so often the case with them anyway.

Brian and Hunter were both very different situations - Elaina wasn’t sure if they would get in more trouble for calling them, or if they would get in more trouble for being called. Best not to push it.

Levi would definitely pull an “I told you so” and was probably talking to Jordan. Those two just did absolutely nothing but gush to and about each other. It was kind of cute, in a really gross sappy sort of way.

The Cello Squad was pretty much reserved for memes, so Elaina chose to wait until their grief had
reached the point where they were comfortable enough to make memes about it before letting them know that they had finished that book.

Felicity and Grace had class today, so they were out of the question.

Only one trustworthy option left…

They opened up the messaging app and tapped Colleen’s contact.

*Elaina: they warned me*

*Colleen: ?!!?!

*El: i read goblet of fire

*Co: you read to the end didn’t u?

*El: i regret so mucg

*Co: o no a typo.

*Co: is ur mom home?

*El: yeah

*Co: o ok nvm then

*El: ?

*Co: crap mam just came in we have to shop for thanksgiving.

*Co: r u gonna stop reading hp now?

*El: im in 2 deep 2 stop now

*Co: ok just met me know if u need me!

*El: thx

*Co: np fam!

Elaina tapped out of the app and hid their face in the quilt.

They took deep breaths for a few moments before deciding to leave the safety of the closet and risk their mother’s wrath.

They crept down the stairs and looked around the living room.

Irma was asleep on the couch, drool leaking from the corner of her mouth as she snored. The drool was tinted with a slight blue color, signaling that Irma had crashed after the Stardust wore off.

Elaina sighed silently in relief.

They had until morning if they were lucky, midnight if they weren’t.

Time to rebel.
Then Irma moaned and stirred slightly.

Elaina fought back a yelp and ran back upstairs as quietly as they could.

They fled into their bedroom, hid in the closet wrapped in the old quilt, and cried in silent fear.

They’d been getting too complacent. Just because they had friends - *friends*, for the very first time in their eleven years of life - didn’t mean that Irma would somehow become a better mom just like that.

The thought that so much could change while staying unchanged saddened them even more than the ending of *Goblet of Fire* ever did.

* * * * *

*BING BONG*

*ATTENTION PASSENGERS. UNITED FLIGHT 433 TO EBOTT WILL BE BOARDING IN FIFTEEN MINUTES.*

Mettaton pumped a fist victoriously. At last, he was coming home.

He knew what he had to do.

He picked up his phone and texted Papyrus the news.

Then someone took a seat next to him.

Mettaton glanced discreetly at the person, a male human in his late teens or early twenties with hair whose color reminded Mettaton of hummus. Mettaton had always known that hummus was not a good color on anyone, but this guy was just proving his point and then some.

“Hey babe, you come here often?” the hummus-head asked flirtatiously.

Mettaton ignored the other person, whose accent was clearly not southern either.

“Whassamatter baby, can’t speak English?” the hummus-head teased. “That’s fine! I can teach you!”

Mettaton had very quickly grown tired of the hummus-headed Human’s creepiness and decided to act.

“Fuck off,” Mettaton said dismissively.

“What if I don’t want to, eh?” the hummus-head countered mockingly.

“I have a boyfriend,” Mettaton replied dismissively.

“So?”

“And a penis.”

The hummus-head fell off the seat, eyes wide with horror.

“And clearly it’s bigger than yours,” Mettaton added.

“The fuck you say, tranny?!?” the hummus-head screamed.

“That my dick is bigger than yours, fuckhat, now do as I said and fuck off before I call my lawyers.”
“You think you can scare me, faggot?!”

“You’re too stupid for that.”

“Damn right I am!”

Silence pervaded the area.

Then laughter erupted from the people as the hummus-head’s eyes widened in realization.

Then they narrowed in fury as he bared his teeth angrily.

“Also, I have the most wonderful boyfriend ever and 50 million Twitter and Instagram followers,” Mettaton said. “Many of whom might just be in this airport right this second watching this entire exchange!”

*BING BONG*

*ATTENTION PASSENGERS. UNITED FLIGHT 433 TO EBOTT IS NOW BOARDING.*

“Oh, that’s my flight!” Mettaton gasped, turning on his heel and sashaying away dramatically without further acknowledging the hilariously horrified hummus-headed Human.

But first, Mettaton decided to be a petty little shit.

He took a selfie in the line and posted it to all of his social media accounts.

The sound of many phone notifications going off followed by shrieks was music to his ears.

He could see people pointing at the hummus-head and laughing.

 Whoever said fuckboys never learn clearly hasn’t seen The Amazing Mettaton™ at work.

But if he hasn’t learned, there are millions of people around the world who would be delighted to teach him.

Or murder him. Whichever came first.

But Mettaton was no longer thinking homicidal thoughts directed at the hummus-head. He was too busy fantasizing about how he should greet his beloved Papyrus upon his return.

He smiled gleefully as he hatched a brilliant plot.

But where, oh where was he going to find a voice-activated glitter cannon in less than seven and a half hours…?

He probably wasn’t.

Better call for the hot pink limousine.

Linda rolled the cart to a stopping point in the produce section, taking the two-and-a-half-pages-front-and-back grocery list out of her white Coach handbag. Hunter and Hannah followed, pointedly walking maybe five or six steps behind her either out of fear or desire to not be associated with their mother.

“Let’s see now, we got the tomatoes, onion, celery…what’s next on the list?”
“Barf.”

“Hannah Grace, I told you a thousand times already, since Grandma Peggy’s not here, it’s up to me to make the Smith family’s famous tomato aspic!” Linda said.

“Her not being here is why we should stop!” Hannah whined. “She’s in jail, so -”

“Hannah Grace Thompson, you shut your sassy little mouth right now or else, missy!” Linda snapped. “Now, next on the list is canned black olives, then tabasco sauce and unflavored gelatin.”

“Um, Mom,” Hunter said weakly, “you said yourself that nobody but Grandma Peggy likes tomato aspect -”

“Aspic, Hunter,” Linda corrected.

“Yeah, that,” the middle blonde dismissed. “You said nobody likes it, so why keep making it? Grandma’s not around to complain, so why?”

Linda stopped the cart short.

She breathed in sharply through her nose.

“Because I said so, Hunter James, now be a good little boy and be quiet!” Linda hissed.

“Mom, I’ll be twelve in like two weeks, I’m not little anymore,” Hunter said.

Or a boy, she thought defiantly to herself.

“I don’t care, now shut up so I can focus on my shopping!” Linda snapped.

“You never care,” Hunter grumbled beneath her breath in hopes that Linda couldn’t hear.

“Did you say something?”

“No, Mom!” Hunter squeaked.

“Don’t squeak like that or your voice’ll never drop,” Linda warned.

Hunter didn’t even respond.

She did, however, make plans to talk in as squeaky a voice as possible whenever no one was around. Then Hannah tugged on her coat sleeve.

When Hunter looked down at her sister, Hannah pointed at a nearby pole.

A woman with box braids and a bright smile was standing there.

“That’s the pretty lady from that dream I had!” Hannah whispered.

Hunter was utterly confused.

Then her eyes widened.

“That was like a year ago!” she hissed. “How do you even remember that?!”

“I dunno, ask the pretty lady!”
Hunter looked in the direction of the pretty lady.

But she was no longer there.

Hunter and Hannah turned to look at each other.

“Whoa,” they said in unison.

“Oh my god, what now?!” Linda griped.

“I saw a thing of hot cocoa with the little marshmallows in it!” Hannah piped with a voice full of hope as she pointed at the aforementioned tin.

Linda stared at her children, their eyes of blue and hazel full of hope and longing.

It made her feel…bad, somehow.

Linda sighed. “Fine, whatever, just take it and let’s go already!”

Hunter and Hannah cheered - both for their little distraction’s success and for the promise of hot cocoa.

But Hunter was still curious about the lady with the pretty smile…

It took him another twenty minutes of scrubbing, but Papyrus was done at last with the tub and shower.

Then he heard someone clear their throat.

He turned to look at Frisk, who bore in their hands a tray of cold pancakes and tepid chocolate milk.

“OH, GOOD MORNING FRISK!” Papyrus greeted. “WHOSE ARE THOSE?”

Frisk looked from the tray to him - a gesture signifying that it was in fact his.

“WHY THANK YOU!” he said. “HOWEVER, I AM TOTALLY AND COMPLETELY BUS -”

Frisk set the tray down on the bathroom counter, then stretched their arms and popped their knuckles - Papyrus flinched as they did so - before signing.

<<Take a break, Uncle Pap,>> they signed with a Look on their face. <<I know you’re excited - we all are, but you need to rest or you’ll be exhausted when Mettaton gets here and you won’t be able to do anything!>>

“BUT .”

<<No buts, mister!>> Frisk signed. <<I waited for twenty minutes after opening the door with my mouth because my hands were full of your food, and also I think you’re using my toothbrush to clean!>>

Papyrus looked from Frisk to the toothbrush in his hand. It was indeed Frisk's, as the red heart sticker showed.

Frisk looked to the counter where the toothbrushes were.

Well, where the should have been.
Once more they gave Papyrus A Look.

Papyrus slumped and sat down on the edge of the bathtub, putting his head in his hands.

“I’M SORRY, FRISK, I JUST WANT EVERYTHING TO BE PERFECT FOR METTATON WHEN HE COMES HOME,” Papyrus said, his voice surprisingly quiet despite it being in all-caps as usual.

<<But he won’t care,>> Frisk signed. <<I think Uncle Metta’s just glad to be coming home to see you, because who wouldn’t be happy to be coming home to see The Great Papyrus if not his super-amazing boyfriend?>>

Papyrus smiled and tousled Frisk’s hair.

“NYEH HEH HEH, OF COURSE!” Papyrus said, his usual vigor renewed. “THANK YOU, YOUNG FRISK! I SHALL NOW BEGIN MY BREAK!”

<<Okay, but you owe everyone new toothbrushes.>>

Caroline sat on the carpet of Penelope’s bedroom, watching Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, Pallas on top of her head, nary a care for the fact that Christmas was nowhere in sight just yet.

“Hey Caroline, is it true that the choir kids are having a concert?” Penelope asked.

“On the sixteenth,” Caroline said. “Alicia and some girl named Rachel are making idiots of themselves in hopes that they’ll get a solo part in the spring concert.”

Penelope’s face scrunched in confusion. “But it’s November!”

“I know, right? They could at least wait until January.”

“They could, but they won’t, because they suck.”

“Accurate.”

Silence.

“So what did Theo wanna talk to you about?” Penelope asked.

“I dunno, maybe he just wanted to complain about something you may or may not have done and make me tell you to stop being autistic or something,” Caroline speculated.

“I don’t really think he’d go that far,” Penelope said. “At least I hope not…”

“If he does I’ll electrocute him,” Caroline said. “He won’t die, but he will be in intense physical pain.”

“You wouldn’t really though, right?” Penelope asked nervously.

Caroline paused.

“I’ll try not to,” Caroline sighed in resignation. “I make no promises though, that boy is an ass.”

Penelope giggled. “That’s good enough for me!”

Caroline smiled.
Penelope had such a cute laugh…

“Checkmate.”

“Okay, how? It hasn’t even been ten minutes.”

“And yet, checkmate.”

Orville Day looked down at the board, his white king piece checked by a white rook and queen.

Orville pinched the space between his eyebrows and sighed.

Megan was getting better and better, and it showed.

“Hey, Dad?” Megan asked suddenly.

Orville looked at his daughter, blinking in confusion. “What?”

“There’s a chess competition at the university next month,” the ash-blonde explained. “There’s supposed to be a lot of good players, and it’d be a great opportunity to test my skills. It’s free for the university students, but non-students have to pay a fee - about ten bucks.”

“You know, you have ten bucks somewhere in your room I’m sure,” Orville said.

“But I need a ride.”

“Doesn’t Sawyer have a license?”

“Just because they have a license doesn’t mean they have a car, Dad.”

“Oh, right.”

Silence.

“So…”

“So…”

“Can you drive me?”

Orville sighed.

“When is it?” he asked.

Megan’s face lit up. “The 20th from three to eight!”

Megan got up and kissed her father on the cheek before running up to her room with a smile so broad it seemed to go on forever.

Orville couldn’t quite recall the last time Megan had smiled like that.

But he hoped she could smile like that forever.

Meanwhile, Courtney sat in the kitchen with her homework, having heard everything.

She was filled with…
Nothing.

No one was even noticing her, so nothing mattered, did it?

Then she remember something Dr. Bradley had said. Something about finding better ways of getting attention than sex and painting herself.

But what other ways were there?

Courtney decided to not think about that.

She got up and stuffed her homework in the garbage disposal.

When she flipped the switch and the disposal roared to life and sent written equations flying, she felt…empty.

“COURTNEY ANGELICA, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!”

Courtney fell the feeling of fulfillment that she always got when someone acknowledged her, for good or ill.

But the worse ways always left something off somewhere inside her afterward.

Maybe Dr. Bradley had a point when he said she had to change.

Maybe Megan was right when she said she was messed up.

Maybe Courtney was even worse than she thought.

The thought was enough to make her cry.

Papyrus and Frisk, joined some time ago by Alphys, Undyne, and Mamoru, sat on the couch watching Spirited Away.

“I DON’T GET IT, WHAT THE HECK IS THE LITTLE GIRL TRYING TO DO AGAIN?” Papyrus asked as the girl stepped on some black slug thing.

“She’s trying to get her name back from Yubaba so she can leave the spirit world and make her parents human again before they’re eaten,” Undyne explained. “Now ssshhhhh !”

Little Mamoru copied the sound - or rather, he attempted to copy the sound, only instead of a “ssshhhhh ” sound, his uncoordinated toddler tongue made more of a “ssshsssthhthhpbltt” sound akin to indigestion combined with a balloon having the air within released through the part you blow into.

Such a description naturally brought those within earshot into hysterics.

Then a song busted out.

*We are the crowd, we’re c-comin’ out~ Got my flash on it’s true, need that picture of you it’s~ So magical~ We’d be so fantastic -*

Papyrus answered immediately.

“HELLO?”
“Another winter day~ Has come and gone away~ And even Paris and Rome~ And I wanna go home~ Let me go home~”

“HONEY, I KNOW THE WEATHER IS BAD, BUT IT IS NOT QUITE WINTER YET~~”

“And I’m surrounded by~ A million people I~ Still feel alone~ Oh, let me go home~ Oh, I miss you you know~”

“OH, I SEE! YOU’RE SERENADING ME AGAIN!” Papyrus realized. “DO CONTINUE!”

But first Papyrus put the phone on speaker.

“Let me go home~ I’ve had my run~ Baby I’m done~ I gotta go home~”

Papyrus settled back into the couch, the movie having been paused - much to the pouty disdain of Undyne and Mamoru.

“Let me go hooooooome~”

“No one’s stoppin’ ya…” Undyne grumbled.

Alphys shushed her.

“It will all be alright~ I’ll be home tonight~ I’m comin’ back home~”

As soon as the song was surely ended, the family applauded.

Mettaton spluttered a bit.

“SORRY HONEY, I JUST REALLY WANTED TO SHOW YOU OFF!” Papyrus explained nervously. “YOU AREN’T MAD AT ME, ARE YOU?”

“Awww, sweetie, I could never be mad at you!” Mettaton reassured his Skeletal boyfriend. “And who wouldn’t want to show off an amazing boyfriend such as myself?”

“A PERSON WITH NO TASTE, THAT’S WHO!” Papyrus replied.

“Right you are, darling~” Mettaton sang. “I’ll be there in an hour and a half unless the storm gets worse!”

“I WILL BE WAITING EVER-PATIENTLY, MY SHINING STAR,” Papyrus assured. “MARK MY WORDS.”

“I haven’t a doubt about that, my darling,” Mettaton finished. “I shall see you all very soon, alright? Love you~”

“I LOVE YOU TOO!”

And with that they (finally) hung up.

Papyrus sighed happily.

A strange silence reigned.

“You want us to leave before he gets here?” Undyne asked.

“TWENTY MINUTES AFTER,” Papyrus replied. “IT HAS BEEN SIX MONTHS SINCE HE
LAST SAW OUR GODSON.”

Papyrus rumpled Mamoru’s wild hair, causing the toddler to giggle.

Mettaton sat in the back of the hot pink limousine, a grin on his face that could only be described as lovesick.

He absolutely could not wait to return home. His family awaited, after all.

*His family.* Mettaton sighed to himself at the words, the warmth they implied coursing through his software and circuitry from his very SOUL. They knew how high-maintenance he was, how could anyone who spent any five seconds in his presence *not* know? But still they accepted him, *loved* him even.

He wasn’t quite sure what he’d done to deserve them all, but he wasn’t complaining.

No one would dare complain with a family like his.

Especially not a lover so great as Papyrus.

It didn’t take long after his little internal monologue to realize that the limo had stopped moving some ten minutes ago.

Without a crack in his lovesick facade, Mettaton spoke but four words.

“Son of a bitch…”

“Son of a bitch…”

Sawyer laid back on their bed, listening intently to the commotion downstairs.

They clearly would not be sneaking out of their room anytime soon - not with an unexpected visitor downstairs.

Stupid Aunt Stacy and her surprise mooching visits. Why their mother never noticed was beyond them, but it probably had something to do with “turning a blind eye to the transgressions of family” or just plain not suspecting jack shit. Either way their mother was stupid as all-getout.

Sawyer looked at their window and studied it.

They saw a pair of latches.

Sawyer got off their bed and fiddled with the latches and window for a bit until the window opened.

They watched the snow swirling in the light of the streetlamp from their bedroom window on the second floor. There was a good-sized pile of snow just below from when they’d shoveled the driveway hours prior.

Sawyer Drew Hebert knew what they had to do.

They got out their phone to text Scarlett, got their coat and boots on, and slipped out the window. After a few moments of sitting on the windowpane, the jumped down and landed perfectly in the embankment, no worse for wear but a bit shaken.
No.

Not shaken.

Stirred.

A surge of adrenaline rushed through their veins and gave them the extra push to start running for the Day residence.

Sawyer Drew Hebert was **DETERMINED** to make their feelings for Megan Cordelia Day known, **damn** the consequences.

They really were crazy.

*Crazy for her…*

Caroline bid Penelope goodbye and put on her coat, ready to head out the front door of the DeMartino residence with Pallas atop her head when someone tapped her shoulder.

She turned around to face Theo - she kind of had to look down a bit if she wanted to meet his eyes, which she didn’t, so she wouldn’t.

“What?” she asked tersely, quite eager to leave.

Theo was clearly trying to find the right words, if his slightly strained facial expression was any indication of what was going on in his head.

“Theo, if you have something you want to say to me, you’d best get it over with fast, because I have to be home by -”

“Do you think I’m a jerkface?” Theo asked suddenly.

“Yes,” Caroline answered with zero hesitation and two hundred certainty. “You always were kind of a jerk, but lately you’ve graduated to jerk face. You hold an abusive man on an undeserved pedestal and the discovery that it may be the fault of the abuser is causing you lash out at those who have done nothing to deserve it. Your anger is understandable, but your way of dealing with it is not.”

Theo just stared at Caroline, his eyes wide.

“You have an opportunity to be the man your father wasn’t, Theo,” Caroline continued. “I suggest you take that opportunity before it’s too late. You’ve torn down your friendships, but your family isn’t something so fragile -”

“THEN WHY **DID** MY DAD LEAVE, HUH?!” Theo shouted. “IF MY FAMILY IS SO TIGHT, THEN WHY IS MY DAD NOT HERE?!”

All was silent. The only sounds heard were Theo’s breathing and the cold wind howling outside.

“He’s coming back for you,” Caroline said quietly. “But not because he cares about you. It’s because you’re normal. I think you and your father both need to accept that there’s no such thing as normal, and that maybe that’s a good thing.”

“How is not being normal a **good** thing?”

“Because then nothing would ever change,” Caroline said.
“But isn’t that a good thing?” Theo asked weakly. “Didn’t you not want to come to Ebott in the first place? Don’t you wish you’d stayed in Colorado too?”

Silence.

“Maybe I used to, once upon a time,” the Wizard said wistfully. “But not anymore. I’ve grown fond of this place. Sure, I miss Colorado, and the mountains and wildlife. But I have something here that I never had in Colorado.”

“And what’s that?” Theo asked, his voice barely a whisper.

“Friends,” Caroline answered, her voice strong and sure. “Back in Silverton, everyone thought I was a freak. They were right, and I never really cared, but there were still times when I felt lonely. Heck, before I met Penelope, I still felt lonely.”

“Don’t bring her into this!” Theo snapped. “It’s her fault I’m here in the first place.”

SMACK!

Caroline slapped Theo in the face.

“Screw you,” Caroline said, her voice cold. “Do you have any idea what you’re saying?!”

Theo stared at Caroline, his eyes wide.

“Do you really think that Penelope is the one at fault?! Do you think she wanted to move here any more than you did?!”

“She’s happier than I am, isn’t she?”

Caroline watched as a couple of tears ran down Theo’s face.

“She’s really not,” Caroline said. “She blames herself for much the same reasons you blame her. She couldn’t help being born with autism, but she still thinks it’s all on her. You thinking it’s her fault your dad’s an asshole only makes it worse for both of you.”

Theo sobbed.

Caroline turned away from the crying boy and left, slamming the front door behind her.

She cried anyway.

“shouldn’t mtt have been here by now?” Sans asked Toriel as he used a rolling pin on the pie dough.

“He should have been here thirty minutes ago,” Toriel sighed and she mixed up the filling.

“think one of us should call and check on ‘im, se if he’s okay?”

Toriel hummed thoughtfully. “I believe that task falls onto his Mate,” she said.

“true. i’ll let pap know.”

Sans set aside the rolling pin and and went into the living room.
Right where Papyrus wasn’t.

Sans turned to see Papyrus in the foyer, sitting with his back against the front door.

He seemed somehow both eager and dejected.

Sans walked up to him.

“pretty rough weather out there, eh?” he asked.

Papyrus merely hummed in response.

“maybe he’s stuck in traffic,” Sans suggested casually.

“MAYBE,” Papyrus said.

Silence.

“go get ‘im pap,” Sans said. “you don’t need dad’s or my permission to do things anymore. your a grown monster, and you can make your own decisions.”

Papyrus looked up at his older yet smaller brother.

“well? whaddaya waiting for?” Sans asked.

Papyrus held out his arms as if to ask for a hug.

Sans smiled fondly and rolled his eyes as he hugged his younger yet taller brother.

“go get ‘im bro,” he said as he let go. “lemme know when you’re on your way back, ‘kay?”

“RIGHT!”

And with that Papyrus was out the door and into the snow.

Sans sighed as he watched his brother’s tall, lean figure disappear into the falling snow.

How he’d managed to raise such an upstanding Monster he’d likely never know, but he wasn’t complaining.

There really wasn’t much in his life to complain about, anyway.

Life was good for now.

Mettaton glared daggers at the rear view mirror - had they been Undyne those metaphorical daggers would have been very much physical he was certain.

The driver - the reliably unreliable Burgerpants, real name unimportant - was sweating nervously.

The surrounding traffic was honking at whatever caused the backup.

“Honk,” Mettaton ordered.

“Yessir,” Burgerpants said, his casual voice weirdly contracting his contorted face.

He honked the limo horn. A car horn rendition of Death By Glamor played.
Burgerpants died a little more inside - a feat he’d long thought impossible.

He mentally begged for the Sweet Embrace Of Death™.

“Screw this, I’m walking,” Mettaton said suddenly. “Burgerpants, sunroof.”

“Sir, there is a blizzard -”

“And if I don’t get out of this goddamned vehicle, there will be blood on the highway, do you understand me?!”

“Yessir.”

“Good. Sunroof.”

Burgerpants opened the sunroof and prayed for a meteor to crash into his head.

“Thank you,” Mettaton said as he slipped out of the sunroof.

Burgerpants’ internal screaming drowned out the maddening increase in angry honking.

It took him another ten minutes to realize that not only had the traffic thinned slightly, but his boss had actually thanked him.

Those things would have been a hell of a lot better if Burgerpants weren’t currently in the driver’s seat of a hot pink limousine.

Oh well.

At least it had cupholders.

Sawyer ran down the sidewalk, their adrenaline not having dissipated a bit in the ten minutes since they escaped the confines of their room.

As always, they didn’t even have to think to know where Megan lived - the knowledge was ingrained into their very being.

They came across a car in a driveway and leapfrogged over it with ease, stumbling slightly on the landing but not falling.

They slowed down for nothing, except maybe going at a cautious jog at the sight of some police cars before returning to full burst when they were out of sight.

Sawyer ran.

And ran.

And ran.

And ran.

Until they ran into a Skeleton.

Papyrus landed on his tailbone - which thankfully didn’t break - and shook his head to rid himself of the shock from the fall.
He stood up and dusted the snow off his pants before noticing a Human.

So that was what he’d run into.

“MY APOLOGIES, HUMAN!” he said, reaching out a hand to help them up. “ARE YOU ALRIGHT?”

“Urgh, yeah, ‘m fine,” the Human said. “Just a bit shaken up ‘s all.”

“WELL AM I GLAD YOU ARE UNHARMED!” Papyrus said. “GOOD LUCK GETTING TO WHEREVER YOU ARE RUNNING TO!”

“Back atcha,” the Human said. “With this weather, we’ll both need some luck.”

“WHO NEEDS LUCK WHEN YOU HAVE LOVE?!” Papyrus declared dramatically.

The Human blinked then shrugged. “Well, guess I’ll see ya ‘round.’”

Then the Human ran off.

Papyrus was sure he’d seen that particular Human somewhere before, but there was no time if any to ponder that.

He had a boyfriend to rescue from the horrors of highway traffic.

Mettaton leapt across the sea of cars and trucks, his destination certain.

He hopped onto the guard rail and scanned the area for his exit.

He found it and made a run for it.

Mettaton ran until he started feeling weak and stiff.

He was running out of charge.

Fuck.

He stopped running, choosing instead to go at a brisk walk to conserve his battery.

He looked at the city around him - before long it would be lit in all the colors of the holidays. It was bound to be a lovely sight - it always was.

Before long Mettaton reached a less crowded area - and great timing too, as his battery was below 20% charge.

He slowed down so his walk was no longer brisk, but rather a mere stroll.

Then he heard footsteps behind him.

Mettaton paused, neither in the shape nor the mood to deal with anymore aimless shenanigans.

Hopefully this next pervert didn’t have hummus hair…

“METTATON!”

Or any hair at all.
Sawyer was out of breath, practically gasping for the stuff, but they were in no way out of energy - that they had in spades.

They jumped over another sedan and briefly pondered joining the track team.

Then they remembered that they were one of the single least athletic kids in school and damn proud of it.

Then they wondered just how the hell they even got where they currently were.

Or where they currently were in the first place.

Sawyer then proceeded to slip on a patch of ice on the sidewalk and land flat on their ass.

They grunted as they stood up and looked about.

Megan’s house was right across the street.

Sawyer silently cheered to themself and stood up, looking both ways before crossing the street - they’d had enough of acting like James Bond for the next few lifetimes.

They made their way across the street and rang the doorbell.

God they hoped Courtney didn’t answer it.

Their hopes were not unfounded by the answer of Orville Day.

Sawyer looked up at the blue-eyed man and cleared their throat.

“Uh, hi there Mr. Day,” they greeted with not inconsiderable nervousness. “Um, is -”

“Megan’s upstairs in her room working on her homework,” Orville said, gesturing toward the stairs with a knowing smile on his face.

Sawyer sighed and nodded gratefully as they went up the stairs.

They hesitated briefly outside of Megan’s room - known to be Megan’s by the noticeable lack of a pink sparkly door hanger with the name “Courtney” on it and the clear presence of a gold skull-and-crossbones one that said “Bug Off”.

Sawyer knocked on the door.

Papyrus gazed into Mettaton’s magenta eyes. Mettaton’s eyes, with their unique heart-shaped pupils, gazed back with unabashed love.

Papyrus was filled with a sudden eloquence.

He spoke the most wonderfully poetic words he could possibly say in that moment.

“HI.”

Well that was embarrassing.

Mettaton, so utterly graceful was he, took it all in stride with a laugh.
Papyrus noticed he was swaying ever so slightly.

“YOU NEED TO CHARGE?” he asked his robotic Mate.

Mettaton nodded and let himself fall into Papyrus’ arms.

“NYEH HEH, LET’S GET YOU BACK HOME, SHALL WE?” Papyrus stated rather than asked as he easily lifted Mettaton bridal-style.

Mettaton merely moaned happily and nuzzled into his lover’s sternum.

Papyrus smiled warmly and pressed a kiss to the crown of Mettaton’s head.

How he’d missed him.

Flowey sighed. Kahuna Hala was defeated, after two hours and five separate losses.

He mentally reminded himself to wait a while to do a Nuzlocke run in UltraSun. And maybe to stop using Grass-type starters first thing.

Oh who was he kidding? There was a snowball’s chance in hell of him not using Grass-type starters.

Besides, Decidueye was way better than Primarina.

Flowey sighed as he saved the game and shut off the 3DS.

He looked out the window at the falling snow as it glistened in the light of the gibbous moon.

If he had a SOUL he was certain the sight would have stirred it. He could imagine the feeling so well it almost seemed real.

Wait.

Flowey’s face contorted in a mix of horror, fury, and a hint of giddiness.

But one thing was certain.

No one must ever know of his newfound SOUL. They’d probably think he stole it.

The falling snow, glistening like glitter in the light of the moon, fills you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

Take Me Home - Phil Collins
Home - Michael Bublé

Fun Fact: Guys, gals, and nonbinary pals, do you have a discord? Do you like Two Worlds? Do you like the comments section of Two Worlds so much you wish you could stay there for the rest of your life? Well, you're in luck! Introducing the TWO
WORLDS DISCORD! The link is in the summary, but if you’re too damn lazy to go there, here ya go: HERE!.
Chapter Summary

Oh, it's wonderful alright.

Chapter Notes

... 

See the end of the chapter for more notes

11:14 A.M., December 16th, 20XR

It's a cold and blustery day outside.

Wind is howling.

Clouds are forming.

On days like this, kids like you...

... are turning in your Spanish worksheet.

Everyone stared at Frisk as they turned in their worksheet, amazed at how fast they finished.

Frisk disregarded their classmates’ whispers and returned to their seat.

They zoned out of this realm and into the Void.

Chara and Rowan were waiting.

As Frisk settled down from the entry, they suddenly felt a shiver crawl up their spine.

They shuddered.

“You feel it too?” Chara asked.

Frisk’s ruby eyes widened.

“We’ve been feelin’ that chill for a good while now,” Rowan explained. “I haven’t a clue what it could possibly be about.”

<<Should we tell Sans?>> Frisk signed.

“But he doesn’t know about Rowan yet, and we don’t know how he’d react to it either,” Chara said.
“We’re gonna have to wait and see what it means.”

<<It reminds me of when The Player shows up but lighter and cleaner,>> Frisk signed.

“I thought the same thing,” Chara said. “When was the last time we saw The Player, anyway?”

Frisk shrugged.

Rowan was utterly confused.

Chara noticed.

“The Player is a being from another dimension who thought our universe was a game,” Chara explained. “They played us, and made me take the fall.”

Frisk put a comforting hand on Chara’s shoulder.

Chara smiled up at Frisk.

Rowan smiled at the two children before him.

No one could have ever foretold such an afterlife for him, but he couldn’t complain. Not when he could see firsthand how the world had changed, how people had changed.

Knowing that not only individuals, but whole societies could change for the better, filled Rowan with DETERMINATION.

Rowan spotted a star. He knew what it meant - it had SAVED him countless times.

He reached out to it as one would an old friend.

FILE: SAVE.

Linda took the ham salad from the freezer, and stuck it in the microwave for five minutes.

She went upstairs and put on her outfit - a maroon blouse with white polkadots and black straight-leg pants with maroon heels. She put in her gold hoop earrings and put on her gold cross necklace.

Then she went into the bathroom to put on her makeup.

She was pissed that she’d have to redo it later, but it sure as hell wasn’t her fault that Hunter in the goddamn choir.

But then again, she supposed it wasn’t really his fault either. Hunter had no control over his schedule, even if he was enjoying it.

But maybe Mrs. Caton did…

The lipstick container creaked slightly as Linda clenched it in rage.

Oh boy, was she ever going to have words with that woman.

Linda was going to show her “misbehavior”, alright.

Besides, it was clearly not her fault she’d been kicked out of her class. It was clearly the fault of the girl with the braces - she was the one who was distracting her.
Who even invented braces, anyway.
Linda put away her makeup and went downstairs.
Two and a half minutes left on the timer.
“So,” Estelle piped suddenly. “How’re you gonna poison them this time?”
“Shut up,” Linda snapped.
“Hmmm, ham salad huh?” Estelle continued, ignoring her haunt. “I remember when your mom made some for the bake sale in 94 .”
“I said shut up!”
“The plumbing system at the school was decimated thanks to that shit - no pun intended, surprisingly .”
“SHUT UP!”
The microwave went off.
“You might wanna get that,” Estelle said.
“Fuck you,” Linda hissed.
“Oh, I didn’t know you was into necrophilia~”
Linda shrieked and threw a wine glass at the spectre.
Estelle merely laughed - that mockingly beautiful laugh that haunted Linda.
“Why are you really here, Crawford?” Linda asked. “You can’t really just be here because I killed you, there has to be something else. If you really wanted revenge, you would have killed me already!”
“Nah, that ain’t my style,” Estelle said dismissively, sitting down on the counter while crossing her legs and checking her nails. “I don’t kill people who piss me off.”
“Then why are you here?!?”
“Revenge.”
“AND HOW DO YOU PLAN ON GETTING THAT?!”
Estelle turned her head and smiled her beautifully bright smile, brushing her box braids behind her left ear.
“You’ll find out soon,” Estelle said. “Now take that nasty-ass ham salad out of the microwave.”
Linda turned to glare at Estelle, but she was gone.
Linda was filled with terror.

Caroline sat on the sofa in the back of the library, a copy of Louisa May Alcott’s Little Women in one hand and a chicken schnitzel sandwich in the other, eating while she read.
She couldn’t imagine anyone willing to have so many children, but at the same she knew that the 19th century was full of infant mortality and people had as many babies as they could to counter that.

She took a bite of the sandwich, then turned the page of the book.

She silently praised John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich, for his contribution to the world of gastronomy.

She looked around at the other school library patrons, who were talking amongst themselves rather than reading - an act Caroline could simply not comprehend. Libraries were meant for reading in silence, and these heathens were desecrating the sanctity of the library.

It sickened her.

She took another bite, turned another page.

She felt the familiar weight on the sofa, saw the familiar black curls in her peripheral, as Penelope sat down beside her.

They smiled at each other.

Penelope stayed silent as she put her head on Caroline’s shoulder to read along - a privilege reserved only for her.

Caroline could feel the sounds of the others fading away.

This, she assumed, was peace.

“…and then this one kid wrote down ‘carlson’s hairpiece’!”

Laughter.

“And what did you do?” Toriel managed through laughter.

“gave the kid half a point for it,” Sans replied. “i didn’t have the heart to mark points off of something so wonderful.”

Toriel giggled. “Well, neither would I.”

“and that’s just one of the many, many reasons why i love you,” Sans said warmly, putting his hand on Toriel’s. “i could go on forever with those reasons, but we only have about ten minutes left for lunch…”

Toriel’s face fell slightly.

“…but that doesn’t mean i can’t say ‘em after school, does it?” he asked teasingly.

Toriel brightened and laid a kiss to the top of Sans’ skull.

Sans brightened as well - quite literally, in fact. His blush was brighter than a Christmas tree.

Toriel giggled. The littlest things could set this man alight.

It made her smile.

“So, have we gotten the venue settled yet?” she asked casually.
Sans blinked himself back into reality. “i’ve been trying to settle a date with gene, and it’s between the fifteenth and seventeenth of november of next year that i’m trying to choose.”

Toriel tilted her head. “An oddly specific set of dates. Why those two?”

Sans shrugged noncommittally.

Toriel sighed.

He was clearly planning something - what it was, she had no idea.

But she was willing to wait.

She’d waited a hundred years to meet him, after all, and she would wait a hundred more.

Just for him.

Helen set her strawberry cake on the table and sat in the metal folding chair in the church gymnasium.

David had, thankfully, accepted its presence as long he wasn’t going to have to eat it.

Not that she would have let him some anyway.

She opened her phone and started playing 7 Wonders.

She watched from the corner of her eye as Linda came in and set down a tupperware filled with… something. It was pink. Wait, was it pink?

Helen gagged a little.

Then she nearly puked when she saw Irma walk in wearing a skintight dress in the same shade of pink(?) as Linda’s…blob. Her makeup was as trashy and overdone as usual. Bright red eyeshadow never looks good on anyone and no living creature should ever wear that much mascara. And lipstick the same color as one’s eyeshadow is a crime against nature.

Helen returned to her app and decided to merely listen when she saw Amber walk up to Linda.

This was going either be hilarious or horrifying.

“Everyone have a seat, the meeting’s about to start!”

And there’s Helen’s cue to stick her phone in her purse against her will lest she be tarred and feathered as a sympathizer.

She was, she just couldn’t say because she’d declared herself a sort of spy for the Monsters, and spies should not get caught.

As soon as everyone was seated, Craig stepped up to the microphone.

“All rise!” he said.

Everyone stood.

“You may be seated.”
Everyone sat.

“Now, as you remember, our beloved founder Leland Schwartz has prepared a wonderful Christmas present for us all in the form of the first-ever Human Welfare Coalition commercial!”

Applause.

Craig pressed a button in a remote, causing a screen to lower from the ceiling behind him. As soon as it was lowered, he pressed another button on a different remote and turned on the overhead projector.

Helen felt ever-so-slightly nauseous.

She looked around to see if anyone else was possibly feeling the same way. A majority of them looked neutral, some looked excited, some looked nervous, Irma looked…lovestruck? Weird.

The lights were cut off.

The film on the projector began to play.

On the screen, a nondescript everywoman was tucking her young child into bed.

"Mommy, are there monsters under my bed?" the child's timid voice asks as their mother tucks them in.

“No, sweetie, the monsters can't get you…” the mother responds, kissing the child on the forehead and turning off the light. “Good night.”

The child looked fearfully into a closet as they hear growling, and as a glowing red eye came into view, the child screamed in terror; the sound of which was cut off by a black-and-white 80's freeze-frame, keeping the look of terror in focus.

Helen fought back a groan of annoyance.

“Can YOU sleep at night knowing that Monsters are REAL and OUT there? They have claws.” A picture of ridiculously elongated and sharp claws was shown. “They have fangs.” A picture of a maw filled with long, crowded fangs was shown. “They have magic.” Flames burst from the bottom of the screen. “Once upon a time, we all thought monsters were just a reason to buy a nightlight.” A nightlight was shown being plugged into a wall socket. “Now, they're a reason to buy a gun.” A man whose head was cut off by the screen holds an M17 pistol, taking off the safety, locking and loading, and placing his index finger on the trigger.

“They pretend to be people, but we all know what they really want.” A heart was shown being torn out of a humanoid stick-figure with a clawed hand. “Your SOUL is not safe. Your children's SOULs are not safe. They have already used a misguided and brainwashed child to further their evil agenda in our fair government.” An image of Frisk walking up to the Capitol Building is shown.

Helen’s blood ran cold. The HWC was trying to put Frisk in danger, and they were actually lying to do it.

“We are the Human Welfare Coalition. Join us, and say NO to this danger.” A pretentious looking group of men and women were shown, clearly trying to display solidarity by not smiling at all.

“I feel safer knowing we can keep them in check,” a woman says.

“They can't be trusted. They come out of that mountain and into our country and act like they were
“here the whole time. We gotta stand up for ourselves!” a man says.

“This won't end well. It didn't before, it won't now.” another man says. “We gotta take the initiative.”

“Join the HWC. Call now, and find your local chapter today! Join Now!” A phone number as well as the HWC logo, membership fees, and some disclaimers were shown, and read off in a fast-paced voice. The screen went black, signaling the end of the commercial.

Everyone applauded and cheered loudly. Helen merely pretended to clap.

The polite smile on her face hid her fear and nausea.

“Now you’re all free to help yourselves to some refreshments!” Craig announced.

Everyone stood and walked over the table with the food and drinks.

Helen was secretly glad that she’d burned the bottom of the cake slightly and used cheap frosting.

She decided to get up and grab some Dr. Pepper and discreetly listen to what the more “loyal” members thought.

“The quality was shit,” a young woman with brown hair and green eyes said.

“Hey, maybe money was tight, you don’t know!” countered a middle-aged man with brown hair and brown eyes.

“Leland Schwartz is more than rich enough to have better production quality than that. No one with half a brain cell would take that seriously.”

“Are you sympathizing?”

“No, I’m criticizing.”

“Criticizing the founder!”

Helen sighed and decided to intervene.

“Hey, break it up you two,” she said. “Gina, I know you mean well, but be careful with how you phrase it or someone could take it the wrong way, okay?”

Helen turned to the smug man.

“John Davis, the quality definitely could be better, and Leland Schwartz definitely could afford better,” she explained. “Perhaps he does have reasons, but maybe he doesn’t, you don’t know either.”

Helen sighed.

“Now both of you, cut it out. You’re making fools of yourselves.”

She walked past the food table, very much unwilling to touch any of it for fear that it may have been contaminated by whatever the pink blob was that Linda brought.

So she took a seat by the food table when she saw Linda and Amber make eye contact, know almost exactly what was coming up.
“Hello, Linda,” Amber sneered. “I see you brought some Silly Putty for the kids to play with.”

Linda smiled condescendingly. “Oh, Amber, Amber, Amber, you never were a smart one, but not recognizing a perfectly good ham salad when you see it? Really?”

“You’ve clearly deluded yourself, Murphy,” Amber said. “That’s not a salad. That’s a rubber band ball.”

“And your brownies are burnt,” Linda snapped back.

“And your mother’s in prison.”

People gasped.

“And you’re still in love with my husband,” Linda countered coldly.

Amber’s eyes widened as everyone gasped even louder.

“At least I’m not sleeping with my best friend’s husband!” Amber said.

More sounds of shock.

“Let’s take this to the parking lot,” Linda hissed through clenched teeth.

“Gladly,” Amber said.

The two women went outside, a decently-sized crowd following.

Helen’s eyes followed David, who was slipping into the bathrooms with Irma.

Helen couldn’t bring herself to care.

Besides, she already knew David was banging Linda. Every other guy in high school had, why would adulthood be any different? Why did everyone care?

Helen took out her phone and began to play 7 Wonders.

Almost done with the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

A free day.

Yeah, the weather was cold, so using the gym was understandable, but a free day. Really.

Theo leaned back against the wall and glared at Undyne, who was playing her toddler son.

Why did she feel the need to bring her kid again? Just because it’s the last day before winter break?

Yeah, whatever.

As long as the kid didn’t come anywhere near him, it was whatever.

A lot of the kids were hanging around their friends for their free time, texting each other or playing basketball or any number of other things.

A small group, however, was gathered around Undyne’s baby.
Julia was in that group.

God, why couldn’t he just get over her already?

“Oh my god, he’s like a little dinosaur!” Julia cooed in awe.

“I know, isn’t he the coolest?” Undyne said proudly.

“ Heck yeah!” Moira agreed.

“Can we play with him?” Sofie asked.

“Sure, just keep a real close eye on ‘im, he’s got my passion and Alphys’ smarts!”

“Thanks for the heads-up!” Julia said.

“No problem, I could use a break anyway!” Undyne assured. “C’mon, Mamo-chan, go play with the nice onee-chans!”

“Ya!” Mamoru said with a nod.

And with that Mamoru toddled alongside the girls.

A few other kids joined them shortly.

“So this is Mamoru, huh,” Cooper said.

“Yes,” Brian said, ruffling the little Dino’s shock of red hair. “I’ve already decided to teach him how to beat people up with a hockey stick.”

“You play hockey?” Bruce asked.

Brian was silent.

“Okay fine, a wiffle ball bat,” he amended. “I’m still gonna teach him how to beat up bad guys.”

“Hey losers!”

Trav was standing nearby, a smug-ass smirk on his face and a basketball under his arm.

“Betcha can’t block the kid from a basketball!”

Trav readied himself to throw the ball.

Brian turned to Mamoru.

“Lesson number one for beating up bad guys Mamo-chan,” he said. “Make sure they’re actually bad, like people threatening to harm the innocent.”

“Aye, sir!” Mamoru said with a tiny salute.

Brian smiled fondly and tousled the little Dinosaur’s hair.

Then he turned to glare threateningly at Trav.

“DON’T TOUCH THE CHILD!” Brian screamed, standing up and charging at the idiot with the basketball.
“Oh, shit,” Trav said as he started running in the other direction, dropping the basketball.

“YOU CAN FREAKIN’ RUN FROM ME, DIPWAD!” Brian cried. “I KNOW WHERE YOU LIVE!”

“SOMEbody SAVE ME!” Trav screamed.

Ridley was filming the strange incident, trying to hold back laughter. The rest of the group was just laughing.

Theo took out his phone to check the time.

Ten minutes until school was out.

He sighed and waited.

Linda pulled into her garage, her hair a mess, a black eye marring her face, contusions across her arms.

Amber had a bloody lip and bleeding claw marks on her cheek, neck, and arms when she left.

Linda growled.

She was going to have to avoid David for a while - no approaching him unless it was an absolute emergency.

Hopefully none of those were coming anytime soon.

Linda walked through the door and slammed it behind her.

“Daaaamn, girl, what happened to you?” Estelle asked.

“You know exactly what happened!” Linda snapped.

Estelle blinked. “You say that like it’s my fault you got your ass beat.”

“That’s because it is Crawford!” Linda shouted.

“In what way?” Estelle asked, crossing her arms and leaning against the wall.

“Don’t play dumb with me!” Linda warned. “You know exactly what you did!”

“Honestly? I have no idea what I did besides be gay, and I’m pretty sure that ain’t what you mean.”

“Fuck you,” Linda growled.

“You really wanted to, didn’t you?” Estelle said with a cold, disgustingly beautiful smile.

Linda stared. Heat was coursing through her body as Estelle stared hungrily at her, and she stared right back -

Linda screeched and tried to hit Estelle with her purse.

The bag phased right through Estelle, who didn’t even flicker or flinch in the slightest.

Estelle just kept staring while Linda kept swinging her bag around like a madwoman.
“You done? This would be a lot faster if you just used the car again.”

Linda screamed at the top of her lungs as she threw her bag through Estelle.

As soon as the bag hit the wall, the contents spilled out onto the ground.

Linda fell to the floor gasping for breath, staring at the unimpressed spectre before her.

“Why must you keep torturing me?” she asked, her voice quaking. “What did I ever do to you?”

“PAH!” Estelle laughed. “Aw man, where to begin? You spread a rumor about me that everyone knew was false just because I won the talent show, you tried to come onto me despite knowing I had a girlfriend, and when I turned you down -”

“No…” Linda choked.

“- you couldn’t handle anyone knowing that you were attracted to another woman -”

“Nonono, please…” Linda sobbed, tears beginning to leak from her beady brown eyes.

“- so you snapped, oh girl did you ever snap -”

“No more, please, I’m b-begging you…”

“- so you asked me to walk you outside -”

“Please, stop, please -”

“- and as soon as you got in your car -”

Linda cried out something unintelligible.

“- you ran me over. Five times you ran me over. I died on the third time.”

Linda was now outright sobbing, her fingers digging into her hair as if the pain from tearing it out would erase the truth from the universe.

“Oh stop whining, woman,” Estelle snapped. “If anybody here deserves to whine it’s me - you know, the person you -”

Linda screeched before her spectral tormentor could finish her sentence.

When Linda was finally done shrieking, Estelle decided it was safe to speak again.

“You know, I’m not here to torture you,” she admitted.

“Then why are you here?!” Linda sniffled. “Why am I the only one who can see you?”

Estelle smiled cryptically.

“I don’t rightly know why I’m here,” she sighed. “All I know is that I gotta help somebody - two somebodies - and those somebodies can see me if I want ‘em to.”

“Who the fuck would want your help?” Linda bit.

Estelle merely smiled - her bright, beautiful smile that threatened to destroy Linda’s mind completely.
Linda stared at the clock.

The choir concert was in three hours.

Linda groaned as she stormed up the stairs to redo her makeup once more before leaving.

This was going to be a long night.

__________________________________________________________

The choir and orchestra kids plus Frisk the translator all stared up at the clock.

Half an hour til showtime.

They had a fifteen-minute break in practice that had just started and no one was quite sure what to do.

Then someone in the orchestra section - a violinist - stood up and began to sing.

“On the first day of Christmas my true love gave to me~ A partridge in a pear tree~”

A choir kid stood up - a tenor, judging by the section from whence he stood.

“On the second of Christmas my true love gave to me~ Two turtle doves~”

“And a partridge in a pear tree~”

The choir kid and the orchestra kid sang that line in unison. A few kids were filming it with their phones.

Then an oboist stood up to sing

“On the fourth day of Christ…”

The oboist realized that he’d gotten the day wrong.

Colleen stood up and picked up the slack.

“On the third day of Christmas my true love gave to me~”

The entire Cello Squad stood up, along with a fourth of the choir.

“Five golden rings~”

Suddenly, a few others recognized just what the heck was going on and stood up to join in.

“Four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree~”

The kids laughed and applauded.

“On the ninth day of Christmas my true love sent to me~”

“On the eighth day of Christmas my true love sent to me~”

“Everyone SHUT UP!” Rachel shrieked.

“You better not shout~ You better not cry~”
Rachel screamed and stormed out of the choir room.

“On the seventh day of Christmas my true love gave to me~”

“Deck the halls with boughs of holly~”

“Seven swans a-swimming, six geese a-laying~”

“Here we come a-wassailing among the leaves so~”

“Five golden rings~”

“Falalalala-lalalala~”

“Mrs. Caton’s coming being dragged by Rachel!” someone cried.

Everyone sat down and shut up.

The door opened.

“See? What did I tell you?” Rachel said smugly.

Mrs. Caton stared at the inactive students.

The students stared back.

Rachel would have been sweating nervously had she not been so thoroughly caked in makeup.

“Look, either you sing, or you don’t,” Mrs. Caton said.

Someone in the mezzo-soprano stood up.

“Four calling birds~”

A baritone stood up.

“Three French hens~”

A tuba player stood up.

“Two turtle doves~”

A trombonist stood.

“Here we come a wassailing among the leaves so green~”

Caroline and Hunter stood up, glanced at each other, and nodded.

“The boar’s head in hand bear I~ Bedecked with bays~”

“And a partridge in a pear tree~”

Rachel left once again, presumably to rat them all out once more.

“On the twelfth day of Christmas my true love gave to me~”

Levi burst in through the door and started singing.
“I have a little dreidel~ I made it out of clay~”

Reuben stood up and joined him.

“And when it’s dry and ready~ My dreidel I shall play~ Oh, Dreidel dreidel dreidel~”

“Dodo do do dodo do do~ Dodo do do dodo do do~”

“On the twelfth day my true love gave to me~ Twelve drummers drumming like Olympus above the Serengeti~”

“Eleven pipers piping~ Ten lords a-leaping~”

“Ba ba ba ba ba oh~”

“Nine ladies dancing they were dancing for me~ Eight maids a-milking they were milking just for me~”

Then everyone sang.

“I had Christmas down in Africa~ I had Christmas down in Africa~ I had Christmas down in Africa~ I had Christmas down in Africa~ I had Christmas down in Africa~ We couldn’t deck the halls to the things we never had~”

And then everyone applauded themselves, laughing and complimenting each other.

They didn’t see Principal Kierkegaard filming them with her cell phone while Rachel fumed silently.

“We’re on in ten everyone, let’s practice each song one last time!” Mrs. Caton announced.

And so everyone returned to their seats to practice.

Energy was flowing through the air.

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Sans, Toriel, Papyrus, Mettaton, Alphys, Undyne, Mamoru, Gaster, Asgore, Chas, and Shelby all made move to sit in the auditorium - toward the back, naturally, since Asgore’s and Toriel’s heights were too much for some Humans to see over.

“Sans,” Toriel began, “just how did you manage to convince Principal Kierkegaard to let Frisk translate the performance into sign language?”

“i didn’t,” Sans said. “she’d heard about their work first-hand from mcbride, and told mrs. caton, and bam.”

“I’m just surprised Linda didn’t try to stop all this,” Mettaton said. “This is exactly the kind of thing she stands against, people forgetting their differences in the name of peace and goodwill…”

“MAYBE SHE DOESN’T WANT TO DO THAT, BUT SHE JUST DOESN’T REALIZE SHE’S DOING IT?” Papyrus suggested innocently.

“Maybe,” Mettaton conceded. “I still don’t think she’s a good person.”

“ANYONE CAN BE A GOOD PERSON IF THEY TRY!” Papyrus said.
“If they try,” Mettaton repeated with a sigh, kissing his taller botfriend on the jaw.

Seriously, this man was just so optimistic it hurt sometimes.

“I-I thought Linda wasn’t the PTA President anymore,” Alphys said.

“thankfully she’s not, and speaking of linda,” Sans said, pointing his right thumb toward where Linda was coming in the auditorium doors.

Her swollen eye and bruises did not go unnoticed.

“dang, what happened to her?” Sans asked.

Then he saw Amber come in through the opposite auditorium doors, her lip swollen and scratch marks all over her.

Then it occurred to him what might have happened.

He had to text Helen to ask what happened.

The two women didn’t even notice each other as they walked down the aisles and into the exact same row.

Until they were literally in front of each other.

The way their faces morphed in shock and fury was hilarious to watch - especially with the swelling.

Eventually they sat down with a single empty seat between them after a few moments of glaring at each other.

Well that’s not suspicious.

Sans added that to the list of things to ask Helen.

She was their spy in the HWC, after all, and if anyone knew just what the hell was going on here it was her.

Sans checked his watch.

Five minutes til showtime.

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Elaina’s phone went off two minutes before showtime.

She took it out to find a text from her mother.

Irma: At airport going to NY. Be back Jan 4.

Elaina stared at the phone.

The Cello Squad stared at her, concerned.

Elaina smiled and shrugged.

The rest of the Squad shrugged.
Elaina returned her phone to her pocket, deciding her mother was too happy to be away from her to want a response.

She and the rest of the orchestra kids plus the choir kids filed out of the room and into the hall to begin the Christmas concert.

It's showtime.

Sawyer and Megan took a seat inside Muffet’s Café, silent and nervous.

They glanced about the café, pointedly avoiding each other’s gazes.

Megan had put on a red plaid halterneck dress with black trim, black tights, and some black leather ankle boots with silver studs. With it she wore a black leather jacket with silver studs, a black beanie, and black leather gloves to stave off the cold.

She removed the gloves, opting to keep the hat on in case any stray spiders happened to fall on them.

Sawyer wore a simple white v-neck with black leggings, a brown leather jacket, combat boots, and some mascara and nude-colored lipstick they’d pilfered from their mother’s makeup box. They’d come to realize that makeup felt really nice to them.

Then Megan’s and Sawyer’s eyes met accidentally.

They couldn’t stop staring.

Their faces flushed.

“Y-you look great,” Sawyer managed.

“Thanks, y-you too,” Megan said.

Awkward silence once more.

“So, uh…what do you wanna do after we eat?” Megan asked.

“I honestly didn’t think I’d get this far,” Sawyer admitted.

“We could walk around and stare at Christmas lights,” Megan offered. “You always liked Christmas lights.”

Sawyer relaxed considerably, a warm smile gracing their face.

“I guess that makes you Christmas lights, then,” they said.

Megan’s face turned red from the compliment.

“See? You’re glowing red just like ‘em!”

“Oh my god, when did you get so suave?” Megan whined.

“I didn’t, I’m a crazy dork with as much gender as social skills,” Sawyer said.

“Hello dearies~” came a voice so sweet it threatened tooth decay. “May I take your orders?”

Sawyer and Megan looked up at the five-eyed, pigtailed Spider Monstress before them. Clearly this
was Muffet.

“I’ll have a spider donut and a spider tea,” Megan said, unaffected by the strange and unusual as always.

“I’ll take the same,” Sawyer said, placing the money on the table as was custom in Muffet’s. “Keep the change.”

Muffet’s eyes sparkled hungrily. “Why thank you, deary~ Do enjoy your meal!”

And with that some spiders dropped from the ceiling to take the money. One accidentally fell onto Megan’s head, as expected.

Megan picked up the spider and held it in her hand, petting it as one would a puppy. The spider reacted in much the same manner.

Sawyer wondered if the spider was a baby or full-grown. Knowing Muffet and her beloved pet it was likely the former.

But Megan was clearly enjoying herself.

It suddenly occurred to Sawyer that the little spider in Megan’s hands was wearing a tiny Santa hat.

Then their foodstuffs appeared before them.

Megan sipped her tea and took a bite of the donut. She discreetly slipped a bite to the spider in her lap.

“I do this all the time,” she explained. “Muffet lets me feed her babies and pets without pay, I get to keep whichever one gets attached to me most by the end of the year. I already have a name in mind for this one.”

“What is it?” Sawyer asked, amused.

“Barnaby,” Megan said.

“Well, he definitely looks like a Barnaby.”

“Exactly!”

“But where’re you gonna keep him?” Sawyer asked, a bit of concern in his voice. “Courtney probably won’t like this…”

“He’ll stay either in my room or the attic, whichever he prefers,” Megan said. “Either way, Courtney had better get used to him because I’m not giving him up.”

“And your folks?” Sawyer asked.

“I’ll say he’s my therapy pet and they’ll just sigh and go about their lives,” Megan said. “Mom’ll probably love him though when I explain the merits of spiders as pest control.”

“You could take him to school and sic him on Kayla,” Sawyer suggested.

“This is why I like you,” Megan said with utter seriousness as she leaned across the table and placed her free hand on Sawyer’s.
Sawyer glanced at her and smiled.

Megan smiled back.

And that was when Sawyer Drew Hebert knew.

They were screwed.

The show ended - a wondrous performance considering it was a bunch of middle schoolers. So really it was above average at best. Not that Mettaton was complaining - his darling Frisk was a part of it, after all. That automatically made it that much better.

As they stood outside preparing to get into their vehicles, the sounds of an argument were heard.

“Your son couldn’t play an instrument if his life depended on it!” Linda screamed.

“Well yours couldn’t play a sport if his life depended on it!” Amber countered.

“Well does Craig know that little Scotty isn’t his?” Linda asked cruelly. “Because with those eyes it’s obvious he isn’t.”

Amber’s eyes widened, her face paling. “How dare you -”

“Honesty is the best policy, Amber Lynn Peterson,” Linda said smugly.

“If only you’d use it once in a while, eh?” Amber sniped back.

“What are you implying?” Linda said through clenched teeth.

“Oh, nothing,” Amber said dismissively. “Come on Scott, let’s go.”

“Richard never loved you!” Linda called out after her before grabbing Hunter by the arm.

Scott wordlessly followed his mother, unsure what to make of the conversation.

He saw her tense a bit and look at her amber butterfly pendant, the one she’d had since before he was born.

The she let it go and walked even faster toward the car.

Scott looked back to where Hunter’s mom was dragging him and his sister by the arms.

Their faces were clenched in…pain?

Scott turned away. Not his problem.

Hunter took out her tablet and opened the notes app to write in her diary.

*Christmas choir performance. Lots of fun. Mom was angry for some reason. Grabbed my arm and dragged me. Blood this time. Hannah was there.

Then she checked the time.

After ten.
She put away the tablet in her dresser drawer and yawned before her head hit the pillow, falling asleep almost immediately.

And finding herself awake again not long after.

This wasn’t her room.

Elaina unlocked the back door of her house and slipped inside, locking it up again before rushing up the stairs toward her bedroom.

She opened the closet door and threw all the hung-up clothing onto her bed.

She removed the blanket from atop the wooden chest.

Elaina stared at the chest and briefly pondered opening it.

It held secrets. What kind of secrets she couldn’t tell, but secrets they were.

The thought made her blood run cold.

She sighed and simply moved the chest from the closet to the foot of her bed.

She folded the old quilt and draped it across the top of the chest.

Elaina didn’t want to open it just yet - even if she had, she didn’t have the key for it.

Irma probably did.

But no one entered Irma’s room. But Irma wasn’t here. But Irma would notice

So Elaina simply sighed and laid herself facedown on her bed.

Two and a half weeks with the house to herself.

What to do, what to do.

Frisk, Chara, and Rowan sat in the Void, waiting.

Then it came.

Wait, no. Wrong chill. Too heavy.

“Well if it isn’t the thing that tried to destroy us all,” Chara sighed. “How long’s it been, Player? A year?”

I am not certain, to be truthful. I am merely here to check on things.

Then The Player noticed Rowan.

You are the Poncho Human from the intro.

Rowan blinked in confusion.

“They think we’re a video game,” Chara explained.
I used to. I still perceive you as such, but I am aware that you are not mere graphic sprites. Within your world you are flesh and blood and souls, as humans are within mine.

<<But I thought the humans of The Hub didn’t have SOULs,>> Frisk signed in confusion.

Silence.

There are many who believe we do. I am honestly uncertain of my beliefs on the matter, as I have never been taken with the spiritual.

“Religion is a trap meant to make people feel fear and to make people in charge feel justified in their actions,” Chara said coldly.

It’s not hard to see how one could think that, what with the crusades and the witch hunts and the inquisitions:

“The Monstrous Diaspora,” Rowan said, his voice barely heard.

Chara and Frisk turned to look at Rowan.

Then they shivered.

“That I did,” Rowan said. “Did you feel it, young Frisk?”

Frisk nodded.

“And you, err - Player, was it?” Rowan asked. “Did you feel anything?”

I can’t feel what you all feel. Not physical sensations, at least. However, I did see exclamation points appear above your heads and flash red a few times. They don’t usually flash at all, and the color is typically black.

The three red-eyed ones suddenly thought something.

<<Maybe there’s another Red-SOUL bearer coming,>> Frisk suggested.

“Who knows,” Chara sighed. “I sure hope not though, three red-eyed bob-cut time-warpers is enough for this void.”

<<You can never have too many friends!>> Frisk said. <<Besides, every Red-SOUL bearer so far has had something to offer! Chara offers kinship and understanding. Rowan offers protection and history. Who knows what this next one could bring?>>

“Let me guess, it fills you with DETERMINATION?” Chara asked, an unfamiliar fondness filling their voice.

Frisk nodded and tapped the SAVE star before them.

FILE: SAVE

Hunter sat up in the room that wasn’t hers.
She looked around, confused, then stopped.

She raised a hand to her hair.

Her fingers laced through long, waist-length hair.

She held a lock before her face, speechless.

“Hey.”

Hunter jumped upon hearing an unfamiliar voice.

She turned around to find the lady with the pretty smile.

“Welcome to my world, Hunter James,” the pretty lady said. “Of course, here you can call yourself whatever you wanna be called. In my world, you can be what you wanna be without anyone telling you it ain’t right because we both know you get enough of that when you’re awake, so you might as well have a place to be yourself while you sleep!”

Hunter blinked in confusion.

“Who… are you?” she asked.

The pretty lady smiled and flipped her box braids back with a flourish and a snap.

“Why girl, I am Estelle Monet,” she said. “And I am your personal fairy godmother.”

A woman with dark red hair and green eyes stared at the overcast night sky above the white mountain peaks in the distance.

She couldn’t believe she was leaving this place. She wanted to stay just a little bit longer - if not forever, then another night would have been just as well.

“Hey!” someone snapped. The woman jumped at the sound and turned around slowly to see a man with dark hair and eyes with a goatee sitting in the driver’s seat of a dark red ’98 Dodge Ram.

“Get in,” he said. “They’re coming in a few hours and we have to be across state lines by then.”

The woman fought back a sigh - no turning back after this.

“Coming, Tony,” she said as she walked toward the truck.

Melanie Dunn didn’t bother looking back at the beautiful snow-capped peaks of the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains as she hopped in the passenger’s seat and buckled in.

She wanted to though.

It must have been so painful for those three to leave this beautiful, beautiful place, but she knew why.

She wondered if it was too late for her.

The possibilities of the future fill you with

DETERMINATION
Chapter End Notes

Wonderful Christmastime - Paul McCartney
Twelve Days Of Christmas - Straight No Chaser

Fun Fact: This chapter heavily features things discussed in the Discord. Also, shit's about to get real.

The HWC Commercial was penned by AU_Lord, AKA Goldy! Thanks buddy!
Chapter Summary

Rowan tells his story, Megan and Sans play a game, Caroline really wants to help, Irma shows something resembling depth, Elaina bakes, and Richard learns something.

Chapter Notes

Warning: This chapter contains heavily implied male pregnancy, parental negligence, and chess. Viewer discretion is not so much advised as it is highly recommended.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

4:42 P.M., December 20, 20XR

It’s a cold day outside.

The clouds are thick.

A layer of frost covers everything.

On days like this, kids like you…

… are chilling in your headspace.

Frisk, Chara, and Rowan all lay in the Void, their limbs splayed about them like starfish.

They lay in this manner in a tense yet oddly comfortable silence.

No one said a thing, as if listening for something.

Except they weren’t listening for anything, but rather feeling for something.

They awaited a chill. An odd thing to await, but it was what the chill potentially preceded that had the three eager.

Another deceased Red SOUL-bearer in Frisk’s headspace was a matter of considerable interest to them, especially considering the fact that they had no idea as to the character of this particular person.

“Okay, I like quiet an’ all, but this is ridiculous,” Chara said.

“Well, what do want me or Frisk to do about it, young Chara?” Rowan asked in exasperation.
“Well…” Chara said thoughtfully.

“You could tell us about the other Seven Great Mages!” Frisk suggested.


Rowan sighed. “And I suppose the two of you are going to hound me until I tell you, is that right?”

The two ruby-eyed youths were standing over him, faces eager to learn.

Rowan sighed wearily.

“Fine, I shall tell you both about the Seven Mages,” he said. “It’ll take a while -”

“That’s why we asked,” Chara interrupted.

“- and forgive me if I get a might overwhelmed while I speak of them.”

Silence.

Frisk laid a hand on Rowan’s.

Rowan looked into the current Red SOUL’s eyes.

They reassured him.

He smiled.

Megan left the passenger seat of the Day family’s navy blue Lincoln in the parking lot of the math and science building of Ebott University.

She was damn eager for this moment.

She started walking toward the building with a joyful smile on her face, her father following nervously behind her.

“You sure you’re okay on your own, hon?” Orville asked.

“Dad, I’m fine,” Megan insisted. “The thing ends at eight-thirty and dinner is provided, remember?”

Orville sighed. “If you say so, hon. I’ll be back here at eight -”

Megan cleared her throat and glared at him.

“…-thirty.”

Megan smiled. “Thanks Dad!”

She kissed him on the cheek and went up to a receptionist.

Orville sighed.

Today, a chess gathering at a college. Tomorrow, applying for it.

God, she was growing up so fast.
Orville turned around and headed back to the car.

Leaving Karen alone with Courtney for more than two hours was never a good idea.

Elaina put on the oven mitts and took the brownies out of the oven, placing them next to the double chocolate cookies they’d made not much earlier.

They hoped that the food would hold them over until Irma returned.

Unless Irma decided to stay in New York, in which case they had to find a job.

Sadly no one was hiring twelve-year-olds at the moment.

They put a tray with snickerdoodles in the oven and set the timer.

The lights flickered briefly.

Elaina paused. They’d been flickering a lot more the past few days.

Would Caroline know what to do?

Then Elaina recalled the time they tried to charge one of Mettaton’s phones and accidentally made it explode.

No calling Caroline then.

They decided to wait and see what came of it.

Caroline was always happy to have Penelope over - even if she wasn’t great at expressing it, she really enjoyed Penelope’s presence.

However, it was quite clear that Penelope was stressed or otherwise bearing negative emotions about something since she was snapping her coil bracelets, so it was rather difficult to be entirely happy in her presence.

Sadly, Caroline was uncertain if she should inquire as to what was the matter. She knew that Penelope’s father would be in town soon, so perhaps that was it. Even so, there was always a chance that this was not the case.

Caroline was now more frustrated than happy.

Overthinking always did that to her.

She sighed and decided to work a bit more on the speech for Sans and Toriel’s wedding since everything was silent save for the snapping of coil bracelets against a Human wrist.

She picked up her pencil and notebook and began to write.

…I am reminded of a poem by -

“Caroline?”

Caroline glanced up at Penelope, hoping that her frustration was not betrayed by her face.

“Yes, Penelope?” she asked.
“My dad is coming,” Penelope said quietly.

“So you’ve said,” Caroline said. “I take it he’ll be here soon?”

Penelope nodded.

“Do you know how soon?”

“Today.”

Caroline paused.

“Do you know how to put someone on speed dial?” she asked.

Penelope picked up her phone and fiddled with it a bit. “Yeah.”

“Put me on speed dial,” Caroline said. “If you need me, call or text. I’ll be right over.”

Penelope hugged Caroline from behind.

Caroline really hoped that the green-eyed girl couldn’t feel her blushing.

She continued to write.

…and we will all the pleasures prove…

The phone rang twice.

“Hello, Mt. Ebott Wildlife Refuge, this is Gene, how can I help you?”

“hey, gene it’s sans, i’m calling to say i’ve decided on a date.”

“Well, how ’bout that!” Gene said happily. “ Whatcha decide on, then?”

“i decided on november seventeenth, since i’ve calculated that to the day they peak next year,” Sans explained.

“Well, it just so happens that the fifteenth was just booked a couple days ago, so you chose perfectly!” Gene said. “Just lemme know all the details you have down so far by email and we can keep in touch ’til then, howzat sound?”

“sounds perfect, thanks gene,” Sans said. “i’ll send you the email with the plans so far by tomorrow since i have a work function going on here in a bit.”

“Alrighty, lookin’ forward to it!”

“kay, thanks gene.”

“Right then, see ya ’round!”

“see ya ’round.”

And with that Sans hung up his cell phone.

He went to sit at one of the boards, on the white side since the faculty and professors were on the white team this year.
A challenger appears.

He glanced up at Dr. Carlson, a grin on his face.

“dr. carlson,” he greeted.

“Dr. Gaster,” Dr.Carlson snipped.

“Did someone call for me?”

Dr. Carlson turned his neck so fast a snapping noise was heard. Gaster was there where just seconds prior was empty space.

“oh, hey dad,” Sans greeted. “dr. carlson, this is my dad dr. wingdings gaster. he’s why i told you and everyone else to call me dr. sans.”

“Bu-b-but there was nobody there just a second ago!” Dr. Carlson spluttered.

“And there’s no body there now,” Sans said.

Dr. Carlson glared at Sans. Gaster chuckled.

Sans didn’t show a reaction as he moved one of his pawns.

Frisk and Chara sat before Rowan, their ruby-red eyes wide with curiosity.

Rowan sighed.

“The first of the Mages I met was Ansketel, a Fire Wizard and the Mage of Bravery,” he said. “We met in London in 148W, and since we had no one to rely on we resorted to thievery to provide for ourselves. Four years later we met Orlando Fiorenti, an Earth Wizard and the Mage of Kindness, while he was on tour with his acting troupe. He chose to stay in England rather than return to Venice so he could help us. Two years after that we were caught and placed under arrest - we’d narrowly escaped being sentenced to death by the timing of Queen Gormlaith Dreemurr and Lucia Arsenault, Water Wizard and the Mage of Justice. Soon after that we met Baltasar de Salaga, Poison Wizard and the Mage of Patience; Mathilda Holding, Air Wizard and Mage of Perseverance; and Gregor von Loeffen, Illusion Wizard and Mage of Integrity.”

“You’ve mentioned Gregor before,” Chara said. “You seem to like him a bit.”

Rowan smiled fondly. “You could say that, I’d suppose.”

Frisk’s eyes widened, as did their smile.

<<Were you two dating?>> they asked.

“Dating?” Rowan asked. “What does timekeeping have to do with -”

“They’re asking if you were in love with Gregor,” Chara explained.

“Oh,” Rowan breathed. He lowered his head.

Silence.

“So is that a yes or what?” Chara asked.
Megan won her third round, allowing her to stay in. She looked at who she would be playing next. She couldn’t believe her eyes.

“You’re the guy I played when I visited the university with my school last year,” she said. “I guess I should introduce myself as your opponent. The name’s Megan, Megan Day. And you are?”

Her opponent smiled - not that it seemed he could do otherwise.

“the name’s sans,” said the Skeleton that sat before Megan. “i take it you’ve gotten better since i last saw ya?”

“I’d hope so,” the blonde replied.

“Well, best of luck to ya,” Sans said, holding out a hand. Megan reached to shake it before pausing.

“Is that a whoopie cushion?” she asked.

The Skeleton blinked, well, as well as a skeleton can blink. “good eye,” he said.

“20/20 vision,” Megan said proudly. “Now let’s begin, shall we?”

“alright then.”

And so their game began.

Piece by piece, space by space, minute by minute. For a good while, neither black nor white gave way for the opposing side.

Until a rook was captured. Finally headway was made in this game.

Sans removed Megan’s piece from the board.

“your move,” he said casually.

Megan blinked in surprise before smiling.

“Looks like you’re going to be a challenge for me,” Megan said as she moved a pawn. “It’s been a while since I’ve had a good one.”

“eh, always someone better,” Sans dismissed with a shrug and a wave of his right hand as he moved a white knight with his left.

A pawn of Megan’s was taken. She moved a bishop.

“You took an orphan,” Megan explained.

Sans chuckled.

“chess is a game of war,” he said darkly. “some claim chess is war unto itself. some call it art, some
call it science, some call it pointless.”
“Looks as though some have never played real chess,” Megan said.
“some would claim they have better things to do.”
“Some have very weird ideas of what better is.”
And the game continued on, with both sides bantering as white slowly - painfully, painfully slowly - overcame black.
Until a white knight was taken.
Sans blinked, expression unchanging.
“huh. you definitely have improved.”
“I’ve been practicing,” Megan said. “Have you?”
“let’s see.”
The game continued, more black pieces taken than white.
Until the game was completed.
“looks like a draw,” Sans said.”
“Well what do you know,” Megan said.
Both parties were silent.
“good game,” Sans said. “looking forward to playing you again.”
He held out a hand.
Megan smiled and shook the hand.
The whoopie cushion didn’t even make her flinch.
“So does this mean we’re both out or are we both moving on?” Megan asked.
Sans was silent.
”Play til someone wins then?”
“good plan.”

Irma sat in the back of the limo, sipping her pinotage like the queen she thought she was.
Directly across from her sat the love of her life, the man of her dreams - the only man she didn’t want for his body or money or position, even if he had all of them in spades and some to spare.
Silky dark hair with eyes to match, broad shoulders - six feet and two inches of pure sex in the eyes of Irma Lorence was Leland Schwartz.
She was a tad nonplussed by the presence of a blue-eyed woman with golden hair by Leland’s side.
He’d said Sarabeth was away for the holidays - he wouldn’t lie to her.

“So, you’re Irma Hess,” Sarabeth said cautiously, a genuinely sweet smile on her face that made Irma want to puke up her pinotage. “I’ve heard so much about you from Ike and Wilma.”

Oh lord.

“Well, I assure you that anything my parents may have said was entirely false,” Irma said tersely.

“Really?” Sarabeth said. “And here they were saying such wonderful things about you!”

Irma blinked. “Such as?”

“You seem to be doing quite well in politics,” Sarabeth explained. “I thought I heard them mention granddaughters, but perhaps they were speaking of those of another child of theirs -”

“I’m their only child and I hate children,” Irma said, far too quickly for her own comfort.

The atmosphere in the back of the limo tensed even more than it already had.

“That’s funny, since I remember them speaking so fondly of their daughters Irma and Irene -”

“You have a sister?” Leland asked.

“She died when we were in high school,” Irma said tersely. “I will say *nothing* more on the matter.”

Silence filled the vehicle.

Irma downed the rest of her glass of pinotage and then hastily filled herself another.

She would be the happiest woman in the world if the guilt associated with the name “Irene” would just die with the girl herself.

But that wasn’t going to happen, so Stardust and sex was the next best thing.

Hopefully at least one of those two things would be happening on this damn trip.

Caroline walked Penelope home, the frost and ice crunching beneath their boots and the cold wind whipping their black hair.

“So you really think you can handle him?” Caroline asked. “Because you know I’m willing to accept a bit of blood on these hands of mine should that… person try to harm your family in any way.”

“Even Theo?” Penelope asked.

“He’s your family, so yes,” Caroline sighed. “Even though I find him loathsome, I feel as though he’s merely parroting the opinions of others without regarding their effect on himself in a social sense.”

Penelope was quiet.

They were silent the rest of the walk to Penelope’s house.

A sleek black sedan pulled out of the driveway.

“That’s the lawyer,” Penelope said. “Hunter’s dad, actually.”
“I think we met him at the fair,” Caroline said. “I guess that’s how Hunter and Hannah turned out so
unlike their mom.”

“I know, he has no taste in women,” Penelope said haughtily.

“I’m sure yours is better by far,” Caroline said.

“It is!” Penelope said proudly.

They stood on Penelope’s doorstep in silence.

“Call me if something comes up, okay?” Caroline said. “I’ll come running fast as I can.”

Penelope smiled and nodded.

The stood silent once more.

“Well, I guess I’ll get going -”

“Caroline, wait.”

Caroline paused.

Penelope gestured for Caroline to lean toward her, to which the latter complied.

Penelope kissed Caroline on the cheek.

“Oh, okay, you’re free now,” Penelope said. “See ya.”

And with that Penelope entered her house.

Caroline remained leaning for a moment in shock.

Then she righted herself, an obvious blush plastering her pale cheeks like red paint.

She walked away from Penelope’s house as if lost in a dream she would rather not wake from.

Until she was snapped out of her reverie by the sound of squealing tires.

She turned around, a big red pickup in the DeMartino driveway.

She hid behind some shrubbery and watched the truck discreetly.

She watched as a man who looked like an older Theo with a goatee stepped out of the driver’s side
and walked over to the passenger’s side.

The man who looked like Theo opened the door and dragged the red-haired woman by the arm.

Her face seemed a tad frightened.

Caroline discreetly followed them from a distance and hung outside the DeMartino house.

Rowan, Chara, and Frisk sat in the void in silence.

“Look, either you loved the guy or you didn’t Rowan,” Chara snapped. “But you clearly have a sort
of soft spot for him.”
Frisk nodded sagely.
“See? The flirt expert says so, so clearly you love him.”
Rowan sighed.
“I do love Gregor,” he admitted.
Frisk and Chara high fived.

“Why so glum then?” Chara asked. “Was it one-sided?”
“I’m ‘glum’ because Gregor has been dead for upwards of five hundred years,” Rowan said.
“Oh.”
Frisk gave Chara a brief stink-eye before turning to comfort Rowan with a hug.
Rowan returned the hug.

“So how did you realize you were in love with each other?” Chara asked.
Rowan simply smiled. “It honestly just kind of happened, I’m not sure how else to say it…”
“Tell us!” Frisk said.
“Yeah, yeah!” Chara agreed.
Rowan sighed - he wondered if this was what it was like having younger siblings.

“Well, alright then,” he said. “Let’s begin.”

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Winter, 150W

Somewhere in northeastern Europe

“Rowan, come on. They’re gaining on us faster than you think.”

“I know Gregor, I’m trying! It’s not my fault the snow’s up to my hips…”

“I know, but we have to keep moving at least. Make it difficult for them.”

“I’m moving Gregor, I have the Red SOUL, you know.”

“Yeah yeah, now come on.”

Rowan pouted as he trudged through three feet of snow and counting.

At Rowan’s side was a man a head taller than he and of stockier build wearing a heavy coat of dark blue over his clothing. His hair was dark brown, his eyes blue as the sea.

Rowan had the hood of his beloved poncho on over his head, pulling on it as he pouted. Attached to his back was his beloved claymore sword.

“Stop pouting, Rowan,” Gregor said. “There’s a barn in the distance we can hide in.”
“Oh good, food and clothing the same building,” Rowan said.

“We’ll have to work for it, since the food and clothing are still alive, but you’re determined,” Gregor snarked. “That won’t stop the likes of you.”

Rowan snickered. He loved Gregor’s sense of humor.

The pair walked until they reached the barn.

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“Wait, who was chasing you?” Chara asked.

“Inquisitors,” Rowan said. “Let me continue, please?”

“Fine,” Chara relented. “But were they Spanish?”

“Yes, now let me speak.”

“Sorry.”

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Rowan and Gregor entered the barn and barricaded it with some bales of hay.

There were, contrary to expectations, no animals living or dead within. Only hay.

“Well, now what?” Gregor sighed. “You’re the Red Soul, you’re the leader. What do you suggest we do?”

Rowan sighed and leaned against a bale of hay, setting down his favored claymore sword.

“I say we rest,” he said. “We need to replenish our strength as best we can.”

“And one of us should stay awake in case of an ambush,” Gregor added.

Both men were silent.

“Then again, we don’t exactly need to sleep to regain strength,” Gregor sighed.

“True,” Rowan conceded. He reached into his satchel and took out an apple, which he sliced in half with his claymore.

He offered one half to Gregor.

“I’m good, thanks,” the Blue Mage said.

“You need to eat something,” Rowan insisted. “Every time we stopped to rest, you gave most or all of your portions to me. Have even eaten at all these past weeks?”

Silence.

“Rowan, you’re the only hope of reconciliation between Monsters and Mankind,” Gregor said. “Your life is worth far more than mine could ever -”

Rowan got to his feet grabbed Gregor by the collar, pushing him against a wall.
His ruby eyes were aglow with anger and **DETERMINATION**.

Gregor's eyes widened.

“No life is worth more than another, Gregor,” Rowan hissed. “If anything, my life is worthless since I can just... start over.”

“Rowan—”

“Gregor, you may be the Mage of Integrity, but there is a fine line between loyalty and foolhardiness which you have crossed many times.” Rowan said lowly. “You can’t come back - not like I can.”

“And what if you don’t come back?” Gregor growled. “If you don’t come back I’ll have nothing left! I’m the one whose life is worthless!”

“Not to me,” Rowan hissed.

Gregor’s scowl didn’t budge.

Rowan loosened his grip.

“Gregor, you are my most trusted ally,” Rowan said. “I trust you with my life - not as the Mage of Integrity, or even as a Wizard. I trust you as you are - as a confidant and a friend. If I lose you, I lose my peace of mind.”

“I didn’t ask for friendship,” Gregor said darkly.

Pause.

“Neither did I.” Rowan hissed.

*Both men were silent.*

*Then they kissed*

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Megan and Sans were in their fifth game, and headed toward their fifth draw of the evening.

People around them had paused their games to watch.

“and draw,” Sans said.

“Again,” Megan added.

A few people in the crowd groaned.

Megan and Sans looked about briefly.

Then Megan paused upon seeing someone familiar.

Sawyer smiled and waved at her.

Megan smiled and waved back.

“Let’s play again,” she said upon turning back to Sans. “My datemate’s in the audience and I want to
win or lose so I can hang with them."

"sounds fair," Sans said. "i wanna get this over with so i can get home to my fiance and kid."

"Okay then, let's go."

And so they began to play again.

Elaina pulled several empty ice cream buckets down from the top shelf in their closet. They were so glad they decided to keep those buckets, although they wanted to use them for an art project. They brought the buckets downstairs and started putting baked goods in.

Snickerdoodles in the blue bucket, double chocolate chip in the red one, brownies in the green one, regular chocolate chip in the white one. They gathered up the buckets and placed them in a wagon.

They smiled - they had never been able to make this much at once!

Then the lights flickered and went out.

Richard sat at the dining table in the DeMartino family residence, papers all laid out before him and Monica.

"So we have your testimony and the associated proof here," he said. "I took the liberty of putting them in chronological order for review."

Monica nodded.

"So the hearing is on the 23rd," Richard said. "Should something happen before then, let me know."

Monica nodded.

"How can you stand someone like Linda anyway?" Monica asked.

Richard tilted his head in confusion. "What do you mean?"

"She’s a hypocrite, for starters," Monica began. "She verbally abuses her children and blames them for her problems. She manipulates people without a second thought."

Richard was silent.

"There’s more, but I don’t think you believe any of those statements I made earlier," Monica said.

"Tell me anyway," Richard said, his voice lacking inflection.

"She’s cheating on you."

Richard blinked.

"With Helen’s husband."

Richard showed no reaction.

"See you on the 23rd," he said as he left.

Monica listened as the door slammed.
She sighed and sat down at the dining table, putting the documents in the silverware drawer.

“That’s it?” Chara asked, slightly disappointed. “You just kissed and whammo?”

“That’s about the size of it,” Rowan said, a blush on his cheeks and a shy smile on his face.

Frisk was vibrating in place and squealing.

Chara stared at them with narrowed eyes.

“Of course you’d like it,” they grumbled.

<<What happened after that?>> Frisk signed.

“Well, we escaped without further trouble and got back safely,” Rowan explained. “In the years between then and the erection of the Barrier, we managed to wed and have a child together.”

Frisk squealed even more loudly and vibrated even more intensely.

“Wait, aren’t you male-bodied?” Chara asked in confusion.

“Yes,” Rowan answered. “Wizards are capable of bearing children regardless of gender, similarly to Monsters.”

Frisk’s eyes widened with curiosity.

<<Can Humans and Monsters make babies too?>> Frisk asked.

“Wizards are descended from Monsters, so yes.”

<<Tell us about your baby>> Frisk asked.

Rowan smiled fondly.

“Her name was Elizabeth,” he said. “But everyone called her Liz. She was about five when the Barrier was put up…”

“What color was her SOUL, do you know?” Chara asked.

“It was green,” Rowan said.

Then came a shiver.

Silence.

“It lasted longer this time,” Rowan noted. “Whatever’s coming is getting closer.”

“Frisk, you should snap out of here,” Chara said protectively. “We’ll tell you whenever we feel the chill again, okay?”

Frisk hesitated before nodding.

“Okay, see ya in a bit,” Chara said.

Frisk nodded again before opening their eyes and finding themself in their room.
It was a close game.

This time, more white pieces had been taken than black.

But Megan felt as though something was off. After all, you can still win against greater numbers if you have the right strategy.

She moved a piece.

It was captured.

“checkmate.”

Megan stared at the board.

She had lost.

Applause rang out.

Megan could hear people speaking.

A few of them came up to congratulate for keeping Dr. Sans - as they called him - occupied for so long.

Just how good was he, anyway?

“Megan!”

Megan turned and saw Sawyer push their way through the crowd.

They hugged her tightly.

“That was amazing!” they said. “You did great out there!”

Megan smiled. “I coulda done better…”

“You were being challenged,” Sawyer said. “You said you’ve been waiting for a challenge, and clearly you got one!”

Megan paused.

“I did, didn’t I?” she said.

“You looked like you were having fun,” Sawyer noted.

“I was,” Megan conceded.

Sawyer smiled and kissed her.

When the two parted, their eyes widened when they realized just what they’d done in full view of everyone.

They blushed as the crowd cheered and whistled.

Then they laughed.
Penelope sat in her room, looking through her camera at all the photos she’d taken in the last year.

Within it there were photos of everyone in costume for the bake sale, the spring concert, graduation, the renfaire, the camping trip, the Book Club…

About half of them had Caroline in them.

Penelope smiled.

She pondered the imagery of the taller girl many a time, and she had long since come to the conclusion that perhaps Caroline was her muse - the inspiration for her art, as it were.

Penelope was afraid of many things in that moment - how the kiss (chaste though it was) would affect her friendship with Caroline, what would happen in the coming days with her father and his new paramour coming to town, if Theo would decide to leave with Tony…

Penelope blinked herself out of her reverie and saw some droplets on the camera screen.

She sobbed.

Elaina’s eyes widened. They fumbled for their phone and turned on the flashlight. Light illuminated the area. They carefully made their way over to their mothers spot at the kitchen table. There was a fairly large pile of mail at her spot.

Elaina set their phone face-down on the table. This was going to take a while.

A short while later, they found exactly what they had been dreading. The power bill. Irma forgot to pay it.

Again.

Elaina picked up their phone and made their way up to their room. There, they started to pack up a small bag with clothing, some drawing stuff, their phone charger and their headphones, then picked up the bag and went back downstairs. They put on their boots, coat, hat and gloves.

They went back out into the kitchen, grabbed the handle of the wagon that contained the buckets and their bag and ventured outside.

They decided to go to Frisk’s house and ask if they could stay. Staying in their own house was not a viable option, since food that didn't need to be cooked had gone bad some time before Irma had left.

By the time Elaina was two miles away from their house, they stopped walking.

They realized that they had no idea how to reach Frisk’s house on their own.

Their heartbeat became irregular, breathing became difficult, vision tunneled, dread set in.

Panic attack.

They barely registered a pair of bony arms picking them up and carrying them somewhere.
Chapter End Notes

My Favorite Things - The Sound Of Music

Fun Fact: A storm is coming.
A Christmas Duel

Chapter Summary

It's been a long time coming.

Chapter Notes

Its hell.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

9:23 P.M., December 20, 20XR

It's a bleak night outside.

Snow is falling

Roads are icing over

On nights like these, kids like you…

… are eating leftovers.

Frisk slurped up some cold leftover spaghetti, removing the chunks of tomato from the sauce with their fork and cutting the meatballs in two.

They noticed that Sans was looking at them with concern on his Skeletal features.

They swallowed their bite then turned to him questioningly.

“you’ve been out of it all day,” Sans said worriedly. “you okay, kiddo?”

Frisk smiled and set down their food.

<<I’m okay,>> they signed. <<Just feeling a bit off-ish, I guess…>>

Sans tilted his head. “how so?”

Frisk shook their head.

<<It’s nothing,>> they said. <<I’ll tell you if something happens, okay Dad?>>

Sans sighed.
“if you say so,” he said.

Sans turned around and walked to the basement door, descending the stairs and setting himself up on the ratty old foldout couch. He put the laptop on in front of him and turned it on.

He opened his email and watched the video Helen sent him from the HWC meeting a few days ago.

Well.

This is taking it all to a whole new level of personal vendetta.

He knew what he had to do.

“No, you hang up first! …No you! No you!”

Sharona glared at Levi from across the table.

She loved her son, really she did.

But his sappy, gooey phone calls with his boyfriend were just plain annoying.

She groaned and left to go to her bedroom.

Randy was on the bed reading a book.

“He’s talking to Jordan again, isn’t he?” Randy said.

“Yes,” Sharona sighed.

“Has been for about a couple hours now?”

“Yes.”

“Caroline’s about to smack him?”

Sharona gasped.

“Caroline’s not home yet.”

The sound of a hardbound book being ripped at the spine resounded through the master bedroom.

“Repeat that?” Randy said casually.

“She went to walk Penelope home an hour ago and she hasn’t come back,” Sharona said, voice speeding up with panic. “Oh god, oh god…”

“She probably knows about Penelope’s dad,” Randy said. “Chances are she’s keeping an eye out so nothing happens.”

Sharona looked at Randy with shock.

“Seriously, Randy?!” she yelled. “What if she ends up getting hurt by that man?!”

Randy paused.

He sighed and put down the halves of the book he had torn.
“I know you’re scared, Sharona,” he assured her. “Believe me, I am too. But she has something now that she didn’t have back when we were dealing with Bethany.”

“Magic doesn’t make her invincible, Randy!”

“I know, but it gives her a chance to defend herself.”

Sharona stopped.

She relaxed and flopped facedown on the bed next to her husband.

Randy ran his fingers through her hair.

It was meant to calm both of them down.

Monica set some coffee down in front of Tony and Melanie.

“I told you she doesn’t want any coffee, you dumb bitch,” Tony said.

“Oh, which is exactly how I know she wants it,” Monica said. “You’d always pull the same thing on me back when you had me under your thrall - convince me I didn’t want what I wanted so I’d be fully dependent on you…boy am I glad I wised up.”

Tony’s face contorted in rage.

Monica smiled inwardly while keeping her face neutral. Tony couldn’t do anything physically if he wanted custody of Theo, and he knew it.

“Anyway, enough about that,” Monica dismissed. “How did you two meet? And I want both sides of the story.”

“We met at a Broncos game two years ago,” Tony said. “Love at first sight.”

Monica hummed. “And what about for you, Melanie?” she asked. “Don’t be shy!”

Melanie fidgeted, clearly uncomfortable.

“I was…” she began quietly, trailing off at the end.

Tony squeezed her shoulder hard enough to bruise, causing her to gasp.

“You shut your whore mouth!” Tony roared.

“He threatened to kill me if I didn’t help him do this,” Melanie manage to squeak out.

Tony screamed and started indiscriminately punching Melanie.

Then he was pushed off of her and onto the ground.

He looked up at the one who pushed him.

His eyes widened in shock and fury.

Theo was standing over him, anger the only discernible emotion in his eyes of brown. Penelope and
Monica were tending to Melanie however they could. The redhead’s face was battered and bloody.

“I’m not gonna go anywhere with someone who hurts people without a reason,” Theo growled.

“I will not be talked back to by my own child!” Tony yelled.

Theo glared at Tony.

All the mistakes the boy had made, all the people he’d pushed away, all of it was so he could gain respect, so he could be like his father.

Theo had never felt more like a bastard than he had in that one moment.

He decided to make a decision.

There’s a fine line between Bravery and stupidity, and Theo was about to take that line and burn it to the fucking ground.

“I have no dad,” he bit, “especially not one like you!”

Tony roared angrily and grabbed Melanie’s coffee mug and threw it at Theo.

Theo ducked.

The sound of the window shattering barely registered with any of them.

Tony got up off the ground and lunged at Theo.

Theo dodged again, running for the front door.

Elaina woke up in what they considered the third worst possible circumstances.

The place was unfamiliar, they’d had a panic attack that was bad enough to leave them unconscious for a time, and they were dysphoric.

Merry fucking Christmas to them.

They couldn’t even panic anymore they were so…so…

They didn’t even know. They were too tired to panic anymore and they didn’t want to move.

But it was the fact that they could move and were covered in a blanket and a (slightly small) Pikachu onesie that made them reconsider accepting their now-uncertain fate.

Elaina sat up and looked about their prison(?).

It seemed like a bedroom, albeit more sparkly than most.

They were on a queen-sized bed with a simple black bed frame and white and navy bedding with a butterfly design on it. On the black bedside table was a metal lamp and an alarm clock blinking 9:28 P.M. of the same day they had set out for Frisk’s.

The bedroom door opened.

Elaina squeaked in surprise and scrambled toward the head of the bed.
Navy eyes met empty sockets.

Papyrus smiled.

“OH GOOD, YOU ARE AWAKE!” Papyrus said, voice lined with relief. “OTHERWISE THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN MOST AWKWARD INDEED!”

Papyrus set down a tray with dinosaur chicken nuggets and macaroni and cheese with ranch and hot cocoa topped with whipped cream, mini marshmallows, rainbow sprinkles, and a cinnamon stick.

Elaina was unsure of what to do.

But they were relieved enough to dip a stegosaurus nugget in their ranch and take a small, gleeful bite.

Linda put the organic lemon thumbprint cookies the oven and took out the fruitcake.

She set the timer and went to sit beside Richard, who was reading the news on his iPad.

She read it over his shoulder.

Her eyes widened.

She tapped the link to the article and scrolled through it as her eyes widened.

**At 9:37 in the evening on December 20, the first-ever Human Welfare Coalition commercial was leaked by Coalition Vice President Angie Nesbit via her twitter account against the wishes of Coalition President Leland Schwartz. Her claims of having been hacked were disproved. Whether or not she will be fired remains to be seen.**

Linda couldn’t believe what she was reading.

“Here, you can read it.” Richard sighed, handing the iPad off to her. “I wasn’t reading anything important anyway. I’m going to bed.”

“But it’s not even ten yet!” Linda protested.

“I’m working on a tough case Linda, I told you,” Richard said. “But you don’t care. G’night.”

Linda said nothing as her husband went up to their room.

She sighed and shook her head as she continued reading.

**Reception for the commercial has been varied, but mostly negative. Most have cited the poor quality, but many have called for the end of the HWC due to their claims that the eleven-year-old Ambassador for Monster-Human relations, Frisk Dreemurr, has been brainwashed into aiding the monsters. In a past interview with the young ambassador’s close friend and adoptive father, a Skeleton by the name of Comic Sans Gaster, this exact subject was brought up.**

“If we were able to magically brainwash people, wouldn’t everybody treat us with respect?” he said in a press conference in the spring of 201Y.

Linda read and reread the quote so many times her vision started blurring.
She turned off the iPad and went to take the cookies out of the oven.

Frisk lay back on their bed, Isolde asleep on their stomach, Yasmin asleep on the rug by their bed, and Flowey staring outside from the windowsill.

They weren’t sure why, but somehow they felt as though Flowey had become…quiet. In an almost sentimental manner.

Maybe they could get Chara to ask him what’s going on at some point. They were getting pretty worried…

Frisk petted Isolde and drifted off.

When they’d reached the Void, they fell to the ground almost immediately with how strong the chill was.

They managed to adjust pretty quickly and walk over to Rowan and Chara, who were huddled together - well, as huddled together as a six-and-a-half-foot-tall man and a four-foot-two-inch-tall child could reasonably be.

Frisk ran up to them and huddled.

“Y-you feel it t-t-too?” Chara asked.

Frisk nodded.

“Whatever’s coming, it’s close,” Rowan said.

“H-how are you n-not f-freezing, b-b-beanpole?!” Chara chattered.

“I’ve been through worse winters than this,” Rowan assured.

“Oh shut up, Caroline!” Chara snapped.

Frisk shushed them and held a hand to their ear.

Chara and Rowan stared at them.

<<I thought I heard something,>> they signed.

“Did you?” Rowan whispered.

Frisk shrugged. If they had, it was probably from outside of the Void if anything.

They huddled against Chara and Rowan protectively.

Theo braced himself against the door, unsure of Tony’s next move.

Tony stood up, picking up a six-inch shard of glass from the remains of the window and moving toward where Penelope and Monica were tending to Melanie’s wounds.

Tony raised the glass above his head, aiming for -

“PENELOPE, LOOK OUT!” Theo cried.
Penelope looked at Theo before noticing Tony.

Theo lunged suddenly, unthinking.

He screamed when he felt a searing pain in his left eye.

When he stopped screaming, he glared up at Tony.

Tony was holding up the bloody shard of glass in his right hand defensively.

Theo could just barely see his reflection in the shard. Blood was covering the left side of his face.

He couldn’t feel a thing.

He braced himself for another attack when he saw a bird-shaped mass of lightning hit Tony’s right wrist.

Elaina sat silently on the bed, Papyrus and Mettaton patiently waiting for them to speak.

Elaina thought they were going to combust under the pressure that was almost certainly not there.

Their tongue wouldn’t let them speak.

Thank goodness they knew sign language thanks to Frisk.

<<My mother is out of town for the holidays,>> they signed. <<I was making cookies when the power went out so I took what I did make and went to look for a place to stay until my mother came back.>>

The couple was silent.

“What kind of parent would do something that selfish?” Mettaton asked.

Elaina shrugged.

“YOU CAN SPEND CHRISTMAS WITH US IF YOU WOULD LIKE!”

Elaina’s eyes widened.

Their mother would be so pissed at them.

<<Okay!>> they signed.

Let the unpaid bills be a surprise.

Merry Christmas, Irma Lorence.

Linda nearly dropped the cookies when she heard the doorbell ring.

She scrambled to put the dish on the counter and ran to the door.

She opened it and deflated instantly.

“What the hell are you doing here, Donna?” she whined.
Donna smiled and shrugged as she walked in the house, a sleeping Frenchie in her arms and Inez right behind her carrying bags full of presents.

“I thought I’d surprise everyone by gracing them with my presence,” she said quietly, so as not to wake her sleeping daughter. “Besides, I wanna see if I’m right about Mom being the only one in the family who genuinely hates everything I stand for.”

“I know I do,” Linda grumbled.

“You don’t count Lin,” Donna chuckled. “You always tried to get on Mom’s good side so she wouldn’t be angry at you, so you started parroting her opinions when we were around six or seven. By the time we got to middle school you’d started believing that bullshit without a second thought even though it didn’t make Mom any less angry at you.”

“Yeah, that’s nice Donna, the guest bedroom is across the hall from Hannah’s, that’s the one with the Peppa Pig stickers on it,” Linda said, clearly eager to get off this line of conversation.

Donna rolled her eyes.

“Okay then,” she said. “Let me know if you need any help in here.”

“I’m fine, Donna!” Linda snapped.

Donna sighed and shook her head.

She’d wait until Linda was asleep and then throw out the bad food.

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Frisk, Chara, and Rowan huddled together and shivered.

“H-hey,” Chara said. “C-can’t we just s-summon some c-coats like we do with c-c-ca-cards?”

Silence.

“Bugger,” Rowan grumbled.

Frisk attempted to summon a giant blanket.

Moments later Frisk and Chara were struggling and laughing under the blanket and Rowan was utterly confused.

“This’ll be a surprise for whoever’s going to show up,” Rowan sighed.

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Theo slowly turned to the direction the lightning bird came from.

Caroline stood in the open doorway, Pallas flutter down onto her outstretched arm, her neutral expression clearly anything but.

She said nothing as she stepped slowly toward the DeMartino clan.

Caroline held out her hand.

She triggered an Encounter.

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“Timeline, I don’t even wanna know where you got that video, but you are my new god.”
“thanks jessamy.”

The sounds of clattering reverberated through the line.

“I found a free moment soon as I heard!” Extempore said quickly. “Bugger actually thinks people would take this bodgy shit serious? And he messed with the kid?! Is Leland Schwartz up himself or just bloody brain dead?!”

“He used Frisk’s image to further his goal, all the while possibly knowing full well that such an act would put the young ambassador in danger,” Kindred said to themself.

“you can call it what you want to, i call it messin’ with the kid,” Sans said.

“Did you just quote the Blues Brothers?” Hyperion asked.

“I have no idea who that is,” Jessamy deadpanned.

“oh man,” Sans chuckled. “we’re gonna have to start up a movie marathon, maybe get doc verne in on it.”

“Oh hell no,” Kindred moaned.

“too late kindred, doc’s already scheduled it for new year’s eve.”

“Oh bugger…”

Frisk, Chara, and Rowan all huddled together under the giant blanket, drifting off.

<<Do you guys dream in here?>> Frisk asked.

“We don’t need to sleep since we’re, well, dead, so why would we dream?” Rowan asked.

“Sleep is for the weak,” Chara grumbled.

<<Because dreaming is fun, and Sans isn’t weak Chara,>> Frisk replied.

“Do the dead dream,” Rowan mused. “An intriguing question. Maybe I’ll find out…”

“Are you kidding me right now?!” Chara snipped.

Too late. Rowan had closed his eyes, his head lolling off to one side.

Chara looked at Frisk.

“If the new guy tries to kill us all, I blame you,” they said.

<<That’s fair.>>

Tony showed no reaction to the sudden change in environment.

Caroline stared him down.

Caroline>ACT>Check

Tony
You want to kill him, but that would upset Penelope.

Tony’s SOUL was clearly supposed to be Orange. It seemed instead a a color akin to an old, tarnished penny, complete with some residual moldy verdigris. Like a penny that was made of verdigris until someone realized and tried to dip it in copper in an attempt to hide it but somehow missed a spot.

Caroline was almost sure that it wasn’t a SOUL in the first place.

Tony>FIGHT

Tony flailed the piece of glass uselessly. Caroline didn’t have to move to dodge it.

Caroline>FIGHT> Magic

MP: 18/20

Caroline aimed a bolt directly at the tarnished thing.

HP: 15/20

Caroline’s eyes widened.

Just what could have happened to turn Tony’s SOUL such a color?

Tony>FIGHT

Tony once again flailed uselessly, missing Caroline by a decent margin.

Caroline stared at her opponent accordingly.

She called upon all the things Toriel and Gaster had taught her about SOUL Mechanics.

Caroline> ACT> Diatribe

“That’s an interesting SOUL you have,” Caroline began evenly. “It reminds me of an old penny.”

Tony screamed and started slashing wildly.

Tony>FIGHT

HP: 14/20

Caroline’s eyes widened. Tony’s weapon was hurting its user with each use.

She probably wouldn’t even have to use up anymore MP at this rate since her opponent was doing all the work for her.

Caroline> ACT> Diatribe
“Did you know that Human SOULs come in seven colors, Mr. Garcia?” Caroline asked. “In all the colors of the visible light spectrum, with each one representing a core personality trait.”

“SHUT UP!” Tony screamed.

Tony>FIGHT

He flailed his shard around, this time close enough to cause Caroline some concern.

HP: 12/20

Caroline>ACT>Diatribe

“Your SOUL is kind of messed up somehow. Like there are two colors instead of one, you see. You wanna know what those colors are? I’m going to tell you no matter your answer.”

Tony>FIGHT

Tony screamed unintelligibly once more and swung the shard.

HP: 9/20

Caroline>ACT>Diatribe

“Your SOUL has two colors visible, Orange and Green,” Caroline explained. “The Orange is the most prominent, symbolizing the core trait of Bravery.”

Tony seemed to almost stumble briefly.

Tony>FIGHT

HP: 8/20

Caroline>ACT>Diatribe

“The second color, Green, symbolizes the trait of Kindness,” Caroline continued. “All Humans bear some of each trait, but the color of their SOUL indicates how they interact with the world around them.”

Tony paused.

Tony>FIGHT

HP: 6/20

Caroline>ACT>Diatribe

“Most healthy SOULs bear only one core trait,” Caroline explained. “So why does yours have two…?”

Then Caroline gasped.

“I think I get it now…”

Tony>FIGHT

HP: 3/20
Caroline>ACT>Disarm

MP: 17/20

Caroline directed a bolt at the Glass Shard in Tony’s hand.

“You seem to be hurting yourself more than you are others, Mr. Garcia,” Caroline said. “That seems to happen a lot with your ilk.”

Tony screamed in fury.

Tony>FIGHT

Caroline moved to the right. It was far easier to dodge than she thought.

Which only further proved her newly-formulated assumptions.

Caroline>ACT>Theorize

“You don’t really hate Penelope, do you?” Caroline asked. “The reason you tried to kill her was not because you believed she wasn’t yours, but because you saw so much of yourself in her that you couldn’t stand it. Am I correct?”

Tony stopped.

He stared at Caroline, his dark brown eyes wide with fury.

He screamed.

Tony>FIGHT

HP: 25/30

Caroline accepted the hit without complaint. She’d been through worse. Plus, her jacket provided an extra 5 Defense.

Caroline>ACT>Theorize

“You couldn’t stand how much she resembled you in personality, so you took out those frustrations on her and blamed the ways she didn’t resemble you because of how guilty you felt for feeling the way you did,” Caroline said.

“SHUT UP!”

Tony>FIGHT

HP: 20/30

Caroline>ACT>Theorize

“You tried to take away the guilt by justifying your actions, by trying to convince yourself that you were in the right while knowing full well that you weren’t anywhere near it. Am I correct?’

“SHUT UP!”

Tony>FIGHT
Caroline>ACT>Submit Theory

“And so, my theory is this: Something happened to you once upon a time to convince you that kindness is a weakness,” Caroline declared. “I dare not ask what, since it is only a guess, but I am speaking from experience when I say that kindness is a strength unlike any other.”

“SHUT UP!”

Tony>FIGHT

HP: 10/30

“Mr. Garcia, your attempts at allaying your insecurities have only served to cause more pain than they otherwise would have. And not just for you, but for the people around you. You got them caught up in your attempts to feel worth something, and it made you feel worse.”

Tony screams incoherently.

Tony>FIGHT

HP: 5/30

Tony was on his knees, pale from blood loss.

He seemed like he was about to cry.

Caroline>ACT>Stand Ground

You won’t back down. Caroline will survive the next hit that connects.

“Now I’m going to give you a choice,” Caroline offered. “You can turn yourself in and reflect on what you’ve done. That’s the first and most favored option.”

Tony was silent.

Tony>ACT>See Other Options

“And the second choice?” he asked, his voice raspy.

Caroline smiled.

Tony flinched.

“Let’s just say that the second choice…” Caroline began.

She chuckled coldly.

“I doubt any of us want the second choice, Mr. Garcia.”

“Tell me,” Tony begged. “Please…”

Caroline’s smile sharpened.

“I don’t think I should say,” she said cruelly. “But I will say this - I made a promise. And Option 2 would require me to break that promise.”
“JUST TELL ME WHAT IT IS!”

“Death,” Caroline said. “Your second option is death.”

Silence.

“Make your choice Mr. Garcia. I don’t want to have to make it for you.”

Silence.

Caroline crossed her hands behind her back and stared down at Tony.

Tony was cowering.

“Just kill me and get it over with,” he whispered. “I don’t deserve to live…”

Caroline tilted her head and quirked an eyebrow.

“If you say so, Mr. Garcia…” she said sadly.

Caroline moved her SOUL to the option at the far end of the row.

Mettaton, Papyrus, and Elaina were all talking about shared interests - which all seemed to be in the arts.

“Ooh, you dance?” Mettaton asked. “What kind?”

<<Ballet,>> Elaina signed. <<I might branch out into other types of dance, but for now ballet is my dance of choice.>>

“You know, Papyrus is a really good dancer,” the Android noticed. “He never even took classes, and yet…”

“HEY, NEITHER DID YOU!” Papyrus countered. “BESIDES, DAD SAID THAT IT'S SOMETHING INNATE TO SKELETONS, LIKE THE CONCEPT OF SOUL-CHOSEN MATES OR SMILING NO MATTER WHAT!”

“So it’s a family trait?” Mettaton said incredulously.

Papyrus shrugged. “SANS IS REALLY GOOD AT HIP-HOP DANCING AND WALTZING!”

<<Really?>> Elaina signed in awe.

“I KNOW IT SOUNDS HARD TO BELIEVE, BUT IT IS ALL TRUE!” Papyrus said proudly. “I EVEN HAVE A VIDEO OF HIM BREAKDANCING AT UNDYNE’S BACHELORETTE PARTY!”

“Okay, show it to me so I send it to Toriel,” Mettaton said.

“send what to toriel?” Sans said.

Screaming ensued.

Rowan rested his head on Gregor’s shoulder, a happy sigh sending waves of relaxation through him.
He combed his fingers through little Elizabeth’s silky chestnut waves as they watch the sun set over the distant hills.

It was so peaceful.

So impossibly peaceful.

*Impossible.*

Rowan’s eyes snapped open to meet nothing.

No sunset.

No Gregor or Liz.

Nothing.

The Void was Rowan Lithgow’s sole companion once again.

He curled up into a ball and cried.

Then he felt a hand on his.

He looked up to see Frisk and Chara looking at him, concern and care in their ruby-red eyes.

Ah.

That’s right.

He wasn’t so alone anymore, was he?

He grabbed them both into an embrace and started crying even harder.

He wouldn’t be alone again for a good long while if he had any say in the matter.

He was **DETERMINED**.

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*Caroline>MERCY>Spare*

Tony stared at her in horror and outrage.

“You…you…”

“I’m acknowledging your guilt and giving you a chance,” Caroline explained. “Ending your life would just be doing exactly what you want. So I have decided to grant you MERCY.”

Tony stared at the options before him.

“No matter how many times you deny yourself MERCY, I will grant it to you. Because someone I greatly care for would do the same.”

Tony started crying.

“Save your tears, Mr. Garcia,” Caroline said with mocking tenderness, “for this kindness I grant you is the cruelest of them all.”
Tony sobbed.
“Wh-what *are* you?” he whimpered. “What Human would do something so cruel?”

Caroline smiled.
“I’m not Human, Mr. Garcia,” she said. “I’m the master of your fate. And you are going to live with your guilt for a long, long time. I only hope you manage to come to terms with it.”

Tony>Deny
Caroline>MERCY>Spare
Tony>Deny
Caroline>MERCY>Spare
Tony>Deny

“I can keep doing this forever,” Caroline said casually. “I’m not going to kill you. No matter what you try to do. Your daughter taught me that no matter how terrible someone feels, they deserve the chance to be happy again.”

Tony started bawling.
Caroline didn’t even react.
Caroline>MERCY>Spare

“Please, Mr. Garcia,” Caroline said. “If you’re going to die, don’t do it here at least. I already hate myself enough without having killed someone.”

Tony stared into Caroline’s eyes.
He felt as though the moon itself was trying to break him apart.
He accepted his fate.
Tony>Accept

Screaming continued.
Sans stared at the screaming people in front of him, his usual smile plastered on his face.
He looked down at his nonexistent watch for comedic effect.
Another moment passed.
Then they stopped.
“sorry ’bout that,” Sans said unapologetically. “i popped over here soon as i heard the news.”

“And?” Papyrus asked.
Sans shrugged. “tori gave the okay, so we’re going out shopping for more gifts for elaina tomorrow.”
Elaina’s eyes widened as they signed frantically.

Sans chuckled and put a calming hand on their head, a bit of calming Magic running through the contact.

“it’s cool, kid,” he assured them calmly. “we wouldn’t do this if we didn’t wanna.”

Elaina nodded - Sans made a valid point.

They smiled.

This really was shaping up to be the best Christmas ever…

“okay, but seriously, send what to tori?”

Hunter was seated in an aquamarine-colored papasan chair, her thoughts wandering as her “fairy godmother” did her hair.

“Okay, so which do you prefer, ponytail or pigtails?” Estelle asked.

“Ponytail,” Hunter said. “Pigtails are more Hannah’s thing than mine, really.”

“Aight then, what color hair tie do you want?”

Hunter hummed thoughtfully.

“Bubblegum blue and bubblegum pink,” she said. Then she tensed a bit. “I-if that’s allowed, I mean…”

“Sugar, this here is our world,” Estelle reassured. “I was gonna do that anyway.”

Hunter smiled.

Estelle began to comb her hair.

“So have you decided on a name for yourself?” Estelle asked.

Hunter twiddled her thumbs.

“I think so,” she admitted quietly. “But I do want to see other options too before coming to a decision.”

“Of course love, take all the time you need,” Estelle said warmly.

Hunter smiled and relaxed.

But something weighed a little bit on her mind.

“Hey, Miss Estelle?” she asked.

“What is it, love?”

“How do you know what my mom’s like?”

Estelle paused briefly.
She sighed.

“Girl, I could spend years explaining that one,” she said. “Where do you want to start, first meeting or last?”

Hunter was quiet.

“We don’t have to talk about this right this second,” Estelle said. “It’d be difficult for me to discuss as well, for many reasons…”

Hunter twiddled her fingers.

“Does that mean you’re…?” she began nervously.

“Dead?” Estelle finished casually. “Yes. Have been for a little more than…fifteen years now, I think? It was right at the end of the nineties…”

“So this is kind of your way of coming back as a Wizard, then?” Hunter asked.

Estelle paused a bit before smiling.

“Wizard, fairy godmother, it’s all the same,” she said. “You’ve got such lovely hair…”

“In my dreams,” Hunter snarked. “It’s impossible in real life…”

Estelle couldn’t help laughing.

“Impossible~ Things are happening every day~” she sang.

Hunter giggled.

“That song sounds familiar,” she said.

Estelle smiled.

“Girl, let me tell you about the best version of Cinderella ever…”

Frisk, Chara, and Rowan had resorted to huddling together under the giant blanket, and adding a few more on top of it besides.

“F-f-for the l-love of c-ch-chocolates, t-this is r-r-ridiculous!” Chara griped. “W-when is this p-person gonna g-ga-g-get here a-anyway?”

“It shouldn’t be long now,” Rowan said, seemingly unaffected by the icy cold. “I hope…”

Then the chill abruptly halted.

The trio tensed.

They felt someone staring at them.

They turned and saw a frightened woman with wavy copper bob cut hair, eyes a familiar and distinctive shade of ruby, lips and fingernails much the same. She wore a navy blue short-sleeved top with a white collar and sunny yellow sailor shorts, and black heels with a strap. In her hair was a yellow bandana that matched her shorts almost exactly.
The three stared at their new companion.

Frisk stood and slowly walked up the woman, followed closely by Chara and Rowan.

The woman stumbled back slightly in fear, whimpers of fright coming from her.

“I think we’re scaring her,” Chara said.

“Oh, you think?!” the woman shouted.

“Our apologies, miss,” Rowan said calmly. “It wasn’t our intent in the slightest…”

The woman stared at the group skeptically.

“That crash killed me, didn’t it?” she asked quietly.

“Crash?” Rowan asked.

“I…was on an ocean liner in the Atlantic,” the woman said. “I was headed to Paris to perform for troops stationed there, but we were attacked by the Germans…”

The woman’s eyes widened.

“Something wrong?” Chara asked.

“What year is it?” the woman asked.

“20XR,” Chara said. “But not for much longer. Five days until Christmas.”

The woman was quiet.

“So I am dead,” she said. “Does that mean all of you are too?”

“Me and this guy are,” Chara said, gesturing to Rowan. “Frisk here is very much alive. We’re kind of inside their head right now.”

The woman was quiet.

“How long?” she asked.

“I died in 191X,” Chara said. “Rowan here died about 400 years before that.”

The woman was quiet.

Frisk cleared their throat.

“Greetings,” they said. “My name is Frisk Dreemurr. You are here because you, like all of us, once had a Red SOUL.”

The woman stared at them.

“But I’m American, not Soviet,” she said.

“Not what they meant, lady,” Chara said, picking at a fingernail. “In this place, Red is for DETERMINATION.”

“De…wha?”
“Times have changed, you’ll catch on,” Rowan assured. “Now, would you mind introducing yourself? Date of birth and death, age at death, occupation, hobbies? I can go first if that would make you more comfortable.”

“That’s quite alright, thank you,” the woman said. “My name is Abigail Stone. I was born on March 20th. I was a showgirl, performing for troops and civilians alike to keep hopes high and morale up. I liked dancing and singing, as well as drawing and tinkering - if I wasn’t a performer I’d’ve been a riveter for sure. I died on… I think August 3rd in 1943. I was 25.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you Miss Stone,” Rowan said.

“Just Abigail’s fine, sir,” Abigail said. “Most do tend to call me Gail, though, so you can do so if you wish.”

Rowan smiled. “Fine then, Gail. My name is Rowan Lithgow. I was born on March 20th as well. I was a rebel soldier, very much against the Inquisition. I enjoy reading and gardening, and I died on September 15th, 151X at the age of 29.”

Rowan nodded to Chara.

Chara rolled their eyes.

“I’m Chara Dreemurr, and yes I am sorta-kind related to Frisk through a common family member,” they said. “I’m gonna go out on a limb and say that we all share a birthday, but I was born in 190W. I died when I was ten on September 15th of 191X, so I didn’t have a job unless you count making sure my brothers didn’t cry. My hobbies are gardening, playing card games, and studying up on history.”

Chara turned to Frisk.

“And now for the live one,” they said with a smirk.

Frisk smiled.

“My name is Frisk Dreemurr,” they said. “I am 11 years old, and my hobbies are drawing and making jokes. I am the Ambassador for Monster-Human Relations.”

Gail’s eyes widened. “Mon… wha?”

“Long story there,” Chara said. “You’re gonna be here a while, so have a seat and we’ll explain everything.”

Penelope had fallen asleep, her head on Caroline’s lap. Not that the latter could really blame her - it had been an… eventful evening, so to speak.

Caroline continued writing Sans and Toriel’s wedding speech.

Then Penelope stirred.

“Care?” she moaned. “What time’s it?”

Caroline looked at the clock.

“It’s a little after midnight now,” she said. “You okay?”
Penelope was quiet for a bit.

“Theo’s gonna be okay, right?” she asked.

Caroline paused her writing briefly.

“Nell, the best case scenario is he’ll have a few stitches and some dizziness from the blood loss,” she assured. “Worst case, he loses an eye and needs a transfusion. He’ll live, but no matter the scenario, everything’s changed for him very quickly, so he’ll definitely need some time to adjust.”

Penelope hugged Caroline.

Caroline tensed, unsure of how to react in this situation.

“Thanks, Care,” she said. “For everything.”

Caroline relaxed and returned the hug.

Then she started sobbing.

All the stress that had built up during the Encounter with Tony came crashing down at full-force and then some.

Caroline had never genuinely wanted to kill anyone - she may joke about it a lot, but she’d never been serious until that moment.

The power was amazing, and it had been all hers. She could have done as she wished to that man, and no one would have blamed her.

But Penelope.

She’d promised.

Caroline didn't dare to think what would have happened had that promise not been made.

______________________________

“Sir?”

The sound of boulders grinding against each other echoed throughout the abandoned caverns.

“Dr. WingDings Gaster is alive.”

“Impossible. He was completely erased from existence.”

“I know. But he’s back.”

Silence.

“He might seek revenge, sir -”

“He won’t. He gave up on such things after his attempt to create an ultimate weapon went completely awry. If revenge will be sought, it will be sought by that weapon.”

Silence.

“Weapon, sir?”
“Weapon, yes. He calls it his ‘son’, the deluded old fool.”

“But sir, the weapon displays sentience -”

“But still it is a weapon, and it is daring to use itself against me.”

“The weapon is in the hands of the former Queen.”

Silence.

“We will deal with that eventually. For now, we will wait.”

Silence.

“Of course, sir.”

Footsteps fade away.

A pair of sodalite stones stared into the lavas of Hotland.

Soon.

So much is happening, and it fills you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

A Christmas Duel - The Hives feat. Cyndi Lauper
Impossible - Rodgers & Hammerstein’s Cinderella

Fun Fact: Holy hell this was fun to write.
Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas

Chapter Summary

A world to behold, a story being told, and painful memories of old.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

11:45 A.M., December 25th, 20XR

It’s a wintry day outside.

Snow is falling.

Friends are calling.

On days like this, kids like you…

…really want to show your new headmate how the world has changed.

Everyone in Frisk’s family had gathered at Mettaton’s and Papyrus’ for the holidays. With the newest additions of Elaina and (unbeknownst to everyone else) Rowan and Gail, Frisk almost felt a little crowded.

Almost.

Really, they felt more loved than anything.

They allowed a portal to open so Chara, Rowan, and Gail could watch as the festivities ensued.

“Those decorated fir trees were just getting popular in Livonia about the time I died,” Rowan reminisced.

“And now you can’t walk five city blocks without seeing ten of them,” Chara complained.

“I don’t even know what Livonia is,” Gail griped.

Frisk walked up to Toriel, pulling on her skirt.

Toril looked down at Frisk and smiled warmly.

“Did you need something, Frisk?” she asked.


Toriel paused briefly, as if remembering something.
“Livonia…” she mused. “Back then everyone in England called it Livland… nowadays it’s been split between Estonia and Latvia, I believe. Why do you ask?”

Frisk shrugged in response.

Toriel smiled and ruffled Frisk’s hair - a gesture Sans typically used.

He was starting to rub off on her.

Frisk giggled to themself.

Their parents had so much influence on each other…

The Thompson family living room was filled with awkwardness.

Linda made a point of sitting as far away from Donna and Inez as possible while the relatives were around. The relatives seemed to be avoiding them as well.

Hunter and Hannah seemed to be the only ones willing to try and get along.

“I’m sorry you have to suffer through this,” Hunter said for maybe the fifteenth time in almost as many minutes.

“Hunter, it’s fine,” Donna assured him. “It’s not your fault they’re so NARROW-MINDED!”

The relatives seemed to stare.

“Well, maybe if you didn’t try so hard to be different we’d let you sit with us!” Linda said.

“Linda, are we still in high school?” asked a female relative perhaps a few years younger than her.

“No?” Linda said in confusion.

“Then grow up and stop acting like it!”

The woman took a bite of a star-shaped Christmas cookie then went over to where Donna and the kids were.

Linda glared at the group.

Irma took a sip of her pinotage and looked about.

She sighed happily.

Indeed, New York City was home to the best of the best.

She smoothed her skin-tight bright red dress and crossed her right leg over her left, discreetly adjusting her matching stiletto heels.

She opened her sparkly gold clutch and took out her lipstick and reapplied it.

“Irma, honey, don’t you think that’s quite enough lipstick?” said a short, dumpy woman with beady brown eyes, a blonde perm, and no room to talk.

“Shut it, Mama,” Irma snapped.
Wilma rolled her eyes and downed her third appletini and grabbed another two from a passing tray.

“Irma, please, you’re making a scene again,” a tall, thin man with thinning brown hair and beady eyes hissed.

“I don’t care, y’all should have told me y’all were gonna be in New York!” Irma snapped before slapping a hand over her mouth in shock.

Her accent had slipped.

She looked around at the crowd of socialites. They were whispering and staring at her.

“This is all your fault!” Irma screamed at her parents. “If you had just retired like you should have, I wouldn’t be so completely humiliated!”

“Irma.”

Irma tensed.

She turned her head slowly.

Leland was staring at her.

With disapproval.

“I think you should leave,” he said calmly.

Irma gaped, her mouth moving in a futile attempt to form words.

“I’ve arrange a cab to take you back to your hotel,” Leland said. “I’ve already bought your plane tickets back to Ebott for tomorrow, so -”

Irma slammed her mouth onto his.

The offended gasps and snapping cameras went unregistered.

No one noticed the blue on her upper lip from the Stardust in her drink.

Theo tried to relax as the nurse replaced the bandage over his left eye.

His left eye that was now an empty hole.

There were a bunch of cards on the table next to him from old friends he’d driven off.

Some expressed forgiveness. Some expressed condolences. All expressed kindness to some extent.

Theo didn’t know what to do with kindness. He’d been convinced for so long that kindness was a weakness only to be proven wrong.

He’d been wrong about everything.

He had no idea how to take it.

But Theo was not about to ignore his surroundings again - not if it was going to lead to something like this.
The nurse left.

Theo stared at the ceiling.

Frisk sat on the couch in the parlor and gave Elaina a cookie.

The pair sat and stared at the tree while nibbling on their cookies. Frisk had decided to go out on a limb and try for Quadruple Control, giving all four of their headmates the chance to fully experience the moment.

Chara and Rowan had control of Frisk’s head, since Gail was overwhelmed by being “alive” again and Frisk crying while eating a cookie and staring at a Christmas tree would seem…

…well, not out-of-character, but very, very unnerving.

The headmates wouldn’t be able to speak unless Frisk chose to relinquish Quadruple Control and allow only one to use their body. And Frisk was content with silence if it meant other people were happy.

They felt a tap on their shoulder

They turned toward Elaina.

<<Are you ok?>> they asked.

Frisk smiled and nodded.

<<I’m fine,>> Chara managed to sign.

Elaina nodded, slightly reassured.

The Red SOULs returned to staring at the Christmas tree.

They really hoped that they were the only ones who got Elaina a sweater…

“The cookies are wonderful, Donna!”

“Thanks, Teresa!” Donna replied.

“Hey, I made those!” Linda snapped.

“No you didn’t, they’re edible,” a slightly older male relative said.

“Harold!”

“You said it yourself just last year, Nancy,” Harold said. “Linda’s chocolate chip cookies ‘taste like rancid veal’, you said.”

“Aunt Nancy, is this true?” Linda gasped.

Nancy said nothing.

“Everyone hates your cooking, Linda,” an elderly female relative said. “It’s a wonder we haven’t died yet.”
“Mother!” Nancy snapped.

“Martha, that’s a little harsh -”

“She inherited Peg’s inability to cook on top of her backwards opinions,” Martha said. “I think it’s time I put my foot down as the matriarch of the Smith family and formally welcomed everyone Peggy and my husband disowned back into the family.”

“Grandma, are you insane?!” Linda snapped. “They were disowned for good reasons!”

“Did you know I had a sister?”

The family was silent.

“My husband drove her out of Ebott for falling in love with a black man,” Martha said quietly. “Nowadays it doesn’t seem like too much, but back then it was suicide. Twenty years and I thought nothing of it. Then the name Emmett Till hit the papers, and everything I knew came crashing down around me.”

“Grandma, stop it.”

“Can you tell me about her?”

Hannah had spoken up.

Linda stared in shock.

“I wanna know about my family,” Hannah said. “Mommy doesn’t seem to like you guys for some reason, but I don’t think that’s fair. Maybe if she knew, she could start to get along with you guys better?”

Hannah walked over to Martha and sat on the carpet in front of her.

“Me too, me too!” Frenchie peeped, rushing over to join Hannah.

Hunter stood up and walked toward them as well.

“I’d like to hear this too,” she said, her relative lack of fear surprising her.

Martha smiled, a faraway look in her eye.

“You seem so similar to her, Hunter,” she sighed. “Soft-spoken, but damn if there wasn’t a fire in her heart.”

“Grandma!”

“Theodore? Your mother’s here to see you, and she brought your sister and aunt.”

Theo hummed.

Monica, Penelope, and Melanie enters, bags of presents draped all over their arms.

“Sorry none of them are from me,” Melanie said nervously.

Theo made a sound of acknowledgement.
“You wanna open them here or when you get home tomorrow?” Monica asked.

Theo shrugged.

“I’ll take that as a ‘here’!” Penelope said cheerfully.

Theo wasn’t sure if it was just him or if Penelope really was forcing herself to be happy.

He opened one of his presents.

A box set of Avatar: The Last Airbender.

Theo stared at it.

“We can…watch it together when you come home, maybe?” Penelope said shyly.

Theo looked at her.

“Okay,” he said.

His voice was so hoarse when he spoke that he wasn’t sure if Penelope had heard him.

But her smile let him know that he’d been heard.

Ever since five nights ago, Sans had been discreetly keeping a close eye socket on Frisk.

They had been pretty quiet lately, even for them.

He could tell when Chara was out and about thankfully, but the past few months he’d noticed something in those ruby-red eyes that was neither Frisk or Chara.

It wasn’t that Sans didn’t believe them when they said they were okay, but he was worried that maybe something was going on that Frisk didn’t know about.

But no matter - not now anyway.

If it’s important, he’ll handle it.

“Was she pwetty?” Frenchie asked.

“Men from all over wanted a piece of her,” Martha chuckled. “She had her pick of Ebott’s finest, but she wasn’t one to settle for shallow appeal. But with her turning them down, many came running to me for a consolation prize.”

“Mother, they are children -”

“I told them they could go find another second-best,” Martha said. “Lord, Nancy, what did you think I was going to say, and in front of my own great-grandchildren at that?”

“She called us great,” Hannah said reverently.

“That’s why they’re called great - grandchildren and not below-average-grandchildren,” Martha said.

The kids plus a few relatives laughed.
“What did she look like?” Hannah asked.

Martha sighed. “It’s been over seventy-five years, and the memory is hazy, but I do recall that she had such lovely red hair…”

“Your sister was a redhead?” Linda gasped.

“I was a redhead until I started graying,” Martha said. “Where do you think Donna and little Frenchie got it, huh?”

“Satan,” Linda grumbled.

“Didn’t he gib us our pwesents?” Frenchie asked.

Everyone laughed.

Except Linda, who looked like she wanted everyone around her to die.

When the laughter died down, the questions about Martha’s sister started up again.

“So what else was she besides a looker?” Donna asked.

“Oh, talented like nobody’s business,” Martha said proudly. “She could do anything - you name it, she could do it.”

“Did she like music?” Hunter asked, hope shining through her voice.

“She liked lots of things,” Martha said. “Music was just her lifeblood.”

“Grandma, you shut your mouth before you give my son any bright ideas about running off to join Broadway!” Linda shouted.

“Don’t worry, Linda, I won’t ruin your children’s lives - that’s your job,” Martha said. “And besides, in my day the big thing was Vaudeville. My sister joined a troupe after my husband forced her out and eventually went on to have solo success…”

Hunter’s eyes were wide and bright.

“Tell me more?” she asked.

“No,” Linda growled.

“Oh, let me tell you about the time I snuck out to watch one of her shows!” Martha said, some youthful glee pervading her voice. “It was 1937, August 19th, when I received a mysterious telegram…”

Scott watched as Craig sliced the ham for lunch.

Amber was busy wrapping the last of the Christmas presents in the study - she always bought too many in case extra people came. If they didn’t - which was often the case - Scott got the presents.

Too bad the presents sucked.

Seriously, why was he not getting Mortal Kombat for his PS Vita?

But what astonished Scott was not that he was almost certainly not going to get the game he wanted,
but rather something else entirely - something less selfish.

He was genuinely concerned about his mother.

He’d wracked his brain trying to recall whether or not he’d seen the multicolored amber butterfly necklace his mother had worn to the concert before that night, and he honestly could not find an answer.

Then there was that thing Hunter’s mom had said…

Scott was curious.

No, wait.

Suspicious.

“Hey, I’m gonna go check on Mom,” he announced.

“Okay, but knock first,” Craig warned. “You know how she is about Christmas presents.”

“Yeah yeah, whatever,” Scott dismissed.

He walked up the stairs and knocked on the door of the study.

“Mom, it’s me,” Scott called out. “Can I come in?”

“Just a minute!” Amber snapped.

Scott flinched, slightly offended at his mother’s tone.

The sounds of tape being ripped and stuck onto packages rang out from behind the door.

Moments later, Amber opened the door.

“What is it Scott? I’m busy.”

Scott stood there for a few seconds.

“Nevermind, I’ll ask later,” he grumbled.

“Scott, you can ask me anything, okay?” Amber sighed.

Scott braced himself.

“Where did you get that butterfly necklace?” he asked.

Amber’s eyes widened briefly.

“From your father,” she said.

Scott relaxed a bit.

“Huh,” he said. “Okay. I’d never seen it before…”

“I only wear it on special occasions,” Amber assured him.

Scott smirked and walked back down the stairs.
Amber closed the door, finished wrapping the last of the presents, and reached into her shirt, taking out the pendant.

It was just two sentences, but in those two sentences were four enormous lies.

She held the pendant up to the light, staring at the air bubbles within the green amber and the tiny insect in the golden one.

Amber sighed and stuffed the pendant back inside her shirt.

Time to return to life she’d settled for.

Elaina sat next to Frisk on the floor, a pile of presents in front of them. They had never had this many presents at once before, and it intimidated them slightly.

Wait, maybe they did. They had these fuzzy memories of a tall man with black hair and blue eyes that always seemed to be smiling slightly. Elaina remembered a Christmas where Felicity and Grace were still at home, and Irma was slightly more pleasant. That Christmas was fuzzy, but it stuck in their mind nonetheless.

Frisk elbowed them gently. They blinked themself back into the world.

They had spaced out.

They smiled sheepishly at Frisk.

<<Sorry,>> they signed.

<<It’s fine!>> Frisk replied.

“Who’s ready for PRESENTS?!?” Mettaton announced while wearing a sexy Santa outfit with ¾ sleeves, a short skirt, and black thigh-high boots.

Everyone cheered.

“Okay then! Counter-clockwise starting with…”

Mettaton covered his eye with one hand and pointed toward Elaina with the other.

He removed his hand from his eye.

“…Elaina! Pick a present, any present at all!”

Elaina felt a bit like they had been put on the spot, so they fumbled a bit and chose a small, rectangular package wrapped in light blue with snowmen on it.

“Oh-oh, y-you picked mine,” Alphys said. “Oh man, I r-really hope they l-like it…”

Elaina smiled. Seems like they weren’t the only anxious one here…

They slowly and carefully unwrapped the paper to reveal a set of charcoal colored pencils and a Mew Mew Kissy Cutie notebook.

They gasped and smiled as they hugged the present close to them.

They signed their enthusiastic thanks to Alphys.
“O-oh, no, it just seemed like something you’d like based on what M-Mettaton mentioned…” Alphys dismissed.

<<Thanks anyway!>> Elaina signed.

“Okay, that means Frisk is next!” Mettaton announced.

Frisk took one of the smaller presents from their pile, which was a bit larger than Elaina’s since their gifters had more time.

“THAT’S ONE OF MINE!” Papyrus said excitedly.

Frisk took the wrapping paper off swiftly and somewhat destructively, revealing a framed picture of Frisk and their friends at the beach from a few years back.

Frisk smiled and held it close.

“i think they like it,” Sans said.

Meanwhile, in Frisk’s headspace, Gail stared at the faces in the photo.

Rowan and Chara smiled.

“You’ll meet them soon enough,” Chara said.

Gail smiled.

“I hope so…” she said quietly.

She had to admit, she was really looking forward to this new world.

It filled her with **DETERMINATION**.

Linda chugged down the last of her third chardonnay in fury as she watched her children listen enthralled to Martha’s tale.

“You said she was banished from the family,” Teresa said. “When did that happen?”

“In 1935,” Martha said. “My husband gathered a group of likeminded brutes and ran her out of town and…”

Martha scrunched her face to keep herself together.

“And what?” Linda added. “Did they kill her?”

“They lynched her husband.”

Everyone but Linda gasped.

Linda didn’t react.

“They tried to get to her too, but she had all of them cowed,” Martha said with a hint of pride.

“And where is she now?” Nancy asked.

“She disappeared before you were even born,” Martha replied. “Nobody really knows what
happened to her, but the most likely thing is that she’s gone as well.”

Hannah hugged Martha with tears in her eyes.

“I’m sorry,” she said.

Martha hugged Hannah back.

Hunter and Frenchie got up to join the hug, followed by Nancy, Harold, and Teresa.

Linda stared at the display and chugged down the rest of her wine.

“You wanna join them?”

Linda looked at Richard, who had just sat down next to her.

“Why should I?” Linda scoffed.

“That’s your grandmother, Lindy,” Richard said. “She just revealed something pretty big about her past that she’s kept hidden for a very long time.”

“Would’ve been a lot better if she’d kept it that way,” Linda grumbled under her breath.

“Linda,” Richard warned. “I know I’m not home often for work, but I know for a fact that you aren’t this cold-hearted.”

Linda stared at Richard, wide-eyed.

“You thought I couldn’t hear you, didn’t you?” Richard asked.

Linda gaped, at him before growling and slamming her glass down on the counter.

“I’m going to bed,” she growled.

Richard said nothing as his wife stormed up the stairs.

He hadn’t wanted to believe Monica’s words.

But he was really starting to wonder…

Irma laid on her back on her hotel room floor, the Stardust having worn off hours ago.

She was starting to feel the regret rush back to her.

She got on all fours and crawled to her suitcase.

She suddenly felt like her face was being pulled at by her hair. She removed her hair from its elaborate updo, letting it fall to her mid-back.

She took all her clothes out of the suitcase and opened a compartment in the lining, revealing vials of the glowing blue liquid.

Irma sobbed as she grabbed one and forced it open, chugging it down. She had long since become used to the powdery sensation that ingesting Stardust left in her mouth.

It reminded her of the time she’d attempted to swallow a shot glass full of Irene’s ashes with
cranberry vodka when she first tried bath salts.

Irma howled in pain at the memory, clutching her head and yanking at her hair.

She forced another vial of Stardust down her throat.

Some of it dribbled down her chin.

She curled up into a ball and cried.

Flowey sat in Frisk’s lap as everyone watched Meet Me In St. Louis.

He found the film to be completely and utterly sappy.

Seriously, how else could one describe Judy Garland?

If that one was Mettaton, the answer was clearly “a goddess, an angel, an icon of a bygone era”.

And judging by the reverent looks on the faces of Frisk and their friend - Eileen? Echo? Something like that - they were very much inclined to agree.

Frisk especially so, somehow. The look in their ruby eyes…it was almost as if Chara was fronting, but it was very clear by the lack of color in their cheeks and smile on their face that it was not.

Flowey was concerned, and it was very clear that Sans was as well.

Frisk started humming along to Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas.

It was still them.

But it wasn’t *them*.

---

_The bright future that lies ahead has filled you with_

**DETERMINATION**

Chapter End Notes

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Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas - Meet Me In St. Louis

Fun Facts: Irma and her parents and sister are all named after hurricanes. It didn't start that way, but shit happened last year.
What Are You Doing New Year's Eve?

Chapter Summary

Yet another New Year's Eve at Mettaton Manor.

Chapter Notes

uh

See the end of the chapter for more notes

5:37 P.M., December 31, 20XR

It’s a cold evening outside.

Stuff is happening.

Things are occurring.

On days like this, kids like you…

…are helping your uncle set up for the annual New Year’s party.

Frisk set the bowl of snack mix on the counter in Mettaton’s kitchen, right next to the chips and dips.

Their task done, they wandered off to go find Toriel to ask for something to eat.

They wandered the halls of what had been dubbed Mettaton Manor™ in search of their mother.

They saw Sans standing outside Theater Room 4, snoring in Aster font.

They pulled on his jacket.

Sans opened his right eye socket and smiled at them, rumpling their mousy mop.

“heya there, frisk-it-all,” he drawled. “need somethin’?”

«Have you seen Mom?» they signed.

“tori’s with asgore getting the stuff set up for your deal with Caroline,” Sans replied. “grand-dadster’s bringing a neighbor of his who’s a wizard too.”

Frisk gasped, their ruby eyes sparkling with excitement and DETERMINATION.
They hopped up and down in place with gleeful anticipation.

Sans chuckled at the sight.

“whoa there kiddo, everyone’s gonna start comin’ at six, so we’ve got a while til then,” he said. “wanna play some mario kart while we wait? elaina’s already asked to join in.”

Frisk nodded.

«Might as well rack up some wins before Hannah gets here!» they signed.

“exactly,” Sans finished. “i mean seriously, just how does that kid win every single time?”

Frisk shrugged.

Sienna stared at her reflection in the mirror.

White turtleneck, black slacks, black heels. Had to make a good impression for the kids and all.

She took a deep breath to calm herself.

A knock on the door was heard.

Sienna went to answer it, finding Gaster, Asgore, and the Wong siblings on the other side.

“Are you ready, Miss Harper?” Asgore asked.

“Just let me get my coat and purse and I’ll be set,” Sienna said.

She grabbed a black overcoat and her favorite purse and went out the door with the rest of them group.

She smiled.

This was going to prove to her once and for all that she is not alone.

Amber loved New Year’s - far more than she loved Christmas, or any time of the year really. With her husband at parties for work and her son off at a friend’s house, she had the whole house to herself.

Every single year.

She sat in the storage closet on the second story and looked through the boxes therein.

She found it.

Amber took the oakwood jewellery box and hardbound books from within their cardboard confines and hauled them to the study.

She opened one of the books and read its contents.

**Ebott University, Class of 199Z**

She sighed happily as she read the signatures from her former classmates. She hadn’t quite kept in touch with any of them - maybe it was time she reached out?
Her eyes stopped over one signature in particular.

*At the end of the next spring semester, I have a very important question to ask you. - Love, Rich*

Amber’s grip on the book tightened.

No one was around.

She let the tears fall.

She and Richard eventually broke up that November - they both wanted to focus on getting their degrees, he his law degree, her her marketing degree. It hurt, but she could understand why he made the decision - they would often put off studying and lectures to go out on dates, and while it was fun, their grades had suffered greatly as a result.

She never would know what he wanted to ask her, but she had fantasized about a lovely white dress when she first read the signature.

She still did, with fantastically blue eyes and black hair waiting at the altar instead of the blue eyes and brown hair she’d settled for.

Of course, she hadn’t settled entirely. She was reminded of that every time she looked into Scott’s hazel eyes.

Amber was dumbfounded at how easily Craig had believed her when she said her grandmother had hazel eyes. She didn’t, nobody in Amber’s family did, but the contractor they’d hired to fix the hot water heater certainly did.

The contractor’s name escaped her - it was one of those names that ended in -son. Patterson? Ferguson? Henderson? Something like that.

Either way, he’d mentioned being stressed out by his newlywed wife’s clinginess, Amber brought up her own marital dissatisfactions, and then…

She slammed the book shut and tossed it, grabbing another one.

Get her mind off *that* memory.

Diana sat on the end of the chaise, her wide smile tense.

“Mother, can we go now?” Miranda whined.

“Not until Daddy gets here, sweetie!” Diana replied.

“He’s gonna leave us in the lurch again,” Miranda grumbled, taking a nail file out of her purse and filing her right index finger.

“Miranda-sweetie, just *when* has Daddy *ever* done something like *that*?” Diana asked through gritted teeth.

“Since always.”

“No he hasn’t.”

“Yeah, he has.”
“No. He. Hasn’t.”

“Name one Christmas when Daddy actually came home from work,” Miranda challenged.

Diana pursed her lips.

“See? You can’t, can you?” Miranda said coldly. “Because he never has! It’s almost like…”

Miranda gestured wildly for a moment before slumping over sadly.

“…it’s like I don’t really have a dad.”

Diana stared at her daughter as if she hadn’t heard her.

Miranda avoided her gaze anxiously.

“Just be patient, Miranda-sweetie,” Diana cooed as if talking to a kindergartener instead of an eleven-year-old. “Daddy will be here soon. He’s probably just…”

“Mother, please stop talking to me like I’m three, I am almost a teenager!” Miranda snapped in exasperation. “And don’t give that crap about me ‘always being your baby’, I don’t care! It’s annoying and I’m NOT a freaking baby, so lay off it!”

Diana was stunned. She gaped at Miranda like she’d been slapped in the face.

“Go to your room,” Diana hissed angrily. “Your father will hear about this, and you will not be going out to dinner with us.”

“He’s not coming, and you know it,” Miranda called out. She was already at the top of the stairs, staring down at her mother with a strange expression.

She calmly walked away to her room.

Diana stared up at the empty stairway.

Her phone went off.

She checked it.

Michael wasn’t coming home again until Valentine’s.

Diana sighed.

She went into the kitchen and grabbed a wine glass.

She was going to need it.

Frisk was silent while they sat next to Sienna and stared up at her reverently.

Sienna was clearly slightly uncomfortable, if her fidgeting was any indication.

“So…you must be Frisk, I take it?” she asked.

Frisk nodded slowly.

“I uh, heard a bit about you from the Doctor and Asgore,” Sienna explained. “It’s nice to meet you.”
Frisk smiled shily.

The doorbell rang.

A few moments later, Asgore, Toriel, and Gaster walked in with Caroline in tow. All three wore long white hooded robes clasped with brooch - Asgore and Toriel with the Dreemurr family crest inlaid with sapphires on Toriel’s and opals on Asgore’s, Gaster’s a Blaster with garnet eyes.

“I do believe that’s everyone,” Toriel said. “Please follow me.”

Sienna and Frisk stood up and followed.

They were more than a little nervous.

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**Ebott University, Class of 200R**

Amber sighed, knowing that this yearbook was from after Richard had already graduated.

She opened it to a random page.

She stared at the blown-up picture of the girl with the box braids and the bright smile.

**In Memoriam**

**Estelle Monet Crawford**

Amber remembered this girl. She’d been killed in a brutal hit-and-run outside of her own apartment. The killer had never been caught.

Amber’s mind wandered back to an incident when Scott was about three.

She honestly wondered if…

No, that couldn’t be. She was out on her third date with Craig when Estelle’s murder had happened.

She sighed and silently worried for her son’s future.

---

Sans got Theater Room Number 2 set up for the Heart of Gold movie marathon.

Now all that was left to do was open the server to video chat and let the Heart of Gold join the fun.

Moments later, someone showed up on the screen.

Two someones. One tanned and green-eyed with a dark blonde ponytail, the other with a distinctive purple-dyed undercut topped with kinky curls.

“*G’day, Timeline!*” Extempore greeted enthusiastically, Jessamy waving from where she was snuggled up under a blanket next to him.

“Howzabout we use our real names tonight?” Sans suggested. “Ring in the new year as friends instead of just people working toward a common goal.”

“*Fine by me,*” Ioniq said. “*It’d be weird to call my boyfriend by some other name.*”

“*Wot, like ‘bae’ isn’t some other name?*” Liam teased.
“Boy, you know what I meant,” Ioniq sighed, rolling her eyes in exasperation.

Another face appeared, brunette and bearded with navy blue eyes and an eyeliner game that could maybe possibly rival Mettaton.


“Alexis,” Ioniq greeted.

“lex,” sans followed.

“Pommy bastard!” Liam exclaimed, as though he were greeting a best friend or sibling. “We’re gonna call each other by our names!”

“Oh joy, now my idiot sister has no reason to STAND OUTSIDE MY DOOR AND LISTEN IN!”

“I am not!” came a muffled voice.

“Angela, get your arse either in here or away from the bleedin’ door!” Alexis snapped.

“Fine, I’ll leave!” Angela countered.

“Good, and get a bloomin’ job while you’re out!” Alexis managed to add.

“But we’re managing just fine with your jobs, aren’t we?” Angela asked.

“Until the next rent hike, as long as you keep within your budget,” Alexis replied.

“Then I’ll just keep within my budget!” Angela said cheerfully.

“banter from both sides of a door,” Sans remarked. “reminds me of how me ‘n tori first met…”

“That story was bang-up adorable!” Ioniq gushed.

Silence.

“You’ve infected her, Liam,” Alexis said darkly.

“Damn right I have,” Liam said before nibbling on Ioniq’s ear, causing her to squeak.

“hey, cool it you two, yuu’s gonna be here at some point,” Sans said. “it’s already 20XS over in japan…”

“So it’s the same in South Korea, right?” Ioniq asked.

“yep,” Sans said. “so that means doc verne’s already in the new year.”

“I can’t believe we’re finally gonna know their true name,” Liam noted.

“Bet it’s something tacky, like Dweezil,” Alexis suggested.

“let’s see what the person themself has to say on the subject when they get here,” Sans said. “for now, let’s go over the movies we’ve got to watch. i got princess bride…”

Frisk, Sienna, and Caroline sat side-by-side on the floor in order by SOUL color, as they had been instructed by Toriel. Before them were three wooden bowls with inch-long polished crystals of
various colors, each bowl being made of a different kind of wood and bearing different carvings in an unknown language that could also have been an intricate pattern.

Three Wizards at the least were the required amount needed for the ceremony to be a success.

And so there were.

“In these three bowls are crystals,” Asgore announced. “You are to pick seven of them so you can create a Talisman.”

Caroline raised her hand.

“Yes, Caroline?”

“I thought our Talismans chose us,” Caroline said. “Wouldn’t making our own be like having a Familiar be a Talisman?”

With Caroline’s words, Pallas appeared atop her head, causing Sienna to gasp.

The Raven blinked in confusion - or whatever counted as blinking for a bird made of Magical Lightning - before deciding that there was no threat and relaxing where he lay, falling asleep on his Wizard’s perch.

“That is true Caroline, but these Talismans are only temporary until you find your own,” Gaster explained. “They should help in tempering your nightmares - and judging by your tired eyes, it’s something you need.”

Caroline blinked.

She sighed.

“They’re not that bad,” she claimed. “It’s nothing I can’t handle. I’m starting to remember more about what all happened while I was six. It was pretty much a blank spot in my memory until now.”

Everyone stared at Caroline. The Electricity Wizard had a far-off look in her silver eyes.

She blinked back into reality.

“Sorry, continue.”

“Right then,” Asgore sighed. “Rule number one of initiation: you do not choose the crystals. It is the crystals that choose you.”

“Second, each crystal holds a special Magic of its own,” Gaster said. “This Magic depends on the crystal. For example, amethyst crystals prevent drunkenness and instill a clear mind, as well as providing protection from poison. Amethyst is also the crystal of the Purple SOUL and the Aquarius star sign. All of these qualities mean that Caroline would benefit greatly from a Talisman with amethyst crystals due to her SOUL trait and star sign.”

Caroline raised her hand once more.

“Yes, Caroline?”

“Are we able to pick more than one of the same crystal, or does it have to be seven different ones?” Caroline asked
“Seven different ones,” Gaster said. “More than one of the same crystal on a Talisman could have adverse effects on the Wizard. I’ve…seen it happen, once or twice.”

Frisk felt Rowan shiver. Apparently whatever happened to a Wizard with a faulty Talisman was quite unpleasant.

“Third, each of these bowls is made from the wood of the Three Sacred Trees of Magic,” Toriel explained. “The medium brown one is made of oak, the pale one of ash, and the dark one of hawthorn. Each wood has a meaning.”

“And what about the woods?” Sienna asked.

“Oak is associated with strength and stability,” Caroline piped. “And hawthorn is supposed to purify and protect. But the ash I don’t know.”

Silence.

Caroline shrunk in on herself, grabbing at her shoulder.

“Caroline is correct,” Toriel said. “Ash is for healing and health, by the way.”

“That aside,” Gaster said as he shook his head as if to rid himself of an unpleasant thought, “since we already know that Frisk is a Pisces and Caroline is an Aquarius, I must now ask yours Sienna.”

Sienna blinked.

“I don’t know it,” she mumbled in embarrassment.

“It’s easy to discern from your date of birth,” Gaster reassured.

“I was born on September 13th,” Sienna said.

“Ah, then you are a Virgo,” Toriel said. “I am one as well, born on September 15th!”

“Rule number three: the crystals that are not for your SOUL or star sign will choose you based on your character, and chosen from the hawthorn bowl,” Gaster continued. “Two will enhance your greatest strengths and are chosen from the oak bowl, three will temper your greatest weaknesses and are chosen from the ash bowl.”

Frisk raised their hand.

“Yes, Frisk?”

«What if more than seven crystals choose us?» they signed somewhat concerned. «Or less than seven?»

“That won’t happen,” Gaster said. “Now, in order by SOUL trait, you must choose. Which means that Frisk must choose first.”

Frisk took a deep breath in, then out.

They were filled with DETERMINATION.

Megan and Sawyer leaned into each other on the couch at Kim’s house during her New Year’s party.
People whispered and pointed as always. They were almost so used to it that it might as well be white noise at this point.

But what was different about the whispers was the content. That was a bit unusual to them.

Whispers about how Megan finally brought Kayla down.

Whispers about how Kayla hadn’t shown up yet, and probably wasn’t even invited.

Whispers about how Megan had better not touch other people’s boyfriends or -

“Should we tell them we can hear them?” Megan asked, loud enough that the source of the whispers could definitely hear them.

“Nah, let ‘em talk,” Sawyer replied with equal loudness. “If it’s worth anything, they’ll say it to our faces.”

The whisperers stared at them, slightly ashamed.

“Have you noticed that no one says anything about you while Kim’s around?” Sawyer asked quietly. “Guess you’re kind of untouchable when she’s around.”

“But when she’s not around I’m free game,” Megan confirmed. “Nothing I can’t handle.”

Sawyer smiled at their girlfriend.

“I know you can,” they said. “You’re pretty tough. You won’t let anyone get to you that isn’t worth your time, and even if they are you keep strong.”

They kissed Megan on the temple.

“That’s what I love about you,” Sawyer said fondly, a warm smile on their face.

Megan smiled back and snuggled into Sawyer’s chest.

The people whispered again.

Megan sighed to herself.

The vicious cycle goes ever on and on…

Penelope was anxious.

Theo was anxious too, but for different reasons.

Penelope was anxious because Caroline was doing Important Top-Secret Wizard Stuff™ that she wasn’t allowed to watch.

Theo was anxious because he had no idea how everyone would react to his newly-created cyclopean appearance.

Apparently it wasn’t a surprise.

Then again word travels fast among Penelope’s friends. They probably knew exactly what to expect.

He really hoped no one asked -
“Can I see what’s under your eyepatch?”

Fuck.

Theo looked down at Hannah with what he hoped was disdain.

He never was good at showing what he didn’t actually feel.

And right now he felt nothing.

Theo sighed wearily and lifted up the plain black patch, hoping the little pigtailed blonde would be scared out of her wits by the scarred empty socket beneath it.

She stared.

“Cooool…” she said in sheer awe. “You need a much cooler eyepatch though.”

“I know!” Penelope chuckled. “I think he should get one with flames on it!”

“That would be AWESOME!” Hannah cheered.

Theo didn’t say anything. He wasn’t sure what he should say.

He didn’t really feel like talking, anyway.

Frisk got up and walked to the hawthorn bowl of crystals, sitting down on their knees before them.

They knew that their month birthstone was aquamarine, so maybe that was their star sign one as well?

They mentally directed the question at Rowan.

“No help from a third party,” he said. “And they’re about to speak anyway.”

“Frisk,” Asgore announced, voice laced with warmth and pride despite the authority with which the words were uttered. “As the bearer of the Red SOUL of DETERMINATION, your SOUL Talisman crystal is red jasper. As one born under the star sign of Pisces, your Star Sign Talisman crystal is aquamarine. You may search through the bowl for these crystals.”

Frisk paused, uncertain.

They couldn’t call out for help.

But nonetheless they would try.

They put their hand in the bowl.

When Frisk found an opaque red stone, they held it up between a thumb and forefinger and looked to their mother and grandfather as if to check that it was correct.

“Red jasper,” Toriel announced.

Frisk pondered where to place the crystal briefly before a hand Gaster had summoned appeared with a square of white silk. They turned to see that Caroline and Sienna had each received one as well.

Frisk took the square and placed it in their lap before putting the crystal on it.
They reached into the bowl once more and found a translucent pale blue-green stone.

“Aquamarine,” Toriel announced.

Frisk placed the aquamarine on the square next to the jasper.

“You may be seated,” Asgore said. “Sienna, come forth.”

Sienna cautiously stood up and went to sit before the bowl.

“Sienna, as a bearer of the Yellow SOUL of Justice, your SOUL Talisman crystal is tiger’s eye,”
Asgore declared. “As one born under the star sign of Virgo, your Star Sign Talisman crystal is sapphire. You may search through the bowl for these crystals.”

Sienna gazed at the bowl.

She reached in and found an opaque brown stone the with golden striations.

“Tiger’s eye,” Toriel announced.

Sienna placed the stone on her square.

She reached into the bowl once more.

In her hands was a translucent deep blue stone.

“Sapphire,” Toriel announced.

“You may be seated,” Asgore said. “Caroline, come forth.”

Caroline stood up and placed herself before the bowls.

“Caroline, as a bearer of the Purple SOUL of Perseverance, your SOUL Talisman crystal is amethyst,” Asgore declared. “As one born under the star sign of Aquarius, your Star Sign Talisman crystal is amethyst.”

Asgore turned to Gaster.

“And since there your circumstances give you two of the same crystal, one crystal must instead be clear quartz,” Gaster announced.

“You may search through the bowl for these crystals,” Toriel announced.

Caroline stared at the bowl.

Pallas chose that moment to wake up and flutter about.

He landed on the edge of the bowl.

Caroline reached into it and grabbed a translucent purple stone.

“Amethyst,” Toriel announced.

Caroline was reaching into the bowl again before she could even think, pulling out a clear crystal that tapered to a point on either end.

“Quartz,” Toriel announced.
“You may be seated,” Asgore said. “Next, the crystals in the oak bowl shall choose based your strengths.”

Frisk breathed to calm themself before Asgore called them.

Elaina lied on the ground in a pile of the sweaters they had gotten for Christmas and felt like garbage. Then they started moving their arms and legs.

Brian and Hunter stared at them.

“What the heck are they doing?” Brian asked.

“Making a sweater angel, I guess?” Hunter said in confusion.

“Remember shaving cream angels?” Brian asked.

“Do I,” Hunter laughed. “Kindergarten was wild.”

“Why can’t we play with shaving cream like we used to without being judged for it?” Brian asked.

“Because we don’t shave,” Hunter said. “I really hope I can’t grow a beard…”

“Whatever makes you comfortable,” Brian said with a shrug. “I’d like a lumberjack beard, like Caroline’s dad has.”

“Why?”

“Because it'll keep my face warm in winter,” Brian explained.

“Are you sure it’s not because you have secret lumberjack fantasies?” Hunter teased.

Brian glared at Hunter before turning away and blushing.

“Okay, that too,” he grumbled.

Silence.

Well, silence interspersed with the sound of someone making a sweater angel.

“Since the invention of the kiss, there have been five kisses that were rated the most passionate, the most pure. This one left them all behind. The end.”

Sans, Liam, Ioniq, Tom, and Rose clapped. Alexis merely had a thoughtful look on their face.

“Wow,” Alexis mused. “I have certainly seen worse movies.”

“high praise coming from you,” Sans said. “whadda we wanna watch next, guys?”

A new face appeared on the screen - a person with bright red hair and amber eyes with glasses in a black and yellow hoodie.

Everyone stared at the face.

“Watch Love Actually,” said the owner of the face.
Everyone else’s eyes widened.

“Oh my god,” Alexis managed. “Doc Verne?!”

“Saeyoung’s the name!” the person said. “Surprised?”

“A little bit, yeah!” Tom admitted. “Have you been listening the whole time?!”

“Oh Neighborhood Friend Tom, I’m always listening!” Saeyoung cooed. “I just got some free time while my fiance is out on business! And speaking of fiances, where is Toriel, Sans?”

“helpin’ frisk and a couple other wizards with stuff,” Sans said. “a bit hush-hush on the specifics, but whatevs. she’s doin’ well though, we got a wedding date arranged and everything. your invitations should be in the mail soon enough.”

“We’re all invited?!” Liam gasped.

“yep.”

Another new face appeared. A young teenage boy with black hair and dark brown eyes was on the other side.

“Hello?” said the boy with a bit of an accent.

“Hey, it’s Yuu!” Ioniq greeted.

“By that do you mean my name or the word used to refer to someone in the second person?” Yuu asked.

Silence.

Yuu laughed a bit. “Got you!”

Sans laughed a bit. “oh my god, i am so proud right now and i didn’t even teach him anything.”

“You taught me the null device for Unix,” Yuu said.

“besides that,” Sans said.

“Well, since that’s everyone, why don’t we watch a movie that’ll make everyone cry?” Tom said. “Last one to cry’s an evil soccer mom!”

“i’m in,” Sans said. “and i’m willing to bet twenty american dollars and six canadian dollars that lex will be an evil soccer mom.”

Laughter.

“Meet me in the back of Tesco, Margaret,” Alexis growled.

Everyone stopped.

“You lot seriously think I’m that much of a bore?” Alexis asked.

Silence.

“I’m playing Up!” Liam said cheerfully.
“Oh hell no,” Ioniq whined.

“My tear ducts are screwed,” Tom moaned.

“brb guys, gonna get kleenex.”

“Now the crystals in the oak bowl shall choose you based on your strengths,” Gaster announced. “The crystals that appear on your hand after placing it in the bowl for seven seconds are the ones that chose you. You can only have two that choose you for your strengths. Is that clear?”

The Wizards nodded.

“Frisk, come forward,” Asgore requested.

Frisk stood up and went up to the bowl.

They took a deep breath.

They reached in and closed their eyes.

A weird, yet not unpleasant, tingling sensation travelled up their arm and throughout their body.

“Don’t be alarmed, Frisk,” Rowan assured. “That’s supposed to happen. It’s the Magic of the crystals at work doing their best to choose you.”

Frisk released a breath they didn’t know they’d been holding.

One.

Two.

Three.

Four.

Five.

Six.

Seven.

Frisk clenched their hand and lifted it from the bowl.

They opened their hand.

In their hand was a pair of stones, one milky blue, the other a spiral shell colored like a rainbow.

“Chalcedony, to promote happiness and harmony among groups,” Gaster announced. “Ammolite, to connect with the past and bring about change.”

“You may be seated,” Asgore announced. “Sienna, come forward.”

Sienna stood up and placed herself before the bowl.

She put her hand in the bowl and shivered as the tingling sensation crawled up her arm.
She removed her hand and found a stone with bright blue and gold striations and a translucent indigo crystal.

“Pietersite, to promote intuition and transformation,” Gaster announced. “Tanzanite, to perceive the truth.”

“You may be seated,” Asgore said. “Caroline, come forward.”

Caroline stood up and sat before the bowl.

She reached in, grimacing slightly at the tingling.

Caroline took her hand from the bowl. Inside her hand were a hollow brown tube-like rock and a sandy-brown rock that looked like a flower, neither of which much resembled crystals at all as much as they resembled sculpted rocks.

“Fulgurite, for lightning manifest and divine inspiration,” Gaster announced. “Desert rose, for perseverance and confidence.”

“You may be seated,” Asgore announced.

Caroline’s eyes stayed on the fulgurite - definitely the tubal specimen - and recalled something she had read in a book on the Great Sand Dunes of southern Colorado. Fulgurite is formed when a bolt of lightning strikes sand or sandy soil, it said, and the heat causes the sand to melt into glass.

Fulgurite was proof of what she was capable of with her magic. The desert rose, its seemingly delicate “petals” unbending as she fingered them, was proof of her ability to stand strong and unmov ing in the face of danger or pressure - **Perseverance.**
Caroline smiled.

She glanced at Frisk’s and Sienna’s crystals.

They didn’t know Sienna well, as they had only just met, but Frisk’s chalcedony was perfect for them.

But the reason for the ammolite eluded Caroline. They understood the part about change, since that was something Frisk’s job as Ambassador required of them, and from what she understood those with the Red SOUL were born to be catalysts for change. But the part about the past was what got to them - what did Frisk’s past have to do with their strength?

Perhaps it had something to do with the frequent flashes in their eyes and the strange smiles that show up sometimes. They had become far more frequent as of late.

Maybe it was nothing, and it was just an odd detail normal to Frisk that she had noticed. It happened a lot, Caroline noticing things about other people that no one else had before.

But then again, eye’s shouldn’t flash quite so literally. Even her own eyes didn’t flash, not even when she used her Magic.

It was something she would have to ask Frisk about for herself.

Boo swerves left. Bowser drifts right. Yoshi uses the blue shell -
- too late.

Daisy wins yet again.

Brian, Hunter, MK, Penelope, Elaina, and Flowey groaned.

“I knew I shoulda used the blue shell soon as I got it…” MK despaired.

“What the heck,” Brian said in shock.

Hannah seemed blissfully unaware.

“Did I win?” she asked.

Brian facepalmed.

“We are so doing karaoke when Frisk and Caroline are done,” Hunter sighed.

“Frisk, come forth.”

Frisk stepped up and sat before the ash bowl.

This was it. This was the final step, the one where they discovered their weaknesses.

They weren’t sure if they wanted to.

But they had to.

Frisk reached their hand into the bowl, the tingling sensation this time even stronger to the point where they had to grab at their arm to keep from quaking where they sat.
Frisk yanked their hand from the bowl, breathing heavily from the effort it took not to shake.

In their hand sat stone that looked like amethyst with stripes of clear orange, an orange stone with sparkly flecks scattered throughout, and an iridescent milky white stone.


“You may be seated,” Asgore announced. “Sienna, come forth.”

Frisk returned to their place as Sienna came forth.

Sienna had noticed Frisk’s reaction.

She swallowed as she put her hand into the bowl.

She tensed, every inch of her body clenching to keep from flying away.

One.

Two.

Three.

Four.

Five.

Six.

Seven.

With great effort, Sienna removed her hand from the bowl, gasping for breath as she stared at the stones in her sweaty palm.

In her palm lay a piece of metal in an intricate geometric shape that shone like a rainbow, a clear yellow crystal, and a deep-red crystal.


“You may be seated,” Gaster announced. “Caroline, come forth.”
Sienna went to sit down as Caroline moved toward the bowl.

Caroline stared at the bowl, slightly unnerved by the reactions if the previous Wizards.

Pallas flew up to her shoulder and nuzzled her comfortingly.

Caroline smiled and reached into the bowl.

It wasn’t as bad as the other two had made it seem.

One.

Two.

Three.

Four.

Five.

Six.

Seven.

She stared at the stones in her hand - a yellow-green stone, a stone with striations of teal and aqua, and an elongated black stone.

“Prehnite, for calming and the banishment of nightmares,” Toriel announced. “Chrysocolla, to aid in gentler communication. Black tourmaline, for purification and the calming of electromagnetic energy.”

“You may be seated,” Asgore announced.

Caroline returned to her spot, staring at the chrysocolla with confusion.

The three Wizards awaited further instruction.

Silence.

Caroline was starting to get a little impatient.

Then something occurred.

The crystals began to glow slightly.

The Wizards stared speechless at the glowing crystals.

The crystals began to arrange themselves end to end.

Seconds later, the crystals were arranged as if they had been strung on a string to make a charm.

The Wizards stared, unsure of how to respond.

Silence.

“Alright, you three are free to go!” Gaster announced cheerfully.
Silence.

“Finally.”

The sounds of exasperation as Daisy won yet another round.

“You’ve gotta be kidding me!” Undyne shouted. “How do you even do that?!”

“How do you even do that?!” Hannah asked.

“Do what?”

“Win every single time!”

“I won?!”

Groans.

“How do you win without even knowing it?” Elaina signed in exasperation.

A knock on the Game Room door.

Frisk opened the door.

Cheers.

“Finally we can stop losing to a kindergartener!” Brian cheered.

“I’m in second grade, Brian,” Hannah corrected. “Get it together.”

“Karaoke time!” Hunter piped happily.

“I’ll go get dad!” Frisk signed, skittering away to do so.

The group stood in silence.

“So what was that all about?” Penelope asked.

“What was what all about?” Caroline asked back.

“That top-secret Wizard-y stuff,” Penelope clarified.

“Can’t tell you, it’s a secret,” Caroline said.

“Sorry, but we’re not allowed to discuss it,” Sienna explained. “I’m not sure if there are consequences, but it’s better to be safe than sorry in these situations.”

“I thought it was smoke and mirrors designed to make it seem mysterious to outsiders,” Caroline said.

Silence.

Sienna stared thoughtfully at Caroline.

Penelope stared suspiciously at Sienna.

Caroline stared blankly at nothing.
“I did not hit her, it’s not true! It’s bullshit, I did not hit her! I did nooooot! Oh hai, Mark.”

Laughter rang throughout the Heart of Gold.

“gets me every time,” Sans chuckled.

“Everything else about this movie is shit, except for that one fucking scene!” Tom managed.

“So this is considered bad by American standards?” Yuu asked in awe.

“Anybody else wanting to call ’him Fujiwara to avoid confusion?” Alexis asked.

“I say save it for a serious moment,” Liam suggested. “Like the HWC declaring war on Monsters.”

“i reeeally hope leland schwartz ain’t that stupid,” Sans said.

“Hey, Frisk!” Ioniq greeted happily.

“How you been, nugget?” Liam asked.

Frisk gave two thumbs up in response from where they had taken a seat beside Sans.

Sans took a moment to rumple their hair.

“whatcha doin’ in here, friskito?” he asked.

«We’re gonna do karaoke!» Frisk signed eagerly. «Do you wanna join us?»

“What did they say?” Saeyoung asked.

“everyone does karaoke here every year, and it’s gettin to be about time,” Sans explained.

“Can we join?!” Fujiwara asked excitedly.

“i doubt you’ll be able to sing, but you can watch,” Sans said.

Fujiwara cheered.

Frisk smiled.

“okay, lemme grab everything and get it set up,” Sans said. “tell caroline it won’t need charging - we don’t want another mishap like the one with uncle metta’s phone, now do we?”

Frisk shook their head, clearly trying not to laugh at the memory.

“frisk,” Sans said in a warning tone, “mettaton can actually afford a new phone or two. i can’t afford a new laptop.”

Frisk hained a sullen look on their face.

“but that was pretty funny the way it caught fire for a few seconds before just exploding,” Sans said. “and caroline’s quip after really sold it.”

Frisk giggled aloud at the memory.

“Do we even want to know?” Alexis sighed.
“Yes,” Saeyoung said.

“well, i hope you guys are ready for a real shocker,” Sans said as he stood up and began to use his Magic to unplug things.

Frisk giggled as Sans recounted the tale.

Caroline fidgeted impatiently with her fulgurite, feeling the crackle of her Magic underneath her skin as she did so.

She liked the way her Magic felt. It calmed her almost, the buzzing like white noise under her skin.

She ran her thumb up and down the Talisman, pondering the sensation of each crystal. Each one was different, in both appearance and effect on the feel of her Magic.

She wondered how Sienna’s Magic felt to her.

Or what Sienna’s Magic was at all.

Caroline looked around the room, eyes settling on the easily-identifiable appearance of Sienna.

Pallas popped into being on her shoulder for reassurance.

He nuzzled Caroline, who nuzzled back.

She walked up to Sienna, who seemed to be texting someone.

“Um, excuse me Miss Sienna?” Caroline asked nervously.

“Yeah? What’s up?” Siena queried.

“What kind of Magic do you have?” Caroline inquired.

Sienna smiled. “How about I show you?”

Sienna turned invisible.

Caroline just stood there for a moment.

“This is just like the time I saw Napstablook for the first time…” she grumbled.

Then a quiet laughter slowly came back into being.

Sienna stopped laughing.

“Invisibility Magic,” she said. “When I use it, no one can sense me in any way.”

“Then wouldn’t it be Intangibility Magic?” Caroline asked.

Sienna was quiet for a moment.

“Yeah, but not everyone knows what that is,” Sienna answer calmly. “Invisibility is easier and gets the point across.”

“But that’s not entirely the case, it only explains a part of it!” Caroline countered, slightly frustrated.
“I know you’re frustrated,” Sienna said, voice still calm. “I know a lot about being frustrated by a lack of details - it happens a lot in my line of work.”

“And what’s that?”

Caroline and Sienna turned toward the sudden Penelope.

Sienna blinked a few times.

“I do investigative work,” Sienna said.

“You mean like Magnum P.I.?” Levi piped.

“Were all of you listening?!” Sienna asked in annoyance.

“Yeah.”

“It was getting interesting…”

“You turned invisible!”

“S-sorry…”

“keep going, it was just getting good.”

Everyone turned to look at Sans and Frisk. No one was sure how long they had been there, but they had learned to get used to Sans suddenly appearing long ago, and they were used to Frisk being as close to Sans as possible whenever they could be so.

“hey, don’t stop the show on my account,” Sans said. “besides, we’re here for karaoke and i got some internet buddies hooked up so they can watch.”

“You know, there are ways we can join in,” Ioniq pointed out.

“ways that would take too much of the time that could be used for karaoke,” Sans added.

“Why must you never put forth any effort?” Alexis groaned.

“It’s not a lack of effort, he just puts forth the bare minimum!” Saeyoung noted. “And it’s not never, just a lot of the time. Depression does that to people.”

Silence.

“thanks,” Sans said. “now let’s get hooked up. you feeling verbal tonight frisk, or are you watching?”

Frisk seemed to be thinking.

They asked if anyone in their headspace felt like singing.

“Is that what karaoke is?” Gail asked.

“Yes,” Chara answered. “I usually serve as Frisk’s speaking, but you can take over tonight if you want.”

“I’m no good at singing anyway,” Rowan said nervously. “I had Gregor do all the lullabies…”
Gail paused.

“I have many questions about that statement, but they can wait until after I sing my heart out for the first time in eighty-something years,” she said. “It’s showtime, boys!”

“I’m not a boy,” Chara deadpanned.

“Force of habit, sorry,” Gail said. “Should I change it?”

“I don’t care, I know what you meant,” Chara said with a shrug. “Just pointing it out. I’m also not a girl. Instead of she, use they. If that gets confusing, just go with what everyone else is saying unless everyone else is Linda. In which case we call out insults.”

“Not through Frisk though, they won’t allow that,” Rowan said. “The child’s too kind sometimes…”

“Try all the time,” Chara recanted.

“You’ve got me there.”

Frisk tuned out the rest of their conversation, knowing it would only turn to insults about Linda and her mother.

Frisk could understand why they would make such comments, but that didn’t mean they liked it.

Maybe they were too nice.

But that suited them just fine.

They returned their focus to the outside world and nodded with a smile.

They wanted Abigail to have the most fun possible in this life, and if this was the way to do it then so be it.

It was certainly a fun way, they had to admit.

They noticed Caroline staring at them out of the corner of their eye.

Frisk decided to shrug it off.

Caroline stared a lot.

Miranda was utterly bored.

She could hear her mother laughing at something on the television in the master bedroom - probably some reality TV show yet again.

She hated her mother’s laugh as much as everyone else did - maybe even more since she had to live with it every single day of her life.

And so Miranda decided to listen to some music.

But the real question is what to listen to?

Miranda decided to play her father’s playlist - it had always been password locked, but Miranda had tried out multiple combinations of characters before finding the right one. However, she had never played it.
Until now.

She scrolled through the playlist, utterly confounded by all the unfamiliar songs and artists.

She clicked on a random song to listen to.

She jumped at the sound of the music.

It was heavy and unfamiliar.

But something about it seemed so…nice?

Weird.

Miranda turned it off and chose to listen to some Ed Sheeran instead.

But what little she’d heard of the song from her father’s playlist kept ringing in her head.

She ignored it.

“Okay, who’s next up?” Penelope asked.

“Randomizer says Frisk is gonna sing A Million Dreams from The Greatest Showman,” Sienna said.

Screams ensued.

After taking a moment to regain their bearings, everyone turned to stare at Mettaton.

Mettaton had the most excited grin on his face, his eye sparkling brightly.

“HE LOVES THAT MOVIE!” Papyrus explained needlessly.

“i’m sure he does,” Sans said.

“Wait, don’t three people song that song?” Caroline asked.

“Ziv Zaifman, Hugh Jackman, and Michelle Williams!” Mettaton said excitedly.

Silence.

Everyone turned to look at Toriel and Sans.

Sans turned to look at Toriel and smiled nervously.

“well?” he asked. “you game?”

Toriel smiled.

“I suppose I could,” she said. “Is Frisk ready, though?”

“i dunno,” Sans said with a shrug. “you ready, kid?”

Frisk smiled and nodded excitedly.

They grabbed a microphone and readied themself.

The music began to play.
Frisk took a deep breath in and out.

They let Gail take over.

Before they entered their headspace, they thought they saw Caroline’s eyes widen.

They didn’t have enough time to dwell on it when Gail started to sing.

“I close my eyes~ And I can see~ A world that’s waiting up for me~ That I call my own~”

Frisk couldn’t hear their voice - this wasn’t their voice.

This was Gail’s voice.

They peeked out of their headspace.

No one else seemed to notice.

“They’re hearing you, but it’s not quite you.” Chara noted. “Interesting…”

«Gail has a pretty voice!» Frisk signed.

“Indeed,” Rowan concurred. “It’s really no wonder she became an entertainer - she’s a natural.”

“Mettaton would love her,” Chara added.

“No argument there, Prinet.”

Gail was paying no attention, the song’s chorus occupying all of her focus.

“Cause every night I lie in bed~ The brightest colors fill my head~ A million dreams are keeping me awake~”

Frisk’s eyes widened. This song spoke to them.

“I think of what the world could be~ A vision of the one I see~ A million dreams is all it’s gonna take~”

It reminded them of what they still had to do for the Monsters as their Ambassador.

“A million dreams for the world we're gonna make~”

Frisk glanced at Chara.

Whether they were thinking the same thing they were they didn’t know.

But they were certain that Chara felt the same.

“They can say, they can say it all sounds crazy~ They can say, they can say we've lost our minds~ I don't care, I don't care if they call us crazy~ Runaway to a world that we design~”

Sans picked up a microphone and began to sing.

“every night i lie in bed~ the brightest colors fill my head~ a million dreams are keeping me awake~”

Frisk and Chara stared up at Rowan, whose face was slack-jawed in awe.
“Sans does really good impressions too,” Chara added.

Frisk nodded in agreement.

Toriel took her microphone.

“However big~ However small~ Let me be part of it all~ Share your dreams with me~”

Sans took Toriel by the hand, sweeping her into a spin.

“You may be right~ You may be wrong~ But say that you’ll bring me along~ To the world you see~”

Sans joined in.

“To the world I close my to see~ I close my eyes and see~”

Sans leaned Toriel in close, their noses touching.

“every night i lie in bed~ the brightest colors fill my head~”

Toriel smiled as she continued.

“A million dreams are keeping me awake~”

“a million dreams, a million dreams~”

They sang together in perfect harmony, dancing all the while.

“A million dreams for the the world we’re gonna make~”

They kissed as the song ended, to the cheers of everyone watching.

Gail walked Frisk’s body back to their spot between Caroline and MK, the former of whom had been filming the performance on her phone.

Then Frisk’s phone got a text message.

*1 text from: ✒ Caroline*

*Cl: You don’t seem like yourself lately. Are you alright?*

Gail wasn’t sure how Frisk would respond to this.

She brought them to the front.

Frisk blinked, staring at the message, then up at Caroline.

«I’ll explain later,» they said.

Caroline nodded then turned her attention back to the current performer.

Frisk lowered their head and returned to their headspace.

They looked at Chara, Rowan, and Gail with slight fear.

“She knows,” they managed.
“So we saw,” Chara said, chewing the inside of their cheek. “Whadda we do now? Do we tell her and risk it, or keep it quiet?”

Silence.

“I trust Caroline,” Frisk said. “Hunter mentioned that she came out to Caroline first, and that took a lot of trust, so maybe it’s safe?”

Chara, Rowan and Gail stared at Frisk.

Chara sighed.

“You’re the alive one here,” they said. “You make the decisions.”

“But this involves you guys too!” Frisk insisted. “I don’t want to make this decision if you have doubts…”

Silence.

“From what I have seen, Caroline is an honest lass,” Rowan said. “A bit too honest sometimes. But she’s loyal and can keep a secret.”

“I like how she hates people,” Chara said. “I get that.”

Everyone turned to Gail.

Gail crossed her arms.

“I barely even know this girl,” she said. “But if you want to, I won’t be the one stopping you.”

Frisk smiled.

“Okay,” they said. “Thank you.”

Then they came back to reality.

They glanced at their phone screen.

Half an hour til midnight.

They looked around.

Sans, Papyrus, and Gaster had disappeared.

Didn’t they disappear just before midnight last year, too?

Sans, Papyrus, and Gaster sat on the back porch, the sounds of karaoke blaring from inside the Manor.

They were quiet as they stared at the sky above them.

“So, Sans,” Gaster began. “What’s your resolution for this year?”

Sans shrugged.

“can’t really think of one,” he said. “i’m pretty happy with my life right now.”
“OH COME ON, BROTHER, YOU HAVE TO THINK OF SOMETHING, IT’S OUR TRADITION NOW!” Papyrus whined.

Sans rolled his eyelights.

“does it necessarily have to be me?” Sans asked. “any one of us can do it.”

“He has a point,” Gaster said. “I suppose I could make a resolution…”

“If it involves doing more work, don’t even bother dad!” Papyrus snapped.

“Okay, nevermind then,” Gaster said. “How about you, Papyrus? Any resolutions?”

Papyrus hummed.

“My resolution is…” he began dramatically.

Silence.

More silence.

Even more silence.

“…MAKE SURE EVERYONE IN MY LIFE IS THE HAPPIEST THEY CAN BE!”

“wow, that dramatic pause took up maybe three whole silences,” Sans noted.

“That’s not even a proper standard unit of measurement!” Papyrus griped.

“Sans, what have I told you about breaking the fourth wall?” Gaster warned.

“That we don’t know who could come in so we should just not do it?” Sans replied.

“I have no idea what you guys are talking about and it is beginning to make me slightly uncomfortable!” Papyrus said. “AND HOW CAN THERE EVEN BE WALLS WHEN WE ARE OUTSIDE?!”

Sans and Gaster turned toward each other, then toward you. They shrugged.

“What are you even shrugging at?!” Papyrus asked, starting to get slightly scared.

“i saw a bird and it confused me because it’s winter and the little guy should be down south,” Sans answered.

Papyrus narrowed his eye sockets suspiciously.

Sans and Gaster looked up at the sky.

The streetlights dampened the starlights.

But still they could see Orion’s belt.

Sans used Hyper Beam.

Buffy used Brick Break.
Sans fainted.

Flowey glared at his fainted Snorlax, then at the opposing Machamp, then back up at the sleepily smiling Hannah.

“I despise you, I hope you know that,” he said.

“I’d probably believe you if you didn’t accept my Pokemon battles so much,” Hannah said with a shrug. “Thanks for the trade by the way, I needed it to beat Olivia.”

“Still don’t know why she gave you UltraSun,” Flowey grumbled.

“Because I already have Moon, and we shared a DS because my mom doesn’t think girls should play video games,” Hannah said.

“Kid, your mom’s an idiot,” Flowey said. “Just don’t tell her that, she’ll get mad at you.”

“She’ll get mad no matter what Hunter and I do, though…” Hannah said quietly.

Flowey was silent for a moment.

“Well, calling her an idiot will only make her angrier, and no one wants that,” he said. “Next time I see her, I’ll do you and your sis a solid and call her an idiot for ya. Sound good?”

Hannah smiled and giggled.

“That sounds awesome!” she said.

Flowey stared at the girl in confusion.

It was almost as if Papyrus had shrunk, turned into a Human girl, and gotten an attitude.

But the worst part was that she liked him.

Flowey sighed.

Oh well.

At least he could have fun calling Linda an idiot at the next PTA meeting.

Maybe he could get Sans in on it…

\[The \ New \ Year \ leaves \ you \ filled \ with\]

\[D E T E R M I N A T I O N\]

Chapter End Notes

What Are You Doing New Year's Eve? - Frank Loesser
A Million Dreams - The Greatest Showman

Fun Fact: I have no fucking clue what to put here.
Special thanks to Saeyoung Choi from Mystic Messenger.
Chapter Summary

In which the title is a little too on-the-nose and another PTA meeting finally happens.

Chapter Notes

fuck

See the end of the chapter for more notes

9:27 A.M., January 30, 20XS

It’s a freezing day outside.

Wind is blowing.

Temperatures are dropping.

On days like this, kids like you…

…are in the final minutes of math class.

Frisk had managed to complete their math worksheet in a timely manner. They rushed back to their seat, grateful to have managed the feat.

Then they tripped over Alicia’s outstretched leg and fell on their knees.

Laughter rang out.

Frisk blinked.

Chara furiously shoved their way to the front of Frisk’s mind, gaining control.

They knew Frisk wouldn’t allow them to FIGHT, but they could do something else suited to them.

They slowly got to their feet.

They turned their head, flashing Alicia one of the creepiest smiles they could.

Alicia stopped laughing and shrieked in terror.

Chara returned Frisk to the front.
Frisk high-fived Chara then took over, returning to their seat without further incident.

Mrs. Bell returned to the classroom to find children mumbling suspiciously.

“What happened?” she sighed.

“Frisk looked at me weird!” Alicia snapped dramatically.

Everyone stared at Alicia. Then at the eternally neutral-faced Frisk. Then back at Alicia.

“What the heck,” Brian said.

“I’m not lying this time, she really did make an ugly face at me!” Alicia whined.

The bell rang.

Everyone else proceeded to leave, ignoring Alicia’s whining.

Frisk, MK, Brian, and Ridley just stared at her in confusion as they walked past her.

Alicia glared at them.

Miranda walked past Alicia without paying her the time of day.

She’d seen Frisk make a creepy face before.

Besides, watching Alicia’s face contort in anger was pretty entertaining.

She considered it a point of pride to have the seventh-largest collection of Precious Moments memorabilia in the entire state.

But a one piece she held above all others.

She took out a resin trinket box, painted in pastel pink and purple and carved in the shape of a present box with a little cherub wrapped in ribbons on top of it. The contents within rattled as she moved it.

She took a dust cloth and began to polish the box.

She hummed quietly to herself, losing herself in her task.

Then the sound of the phone ringing caused her jump.

The box was sent flying into the air.

Linda scrambled to catch it.

It fell to the ground, the sound of resin breaking being heard.

Linda stormed over to the phone and picked it up.

“Listen up asshole, I don’t know who you think you are or who you think you work for, but I will have you know that I -”
“Hi Mrs. Thompson, this is Jill Lourdes,” came the slightly tense voice on the other end. “I’m calling to remind you of the PTA meeting this afternoon at 3:30. I do hope you can make it.”

Linda was silent.

“Well, I’ll expect to see you there an hour early as usual!” Jill said. “Buh-bye now!”

“Wait, DON’T YOU DARE HANG UP ON ME -”

Too late. Jill had already hung up.

Linda put the phone back onto the port and held her head in her hands.

She half-expected Estelle to be standing above the shards.

Linda picked up the shards of resin and put them aside before picking up the contents.

She sighed before putting the contents in a porcelain vase on the mantle above the fireplace, the tinkling sound each little content made counted carefully.

She sighed and put the vase down.

Somehow she felt that this was NOT going to be her day.

Caroline and Hunter cringed as Alicia and Rachel yowled soprano lines despite being mezzos.

“Oh my god, TAKE FIVE EVERYONE!” Mrs. Caton shouted. “You two, any more of that and you won’t be in the spring concert!”

Alicia and Rachel were silent.

The whole room seemed to let out a collective sigh of relief.

Everyone began to chat quietly amongst themselves, save for a number of seventh and eighth graders who began to chat loudly amongst themselves.

Caroline took out a notebook bound in aged brown leather and a little black fountain pen and began to write in it.

“Ewww, what is that thing?!”

Caroline sighed and turned to look at the girl with the flaxen blonde bob cut and blue-gray eyes with a smug smirk.

“This is a notebook,” Caroline replied.

“Not that, I meant -” Brooke gestured to Caroline’s face. “- this.”

Laughter.

“The face of someone who saw you cheating on Friday’s math test,” Caroline snipped.

More laughter.

Brooke’s face flushed in anger.
“Now go back to your fake friend,” Caroline said.

“Alicia’s not fake, you freaking loser!” Brooke screeched.

“Brooke Lane, quiet or I’m sending you to the office!” Mrs. Caton snapped.

Silence reigned.

Brooke glared at Caroline.

Caroline ignored her, choosing instead to continue writing.

Brooke started ripping paper out of her a spiral notebook, crumpling it, and throwing it at Caroline.

Caroline still did nothing.

Brooke kept tossing it in hopes of getting a reaction.

“Brooke!” Mrs. Caton screamed. “Office, NOW!”

Brooke scowled, then threw the spiral notebook itself at Caroline before storming out of the room.

Everyone stared at Caroline.

She was still writing.

Hunter walked up to her.

“Hey, you alright?” she asked.

Caroline glanced up at Hunter briefly before returning to her work.

“Yeah,” the bookworm replied. “Too bad that moment reminded me of how much I hate people.”

Hunter sighed.

“Working on the thing for the wedding?” she asked.

Caroline nodded. “I chose one poem written by a known writer, and I’m writing one myself based on Dr. Sans and Mrs. Toriel’s love story.”

Hunter smiled. “They’re gonna love it!” she said.

“I really hope so…” Caroline said.

“Hey.”

The pair looked up and saw Sarah Ward standing before them.

“What’s this about weddings and poems?” she asked.

“I was tasked by some family friends to write a speech for their upcoming wedding,” Caroline explained. “I’ll also be reciting a few poems for them too. And considering the company that will be attending, it’s going to be a very big event,” Caroline said. “The ceremony, at least. That was apparently the case for Dr. Alphys and Mrs. Undyne’s wedding - big ceremony, small reception.”

“Oh yeah, that’s how you met Frisk’s family isn’t it?” Hunter asked. “That was about three years
“June 26, 201Z,” Caroline blurted. “So technically it’s two and a half years ago. Papyrus would probably have it down to the minute…”

“How long have you two been friends anyway?” Sarah asked.

“About two and a half years,” Caroline said. “We met on the first day of fourth grade.”

“And when did you meet Elaina?”

“We were all introduced to them through Frisk at different times,” Hunter explained. “But Caroline and I met her while we were last-minute Christmas shopping in fifth grade!”

“Yep,” Caroline said. “It’d been a few weeks since I’d found out about my Magic.”

Sarah blinked.

“You kids lead very eventful lives,” she sighed wearily. “Well, see ya ‘round. Book club this afternoon, right?”

“It’s Tuesday, so yeah,” Hunter said.

“Aight, see ya then,” Sarah said before walking back to her seat.

Caroline hummed thoughtfully and returned to her writing.

Hunter sighed and slumped back in her chair.

She saw Alicia and Trav out of the corner of her eye whispering about something.

Hunter was filled with suspicion.

Theo laid his head on his desk, his textbook opened before him, his paper next to it.

His handwriting had gone to hell since losing his eye. It was still legible, but it was not what it used to be.

Nothing is what it used to be.

Theo had three more questions to go.

Then he noticed.

He reread the textbook.

He groaned.

Make that five more questions to go.

He got back to work, checking each question and answer twice to make sure he didn’t miss anything.

“Do you need any help, Theo?”

Theo looked up.
Fiona and Julia stood over him.

Theo was quiet for a moment, wondering just what to say.

He decided to suck it up and be **Brave**.

“Question number nine,” he said. “I can’t seem to find it.”

“You mean you can still read?”

Silence.

Everyone stared at Matt.

“Not cool, dude,” someone said.

“Your mother,” Matt countered.

“Courtney’s cheating on you,” Theo snapped. “With *everyone*.”

A few kids gasped. Others started whispering. A few laughed.

Matt’s face contorted in fury.

“You shut your mouth, Cyclops,” Matt snapped. “Courtney would *never* do something like that! She’s a fucking *angel!*”

“Emphasis on the word ‘fucking’,” Julia said.

The class howled with laughter.

Matt looked ready to blow a gasket when the bell rang.

The kids put their stuff away and went to lunch.

Matt glared at Theo the whole time.

“…and then, WHAM! The guy falls on his butt into a pile of horse crap!”

Bruce, Nicko, Kristina, Ridley, and Marilla stared at Eddie from their respective places at the lunch table.

“We were talking about what tattoo Leslie should give Bruce next,” Marilla said.

“Oh,” Eddie said sheepishly. “How about a unicorn?”

“No,” Bruce replied.


“That works,” Bruce said.

Then Ridley hushed everyone.

She pointed toward the end of the lunch line where kids were leaving to sit down with their tray of poor-quality school lunch food.
Matt was sneaking up behind Theo.

“Oh no, what’s that dumbass about to do?” Eddie groaned.

Matt dumped the meatloaf on Theo’s head.

Everyone in the cafeteria gasped.

Theo turned around slowly, silently.

He lifted his eyepatch.

Matt screamed in shock.

Theo took the opportunity to stuff some mashed potatoes in Matt’s shirt.

Silence.

Matt picked up some green beans and threw them.

Theo dodged.

The green beans hit Bruce in the cheek.

Everyone gasped.

Bruce merely wiped the stuff off his face.

But his Water Elemental girlfriend wasn’t quite so forgiving.

Marilla stormed over to Matt and smashed a carton of milk on his head.

Matt tried to punch her, only for his fist to go through water.

“FOOD FIGHT!” someone shouted.

And so it began.

The time-honored tradition of tossing low-quality cafeteria food at one’s fellow students began.

Fruits and meatloaf and mashed potatoes and green beans and milk flew everywhere. Some of the girls were running for the bathroom to get gunk out of their hair.

Eddie was about to cry from happiness.

He had never seen a real food fight before, and now here he was, living one.

What a time to be alive.

Eddie took a pair of lunch trays and stood on a lunch table.

“VIVA LA REVOLUCIÓN, MOTHERFUCKERS!” he cried before tossing an orange like a baseball.

It flew a ways before unceremoniously hitting the wall, the juice spraying out all over Rachel’s white blouse.
Meanwhile, Kristina was hiding in a corner, trying not to get hit.

She was cowering, quaking with fear.

Then shadows appeared behind her.

Two shadows.

Two familiar shadows.

She curled up into a ball, waiting for Trav and Scott to do the inevitable.

Then she heard tumbling and groaning and scuffling and…what?

Kirstina cautiously turned around.

Nicko had Scott and Trav in a headlock under either of his arms. The terrible twosome seemed to almost be unable to breathe.

Nicko nodded at Kristina.

Kristina nodded back, understanding.

She flew up and over the crowd.

She flew until she reach a relatively people-free spot to land in and started looking for someone, anyone who could help.

Seriously, where were the teachers when you really needed them?

Then she spotted Penelope and Caroline on their way to the school library.

“Penelope! Caroline!” Kristina called, running over to them.

Penelope and Caroline stopped walking.

“What is it, Kristina?” Caroline asked.

Kristina took a few deep breaths.

“There’s a food fight in the cafeteria,” she said. “It started when Matt dumped some food on Theo -”

“HE DID WHAT?!” Penelope screeched.

Kristina squeaked as Penelope angrily rushed to the cafeteria.

Caroline was silent as she stared after Penelope, a wistful look on her face.

Kristina looked up at her in confusion, and then realization.

“You like her, don’t you?” she asked.

Caroline tensed, blushing heavily. Or maybe it just seemed that way because she was so pale.

But it was all Kristina needed to see.

She smiled.
“Wanna go after her?” she asked.

“On it,” Caroline said. “Thanks for the heads up, Tina.”

“No problem!”

And then Caroline was off at the speed of light. Or maybe it just seemed that way because she was so tall.

But it was all Kristina needed to see.

Penelope stared at the food-covered carnage of the cafeteria. The smell of the meatloaf - she wondered if it even was meat in the first place - threatened to overwhelm her.

But Matt had gotten to Theo.

In the middle of all the kids tossing food, Penelope spotted Matt and Theo fighting - not with food, but with fists.

Theo’s eyepatch had come off.

Penelope nearly threw up at the sight of what seemed to be meatloaf coming out of the empty socket.

Penelope screamed and picked up a random piece of food.

She threw the apple in Matt’s direction.

She missed him completely and hit Alicia square in the nose.

The sound of a yelp and a crunching silenced the cafeteria.

The apple fell to the floor unharmed.

Alicia’s bleeding, smushed-in nose was a sight to behold.

She stood stock still.

She screamed and ran crying toward the principal’s office.

Everyone was silent.

Matt kept fighting Theo.

A few moments later, Principal Kierkegaard walked up holding a megaphone.

She was pissed.

“WHO STARTED THIS?!” she shouted into the device.

Everybody pointed at Matt, who had his hands wrapped around Theo’s neck.

Matt looked up at Principal Kierkegaard.

He let go.

Penelope ran over to Theo with napkins, followed by Julia, Elliot, and Fiona.
“Matt, let’s go,” Principal Kierkegaard said.

“No, he started it!” Matt snapped. “He made fun of my girlfriend!”

“You made fun if his eye first,” Julia said.

A few seventh graders mumbled in agreement.

“Oh my GOD, I don’t CARE, just EXPEL ALL OF THEM!” Alicia screeched.

“Alicia, there is an ambulance on the way and your parents have been called, go sit in the nurse’s office and wait for them please,” Principal Kierkegaard snipped.

“Alicia also tripped Frisk Dreemurr in Mrs. Bell’s first period class!” someone announced.

A few kids voiced confirmation.

“Yeah, I was there when she did!” Ridley said.

Principal Kierkegaard sighed and dragged Matt and Alicia to her office.

Everyone was silent.

Sans returned to his office from lunch, just before it claimed he was to get off his lunch break.

He took the out-to-lunch sign off his office door and entered, sitting down in the chair and getting out some papers to grade.

A about ten papers in, someone knocked on the door.

“come in, it’s unlocked,” Sans said.

Carlson opened the door.

Sans didn’t even bother looking up at him.

“hey there paul, what do you think i did this time?” he asked.

“Dr. Gaster, are you aware of the importance of your position as the professor of physics at this university?” Dr. Carlson asked coldly.

“how could i not be with you reminding me every single day?” Sans countered, not even bothering to correct the stats professor.

“Then surely you must know who had the position before you did?” Dr. Carlson sneered.

Sans paused.

“never occurred to me to ask,” he said. “is it important?”

Dr. Carlson slammed his hands onto Sans’ desk angrily, sending some of the papers flying.

Sans didn’t react beyond his eyelights blinking off for a few seconds.

“Is it important you ask? IS IT IMPORTANT YOU ASK?!” Carlson screamed. “YOU WILL NEVER REPLACE DR. ADAMSON, AND I WILL MAKE SURE OF IT!”
Silence.

“yeah, i’m gonna have to ask you to leave, i have a phone call to make,” Sans said. “come back when you’re, uh…yeah, just…please leave.”

Carlson left without another word, slamming the door behind him and causing the papers to fly about again.

Well.

Perhaps it’s time for a little investigation…

Sans looked down at the papers scattered all over the floor.

He sighed as he used Cyan Magic to pick them up and stack them on his desk again and began to grade.

Work before play, as they often say.

And some of these people clearly did more of one than the other…

Miranda sighed as she timed out of her typing lesson. 23 words per minute with eight errors - a new personal best.

Then Scott sat next to her.

Ugh. Was this what Brian felt like when she was trying to get him to like her? No wonder he hated her…

“So I heard you broke Alicia’s nose with an apple,” Scott said. “That’s hot.”

Miranda blinked in confusion.

“Okay, first of all, I was in the bathrooms getting gunk out of my hair when that happened,” she said. “Second of all, go the heck away, Skip.”

“My name’s Scott,” the boy corrected. “But hey, you’ll remember my name soon enough after we start dating!”

“Not even in your dreams, Scoot.”

“It’s Scott.”

“Oh my freaking gawd, leave me alone, Scat!”

Kids started whispering.

“Wasn’t she stalking Brian Green?”

“Yeah, this is karma!”

“But it is Scott Foley, I kinda pity her.”

“Don’t bother, she’s just lucky she’s not being ignored entirely.”

Miranda ignored them.
The song she’d heard on New Year’s Eve kept ringing in her head.

What was it called again?

And why did she care?!

She fought back a groan, Scott’s incessant yammering starting to get on her last nerve.

Then the bell rang.

Miranda logged out of her computer and left the classroom as quickly as she could.

Thank goodness the drama classroom was on the opposite side of the school, or she’d be screwed.

Miranda made it into the classroom and sat in her usual spot.

Not long after the bell rang, she realized she was tapping her foot to the beat of the song she had gotten trapped in her head.

And she didn’t even know the name of it - she hadn’t even heard a minute of it before throwing her headphones off in surprise. And yet what little she had heard stuck with her.

What was she to do?

Linda nearly shouted with relief, as she stared at the words on the computer screen in the Thompson family study.

She’d managed to successfully bid for the last Precious Moments trinket box she could find - a resin thing topped with a sculpted little blonde woman kneeling beside a sculpted birdhouse on a sculpted tree stump and holding a sculpted little bluebird in her hand, another sculpted bluebird atop the sculpted birdhouse itself. On the front side of the little box were the words “Home Is Where Mom Is” - the perfect phrase, in Linda’s opinion. Which was always right.

Yeah. It was other people who had the wrong idea. She was in the right. Everyone agreed with her - they were just misguided or afraid to admit it.

“Psh, afraid if what, your face?”

Linda gripped the edge of the wooden desk, her nails digging into the surface.

She turned around, but she didn’t to turn all the way. Estelle was looking over her shoulder.

“Oh, wait, nevermind,” Estelle said. “They’re afraid of this creepy shit.”

“It is not creepy, it’s cute!” Linda snapped. “If anything’s creepy, it’s you!”

“You didn’t seem to think so That Night,” Estelle sneered. “But then again, you don’t really think at all. You made Helen do your work for you all through middle and high school, and you lied about dropping out of college because you were afraid to admit that you’d flunked out!”

“That’s your fault, you know,” Linda hissed. “If you hadn’t -”

Linda suddenly felt a searing pain in her head unlike any she’d ever felt - like hangover and a migraine joined forces with Diana to make her life utterly miserable.
She clutched her temples and wailed in agony.

After what felt like forever, the pain left as quickly as it had come.

Linda looked at Estelle through her tears.

Estelle just stared at her coldly.

“Stop blaming other people for your problems,” the Spirit said. “Especially when you made them suffer because you couldn’t handle the results of your own mistakes. So suck it up and stop your whining, because I ain’t got time for your ‘woe is me’ bullshit! Your mama’s in jail? It's her own damn fault for trying to hurt your kids! Your husband’s not trusting you? Well then stop giving him reasons not to! Grow the fuck up and get over yourself, you idiot!”

Linda blinked, tears still burning behind her eyes.

“But I haven’t done anything wrong!” she defended.

“Oh my fucking god, where to even begin with that statement?” Estelle groaned. “You murdered me, you ruined some poor girl’s self-esteem, your own kids are so afraid of you that they think you’re going to up and kill them -”

“Why in God’s good name do you think I would do such a terrible thing?!” Linda screamed.

Estelle just gave her a look that said “really?”

Linda groaned. “That was completely different! My children aren’t filthy faggots like some people!”

Estelle sighed and rolled her eyes.

“I’m done here,” she said. “Wonder what your babies will think of the stuff in that box you broke earlier…”

“They won’t think anything,” Linda asserted. “They’ll never find out!”

Estelle gave Linda the “really?” look again.

“Whatever, I’m steppin’ off this crazy train,” she said. “See ya ‘round, Lindope.”

Linda screeched in fury as Estelle faded out.

Linda stared at her fingernails.

She sighed.

Time for a fresh top coat.

Again.

Funny thing. Despite all the flak he gave it, Theo really did like PE class. It had almost always been the students that ruined the experience for him.

Like in this case. Trav was having a little too much fun ramming into Theo’s blind side during dodgeball.

Theo had just about had enough and was about to call it quits.
But then he caught the ball.

“Lourdes! You’re out!” Undyne called.

Theo blinked.

Audrey gave him a thumbs-up and went toward the wall.

Theo felt someone slam into him.

He turned toward the person and shoved the dodgeball in their solar plexus.

Trav keeled over, the wind having been knocked out of him.

Trav stood up and glared at Theo.

“Martin! You’re out!” Undyne called.

Trav tried to groan, but all the only sound he could make was a sad and pathetic yet still somehow angry wheezing sound.

He limped over to the wall, leaning his head against it.

A few students cheered.

Theo wondered why.

Then he saw Trav glaring at him.

About half of the kids against the wall came back to the court.

Oh.

Theo stared at the ball in his hands.

He threw one at Brian.

It missed him by about two and a half feet.

Everyone stared.

“What the heck,” Brian said, breaking the silence.

“Weren’t you on the soccer team last year?” Trav mocked. “Did you lose a brain or an eye?”

“Martin, do you know what happens when you lose a body part?” Undyne asked.

“I don’t really care,” Trav snapped.

“Can I rip his eye out?” Brian asked.

“Penelope would probably get to him first,” Bruce said.

“True.”

“Oh come on, Penelope ran away from our last fight!” Trav claimed.
“It’s not running away if you don’t even show up,” Undyne said. “By the way, Martin, go to my office.”

“But why?” he whined.

Undyne sighed and took him out if the gym and to her office.

She set him down in the black chair across from her desk.

“I’ll tell you why,” Undyne said, tenting her fingers in front if her face a la Gendo Ikari. “You just made fun of someone who’s been seriously injured. Do you have any idea how close he was to dying?”

“But he’s not, so what’s the big deal?” Trav asked dismissively.

“Oh, how about this,” Undyne said, really close to losing her patience. “Imagine what would happen if you got stabbed in the eye and it had to be taken out. You’re probably thinking either ‘Oh, I’m gonna get a cool eyepatch’ or ‘Oh, I’m gonna be some kinda freak’. Neither of those are right. You wanna know what happens when you lose an eye?”

“Not really -”

“TOO BAD PUNK, I’M GONNA TELL YA ANYWAY!” Undyne shouted. “You suddenly stop being able to see on the side that lost the eye. A lot of things that require sight suddenly get a whole lot harder.”

“But he can still see, right?” Trav asked

“Not out of his left eye he can’t,” Undyne said. “And you know it.”

Trav was quiet.

“Yeah, I saw you slamming into him,” Undyne said. “By the time I realized it was intentional, you were already out. Then you made that remark about him being unable to play soccer. So you know DeMartino’s having a rough time right now, you either don’t know how rough it is or just don’t care.”

Silence.

“You wanna know how I lost my eye?” Undyne asked.

Trav was quiet, merely lowering his head.

“You know the story of Frisk freeing all the Monsters from the Underground?” Undyne asked.

“What’s that got to do with anything?” Trav asked.

“They weren’t the first Human get lost in the Underground,” Undyne said. “One of them - the next-to-last one before Frisk - ended up taking my eye out.”

Trav’s eyes widened.

“I hated Humans for it for the longest time,” Undyne admitted. “I thought they were all like the one that took my eye. I know better now, but sometimes I still feel like most Humans are pretty darn hateful. And your actions are only making that feeling stronger.”
Trav was now slightly terrified.

“Listen Martin, you have two options,” Undyne said. “You can stop bullying and prove me wrong about Humans, or you can keep it up and prove me right. The choice is yours.”

“But I’m not a bully!” Trav claimed.

“I heard you and Scott Foley tried to attack Ketal during the food fight,” Undyne said. “What would you have done if Cantrell hadn’t stopped you? Answer me honestly.”

Trav looked appropriately ashamed.

“Now man the frick up and stop being a jerk, okay?” Undyne said. “The bell’s about to ring, so head off to the locker rooms and get changed.”

“Yes, Coach Undyne,” Trav said.

“Okay, now get going, and I’ll see ya tomorrow.”

Trav stood up and left to change in the locker room.

He half expected all of the guys to start ganging up on him and beating him up. All they did was glare at him.

He should have known they were better than that.

Sans sat in his usual spot at the table in the North Middle School library as he waited for the beginning of the meeting.

It was abnormally silent.

And everyone knew exactly why that was.

The food fight. Everyone knew about it. It was written on their faces.

Sans was actually surprised that Linda wasn’t there yet. It was…suspicious.

The library door opened.

Everyone turned, expecting either Linda or Jill.

Caroline and Frisk walked in. Frisk was carrying Flowey while Caroline set down some library books so they could be checked in.

Sans could see Diana smiling smugly out of the corner of his eye sockets.

“So, Monica,” she sneered. “Where was Theo during that little food fight, hmm?”

“I think everyone here knows, Diana,” Monica sighed, rolling her eyes.

“You know,” Sharona piped, “I heard that Miranda was nowhere to be seen. Where was she during the food fight?”

“I heard some people say she threw an apple at Alicia and broke her nose,” Caroline said.

Some of the parents started whispering.
“How dare you!” Diana screeched.

“Everyone, settle down!”

Jill had entered.

She moved to her place at the head of the table.

“Okay, let’s see who all’s here,” she said. She scanned the room, one of her fingers seeming to count all the parents present.

“Okay, Irma’s absent as usual, Amy Brown has jury duty, Jen Markle’s taking care of her sick kid… huh. Okay, that-that’s weird.”

“What is?” Janice Gilmore asked.

“Of all people, Linda Thompson is absent,” Jill said.

A few parents gasped.

“Hallelujah!” Sharona exalted.

“don’t start partying just yet, people,” Sans suggested. “if i know anything about linda, it’s that she goes to pta meetings. chances are she’s bringing something to suck up with.”

“I really don’t want to be biased here, but that’s actually very likely,” Jill sighed.

“Oh, by the way Jill?” Karen chimed. “Do you know what little Audrey was doing during the food fight?”

“Her science fair project,” Jill said. “Mr. Ochoa can confirm this, and say the same for five other eighth graders. But for now, we will be discussing OH DEAR GOD WHAT IS THAT SMELL?!”

Sharona was coughing and hacking, her eyes watering and face turning red and blotchy.

“oh no, someone get something to help her cover her face, asap,” Sans said.

“I got a scarf!” Monica announced. “Someone get some water!”

Caroline rushed up to the table with a water bottle.

“Thanks Caroline,” Monica said.

Caroline merely nodded, covering her face with her turtleneck collar.

She left the library, running past a very irritated Linda and leaving Frisk and Flowey in the library.

As soon as the doors closed behind her, Linda stormed over to the table.

“Sorry I’m late, rush hour traffic,” she said quickly.

“Linda, it’s half past three in the afternoon,” Monica said. “Rush hour doesn’t start for another hour.”

“And stop bathing in perfume!” Sharona said, her voice muffled by the scarf. “Seriously, I could literally die!”

“No one dies by smelling perfume!” Linda said.
linda, that’s not perfume, that’s an assault on our senses,” Sans said.

One parent ran for the bathroom at the back of the library.

“see?”

“Oh come on, you can’t even smell, you’re a Skeleton!” Linda griped.

“oh, i can smell alright,” Sans said. “and right now i smell b.s.”

“Sans, Linda, break it up,” Jill commanded. “Linda, you are using way more perfume than is necessary. Sans, you really don’t have to dignify her with a response every single time, do you?”

“no,” Sans said.

Jill sighed, which turned into a gag. “Anyway, moving ahead with the meeting. The first order of the day has to do with the food fight that occurred at lunch today. As I am sure most if you know, one girl ended up with a broken nose as a result.”

The parents started murmuring.

Flowey tapped the shoulder of a reading Frisk and whispered something in their ear.

Frisk shook their head. Flowey looked up at them with doe eyes.

Frisk sighed and put their book back on the shelf. They walked Flowey over to the table next to Sans.

«Watch him for me?» Frisk signed.

Sans quirked a brow ridge at Frisk, then turned to look at Flowey, the back at Frisk.

“sure, i’ll keep an eye socket on your little buddy here,” Sans said.

Frisk giggled and hugged Sans before leaving the library to join the book club.

“sorry ’bout that jill,” Sans said. “frisk wants to test out whether they need a translator or if their friends can understand asl enough to translate for them.”

“Okay, so long as he doesn’t cause too much trouble,” Jill said. “I heard some stories from Principal Kierkegaard that she heard from Mr. McBride.”

“yeah, i’ll make sure he’s on his best behavior.”

“Yeah, yeah, I’ll be a regular ray of sunshine, now can I have my DS?” Flowey griped.

“frisk has it,” Sans said. “now shhh.”

Flowey pouted as Jill continued.

“Anyway, as I was saying, there was a food fight in the cafeteria today that resulted in one girl getting a broken nose,” Jill explained. “Apparently it was started by a seventh grader. Matthew Gorman’s his name.”

“Matthew Gorman? That can’t be right!” Karen claimed. “Matt’s a perfectly good kid! He’s Courtney’s boyfriend!”
A few parents groaned.

“Well, apparently the story is that Matthew attacked Theodore DeMartino for supposedly insulting his girlfriend,” Jill continued. “However, other kids say that either that never happened at all or that Matthew insulted Theodore first. No matter who you ask, the answer remains much the same: Matthew Gorman started it all. However, the food fight did escalate, getting other kids involved. For now we’ve done all we really can, but considering who Alicia’s parents are we may want to be extra cautious in the coming months.”

“Why? Who are her parents?” Helen asked.

“Barry and Amy Berry,” Jill said. “Barry Berry’s name may be embarrassing, but his connections and bank account are most certainly not. And Amy is the secretary of the CEO of the Ebott Energy Corps. So we should be really careful for a while.”

Barry Berry. Sans pondered the name. It was repetitive.

And some part of him feels as though he heard it somewhere before.

Yet more investigating to be done.

But later.

“The second order of business, the Winter Formal,” Jill said. “We have the date set for the 23rd with permission from the principal -”

“Begging your pardon Jill,” Linda interjected, “but isn’t the 23rd the day spring sports tryouts begin?”

“I was wondering that too,” Amber said.

“I knew someone would mention that,” Jill said. “The date is the same, but the times are different. Tryouts are directly after school from 3:15 to 4:45, but the dance is in the school gymnasium from 5:30 to 7. Now I’m sure some of you will have a disagreement over those times -”

“Jill, this is one of the worst decisions you’ve made as PTA president,” Karen sneered. “Well, agreeing to become president in the first place was your worst.”

Linda and Amber snickered.

Jill sighed, seemingly unaffected.

“I didn’t so much agree to it as get shoehorned into it,” Jill said. “I’d be willing to give up this position any time, but I have a job to do and I’m going to do it. Next time you make a comment like that Karen, you’ll be removed from officership. Am I clear?”

Karen was silent.

“Karen…”

“Oh my god, I GET IT!” Karen snapped.

“Good,” Jill sighed. “Anyone else feel like complaining about a decision I had no part in making?”

Everyone was silent.
“But you’re the president,” Linda said. “You have full authority to change things like this!”

“O-kay, I call BS.”

Everyone turned to where Flowey was placed next to Sans, who seemed to be sleeping.

“Linda, remember that time you tried and failed to get the Spring Concert cancelled back in 20XQ so the baseball team could get all the funding?” Flowey asked.

“Oh my god, that was two years ago, get over it!” Linda groaned.

“Only when you get over yourself, idiot!” Flowey said in the most cheerful voice he could muster.

Everyone gasped. Linda screeched.

Sans blinked his eye sockets.

“what’d i miss?” he asked. “i conked out after i got the schedule for the winter formal.”

Everyone was silent.

Jill sighed.

“All of you are dismissed,” she said. “If you want to sign up to be a chaperone at the winter formal, the sheet is are over by the refreshments. Sans, next time Frisk needs to leave their translator with you, find a way to make sure he doesn’t upset anyone.”

Sans gave an “okay” gesture as he left the library with Flowey. Sharona and Monica quickly followed.

As soon as they were closer to the hallway with the Book Club™, they started laughing.

“You should bring Flowey more often!” Sharona suggested. “Ooh, better yet, sign him on as an official member!”

“either way linda suffers, so the first thing’s a yes and the second thing’s a maybe,” Sans chuckled.

“Wait, we should stop laughing in case you-know-who is about…” Monica warned.

Sharona, Sans, and Flowey nodded gravely.

“let’s go get the kids,” Sans said. “tell ‘em we’re leaving early.”

“Caroline probably won’t be happy we’ve interrupted her club…” Sharona mumbled.

“what if we sit in, see what it’s all about?” Sans asked.

“Good plan,” Sharona said.

And so the three parents went to seek out the book club room.

Caroline stared out at the Book Club™ with disappointment in her eyes.

“So, none of you have read the book of the month?” she asked.

“Caroline, some of us have science fair projects to work on,” Audrey said.
“That’s not a *book*, it’s a *brick!*” Eddie said.

“I used it as a paperweight,” Jayme admitted.

“It looks boring,” Brian said.

Caroline facepalmed.

“So none of you read it,” she sighed. “I suppose I should take the blame. I should have chosen a book everyone would want to read…”

“Hey, it’s fine!” Penelope assured. “Maybe when we’re older we’ll want to read While Christ And His Saints Slept?”

“It does look interesting,” Almsal admitted. “Maybe when I get some free time after I finish finding what I want to do as a science fair project I’ll read it.”

“You mean you *haven’t* picked yours yet?” Jayme asked.

“There’s a shocker.”

“The school science fair isn’t until March,” Almsal said. “All of us have enough time to come up with something that *isn’t* a baking soda volcano.”

Silence.

“Listen Smokestack, none of us have a *chance* of winning if you’re involved,” Jenson said. “You’re the Science God of North Middle School, kids from other schools are being *warned* about you because of how good you did last year.”

“How well he did, Jenson,” Caroline corrected.

“Same diff,” Jenson groaned.

“Even *if* - and that’s *if* - my success is inevitable, you could at least *try* to challenge me,” Almsal said.

“What would be the point?” Audrey asked.

“Science,” Almsal said. “Winning is enjoyable, of course, but I partake in the science fair for the sake of *science*, not something as silly and subjective as *winning*.”

Everyone was silent.

“Has anyone ever told you that you’re a lot like Caroline?” Coleen asked.

“How so?” Caroline and Almsal asked in deadpan unison.

Silence.

“Moving on then,” Caroline sighed. “Next month, I want everyone to read *A Wrinkle In Time* by Madeleine L’Engle.”

“Isn’t that gonna be a movie?” Astrid asked.

“That it is,” Caroline said. “Which leads me to my reasoning for choosing this book: I want everyone to read it and take notes, then come Spring Break we will go see the movie and compare it to the book.”
“That sounds like you’re taking the worst part of a book report and shoving it over to the movie,” Julia complained.

“Ah, but what if I told you that you don’t have to write anything?” Caroline said. “You just have to remember your favorite parts and compare them to the movie.”

Silence.

“I don’t know if that’s easier or harder,” Brian said.

“I think it sounds fun,” Hunter said. “I watched the trailers on YouTube. The music sounds awesome!”

“I know!” Caroline agreed. “I really hope it lives up to me expectations…”

“That’s impossible and you know it,” Brian said.

“Hey, let me dream!”

A knock on the door.

Caroline nodded at Bruce, Eddie, Nicko, and Brian.

The boys walked over to the door, Colleen tailing them.

Bruce opened the door.

Sans, Flowey, Sharona, and Monica were on the other side.

The bouncers and Colleen turned to Caroline.

“Why are you guys staring at me?” Caroline asked.

“Do we let ‘em in?” Eddie asked.

“Sure,” Caroline said. “Meeting’s about over anyways, but doesn’t the PTA meeting end in another half hour?”

“got out early,” Sans said. “you guys have any cupcakes left?”

“Well, I made a batch more than usual, so we have about six left,” Penelope said. “You guys can have them if you want - but save the last one for Caroline!”

“Why, has she not had one yet?” Monica asked.

“No, I just think that as Book Club™ president, she should have the last cupcake!” Penelope explained.

“Or so she claims,” Levi teased.

A few kids giggled.

“If Penelope says that’s the case, then that’s the case,” Caroline said, closing her book loudly. “Now, all of you are hereby dismissed. I shall see you all tomorrow, I hope?”

Everyone cheered and got their bags.
Frisk walked up to Sans, their backpack slung over their back and their coat and hat on.

“you ready to go, kid?” Sans said. “we’re takin’ a shortcut outta here - flowey made linda upset.”

“She was askin’ for it, and so was everyone else!” Flowey defended.

«Flowey, don’t be rude!» Frisk signed.

Then Frisk got a weird look on their face.

Their eyes widened.

«Dad, I gotta talk to Caroline, I’ll be right back!» they signed quickly.

Sans quirked a brow ridge.

“okay then, make it quick though,” he said. “i told tori we’d be back early so we can go to grillby’s.”

Frisk’s eyes widened with delight. They hugged their father before going over to Caroline.

“So whaddya think they’re gonna talk about?” Sharona asked.

“not a clue,” Sans sighed. “probably something about book club advertising…”

Sharona hummed.

Caroline walked up to them.

“Hey, Sharona?” Caroline asked. “Frisk and I are going to the art room to help them look for stuff they might want to help with their art final. I also want to look for stuff for some Book Club™ poster ideas. We shouldn’t be more than ten minutes.”

“Sure, but only ten minutes!” Sharona said.

Caroline nodded her thanks and ran, Frisk tailing her closely.

Sharona turned to Sans.

“Toldja,” she said.

Sans shrugged and placed a ten dollar bill in Sharona’s hand.

Theo walked by the bathrooms before he left, only to hear moaning.

“Oh god, is it in yet?”

That voice…Trav Martin?

“Not yet, just hang tight okay?”

Scott Foley.

Theo was both curious and freaked out.

“Dude, you said it wouldn’t take long!” Trav moaned.
“Hey, don’t freak out ya big baby!” Scott scolded. “It’ll only hurt for a few seconds. It might be sensitive for a while, and there might be some blood, but the first time’s always like that.”

Theo was suddenly very uncomfortable.

“Dude, I don’t think I wanna - AAAAAAHHHH!”

Theo sprang into action, running into the bathroom and…

…finding Trav with his right ear freshly pierced and bleeding.

The three boys stared at each other.

“Oh thank god,” Theo said. “I thought you two were…y’know. Screwing.”

“Hey, we ain’t fags, Cyclops!” Scott snapped.

“Well, you might wanna keep those noises down,” Theo said. “People could get the wrong idea.”

Theo walked over to a urinal.

Trav and Scott were staring at him.

“Do you mind?” Theo asked. “Gawd, you say you aren’t gay and yet…”

“Tch, fine, whatever,” Scott said. “C’mon Trav, let’s clean that thing and get going.”

“Yeah yeah, I’m comin’,” Trav sighed.

_Sure sounded like you were_, Theo thought to himself with a smirk.

When he was done and washed his hands, he left and found a girl in a raggedy Misfits hoodie and cargo pants who looked like an older, unstylish Courtney.

“Were they banging?” the girl asked.

Theo shook his head.

“Okay then,” she said. “I’m still gonna keep it for blackmail. They seem like shits.”

Silence.

“Are you related to Courtney Day?” Theo asked.

“I wish I wasn’t,” the girl sighed. “The name’s Megan. I’m Courtney’s older sister. High school sophomore. And in case you were wondering, the rumors about Courtney banging the entire football team are not true - it was only two-thirds.”

Theo wasn’t sure what to think of that.

“I heard about what Matt did to you,” Megan said. “If you wanna help me bring Courtney down, I’ll throw Matt under the bus for ya as a bonus.”

Theo paused.

“I’ll…think about it,” he said.
“Okay, lemme know at next month’s PTA meeting,” Megan said. “If you think anyone else would like to have a part in this, let me know then.”

Theo nodded as Megan left.

He could already picture a good amount of people who would like to see Courtney and Matt get taken down.

But how to convince them…

Caroline and Frisk sat in the art classroom, silent.

“So are you going to tell me what’s been with you lately?” Caroline asked.

“More like who.”

Caroline’s eyes widened.

She’s heard this voice before.

It suddenly occurred to her that this wasn’t Frisk speaking.

It was someone else speaking through them.

The person speaking through Frisk smiled using their face.

There was a rosy flush about their cheeks.

“Greetings,” they said. “I am Chara.”

Caroline gasped, her eyes widening.

“You were one of the previous Red-SOULed Humans.” Caroline stated. “The adopted child of Toriel and Asgore. The one who died a century ago.”

“Yep, it’s me,” Chara said. “There are two others in Frisk’s headspace with me.”

Caroline was silent.

“You know, you’re really lucky,” Chara said. “It’s not every day I decide to place my trust in a Human. Then again, you’re not exactly Human, are you?”

“I’m a Wizard,” Caroline said. “Though I sometimes get the feeling I might actually be a vampire.”

Silence.

“Anyway, lemme get Rowan out here,” Chara said, clearly wanting to get off of that topic of conversation. “He was one of the Mages who made the Barrier that kept Monsters Underground, you know.”

Caroline sat still.

Frisk’s face changed once more. Their cheeks had lost the flush of Chara, and their eyes were strangely hollow.

“Are you Rowan?” Caroline asked.
“Yes,” Rowan answered through Frisk’s body. “It’s a pleasure to meet you properly, Miss Marlow.”

“The pleasure is mutual,” Caroline said. “So you lived five hundred years ago, then?”

“Indeed I did,” Rowan said. “I was close friends with Asgore and Toriel during those days…”

“I heard from Chara that you were one of the Mages who erected the Barrier.”

Silence.

“That is…true, yes,” Rowan admitted sadly.

Caroline was quiet.

“I’m sure that if you’re anything like Frisk, you would rather have done anything else,” Caroline said. “Maybe what you did ended up being better for the Monsters in the long run. Who knows what Humans would have tried to do to them over the centuries?”

Rowan smiled.

“You have very strange ways of comforting people,” he said. “But that’s enough of me. Next you’ll be meeting Gail. She passed on in the 1940s, and is the most recent of us to appear in Frisk’s headspace.”

Caroline tilted her head.

Frisk’s eyes returned to normal. They held their hands before them, their fingers laced.

Caroline waited a moment before speaking.

“I take it you must be Gail?” she asked.

“That’s right,” Gail said. “Gail Stone’s the name. I was a Vaudeville performer in life. When Frisk sang at the New Year’s party -”

“That was actually you,” Caroline finished.

Gail smiled and nodded. “I’m still unfamiliar with this era, so I hope you’ll forgive me for not understanding some things…”

“That’s fine,” Caroline said. “I hope you and the others won’t mind if I have any questions about the times you came from.”

“I assure you that we’ll all be more than happy to answer!” Gail said.

Frisk blinked.

They looked up at Caroline nervously.

“Are you finally Frisk again?” she asked.

Frisk nodded.

“Does anyone else know about…them?” Carole asked.

«Dad knows about Chara, but that’s it,» Frisk signed. «I don’t know how he’ll react to the others…»
Caroline hummed.

“Well, it’s your mind, and the people in it are part of it,” she said. “I wouldn’t quite know how to act in your situation either. But I’m honored you would trust me. Though I’m not sure why…”

«Hunter trusted you,» Frisk signed. «Chara really likes you, and Rowan seems to trust you too. Gail doesn’t know enough about anyone just yet, but she seems to like you enough!»

Caroline was quiet.

“Well…thanks, I guess,” she said. “We should head back now, they might be wondering.”

Frisk nodded, grabbing some acrylic paints while Caroline took a couple of pieces of poster paper and left the art room.

Flowey sat on the windowsill of Frisk’s bedroom while they slept.

He stared up at the full moon, wondering.

His budding SOUL ached with a strange longing.

But he didn’t care.

Asriel did.

The bright moon and trustworthy friends fill you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

Food Fight - Digital Underground

Fun Fact: Libraries are awesome and you should visit your local library when you have the time.
I Am The Walrus

Chapter Summary

When birthdays are just another day and eleven-year-olds really shouldn't get plastic surgery.

Chapter Notes

I have no idea.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

11:46 A.M., February 10, 20XS

It’s a cold day outside.
The wind is blowing.
A bit of snow is falling.
On days like this, kids like you...

...are at your local skating rink.

Everyone cheered as Caroline blew out the candles on her birthday cake.
Err, birthday cheesecake.
Okay, birthday cherry cheesecake cupcakes.
Either way she blew out twelve candles, one on each cupcake.
“So, how’s it feel to be twelve?” Colleen asked.
Caroline was confused all get-out as she bit into her cupcake.
“Wha voo yoo meemf?” she asked.
“Caroline, don’t talk with your mouth full,” Randy chided.
“yeah, kid, we’re not eating see -food, yanno,” Sans joked.
Papyrus groaned loudly while nearly everyone else laughed.
Caroline swallowed her food before speaking again.

“Why would being alive for a set number of days make me feel any different from usual?” she asked. “It’s just a day, right? Only difference is that there’s cake - err, cupcakes - and presents. All I see is a tradition that would have been celebrated in the bygone era of extreme infant mortality. Not that it’s a bad thing, I just don’t see a point in rewarding people for being alive.”

“But you died,” Brian noted.

“Then using that logic I should have two birthdays,” Caroline said. “One for my actual birth, and one for my resurrection as a Wizard.”

“Actually, the Summer and Winter Solstices are the days to celebrate Wizardry and Wizards in general,” Gaster said. “Bonfires are lit, dancing happens…it’s all very Magical!”

Caroline blinked.

“They are also known as Midsummer and Midwinter respectively!” Gaster said.

“But why is it called that if it’s the first day of the seasons?” Caroline asked.

“Because in the past, many viewed the equinoxes as being the beginning of the seasons,” Toriel explained. “It was certainly before my time, since I do not understand the reasoning behind such logic…”

«Warm is summer, cold is winter?» Frisk signed.

“sounds good enough to me,” Sans said with a shrug and a rumple of Frisk’s mousy mop.

“Can I skate now?” Caroline asked impatiently.

Randy sighed. “Sure, go ahead.”

“Thanks Dad,” Caroline said, giving her father a kiss on the cheek before rushing off with her skates. Randy stared after her before sighing.

“Was…she always that tall?” Randy asked.

“Yes,” everyone said in unison.

“Berry, come on back.”

Alicia and Amy stood up and walked back to the doctor’s office.

The doctor, a rather handsome man with brown hair, blue eyes, and a rather chiseled jawline sat behind the desk.

“So, Mrs. Berry,” he said. “What do you need done?”

“Oh, I don’t need another treatment for a few months, Dr. Troy,” Amy said sweetly. “It’s my daughter that needs help.”

The doctor looked at Alicia, her nose taped up but otherwise completely healthy and normal.

“And what is it she needs done?” Dr. Troy asked.
“I need a nose job,” Alicia said. “I broke my nose last week, and the people said they got it right, but I know they got it wrong.”

Dr. Troy sat there.

“Well Doctor?” Amy asked.

“How old did you say she was?” Dr. Troy asked.

“Eleven,” Alicia said.

“Yeah, she’s a bit too young for rhinoplasty,” Dr. Troy sighed.

“Nonsense, my Alicia’s old enough to know what she wants, and what she wants is a new nose!” Amy insisted.

Both Amy and Alicia turned up their noses haughtily.

“Mrs. Berry, what she wants now might not be what she wants later,” Dr. Troy explained. “You don’t want her to do something she might regret, do you?”

“Berrys don’t have regrets, Dr. Troy,” Amy said coldly. “My child wants it, my child gets it, understood?”

Alicia began to sob loudly. She hid her face in her hands in a gesture that was almost certainly practiced well in advance.

Amy glared at Dr. Troy - yet another gesture that was almost certainly practiced well in advance.

“Oh, now look at what you’ve done!” Amy said in a voice loud enough for people in the hallway to hear. “Alicia, be a good girl and wait outside, okay?”

Alicia sobbed and nodded before leaving and slamming the door behind her.

Amy and Dr. Troy sat in icy silence.

“So,” Amy said sultrily. “Name your price. What will it take to convince you to do this one, simple thing for me, Doctor?”

Dr. Troy stared at Amy in confusion. “Excuse me?”

Amy began to unbutton her bright red blouse.

“No price is too great, Doctor,” Amy said lowly as she leaned over the desk. “Name it, and I’ll give it to you. Right here, right now.”

Amy’s cleavage was taking up the entirety of the doctor’s line of sight.

Dr. Troy sighed as he removed his belt.

He was going to regret this, he was sure of it…

Mettaton laced up his bright pink knee-high skates and walked gracefully onto the ice with Papyrus at his side.

“Step aside, beauties,” he announced. “The star is gonna show…”
He posed dramatically.

“…Master Class™!”

“WOWIE, I THOUGHT YOU’VE NEVER SKATED BEFORE!” Papyrus said.

“I haven’t, but I’m naturally good at anything, darling,” Mettaton drawled.

“WELL, OKAY, IF YOU’RE SURE,” Papyrus sighed, skating onward with ease.

Mettaton did a double take once he realized.

He pouted for a few seconds before skating off.

He stumbled on the skates like a newborn fawn - a very very pretty newborn fawn, but still a newborn fawn.

Mettaton briefly considered using the walls of the rink as a ballast before his pride denied him the help in favor of preserving his ego.

He was not going to ask for help.

Besides, Papyrus wouldn’t hold it against him. He understood Mettaton’s nigh-pathological need to prove himself in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds imagined or otherwise.

He was so, so perfect.

Mettaton skated toward Papyrus on wobbly knees and ankles, his arms flailing as he attempted to keep his balance.

Caroline skated past him smoothly. Mettaton recalled the times he’d watched Caroline’s skating and realized something.

He straightened himself and stumble-skated onward like the inexplicably pretty newborn fawn he was accidentally evoking the mental image of.

Elaina glided past him, and then promptly fell flat on their behind.

Mettaton tried pulling them up, only to slip and fall himself.

The embarrassment was promptly ended when Elaina started laughing with relief - more a snicker than anything, but it was enough to rid Mettaton of the embarrassment.

Then he thought he heard cameras going off.

He turned around.

Papyrus was blocking a rather irate Human with a digital camera that any self-respecting paparazzo would scoff at using. The Human, a heavyset male about a head shorter than Papyrus, was trying to take pictures of something. Behind him was a skinny woman who was clearly tired of this shit.

“Ron, just stop, you’re embarrassing yourself,” the groaned, hiding her face in her hand.

“Hey, I wouldn’t have to do this if this bag of bones would just step aside and let me take a damn picture!” Ron growled.
Caroline skated up toward the man and stared him down.

“This rink is reserved for the next few hours, sir,” she said. “Please leave.”

“Shut it kid, this is a free country and I can do what I want,” Ron snapped.

“The millions of Americans in prison for minor offenses say otherwise, but whatever,” Caroline said with a shrug. “By the way, assaulting a minor is not a minor offense.”

Ron lowered his camera to rebuke Caroline before his eyes widened.

“Do I know you?” he asked.

“Well, a couple of years ago at the mall skating rink, you were chasing after a couple of teenagers because you assumed they were criminals just because they dyed their hair and then you ran onto the rink and pushed me, so…”

Ron’s eyes widened. He started sweating.

“You did what?” the woman asked.

“Nothing,” Ron said through gritted teeth.

“He pushed me and tried to get Elaina’s sisters wrongfully arrested,” Caroline explained as if it wasn’t a huge deal.

“He did WHAT?!” Colleen screeched.

“They looked like a pair of criminals, what was I supposed to do?!” Ron snapped.

Colleen screeched and ran toward the man, her skates digging into the ice with each step.

Penelope lunged, tackling her to the ground and sitting on her to keep her there.

“Penelope! Let me go!” Colleen shouted, struggling to break free.

“He’s not worth it,” Penelope said calmly. “Besides, I think that lady is angry enough.”

She was. She was hissing something in the man’s ear that was clearly distressing him.

The woman then turned to Papyrus.

“I’m very sorry about my husband,” she said. “He’s not exactly smart, as you can see.”

Ron was trying very hard not to say something.

“We’ll be going now,” the woman said. “Sorry about the trouble.”

She grabbed Ron by the ear and dragged him away.

Silence reigned.

“Who else wants to forget that ever happened?” Sharona asked.

Miranda sat in the back of her mother’s car, listening to her own music since Diana’s musical tastes were…
Okay, Miranda could speak her mind inside her own mind. Her mother had zero taste in music.

Miranda had stopped listening to Taylor Swift years ago, and no one even cared about 3 Doors Down anymore. And how do you even say 2ge+her anyway?! And even Miranda knew that Milli Vanilli was fake! Seriously!

Miranda fought back a groan. Her mother could handle whining just fine, but groaning? Heaven forbid.

Miranda’s eye caught her father’s playlist.

She checked it.

Miranda smiled to herself as she entered the passcode - looks like she has quite a bit in common with her father in regards to their opinions on Diana.

She entered the code and saw the numerous album covers.

She saw one that was familiar.

The one she’d heard but had never gotten out of her head no matter how hard she’d tried.

Miranda fought mentally over the decision, switching back and forth between her own playlist and her father’s.

She made her decision.

The lyrics of her chosen song flowed from the earbuds and into her ears.

*Hey! Ho! Let’s go!*

*Hey! Ho! Let’s go!*

It was definitely unlike any of the stuff in her own playlist.

It was…hard to describe.

It was *rough*. It was *raw*. It was…

It was *real*.

She decided to check the name.

Blitzkrieg Bop, by The Ramones?

Hm.

Miranda put her father’s playlist on shuffle.

She stared out the car window as the stables rolled into view.

She briefly wondered if Emma had heard this song.

Then she wondered why the heck she even cared.

Alicia sat in the seat next to her mother in front of Dr. Troy’s desk. The man was sweating through
“Well Miss Berry, I’m afraid that I can’t exactly give you what you want here,” Dr. Troy said.

Alicia’s face contorted in fury.

“EXCUSE ME?!” she screeched.

“However, I do know of a plastic surgeon in the capital who would be more than willing to give you what you want,” the doctor continued. “Just mention your father, and he’ll do whatever you want.”

Alicia was silent for a moment.

“Fine,” she huffed. “But this guy’d better be good!”

“He’s the only guy in the state willing to do this,” Dr. Troy sighed. “I’ve done about all I can do.”

Amy glared at him.

“Fine then,” she said. “I’ll just be taking my business elsewhere!”

Dr. Troy said nothing.

“Have a nice day Amy,” he said.

Amy growled as she took Alicia and left, slamming the door behind her.

A nurse walked in.

“What happened just now?” she asked.

“Amy Berry wants her daughter to get a nose job,” Dr. Troy said. “I refused and now Amy’s not going here for botox anymore.”

“You sent her to McNamara didn’t you?” the nurse sighed.

Dr. Troy smiled.

The nurse’s eyes widened.

“But Dr. McNamara hates Barry Berry!” the nurse hissed.

“And so do I,” Dr. Troy said. “McNamara’s been wanting to quit for a long time, and this is giving him the opportunity for both a beginning and an ending.”

The nurse was nervous.

“If you say so,” she sighed. “You’re lucky I hate the Berry family too…”

“Trust me,” Dr. Troy said. “Everyone hates the Berry family. Whether they know it or not.”

“And just who do you mean by they?”

Dr. Troy shrugged.

Caroline skated past the other guests.
She turned and twirled about with abandon.

Then the song changed.

She looked over at Hunter.

Hunter looked back.

They knew what they had to do.

*Baby, look at me~ And tell me what you see~ You ain’t seen the best of me yet~ Give me time, I’ll make you forget the rest~*" 

Caroline and Hunter skated up to each other.

The started their routine.

Caroline took the lead, doing a few simple twirls with Hunter imitating her.

Mettaton had long ago chosen to sit on the sidelines, and now he was regretting it.

But somehow, seeing Hunter smile so happily made the regret disappear.

“THEY SEEM QUITE HAPPY, DON’T THEY?”

Mettaton looked up to find Papyrus, holding two cups of cocoa.

“They really do,” Mettaton said. “Remember when we first met Caroline?”

“I DO,” Papyrus replied, sitting down next to his boyfriend and giving him a cup of cocoa. “IT WAS TWO YEARS, SEVEN MONTHS, AND TWENTY-FIVE DAYS AGO. IT WAS ALPHYS AND UNDYNE’S WEDDING RECEPTION.”

“Wow, has it really been that long?” Mettaton mused.

“IT HAS!” Papyrus said.

“I remember how… empty she seemed,” Mettaton said. “She’s a lot happier now.”

“AND HUNTER’S GROWN A LOT TOO,” Papyrus noted. “SHE SEEMS A BIT MORE CONFIDENT!”

“I know,” Mettaton said with a smile. “And Hannah’s gotten so sassy! Those girls are going places, I swear it!”

“I KNOW! AND ELAINA SEEMS A BIT HAPPIER THAN THEY WERE WHEN WE MET THEM!”

They giggled as they watched Caroline and Hunter skate while Hannah cheered them on.

“You know,” Mettaton began, “if I had the choice, I would take those children in and raise them far away from those dreadful people who call themselves their mothers.”

Papyrus’ eye sockets widened.

“I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL,” he admitted. “BUT WE CAN’T. WE DON’T HAVE PROOF, AND…”
Papyrus sighed.

“I WANT TO HAVE FAITH THAT THOSE WOMEN WILL SEE THE LIGHT AND CHANGE.”

Mettaton looked at Papyrus.

He rested his head on Papyrus’ shoulder.

He *wished* he was as optimistic as his lover in that regard.

Flowey and Hannah sat next to each other, sipping on their hot cocoa as they watched Caroline show off - err, skate.

“She’s good, I’ll give her that much,” Flowey admitted.

“Yeah,” Hannah said. “Hey, does this cocoa taste weird to you?”

“Randy said the water’s made of used rink shavings,” Flowey said. “Maybe that's it.”

“Ew,” Hannah moaned.

Then she shrugged and drank some more.

“Ugh, gross, you’re still drinking it!” Flowey groaned, cringing.

“I said it tasted *weird*, not *bad,*” Hannah defended.

Flowey was silent.

“Curse you, exact wording,” he groaned.

“Okay, but wasn’t today, like, really short?” Hannah asked.

“It *was!*” Flowey said. “Seriously, what’s *with* that?”

“I dunno,” Hannah said.

“In the words of Caroline, that’s just *bad writing,*” Flowey hissed, making an evil face.

*Flowey’s silly ineffectual insult fills you with*

**DETERMINATION**

Chapter End Notes

I am The Walrus - The Beatles
Blitzkrieg Bop - The Ramones
Fame - Irene Cara
Hey Ya!

Chapter Summary

The Winter Formal has arrived.

Chapter Notes

This is...yeah.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

3:37 P.M., February 23rd, 20XS

It’s a pretty nice day outside.

The sun is shining.

The warmth is unseasonable but not unpleasant.

On days like this, kids like you...

...are giving your friends emotional support.

---

Frisk jogged alongside Hunter and Brian, looking about at the world around them as they did.

The older students who were on the team last year watched the tryout kids as they jogged for five minutes.

Wait, had it been five minutes?

“Three more minutes, punks!” Undyne announced conveniently.

Brian was starting to break a sweat. Hunter was breathing heavily, but evenly.

Frisk turned along the edge of the field and watched as Scott walked off the field and sat down.

Scott looked like he could keep going, but just really didn’t want to.

Frisk suddenly became concerned when they saw Trav still going along the track.

“You seein’ what I’m seein’?” Brian asked.

Frisk and Hunter nodded.
Scott was glaring in Trav’s direction. Trav didn’t seem to notice.

“Okay, punks, jogging time’s over!” Undyne announced. “Now we’re gonna stretch it out for a bit before checking out your control!”

The kids lined up to stretch.

A few girls were watching them, apparently for some of the boys.

Scott noticed them and winked.

They giggled - whether from condescension or happiness none could tell.

“Okay, now we work on control!” Undyne announced. “You punks ready?!”

Cheers.

“Okay, here’s whatcha gotta do…”

Undyne showed the kids how to perform the control exercises.

Frisk and Brian pulled it off with ease.

Hunter and Trav made a few mistakes at first before getting into it.

Scott was doing decently, but he kept trying to show off for the girls watching. Which made his performance less than stellar.

Chara sighed. Gail laughed. Rowan facepalmed.

Frisk kept up their moves.

Making the team didn’t matter much to them, but they were going to do their best.

They were DETERMINED to support their friends.

FILE: SAVE

Elaina stared in the mirror at his dress.

He hated nothing more in that moment than himself.

But damn if he didn't look good… the dress was blue and it had a high low hem. It was a sort of halter neck with a blue lace bodice. The skirt was a sheer blue with satin edging. Blue is a good color.

Now, he just needs some knife-sharp eyeliner, lipstick the color of the blood of his enemies, and killer heels so he could become the most fabulous drag…well, not a queen, but a princess. A drag princess. He liked the sound of that.

He felt a bit better.

Then he realized. He still had to show Irma.

He opened the door of the dressing room and walked over to where Irma was sitting.
He held his breath as he waited for Irma to look up from her phone.

Irma looked up and looked Elaina up and down.

“Well, do you like it?” Irma asked impatiently.

Elaina blinked.

“Yes?” he stuttered.

Irma sighed.

“Do you want to get it?”

Elaina’s eyes widened.

“Wuh-will you r-really get t-this for me?” he asked, slightly hopeful.

Irma rolled her eyes.

“Yes, now get it before I change my mind,” she sighed.

Elaina smiled.

Rare were the times that his mother showed them kindness, but that ended up making them all the sweeter.

“Thank you Mother!” He exclaimed, twirling and then skipping back into the dressing room.

Irma said nothing, continuing to text.

Caroline hummed quietly to herself as she shelved the fiction books.

Surprising how many YA authors have last names starting with M…but then again M was a common consonant in general when one thought about it. So in essence it really wasn’t surprising after all, you just have to notice it for it to take effect. Like everything really.

Caroline sighed. She was glad she volunteered at the school library in lieu of attending the school dance.

It was quiet.

Peaceful.

Perfect.

Heaven.

Blessed indeed was Caroline Violet Marlow in this moment.

She shelved the books by authors with names beginning with O, humming to the tune in her head.

Her Magic hummed and thrummed beneath her skin. The feeling had grown stronger since she’d discovered it. She’d become used the fluctuating sensation, enough that she couldn’t imagine how she’d gotten along before.
Then Caroline paused.

Things were never peaceful like this for long - not for more than a few months at most.

Good things never last.

Something was definitely coming up.

She sighed.

It was probably just anxiety.

*Nothing to worry about…*

---

Sans and a few other Monster parents used their Cyan Magic to hang some fairy lights from the gym rafters in intricate patterns.

A few Human parents applauded, while a few others glared in disgust.

Sans and the Monsters paid them no heed, continuing their task of putting up decorations.

Sans could feel some of them glaring at him specifically.

He looked at them, flashing a rictus grin and turning off his eyelights.

The Humans scattered sheepishly.

Sans returned his face to normal.

He looked about at the room full of volunteers.

Linda was not among them.

Huh.

Weird.

Sans sighed as he used his Magic to pin up some white paper snowflakes.

He was pretty sure that snowflakes were hexagonal, not square, but he wasn’t the one of the people who made them, so he chose not to complain.

Not that it would do anything. The snowflakes were already made.

Sans sighed and went to check in with Jill.

He found her, but Karen was talking to her.

Oh boy.

“Why can’t you just give me the position?” Karen implored.

“Because you weren’t offered the position,” Jill sighed. “Believe me, if I could I would. This position is *not* what you think it is -”

“Jill, I am *not* an idiot!” Karen hissed. “I know how hard it is! I just think that since you’re divorced,
you should take some time to get yourself back up -”

“That’s why I’m doing this, Karen!” Jill snapped. “This is my way of getting myself in order! Until I can get things arranged, this is what I’m doing to manage my stress, an you are not helping me one bit and you know it!”

Karen blanched.

Jill sighed wearily.

“I have to go,” she said. “Principal Kierkegaard asked me to tell her how decorating’s going, and I don’t wanna keep her waiting.”

And with that Jill walked off.

Sans turned off the recording device and decided to wait to check in with Jill. Give her some much needed space.

He pondered what to do next.

Then he saw Amber trying to order around a few of the meeker parents.

Sans knew what he had to do.

He waited.

“Okay punks! Tryouts are OVER!” Undyne announced passionately. “School’s out on Monday, so on TUESDAY afternoon, we’re gonna find out which of you punks are SOCCER MATERIAL, and which of you SHOULD TRY AGAIN NEXT YEAR!”

Scott had a smug smirk on his face, assured he had made the team.

Levi walked up to the group and closed his video camera.

“So what do we do now?” Levi asked. “Jordan and I are going to the dance together.”

Brian and Hunter groaned sympathetically.

“Dude, do you have any idea how many people here are homophobic?” Brian asked.

“Yeah, I know, but I also don’t care,” Levi reassured them. “If Jordan starts getting uncomfortable, we’ll stop.”

Frisk quirked smirked and wiggled their eyebrows.

“Not like that!” Levi claimed. “What the heck, Frisk!”

“Hey! That’s my catchphrase!” Brian snapped.

“Brian, does it really matter who says it when Frisk does the flirty thing to them?” Hunter sighed.

“Uh, yeah?” Brian said. “I’m the one who says ‘what the heck’, everyone else says the other stuff.”

Silence.

“Anyway, we gotta go get Caroline from the library,” Levi said. “Frisk and I have arranged for her
to have at least one slow dance with Penelope this evening!"

Frisk nodded in confirmation.

“Caroline is gonna kill you both,” Brian noted.

“It’ll be totally worth it!” Levi claimed. “It’s the final step of making Caroline completely happy here in Ebott!”

“Um, Levi?” Hunter piped. “Your intentions are good, but I doubt making Caroline do that is the right way to help. You know she’s more closed-off than most people…”

Levi seemed to ponder this.

“Good point,” he said. “Instead of a slow dance, let’s let them be alone together for a while!”

“And that is how you help a Caroline!” Brian said.

Frisk shushed them all.

They paused and looked about in confusion.

Alicia was talking to Scott at the side of the field, laughing about something or another.

Levi snapped a few photos of them.

“Levi…” Hunter warned.

“You guys know how many girlfriends Scott Foley has?” Levi asked.

Alicia and Scott kissed each other on the lips.

Levi took one last picture and pocketed his phone.

“Eh, probably none,” Levi said with a smirk.

The group stared wide-eyed at Levi.

“Can’t stand cheaters,” Levi said. “Not at cards, not at schoolwork, not at relationships.”

Caroline shelved the last of the books in her pile and returned the cart to the front desk.

“Back already?” Mrs. Hill asked. “That was fast…”

“It was just putting books in alphabetical order by author and title,” Caroline dismissed. “But I am wondering why the titles aren’t in chronological order in the case of books in a series. It makes no sense! It would invite people to read them out of order! What kind of tyrant -”

“Caroline, calm down,” Mrs. Hill sighed, knowing that if Caroline went on, she wouldn’t stop. “If I find out, I will let you know.”

“Okay,” Caroline said with a shrug as though she hadn’t just been about to scream her lungs out. “Guess I’ll be going then. See you Tuesday?”

“Alright,” Mrs. Hill said. “See you Tuesday.”
Caroline picked up her backpack and left the library.

She felt a crumpled piece of paper hit the back of her head and shoes squeaking away.

She looked at the ground and picked up the paper.

She uncrumpled it.

She looked at the words within.

They weren’t words.

They were…scratchings. Seemingly done by a drunken, inbred chicken who took a swim in an inkwell.

Caroline gagged at the horrible penmanship.

She put the paper in the pocket of her backpack and carried on her way with a weary sigh.

Then she got a text.

*1 text from: Levi*

*Levi: hey come here 4 a sec!*

*Caroline: Come where?*

*Le: Just wait at the library and we’ll get you!*

*Ca: Oh no, there’s more than one of you.*

Caroline waited for further texts when she heard someone whistling.

She turned to glare at the whistler, only to see Levi and Mettaton flinch.

“Whoa, how did you do that?!” Levi asked in awe.

“Do what?” Caroline asked.

“That… thing with your eyes!” Levi said. “You saw it, didn’t you Mettaton?”

“All I saw was her glaring,” Mettaton admitted. “It was very creepy, I’ll admit - seriously, you are so good at that!”

“Anyway, come with us!” Levi demanded.

“No,” Caroline deadpanned, walking away.

“I’ll give you any Barnes & Noble gift cards I get from now until next Yom Kippur,” Levi said.

“So what are we doing?”

Theo sat on a wooden bench in the courtyard of North Middle School finishing his math homework.

Such and such a variable divided by this and that equals…
Theo sighed. Math and science were not his strong suit. He was more athletically oriented…well, supposed to be at any rate. Depth perception shot to crap and all.

Undyne and Mettaton had both offered to help him find alternatives at different points over the last few months. Touching, but unnecessary.

No.

It was necessary. He was going to need all the help he could get with this.

He sighed.

What he really needed help with was math...

Elaina sat in his mother's car, fidgeting anxiously. He hoped he could dance with colleen at least. She was really nice to him, and her voice was really pretty...

He smiled to himself, but then stopped as he saw his mother frowning at him.

“Stop smiling, you know I hate when you do that,” Irma snapped as she took a drag from her cigarette.

“Sorry,” Elaina said quietly.

“And stop apologizing when you don’t fucking mean it you little -” Irma screeched, the car swerving somewhat and the screech of the tires conveniently drowning out the last word of that sentence.

Elaina grabbed onto the grab handle for dear life as his mother failed to be a good driver and a good parent at the same time.

Irma righted the vehicle just as they reached a stoplight, but Elaina couldn’t shake the feeling that it was too late.

Lord help him.

Frisk looked in the bathroom mirror and struck a pose - red sleeveless blouse, black culottes, black combat boots with red laces for a bit of edgy flair, Faded Ribbon, and The Locket. Chara once again outdid themself with their outfit choice, even more so since they had help from Gail.

They adjusted the Ribbon and winked at their reflection, taking a selfie.

Someone knocked.

Frisk flinched, remembering that this was the family bathroom - the one they usually used since the other bathrooms were gendered.

They flushed the unused toilet and washed their hands before leaving the bathroom.

But nobody came.

Wait.

Frisk noticed a piece of paper taped to the door.
It had a bunch of crooked lines on it, like a bunch of letters that tried to be written only to give up part of the way but still managed to form a whole - a very incoherent whole.

“Wait, I think I can read this,” Gail said. “Whoever wrote this is on the slow descent into madness.”

“So what does it say?” Chara asked. “And how do you know that?”

“In the world of the arts, it’s the actors and writers that are most likely to lose their minds,” Gail explained. “I’ve seen it happen, and some were lucid enough to translate their own writings.”

“Good to know that Mettaton and Caroline are probably gonna go crazy -” Chara began.

“I believe they already have,” Rowan interjected.

“- but what does it say?” Chara finished.

“It says…‘You took my crown. You will pay.’”

Silence.

“So Frisk won Prom Monarch?” Gail asked.

“The Winter Formal doesn’t have a monarchy,” Frisk explained. «We have homecoming, but only the eighth graders are allowed to be monarchs.»

“Well then,” Rowan sighed. “This just became a wee bit harder to solve…”

“…but that’s what’s gonna make it more fun!” Chara added, a wicked grin on their face.

Gail had a wide smile as well. “Ohoho boy!” she squealed. “This is gonna be just like an Agatha Christie novel!”

“Agatha who?” Rowan asked.

Gail just smiled.

“You have much to learn about the twentieth century, my dear Rowan,” she said. “But for now, just follow my lead.”

“Should we tell Caroline?” Frisk signed.

“Probably,” Gail said. “She’s the only one who knows about all four of us…”

“Five if Frisk counts,” Chara said. “Though they probably don’t count as the host body.”

“Anyway,” Rowan announced, “we should wait for Caroline since she is currently with Mettaton and Levi preparing for Operation: Carolope without her knowledge.”

“Or we could seek her out ourselves,” Chara said with a shrug. “We got Levi’s number.”

“Okay then, let’s do this.”

______________________________________________________________

Amber sat down and filed her nails - really, telling people what to do is a lot of work. She deserved this. If she was going to be the PTA president again, she was going to have to keep practicing telling people what to do, or else she would end up losing the position to that Linda bitch.
Seriously, what does Richard see in that woman? The only thing Linda had going for her was apparently just being blonde. Otherwise she had nothing. Maybe she payed him? Maybe she blackmailed him?

No.

Richard probably just…settled for second best. Like Amber had.

All the more reason to go after him again, right? She’d tried to fill the emptiness he’d left behind with someone else and failed, so the only viable option was the man himself.

Of course, that was easier said than done.

It was like yelling at people. It wasn’t as though Amber enjoyed it - she wasn’t delusional. She knew what people thought of her. She knew they considered her cold and demanding, she knew they felt pity for her son and husband.

But what else was she supposed to do? She sure as hell had no idea.

“i dunno amber, i hear that doing your job is a pretty good way to keep it.”

Oh hell no.

Amber turned around to glare at the Skeleton that had become a part of her existence - the world’s existence - against her will and protestations. Alas, civil rights extended to more than just Humans now, and she was forced to accept the dreadful things or be removed from the PTA.

“You shut your disgusting mouth,” Amber sneered. “Oh wait - you don’t have one.”

Sans responded by proving her wrong - he even formed a Cyan tongue out of Magic.

Amber screamed.

Sans disappeared before people could see him.

All the parents and the early students stared at Amber like she had lost a marble or two.

Amber hated Monsters. Just because they were a minority, people treated them with favoritism - they weren’t even Human.

So what if they could speak and think and reason? They weren’t Human, so they should just go back to the mountain they crawled out of.

Amber huffed indignantly and stamped out of the gymnasium, people murmuring as she stormed past.

She knew what they thought.

And she couldn’t do a damn thing about it.

Caroline stared at her reflection in the full-body mirror, Mettaton and Levi on either side of her.

“Well? What do you think darling?” Mettaton asked eagerly.

Caroline merely continued to stare, gleaning information ao she could formulate a response.
The dress was a floor-length affair with a hoop skirt and short, slightly puffed sleeves and a square neckline and a purple ribbon - purple was the color of the top portion, with the hoop skirt being black. The top portion of the dress flowed down to cover the back of the skirt.

All in all it was a very beautiful dress.

However, there was one tiny problem…

“Why makeup though?” Caroline asked.

Indeed, she had been made to sit through upwards of ten minutes of eyeliner (put into a lovely wings pattern) eyeshadow (a simple yet effective shimmery deep purple) and lipstick (matte black, as per Mettaton’s personal philosophy).

“Because makeup looks great on everyone!” Mettaton replied as if it were some universal truth.

“But it feels gross,” Caroline said. “It looks good, but it makes my face feel heavy and kinda sticky…”

Silence.

“And the dress?” Mettaton asked.

“The dress is awesome,” Caroline said, a smile on her face. “The style is beautiful and the fabrics are soft and comfortable and noticeably not itchy! I’m almost tempted to just wear it everywhere!”

Mettaton nodded, mentally taking note. “So the only problem is the makeup then?”

“Pretty much,” Caroline said with a shrug. “It looks nice, but it feels iffy at best. I’m sorry.”

Mettaton smiled apologetically.

“Don’t worry your little head,” he said, petting Caroline on top of her head. “We can clean it off for you. All that’s left is to do your hair - but really? Your hair goes with this outfit no matter how you style it, it’s just so gothic!”

“Gothic?” Caroline asked.

“We both agreed that you’re probably a goth girl just waiting to break free,” Levi said with a shrug.

“Just because I read and write obsessively, talk about my own death as if it’s utterly normal, have almost unnaturally pale skin and long black hair,” Caroline stated.

“That and it just seemed like it would look really good on you,” Levi admitted. “And whaddya know, it does look good on ya!”

“It does,” Mettaton gushed. “If this weren’t a surprise I would post pictures.”

“Wait, what?” Caroline asked.

Levi and Mettaton smirked at each conspiratorially.

Elaina watched as his mother drove away.

He sighed, removed his royal blue kitten heels, and started the three block walk to the school.
Thank goodness the school was closer to Upland. He knew the area well enough from all the times Irma tossed him out for “asking too many questions” or “back-sassing her” or “being in the way”. Mountainside was unfamiliar to him still, and would likely remain so for a good while yet.

Before he knew it he had reached the school building.

He clenched his hands, his nails digging into his palms.

He took a deep breath and walked through the parking lot and into the main building, head high and confident.

Wait.

Not he.

She.

Farewell for now dysphoria, and go fuck yourself while you’re at it.

You won’t be touching this genderfluid wonder tonight.

She walked through the doors, glancing at everyone present from the corners of her eyes.

They were busy with their own lives, though one or two did a double take before returning to what they were doing.

Elaina smiled.

Not an Alicia in sight - she’d been absent from school for a whole two weeks, and tonight was no exception.

What a great night this was going to be…

Frisk stared at the decor in the gymnasium, ruby eyes wide and sparking with awe and amazement.

They loved fairy lights. And snowflakes. And Muffet’s no-bake fudge cookies.

Really, everything was great.

“U-uh, hi Frisk.”

Frisk turned to the source of the voice, a boy in a blue polo and khakis with brown hair and blue eyes.

Frisk waved. They were suddenly wondering where they’d left Flowey.

“Oh, do you wanna d-dance with me?” the boy asked.

“Markus, you stay away from that Dreemurr freak!” one of the parents, a woman with blue eyes and brown hair in a ponytail, said. “She could brainwash you!”

“Debbi, this is a school dance, not a political rally,” Mrs. Caton chided. “If your son wants to dance with Frisk, let him. Unless you want to be reminded of that little incident with the dish soap at regionals in ‘94.”

“Ugh, fine, just don’t mention that!” Debbi groaned. “I still get nauseous when I hear the word
Frisk and Markus stared at Debbi.

“Sorry about my mom…” Markus said. “She’s not really nice…”

Frisk shrugged it off and smiled.

“You, uh…still wanna dance?” Markus asked.

Frisk nodded and dragged Markus onto the dance floor.

Brooke straightened her sparkly powder blue dress and huffed as she watched Frisk and Markus dance.

A couple of her friends stood by with concerned expressions.

“Um, you okay Brooke?” asked the friend in a pastel yellow halter dress with long wavy dark brown hair and eyes.

“Of course she isn’t Clarissa, Frisk Dreemurr is dancing with Markus Hays!” replied the other friend, a girl with strawberry blonde hair and blue eyes in a pastel green dress.

“No one asked you, Summer!” Clarissa countered.

“Why is that musty Dreemurr freak dancing with Markus?” Brooke asked coldly.

“He asked them to dance and they said yes,” Summer answered.

“How can she say yes if she can’t even talk?!”

“She nodded,” Clarissa snarked.

“Don’t talk back to me!” Brooke demanded.

“You’re not the boss of me,” Clarissa said, crossing her arms.

“Guys, please, we’re not here to fight,” Summer implored. “Besides, it’s not like Markus is the only guy here!”

“You shut up, not everyone has a boyfriend!” Brooke snapped.

“And not everyone has to be a petty bitch because they don’t have a boyfriend!” Clarissa said. “Come on Summer, they have those no-bake fudge cookies from that one bakery you like.”

Summer smiled brightly and cheered before following Clarissa.

Brooke watched them angrily before turning back to watch the crowd.

Frisk and Markus were still dancing.

She glared.

Penelope was seated at one of the tables set up in the gymnasium, going through the photos she’d taken of the evening.
She was all dressed up for some reason - a forest green romper with white lace accents and black flats. Mettaton had insisted she dress up for...some reason. He would say.

Penelope sighed and adjusted her white lace headband, continuing to scroll through the photographs.

“Um, pardon me, may I sit here?”

Penelope looked up to find a woman in a purple dress who appeared to have stepped out of a time machine in the nineteenth century. She had black hair tied in a chignon, eyes silver like the moon - Oh.

“Caroline?!”

Caroline sighed.

“Yes, I know, it’s over-the-top,” she said. “It wasn’t my idea in the first place. I was accosted by Levi and Mettaton - and I assume that Frisk had a hand in all of this since they -”

“You look amazing!” Penelope gushed.

Caroline’s eyes widened. Her face turned a fierce shade of red.

“Oh,” she said quietly. “Thank you.”

She curtseyed. Penelope returned the gesture with a giggle.

“You seriously look like a princess!” Penelope said. “Seriously, I don’t think anybody recognizes you!”

Caroline looked about.

People were staring at her and whispering.

“Why would they not recognize me?” she asked. “I kind of tend to...stand out from the crowd with how tall I am...”

“I think it’s because you forgot your glasses,” Penelope sighed.

Caroline’s eyes widened as she tapped the bridge of her nose to adjust her glasses.

She really wasn’t wearing her glasses.

“Oh no...”

“Hey cutie, whatchu doin’ sitting here all alone?”

Caroline and Penelope looked up at Scott.

“Anyway,” Penelope sighed, “do you know where -”

“Can it midget, I was talking to the hottie,” Scott snapped. “So, I don’t think I’ve seen you around. You from West Middle? You look posh enough.”

Caroline was silent, expressionless.

“I’m not from here, no,” she said, affecting a British accent.
Scott raised an eyebrow and smiled hungrily.

“So you’re foreign, eh?” he noted. “What a steal.”

“Don’t you already have like five other girlfriends?” Penelope asked, starting to get a little testy.

“I said can it, shrimp!” Scott said through gritted teeth. “So, you got a name, hot stuff.”

Caroline was silent.

“I would rather not share my name with a Human,” she said. “Particularly not one so deplorable as you.”

Penelope snorted before covering her mouth.

Scott seemed affronted for a moment before smiling again. “Hah, I love a girl with a sense of humor!”

“I sigh at you Humans,” Caroline sighed. “Really, such a delusional species…”

“What, you tryin’ to say you’re not Human?” Scott asked. “What’re you, a vampire?”

Caroline stared at Scott.

Scott’s hair was standing on end.

Literally. The hair on his head was sticking out, sparks flying between the ends.

One of the ends caught fire.

Penelope yelped.

Caroline’s eyes widened.

“Let’s go,” she said, grabbing Penelope by the arm and running off.

Scott was utterly confused.

“Holy crap, that sixth grader’s hair is on fire!”

Scott looked around.

Nobody’s hair was on fire -

Wait.

He spotted his reflection in the punch bowl.

He screamed and dunked his head in the punch.

Several people were staring.

Some of them were whispering amongst themselves.

A number of them were laughing

“SCOTT JACOB FOLEY, JUST WHAT IN THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU’RE DOING
MISTER?!

Scott whipped his head around, splashing his mother with the bright blue punch.

The look on Amber’s face was one of hellish fury.

“We are going home right now mister,” she hissed. “You have no idea how much trouble you’re in!”

She grabbed Scott by the ear and dragged him away.

Scott reminded himself to make that seahorse-eating midget suffer on Tuesday.

Elaina and Colleen stood next to each other on the other side of the refreshment table, watching the entire scene with Scott and his mother play out.

“Wha…” Elaina managed.

“I’m just as confused as you are,” Colleen sighed. “Who was that tall girl wearing the purple dress though?”

Elaina shrugged.

“Eh, she’d’ve looked better in blue if you ask me,” Colleen said, smiling up at Elaina.

Elaina squeaked and blushed.

Colleen smirked, taking a bite of a no-bake fudge cookie.

“Where’s the bakery that sells these again?” she asked.

“Apparently it’s a Mon-Monster bakery,” Elaina said. “I think it had something to do with sp-spiders?”

Colleen hummed and finished off the cookie.

Then she saw…something.

“Hey, Elaina, who’s that kid dancing with Frisk?” she asked.

“Hm? Oh, I think that's Markus” Elaina said.. “He’s in my Eng-English class.”

“Huh,” Colleen said. “I think I’ve seen him in my Math class. Brooke’s always sitting right behind him and smiling for some reason…”

Elaina hummed.

Then her eyes widened.

She turned to look at Colleen, who was making a similar expression.

“We have to tell them,” they said in unison.

Frisk and Markus sat across from each other in silence.

“So, uh… I had fun!” Markus said. “Did… did you?”
Frisk nodded, smiling.

“So, uh, would you...be my...girlfriend, or whatever the not-girl-or-boy equivalent is?” he asked.

Frisk gasped and nodded.

Markus smiled and cheered to himself.

“Okay, uh...see you Monday then?” he said.

Frisk nodded.

Markus bid Frisk goodbye and exchanged numbers with them, and headed on his way.

Frisk smiled and headed to find Sans and tell him the news when they got a text.

*I text from: Elaina*

El: saw you with markus

El: brooke is not gonna be happy

El: i’ll let caroline know

Fr: thanks elaina! -v-b

El: np

Frisk sighed.

They spotted Sans and ran up to him.

“hey kiddo, what’s up?” he asked.

«I got a boyfriend!» Frisk signed proudly.

Sans blinked. “huh, already,” he noted. “interestin’,”

«His name is Markus! He’s in my English class, and he has really pretty blue eyes!» they signed enthusiastically.

Sans rumpled Frisk’s hair, his smile unreadable.

“eh kid, you seen mrs. foley around?” he asked “i’d like to have a few... words with her.”

Frisk shook their head.

“huh,” he said. “weird. anyway, we’re leavin’ in about a half hour, so ya might wanna get flowey.”

Frisk saluted and ran off to get their Flowey.

Sans sighed.

Welp.

Time to go ask around.
Levi and Jordan stood off in a corner, nervous. They were wearing matching deep teal dress shirts and black slacks with black neckties.

"So," Jordan began. "I'm having a nice time. You?"

"Yeah," Levi agreed.

Then the song changed.

A slow dance song.

"This song sounds familiar somehow," Jordan said.

Levi hummed in agreement.

Then he got an idea.

"Hey, Jordan," he said.

Levi held out his hand.

Jordan's eyes widened.

"May I have this dance?"

Jordan gasped.

"Heck yeah!" he said, taking Levi's hand.

The two boys went to the dance floor and swayed to the music.

Levi hummed along with the lyrics.

"Oh boy~ You stand~ By me~ I'm forever yours~ Faithfully~"

He touched his forehead to Jordan's and continued swaying.

A few people stared.

Neither of them cared.

Levi got another bright idea.

"Hey, Jordan?" he asked. "Could you…close your eyes for a bit."

"Why?" Jordan asked.

Levi swallowed thickly.

"Just…please?" he asked.

Jordan sighed and closed his eyes in compliance.

Levi kissed his lips.

A brief round of applause erupted.
The kiss deepened a bit before they decided to stop.

They gazed into each other's eyes, sky blue on navy.

They chuckled and continued slow dancing as the songs kept changing.

Caroline and Penelope ran out to the courtyard and sat down on a bench, gasping for breath.

Then Penelope began to laugh.

Caroline stared for a moment before joining in.

The girls laughed until their sides ached.

“H-how did you even?!” Penelope gasped.

“I don’t know, I was trying to make his hair stand on end!” Caroline insisted through laughter. “How was I supposed to know it would catch fire?!”

“You should try that on Alicia or Rachel or something!” Penelope suggested.

Caroline hummed.

Then her text tone went off.

*1 text from: Elaina*

El: frisk has a boyfriend now

El: but brookes into him

Cr: I see.

Cr: Thank you for the information.

El: okay???

Caroline smiled cryptically.

“Well,” she said. “Looks like I have my first mark…”

Penelope looked at the texts and sighed.

“Only if she attacks first,” she said.

“Naturally,” Caroline said.

Caroline and Penelope stared up at the waxing crescent moon.

Penelope smiled.

Caroline’s eyes really are the color of the moon…

Dartrix used Leaf Storm.
Wishiwashi fainted.

Flowey obtained the Waterium Z and completed Lana’s Trial in Ultra Sun.

He saved his game and set the 3DS down with a metallic clang.

So this was his life now.

Stuffed in a locker while Frisk is dancing the night away.

Then he paused, hearing footsteps a bit too heavy and clunky to be Frisk’s.

Flowey pricked up his metaphorical ears and listened.

He saw a figure with blond hair and blue eyes outside the locker.

The figure slid a piece of paper into the locker and ran.

Flowey turned on the 3DS and used the light to read the paper.

He squinted.

“The hell even is this chicken scratch garbage?”

__________________________________________________________

The music ringing through the night fills you with

DETERMINATION

__________________________________________________________

Chapter End Notes

Hey Ya! - OutKast
Faithfully - Journey

Fun Fact: In Two Worlds, Monsters have illnesses specific to them than cannot be spread to Humans, and vice versa. For example, Monsters cannot catch chicken pox, and Humans cannot catch flashing shakes (a Monster-specific illness characterized by tremors and sudden small bursts of Magical energy).
Pompeii

Chapter Summary

Get ready for a whale of a time kids.

Chapter Notes

You know, I may just stop using this top notes thingy altogether. Not really with it imo.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

12:10 P.M., February 27th, 20XS

It’s a cold day outside.

The sun is shining.

An icy wind is blowing from the north.

On days like this, kids like you...

...are trying so hard not to fall asleep in Social Studies.

“...so the Treaty of Versailles was signed on November 11th, 1918 at 11:11 in the morning. Anybody know what the consequences of this were?”

Silence.

Inside Frisk’s head, Chara and Rowan turned to face Gail, hoping she would know the answer to the question.

She raised Frisk’s hand.

“Yes? Mx. Dreemurr?” Mr. Nielsen asked.

“World War II?” Gail signed a bit clumsily.

“That’s correct!” Mr. Nielsen announced. “World War II was but one of the consequences. However, that will be covered in Unit 9. And so we begin Unit 8 - The Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression. And no, The Great Depression does not refer to the divot in my swivel chair.”

The kids laughed.
“However, before we begin this unit, I must start by announcing an event that occurred in 1919,” Mr. Nielsen said. “On January 6th, 1919, Theodore Roosevelt passed away in his sleep, because if he had been awake he would have punched Death in the face.”

The kids were silent.

“Anyway, my favorite president died,” Mr. Nielsen sighed. “Moving forward now…”

Chara was quiet.

“What year did Ebott become a part of national parks system?” they asked.

Everyone in Frisk’s head shrugged.

“It definitely had to be in the 20th century,” Gail said. “And not while I was alive…”

“Mystery the second - the founding of Mt. Ebott National Wildlife Refuge!” Chara announced.

«Might wanna get Jayme on that, you know she has a business for this,» Frisk signed.

“But we don’t have money,” Chara noted. “Seriously, if we didn’t know she was afraid of spiders I’d’ve guessed she’s taken some cues from Muffet.”

“I have no idea what nursery rhymes have to do with any of this, but she may be of help with the Mysterious Night Scrawler…” Gail said.

“I’m still proud of Frisk for that name…” Chara admitted.

Frisk smiled proudly.

Miranda finished up her typing - a first for her her, finishing up her work before class ended - and checked her phone for messages from any “friends”.

Note the quotation marks.

Miranda had always known it on some level, but these people weren’t friends with her. They were friends with her reputation. Her façade.

Nothing about Miranda was real, it seemed.

Alicia walked into the classroom with freshly-drawn eyebrows.

Rumor was quiet but quick to spread - and it was clear to see that the rumor of Alicia’s new nose was true. A few girls were seriously considering asking for nose jobs over the summer from what Miranda had managed to hear.

Really. It’s not like their parents would let them - especially if they knew it was a Berry that inspired them.

Then the bell rang.

Miranda gathered her things and left the classroom, passing by Scott necking some girl under the stairs - the eyebrows promised Alicia.

Miranda took a photo and ran.
Sure, she’d been having an identity crisis for the last few weeks, but one part of her identity remained certain.

Her hatred of Alicia was probably going to be there forever.

At least something in her life was certain.

“Hey, isn’t that book club meeting this afternoon?”

“They meet every Tuesday afternoon.”

“Should we sit in?”

“Dude, Matt’ll murder us.”

“Oh please, he’s all talk anyway. He doesn’t even know that Courtney’s sleepin’ around!”

“He’d probably try to defend her if he did - the guy thinks she loves him!”

“Courtney doesn’t love anything but sex and attention, and Matt’s neither one of those.”

“Dude, shush, Matt’s croneys might hear.”

“It’s his psycho fangirls you gotta watch for, especially Alison.”

“Well then, shut up before Alison hears you!”

“So we’re hitting the book club this afternoon?”

“Eh.”

And with that the two students went on to their next class.

Two boys, one with cropped black hair and brown eyes with mocha-colored skin and the other with red hair and green eyes with pale freckled skin, stood by Matt and watched him as he hoisted a gym bag over his shoulder.

“C’mon boys,” Matt said with a smirk. “We’re skiping the rest of the day.”

“Dude, my girlfriend’s in my next class,” the dark-haired boy said.

“I don’t fucking care Chris, you’re coming with me,” Matt snapped.

“Hey, you’d ditch us if Courtney made plans with you,” the red-haired boy stated.

“That’s different and you know it Jake!” Matt defended.

“Bitch how?” Chris asked.

“Does it matter? I’m the one in charge here, so you do what I say or else!” Matt ordered.

“You know, maybe we should all go to jail,” Jake suggested. “Maybe then Matt’ll finally ditch us like he ditched Theo.”

Matt punched Jake in the mouth.
Jake glared up at Matt, blood trickling down his chin.

“On second thought,” Jake said, “maybe we don’t need jail.”

“That’s what I thought you said,” Matt said with a cold smirk.

“We just need to be the ones to ditch you,” Chris said.

“You what?!” Matt shouted angrily.

“We’re ditchin’ alright,” Chris said. “Ditchin’ your crazy ass!”

“Run for it before he kills us like he killed his mom’s fish!” Jake taunted.

And with that Jake and Chris ran off to class.

Matt stayed behind, fuming with anger and confusion.

Something in his chest hurt.

It always did whenever someone left him.

Matt blew his bangs out of his eyes.

Who needs those two anyway? He had Courtney. She wouldn’t leave him - just like he wouldn’t leave her.

She was better than all of them - his family, his friends, all of them had left him. Courtney wasn’t like them.

Courtney was all he had left.

Matt adjusted the gym bag over his shoulder and headed off to the room where the book club was held.

He opened the unlocked door, then closed it behind him. He placed the gym bag on a table and took out his father’s golf clubs, a carving knife, and a can of black spray paint.

He’d tried to warn them.

Anybody who stole his crown was going to get what they deserved.

Undyne observed as her students played wiffleball. Team A was winning by three runs, and Team B was at bat.

Theo was up to bat for Team B. A few of his teammates had expressions of anxiousness on their faces - Undyne was glad they were taking this seriously, but this isn’t about winning or losing, it’s about about WIFFLEBALL.

Undyne watched as the pitcher for Team A, Jake Gallagher, threw the ball - intentionally away from mound.

The Team B kids groaned. Some of the Team A kids giggled, while others whispered to each other.

“Jake, I can aim better, and I have one eye,” Theo taunted. “Are you even trying?”
Jake quirked a corner of his lip into a sort of half-grimace and threw the ball.

Theo didn’t even swing. The ball once again missed the mound by a good yard or so - this time probably on accident. Probably.

“For Chrissakes man, actually freaking try!” Theo taunted.

Jake roared angrily and threw the ball toward the mound.

Theo hit the ball way into the outfield-slash-other-side-of-the-gym and made a break for it.

Team B cheered as all three filled bases headed for home.

Theo then made it to home plate - literally just a frisbee duct taped to the floor because budgeting.

Team B was now in the lead by one point.

A few kids on Team A were cheering as well - it had been a pretty good play, if a little overloaded with less-than-stellar sportsmanship on both parts. Jake was clearly unhappy with this.

Then Undyne heard her phone go off.

“Ugh, for the love of anime - TAKE FIVE EVERYONE!” she shouted.

Undyne left to take the call in the hallway, not even bothering to check the caller ID

“This better be good, because class in over in ten minutes -”

“Oh, sorry to interrupt Mrs. Bluemako,” came the apologetic feminine-sounding voice on the other end of the line. “I’m Marie Dotson with Edgemere Strand State Park, I was directed to this number by a Mr. Ivo Gerson who said you could help…”

Undyne’s eyes widened. She hadn’t heard from Gerson since just after Mamoru was born.

“Whaddaya need me fer?” she asked.

“Well,” Marie began, “news hasn’t got out yet, but there’s a beached sperm whale on the north shore. Male, 19 meters long or thereabouts. Still alive, but only just. We need help moving him back to open water, you see, and we were told you had the means to help out.”

Undyne was quiet for a moment.

“I’m in,” she said. “But I’m gonna need a ride.”

“Already in the parking lot of North Middle School,” Marie assured.

“Hold on, what?!”

“Sorry Mrs. Bluemako, but time is short before some idiots with cameras show up for a few likes on social media,” Marie said.

Undyne groaned. “Fine, I’ll let my boss know, but you’re coming in as proof!”

“Understandable.”

Randy hated working in IT.
Little if any respect from most customers, having to treat many others like total idiots just so they could find out that they had somehow downloaded forty-seven different viruses with their hundred terabytes of porn.

But on the bright side, the number of people he worked with who left their passwords lying about willy-nilly was absurd, and the number who left their social media open during company time was just sad.

But hey, if he needed anything, he had ammo.

But the number of coworkers in the HWC concerned him greatly.

Then he received a text message.

*1 text from: The Boy*

*Levi: sos*

*Randy: I don’t get it.*

*Le: SOS SOS SOS*

*Rd: What happened?*

Levi sent a picture.

Randy choked on air when he saw it.

He knew what he had to do.

If anyone with half a SOUL took even a glimpse at this room, they would pissed.

To say it was a disaster would be accurate, if a touch if an understatement.

The posters had been slashed to shreds. The walls had been spray painted - slurs and swastikas covered the walls, the black paint dried halfway down the wall. Many of the desks and chairs had been smashed to bits. Books had been torn, the bits of paper and cardboard scattered across the floor.

Caroline’s expression was unreadable. She walked through the carnage and scanned everything, as if searching for evidence.

She took Frisk aside.

“I think I know who did this,” she said.

“So do we,” Gail said. “Not the name or anything like that, but we got hints of a possible suspect.”

“Did they leave things like this lying around?”

Caroline took a crumpled piece of paper and opened it up to reveal the chicken scratch of a drunken inbred on the brink of madness.

“That they did,” Gail said. “And the exact same message too…”

“So they were warning us…but they’re illiterate,” Caroline clarified.
“As good as,” Gail sighed. “This person isn’t illiterate I don’t think, but slowly going crazy.”

“Well, I’m guessing it’s been a downward slope for a good few miles, and now they’ve almost reached their destination,” Caroline sighed. “If this is partial madness, I fear the full extent of their madness.”

Caroline sat down on a shelf.

“I knew the peace wasn’t going to last. It never does.”

“Okay, what the hell is going on and why did I have to come along?!”

Everyone turned to face Linda.

“You’re here because your kid’s a part of this club,” Mrs. Hill explained. “Principal Kierkegaard should be here any moment.”

“Try right now,” Principal Kierkegaard said. She visibly flinched when she saw the wrecked room. “Oh dear god…”

“ms. kierkegaard, are there any security cameras in this part of the school?” Sans asked.

“There are,” Principal Kierkegaard said. “There’s definitely CCTV footage of whoever did this.”

“Oh my god, I don’t care!” Linda snapped. “I have a PTA meeting to get to!”

“Well tough titties Linda, because I’ve set it back for an hour until we figure out what to do about this,” Jill said. “This classifies as a hate crime, I hope you know.”

“Why, just because a few Monsters are in this stupid club?” Linda sneered.

Everyone stared at her.

“I’m sorry,” Sharona began. “Perhaps you missed the GIANT FUCKING NAZI SYMBOLISM ON THE MOTHERFUCKING WALL YOU HEARTLESS BITCH!”

Linda looked into the room, her eyes widening.

“Oh.”

“Is that all you can say?!” Sharona shouted. “IS THAT ALL YOU CAN SAY?! ARE YOU SERIOUSLY THAT FUCKING SPITEFUL AND RACIST?!”

“Sharona, honey, calm down,” Randy said gently, holding Sharona close to him.

“Thank you, Randy,” Linda sighed.

“Linda’s not worth it, Sharona,” Randy cooed, glaring pointedly at Linda.

Linda gasped. “How dare you -”

“linda, just stop,” Sans sighed wearily. “you assumed shit and won’t own up to it again, and i’m not even gonna bother right now because i am way too pissed off at these circumstances to care.”

Linda wasn’t sure what part of that sentence made her angrier, what was said or who said it.

The parents and kids followed the Principal to a room by her office filled with screens. The footage
on the screens was slightly grainy, but some details could still be made out.

Principal Kierkegaard sat in one of the chairs, the seat creaking a little under her weight, and rewound the screen that displayed the hallway outside the club room.

Then they spotted something.

“Wait, who’s that?” Jill asked.

“I think that’s Matt Gorman,” Caroline said lowly.

“But why? He’s not even in this club!” Linda said.

“some people don’t need a reason to hate,” Sans said casually. “they just do. and this is more than enough evidence to indict him of hate crime and vandalism.”

“Sans, this is a child!” Linda said, appalled.

“a child who, as we have seen, has expressed delinquent tendencies,” Sans said. “you really think i’d try him as an adult? i’ve studied up on state law here and there, and i was a judge back in the underground. the kid’s thirteen linda, and his crimes are just delinquency at this point. he'll probably be on probation for a few months for vandalism, the hate crime but may make it longer if that part holds up. considering the bias toward humans in the legal system it’s likely he’ll get off with vandalism.”

Linda blinked. “I have no idea what you just said.”

“So where would this kid be about now?” Jill asked.

“Home,” Principal Kierkegaard sighed, standing up slowly and ejecting the video evidence. “I’ll go call the police about this…”

“Okay then, we’ll go ahead and get the PTA meeting started,” Jill said. “See you all in a bit.”

And with that Jill walked off, Principal Kierkegaard heading to her office. The kids left to go clean up what they could in the club room.

Sans and Linda remained in the room in silence.

“so linda,” Sans began, “didn’t see you at the dance on friday night. something happen?”

“What are you talking about?” Linda asked. “I signed up, I was there!”

“no you weren’t,” Sans said. “your name wasn’t on the chaperone roster either.”

Sans’ eye sockets widened.

He suddenly realized something.

“you really need to work on your priorities,” Sans said, walking away.

Sans took out his phone and texted Helen.

*Sn: so u disobeyed linda

*Sn: im proud of u
Sans put his phone away and walked to the library for the PTA meeting.

Undyne had never seen a creature so big.

The whale lay on its belly in the shallow water, its tail splashing uselessly.

She would have cried if there hadn’t been a crowd of Humans on the pier above trying to get pictures of the poor thing. So instead she was literally biting her tongue to keep from spearing someone to bits. Gerson had set himself up a seat on a bar stool next to the massive creature. Marie was standing next to Undyne, her salt-and-pepper ponytail waving in the breeze as her blue eyes scanned the surroundings.

“So this is it,” Undyne said, her voice quiet with reverence.

“Yes!” Gerson replied. “Ebott’s a major feeding ground in the winter and spring months, so this’ll happen once in a while. It’s usually a bit quieter when they have to do this…and then sometimes the poor things die before they reach open water…”

The whale made a deep chuffing noise, as if alerting the old Tortoise that he could hear him and that all that talk of death was not helping his case.

“So whaddya want me to do?” Undyne asked, stretching her body. “Drag the thing to open water?”

“No dragging, that could injure it,” Marie warned. “Pushing’s fine, if you’ve got enough people.”

“Lady, I can bench press a bleacher full of rowdy middle schoolers,” Undyne boasted. “How much different can this ol’ boy be, eh?”

Undyne patted the whale just below its eye and gave it a toothy grin. The whale’s big dark eye focused toward her.

“We’ll getcha back out there big guy,” Undyne said quietly.

The whale made a deep chuffing sound, almost as if to thank her.

Undyne cracked her knuckles and elbows and neck, stretching just a little bit more before pushing her weight into the side of the whale and grunting as it moved a good foot and a half toward the water.

Undyne relaxed briefly to get her bearings, breathing heavily as she leaned into the whale.

“Damn,” she gasped. “You’re pretty damn heavy, ain’tcha?”

Marie’s eyes were wide. She turned to Gerson.

Gerson smiled knowingly and winked conspiratorially.

“Male sperm whales weigh up to 45 tons,” Gerson said. “And that’s just the average!”

Undyne smiled.

“Now this is what I call a challenge!” Undyne said giddily.

She started pushing again, the whale moving a further two yards.
Undyne looked about, seeing Marie and a few rescue workers helping her move the whale back out to sea.

Undyne knew the beaches of Ebott like the back of her hand - she knew it would take a few hours to get the whale to open ocean. By sundown, the job should be done.

But did the whale have time until then?

Undyne looked around again.

Now a bunch of random people were helping push the whale - Monsters, Humans, both were joining forces to get this whale back to open water.

Nearly an hour later, the whale was past the continental slope. A boat rode up alongside the whale.

Undyne and the crew climbed onto the boat, Gerson awaiting them.

Along with Alphys and Mamoru.

“Alphy! Mamo-chan!” Undyne cried out, scooping her wife and son into a bone-crushing hug.

“Mama stink!” Mamoru giggled.

“Mamo-chan’s ri-right Undyne, you smel-smell like whale,” Alphys chuckled.

“I know, I know, I need a flippin’ shower,” Undyne said as she rolled her eyes, her smile still fast in place. “Man, that thing weighed a ton!”

“A-actually Undyne, male sperm whales can weigh up to -”

“45 tons, yeah, Gerson said it already,” Undyne said, waving her hand. “But hey - I touched a whale!”

The whale chuffed, a bit of water blowing up from his blowhole and spritzing the crew.

Alphys yelped, while Undyne and Mamoru laughed.

Marie watched the mothers and child dance on the deck, waving at the whale just off the starboard side of the vessel.

“A happy family if there ever was one eh?” Gerson said fondly. “I still remember when Undyne there was a little guppy - now lookit ‘er! A kid of her own, a lovely wife…”

Marie nodded, saying nothing.

Gerson was silent.

“Welp!” he announced. “We’re just about to open sea! Might wanna say goodbye to our friend here!”

“Laboon bye-bye?” Mamoru asked sadly.

Marie’s confusion must have been written on her face, because Alphys spoke up.

“I-it’s a long story,” she said. “Fig-figuratively and literally.”

“Anime!” Mamoru chirped.
Marie just shook her head and smiled.

A happy family if there ever was one…

Not a bad description.

Due to the fact that the club room was thoroughly trashed, the Book Club™ was taking place in Mr. Nielsen’s classroom for the time being.

“Thank you all for coming today,” Caroline said. “I wouldn’t have blamed you if you’d decided to skip or stay home from today’s meeting in light what happened.”

“That’s kind of because we’re afraid you’ll kill us if we skip,” Brian admitted.

Caroline seemed a bit hurt for a moment before shaking it off.

“Anyway, thank you all for being here today.” Caroline said. “I would like to discuss the possibility of having the club exist for another year. The eighth graders will be graduating soon, so we may need more members to fill the quota.”

Silence.

“Caroline, if you stop the club, what else would we do on Tuesday afternoons, homework?” Eddie asked. “I don’t think so!”

“Don’t stop the club on our account,” Jenson said. “It’s yours. We might even come back and visit. Right guys?”

The eighth graders agreed.

“I have no qualms either way,” Almsal said. “It’s your club, we willing signed up, we reap the consequences.”

“You liiike us~” Jayme teased.

Almsal narrowed all three of his eyes. “You think that Jayme, if it gives you comfort,” he deadpanned.

Caroline looked about at the many, many members of her club.

She smiled.

Never had she been more at ease with a crowd.

It gave her a bit of strength.

She would **Persevere**.

Nothing would break the Book Club™ apart. Matt was going to have to pry it from their cold dead hands before it was destroyed.

The present was dark, but the future was bright like a star.

Frisk spotted something off in a corner of the classroom and ran up to it.
They smiled.

Knowing that nothing could keep their friends down for long…it filled them with **DETERMINATION**.

FILE: SAVE

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When Matt got home, he wasn’t sure what he expected, except perhaps the usual lack of parents.

But his mother chatting with a police officer - Hathaway, Haventhy? Yeah, that - was definitely not it.

Officer Haventhy spotted him.

“Matthew Gorman,” they said. “Take a seat.”

Matt narrowed his eyes. “Gimme one good reason why I should.”

The officer smiled. It seemed detached and cold.

“Don’t worry, you’re not going the big house or anything,” they said. “At worst you spend weekends in juvenile detention.”

“Which he is **not** going to be doing,” Veronica snapped.

“Best case scenario, he only has to pay a $2,000 fine,” the officer said. “And since Matthew here isn’t old enough to work for it, you and your husband will have to pay it.”

Veronica turned to glare at Matt.

Matt stood and said nothing.

“The court date is this Friday,” Officer Haventhy said, standing up. “Thank you for your time.”

The officer left without another word.

As soon as the vehicle was out of earshot, Veronica stood up.

She slapped Matt across his face.

Matt looked up at her and smiled.

But it wasn’t really a smile at all.

“So you finally show me some attention,” he sneered. “And all it took was painting a few swastikas on a wall! Maybe if I join the KKK you’ll actually love me! Huh? Wouldja like that Mom? Want me to join the Klan? We could join together - just the two of us!”

Veronica slapped him again.

“You go to your room,” she said coldly.

“Since when have you cared where I go or what I do?” Matt spat. “I gave your fish your valium, I egged some rich people houses, I destroyed a classroom - what’ll it take to make you care about me for once in your goddamn life?!”
“Oh my fucking GOD, why are all the men in my life so fucking SELFISH?!” Veronica screeched.

“You’re the selfish one, you worthless bitch,” Matt said icily, throwing his backpack at Veronica’s face and storming away to his room as the woman screeched in fury.

Matt slammed his door as loudly as he could.

Then he waited.

He heard his mother slam the the front door and drive away. His dad was at work - he always took the night shift.

Matt opened his bedroom window. He took the rifle out of his dresser, loaded it, and aimed outside.

He spotted a squirrel and pulled the trigger.

He watched the creature fall to the ground a mangled bloody mess.

He imagined the blood was mixed with Dust.

He closed the window.

He had an idea.

Flowey sat on his windowsill and watched as Frisk texted Markus, a grin on their face.

But something about it seemed a tad…forced.

Flowey decided it was high time for a teasin’.

“Hey Frisk,” he piped, his voice full to the brim with fake cheer, “funny thing about lowercase love - if you have to force it, it’s probably shit!”

Chara glared up at Flowey.

“That’s what we’re trying to decide,” Chara said. “Frisk doesn’t exactly like Markus that way, but they feel like they have to date him because he asked them and they feel bad.”

“What, are they scared he’ll be mad if they’re just friends?” Flowey asked bitterly.

“Frisk is more scared he’ll be sad,” Chara said. “You know how soft they are about feelings and junk.”

“Don’t we all.”

Chara texted Markus goodnight and closed Frisk’s eyes.

They rushed into Frisk’s headspace.

“So what’s your choice?” Chara asked. “End it and keep yourself from drawing out something you can’t feel, or keep it up and feel guilty for feeling nothing at all?”

“Chara, that was a tad harsh,” Rowan sighed. “But they make a fair point, Frisk. You have a difficult choice, and you may hurt either way. But the choice, in the end, is yours. We are merely guides in that regard.”
Gail sighed.

“Frisk,” she said. “I can say from personal experience that forcing yourself to feel what you don’t isn’t healthy. Markus may be upset, but he seems to be the understanding sort of boy. If you explain to him what you really feel and why, perhaps he’ll understand.”

Frisk paused.

They nodded.

They had made their choice.

The days ahead fill you with

**DETERMINATION**

Chapter End Notes

Pompeii - Bastille

Fun Facts: Whales are fucking cool as shit.
Chapter Summary

Blurred is the word, Caroline starts on the path of darkness, bachelor party plans, and a breakup.

Chapter Notes

... See the end of the chapter for more notes.

9:45 A.M., February 28th, 20XS

It’s a cold day outside.

Clouds are forming.

A chilly wind is blowing.

On days like this, kids like you...

...are feeling the awkwardness that comes from a recent breakup.

Frisk was so glad Gail was right about Markus being understanding - otherwise the post-breakup period would be so much more awkward.

Frisk tried not to think about the sad look Markus’ eyes when they explained it to him.

They tried to turn their thoughts elsewhere.

Brian and Hunter were almost definitely going to make the soccer team. The announcements were originally planned to be announced yesterday after school, but it was decided that they would be posted on the bulletin board at lunch today because of Undyne saving that whale.

Knowing their aunt and friends were cool filled Frisk with pride.

And **DETERMINATION.**

FILE: SAVE

Frisk stared at the essay prompt on the board and squinted.
They moved their body back and forth to see if it made any difference.

Still blurry no matter what.

They sighed.

Maybe glasses were needed? Who knew. Maybe they were just tired.

Maybe one of their headmates had bad eyesight...?

“Sorry, ‘m afraid that’s all you Frisk,” Rowan said.

“Never needed spectacles in my life,” Gail said. “I was the spectacle.”

“It’s you, Frisk,” Chara said. Then they giggled.

Frisk gave a half smile in response to their little inside joke.

Frisk decided to roll with it for the day and check with Sans when they got home.


Frisk sighed and squinted, tilting their head to the side and just guessing at what the board said.

They were **DETERMINED** to finish their work.

FILE: SAVE

Elaina sat in their chair, their mind wandering. Mrs. V had taken the trumpets aside to work on a particular part that they could not get down for some reason. It was probably just Scott, but really all the trumpets were kind of jerks on some level.

Elaina’s eyes kept wandering over to Colleen for some reason. The world was so blurry, and yet Colleen was so...

...also blurry.

Maybe they should get their eyes rechecked. They had an eye appointment...next week? Week after? They didn’t know. It was definitely soon. They happened every year, right? Or was it six months? Wait, that was the dentist.

Elaina sighed wearily.

“Preach it enby,” Jenson said, munching on some Cheetos.

“Those puffs?” Sarah asked from inside of her cello case.

“Twisty kind,” Jenson replied.

“Give,” Sarah demanded, lifting a hand.

Jenson put some of the snack in her hands.

“I am SO glad we’re not brass or wind,” Chloe said, holding out a hand for some cheesy, twisty goodness.
Elaina holds out a hand, still zoned out. They bit into the puff.

Cheesy as a good bad pun.

Hunter watched out if the corner of her eye as Caroline adjusted her black turtleneck and black skirt. Ever since the school dance, she’s been wearing all black clothing. The reason was a mystery to Hunter, but that changed nothing about the reason it was quiet in choir.

No, not because Caroline is possibly going goth.

Spring Concert Solos tryout dates were to be announced.

Maybe it was an Ebott tradition or something.

All Hunter knew was that it seemed to happen every year. She’d been in each one so far.

And she couldn’t see a reason why she’d be in it this year. Two years of luck was enough. One more would be…unrealistic, she felt.

But she wasn’t in control of that. She was, however, in control of whether or not she tried out.

Which she would. At least she could say she tried.

Besides, her mother wouldn’t know she tried out unless she got the part. Which was unlikely since there were seventh and eighth graders who have been in the class longer.

So it was whatever.

“Okay class!” Mrs. Caton announced. “I just got the email - solo tryouts are open for all students, ten will get parts! Tryouts will be from March 14th through the 16th, art students are making posters!”

The students instantly began chattering amongst themselves. Hunter couldn’t make heads or tails of any of it.

“You got all that Hunter?” Caroline asked. “I have it written down if you don’t.”

“N-no, I’ve got it,” Hunter assured the taller girl. “Th-thanks though.”

Caroline seemed to stare at the blonde for a moment.

“You’re anxious,” she said bluntly.

Hunter looked down, ashamed.

“If you need me to I’ll try out with you as support,” Caroline said.

Hunter’s blue eyes widened.

“A-are you se-serious?” she asked incredulously.

“Yeah?” Caroline responded in confusion. “I probably won’t get a part, I’ll just try out to support you. Doesn’t mean I won’t try my best, of course, but still.”

Hunter smiled.

“Thanks,” she said.
Then the bell rang.

“Time to get going,” Caroline said.

“Wait, one thing first,” Hunter said.

Caroline turned to look at her. “Yeah? What’s up?”

“Are you…going goth?” Hunter asked nervously.

“Yes,” Caroline replied bluntly.

“Oh,” Hunter said.

“Is that bad?” Caroline asked. Her tone of voice left the true intent behind the question a complete mystery.

“N-no, it really suits you!” the blonde quickly amended.

“Thanks,” Caroline said with a smile. “Now to just wait for the inevitable spread of the rumor of my vampirism. Then my transformation shall be complete.”

Hunter stared at Caroline.

“O…kay, then.”

“Okay, what’s acid rain again?”

“Precipitation carrying large amounts of dissolved acids, capable of killing wildlife and damaging buildings, forests, and crops.”

“Dammit Almsal, let someone else answer!”

“But someone else might get it wrong.”

Almsal watched as Sarah Ward and Audrey groaned in frustration.

“Dude, that’s not the point here!” Audrey said sharply. “You gotta let the rest of us fuck up or we won’t learn!”

“But it’s painful to watch all the stupid,” Almsal said.

“We know, that’s why we’re in honors geography,” Sarah Ward said. “It challenges us. But not if you’re giving out the answers.”

Almsal’s three eyes blinked in confusion. “But don’t most people prefer the easy route?”

“We don’t,” Audrey snapped. “Why else would we be in honors classes?!”

Almsal sighed.

“If you say so,” he said. “Let’s just keep working. A caldera is…?”

The girls stared at him.

“Look, I’m giving you a chance to answer the question, either answer or don’t,” Almsal said
The girls blinked.

“A volcanic crater formed by a major eruption,” Sarah Ward said.

“Correct,” Almsal said shortly. “Audrey, you’re next.”

The group continued on.

It went slightly better than expected.

Toriel typed up some emails as her students completed their review questions for the week’s lesson.

Then came two knocks at the door.

“knock knock,” came a low, familiar voice.

Toriel beamed. “Who is there?”

“spell.”

“Spell who?”

Sans opened the door, a grocery bag of takeout boxes in his hand.

“w-h-o,” he spelled out.

Toriel laughed, as did some of the students.

“You’re early today, dear,” Toriel noted. “Lunch does not even start for another few minutes!”

“eh, i just thought i’d hop in early, cover some wedding stuff,” Sans said with a shrug.

Most kids oohed. A few gagged.

The bell rang.

The kids rushed out, leaving their work on their desks without a care.

Toriel sighed.

“Well, at least none of it’s on the floor…” she attempted.

“good point,” Sans said.

“So what was it about the wedding you wished to discuss dearest?” Toriel asked.

“bachelor and bachelorette parties,” Sans said casually.

Toriel choked on some of her beef lo mein for a moment before calming down.

“Wh-what about them?” she managed.

Sans was quiet.

“okay, so i’m about to go into some skeleton tradition stuff here,” Sans said. “when a skeleton is
engaged, the bachelor party lasts for about two weeks and then everyone heads home. And skeleton bachelor parties…stray a lot.”

“Just…how much is ‘a lot’?” Toriel asked cautiously.

“My dad mentioned one my uncle Algerian went to in 1333,” Sans said. “The group ended up in a jail cell in Bombay.”

Toriel blinked.

“They started their journey in southern Germany.”

“Oh my.”

“Yeah.”

“And this is typical of Skeletons?”

“Yep.”

Toriel sighed.

She was not sure what to think of this.

“Tori, if you want me to stay nearby I will,” Sans said, taking her hand in his. “If it makes you uncomfortable we can do somethin’ else.”

Toriel was quiet.

“If it is something you wish to do, then I will not stop you,” she said. “I merely ask that you send updates via text message and stay out of too much trouble.”

Sans smiles.

“And what constitutes that?” he asked.

“No violent crimes, no verbally assaulting police officers, that sort of thing,” Toriel said. “And no streaking.”

“No promises on that last one, but I’ll try,” Sans said with a wink.

Toriel blushed and narrowed her eyes.

Sans was so lucky he was cute…

Lunchtime.

Frisk saw a few kids gathered around the bulletin board - they were blurry, but Frisk recognized them as having tried out for the soccer team.

MK, Hunter, and Brian were by their side.

“You guys ready?” Brian asked.

Hunter and Frisk nodded.
“Okay, let’s go.”

“Outta the way, losers!”

Scott and Trav pushed Frisk aside and went up to the bulletin board.

Frisk didn’t so much as budge.

“Hey, not cool yo!” MK shouted.

Scott and Trav ignored them.

Frisk sighed and made their way up to the bulletin board.

They could barely read their own name on there…

Wait.

Their name was on there.

“Oh my gosh Frisk, you made it dude!” MK said happily! “Yooo, so did Hunter and Brian!”

“Trav’s name is up there,” Hunter said.

“What about Scott’s?” Brian asked.

Hunter merely shook her head.

Frisk turned to look at Scott and Trav.

Scott was clearly pissed. Trav’s expression was unreadable.

Scott punched Trav in the eye and walked away as some of the students gasped.

Levi walked up to the group, doing something on his cell phone.

“What happened, did gay and gayer break up?” he asked.

«Trav made it onto the soccer team, but Scott didn’t,» Frisk signed.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” Levi said. “Also, Caroline and I were thinking of getting our ears pierced, and apparently the right ear is the gay ear!”

The group looked at Trav.

His right ear was pierced.

“Holy crap,” Brian muttered.

“The hell’re you fags starin’ at, huh?!” Trav snapped.

He didn’t even wait for a response before storming off.

The group stood there awkwardly.

“Library?” Levi asked.
“Library,” the others agreed in unison.

The world is a blur. This knowledge fills you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

World In Motion - New World Order
Chapter Summary

Soccer. Gay. What else can we say?

Chapter Notes

…What?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

11:39 A.M., March 17th, 20XS

It’s a nice enough day outside.

The sun is shining.

A cool breeze is blowing.

On days like this, kids like you…

…are preparing for your first soccer game of the year.

Helen had been tasked with taking the pictures. It had been the diplomatic option as chosen by the kids.

Linda was not happy.

Hunter wasn’t supposed to be happy with the number 9! He should have asked to be number 1 - and Linda tried, but the school athletic director had the nerve to ask her to leave!

Well, at least he wasn’t number 10 like that Dreemurr brat. Serves her right.

Hmph.

Linda stepped away for a smoke.

She didn’t see Hunter watch after her as she did so, a look of trepidation in the girl’s eyes.

Undyne had the North Middle School Badgers soccer team in a circle. Their fresh new navy blue jerseys and white shorts, the numbers on their backs in white below their named.
“Alright punks, the West Middle Lions are good! But we! Are! BETTER! Because what do we have that they don’t, huh?”

“Standards!” one kid said.

“Besides that!”

“SOULs?” another asked.

“Besides that!”

«DETERMINATION?» Frisk signed, ruby eyes glinting DETERMINEDLY behind their brand-new red-rimmed glasses.

“Thank you Frisk!” Undyne encouraged. “That’s what we got! DETERMINATION! And with all of our DETERMINATION, we will KICK THEIR BUTTS!”

The North Middle School soccer team cheered in excitement.

They could see the West Middle School kids staring at them with poorly-concealed disdain.

Brian flipped them off quickly before returning to doing nothing.

A few West Middle Schoolers complained loudly.

Brian snickered. “Stupid Westies…”

“Brian…” Hunter warned.

“OKAY! GAME STARTS IN TEN! YOU READY PUNKS?!”

The North Middle School soccer team cheered.

“Hey, Coach Undyne, aren’t the Westies short on players?” Hunter asked.

“Yeah, they are aren’t they?” Undyne said. “I dunno if they’re cocky or what, but we gotta let someone know.”

“I’ll do it,” Brian said.

“I’ll go too,” Hunter chimed.

“Okay, just stay safe,” Undyne warned. “Could be a trap, and they’re waiting to ambush ya.”

“Then I just punch ‘em,” Brian said.

“I like that idea, but it also sucks because you could get in trouble,” Undyne said. “Their parents have money and they could hire a hitman to murder you and your family.”

“What the heck,” Brian replied.

“Yeah, now go before THEY TRY TO STOP YOU FROM FINDING THE TRUTH!” Undyne said loudly while pointedly glaring at the West Middle coach.

The West Middle coach glared at Undyne.

Undyne glared back.
Impromptu glaring contest ensues.

Sans sat in the bleachers next to Toriel, leaning on her.

He smiled up at her, eyelights shining like the bright summer sun.

Toriel smiled back, warmer than the still summer air.

They simply gazed into each others’ eyes, white eyelights on cinnamon irises.

Nothing could break the heat of this moment.

“What are you doing here, Dr. Gaster?”

Sans ignored the voice of Dr. Carlson.

“Oh, I’m here to watch my grandchild play soccer!”

Enter Dr. Gaster.

“What - HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN HERE?!” Carlson shouted.

“Six-hundred and sixty-one years, two months, and three days and counting!” Gaster said.

“THAT’S NOT WHAT I MEANT! AND I WASN’T TALKING TO YOU!”

“But I see no other Dr. Gasters here,” Gaster said. “I only see my son Sans and his affianced Toriel!”

“I WAS TALKING TO THE OTHER ONE!”

“Well, you are off the clock,” Gaster said with a shrug. “Why not use his first name?”

“yeah, paul,” Sans concurred. “if you wanna talk to me, use my name. we’re not on university grounds, so it’s not like you’d be being unprofessional or anything.”

Carlson steamed.

“Okay then, Sans,” he hissed. “What the hell are you doing here?”

“I’m here for my kid’s soccer game,” Sans said. “you here for yours?”

“My son Landon plays for West Middle School,” Carlson bragged. “And just what is your child doing?”

“Oh, frisk’s for north middle,” Sans said, ignoring the blatant disdain with which Carlson referred to Frisk.

“Isn’t your child deaf or something?” Carlson asked in disbelief.

“Nope,” the Skeleton replied. “frisk is the strong, silent type. perfect for sneaking past enemy lines.”

“Then why does your child use sign language if your child isn’t deaf?” Carlson asked.

“because they’re more comfortable that way,” Sans explained patiently. “like how i’m more comfortable with my hoodie somewhere on me, or how you’re more comfortable crapping on my credentials.”
“I wouldn't have to if you’d gone to a normal university!” Carlson sneered.

“well, sorry my people were literally imprisoned under a fucking mountain for five hundred years, paul,” Sans deadpanned. “won’t happen again.”

“Paul, have you seen Landon? Coach Duff says he’s not on the field - oh?”

A woman with auburn hair and brown eyes looked at the people.

“I take it you’re Sans Gaster?” she asked.

“that’s me,” Sans said. “you mrs. carlson?”

“Yep!” the woman said cheerfully, holding out a hand. “I’m Nancy Carlson! So nice to finally meet you!”

“likewise,” Sans said, shaking Nancy’s outstretched hand. “this is my fiancee toriel dreemurr, and my dad wingdings. everyone calls him dr. gaster or just gaster though.”

“Well it’s so nice to meet all of you!” Nancy said cheerfully. “I’m so sorry about my husband, he can be pretty obsessive sometimes, but he has his charms!”

“Nancy, sweetheart, we have been over this, I am not obsessive!” Carlson said, clearly trying to tone himself down in his wife’s presence.

“Sure, Paul,” Nancy said dismissively. “But I got off track! Have you seen Landon? He should be with the rest of the team, the game starts in ten minutes and drills start in five!”

“No, I haven’t,” Carlson said, now seeming a tad concerned. “He ran off as soon as we parked…”

“Well, tell me if you see him, okay?” Nancy said.

“Perhaps we could help?” Toriel offered. “We would need a description, but if there is any way for us to help we will!”

“No, but thank you,” Carlson said coldly.

“Paul!” Nancy warned. “Thank you, any help is appreciated! I have a picture of him!”

Nancy took out her phone and opened it to Facebook, showing a photo of a boy around Frisk’s age with dark reddish-brown hair and blue eyes.

“This is him,” she said. “Thanks again for the help.”

“It is no trouble at all Ma’am,” Toriel assured. “I hope you find him soon.”

“Thank you!”

And with that Nancy went off to seek her son once more.

Brian and Hunter returned to the field.

“Didja tell somebody?” Undyne asked.

“Yeah,” Brian said.
“Good, now we just wait. Game can’t start until all players are on the field.”

Undyne looked over at the West Middle coach.

He was talking to a referee - and not nicely at that. Undyne could hear the shouting from where she stood with the kids. It was bad enough that some of the West Middle kids were starting to look uncomfortable.

Undyne walked over.

“Hey,” she interjected, “stop that, you’re scaring the kids.”

“Don’t tell me how to do my job!” the West Middle coach snapped.

“I’m pretty sure screamin’ at referees ain’t in the job description,” Undyne countered. “Sure as heck wasn’t in mine.”

The West Middle coach sneered and walked away.

The referee sighed with relief.

“Thanks, ma’am,” he said, voice a bit shaky. “I am so sorry you were forced to intervene.”

“I wasn’t forced to do anything,” Undyne assured. “I’m just doin’ what I think is right.”

“Well, thank you anyway.”

“No problem!”

And with that Undyne returned to the bench.

Amber slammed the phone back down on the charge port with a growl.

“SCOTT JACOB FOLEY, YOU GET DOWN HERE THIS MINUTE MISTER OR I WILL COME UP THERE MYSELF!” she shouted.

Scott ran down the stairs.

“What is it?” he griped.

“Well did you lie to me about making the soccer team?!” Amber asked.

Scott’s eyes widened. “I-I didn’t! I-I actually thought I made it.”

“I just checked with the school athletic director about picking up your uniform, and he said that the listings were on the bulletin board in the school cafeteria two weeks ago - where you would have seen them!”

“I - he - I -”

“No. You are grounded, mister.”

“I swear Coach Undyne has it out for me! Just ‘cause I’m a Human she -”

“I thought the same thing until I found out that two thirds of the team are Humans!”

“But why is that stupid Dreemurr girl on the team while I’m not?! It’s not fair! I never get what I want around here!”
“You can shut up right now because you know that’s bullshit” Amber hissed. “That PSP? You wanted it, you got it. That XBox in your room? You wanted it, you got it. The trip to Universal Studios I had planned for us this summer? You wanted it. And if you keep this attitude up, you won’t be getting it. Is that understood?”

Scott lowered his head.

Amber went back upstairs.

Scott sat on the couch and threw a throw pillow.

He flinched as it just narrowly missed a table lamp.

He wanted his dad.

Courtney wasn’t much for dates. They implied desperation.

Which she lacked.

But if it meant she got some then whatever, right?

She didn’t even know this guy’s name. Just that he played soccer for West Middle. They were outside the soccer field. Courtney was listening to him yammer on about nothing.

He was cute, in a plain sort of way. Not her type really, but she was…

Yeah.

Before long, Courtney was kissing the boy behind the storage room.

Yes. This was what she was meant for.

“If it feels good, that’s all that matters.”

She couldn’t remember who’d said that. All she remembered was heat, a bright room, her sister crying -

Courtney flinched and grabbed her temples, squeezing her eyes shut.

Her head suddenly hurt. Lights danced behind her eyelids.

“Oh, hey, are you alright?” the boy asked.

Courtney nodded. The headache was starting to fade.

“I’m fine,” she said. “Let’s keep going…”

Courtney kept kissing the boy’s neck.

She trailed a hand down his back and to his rear -

“What the hell is going on here?!”

Courtney and the other boy gasped, releasing each other.

Matt stood there, face red with fury.
The boy ran.

Courtney stared at Matt.

“Oh my god, what are you even doing here?” Courtney groaned. “You don’t have Saturday detention this week!”

“WHO IS HE!” Matt screamed.

“Why do you care?”

“BECAUSE YOU’RE MY GIRLFRIEND!”

“Yeah, about that, I've been meaning to break up with you for a while now.”

Matt froze.

“Say what?” he asked.

“I’m breaking up with you, are you deaf?” Courtney snapped. “Gawd, you’re so fucking clingy! I can’t do anything with you around!”

Matt just stared at Courtney.

“Whatever. I’m leaving,” Courtney said. “If you wanna be clingy, date your mom.”

And with that Courtney walked away.

Matt just stood there frozen.

Undyne sighed with relief as the last of the West Middle kids finally showed.

Fifteen minutes after the game was scheduled to start.

The players arranged themselves.

The ref’s whistle blew.

The game was on.

Brian managed to snag the ball and kick it to Frisk.

The ball was theirs.

A single kick was all it took.

“Point for the Badgers!” the ref called.

Cheers and jeers rang out.

“That’s my baby!” Toriel cheered proudly.

Forty minutes left.
Sans and Toriel had proud smiles on their faces.

Carlson and many other West Middle parents had angry grimaces on theirs.

Linda was trying very hard not to scowl.

A Human boy from West Middle grabbed the ball.

The red blew the whistle. “Foul!”

“Hey, Oliver did nothing wrong!” screeched a woman, likely the kid’s mother.

“He touched the ball, Karla!” another parent shouted.

“He did not!” Karla shrieked.

“Karla, stop! Remember last time you did this?!”

Karla growled, but conceded.

North Middle was awarded a direct free kick.

Brian kicked the ball into the net.

Two points for the Badgers

Helen, Sans, Toriel, and Gaster cheered. Linda clapped politely.

New play.

Thirty minutes left.

Badgers 2, Lions 0.

Levi and Jordan sat in the couch in the Marlow-Goldsby residence, watching Thor and cuddling.

“So,” Levi began nervously, “great movie choice….”

Levi mentally /slapped himself - seriously?! Is that the best he could come up with?!

“Oh, thanks, you too,” Jordan managed awkwardly.

Oh thank god he wasn’t the only awkward one.

As time passed, the movie was at the back of their minds.

The only thing was them. Jordan and Levi.

They locked eyes briefly.

The sounds of the movie suddenly seemed to die away.

The only thing was them.
Levi swallowed thickly.

“H-hey, Jordan?” he asked. “I wanna…try something.”

“O-okay,” Jordan managed. “What is it…?”

“Close your eyes.”

Jordan closed his eyes.

Levi took a deep breath. Now or never.

Next thing Levi knew, he was kissing him.

Levi felt a hand on the back of his head, the red curls slipping through Jordan’s fingers. Levi wrapped his arms around Jordan.

They stayed in this position for who knows how long before they decided to come up for air.

They looked into each others’ eyes.

Then they smiled.


“Same,” Jordan breathed.

They paused.

Then they laughed.

“That…that was my first…”

“Same…”

“Is that all you can say right now babe?!”

“Same.”

Laughter.

Caroline stood in the hallway with a leather-bound notebook in hand, just out of sight of her stepbrother and his boyfriend with a smile on her face.

She wrote all she heard.

Nicko sighed and sat in the dugout bench as the final whistle blew and cheers rang out.

North Middle Badgers beat the South Middle Hawks, 5 to 1.

Bruce and Eddie sat next to him and high fived each other and him.

The coach droned on about the good game for what felt like hours but was actually just five and a half minutes.

As soon as the coach was done, Nicko, Bruce, and Eddie got up and went to find their families.
The sounds of cheering in Spanish rang out.

The Suarez family, comprised of Eddie’s parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and countless older and younger siblings, as well as a number of niblings.

Bruce’s parents and older sister congratulated him.

Nicko spotted a girl, about a junior in high school, in the driver’s seat of a red ‘99 VW Golf. Brown hair in a ponytail, muted green eyes.

She honked the car horn. Nicko waved goodbye to his friends and ran for it.

He went into the back seat and buckled in.

“How was it?” the girl asked.

Nicko shrugged in response.

“Nicko…” the girl warned.

Nicko gave a thumbs up.

“Sean, please use bloody sign language at least!”

«We won,» Nicko signed.

“That’s great! Mum and Dad’ll be chuffed!”

Nicko shrugged.

“Nicko, they apologized. Give them a break.”

«Maybe when they come to a game for once.»

“Nicko, you know why they couldn’t -”

“Wouldn’t, Sam.”

Sam’s eyes widened. Nicko preferred not to verbalize when he could help it unless he felt it dire.


“Nicko, I’m sure they just forgot -”

“As always.”

“Not always!”

“When was the last time they came to watch me play?! When we lived in Manchester?! Over six years a -!”

Nicko started coughing.

Sam gave him a bottle of blue Gatorade.

Nicko chugged a quarter of the bottle.
He shook his head and stared out the window.

Sam sighed.

She drove on.

The soccer game was almost over.

Badgers 4, Lions 4.

Last play. All comes down to this.

The whistle blows.

Trav kicks the ball to Hunter.

Hunter travels with the ball, then kicks it to Brian.

“That’s my boy!” Linda screeches.

Brian nearly stumbles at the sound, but catches himself instantly.

Some West Middle players start running up to him from the front and sides.

Brian was surrounded.

“Get him Oliver!” Karla screeched.

A blond kid - presumably Oliver - looks at his mom and waves.

Brian takes advantage of the distracted kid and kicks the ball between his legs.

“HEY!” Karla shrieks.

Landon turns and snags the ball.

“YES!” Carlson shouted.

He turned to Sans and pointed at him. “In your FACE!”

Landon tripped.

Frisk grabbed the ball, kicking it in the direction of the Badgers’ goal.

They swung their leg back, ruby eyes glinting behind their glasses.

They are filled with

**DETERMINATION**

They kick the ball.

It goes into the goal.

Badgers win.
Cheers.

Cheers all around from the parents and children of North Middle.

The West Middle parents griped and complained while the students stood by, glaring at the North Middle kids.

Sans shortcutted onto the field with Toriel as Coach Undyne lifted all the kids into a proud hug, spinning them around briefly before putting them down.

The West Middle parents glared with self-righteousness.

“Hey!” one of them said. “Isn’t it Paul and Karla that screamed and distracted the kids?”

“Hey, it is!”

“What the hell Karla! You cost everyone the game!”

“I did not!” Karla shrieked.

Sans watched.

“yo undyne, got a megaphone?” he asked.

“Under the bench, why?” Undyne asked.

Sans walked over to the bench and picked up the megaphone.

He held it up to his mouth and said into it…

“way to go, paul.”

Silence covered the field.

Then the West Middle parents continued bitching at Carlson and Karla.

“C’mon, let’s go get some snacks!” Undyne said. “And leave these bad influences alone!”

Frisk tugged on Undyne’s pant leg.

“What is it, Frisk?” she asked.

«Do you think we could invite the West Middle kids to have snacks with us?» they asked. «I feel bad that they lost, and that their parents are being mean about it…»

Undyne was quiet for a moment.

She sighed.

“Look, Frisk, that’s real nice whatcha wanna do for ‘em,” Undyne assured, “but Coach Duff ain’t gonna like it, and neither will the parents. Some of the kids’ll probably take it bad too…”

Frisk lowered their head sadly.

“c’mon kiddo,” Sans said, rumpling Frisk’s hair fondly. “let’s go to get some snacks and head to grillby’s.”
Frisk smiled.
«Thanks Dad,» they signed.
Sans smiled warmly.
Yeah.
His kid really was the best.

Trav absently munched on a chocolate chip granola bar, staring into space at nothing in particular.
“Hey, Trav, that was a good play.”
Trav blinked back into focus and turned toward the source of the praise.
Hunter was there, smiling at him. Brian and Frisk were too.
“Buzz off, I ain’t queer,” Trav grumbled.
“…Good for you, I guess?” Hunter managed.
“Dude, accept the damn compliment will ya?” Brian snapped. “I toldja guys he’d do this.”
«Brian, he’s probably surprised we’re even talking to him!» Frisk signed. «We never exactly talked to him before without him saying something first…»
“That’s because he’s a dick.”
“The hell is she even saying?” Trav asked.
“They are giving you the benefit of the doubt,” Hunter explained patiently. “Sorry we bothered, I guess.”

Hunter and Brian turned to leave.
Frisk just stared at Trav for a moment.
Trav blinked.
“Why are your eyes red?” he asked.
Frisk smiled and shook their head before running after their friends.
Trav stared after them.
He swore he saw their red eyes still staring at him.

Your victories, great and small, fill you with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes
The Name Of The Game - Abba
Chapter 72

Chapter Summary

Hmmm…

Chapter Notes

So, I've decided that this arc will be that last one for this particular story. Two Worlds isn't over - far from it. I'm just separating it into a more digestible format. Like how Ikea sells their furniture.

8:00 A.M., March 20th, 20XS

It's a beautiful day outside.

The sun is shining.

Flowers are blooming.

On days like this, kids like you…

…have just turned twelve.

Frisk was absolutely bouncing in place.

Twelve. They were twelve.

Five years ago today they were about to walk through Snowdin.

And now?

They were free.

Frisk and the Monsters both.

But today wasn’t only Frisk’s birthday.

It just so happened that Chara, Rowan, and Gail all shared their birthday!

What are the odds, huh?!
Knowing how cool it is to share a birthday with three awesome people filled them with DETERMINATION.

FILE: SAVE

Frisk stared at the equations on the whiteboard, biting their nails anxiously as they lightly tapped the table with the other.

Augh. Ratios and percents.

“Will you stop that tapping Freak Dreemurr?!”

“Alicia, no shouting during the lesson,” Mrs. Bell warned.

“But Frisk is tapping her nails!” Alicia complained.

“And you’re tapping your pen, now stop talking and take notes.”

Alicia growls and starts clicking her rose gold ballpoint pen.

Frisk grits their teeth - pen clicking just bothered them to no end. It made them feel like someone was jabbing them in the back of the skull with a pen to the beat of the clicks.

They were not happy.

“You okay Frisk?” MK whispered.

Frisk nodded despite the jabbing feeling in their skull.

Chara switched out.

Frisk needed a break.

It was their birthday after all.

-----------------------------------------------------------------

Caroline turned in her paper. Once again before everyone else was finished.

By this point in the year everyone was used to it.

She sat down and took out her leatherbound notebook and started writing.

Trav stared at his paper and textbook.

Exactly one problem solved.

Out of ten.

He was starting to get desperate.

Scratch that, he was desperate.

He growled and walked over to Caroline, Hunter, and Tina’s table.

He slammed his textbook onto the table.

Tina yelped in surprise and made a beeline for the ceiling in fear. Her claws dug into the panel.
Hunter flinched.

Caroline was too busy writing to pay any attention whatsoever.

“Hey, do this for me,” Trav snapped.

Caroline looked up at Trav with a deadpan expression.

“Care to rephrase that?” she asked, her voice monotone.

Trav tried to glare at her.

Caroline wasn’t even glaring at him and he still felt like she wanted him dead.

He groaned.

“I need… help,” he managed.

“Okay, with what?” Caroline asked.

Trav just passed the textbook and paper.

Caroline looked it over.

“…Page 347,” she said. “Paragraph three.”

Trav turned to the page and read the paragraph.

The answer to the second question was literally right there.

“This section also answers questions five and nine,” Caroline explained. “The section that answered question one also answers question three.”

Trav blinked.

“Now please don’t use me to cheat,” Caroline warned. “This is a one-off. If you ask for help - politely - I will give it. But what I just did for you is a one time thing only.”

Trav felt his gut squirm.

“But what about…”

“No one gets a free pass,” the tall girl. “Not even these guys.”

“She’s right, we’re on our own mostly,” Hunter admitted. “But she helps us when we need it.”

Trav blinked.

“You can sit down you know,” Caroline said.

Trav did so slowly.

“It’s okay Tina, you can let go now,” Hunter reassured.

Kristina unlatched herself from the ceiling.

And fell right onto the floor.
“I’m okay!”

Theo wasn’t the best or the worst at French. He was average.

A bit above when it came to vocabulary. Some French words were similar to Italian ones, and Theo had a sort of working knowledge of Italian. But it was still very hit-or-miss.

People still avoided him. But at least they didn’t veer out of his way. They just ignored him mostly.

“Dude, what’s the first person singular past-perfect tense of *avoir* again?” MK asked.

Mostly being the key word in that sentence.

“*J’avais eu,*” Theo said.

“Thanks!” the Wyvern chirped.

Theo grunted in response as he finished the last problem on his worksheet.

Ten minutes until class was over.

Might as well sleep it off.

“okay, the force of gravitational attraction between the earth and the sun. their masses are 5.98 x 1024 kg and 1.99 x 1030 kg, respectively. the average distance separating the earth and the sun is 1.50 x 1011 m. determine the force of gravitational attraction between the earth and the sun and you are free to go until friday.”

Sans sat down and watched as his first-year Physics students scrambled to solve the problem in exchange for freedom.

It took maybe ten minutes for all of them to turn in their sheets.

He put them in his Inventory and made the trek to his office.

Then his phone went off.

*I text from: dadster*

*Gaster: Sans! I must ask you to come to the Workshop posthaste! It is of utmost importance!*

*Sans: dad i am at work*

*Sn: u know how carlson is*

*Gt: But isn’t your next class not for another day and a half?*

*Sn: ok u got me*

*Sn: omw*

Sans pocketed his phone and grabbed a few things from his office before shortcutting to the Workshop.

Gaster was pacing back and forth excitedly, fingers flexing in a rhythmic motion.
Clearly there was some very good news indeed.

Sans knocked on the doorway.

Gaster jumped about a foot in the air in shock.

“Ah! Sans! T-there you are!” he managed, regaining his composure. “I have astounding news!”

“lemme guess, you discovered a new element?” Sans asked.

“No, better!”

“a new planet?”

“Better, Sans!”

“a new planet that can sustain life?”

“I’ve managed to find a way to bring back Prince Asriel!”

Silence.

“you’re right, that is better,” Sans said, much more calmly than the situation seemed to warrant. “now comes the hard part - telling Tori and Asgore that their kid who died a hundred years ago is still alive inside a flower. and also has no soul. and tried to fucking kill us all.”

Silence.

“That…is definitely going to be a problem, yes,” Gaster sighed. “But you do have until perhaps June at the absolute soonest to tell your affianced. I shall take it upon myself to tell Asgore.”

Sans sighed and nodded.

“thanks dad,” he said. “heh, wait’ll friskito hears the good news - helluva birthday present, eh?”

“Indeed,” Gaster concurred. “That is precisely why I told you now, rather than when I got all the blueprints done!”

“Well, looks like i’m pickin’ ’em up in the motorcycle today,” Sans said. “take ‘em to grillby’s after school.”

“A lovely plan!”

Sans hugged Gaster.

Gaster hugged back.

“thanks old man,” the shorter Gaster said.

“Of course.”

Alicia filed her nails. Everyone else did their work.

It was just how things went.

Until…
“Alicia, at least finish your classwork before doing your nails,” Mrs. Marker said.

Alicia ignored her and kept filing.

Seriously, what was with teachers? It’s not like they can actually do anything. Not when her daddy pays them not to.

Alicia smirked.

And continued filing her nails.

Ridley and Kristina watched the exchange briefly before returning to their work.

Nope. Not getting involved in that.

Fifth period English 6 had never been as tense as it had been in the last few weeks.

Then again, Scott and Trav had never so much as looked at each other funny, and now here they were actively avoiding each other.

It was wrong.

The two idiots were just glaring at each other.

Well, more like Scott was glaring while Trav was very obviously trying to ignore him.

Scott crumpled a piece of paper and threw it at Trav.

It hit him and fell to the floor ineffectively.

Another paper crumpled and tossed.

Hit and fall to floor.

Crumple. Toss. Hit. Fall.

Repeat cycle ad nauseam.

Then Scott went full-throttle and tossed his textbook at Trav.

It ended up hitting him so hard it knocked him out of his chair.

Gasps and shouts were heard. Students gathered around him.

“Scott Foley, come with me,” the teacher said.

Scott balked, horrified, but relented.

Trav had a gash near his temple. It was bleeding.

Scott felt sick to his stomach.

Had he seriously…?

He could have…
Could have…

He didn’t want to imagine it.

So he wouldn’t.

Trav was asking for it anyway, right?

Right.

Courtney doodled little spirals in the margins of her spiral notebook.

She made them look like paisley patterns.

She didn’t feel like doing the work today anyway. Luckily class was almost over for the day anyway. She could just do it at home, probably.

“Hey, Courtney!”

Courtney looked up at the source of the voice.

A hazel-eyed brunette with her hair in a ponytail held in place by a navy blue ribbon stood before her.

Alison Braun. Cheerleader. One of Matt’s biggest fans.

“Do you know where Matt is?” Alison asked. “I haven’t seen him around the last couple of days…”

“He probably got suspended again,” Courtney dismissed.

“Well, that does make sense…” Alison admitted.

“Can you go away now? School is almost over anyway, and I think cheer practice is after Tuesday through Thursday?”

“Well, okay then,” Alison sighed. “Thanks for the info. Bye!”

Courtney said nothing, merely continuing to doodle.

Book Club was gathered.

“Okay everyone, in honor of Frisk’s birthday, I declare today a free day,” Caroline announced. “I hereby order you to go nuts.”

Cheers.

Caroline sighed.

She grabbed a cupcake - chocolate with buttercream frosting, Nutella filling, and rainbow sprinkles - and sat down next to Frisk.

“So,” she began quietly, “when are the others’ birthdays…?”

«They all share my birthday, actually!» Frisk signed. «Apparently it’s like that for all the Red SOUL Bearers.»
“Interesting. May I write it down?”

Frisk nodded.

“What other things do the Red SOUL Bearers have in common, if you don’t mind me asking?” Caroline asked.

«Same haircut,» Frisk signed. «Same eye color too.»

“Uh-huh…anything else of note?»

Frisk hesitated before shrugging.

“I noticed that all of you seem younger than the modern age of death,” Caroline noted. “Is that another point of commonality?”

Frisk paused before closing their eyes and nodding.

Caroline was quiet for a moment.

“I’ll do everything in my power to make sure that doesn’t happen to you,” she said. “And I know your family will as well, even if they don’t know that you’re…well, more than you seem to be.”

Frisk smiled.

Or perhaps it was all of the Red SOULs.

Who could say.

1:00 A.M., March 21st, 20XS

Frisk sat on the ratty old foldout couch in the basement next to Sans, Flowey set in their lap.

They should be sleeping right now.

But Sans had…news.

“So,” he said. “I got word from your granddadster. Seems that your little buddy here’s gonna be a real boy by the end of summer.”

Frisk blinked in confusion.

Then their eyes widened.

They looked from Flowey to Sans and back.

“Yep,” Sans said softly. “Azzy’s comin’ home.”

Flowey just stared at Sans.

“But I don’t even have a SOUL!” he he said. “How’s that even gonna work?!”

Sans chuckled.
“like this.”

An encounter was triggered.

Flowey stared at Sans.

Sans stared back.

“welp,” Sans began. “here goes.”

sans>act>check

Flowey

LV: 1

HP: 6000

AT: 19

DF: 0

your kid’s best friend, just checking in.

Then…

!!!

A small, glowing white speck appeared before Flowey.

It was small. Barely discernible.

But there was no doubt whatsoever what that speck was.

Flowey had a SOUL.

Flowey>MERCY>Flee

The encounter ended.

Flowey was in shock.

Frisk looked from Flowey to Sans and back again.

Sans flopped down on the couch with a sigh.

“yep. he is definitely comin’ back.”

Frisk’s face brightened.

They hugged their father and brother close to them.

________________________________________________________

*Your brother is coming home. This fills you with*

**DETERMINATION**
Chapter 73
Chapter by Spazzin

1:28 P.M., April 30th, 20XS

It's a dreary day outside.

Rain is falling.

More rain is due to arrive.

On days like this, kids like you…

...are still hype for your brother’s return.

It was true.

Frisk was hype.

And they’d likely never not be until Asriel came back fully.

But…they had to admit, a part of them would likely miss Flowey’s cutting jabs. Then again, those had been decreasing in frequency for quite some time.

Clearly Flowey was trying to get used to the idea of being fluffy again.

…Really, so was Frisk. They’d become used to rubbing Flowey’s petals - or rather, noticing they’d started to at some point then expecting Flowey to snap at them for it.

He never did. Not for that, anyway. Maybe he liked it too.

Maybe when Flowey is Asriel again Frisk can rub his ears like they did his petals.

“Uh, Frisk? You okay?”

Frisk blinked.

They looked down at their blank paper.

They nodded to…whoever said that. They weren’t sure.

It wasn’t wholly true though.

Because they were much better than okay.

Everyone knew something was up when they saw Ms. Clark smiling brightly as she came in.

“Good afternoon everyone~” she greeted. “I have exciting news!”
A few kids whispered. What could it be?

“Next year, there is going to be a school musical!”


“And that’s not all! All of you will be choosing what musical we perform!”

Even more excitement.

“I’ll be passing out the surveys, and the musical that gets the most votes is what we’ll be doing!” Ms. Clark announced.

As the surveys were passed around, excited chatter abounded.

Caroline stared at the survey.

Lost.

Of all the musicals available to choose from, she’d seen all but one, and that one she’d at least read the book of.

She made her choice and turned in the paper, returning to her place between Kristina and Levi.

“Matt’s been gone for over a month,” she noted. “That’s not suspension anymore - it’s expulsion, if he was in fact expelled.”

“But…what did he do if that’s the case?” Kristina asked.

“No way he was expelled,” Almsal deadpanned. “To require expulsion, he would have had to do something so egregiously wrong that everyone would know about it somehow.”

“So he’s been playing hooky for a month?” Caroline monotoned.

“Hey, he’s got the power to get away with it,” Astrid said with a shrug. “Stereotypical troubled white boy…”

“But the question now is why would he skip?” Caroline asked. “Matt may skip classes here and there, and he gets suspended more often than a serial bungee jumper, but he doesn’t skip school like this. Something big happened.”

“But what?” Levi asked.

Caroline sighed and looked through her notebook.

“I should add tabs to this…”

Courtney stared into the compact mirror and brushed her hair.

She loved her hair. It was her favorite part of her.

“Such pretty hair…I could play with it all day…”

Courtney flinched and grabbed her temples, head searing with pain.

After a moment it faded.
She blinked.
She sighed and put away her brush and reached into her purse for some lip gloss.
Something slammed onto her desk while she was digging.
No.
Someone.
Alison.
“Matt’s been gone for over a month,” she snapped. “What happened?”
Courtney blinked in confusion.
“Don’t look at me like you’re stupid! Where is Matt and why hasn’t he been at school?!”
“I don’t know, he hasn’t called me,” Courtney explained tersely.
I have his number blocked anyway.
“Well ask him then! You’re his girlfriend, aren’t you?!”
“Well, would you think you’re still dating someone who hasn’t called in a month?”
Alison was quiet.
The final bell of the day rang.
“…Fine then. I’ll go look for him myself. He deserves better than you anyway.”
Courtney watched as Alison stormed away.
She sighed.
Matt and Alison would be okay together.
They’re both annoying as fuck.

Sans and Gaster looked at the blueprints.
The device looked like a capsule, but the dimensions were a fair bit larger. It was connected by wires to a machine with buttons and a screen.
“so how’s this work again?” Sans asked.
“Alright,” Gaster sighed. “This capsule is where we put Flowey-Asriel. The machine will first test how much more DT we’ll need to bring him back to true Monstrosity again.”
“but ain’t flowey already a monster?”
“Not entirely. Monsters are made of Magic and Dust given physical presence. Flowey is made of a Golden Flower and DT - did you know that Golden Flowers are a variety of primrose bred to grow to the size of sunflowers?”
“dad, focus?”

“Ah, yes, of course. So Flowey isn’t a Monster because, for lack of a better term, he’s too physical. But that’s not the real issue. The issue is how much SOUL he has - and whether or not it’s anything like Prince Asriel’s.”

“So where’s this machine figure in?”

“Well, my ability to Check SOULs outside of encounter mode -”

“You mean checkout?”

“Yes, that. Checkout is limited in its scope - really, most traditional methods of Checking the SOUL can only see the usual LV, HP, AT, and DF, as well as MP and MS where applicable. This device can check Hidden STATS as well.”


“Yes.”

“This can see those.”

“Yes.”

“And what hidden stats, if any, will decide whether flowey is gonna be asriel again?”

Gaster was silent. Hesitant almost.

“You said that Flowey’s SOUL is still small, barely even a speck. This device could show what we need to bring him back completely.”

“Okay…and when we get these ingredients, what then?”

“That is when the second function will be used.”

“And that function is…?”

“After we’ve gathered the necessary materials, we take their essence and upload it into the device. And then…”

Gaster hesitated, then sighed.

“…and then we use Frisk.”

Sans’ eyelights darkened briefly before turning back on.

“…meaning?” he asked.

“Their SAVE power is unlike any Magic in existence,” Gaster explained. “It is almost wholly derived from their Determination. Almost being the keyword.”

Sans blinked. “why almost?”

“To put it in terms you are likely to understand and enjoy, the SOUL is like an ogre - it has layers.”

“Do they also smell weird?”
“Some Magic types will do that, yes, but back on topic.”

“my bad.”

Gaster hummed.

“Frisk’s Magic has to do with their entire SOUL, not just that first layer of DETERMINATION. That is the way of the Red SOUL - Red SOULs are born Magical, while Wizards have Magic thrust upon them.”

Sans was silent.

“What are you saying, dad?” he whispered.

“I’m saying…we need to tap into Frisk’s SOUL. Have them use their SAVE Power on Flowey-Asriel. Chances of this path succeeding as I expect are 87.98%, rising with each error I find and correct. If I can find a way to connect to the Hub again, chances could well rise to the point where success is inevitable.”

Sans was silent.

“…i was gonna tell tori about all this, but…tell me when you wobble to 90%. i’ll tell ‘er then.”

Gaster looked at Sans.

“It’s a promise, dad.”

Gaster blinked, then smiled.

“You’ve made a number of those, haven’t you?” he teased.

“Heh, for my family? anything.”

Gaster chuckled.

“You’re a fine husband and father, Sans,” he said warmly. “I’m so, so proud of you.”

Sans smiled, eyelights twinkling somewhat.

“I should go. got a pta meeting this afternoon.”

“Oh dear. Best of luck.”

“Right. Thanks pops.”

Sans gave Gaster a hug and shortcutted away.

Elaina entered the dance studio and opened his - wait, no, their - locker.

Candy wrappers and thumbtacks.

Giggles from Alicia and Brooke, plus maybe a few other girls.

Elaina just tossed the trash in a bin and dropped the tacks in with it, put on their pointe shoes, and walked away.
They entered Ms. Yvonne’s classroom.

“Okay girls!” Ms. Yvonne announced. “I have the best news!”

Whispers.

“Our next recital is going be at the Capitol Music Hall!”

Gasps. Cheers.

“So you know what that means - we have to practice hard! Pour blood, sweat, and tears into this performance! We have to work for it! Because you ladies are here for a reason - you are dedicated to dancing. And this is your chance to prove it - to me, to your families, to the world. Okay, not the world, but a few hundred people. You get my point.”

The girls were silent.

“Anyway, let’s get started!”

And so it began.

It wasn’t long before Elaina’s legs and feet were dying.

But they’d never felt more alive.

Alison rang the doorbell of the Gorman residence.

She never went into this part of Upland. She only came when Matt needed something from her. Which wasn’t often.

But she never knew when he’d need her. This situation was proof.

No answer.

She rang the doorbell again.

Still no answer.

She knocked.

No answer.

She tried opening the door.

It was unlocked.

She felt a giddy feeling swell up inside of her.

She discreetly entered the house and closed the door behind her.

It was…more ramshackle than she’d expected.

Clearly the Gormans weren’t expecting visitors.

Alison smiled as she walked down the only hallway in the house.
She noticed a door cracked open with a blanket peering out of the open crack.

She knocked on it.

“What?” came a familiar voice.

Alison froze.

This was Matt’s room.

Oh my god she was about to enter his room.

She took a few deep breaths and slowly opened the door.

She peeked inside with a shy smile.

Matt stared at her.

He was polishing a gun of some kind. It was a pretty big one too.

“Hey,” Alison said. “I, uh…just came to check on you. Is everything okay?”

Matt stared at her for a moment before polishing his gun again.

“Will ya fuck off? I’m busy,” he grumbled.

“Matt, you haven’t been at school for a month,” Alison pointed out. “A lot of people are worried about you - Courtney doesn’t think you two are dating anymore!”

“I SAID FUCK OFF!” Matt screamed.

Alison blinked.

“…Okay then,” she said. “I…I’ll go.”

Alison left the Gorman house.

She ran down the street with tears in her eyes.

She wasn’t sure what was going on.

But she knew it was Courtney’s fault.

———

Amber had just walked into the library. After having been absent from the last meeting, and everyone knowing exactly why, it was no surprise that they stared and whispered.

Amber couldn’t do anything about it. Craig would just override it as usual anyway.

She’d settled for less. She was paying for it.

And you get what you pay for they say.

It was almost enough for her to consider communism as a viable option.

…Wait, what?
Anyway.

“Okay, let’s start the meeting,” Jill announced. “So next year we’ll be having a school musical, chosen by the stude –”

“Objection!” Linda announced.

“It’s too late, we’ve already gone through with it and the budget can in fact cover it, so we are in fact doing a school musical next year,” Jill said evenly.

“B-but you won’t even be here! Your daughter is graduating!”

“Enough, Linda, it’s already been decided since last year that if the budget allowed that this would go through. Now let’s continue.”

Linda sat back in her seat with a huff.

 Seriously, what had Jill done that she hadn’t?

“Besides everything?”

Linda ignored Estelle, face contorting in rage.

She would not respond to that.

Or anything.

Show them she was better.

She snuck a glare at Sans.

He seemed…oddly contemplative.

Sans noticed her.

He winked his right eye and smiled.

Linda flinched.

Then she scowled.

Stupid shitty Monster.

_____________________

Scott sat on his bed playing his PS4, the sounds of GTA 5 blaring from the speakers on his TV.

He almost didn’t hear the thing hitting his window.

Wait.

Scott listened.

There it was again.

He groaned as he paused the game, threw the controller over the side of his bed, and got up to open his window.
He saw Matt Gorman in his backyard.

Scott was conflicted.

The most popular kid in seventh grade was in his backyard.

But on the other hand, the most popular kid in seventh grade was in his backyard.

Scott made his decision.

He crept down the stairs and out the back door.

Matt was smiling.

“Scott Foley! I knew this was the right address!” he said happily.

“…Why are you in my backyard?” Scott asked.

“heard about the thing with Trav Martin,” Matt said.

“I don’t want your fucking pity,” Scott hissed.

“I’m not here to pity you. I don’t pity.”

“Then why are you here and what does Trav have to do with -”

“I have a plan. And I’ll let you in on it.”

Scott was silent.

“What kind of plan?” he asked.

“Revenge,” Matt said coldly. “The exact details are a secret, but on the last day of school, I’ll go through with it.”

“…Revenge on who?”

Matt smiled.

“No one special. No one that’ll be missed…”

Something about the way he said that made Scott’s skin crawl.

But then again, that was probably just because the older boy was in his backyard. Unannounced. Without having set off the burglar alarm.

“So here’s what I need from you,” Matt began. “Have you ever taken your mom’s or dad’s credit cards?”

“Wh - no! Why the hell would I -!”

Matt smacked a hand over Scott’s mouth.

“No screaming,” he said coldly. “Or else you’ll end up on the wrong side of revenge.”

Matt didn’t even wait for a response as he removed his hand from Scott’s face.
His smirk was sharp as a switchblade.
And something in Scott’s gut screamed that it was twice as deadly too.
But he suppressed it.
Maybe this could be his chance to…
“…I could try.”
Matt’s smirk was now like a switchblade covered in dry ice.
Unreadable but still so very deadly.
“Good. Now here’s what you’re gonna do…”

Frisk stood in the Void pocket that was their headspace.
Their fellow Red SOULs stood before them with wide eyes - all the same ruby red as their own.
“So…you want to contact the Hub?” Chara asked. “To get to the Player.”
Frisk nodded solemnly.
“Who may or may not even exist anymore.”
Frisk nodded.
“Just so we can…turn Flowey into my brother.”
Frisk nodded again.
Silence.
“That is the smartest stupid idea ever,” Chara said. “I’m in.”
Frisk smiled brightly.
Chara smiled brightly in return.
They looked to Rowan and Gail.
Rowan smiled warmly.
“Can’t say no to those smiles, now can we?” Rowan teased.
“Got that right sugar,” Gail sighed. “So how do we…do whatever you just described?”
Frisk smiled.
«Here’s what you do…»

You’re getting closer.

You are filled with
DETERMINATION
7:30 A.M., May 27th, 20XS

It’s a beautiful day outside.

Birds are singing.

Flowers are blooming.

On days like this, kids like you…

…are waiting on a message from the hub.

Nobody was in class.

Nobody cared anymore.

Not because there wasn’t any point.

Actually, that’s exactly why, but not for the reasons most people would expect.

See, this was a positive pointlessness.

For it was the last day of school.

It had been quite a year, and now it was coming to a close.

So the Book Club had opted to congregate in the club room with some snacks and drinks. Have a little party for themselves.

But first, it had to be set up.

Everyone was helping set everything up.

“Caroline, this can go here right?” Eddie asked from one end of the table he and Nicko were carrying.

“Put it along the wall,” Caroline directed, untangling some fairy lights with help from Hunter and Penelope.

“Augh, why is this so hard!!” Hunter groaned.

“These things must be older than we are,” Penelope grumbled.

“Caroline, what chairs’re we usin’,” Colleen piped. “Navy blue plastic or navy blue…fuck, they’re all plastic, what shape’re we usin’?”
“Which one’s more ergonomic?” Caroline asked.

“I have no idea what that means,” Colleen admitted.

“Pick the more comfortable one.”

“Ohhh. Okay!”

Colleen went off to retrieve the chairs.

“Caroline, where do we put the cooler?” Audrey asked, bearing a blue cooler in hand.

“Next to the tables,” Caroline directed. “They’re not set up yet, so just set it by the shelves.”

“Gotcha.”

Caroline sighed.

“You know, I never expected leadership from you of all people,” Brian commented.

Caroline seemed confused.

“The hell are you talking about?” she deadpanned.

«You founded and direct the Book Club pretty much all by yourself,» Frisk pointed out. «Your vocal hatred of people makes all of this pretty unbelievable.»

Caroline blinks.

“But…I don’t…”

“Caroline, you’re a leader,” Levi said gently. “Accept it.”

Caroline paused a bit before sighing and continuing to untangle the fairy lights.

She couldn’t see it.

Scott opened his locker.

He found a note and his dad’s credit card.

He opened the note.

He couldn’t read a word of this, but he knew it was from Matt.

Then someone hit him with a spiral notebook.

He turned to the laughing throwers with a glare.

They noticed him and ran away, still laughing their asses off.

He blew his bangs out of his eyes.

He’d like to see them stick around after throwing shit at him.

Cowards.
Miranda rode Diamonds around the competition track.

Her mother had told her she wasn’t going to school that day since it was the last day and then rushed her to the stables.

Miranda didn’t see the point. Everyone else she knew was at school - even Emma was at her own school! Seriously, what was her mother thinking?

Oh yeah. She didn’t. That would require brain cells. In which Diana was sorely lacking.

Miranda had Diamonds jump an obstacle.

Success.

Alicia, Brooke, and Rachel were sitting on the bleachers, giggling as they watched the boy’s lacrosse team practice.

Well, Alicia and Rachel were giggling. Brooke was just watching.

She was more sporty than Alicia or Chloe ever were. Alicia would sometimes wonder aloud if Brooke was even a girl - Brooke just brushed it off as friendly teasing. But when Rachel joined in it made it seem a lot less than friendly.

Borderline hurtful even.

But Brooke had better things to focus on.

Like the chances of joining the girl’s lacrosse or volleyball teams. Even cheerleading seemed pretty fun, what with all the gymnastics elements involved. Brooke was pretty good at gymnastics, if she did say so herself. She’d even been considered for pointe ahead of Alicia in ballet, she’d heard - but if Alicia knew, she’d be after her head.

So Brooke would simply keep quiet.

“Brooke, come on, Pierre’s here to take us shopping!”

Brooke blinked back to reality.

She followed wordlessly.

Better the low-level teasing of being in than the full-scale bullying of being out.

Trav was practicing soccer drills in the gym. Coach Undyne had been shockingly happy to give him a soccer ball to practice with instead of the dodgeball he’d originally planned on using.

He dribbled the ball through some cones he’d set up with help from coach Undyne.

He kept hitting a few of them.

Soon enough he got frustrated and kicked the ball toward a wall.

He did not expect anyone to catch it.

Or for this anyone to be Theo DeMartino.
The older boy stared at him.

“You’re doing it wrong,” he said.

Trav glared angrily. Seriously? This kid had one eye, what did he know?

Then Trav remembered Coach Undyne’s words.

How Theo’d lost his eye in the first place.

It was an unbelievable story. But the proof was there.

And besides that, Theo had been on the soccer team before then too.

And there had been stories of injured sports people becoming coaches after, right?

Wait, what was he even…?

“Fuck it, I’ll show ya how to do it,” Theo groaned.

Theo proceed to do so.

He didn’t even hit the cones.

Trav watched, unsure how to feel about all this.

Theo gave Trav the ball back.

“You have to twist your ankles outward a little more, and you’re striking too soon,” the older boy explained.

Then off he went.

Trav stared from the ball to Theo and back.

He tried it.

It took adjusting, but he got it.

And he only hit maybe three cones.

He felt oddly accomplished.

Theo walked down the halls aimlessly. No goal in mind.

No nothing in mind really. He was just walking to be walking.

Walking to be doing literally anything but hearing that awful static.

It was like hearing shattering glass, but played over thousands of intercoms at once from a distance in his head on an endless loop. It made him sick sometimes.

He still had nightmares. Either of what happened the night he lost his eye…or what would have happened if he didn’t.

It was always a lose-lose. No matter what, someone would always end up hurt irreversibly.
And it would be his fault.

Theo lurched a bit, grabbing his eyepatch as if it hurt. He ran to the bathrooms and puked.

When he left he saw Coach Undyne nearby.

She sighed.

“Spotted you helpin’ Martin with drills earlier,” she said. “Either you've been practicin’, or you’re just that damn good, but you did pretty well.”

Theo was silent.

“…You okay?” Undyne asked.

Theo just leaned against a wall.

Undyne sighed.

“Hey, it’s gonna be okay,” she said. “When I lost my eye, I kept having nightmares out the wazoo for the longest time - even I can’t say when they stopped, but…they did. It takes time. And a lot of help.”

Theo looked up at Undyne.

“It’s been months. I should be over this.”

“DeMartino, it took me years before I stopped freaking out whenever I saw a goddamn tutu,” Undyne said. “And a part of me is still scared of ballerinas. There is no getting over anything. There’s just coping as best you can and getting the right help.”

Theo just stared at Undyne.

“Look punk, I’ll tell it to ya straight,” the Fishwoman sighed. “You have PTSD. After what all you’ve been through it ain’t a surprise. But you’re coping okay, at least in public.”

Theo blinked. He let the words settle in.

“Listen, tell ya what,” Undyne said. “I’ll go over it with Principal Kierkegaard and the athletic director, but I think there’s a damn good chance of you bein’ on the team next year.”

Theo’s eyes widened.

“You don’t hafta take me up on my offer. Just lettin’ ya know that if ya want it, you got it.”

And with that Undyne walked off.

Theo remained leaning against the wall for a but before standing upright and walking away.

He…had a lot to consider.

“A little to the left.”

“Your left or mine?”

“I’m speaking to you, so the left is definitely yours.”
“Okay, if you say so…”

“…Perfect. You can come down now Tina.”

Tina pushed the tack into the wall and fluttered down.

Caroline stared at the banner, taking in every detail.

Yep.

Perfect.

Caroline gave the banner a small grin.

The banner had depictions of the seven Human SOUL Traits plus a Monster SOUL done in glitter paint, all on a black background with a white border. It was placed at the very back of the room so as to be the first thing seen when you enter the room. Fairy lights were strung about the room and on the ceiling. Various snacks and drinks were placed on a table against the wall. All the books the Book Club had read that year were on a shelf beneath the banner.

Really it was rather nice.

Caroline used her Magic to turn off the lights.

Then on came the fairy lights.

Oohs and ahhs erupted.

Caroline grabbed a cupcake - Penelope had made chocolate cupcakes with a cream cheese filling, frosted with blue and white with a dark chocolate fondant graduation cap on it and a tassel made of licorice and an M&M - and sat down to read.

Caroline checked the clock.

11:47 A.M.

Maybe later they could watch the soccer team practice. She knew a few Book Club members were on the team or knew someone who was, and others would probably love to watch just for the experience.

And maybe meeting during the summer would be fun…

A loud bang was heard.

All went silent.

“…Was that fireworks…?” someone asked.

“Fireworks don’t sound like that…”

More bangs.

“That’s a gun,” Penelope whispered.

The door slammed open, causing some to cower.

Thankfully, it was…
“Theo!” Penelope gasped.

Theo went to his knees and let out a sound that seemed to mix a sob with a sigh.

“Oh thank god you guys’re okay…” he managed, voice barely above a whisper.

“Theo, what’s going on?” Penelope asked. “I heard…”

Theo swallowed.

“It’s Matt,” he said. “He just opened fire in the cafeteria.”
“It’s Matt,” Theo said. “He just opened fire in the cafeteria.”

Silence.

“How many were hit…?” Brian managed to ask.


Frisk’s eyes seemed to flash. Their face…changed, somehow.

“Frisk…?” MK managed. “Are you…okay?”

Frisk stood up.

They had to do something.

They were filled with

**DETERMINATION.**

FILE:

SAVE.

A few shots sounded.

They moved toward the door.

“Frisk, what the hell?!” Hunter snapped. “Are you insane?!”

Frisk shook their head.

«Not insane,» they signed. «DETERMINED.»

“I’m coming with you,” Caroline said. “I can fend him off if it comes to that.”

“I’m comin’ too,” Brian said. “Gonna punch this guy in the goddamn face.”

“Count me in too man!” Eddie said.

“No, it’s too dangerous,” Theo insisted. “Besides, he used to be my…well, not friend, but -”

“We all go then,” Caroline said. “There’s one of him and twenty-seven of us. We can split up into groups of two to three. Frisk, do you know if any Monster students or teachers know Healing Magic?”

«Coach Undyne knows a little,» Frisk signed. «And a Bat Monster in my art class named Gavril knows some too.»

“Um,” Tina piped anxiously. “I-I know a l-little Healing M-Magic…I-I’m not very g-good at it yet, b-but I hope I can h-he-help…”

“I don’t have Healing Magic, but I am a Water Elemental,” Marilla said. “I can at least clean
wounds…”

A few more shots rang out.

“I know CPR and basic first aid!” Jordan said.

“I have enough knowledge of Human and Monster anatomy that I could likely perform first aid if required,” Almsal stated.

“Monster Food also heals!” MK said.

“Well then, we’ll settle into our groups,” Caroline said. “And we’ll keep in touch via group chat.”

“But how do we pick our groups?” Jayme asked.


Theo blinked. “But…why me?” he asked.

“Because you know Matt best out of all of us,” Caroline explained. “For a short while, you were with him. You have information we don’t.”

Theo was silent. Gunshots.

“He…showed me a rifle,” he said quietly. “I didn’t…think he would…I mean, it’s usually bullied kids that do this stuff -”

“On the news, yeah,” Caroline said. “But this isn’t the news - this is real life. And it’s fucked up. Plus, you’re physically stronger than many of us.”

“So why are we splitting up?” Sarah Ward asked.

“Because Matt knows we meet here,” Caroline explained. “Remember a few months ago when he vandalized the club room?”

“He could do it again,” Hunter choked out. “But…worse…”

“Yep. So it’s best to split up and stay out of here in case he comes for us here.”

“Sounds like you’ve thought of this scenario,” Almsal noted.

“And because of what Frisk, Theo, and I are capable of, we will be staying here in the club room.”

“You will not!” Penelope snapped.

“Everyone else, group off,” Caroline said. “Alert someone if something happens, alright?”

“Guys, the news got a hold of this,” Sarah Ward said. “Police officers are standing outside, school security isn’t doing anything but talking to news crews…”

“Is the school on lockdown?”

“Yeah.”

“But no security guards…”

Caroline summoned Pallas.
“Pallas will look for Matt,” she said. “I can see what he sees. If we see Matt near where a group is, I’ll send a message.”

Pallas disappeared.

Everyone grouped off and bid each other a tentative goodbye.

Sans, Toriel, and Asgore made their way to the front of the crowd. The crowd was gathered in front of police tape, many crying and huddling together fearfully, some were praying silently, others just taking pictures of the many news crews gathered and the crying family members.

Sans’ eyelights were gone, as was his ever-present grin. He was all business right now. Any more business and his left eye would be glowing. And nobody wants that right now.

It was taking every ounce of energy he had not to let his left eye glow.

He barely registered Toriel’s and Asgore’s words - he caught snippets, words like “assistance” and “Healing Magic” and “racism” and “there are children in there and the police are doing nothing”.

He was trapped. Too many people about to shortcut, too crowded to escape.

He felt Toriel take his hand.

He glanced at her.

He relaxed.

His fiancee had that effect on him really.

But he still felt troubled.

It was impossible not to be when your child was in danger.

Matt made his way through the halls.

He should have felt powerful, all these worthless freaks cowering before him, rifle in his hands. King of the North was he.

But he didn’t feel powerful.

He didn’t feel anything.

No matter what he did, he felt nothing.

He should be feeling something.

Every shot was an attempt to feel.

Each one failed.

Like they failed to kill.

Maybe killing would make him feel.

Everything else was failing.
Yeah.

Kill.

That would work.

Chara’s first instinct was to go back to Frisk and comfort them.

But they had friends out there with them. Chara couldn’t exactly do much of anything - they had zero physical presence outside of the Void.

And they were currently attempting to contact the Player with Rowan and Gail. It wasn’t working.

“Okay, how will we know when this ‘player’ gets here?” Gail asked.

“Trust me, we’ll know,” Chara said.

“Okay, but how?”

“We just will! I can’t describe it - they just appear and stuff!”

Chara groaned in frustration.

“Everytime I wanna help, I end up making things worse every single time!” they growled. “First Will, th-then Azzy, and-and now Frisk too! Every last one of my siblings has died because of me!”

“Chara,” Rowan said, voice firm. “Frisk isn’t dead. And if those friends of theirs have anythin’ to say about it, they ought to live for a good long time. And Will and Prince Asriel didn’t die because of you.”

“Yes they did!”

“Will was killed by Hiram, and Prince Asriel was killed by an angry mob. You are neither of those things, Prinx Chara. You’re a child who’s lost so much and gained so much, and you have a chance to come back for more. Gail’s and my presence may complicate that, but Dr. Gaster and his son are brilliant men. They can find a way - they’ve done so many a time until now, and they’ll keep findings ways until they Dust, and maybe even longer.”

Chara stared at the nonexistent ground, fighting back tears.

They couldn’t cry. They wouldn’t.

Not now.

Not when they still had a chance to save their sibling.

They stood as tall as they could.

“Let’s keep trying.”

Alicia and Rachel chatted with each other while Brooke wrote stuff in her phone for her next gymnastics routine.

The vault wasn’t her best routine, so she had a list of moves to try and work on.
Then she got a notification.

She gasped.

“What is it?” Rachel snipped.

“Check the news,” Brooke managed. “Someone’s shot up the school.”

“Not ours though, right?” Alicia asked. “It has to be South Middle. They’re so fucking ghetto -”

Rachel showed Alicia the article.

Alicia blinked.

“Let’s hope that dumb Book Club’s fucking dead then,” she sneered.

“Yeah, buncha freaks!” Rachel agreed.

Brooke was silent for a bit.

“I’m gonna go,” she said. “I saw something I thought I’d want.”

“Okay, whatever,” Alicia dismissed.

Brooke grabbed her purse and went off.

She entered a restroom and sat on a couch.

She started to meditate.

Calm the anger.

Don’t give in.

Outward, not inward.

Before long she was calm once more.

She stood up and exited the bathroom.

And left the mall.

Not like she’d be missed.

Besides, it’s only ditching if it’s two against one. The other way around it’s escaping.

Matt stalked the halls. Shooting at random passersby.

Some cried. Some screamed. Some were staring into space.

He didn’t know if any were dead or not.

He felt nothing.

He tried picturing some of them dead at his feet.

He felt nothing.
He spotted someone.

From a distance it looked like that Book Club president chick. Tall goth.

A closer look - maybe a few steps closer - showed that this one was shorter. And more scared. And emo.

Matt shot at her and walked away.

He heard someone crying the name…Irina? No, Elaina.

It didn’t matter.

He felt nothing.

Caroline got a message on her phone.

Her eyes widened.

“Elaina’s been hit,” she said. “Bullet grazed his arm real bad. Lot of blood.”

Frisk covered their mouth in horror.

Theo’s face grew angry.

“That rat bastard,” he hissed.

“Insult to rats,” Caroline sighed.

«Is there anyone with him that knows first aid?» Frisk signed.

“Almsal’s near where he and Colleen are,” Caroline said. “He should be there shortly.”

Frisk started chewing their nails.

Courtney watched the news with Megan.

She knew it was her fault Matt was doing this.

She felt like she’d been punched in the gut.

Megan stared at the screen in horror.

Courtney waited for her sister to…to do something to her.

But she didn’t.

Courtney wasn’t sure what she was feeling. It wasn’t like the gross hollow feeling she got when she was being ignored. It was more…just plain gross. She felt nauseous.

She went upstairs and threw herself facedown on her bed.

She wanted this to be a bad dream.

But she knew it wouldn’t.
Chara, Rowan, and Gail walked.

Where to? None of them knew. They just walked.

Maybe they thought if they did, the player would just…magically appear before their eyes. Maybe it was just a distraction.

None of them knew.

They just walked.

It didn’t stop their worry.

Matt kept on walking.

He knew he was getting closer to the Book Club room.

He spotted a member. Kid on the baseball team. One of the more popular sixth graders even without the Book Club.

He aimed.

He fired.

A…bat-rabbit-alien-thing jumped in front of him.

Dust fell from the holes in her wings.

She slumped to the ground, still conscious.

The baseball player grabbed her before her head hit the ground.

Matt kept walking.

He felt nothing.

Alison and her friends Ariana Solis and Hailey Wexler sat in a park bench.

“Oh my god Hailey, did you hear?!”

“How could we not?”

Alison stayed silent. She felt like she’d been drenched in ice water.

No way Matt would do that, right?

But all the news stations…all the frantic text messages…

There was no way it couldn’t be.

But…school shooters tend to be troubled boys who were pushed over the edge somehow, right? And Matt had always been deep and brooding, like troubled boys tended to be.

And…
Oh.

Of course.

It was so obvious.

Alison hatched an idea.

“You know,” she said innocently? “Matt finally found out a couple of months ago that Courtney was cheating on him.”

“He did?!”

“No way!”

“Way,” Alison said somberly. “You don’t think…?”

“Come on, Alison, Matt’s not that fucked up in the head! Right, Ariana?”

“Well, I mean he did vandalize the Book Club,” Ariana said cautiously. “Like, I know they’re nerds, but like…they’re cool nerds, you know? Apparently it was because he thought they were getting more popular than him since he was kicked off the football team…”

“Wow, talk about delusional!”

Alison said nothing, checking the news for more updates.

Injuries confirmed, amount unknown, no deaths.

Alison knew she shouldn’t blame Courtney for Matt’s actions.

But she didn’t want Matt to be completely at fault.

So it was blame Courtney or blame Matt.

And Alison knew her choice.

Caroline stared at her phone as she clawed at her shoulder. Her expression was dead.


Frisk was crying silently by this point. Their bails had been chews to the quick. Anymore and they’d be bleeding.

More shots.

Louder. Closer.

“Frisk? He’ll be here in a moment,” Caroline said softly. “You sure you still wanna do this…?”

Frisk sniffled and nodded.

Their eyes were red - the ruby of their irises with their bloodshot sclera made for a tragic, terrifying vision.

Caroline saw the shadows under their eyes, the flush in their cheeks, and the grace in their posture.
Four times the **DETERMINATION.**

They were going to do this come hell or high body count.

The door slammed open.

Matt had arrived.

«Ready?» Frisk - or was it Rowan? perhaps Chara or even Gail? - signed.

Caroline and Theo nodded.

They turned to face Matt.

Matt’s expression was lifeless.

They almost missed the sound of running footsteps as the encounter was triggered.

Matt’s expression sharpened at the four Book Club members.
Chapter 76

Chapter by Spazzin

Chapter Notes

WARNING

This chapter contains the following triggering content:
Blood
Body horror

Matt glared at the four Book Club members.

He shifted his gaze to the four hearts in the bulletin board - Red, Orange with a small Yellow patch, Purple with White cracks, and Green.

Frisk, Theo, and Caroline turned to face Penelope.

Penelope looked at them.

“I’m not leaving you alone with a psycho,” she said.

“We’re not alone, Nell,” Caroline sighed. “But if you insist, I suppose you can stay.”

Frisk was first.

Frisk>ACT>Check

Matt

LV: 1

HP: 15/15

AT: 15

DF: 1.5

A schoolmate if yours. Something feels wrong in a familiar sort of way.

Matt’s SOUL became visible.

It was Yellow.

No it wasn’t.

But it should have been.

It really really should have been.

Instead it was the color of tarnished brass. It had spots of dull dark grayish-yellow, and some small
flecks of Blue.
Frisk nearly vomited at the sight. They started crying.

Matt>FIGHT

Matt fired.

A flashing exclamation mark appeared in a corner of the bullet board behind a yellow line. The area contained inside it was pretty small, no more than perhaps a sixth of the board.

«Move away from the flashing thing!» Frisk managed to sign.

“Don’t gotta tell me twice,” Theo snarked.

All four SOULs moved away from the exclamation mark. Penelope simply moved her shield. Bullets filled the area behind the yellow line.

Theo>ITEM>Soccer Ball

7 AT

A ball for soccer. Don’t use your hands.

EQUIP?=>Yes

Theo equipped the soccer ball. He placed a foot on it and leaned, looking properly dramatic. He leaned on an elbow.

Matt>FIGHT

Exclamation mark. Box took up a sixth or so of the board. Missed everyone completely.

Caroline>ITEM>Notebook

5 AT

A treasured thing, full of secrets. Increases DF by 4.

EQUIP?=>Yes

Caroline equipped her notebook. She took out a pen and made note of Matt’s SOUL abnormalities.

Matt>FIGHT

Exclamation mark. Box took up a fourth of the board. Missed everyone completely.

Penelope>ACT>Calm

You try to come up with words that could soothe the savage beast before you, but think of nothing.

Matt>FIGHT

Exclamation mark. Box takes up a third of the board. Missed everyone completely, though Caroline ended up having to dodge a little.
«This could be a while,» Frisk signed.

Theo sighed.

“Now what?” he said.

“Maybe you could use the ball as a projectile,” Caroline suggested.

“Are you crazy?!

“Yeah, crazy for this to just fucking end already!”

“Well, so’s everyone else!”

“And now we can end this!”

Theo glared a little. Caroline’s expression was fierce, but did not budge.

Theo turned to Matt.

**Theo>ACT>Disarm**

A meter appeared, a bar running across it.

Theo watched it hit the center.

He kicked the ball.

**Matt’s weapon is lost! Matt’s AT decreased by 10!**

He finally showed emotion. It was rage. Pure, impenetrable rage.

**Matt>FIGHT**

A flurry of fists ran across the board.

Everyone dodged easily.

«I got an idea,» Frisk signed. «Everyone do what I’m about to do!»

**Frisk>MERCY>Flee**

Theo, Caroline, and Penelope watched Frisk’s SOUL leave.

Matt growled.

**Matt>FIGHT**

Fist flurry. Dodging. No hits.

**Theo>MERCY>Flee**

Theo’s SOUL left the screen.

**Matt>FIGHT**

Dodging flurries of fists.
“This is really childish you know,” Caroline stated. “Trying to kill people because you’re not as popular as you used to be? The fuck.”

Matt screamed in rage.

The fists seemed to aim for Caroline. Caroline dodged, moving and jumping along the lines with ease.

“Nell,” she said. “Go.”

“But Care -”

“Now.”

Penelope flinched a little at Caroline’s tone.

But she trusted Caroline.

Penelope fled.

“Looks like you’ve been ditched,” Matt sneered.

“I’m simply buying them time to escape before you once again fail to slaughter us all,” Caroline dismissed.

Matt screamed with rage.

Caroline dodged every hit with ease.

“*The Ebott Police and North Middle School security are reportedly doing very little to stop this -”*

“*Highly controversial HWC founder Leland Schwartz claims Monsters brainwashed a young teen in order to -”*

“*The young Ambassador for Monster-Human Relations, Frisk Dreemurr, is among those inside the building. Their status is currently unknown -”*

“*Leland Schwartz is under fire by numerous foreign heads of state for -”*

“*Sources state that North Middle School principal Opal Kierkegaard and physical education teacher, former Captain of the Monstrous Royal Guard Undyne Bluemako are assisting with administering first aid -”*

“*The perpetrator’s parents, George and Veronica Gorman, were present at the scene but declined to comment before leaving -”*

“*”
The screen turned off.
The sound of boulders shuffling along stony earth echoed through the cavern.
Soon slithering joined in.
“So will you strike soon, Diaspro?”
“No. And I told you to call me Nil.”
“Remember our goal, Diaspro.”
“My goal. And it’s Nil.”
“I’m giving you my resources. Therefore our goal is shared.”
“I’m the one doing actual work. I’m the one who thinks and does. I’m the one with the actual reason for having this goal.”
“It’s a damn petty reason.”
“What I’ve told you is only part of the story. The whole story will come to light when I deem it right.”
“Tsstsstss, you rhymed…”
“Leave.”
“Fine, fine. Just don’t dilly-dally. I want to see just what this plan of yours has to do with your goal!”
The slithering sound moved to another direction.
The shuffling boulders stopped on the end of a catwalk.
Diaspro gazed into the magma.
For a moment, he thought he saw it gaze back.
It didn’t matter. Gaster was the one who returned, not them. Whether they came back or not was of no importance.
“You betrayed us.”
“You bastard.”
“This is why he was chosen over you.”
Diaspro’s legs fell apart. Then his arms.
The boulders that comprised his limbs rolled into the magma below.
He lay dormant on the end of the catwalk.
He would summon more when he woke up again.

Matt blinked in surprise as he stared at the walls of the Book Club room.
He picked up his gun and roared as he shot at the walls.
He stopped and breathed heavily, staring at the bullet-riddled walls.
He felt nothing.
He knew.
He knew he had to kill them.
Then he’d finally…
Finally what?
What’s the point?
He left the Book Club room and stalked the halls.
He saw someone.
Or did he?
Only one way to find out.
He followed the person. Apparently a girl. Pretty short. Kind of a fatty.
He shot.
It hit the girl in the back of her left knee.
Her scream was short - more of a gasp.
Matt suddenly recognized the girl.
He smiled coldly.
He felt something.
Didn’t he?

Caroline went one way. Pallas went many. And Caroline saw what Pallas saw.
But though Pallas could see far and wide, he couldn’t see everything.
Caroline could tell Pallas was frustrated by his own limits. In this moment, so was she.
Even Magic had limits.
Her phone vibrated.
She’d received a text. She didn’t see who it was from.
But she felt everything stop.
Everything stopped.
But Caroline started.
She hadn’t seen where she went. But she would run until she was found.
But if she saw him first…
Caroline bared her teeth.
And she ran, leaving a trail of sparks behind her as she rushed off to stars-know-where.

He felt nothing.
He’d tried so hard. He’d shot everyone he could see.
But still he felt nothing.
No Book Club kids in his part of the school. No worthwhile targets.
He saw nothing.
He heard nothing.
He felt…
…static?
The feeling got stronger.
His hair stood on end of its own volition.
His vision went dark.

Caroline glared at Matt.
Matt glared at her…
Wait.
His eyes widened.
His face contorted in fear.
Matt>FIGHT
Bullets flew across the board.
Caroline didn’t budge.
She would not back down.
Caroline>ACT>Confront
“You know what you’ve done,” she hissed.
Matt’s lip quivered. He looked like he was about to cry.

Matt>FIGHT

Bullets flew.

HP: 20/30

Caroline’s flesh prickled as the bullets hit her. The impact points felt strange, like the spot was tightening and loosening at the exact same time, but they didn’t exactly hurt.

Caroline>ACT>Disarm

Caroline aimed a lighting bolt at Matt’s wrist. Matt shouted in pain and grabbed his wrist.

HP: 13/15

The gun fell to the ground and disappeared from the encounter.

Matt held into his wrist and stared at the Wizard before him.

He felt…something.

Matt>MERCY>Spare

“S-stay back…p-please…”

Caroline>Decline

“Give me one good reason why I should, you sick, twisted excuse for a person.”

Matt cowered.

“Wh-what are you…?”

Caroline>FIGHT

Caroline shrouded her fist in lightning and swung.

HP: 10/15

Matt>MERCY>Spare

Caroline>Decline

Caroline>FIGHT

HP: 7/15

Matt>MERCY>Spare

Caroline>Decline

Caroline>FIGHT

HP: 4/15
Matt> MERCY > Spare
Caroline> Decline
Caroline> FIGHT
HP: 1/15

Caroline glared down at Matt.
She removed her glasses to get a better look at his cowering self.
Matt flinched, falling on his rear and scrambled back.
He was close to tears.
“D-don’t k-kill me…” he whimpered.
“You’re not worth the blood inside your body, what makes you think you’re worth it on my hands?”
Matt just wept.
Caroline> MERCY > Spare
“Turn yourself in. Or else.”
Matt> Accept
The encounter ended.
Matt fell to his knees in tears.
Caroline just glared at him.
“Where is she?”
Matt just looked up at her.
“Wh-what?”
“Where. Is. She.”
“I-I don’t know! I-I-I just - I - I -”
Caroline just walked away.
Then she spotted…something out of the corner of her eye.
Her arm.
Black flecks.
No.
Not flecks.
Feathers, slowly growing out of her arms and legs.

Her fingernails were growing into long black talons.

She watched as her ulna split from her elbow, blood spattering on the ground, her skin regrowing instantly, feathers covering the new flesh.

Wings.

She ran to a bathroom and looked in the mirror.

Her eyes were solid silver, whites and all. Pupils completely absent. And yet she could still see - nay, her vision was better than it had ever been.

Her teeth were like those of a shark.

She felt her Magic running through her stronger than ever.

Like her flesh and hair didn’t exist and anything but solid Magic.

She disappeared in a bang and a flash of lightning.

Matt walked out of the school building through the nearest exit, gun in hand.

When he reached the side parking lot he saw someone.

Two someones.

Two familiar someones.

Screaming at each other.

“This is your fault! If you’d just taken responsibility -”

“Neither of us wanted him in the first place! Why did we even have him? Why couldn’t you have gotten that fucking abortion?!”

“You’re the one who didn’t wanna pay for it!”

“You’re the one who thought he’d be a rax writeoff or some shit!”

Matt listened to his parents fight.

Their voices rang through his head.

worthless

disgraceful

coward

bastard

nothing

die
“Hey.”

Matt walked up to them.

They turned to face him.

He put the barrel to his temple.

“I’ll make you guys happy for once. Watch.”

The Player had always been there.

Chara looked at them.

Rowan and Gail watched, uncertain.

**You wish to speak to me?**

“Yes,” Chara said. “We’re gonna make Flowey Asriel again. You’re our best - no, our only chance of making that a reality. Making it our reality.”

---

“Well? Whaddaya say?”

**You needn’t ask me twice. I shall do all that I can.**

Chara nods. “Thank you.”

Then the player never was.

Silence.

“Whoa,” Gail managed.

“Ye’re tellin’ me,” Rowan remarked. “Ach, that was…that was somethin’…”

“That was The Player,” Chara said. “That’s what they do. They ruined my afterlife, and made me the scapegoat for all sorts of bad things. Frisk is the reason they’re not doing it anymore.”

“Frisk is somethin’ else,” Rowan sighed, a warm smile on his face. “As are you Prinx Chara.”

Chara looked at Rowan.

Their expression was unreadable.

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7:28 P.M., May 27th, 20XS

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Frisk was being held in their parents’ arms.
They’d managed to cry themself to sleep.

Sans and Toriel watched as police officers from outside of the city did what the ones from inside the city should have been doing a long time ago.

Ten injuries, one casualty, one unaccounted for.

There would be no justice. Just a summer of healing - both physical and mental.

Storm clouds were rolling in quickly.

Too quickly.

It was unnatural.

Rain didn’t fall.

Just thunder and lightning and strong, strong wind.
Chapter 77

Chapter Summary

As one trial ends, another begins.

7:36 P.M., June 2, 20XS

It's a stormy day outside.

Rain is falling.

Thunder is crashing.

On days like this, kids like you…

…are bringing your friends up to speed.

Penelope had just woken up from her coma earlier that day, and was eating some dinner with Frisk and Levi. They’d brought stuff up to her since hospital food is likely to be shit.

Her left leg almost had to be amputated. It was salvageable though. She had to have her knee replaced. It would take a very long time for her to heal entirely, likely the whole of summer and much of fall, but she would recover. However she would require a knee brace.

Silence reigned over them all.

“So Caroline’s still missing,” Penelope said quietly. “And Matt’s dead so nothing can be done about him.”

«Word got out that it was Caroline who stopped him,» Frisk signed. «Nobody that was questioned stayed around long enough to see what became of her…»

“So…do they know she’s a Wizard?”

“They do now,” Levi said. “People are making assumptions about the how.”

«If we do reveal how Wizards are made, Caroline and all of Monsterkind will be exonerated, but them some people will try take advantage of those methods…»

“It’s fucked up…” Levi sighed.

Silence.

«I’ll have to go in a bit,» Frisk signed. «Politics never sleeps, no matter how much Dad wishes it would…»
“Okay,” Penelope said. “Thanks for visiting.”

“Hey, we’re here because we wanna be,” Levi assured. “You’re our friend.”

Penelope smiled.

Kristina looked at the presents on her bedside table - the get-well cards, the sketchbooks and pencils, the galaxy-themed everything.

She’d been visited by her parents in the morning, then Frisk and Levi and around lunchtime.

The doctors said it would take her a while, but she’d be able to fly again.

It was too long without what she loved.

She heard a knock on the door.

A familiar pair of muted green eyes peeked in.

Kristina smiled.

“Hey Nicko,” she said.

Nicko entered. He had some food with him - apparently Chinese takeout.

He set it down on front of her - beef chow mein.

Kristina smiled up at him.

“Thanks for visiting every day,” she said. “It really means a lot since hospital food is gross.”

Nicko returned her smile with a small one of his own, no less real for its lack of size.

“You’re welcome.”

Kristina paused and looked up at Nicko.

“Uh…did…you just…?”

Nicko nodded.

Kristina’s eyes widened.


“S-so, uh…” Kristina squeaked. “A-any news of…C-Caroline…?”

Nicko shook his head. “Still lookin’. No trace of ‘er.”

Kristina drooped.

Nicko seemed hesitant.

Them he hugged her.

Kristina squeaked.
Oh dear.

“We’ll find her,” he whispered, voice so hoarse it was as if he was making an effort to even make those sounds.

Kristina hugged him.

“- freak thunderstorms continue to rage across the eastern United States today, that’s five days in a row without stopping and no signs of stopping in the near future -”

*flick*

“- hurricane-force winds off the coast of the Carolinas bringing flash flooding and heading inland with alarming speed and no signs of dissipating -”

*flick*

“- folks, this could be the first time in recorded history that a hurricane has managed to make its way completely inland -”

*flick*

*Ridin’ the storm out~ Waitin’ for the fallout~ On a full moon night in the Rocky Mountain winter~*

Shrieks echoed throughout the land.

They came from everywhere.

What sound it was none could tell. It was unlike any sound ever heard.

It was anguished. Painful. Tragic.

It was the sound heard before the storms.

Were one to look to the skies, they’d see a raven flying to the west.

It wasn’t a raven.

It was myth reborn of misery, power born of pain.

It was a return to the dust in the blood.

Toriel rang the doorbell of the Marlow-Goldsby household.

Sans held onto her hand. His eyelights were off.

Toriel rubbed his carpal bones, tracing them with her thumb claw.

Sharona answered.

Her hair was an even worse mess than usual. Her eyes were tired and bloodshot.

“Tea’s almost gone,” she said, voice monotone. “Randy’s in his room working. Has been since…”

Sharona bites her lip.
“It’s alright,” Toriel assured. “Sans and his father are checking areas the police aren’t.”

“Thank you…,” Sharona managed coarsely. Her voice was wavering. She was trying so hard not to break down.

Sans and Toriel entered the house.

Suddenly, a Windows XP error sound was heard.

Pallas appeared before them on an end table.

He was much bigger than he was last time Sans and Toriel had seen him.

“Pallas!” Sharona gasped. “If you’re here, then that means -!”

“I am afraid not.”

Pallas had spoken.

His voice brought to mind Snape and Gandalf in equal measure. In short, British and stern, but fair. And unequivocally Magical.

“I am here not at her command, but of my own volition,” he revealed. “Miss Caroline appears to headed west.”

“You don’t mean…” Toriel whispered.

“She is the cause of the storms,” the Familiar said. “She appears to have taken the form of her Monster ancestor in her fear and despair.”

Toriel gasped in horror. “No…this is…oh, this hasn’t happened in…in centuries, I…”

“What hasn’t happened, Tori?” Sans asked gently.

“…When Wizards experience strong feelings of despair, they…Revert. To the form of the Monster they descended from.”

“And what monster’s Caroline come from?”

“…Pallas, her Familiar, is a raven…her Magic is Electricity…and she’s causing the storms…”

Toriel gasped.

“She’s a Harpy…”

“I’m gonna assume that’s not an insult, but an actual monster.”

“Harpies were supposedly driven to extinction centuries before the War…but it can’t be proven since they’re solitary by nature…it may even be likely that some may have survived on the Surface after the Barrier was erected…”

“So how much of these storms are her doing, Pallas?”

“She is travelling due west without turning,” Pallas explained. “So only the storms directly behind her are her doing. The damaging ones occurring as we speak are but aftershocks, of a sort. They are not her direct doing, but they are connected.”
Sharona was silent. Her hands covered her mouth. Tears fell from her unblinking blue eyes.

“any idea where she’s headed?” Sans asked.

“…You recall how she came to be a Wizard in the first place, do you not?” Pallas asked.

“yeah, her birth mom left her to die in a blizzard.”

“And you are aware that her strength is far beyond that of a Wizard her age, are you not?”

“…so she did…”

“…It is not my place to divulge details, but yes. She has been killed - or Wizarded, as you would say - twice.”

“…i knew she couldn’t be so strong without training.”

“I fear that she may be headed west for a reason,” Pallas said, voice betraying concern. “Both times she was Wizarded, it was by Bethany’s hand. I fear she may be seeking Bethany in order to -”

“Where is she.”

Everyone turned.

Randy was there.

He was…a mess. No surprise all things considered.

“Where is my daughter,” Randy growled.

“She is currently circling the San Juan Mountains,” Pallas said. “Searching for something. She has been for days now.”

Randy stood still for a moment.

Then he left.

He returned moments later in cargo shorts and hiking boots with a crowbar in hand, a backpack sling over his back.

“I’ll give you the coordinates. Get everything and everyone you think we need and take ’em along.”

“Why do you have a crowbar…?”

“Multi-purpose tool,” he said. “I also have a Swiss Army knife, a near flashlight, emergency rations, some light reading material, and other things we’ll need.”

Sharona went and hugged Randy.

“We’ll get her back,” she whispered. “We’ll get her back and dammit we are going to do it if it kills us.”

Randy kissed the top of Sharona’s head. “I know.”

“well, let’s go,” Sans sighed. “tori? whadda we need?”

“Sienna and Frisk should be able to sense where she is,” Toriel said. “Wizards can tell when another
Wizard is nearby. They could help with tracking. Randy will help with navigating the area.”

“Okay. there a way to bring her back to lookin’ human again?”

“The best bet for that has always been time and reassurance,” Toriel said. “Which she has plenty of…”

“good. let’s get goin’ then. we got a kid to bring home.”
Chapter 78

Chapter Summary

Hot on the trail, with a look back in time.
Not much longer now…

11:43 P.M., June 2, 20XS

It’s a stormy day outside.
Rain is falling.
Thunder is crashing.
On days like this, kids like you…

...are bringing someone home.

Sans shortcutted Gaster, Toriel, Frisk, Sienna, Randy, and Sharona to a spot in the heart of the San Juan Mountains. Rain fell hard and fast and cold. Thunder roared and lightning crashed.

Sans got rain gear out of his inventory. Randy came prepared with his own, if not overprepared.

“Augh, it’s cold as a bitch out here,” Sienna grumbled as she slipped on her coat.

“Okay,” Randy said, his voice loud and authoritative. “Frisk, Sienna, we’ll be a few steps ahead. I know the area, you two know the signs. Sans, Toriel, Gaster, you take up the rear guard. And Sharona?”

Randy hands the crowbar to Sharona.

“This has been in the Marlow family since…fuck if I know. I want you to use it for whatever we need to use it for.”

Sharona looked up at him and nodded. Her eyes were full of resolve.

Randy smiled and kissed her.

“Alrighty. Which way is she?”

“North and a bit west,” Sienna said.

Randy’s eyes widened.
“Crazy Woman Creek,” he hissed. “Fuck. It’s definitely flooded right now - not that we’d be able to cross it if it wasn’t, those waters are insane…”

“So where is Bethany, might I ask?” Gaster enquired.

“San Juan Mountains Psychiatric Facility, thirty miles to the south of where we are,” Randy said.

“You mean she’s not in prison for what she did?” Toriel hissed coldly.

Randy was silent as he turned on a lamp and headed the direction Frisk and Sienna had indicated.

“Much as I hate to say it…no,” Randy said lowly. “I…don’t wanna talk about it…Caroline doesn’t know anyway…”

Silence. The only sounds were wind whipping, thunder roaring, rain falling.

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August 20th, 201X

Needleton, Colorado

Caroline sits on the train from Durango to her hometown of Silverton, leatherbound notebook in hand.

She hasn’t paid for the train ride. She never has to. Being quiet has many advantages you see.

It takes three and a half hours for the train to reach its destination. It is over three fourths of the way to its destination.

She stares out the window. The clear blue sky above, the Animas River below.

The sight never ceases to fill her with happiness.

Even if that happiness has been a fair bit less than usual as of late.

She wonders if her mother is feeling okay today. That would make her even happier.

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The group went northwest. Randy kept them on the most solid ground he could.

“She’s moving a lot, but she’s sticking to the same general area,” Sienna explained. “How far from that place you said she’d be are we Mr. Marlow?”

“About seventeen miles,” Randy replied.

Frisk suddenly paused.

They seemed to perk up.

They ran ahead.

“Frisk!!”
“kid!”
“What are they doing?!”

August 20th, 201X

Silverton, Colorado

Caroline steps off the train with her book and walks onward. She recognizes that there are more tourists out and about than residents today. Perfect for hiding away. She walks on down the dusty road. She spots an alleyway on Notorious Blair Street. Sparse in general. Away from sight. Somewhat clean. Perfect. Caroline sits down and begins to read.

Frisk felt a strong pulse of very familiar Magic. They ran toward it without thinking. They barely registered the group calling out to them. They followed the feeling, knowing what could be at the end. Did they really know what it was though? It was Caroline, but it was also…not. It was much stronger, while still undeniably hers. It was also…purer? Like something had been muddling it before but wasn’t now.

“That’s what Reversion is, Frisk,” Rowan said, voice dark. “It’s when a Wizard is dangerously close to giving into rage or despair. They become Monsters - beings made of love and compassion and emotion - to better bear the pain. I’ve seen it before among Wizards fighting in the war. Some still gave in…”

Frisk kept running. They felt Caroline’s Magic move…up? They looked around them. Mountains. So many mountains.
But which one was Caroline on?
Only one way to find out…

\=/=

Caroline has always been rather good at ignoring taunts.

This time is no different.

Just more irksome than is typical.

Perhaps it’s the fact that they’re throwing things.

Their names are unknown. Like they don’t want to be found out. Or maybe they don’t want to be remembered. But their faces are clear as day.

All the taunts are overly typical, bordering on utterly uncreative. The throwing is nothing new either, just less common.

Then the topic turns to Bethany.

“She doesn’t love you! Nobody does! So why don’t you just kill yourself already you useless piece of crap?!!”

Caroline is silent.

So too are the other bullies.

Caroline thinks.

It does make a lot of sense. The words Bethany said as she threw her out into the snow, the year-long silence that remained unbroken between them…

And Caroline isn’t a fool. She hears the people talk. She knows they find her a bother, a burden.

Oh.

Of course.

Caroline smiles at them.

The kids recoil in fright. One screams and runs.

Caroline gets up and walks home.

She has some questions that need answering.

And she is certain she knows the answer.

A part of her hopes she is wrong.

\=/=

Pallas returned to the group.
“I have seen Frisk,” he said. “They are headed toward Uncompahgre Peak. Caroline’s Magic is concentrated there.”

“But it’s so spread out that she could be anywhere on that…that giant-ass mountain!” Sienna growled.

“We’re half a mile from the trailhead, and the trail to the summit…” Randy explained. “Pretty rough trail too…7.7 miles, steep and rocky. And the weather’ll only make it worse…”

“I shall keep watch over Frisk and guide their way as best I can,” Pallas said. “I shall send you information regularly.”

“Thank you, Pallas,” Toriel sighed. “Should either of you find Caroline, please let us know?”

“Of course.”

And with that Pallas was off once more.

Frisk saw a small light head toward them.

Pallas.

He landed on a rock nearby.

“They’re worried for you,” he said.

Frisk sighed.

“…You are getting close,” Pallas said. “You are currently six miles from Caroline, if I am sensing correctly.”

Frisk perked up immediately.

“I shall guide you,” he said as he flew up. “Follow my light.”

Frisk nodded.

Pallas flew on.

Frisk followed the light.

After a while, Pallas appeared before the group once more.

“Frisk is safe,” he said. “I found a safe, relatively dry place for them to rest a moment. They are unwilling to sleep, but they are resting. They are getting close to Caroline’s location.”

“Is C-C-Caroline s-safe?” Sharon asked, teeth chattering.

“As long as I exist, so too does she,” Pallas said. “She is alive at the very least, for what little comfort that may bring you all.”

Sharona sighed and leaned into Randy.

“I shall return to Frisk,” Pallas said. “I shall return after they pass the next mile marker.”
“Thanks Pallas,” Randy said. “You’ve been a real help to my girl.”

“It is my pleasure to have been created as her Familiar,” Pallas said. “You’ve raised a fine young lady.”

Randy managed a smile.

Pallas gave a nod and flew off once more.

/==

Caroline enters her house.

Bethany is sitting on the couch watching something on TV and clipping coupons.

Caroline stands in front of the television.

She waits until Bethany spots her.

“I’m watching that.”

“Do you love me?”

“What the hell kind of…? Get out of the way.”

“Do you love me Mommy?”

“You have to the count of five -”

“Do you love me?”

Bethany is getting angry. She’s no longer cutting the coupons. She’s snipping her own fingers. Some blood is forming.

“Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you -”

Screams.

Slashing.

Stabbing.

Blood.

Tears.

Darkness.

/==

Frisk followed Pallas. His light lit up the rocks. Frisk had to be swift, yet cautious. The rain was falling hard.

Pallas stopped before a rock face.
Frisk stopped as well.

They looked at the rock.

There were markings. Spirals in all sizes and shapes arranged vertically, connected to each other. Some spirals repeated, as if this was a written language.

Frisk looked at Pallas questioningly.

“Touch them,” he said.

Frisk placed a hand on the spiral markings and recoiled. They felt a jolt of static electricity - but stronger.

“How did it feel?”

Frisk merely held up their hand. It was red where they’d touched the markings.

“A warning then,” Pallas sighed. “She does not want us near, it seems…”

“We have to help her,” Chara said, taking control of Frisk.

“I never said we would turn back, Prinx Chara,” Pallas said. “We shan’t back down. Not when we’re so close to bringing her back safe…”

“Then let’s go!” Chara said.

They moved on ahead.

Pallas followed.

“Who else knows of you, Prinx Chara?” he asked.

“Sans and Gaster.”

“Do they also know of Rowan and Gail?”

Chara said nothing.

“It would be prudent to tell them sooner rather than later,” Pallas advised. “They must know of them so you can be retrieved safely.”

Chara said nothing.

Soon, the rest of the group reached the markings.

“…The hell is this?” Sharona asked.

Toriel touched it. She pulled her hand back.

“A warning,” Toriel said lowly. “She doesn’t want to be found.”

“But we gotta find her,” Randy growled. “I’ve come too close to losing her before. I’m not gonna let it happen again.”

“and we will,” Sans assured. “frisk’s definitely already close. only a matter of time before she’s -”
A bolt of lightning strikes a boulder nearby. It crumbles to smithereens.

“…welp. she’s not happy, that’s for sure.”

September 20th, 201X

Durango, Colorado

“I’m saying that there is no reason that patient should still be alive! She should be dead, she even WAS dead for seven whole minutes, but she’s not anymore! It’s not natural!”

“So you’re saying we should just cut her off? Even though she’s not only alive, but showing signs of recovery? Just because she didn’t die like her nutcase mother wanted?”

“You saw the goddamn news! That kid’s probably not even Human! Maybe her mother killed her for a reason!”

Caroline lay still. She can just barely move.

But she can hear.

And she can understand.

She understands everything now.

She wants to speak up.

She opens her mouth.

The words come out scratchy. It hurts to speak. But she doesn’t give a damn. She has something to say.

“Then…kill me…if you want me dead…finish me…”

The people who’d been speaking stare at her in horror and guilt.

“You…want me dead…I…want me dead…finish…the job…make me normal…make me dead…let me die…please…let…me…die…”

Frisk placed their hand to another series of spiral markings.

This one didn’t hurt. Well, actually it did, but it’s a different kind of hurt. Heavier. The kind of hurt you don’t notice until you’re struggling beneath the weight of it.

They were so close.

A bolt of lightning struck the rock with the markings.

A chunk of stone the size of Frisk’s head fell off a few feet away from them.

An agonizing shriek was heard from further up the mountain.
Pallas glitched in and out for a moment with a painful-sounding mix between a crackle and a croak.

“...We are close. Come on.”

Pallas flew ahead.

Frisk followed close behind, steps swift but careful.

They were so close...

It filled them with **DETERMINATION**.

FILE: SAVE
Frisk walked against the wind, trying so hard to keep from being blown over.

Caroline’s Magic wasn’t wind-related, but one would be forgiven for thinking otherwise.

Bolts of lightning struck dangerously close to them - so close they could feel the heat from them.

But Frisk knew Caroline wouldn’t miss unless she wanted to. She didn’t want to hurt them. She wanted them to be safe.

Safe from her.

Frisk paused.

They felt for Caroline’s Magic.

They followed it.

It led away from the marked trail into…

Well, they had to find out.

Caroline was there after all.

“Frisk, I do suggest waiting on the rest of the party to arrive,” Pallas said. “They will arrive in a few minutes.”

«But we have to go save her now!»

“Frisk, so long as I remain, so too does Miss Caroline,” Pallas said firmly. “I shan’t fade until she does.”

«But just because she’s alive doesn’t mean she’s not hurt!»

“I feel what she feels, if less. She is uninjured.”

«Caroline doesn’t feel pain easy!»

“You needn’t feel pain to know you are injured. She is uninjured. She is alive. She is upset - so very deeply upset that I fear for her safety.”

Frisk was silent.

“Frisk!”

Frisk perked up.

They ran to Toriel and Sans. Toriel was sopping wet - Frisk was glad Monsters didn’t smell like wet
dog, but even if they did they wouldn’t give a rat’s ass. This was their family - the only one they’d ever known.

“She is a ways off the trail,” Pallas announced. “I shall follow her Magic signal. Follow my lead. She already knows we are near. I know not how she will react when she sees you all, so I recommend exercising extreme caution for the time being. If lightning strikes nearby, do not fret. She will not harm, only intimidate.”

“I’ve literally seen her corpse twice, once frozen once bloodied,” Randy growled, leaning in close to Pallas. “Fuck lightning won’t do shit to keep me from saving my little girl.”

“As is to be expected,” Pallas said. “I am merely forewarning you all. This will be quite trying.”

“We know, and we have known for hours!” Sharona snapped. “Now take me to my daughter or else!”

Pallas gave a crackling sound - likely the equivalent of a sigh for the lightning-based Familiar.

“I understand. Come along now.”

And so they followed.

Penelope was startled awake by her text tone.

The only one who would ever text her at -

Wait, what time is it?

Penelope checked the time.

2:43 A.M.

The only one who would ever text her at that hour was Caroline.

Which could only mean…

Penelope gasped in excitement and checked her phone.

*I text from: Randy*

*Randy: Close to Caroline. Will call you when we see her.*

Penelope thought she would cry she was so relieved.

Instead she held the phone close and stared up at the ceiling.

She silently wished Caroline was okay.

It was a few minutes before three when Frisk spotted her - or what they thought was her.

But she hissed and…disappeared? Apparated? Whatever happened, she was gone in a very literal flash.

“Please tell me I’m not the only one who saw that,” Randy sighed.
“Guess we’re all nuts then, because that sure as hell looked like Caroline, if she had feathers,” Sienna said. “She’s still in the area. Very close.”

Frisk led the way, Pallas lighting the path they were to follow.

After an unknown amount of time following Pallas, they came across a large crack in the rock face, just large enough for an average adult Human to walk through with some squeezing.

Randy groaned. “…She likes small spaces. Of course she’d be in here.”

“Looks like a job for friskito then,” Sans says. “You up to the task?”

Frisk nods, eyes brimming with DETERMINATION.

FILE: SAVE

Sans smiled at Frisk and rumpled their hair.

“Good kid,” he said. “Almost there.”

Frisk nodded and saluted.

They entered the gap.

It was dark.

It was also drier and a little warmer than it was outside. Not unlike how the Ruins were warmer than the February air on the surface.

And yet still they felt anxious.

They walked further into the gap.

They felt as though something at the very end of this tunnel was watching their every move, expecting them.

It wasn’t all that long before they reached the end of the gap.

Caroline stared at them, expression empty.

Was it Caroline though? It looked like her - but as a Monster. Silver eyes, no white or pupil, softly glowing like the moon. Black feathers on arms and legs that ended in talons. Where her hands and arms met at the wrist sprouted protrusions that resembled wings - nay, they were wings.

She opened her mouth and spoke.

Not English.

Frisk wasn’t sure what it was she was saying. Just that it wasn’t in English or Spanish or…or any language they’d ever heard. And being Ambassador they’d heard a great many, and understood basic key phrases in all of them.

Her teeth were pointed. Shark-like.

«Caroline, what are you saying?» they signed, full of worry.

Caroline groaned and started signing.
«Leave. I’m begging you. I want to be alone.»

«Well we’re not leaving until you join us!» Frisk retorted. «Everyone’s worried sick about you, especially Penelope!»

Caroline groaned pulled at her hair with one hand and clawed at her left shoulder with the other. Her talons were sharp enough to make it bleed.

Frisk lunged at Caroline and tried to pry her claws from her shoulder.

After a brief struggle they succeeded.

Caroline’s shoulder was bloodied. On closer inspection dried blood could be seen on the feathers at her collarbone. She’d done this to herself before.

But then Frisk saw something on Caroline’s left shoulder.

A patch where feathers were lacking.

A scar.

One word that could be used to describe it was “gnarly”. Another was “painful”.

This was why she grabbed her left shoulder. The scar. Something about it…Frisk couldn’t explain what it could possibly have meant to Caroline. She would tell them on her own terms.

Caroline growled. Frisk gasped and stumbled backwards.

They backed up.

Caroline just stared at them. Her teeth were gnashing at her lower lip. She was tearing up.

«Caroline…please…you have to come back…»

Caroline shook her head.

«Can’t. Useless. Nothing.»

«Caroline, is this about your mother?»

Caroline shrieked as if the words physically pained her.

«Caroline, you did die twice didn’t you? You had two Wizardings?»

More shrieks.

«You…you know where she is, don’t you?»

The shrieks became wails of agony.

Frisk fought the urge to cover their ears.

«Caroline, please…!»

“Listen to us.”

Caroline looked up.
All four Red SOULs gazes back at her. Tears falling from hollow ruby eyes onto rosy cheeks. The Red SOULs stood straight and tall.

“Caroline, we trusted you with our existence. You are our sole confidant. We need you. The Book Club - they need you. Your family - they need you. Penelope - she needs you!”

Caroline shrieked even more loudly. It died into a wail that shook the walls of the gap, shook the very mountain itself.

Frisk suddenly realized.

«Caroline…Penelope’s alive.»

Shrieks.

Frisk took out their phone and dialed Penelope’s number.

A few rings went by.

Penelope heard the text tone.

She picked it up.

_1 text from: Frisk_

*Frisk: Found Caroline. Calling you now. Say what you want to say to her the minute you pick up.*

Penelope could have cried then and there.

But she wouldn’t. It wouldn’t be *Kind* to worry Caroline while she’s like this.

The phone rang.

Penelope answered.

_“Hey Care. I’m…I’m so glad you’re okay, I…oh dang it, I told myself I wouldn’t cry…I’m just relieved right now, okay? I…I’m okay. My leg’ll take the whole summer to get better, but I’m alive. Tina’s alive too. Her wings are torn up, so she won’t be flying for a while, but she’ll heal. Elaina’s got stitches - twenty of ‘em all in their arm. They’re okay otherwise. Should be discharged this weekend. The other injured students - they’re fine. Some have already gone home. Others are staying a while longer. I should be free to go in a few weeks…I really wanna see you again Care. I miss you. Everyone misses you…but I also know you need your space sometimes. Just…don’t go off like this again without telling someone. Okay?”*_

Silence.

Frisk was looking at the ground, afraid of Caroline’s reaction.

_“…Okay. I’ll come home soon, okay Nell?”*_

Frisk gasped and looked up.

Caroline was back. Long black hair and deathly pale skin - no feathers or wings. Her eyes were silver - with whites and pupils.
And she looked…tired.

“Okay. See you. Bye.”

“…Bye…”

Penelope hung up.

Caroline blinked, as though attempting to regain her bearings.

She started sobbing.

The Red SOULs hugged her.

“Let’s go home…” they said.

Caroline said nothing. She only hugged back.

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3:28 P.M., June 4th, 20XS

It’s a beautiful day outside.

The sun is shining.

The heat is almost oppressive.

On days like this, kids like you…

...are checking in on your classmates.

Frisk merely sat to the side with a shit-eating grin on their face.

No.

A *ship*-eating grin.

Because they shipped it and shipped it *hard*.

They left Penelope and Caroline alone for the moment.

Sans was waiting for them.

They looked at him.

«Did you tell her…?»

His face fell slightly.

“yeah…” he said quietly.

«And?»
Sans sighed.

“i explained it to her as best i could. she…actually understands why i didn’t tell her. dad told asgore. nearly got violent - good thing shelby came in at the right time…”

Frisk nodded.

“you gonna be there with me when i explain chara to ‘er?”

Frisk tensed.

«Uhhh, Dad? About that…»

Sans sighed.

“don’t tell me there’s more in there.”

Frisk blinked in surprise.

Sans sighed.

“i saw ya speaking verbally with caroline. and from the looks of it, it wasn’t chara doin’ the talking. so who are they?”

Frisk sighed.

And switched.

“Good morrow. I am Rowan Lithgow of Edinburgh, Red SOUL Bearer of the Seven Great Mages. You must be Sans Gaster. I’m quite familiar with your father. Without his help Monsterkind would not be where it is today.”

Sans blinked. “seven mages. as in…the guys who made the barrier.”

Rowan’s eyes fell to the floor. The ever-present shadow that hung over them darkened further.

“No amount of penance shall ever be enough to atone for what I’ve done,” he wavered. “The best I can do in mine present circumstance is aid Frisk in their duties as best I can. Give them advice. Defend them when no one else can.”

Sans paused.

“…i’ll have to ask dad about ya. anyone else in there i should know about?”

Switch.

Frisk - no it wasn’t - seemed to look up at him immediately with a winsome smile.

Something told him this one was very similar to Frisk somehow…

“Hi there! I’m Abigail Stone, just call me Gail! I was a showgirl in the 1940’s y’see - died in 1943. Let me tell ya, Frisk is an absolute darling - and Chara’s fashion sense? Kid’s got taste! And Rowan - mmm, if he wasn’t taken with a kid I would be all over that!”

Sans was silent for a bit.

“Oh, sorry! I got carried away there - I’m just… so happy to see how the world’s changed for the
better since my days... so much freedom... it’s wonderful...”

Gail was just smiling.

“good to meetcha,” Sans said.

Switch.

Frisk was back.

They hugged their father.

Sans hugged his child in return.

“i’m proud of ya kid,” he said quietly. “like nothin’ else.”

“I love you Dad...” Frisk whispered, voice scratchy from disuse.

Sans just held Frisk closer.

Yeah.

He let them go and looked them in the eye.

“c’mon kid, let’s go get your mom. we’re goin’ to grillby’s.”

Frisk hopped in place excitedly as their father shortcutted them away.

The future, the pride of their father, the friends they’ve made.

All of it filled them with

DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

One more to go.
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

This is it.

Chapter Notes

Well, it’s been a hell of a ride. Two years of…well, all of this. I honestly never thought I’d make it this far. You all have seen me through thick and thin, through dropping out of college and getting my first job, through making a simple PTA Sans fic that just exploded to the end of what became among the longest fics of its kind. And damn, I gotta say…

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

2:43 P.M., June 23rd, 20XS

It’s a beautiful day outside.

Birds are singing.

Flowers are blooming.

On days like this, kids like you…

...are going to bring your brother home.

Frisk had to hand it to Caroline - she really was charismatic. If anyone else had told the Book Club about Chara and Rowan and Gail and Flowey, the news would probably not been as well received. It was really impressive - she would likely do well in politics if she wasn’t so straightforward or openly disdainful of everything and everyone.

And she said she wasn’t a leader.

Still.

To the frustration of nearly everyone.

Still, everyone had gathered at the Gaster-Dreemurr house for the big event at Caroline’s insistence. Giving Asriel a warm welcome, she said. She’d already gotten the applications ready, so now it was a matter of giving them to the lad himself.
Penelope had brought cupcakes to tide everyone over as usual.

“How much longer is this gonna take?” Brian griped.

“I don’t know,” Caroline said. “Why do you think I brought entertainment?”

“Just what is it you’re writing anyway?” Hunter asked.

“A tale of a star-crossed romance set against the backdrop the Cold War era in the late 1960’s,” Caroline explained. “A British spy falls in love with an undercover North Korean terrorist, who in turn falls in love with him. I don’t want to spoil anything, so I’ll leave it at that~”

Caroline seemed proud of herself.

“I can’t wait to read it!” Penelope chimed.

Caroline smiled brightly and hugged the leatherbound notebook to her chest.

12:47 A.M., June 4th, 20XS

Toriel sat on the edge of the bed, dried tears matting her fur. Everything about her screamed “stressed”, even though the Boss Monstress herself was utterly silent.

“So you’ve kept this from me for…how long has it been now? Five years?” she asked.

“thereabouts, yeah,” Sans said quietly. “i promised them i wouldn’t tell anyone. i’m telling ya now because you deserve to know. this has been left hidden for far too long.”

“Does Asgore know?”

“dad’s telling him. dunno how he's gonna react, considering…”

The silence was heavy with truthful words unspoken.

“Thank you for telling me this, Sans,” Toriel managed at last. “And for keeping my children as safe as possible…”

“our.”

“Pardon?”

“our children,” Sans sighed. “tori, we’re engaged. which means your kids are gonna be my kids. i accepted that long ago, and damn if i’m not gonna treat ‘em like it.”

Toriel kissed Sans on the forehead.

“Seeing how well you treat Frisk, that can only be a good thing,” she said. “And for them to trust you with all of this…I know they care deeply for you, despite everything…”

Sans smiled up at her, eyelights sparkling warmly. A few cyan tears rolled down his face.

“heh…’s funny…i can actually…sorta believe it…”

Toriel says nothing and hugs Sans.
He feels her tears on top of his skull. She feels his on her shoulder.

==

“we in with the hub yet dad?”

“Just a few more firewalls to conquer and we’re there, Sans.”

“how many is a few?”

“Twenty-four.”

“can i do some?”

“How do you say it…heck yeah.”

“sweet.”

Sans typed away.

Gaster sipped some tea.

“So after all that, shel and fluffybuns still aren’t together,” Sans grumbled.

“Give them time Sans,” Gaster sighed. “Dear me, you are almost as impatient about this as Frisk was when they were trying to push you and Ms. - or perhaps it should now be Mrs. - Toriel together!”

“i get why asgore’s not doing anything, but damn, guy’s gotta give ‘imself a break here…”

“Sans, it took the imminent end of the world to convince you to tell Toriel of your innermost feelings, so what makes you think it will take any less for Asgore and Miss Wong?”

“The fact that shelby’s got a good head on ‘er shoulders and chas is their frisk.”

“And how did the equivalent circumstances work for you?”

“…shut the hell your mouth.”

“Clever.”

“I know, i try - and now we have twenty-three firewalls to go. want i should get the heart in on this?”

“After all they’ve done to bring me back? We’ll be damned if we don’t!”

“okay, let’s do this thing!”

==

10:38 A.M., June 4th, 20XS

“You WHAT?!”

“Sire, I have repeated this statement thrice already in the most simplistic terms I can muster. Asriel is alive in another body and I have means to bring him back fully.”
“You LIE! I WATCHED MY CHILDREN DIE BEFORE MY VERY EYES!”

“Asgore roared and made move to lunge at him when…

…a pair of arms were wrapped around his midsection.

“That’s enough Asgore,” Shelby said firmly. “Calm down and let him explain again. Please don’t let your anger get the better of you.”

“But he -”

“Is telling you this so he can help you move forward. Now let him speak.”

Asgore glared at Gaster, blue eyes like flames.

“…Thank you,” Gaster sighed. “Now, here is the plan…”

/==

Asgore stood outside in the backyard, cup of tea in hand.

The sliding door opened.

Toriel stared out at the garden.

“So it is happening,” she sighed. “Our son is…coming back to us.”

“Indeed,” Asgore said. “It’s...almost unreal…”

“Perhaps when we see for ourselves it will feel real,” Toriel said. “Seeing is often believing they say…”

“And perhaps it will be the case here. Who can say for certain until it happens?”

Silence.

“We will have to attempt civility, you know,” Toriel said. “And not half-ass it like we have been - no...like I have been...so I shall be making an effort to be more civil.”

Asgore said nothing. He merely smiled warmly.

They both stared out at the garden at the patch of Golden Flowers.

/==

1:54 P.M., June 4th, 20XS

Randy heard a knock on the door of his office at work.

“Who is it?” he asked.
The door opened.

He turned to face the person who entered.

His eyes widened in shock.

“Caroline?! What - how - you need a key fob to get back here!”

“Magic, Dad,” she said. She took a seat in a chair in the corner of the office.

Randy sighed and took a swig from the mug of tea on his desk. He’d accepted long ago that normal was never a thing for Caroline in the first place. “Why’re ya here?”

“Why did you lie to me about Bethany?” Caroline asked.

The firmness in her voice made Randy stiffen.

Caroline hated liars. Abhorred them.

“Because in this case there’s really not much difference,” Randy explained. “Asylum, prison…both hold pretty bad people Caroline.”

“Most of those people are people deemed threats. Many of them are innocent and serve as padding to fill the coffers of prison and mental facility owners.”

“Mental facilities aren’t as lax as prisons,” Randy countered.

“Father, we’ve gone off track.”

Randy flinched. Caroline never called him “father” unless she was exasperated with him or very very serious.

“Why is my mother in a mental institution and not a prison?”

Randy chugged down the rest of his tea.

“You sure you’re ready to know?” he asked, voice tired.

Caroline paused.

“Is it really that uncomfortable for you to talk about…?” she asked, voice lined with…shame?

“It’s not…well, not completely. It—it’s complicated. It…there was…a lot about Bethany that I never knew. Still don’t know really.”

“But what DO you know?”

Randy hesitated.

“Dad, if you don’t want to I can wait,” Caroline said. “But I do want to know. This involves me - she KILLED me Dad! I - I have to know WHY! If not now, then…soon. Just…promise me you’ll tell me?”

Randy stared agog at his daughter.

Her face was as perpetually angry as ever, but her eyes were practically begging him to make that promise.
Randy sighed. After all Caroline had been through, she did deserve to know.

“…Promise, Care-Bear.”

Caroline took a deep, shaky breath and then managed a smile. The edges were dull - she was clearly forcing it.

“Thanks Dad,” she managed. “See ya.”

And with that she…disappeared in a flash of lightning.

Randy blinked and checked his work. Everything was the same. A few key clicks proved everything to be in working order.

Randy then checked his mug and made a phone call.

“…Yeah, who’s in charge of the water filter in the break room?”

=/=

Sans stared at the screen.

Last wall almost down.

He sighed as he drank down some ketchup.

“i’m not religious, but…shrek, if you’re out there…let me into your swamp, and find inner peace so i can break this fucking wall.”

Sans closed his eyes, and inhaled. Calming action, expanding and contracting the rib cage.

He opened his eyes. Eyelights gone.

Except for his left eye. Flashing Cyan and Yellow.

He typed away.

Somehow, he could almost feel the firewall crumbling with each click of the keyboard.

Then…

A loud whirring sound came from the machine.

Sans smiled.

“i should pray to shrek more often.”

Everyone was gathered in the Gaster Family Workshop in Snowdin.

All were silent.

“Are you ready Frisk?” Gaster asked.

Frisk saluted, Flowey in their arms.
“Good. Place the subject into the capsule, if you would please.”

Frisk straightened their posture and walked toward the open capsule, placing Flowey inside.

Flowey looked up at them, trepidation in his eyes.

Chara smiled at him.

Flowey managed a smile back.

“You’ll be fine baby bro,” they whispered. “I know it.”

“Okay…if you say so…” Asriel whispered back.

Chara smiled and sealed the capsule shut.

“Alright everyone, get behind the white line. Frisk, you get behind the yellow line.”

All did as bidden.

“Now. Frisk. Hold out your hands in front of you, palms upward.”

Frisk did.

“Now, I want you and everyone in that head of yours - Chara, Rowan, and Gail - I want you to focus all of your DETERMINATION. Pace yourselves, but don’t hold back.”

Frisk inhaled.

Ready?

As I'll ever be.

On your marks.

Let’s get this show on the road.

Okay.

Frisk exhaled, then inhaled again.

They focused.

They focused all the DETERMINATION they could.

“Now! PULL THE LEVER SANS!”

Sans pulled a lever.

The machine whirred to life.

Gaster and Sans began pressing buttons.

“Frisk! Aim the DETERMINATION at the capsule!”

Frisk hoped and dreamed.
And took aim.

The room glowed blindingly white.

The machine’s whirs became louder, louder, yet louder.

Gaster closed his eyes - he couldn’t seize up. Not here. Not now.

“Sans! Keep an eye socket on the screen! Watch the progress!”

“on it!”

Sans stared at the screen.

21%
28%
35%

“increments of seven…” he mused.

42%
49%
56%

Going fast.

Frisk strained to keep up their pace.

They had to.

They were too **DETERMINED** to let it stop here.

They kept switching out - Frisk, Chara, Rowan, Gail, Frisk, Chara, Rowan, Gail. All expended equal effort. None left another in the lurch.

70%
77%
84%
91%
98%

All watched intently.

Waiting.

The light was so bright now that shielding one’s eyes was futile. One could only stare at the brightness and hope they weren’t blinded after.

100%
A sound akin to distorted cries of pain was heard.

Then the lights went dead.

“Ssssso, they’re closssssse. Are you finally going to sssssstrike?”

“…No.”

“…Are you sssscared?”

“No.”

“Ssssssstupid?”

“No.”

“Then you’re jussssssst bonkersssss.”

“I’m strategizing.”

“…He is practically in the palm of your hand and you’re sssssstrageizing?”

“I do not merely want to end him.”

“Oh? Sssso you wish to torture him? Perhapsssss his family? While you make him watch?”

“I wish to end this miserable world.”

“…You realize that if you desssstroy the world, that includessss you.”

“I would not make a decision without putting all variables into account.”

“…Well then, the viper sssshan’t bother you again for sssssome time. I bid you farewell.”

Silence.

Diaspro Nil pondered the variables once more.

He could see nothing.

“Caroline, would you kindly turn on the lights?”

“On it.”

The lights came back on.

The capsule was filled with steam.

The capsule door opened.

The steam left with a fwoosh.

Everyone watched.

Not a sound was made.
The steam cleared.

It had worked.

On the capsule floor, surrounded by shards of pottery and clumps of dirt, lay Asriel Dreemurr.

The young Boss Monster groaned as he stirred into consciousness.

His big brown eyes blinked.

“**Asriel!**”

“**Son!**”

Toriel and Asgore went to him.

He hugged back moments later, tears running down his face.

“Hey Mom and Dad,” he greeted weakly. “Been a while huh…?”

“Oh, my dear boy, it was well worth the wait…” Toriel managed. “I am so, so happy you are back…”

Asgore said nothing. He just blubbered inelegantly. But damn if he wasn’t happy for all that.

Sans stood beside Frisk and watched the Dreemurrs with a smile.

“well kid,” he said. “ya done good.”

No response. Nonverbal or otherwise. Kid seemed…out if it? Was that the right term?

“…you okay there kid?” Sans asked. “didja wear yourself out, or -”

«Where’s Chara?»

Sans blinked.

Then his eye sockets widened.

Chara wouldn’t just disappear. Not now. Not when Asriel was…

Then it hit him.

Well, not it, but *something*.

He slowly turned to the capsule.

“oh fuck.”

Then so did everyone else.

Within the capsule, gently floating some inches above the floor, was a single Red SOUL.

«Chara…!»

Chapter End Notes
Don’t you people have anything better to do?

End Notes

See ya, Space Cowboy.
Leave something if ya liked this.

Works inspired by this one: Another Tale by KariHasAnAo3Account

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!